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## **Boost agroecological farming to feed world and save climate, UN expert says**



22 June 2010 – Agroecological farming, which improves food production and farmers' incomes while at the same time protecting the soil, water and climate, could feed an estimated world population of nine billion people by 2050 and go a long way to save the climate, if implemented now, experts at a United Nations seminar concluded today.

The two-day international meeting on agroecology, held in Brussels, was organized under the auspices of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, and featured many world experts on the subject.

Reporting on their findings, Mr. De Schutter said that today, most efforts to boost food production focus on large-scale investments in land and towards a "Green Revolution" model: improved seeds, chemical fertilisers and machines. But scant attention has been paid to the more effective agroecological methods, he said.

Agroecological farming approaches include agroforestry (planting trees and crops on the same parcel), biological control of pests and diseases through the use of natural predators, water harvesting methods, intercropping, green manure cover crops, mixed crops, livestock management, and a range of additional practices.

The widest study ever conducted on the subject found that agroecological approaches resulted in an average crop yield gain of 79 per cent. The study covered 286 projects in 57 developing countries, representing a total surface of 37 million hectares.

Such “agroecological success stories” abound in Africa. In Tanzania, where the western provinces of Shinyanga and Tabora were once known as the “Desert of Tanzania,” agroforestry techniques and participatory processes allowed some 350,000 hectares of land to be rehabilitated in two decades. Profits per household rose by up to \$500 a year. Similar techniques are being used successfully in Malawi.

This is in contrast to the methods which have made modern agriculture a huge contributor to greenhouse gas emissions – accounting for 14 per cent of total annual emissions, with changes in land use, including deforestation for agricultural expansion, contributing another 19 per cent.

“With more than a billion hungry people on the planet, and the climate disruptions ahead of us, we must rapidly scale up these sustainable techniques,” Professor De Schutter said. “Even if it makes the task more complex, we have to find a way of addressing global hunger, climate change, and the depletion of natural resources, all at the same time. Anything short of this would be an exercise in futility.”

The experts in Brussels based their conclusions on the experiences of countries such as Cuba and Brazil, which have pro-agroecology policies, and on the successful experiences of such international research centres as the World Agroforestry Center in Nairobi – as well as on the programmes of La Via Campesina, the transnational peasant movement, which runs agroecology training programmes.

“What is needed now is political will to move from successful pilot projects to nation-wide policies,” the Special Rapporteur said. To that end, would ask the Committee on World Food Security to work, during its October session, on the policy levers to scale up agroecology.

“This is the best option we have today,” he added. “We can’t afford not to use it.”

Professor De Schutter was appointed the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in May 2008 by the UN Human Rights Council. In that capacity, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in an unpaid capacity.

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