

Comments on the Draft Scope of the report ‘Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition’

The proposed draft scope is clearly missing a holistic approach concerning agroecology reflecting on why agroecology is taken into the center of the report. The report would benefit from a stronger framing of the urgent need for agroecology resulting from the failure of conventional agricultural and food systems in terms of food security, nutritional adequacy, environmental protection, climate resilience and social equity.

- Challenge the “growth” narrative

Research has shown that the global problem of hunger and malnutrition is not caused by a lack of food supply but rather its root causes are factors such as unequal access to resources (land, water etc.), poverty and lack of democratic representation with a special exclusion of the most vulnerable groups. Therefore, the emphasis on the growth narrative in the first paragraph should be reconsidered. Agroecology and other innovations should be assessed with regard to their impact on food sovereignty, which is the people’s right to produce, distribute, and consume their food sovereignly and independently from the influence of the food corporations and market institutions which are increasingly dominating the global food system. Food Sovereignty frames agricultural production in a much wider socio-political-context and demands that particularly small-scale food producers have the capacity, information, resources, and power to access and use appropriate techniques and innovations, and that productivity gains occur in places where food is desperately needed. As women are especially suffering from structural and institutional inequalities, gender inequality should be addressed explicitly in the scope of the report.

- Draw clear lines between agroecology and other concepts / practices (such as precision agriculture & genetic engineering)

Agroecology is based on working with the nature and with people, not against both of them. One goal of agroecology is to minimize the bad effects of agriculture’s interference with nature and environment. This means the precautionary principle is absolutely at the core of agroecology. Accordingly risky technologies that manipulated and change nature such as old and new forms of genetic engineering can never ever be a part of agroecology. In fact agroecology and genetic engineering are antagonistic concepts. Agroecology works with nature. Genetic engineering works against nature and wants to manipulate it. The HLPE report will have to respect that these two are completely different concepts. The HLPE should be considered as failed when blurring these core values.

Agroecology is a concept that is routed in circular economy trying to achieve independence from external inputs in order to secure long term FSN without negative impacts on the environment. The report should highlight that holistic thinking is at the core of agroecology. This needs to be considered especially when it comes to new technologies such as digitalization and precision agriculture. So whether for example precision agriculture can be a part of agroecology needs to be very critical analyzed. Since for the production and maintenance of precision agriculture products (satellites, tractors, drones, computers and so on) huge amounts of minerals (to be extracted from the environment, maybe even former farm- or grassland or forests and destroying these places of

agro ecological importance) and energy and external knowledge are necessary, precision agriculture should be considered rather and at the least as an external input. This would imply that agroecology would try to use this technology as little as possible and try to replace it with local, traditional and participatory knowledge and low input machinery, maybe even based on animal drag force.

- **Elaborate indicators about how agroecological innovations are developed:**

It should be made very clear in the report that agroecology and agroecological innovations require participatory research that involves farmers and recognizes their central role in defining the research needs. Smallholders and other vulnerable groups have to play a central role to define strategies and elaborate innovations. This is important to make sure to elaborate approaches they will benefit from and which fit to the local context and local conditions. Therefore it is important that people in the territories have the possibility to organize themselves and be represented in the debates around agroecology. There should be no debate on agroecology without having grassroots organizations involved. Agroecological innovations can be distinguished from other innovations as they are build bottom up and not top down, and also as they promote holistic solutions instead of technical solutions.

- **Put biodiversity and farmer seed systems at the core of agroecology**

Agroecology is a concept of minimizing risks and reaching resilience. Therefore it is deeply rooted in diversity. Agroecology is impossible without a huge diversity of crops grown and a huge diversity of livestock reared. This means working with and for biodiversity is again at the core of the concept of agroecology. Concerning seeds this clearly calls for focusing von traditional and farmers seed systems and not industrial seeds. This especially while facing natural disasters such as climate change. The report should look at how farmers managed to cope with recent disasters such as earthquakes in Nepal based on their agro-ecological practices such as setting up seed banks. Also it should be looked at on how Vietnamese farmers managed via participatory seed breeding and farmers field schools to breed new rice varieties well adapted to the changing climate in the Mekong area.

- **Emphasize the connection between agroecology and food systems**

The scope should also include:

- A clear definition of what is meant by “innovative approaches”
- A Human Rights and people-centered perspective should be central throughout the report
- How agroecology is a viable option for dealing with the issue of resource management from a rights-based perspective e.g. land, water and seeds
- How agroecological practices enable small-scale and marginal farmers/producers, pastoralists, fisher folk, forest dwellers, gatherers, hunters, indigenous peoples, the rural landless, who are large in number, to maintain and/or improve their food sovereignty and food and nutrition security.
- How diverse public policies can be elaborated that provide localised solutions and actually respond to farmers’ and local communities’ collective needs