

## Position Paper:

### Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture in Rio+20:

What would be a meaningful outcome to deliver the urgent change we need?



#### A MEANINGFUL OUTCOME IN RIO

1. Mandate an International Organization to propose actions to implement sustainable agriculture and food security based on the findings of relevant reports such as the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD).

2. Strengthen the scientific basis for political action on sustainable agriculture and food and security by inviting an existing body to conduct a regular, intergovernmental, participatory, and multi-stakeholder assessment of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology, while taking into account pre-existing processes.

#### WHY?

The UNCSD Rio+20 Conference's declared goal of Sustainable Development through a "balanced consideration of social, economic and environmental goals and objectives in both public and private decision-making" cannot be achieved without including *Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture* as one of its most critical topics.

Current agricultural policy and governance fall short of contributing to sustained food security, the eradication of poverty and sustainable rural development. The reasons are numerous: diverging views on the future of agriculture and consequently a lack of financial and political commitment; the lack of a well-coordinated initiative no global level to implement sustainable agriculture; economic, social and ecological benefits of sustainable agriculture have not been duly considered in policy making.

A paradigm shift in agricultural policies and practices towards sustainable agriculture is necessary. It is in fact the only viable solution, if agricultural produce is to be increased to feed a growing world population in the long run, under the given circumstances of degraded soils, dwindling water reserves, loss of biodiversity, climate change and high dependence on finite natural resources.

The timing for change is excellent: The UNCSD Rio+20 Conference presents the opportunity for the international community to acknowledge the critical role Sustainable Agriculture for Sustainable Development and the Conference theme Green Economy, and to finally take action for its implementation, especially within the Conference theme of the Institutional Framework. The necessary knowledge and know-how for a change exists and was put forth for example in the 2009 IAASTD Assessment or UNEP's Green Economy Report 2011.

#### FACTS & FIGURES

1. 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and directly or indirectly depend on agriculture for their livelihood.<sup>i</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>ii</sup>
2. Agriculture provides for a high percentage of GDP and work force engaged in agriculture in least developed (LDCs) and least industrialized countries (LICs)<sup>iii</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>iv</sup>

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3. 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>v</sup>
4. 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>vi</sup>
5. Sustainable agriculture:
  - boosts the agricultural yields with less input of finite natural resources;<sup>vii</sup>
  - contributes significantly to reduce GHG releases and to sequester carbon in soils and biomass;<sup>viii</sup>
  - conserves agricultural biodiversity and reducing environmental degradation impacts;<sup>ix</sup>
  - provides a safety-net for millions of smallholders. It is multi-functional as a provider of food and other economic, societal and environmental goods.<sup>x</sup>

### CONTACT

*Mr. Michael Brander, Project Coordination, Biovision, [m.brander@biovision.ch](mailto:m.brander@biovision.ch), +41 44 500 45 17*

Biovision and the Millennium Institute, together with an alliance of 140 NGOs (see also: <http://www.timetoactrio20.org/en/>) are contributing to the process towards Rio+20, to promote sustainable agriculture as a key issue and work towards its implementation.

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i IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.

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

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

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

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

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

vii IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.

viii 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>

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 IAASTD (2008). Synthesis Report.

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