

## **HLPE Scoping Consultation for the upcoming report on "Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition" - CSM Comments - November 2017**

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*This document conveys the collective input of the Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS regarding the e-consultation by the HLPE Steering Committee with respect to the scope of the upcoming HLPE Report. The document is based on the ongoing work of the CSM Agroecology Working Group, which currently comprises 65 movements, organizations and networks from all CSM constituencies.*

The Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) warmly welcomes the initiation of a CFS collective process to reflect on and engage with the critical issue of agroecology. As CSM, we have been the strongest advocates for the CFS to take on an agroecology workstream. We reaffirm our commitment to engage comprehensively, and with the full scope of our diverse constituencies, with this report process and the policy engagement that will follow.

*“We call on our fellow peoples to join us in the collective task of collectively constructing Agroecology as part of our popular struggles to build a better world, a world based on mutual respect, social justice, equity, solidarity and harmony with our Mother Earth”*

Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, Mali, 27 February 2015

### **1. A Rationale for Agroecology**

In articulating the urgency to adopt agroecology, the report needs to outline ‘why’ the current industrial agri-food model is not viable. This would require the adoption of a holistic viewpoint that combines production, livelihoods, gender, socio-cultural, ecological and political perspectives rather than any narrow neo-productivist approach that does not fully acknowledge the interlinkages across all these dimensions while claiming to respond to calls for urgent production increases to cater for population growth. A similar holistic viewpoint should be used to assess the “other innovations” that the report aims to explore, avoiding to place at the same level such a comprehensive and integrated framework, such as that of agroecology, with singular technologies.

Furthermore, instead of evaluating the risks and uncertainties associated with agroecology, it would be more useful to examine the benefits and positive impacts of agroecological approaches and resilient food systems to address multiple development challenges. In this respect, one of agroecology’s strengths is its ability to spread and scale out according to the needs and capacities of each territory. The report should therefore also assess the political and economic obstacles that prevents agroecology to spread and scale out according to its full potential, moving beyond and challenging the notion that global/industrial and local food systems can easily coexist.

### **2. An Open and Inclusive Process**

Learning from the lessons of the past, taking into account that the vital role that many of the social movements that are part of the CSM play in producing our food, and considering that agroecology is largely the practice of peasants, indigenous peoples and family farmers, the HLPE should ensure that the process will be fully mindful of their situations, languages and turnaround time for feedback. It is particularly important to recognize internet connection limitations within remote areas, and be cognizant that relying excessively on this kind of communications to gather information may exclude many critical constituencies and contributions.

### **3. A Different Methodology**

Given the complexity and multifunctionality of agroecology, we feel that the methodology for collecting information and input for this report should be different, and more diverse and wide-ranging than those used for previous HLPE reports. It should be multidisciplinary, and include more practitioners (i.e. small-scale food producers and grassroots organisations working with them) and multidisciplinary scientists. It should employ more creative ways of gathering information, narratives and perspectives (including qualitative data such as personal testimonies, or visual material). Furthermore, the study of agroecology should investigate what are the *gaps* (either methodological, or in content) in our knowledge about agroecology.

### **4. Guiding principles**

When determining the scope of the HLPE report, the following guiding principles must be considered:

- Agroecology is based on a holistic approach and system-thinking. It has technical, social, economic, cultural, spiritual and political dimensions. The scope of the report must be congruent with this understanding and discuss agroecology beyond sheer technical aspects in the broad circular context of agri-food systems, from production to consumption and including all related social and ecological foundations and implications;
- The report must be solidly grounded in the human rights framework and therefore use human rights lens, including the right to adequate food and nutrition, the rights of farmers, the rights of peasants and agricultural workers, the rights of women, the rights of indigenous peoples - including their right to self-determination, and the rights of local communities over their territories, lands, waters, ecosystems and genetic resources. Such human rights lens should also include an analysis of how agroecology is an important means to realize all human rights in their interdependence;
- A strong gender analysis and perspective should inspire, influence and permeate the entire report. Particular attention should be given to the gender dimensions of agroecology, to both recognize the role of women in agroecology as well analyze the potential of agroecology in fostering women's rights and women's full empowerment and autonomy;
- The report should pay special attention to the context of small-scale food producers, especially the most vulnerable, and their knowledge systems, especially young women and men in smallholder agriculture and relevant non-farm rural and urban sectors;
- The report should not attempt to redefine agroecology in terms which are different that those established by the movements that characterized it in the first place. In this respect, the characterization of agroecology must not be diluted nor undermined, and agroecology should not be equated, nor the term used interchangeably, with other concepts borne in completely different contexts, such as sustainable agriculture and/or Climate-Smart Agriculture;
- The interconnections between agroecology and food sovereignty should be appreciated and examined by the report;
- In addition to small-scale food producers and indigenous peoples as the primary agents of agroecology, the report should also include the perspectives and concerns of consumer organizations and agricultural workers, in order to take into full consideration the health, food safety and occupational dimensions, especially the hazardous nature of agricultural occupation (health and safety) and the elimination of child labour in agriculture.

## 5. Framing Agroecology in all its Dimensions

Agroecology is vast, diverse and multi-dimensional. In framing the report, it would also be necessary to set boundaries on what can be qualified as ‘agroecology’ and what can *not*. In this respect, the critical screening criteria to consider relate to what strengthens the rights and livelihoods of smallholder farmers/food producers (in terms of their agroecological practices, their resilience, their ecological foundations, their cultural heritage, among others) and sustainable local food systems, and what threatens or erodes them. Consistently with such multidimensional framing, the report should also focus also on consumers’ involvement in co-production, local direct food chains and farmers’ connection to territorial markets, as an integral part of agroecology.

### ***Science, Practice, Movement***

We support the HLPE’s approach of seeing agroecology as science, practice and movement. Each is essential, and each is an equal component of the whole. We recommend that the HLPE uses the scoping exercise to develop deeper questions that examine each of these aspects in greater depth, and propose to embed the following points in each of these three domains:

#### i. Agroecology as Science: What do we know and what do we need to explore?

- More than a science, agroecology represents ‘ways of knowing’. The broad understanding of knowledge vis-à-vis conventional science/knowledge should be clearly examined by report. How do we treat the role of diverse knowledge systems in agroecology and how can we build on this experience? What is the value of participatory research in agroecology, where practitioners themselves are the principal researchers? How to design research to unleash the potential of agroecology?
- The corollary of such broader understanding of knowledge is that the concept of innovation requires re-framing, including the methodologies and actual locus where innovation happens. Agroecology flourishes through practice, experimentation, innovation, which leads to adaptation, learning and the exchange and horizontal spread of knowledge and good practice through peers (e.g. *dialogos de saberes, campesino a campesino* methodologies). This should equally be captured by the report. What kinds of innovation drives and strengthens agroecology? How to design participatory innovation platforms that bring together small-scale food producers and scientists? How can agroecological innovation strengthen the often narrowly-framed scientific innovation and adaptation? How should the conventional scientific method be re-envisioned to ensure that the kind of innovations that spring from agroecology find their proper place and value within what is considered to be “scientific”? What are the technical, social, cultural and economic forms of innovation inherent to agroecology? Why has farmer innovation been more important for agroecology? How can it be supported by public policies and investments?

#### ii. Agroecology as Practice: What do we know and what do we need to explore?

- The report should expose the common principles that bind together a wide range of peoples and their organizations practising agroecology: -- peasants, farmers, fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers, urban poor, youth, women – in the way they themselves articulate them. What can we learn from this? How can public policies and investments recognize these binding principles and strengthen them through public interventions? How do agroecological practices, including traditional practices, mobilize available resources and experience, and strengthen resilience, with the least costs to the system, and the greatest benefits?

- Gender equality and the full realization of women's rights are at the core of agroecology and the report should clearly expose it. How does agroecology strengthen the full recognition of women as civic actors, knowledge bearers and agents of transformation, and how it can contribute to their economic autonomy by also deconstructing the current dominant power balance paradigm?
- Agroecology embodies an approach to food systems that aims to strengthen the relationship between producers and consumers, foster food environments that nourish the community, reduce losses and waste, reduce non-carbon and carbon Greenhouse gases emissions, and maintain and enhance biodiversity, while strengthening local and territorial markets and economies. In many ways, agroecology is a 'way of living'. Since such an approach clearly pursues many critical public objectives, how can public policies and investments strengthen the practice of agroecology? How does agroecology guarantee the strengthening and continuity of agri-food systems (production and distribution in short circuits) [in low-resource countries]? How does unequal access to land (such as concentrated land ownership and use) affect the development of agroecology? How has agroecology advanced our thinking about food, lands, territories, waters, seeds and genetic resources as fundamental commons, and led to alternative tenure systems in these areas?
- Agroecology provides an adequate answer to the challenges addressed by climate change, in the sense that offers a clear alternative to industrial agriculture and associated food systems which contribute to global warming. Indeed, agroecology contributes to environmental justice (e.g. fair use of scarce resources, etc.), ecological integration (i.e. by looking at how the whole system performs ecologically rather than just measuring one resource), and ecological regeneration and recycling. How should public policies, incentives and investments reflect this reality, and be rebalanced to support and enable climate-virtuous agroecological approaches? How can agroecology become the critical resilience strategy to address climate challenges related to agriculture and food systems?
- Agricultural biodiversity (including plants, animals and fish) as well as farmers and indigenous seed systems are the heart of all food systems and at the very core of the practice of agroecology. This should be a central theme to be explored in the report. How does agroecology offer a viable pathway to maintain and enhance biodiversity? How does the strengthening of agroecological practices offer the opportunity to reverse the dramatic loss of biodiversity that industrial agriculture has been driving over the past decades? How can public policies support agroecological practices to enhance biodiversity and strengthen the resilience of our communities in the face of climate change and genetic erosion?
- Accessible and locally generated agrobiodiverse production is one of the cornerstones of balanced, healthy and diversified diets. The report should therefore expose the connection between agroecological practices, particularly those that promote agrobiodiversity, and healthy nutrition. What are the multiple connections between agroecology and nutrition and health? How does agroecology ensure adequate access to healthy food for the full realization of the right to food and the right to health? Considering how nutrition is deeply embedded in equitable socio-economic systems, how does agroecology create conditions of equality between men and women, generate cultural and social equity, enhance community solidarity, and contribute to more sustainable socio-economic processes, creating decent jobs - especially for young people - in agriculture and food systems?
- Recent years have witnessed the increased penetration of the global food system and its large-scale distribution systems at multiple levels, with significant negative implications for small-scale food producers. However, the largest majority of food continues to be traded in local territorial markets which tend to be invisible to public analysis, policies and investments. Building on the recent CFS recommendations on "Connecting Smallholders to Markets", how can public policies and

investments support agroecological practices by strengthening local and territorial markets? How do local markets help spread and scale out agroecology while strengthening local economies? How can public procurement policies (i.e. procurement for schools, governments, hospitals and other public institutions) enhance the impacts of agroecology?

### iii. Agroecology as Movement: What do we know and what do we need to explore?

- Agroecology is profoundly transformative, addressing both the structures that keep people poor, and having multiple benefits across the development and social justice spectrum. It is a very powerful force for social change. It has unleashed energy, power, and creativity to confront multiple developmental challenges and has brought essential voices to policy making at all levels, from the community to the national and international spaces. It has catalyzed the agency of those most affected by insecurity and marginalization to become the architects and drivers of socio-economic justice in their food systems. How can public policies strengthen and further build on this agency to drive the transformations that are necessary to find new sustainable pathways for our societies and economies? How does this agency that comes from below challenge conventional and often top-down development interventions by national and international institutions? What are the implications of this agency in the design of truly participatory public policy spaces at national, regional and international levels?
- We believe that social organization and social process methodologies, which strengthen the protagonism of peasants, farmers and other small-scale producers, are key to scaling out agroecology. Promoting agroecology therefore means to strengthen these processes and methodologies rather than appropriating them. How can national and international development agencies best relate to and build on these processes, and strengthen the work of grassroots, community-led social movements and peasants organizations?

## **6. Evaluation and Monitoring**

The scope of the report needs to consider how to evaluate and monitor over time the multiple impacts of agroecological practices and technologies on food security and nutrition and the full realization of the human right to adequate food. What methodologies, criteria, indicators, statistics and parameters are required to do so? How to build processes and platforms for monitoring and evaluating the contribution of agroecology in all its dimensions? How can these monitoring systems ensure the full participation of those that actually live and practice agroecology?

## **7. The Project Team**

The CSM strongly demands to the HLPE Steering Committee that the composition of the project team ensures gender parity and regional balance.

## **8. Conclusion**

Three main concluding remarks. First, the report should not attempt to redefine agroecology but rather expose the way movements have shaped it as a result of their struggles and solutions. Secondly, the report should articulate the way agroecology contributes to multiple public objectives, exposing the transformational potential that it carries with respect a number of critical development challenges that all countries are confronted with, in the global South and North. Thirdly, the report should generate the knowledge basis to support and articulate clear recommendations for public policies and investments that can strengthen agroecology as a science, as a practice, and as a movement.

On this latter point, the CSM fully supports the HLPE's proposed scope, which states: *“What regulations and standards, what instruments, processes and governance mechanisms are needed to create an enabling environment for the development and implementation of agroecology and other innovative approaches, practices and technologies that enhance food security and nutrition? What are the impacts of trade rules, and intellectual property rights on the development and implementation of such practices and technologies?”*

The CSM stands ready to support the HLPE in rising to this challenge and mobilizing our collective knowledge and energy to contribute to the pursuit of this objective.