

## Position Paper: Sustainable Agriculture in Rio+20



### CONCERN

To achieve the goal of contributing to Sustainable Development through a “balanced consideration of social, economic and environmental goals and objectives in both public and private decision-making” the Rio+20 conference must treat Sustainable Agriculture as one of its most critical topics.

Sustainable agriculture enhances production while being more resilient to climate change and natural resource depletion, it diversifies produce and enhances food security, it is less exposed to price volatility and it benefits the livelihood of millions of families and family farmers around the globe. Feeding tomorrow’s generations will be impossible if soils are not kept rich, water resources are not available and catchment areas are not kept in place.

The UNCSD Rio+20 Conference presents a critical opportunity for the UNECE Region to share its advanced knowledge and experience on Sustainable Agriculture in governance and policy matters.

### RIO+20& AGRICULTURE

#### Generally:

- Agriculture provides for a high percentage of GDP and work force engaged in agriculture in least developed (LDCs) and least industrialized countries (LICs)<sup>i</sup>. Greening the economy essentially seeks to create new jobs and a green agriculture is a net job creator<sup>1</sup>.
- Investments in agriculture contribute more to GDP growth and the ultimate eradication of poverty in comparison with other sectors.<sup>ii</sup>
- Growth in agricultural yields generally leads to a higher rate of poverty alleviation than growth in other sectors.<sup>iii</sup>
- 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and directly or indirectly depend on agriculture for their livelihood.<sup>iv</sup>
- The prevalent problem of malnutrition affects almost one billion people worldwide and is deemed to increase due to growth in global population up to 9 billion by 2050.<sup>v</sup> This will be an enormous challenge for conventional agriculture.

#### Sustainable Agriculture:

- Prevalent, intensive agriculture, which is mainly based on heavy use of fossil fuel-based energy and inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides leads to environmental degradation in soil, air and water throughout the world.<sup>vi</sup>
- According to IPCC, agriculture contributes 13.5% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which is even more than global transport contributes (13.1%).<sup>2</sup> The highest emissions of greenhouse gases from agriculture are generally associated with the most intensive farming systems.<sup>vii</sup>
- Sustainable agriculture boosts the agricultural yields with less input of finite natural resources, it recycles nutrients.<sup>viii</sup>
- Sustainable Agriculture contributes significantly to reduce GHG releases and to sequester carbon in soils and biomass.<sup>ix</sup>
- Sustainable Agriculture is conserving agricultural biodiversity and reducing environmental degradation impacts.<sup>x</sup>
- Sustainable agriculture is a safety-net for millions of smallholders. It is multi-functional as a provider of food and other economic, societal and environmental goods.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Position Paper: Sustainable Agriculture in Rio+20**



### **CHALLENGES**

Current agricultural policy and governance fall short of contributing to sustained food security, the eradication of poverty and sustainable rural development. The reasons remain numerous: There are diverging views of the future of agriculture and consequently a lack of financial and political commitment exists. Policy coherence is missing, there are currently no institutions taking care of the transition towards Sustainable Agriculture on an international level.

### **AIM OF THE EVENT ON EFFECTIVE ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The overarching objective of the event is to exchange possible solutions on how to promote Sustainable Agriculture through governance and policy measures in the context of Rio+20 and beyond. The UNECE Region forms a particularly interesting body for such a discussion, as it can look back on at least two decades of experience with the topic.

1. Facilitate the exchange of information among stakeholders on sustainable agriculture and food security in the context of Rio+20
2. Exchange ideas on effective governance and action for a meaningful outcome in Rio+20 and beyond on Sustainable Agriculture
3. Discuss inputs of the UNECE Region on the issue
4. Facilitate networking and contacts between various stakeholders

The exchange should translate into:

5. Integrating Agriculture as a critical topic in the Co-Chairs Summary in order to be presented at the Intersessional Meeting in New York 15-16th December 2011
6. Formulate next steps to promote Sustainable Agriculture in the process towards Rio on International and national levels.
7. Provide ideas on how to move on in order to insert Sustainable Agriculture as a main theme in the UNCSD 2012 Zero Draft.

### **CONTACT**

Mr. Michael Brander, Project Coordination, Biovision, [m.brand@biovision.ch](mailto:m.brand@biovision.ch), +41 44 500 4517

Ms. Sonja Tschirren, Project Officer, Biovision, [s.tschirren@biovision.ch](mailto:s.tschirren@biovision.ch), +41 44 500 4983

---

i Estimates are that the value added of GDP through agriculture is at 25% for LICs, World Development Report 2010.

ii The World Bank (2008). World Development Report 2008. World Bank: Washington D.C.

iii Irz, X., L. Lin, C. Thirtle and S. Wiggins (2001) Agricultural Growth and Poverty Alleviation." Development Policy Review 19 (4): 449–466.

Bravo-Ortega, C. and D. Lederman (2005). Agriculture and national welfare around the world: causality and international heterogeneity since 1960. Policy Research Working Paper Series 3499, The World Bank.

iv IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.

v United Nations (2005). World Population Prospects - The 2004 Revision. United Nations: New York.

vi IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report. (p. 59)

vii The World Bank (2008). World Development Report 2008. World Bank: Washington D.C.

viii IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.

ix Niggli, U., Fließbach, A., Hepperly, P. and Scialabba, N. (2009). Low Greenhouse Gas Agriculture: Mitigation and Adaptation Potential of Sustainable Farming Systems. FAO, April 2009. <http://orgprints.org/15690/1/niggli-et-al-2009-lowgreenhouse.pdf>

x Niggli, U., Fließbach, A., Hepperly, P. and Scialabba, N. (2009). Low Greenhouse Gas Agriculture: Mitigation and Adaptation Potential of Sustainable Farming Systems. FAO, April 2009. <http://orgprints.org/15690/1/niggli-et-al-2009-lowgreenhouse.pdf>

xi IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.