

Contributions to the HLPF 2016 from the Committee on Agriculture (COAG)

I. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

Since it was founded in 1971, the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) has played an important and influential role in helping to guide the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through a period of extraordinary development and change in global food systems. As FAO’s main technical advisory committee on agriculture, COAG has provided strategic policy and technical advice on many of the challenges FAO has faced including the safe use of pesticides, gender, food production and safety, nutrition and sustainability, the management of natural resources, statistics, soil, water, livestock and many other issues leading to the improvement of livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities at large.

COAG is increasingly addressing the multiple dimensions of agriculture, making sure that its social, environmental and economic dimensions are taken into account into FAO work and in its relation with member countries.

FAO’s strategic framework puts people at the centre of all its efforts towards food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, rural poverty reduction, efficient and inclusive markets, and resilience to crises.

As part of this process, COAG is helping FAO better fulfil its mandate by providing technical and policy advice on issues ranging from sustainable crop and livestock production intensification to how to manage land and water resources in a changing climate. The Committee also highlights the role of agriculture not only as a source of food, but in providing livelihoods for millions of smallholder farmers and their families around the world.

Throughout this process of strategic transformation, FAO has been listening carefully to its Member Nations with COAG providing one of the most important forums for informed and strategic discussion. This important role has been typical of COAG over the past 40 years.

FAO supports the integration of agreements and guidelines that are important in the agriculture /environment nexus and assists member countries in their implementation with a view to the needs of the poorest farmers. The International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides is one example. In addition, COAG supported the FAO Strategy for Sustainable Crop Production Intensification through an ecosystem approach and an enabling environment (the “Save and Grow” approach). Such instruments have different approaches to vulnerability. The Code of Conduct on Distribution and Use of Pesticides and several of its guidelines refer to the need to protect vulnerable populations, which they define as including women, children, and unborn children. “Save and Grow” specifically refers to vulnerable groups such as smallholders and in particular to the importance of social safety nets for their benefit.

In 2000, COAG recommended the need for policies to support smallholder agriculture and stressed the need to recognize that “sustainable smallholder agriculture (including livestock) can provide environmentally friendly, socially equitable and economically viable solutions”.

Recently, FAO has been promoting the Common Vision on Sustainable Food and Agriculture approach, an approach based on five principles that puts rural livelihoods, equity and social well-being at the center of the agricultural debate. The Common Vision on Sustainable Food and Agriculture will benefit from COAG discussions in September 2016 and is a framework, to promote more productive and more sustainable agriculture, in order to more effectively address the relevant targets of Agenda 2030.

Since the initial development of the Agenda 21 plan of action for sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, FAO has been leading its implementation in agriculture, with COAG contributing in a number of areas.

While recognizing that sustainability is the key to successful agricultural and rural development, in 2005, COAG strongly backed the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) initiative. In 2010, the Committee fully endorsed FAO's plan to support and contribute to the Rio+20 process and to advise member countries on the preparatory process.

While backing the [Save and Grow](#) initiative in 2012, COAG recommended it to FAO Member Nations and advised them to incorporate relevant aspects of it in their national agricultural development strategies.

One of the most important developments in global agriculture since the food price crisis of 2007 and 2008 has been the increasing levels of investment in food production and the rapid growth of the agribusiness sector, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In 2007, COAG recommended that "FAO give priority to responding to the challenges of agribusiness and agro-industries development by reinforcing expertise and capacity, providing high quality information and analysis, supporting agro-industry and value chain programmes and enhanced public-private cooperation".

Then in 2010, COAG's Member Nations focused on FAO's existing Strategic Objectives and "emphasized the importance of the work on agribusiness and rural agro-industries, in particular small and medium enterprises, also with a view of expanding rural employment opportunities."

Agriculture – including horticulture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, and fodder and milk production – is increasingly spreading to towns and cities. In 1999, COAG first reviewed and discussed the role of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) and recommended that FAO develop an integrated approach to assist member countries deal with UPA at the policy and technical level. Since that initial step by COAG, FAO has launched various initiatives in this area including the Growing Greener Cities project to promote urban and peri-urban-horticulture; School garden projects in a number of countries; Programmes to improve water quality used for urban horticulture, and the Food for the Cities programme, which since 2001 has supported and coordinated activities focused on urban food security.

COAG has been in the forefront in addressing land degradation and water issues. In that regards, COAG requested FAO to address land degradation and sustainable land and soil management through a country-driven approach. Over the past decades, this has led to the production of validated guidelines, methodologies, tools and statistical information that support capacity development to assess, and in some cases to regularly monitor, land degradation and promote Sustainable Land Management (SLM).

Freshwater resources are subject to increasing competition, led by a progressively escalating demographic pressure and the direct and indirect impacts of on-going economic development efforts in many countries and regions. At country level, competition on the use of available freshwater resources is expressed mainly across different economic sectors (such as agriculture, industries, services and households). The issue of water governance has been discussed by COAG and recommendations made concerning within transboundary river basins, competition for limited freshwater resources which fundamentally exists among countries sharing the same basin and, if not managed properly through cooperation and mutually agreed modalities, formal or informal, this kind of competition could potentially lead to dangerous tensions between the countries involved.

II. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

While smallholders and family farmers are among the most susceptible to food insecurity globally, those affected by natural and human-induced disasters or political instability are the most vulnerable among them. In such contexts, measures to protect vulnerable population groups and improve livelihoods have been difficult to implement or ineffective¹. The SDGs and the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” provide the opportunity for examining the impact of crop production on multiple aspects of sustainable development (i.e. all SDGs). Who are the vulnerable and what are they vulnerable to? How should policy-makers approach the trade-offs that arise from multiple interests? For example, would it be more effective to give priority to increasing farmers’ crop production or to decreasing their costs of production?

Moreover, in the area of land degradation, based on project experiences such as Land Degradation Assessment (LADA) and others, a definition must be developed to address to which degree national methods should conform to agreed procedures, standards and definitions.

Concerning food safety and nutrition, COAG closely monitors and supports FAO’s program. It remains a topic of on-going attention to ensure that food safety is appropriately incorporated in all of the relevant programs by FAO to ensure not only trade-inclusive but also health protective development of value chains and food systems globally. There also remain a need to mainstream nutrition in all agriculture development policies and strategies at national and regional levels. Policy coherence is also needed at national and regional levels to mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation principles in agricultural development programs.

III. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

Past FAO experience shows that there cannot be successful and sustainable agriculture if the conditions of living of those who live out of agriculture are not taken into consideration and addressed in policies and programmes. Progresses in agricultural development imply that farmers and other rural dwellers are put in the driving seat and in the conditions to perform better. Excessive inequalities and lack of consideration for the most vulnerable segment of the population leads to unstable situations and poor development performances. In focusing on smallholders and family farmers, FAO and COAG in particular focus on the need to consider all segment of the agricultural population and to address their specific needs.

¹ FAO. 2015. *The State of Food and Agriculture*, Rome.

Integrated approaches to production, which include strategies like decreased dependence on external inputs, increasing the capacity of ecosystems to sustain natural processes, etc. are important for sustainable agriculture and provide links with several other SDGs. Efforts to up-scale such approaches, which are embedded in a diversity of specific local contexts, show that family farmers are the main actors in the development and sustainability of their own production systems. The learner-centred, group-based learning processes of Farmer Field Schools (FFS) encourage collective processes among farmers that serve to strengthen the basis of farmer organisations that defend the interests of smallholder farmers, both in terms of the relation with markets and to ensure their participation in the design of policies that affect them.

The successful experiences gained with the FAO-hosted Global Soil Partnership (GSP) on the Global Soil Information System (which includes SoilSTAT) follows a country-driven implementation with harmonized approaches and policies. Capacity development is inherent to the GSP approach, as many countries require updating technologies and methods on soil data and information, nationally and at the regional level.

Moreover, FAO has a remarkable experience in collecting, analysing and systematically disseminating data and information on status and use of water resources, which is important for agriculture and livestock development including for smallholders. The AQUASTAT database indeed is a prominent resource, and is considered a benchmark reference. The AQUASTAT experience emphasizes the importance of both data and its provision by countries. Substantial improvements are needed at country level in the methodologies and mechanisms of data collection and processing, in order to provide relevant, useful and reliable information to planners, policy- and decision-makers. The capacity of the countries to manage the information on their water resources needs to be boosted.

Concerning food safety, some of the most critical lessons learned is the need for a strong political will necessary to make safe and nutritious food for everyone. The cross-boundary and cross-disciplinary nature necessary to make safe and nutritious food accessible to everyone requires a strong commitment to a multi-stakeholder infrastructure that often needs to consider trans-boundary issues.

IV. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

The most vulnerable agricultural population are, by definition, vulnerable to shocks. These include extreme climate events like droughts and floods or heat waves, excessive volatility of agricultural food prices, pest outbreaks etc. In many places, vulnerable populations also face issues related to poor governance of land and water tenure and risks associated with the loss of agricultural assets.

Crop production, especially family farming remains the main productive activity of smallholders. Unfortunately, there are still many barriers and challenges to taking integrated approaches to crop production and diversification. These exist both at the technical level (such as lack of knowledge of integrated approaches among farmers and extension agents), and at the policy level: policies related to production, access to natural resources, markets, etc. are often focussing on increasing production for global markets with insufficient attention to impacts on ecosystem services and nutrition.

Food safety affects the whole chain from agriculture to consumer. Food safety is critical and only can be achieved through coherent approaches involving all stakeholders. Not all countries have the infrastructure in place to be able to adapt to a changing world. Urbanization and climate change are

the two drivers that will require a re-tooling of food producers and regulators to continue to provide food for all.

V. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

Political guidance and support will continue to be necessary to ensure a common understanding that safe and nutritious food is a basic human right of the United Nation and the underpinning of many sustainable development goals. For a world without hunger and poverty, all countries need to have food systems in place that have the production of safe food incorporated in its core. FAO is helping countries to build and strengthen the capacities to implement global food safety standards and thus enabling access to trade for their local food value chains, contributing to value creation and employment in support of SDG1 to help end poverty in the agriculture sector. Food safety is a critical goal for SDG2, as improved nutrition can only be achieved when the food consumed is safe. Furthermore, food safety is one of the most essential prerequisites for SDG3, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

The two SDG targets directly associated with sustainable agriculture (2.3, on smallholder productivity and earnings; and 2.4 on sustainable and resilient agriculture) have the potential to substantially contribute to the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. In many cases, this will require to move from a view of agriculture based primarily on production and productivity, to an approach that fully integrates the different dimensions of sustainability and puts people's livelihood at the center of the agricultural policy processes. This will require efforts at national, regional and global levels.

The HLPF should give priority to developing an integrated approach to monitoring the SDGs. In particular, it should recognise the complementarity of Goal 2 with other related goals.

SDG target 6.4 and indicators 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 focus on the sustainable use of water resources. In particular, the HLPF could focus on the interaction between these two indicators, and on how to link the information that they can provide with the third subject of target 6.4, that is reducing the number of people affected by water scarcity.

VI. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

In order to feed an ever increasing world population that will mostly live in urban settings and will depend on a global food supply that is resilient towards the adaptation necessary to deal with climate change, it will be critical that all policies support an integrated multi-stakeholder process to ensure that all food is safe, nutritious and accessible to all. Policies supporting national, regional and global value chains will need to focus on being health-protective and trade-inclusive at all steps of the chain.

Efforts in developing and adopting voluntary guidelines on issues like governance of tenure or responsible investments in agriculture offer the right sets of principles to ensure that development does not take place at the expenses of the most vulnerable, and that it is inclusive in benefitting all categories of populations.

COAG recommendations are needed to support the development and implementation of SDG targets not only using country statistics, but also with other platforms for observing and monitoring change, such as systems for facilitating documentation and reporting.

Set up a working structure for the collection and processing of data and information on water resources and their use at country level.

As noted above, while COAG has a number of policies, norms and codes of conduct that relate to crop production, their impact on the most vulnerable needs to be elucidated. COAG could be invited to consider how its policies and instruments address the issue of vulnerable groups with a view to identifying gaps and opportunities towards developing approaches to sustainable crop production that focus on the needs of the most vulnerable.