Third Informal Discussion: "Agroecological and other innovative approaches (including relevant tools such as digitalization)"

CSM Written Inputs

1. *Do you agree with the HLPE report's two broad categories of innovative approaches: i) agroecological approaches and ii) sustainable intensification approaches?*
2. *Do you agree with the HLPE report's finding that agroecological and related approaches are more focused on transforming food systems, while sustainable intensification and related approaches are more focused on input use efficiency?*

As CSM, we agree with the categorization made by the HLPE into agroecological approaches and sustainable intensification approaches. This categorization helps divide the approaches based on their contribution or not towards resilient food systems, to identify the correct pathway towards the transformation we need.
CSM also agrees with the report findings in recognizing that agroecological and related approaches are more focused on transforming food systems, although we'd like to point out that Agroecology ensures also long-range efficiency through circular economy and practices such as recycling, while sustainable intensification approaches look more at increasing productivity. Furthermore, these "incrementalist" approaches may present the risk of undermining desired progress towards system transformation and sustainability.

The current COVID19 crisis highlights even more the approaches that are truly able to respond to the crisis, namely agroecological approaches, and the ones that are not. Industrial agricultural approaches, which might be adjusted to 'fit-in' the category of sustainable intensification, have been responsible for the destruction of our environment and the planet's biodiversity. Various studies have strongly linked the fast-paced loss of biodiversity with the broad expansion of this pandemic, and possibly future ones.

On the other hand, Agroecology has as a core principle to maintain the balance between planetary and human lives, preserving biodiversity as a pillar to provide health in all perspectives: animal and plant health, soil and water health, which are fundamental for providing a wide range of food ensuring our human health, and preventing similar crisis in the future. Agroecology in this sense not only prevents pandemics but ensures the resilience of local food systems in all its dimensions. Agroecology pursues many critical public objectives, thus leading to a holistic transformation of food systems by going beyond our current economic model and building on solidarity and social relations to ensure that no one is left behind during times of crisis such as the one we are facing.

The HLPE report's extensive analysis and its primary contributions clearly demonstrate that Agroecology is a truly transformational pathway to address all the structural changes needed in our food system in a systemic and integrated way. Agroecology has catalysed the agency of those most affected by food insecurity and marginalization to become the architects and drivers of socio-economic justice in their food systems.

In this sense, Agroecology must be part of the transition process towards the food systems we want to achieve not only in terms of sustainability, but also equitability. Small-scale food producers have already been putting in practice agroecology for decades and are continuing to do so on the territories today as a path to the progressive realization of the Right to Food. These policy process should therefore aim to reinforce and support the practices that are already on the ground to provide the adequate policy environment for small-scale food

producers to enhance the beneficial outcomes that agroecology con provide for social, ecological and health aspects.

3. *Are there any tools or technologies, for example digitalization, that could contribute to both of these approaches, and if so under what conditions?*
4. *Digital technologies are clearly here to stay but are not without their risks and challenges. What should be the focus of any possible recommendation(s) on digitalization in relation to sustainable food systems that enhance food security and nutrition?*

Digitalization is a broad concept in itself. The notion of digitalization being only one- single dimension, that you can agree with it or not needs to be contrasted. In this sense, digitalization is a dimension that needs to be assessed within the broader evaluation framework of each innovation.

In addition to that, the lack of clarity on the impacts of digitalization on food and agriculture, and in particular, on the collecting and concentration of data, risks the extreme concentration of power in the food sector.

Agroecology is not anti-technology and anti-innovation, as modern technologies, including digital ones, are an integral part of the rich mix of heritage, practice and science that agroecological producers experiment and apply. However, an analysis of the political economies associated to digital technologies is needed in order to ensure that their application originates from real needs of local small-scale food producers and is therefore context-specific and/or locally adapted. Peasant knowledge should therefore be always protected from appropriation of data. Addressing the potential negative impacts that digitalization may have on small scale food producers is paramount. However it requires a full dedicated discussion and space, which this process is unable to provide. Moreover, the HLPE report did not put focus on digitalization per se, and we believe this should be maintained as such during this process.