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Launch of HLPE Report

Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition

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Patrick Caron
HLPE Steering Committee Chairperson

Opening statement

Mr Chairperson, dear Mario, thank you very much for your warm words and for your precious support.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to introduce the presentation of this 14th HLPE report on “*Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition*”, requested by the CFS during its 44th Plenary session in October 2017. The HLPE will release the report translated in all UN languages on the 2nd of September 2019, so that it can stimulate discussion during the next 46th Plenary session in October. But in order to best anticipate this process, the HLPE suggested to organize the presentation of the Summary and Recommendations today, before the summer break. And in a few days, the full report will also be made available online in English in advance.

Well, all recent publications on food security and nutrition, in particular from the UN agencies and the HLPE, depict a striking situation: global hunger is on the rise – you all know, while all forms of malnutrition – and not only undernutrition – are increasingly affecting all countries, making it the number one problem in public health!

The global agriculture and food systems are clearly not meeting the world's food demands, as you pointed out Mr Tijani. Moreover, on-going and foreseen changes such as urbanization, conflicts, migrations, depletion of and competition over renewable resources, climatic changes, loss of biodiversity and erosion of ecosystem functions, are likely to generate impacts immediately and on the long term, which will be dramatic.

The HLPE has thus systematically and constantly called, in its reports, for profound transformations in agriculture and food systems to achieve, at all scales, the four dimensions of food security and nutrition.

Acknowledging the need for change does not suffice: we need to understand the reasons which hinder it and promote what makes it possible at a large scale. I will have further opportunity to express myself before the end of my term, but today is not the moment for a legacy. Yet let me remind that one of the beauty of the HLPE is to help identifying the reasons for disagreements and exploring avenues to move beyond, through a rigorous and inclusive process. Disagreements are often generated by differences of perspectives and convictions. They might prevent stakeholders to move beyond sterile opposition to engage a constructive debate. They might divert them from elaborating concrete solutions and designing innovative pathways towards sustainable food systems for food security and nutrition. HLPE reports do not pretend to answer all questions but aim at building a common grammar and vocabulary to fuel discussion and action. I hope that our report will contribute to structure the debate beyond conflicting views. This is the angle you should look at it. And because it completes previous reports to explore the potential contributions of agroecological and other innovative approaches to sustainable food systems, I know how much this particular report is expected.

Agroecology has gained traction in recent years, as you rightly mention. No wonder then, that with a total of 310 contributions in the consultations and 255 candidates to the open call for experts, this report comes second to none of all in terms of attracting public interest. And the audience in the room is one more signal for this.

There is no single and consensual definition of agroecology, nor agreement on all the aspects embedded in this concept. Based on two consultations, the report reflects the current state of knowledge, highlights the main areas of consensus and controversy, as well as the major challenges, gaps and uncertainties to address. It also provides a comparative assessment of different innovative approaches towards sustainable food systems and examples of such approaches and experiences to be promoted and adapted. More examples can be found in the proceedings of the public consultations, both available on-line, which demonstrate the fantastic capacity to innovate in all regions of the world. This is certainly a unique asset of this report.

Central and unique – also – in the report is the recognition of the multiplicity of pathways to be designed and implemented. Both incremental transitions at territorial level and structural changes to institutions and norms at larger scales need to be articulated. Institutional environments are essential to make the transformations needed in food systems happen; this is reflected in the recommendations.

The illustration on the cover pages are always carefully selected to convey key messages. And we wanted this year to share the promise that agroecological and other innovative approaches may sow the seeds of a better future. On the back page, we illustrate the need to look at technology as an essential instrument, yet as a support to be tailored to achieve the political and social expectations for sustainable food systems for food security and nutrition.

This 14th report strengthens the messages conveyed year after year by the HLPE. It confirms the main shifts in the global agenda: on the one hand, the move beyond a focus on food production to consider the whole food systems to address food security and nutrition; on the other, the importance of looking at food systems as a strong lever to achieve the Agenda 2030 in its entirety. This report will thus certainly contribute to the global forward looking narrative which is expected by the CFS in 2020.

I sincerely hope that this report will provide elements to fuel future policy convergence discussions within the CFS and will open new avenues for innovative approaches.

On behalf of the Steering Committee, I would like to acknowledge the engagement of all experts who contributed to this report, firstly the Project Team members and to their leader, Dr Fergus Lloyd Sinclair. I would like to thank the HLPE Secretariat for its precious and continuous support and take this opportunity to thank the outgoing coordinator, Nathanaël Pingault for its tireless engagement, and to greet the incoming coordinator, Èvariste Nicolétis. I would like to show my gratitude to all the resource partners who supported the work of the HLPE in an independent way and hence enabled the HLPE to release this publication.

I am happy to leave the floor to Fergus Sinclair for a detailed presentation of the findings and recommendations and I very much look forward to our further discussions.

Mr Chair, dear Mario, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, many thanks for your attention.