

Concept note for CSD- 17 Major Groups

People-centred and knowledge-based agriculture: a new paradigm for agricultural development

The following concept note was drafted by the Farmers, Scientific and Technological Community and Business and Industry to stimulate the discussion on a possible common approach to CSD -17 Policy discussion on sustainable agriculture

Recent events regarding global food production have made it clear that the current system for developing agricultural policy is not capable of meeting the world's needs in a sustainable manner. Relevant policies lack integration and too often focus on short-term objectives with little consideration of long-term impacts or spill over effects. In the past, government policies have been focused on structural issues rather than on human development and capital. Now, governments need to look in a new direction to equip farmers, particularly small shareholders, with the tools they need to sustainably increase agricultural productivity.

Over the last two years, tight food markets as well strong weather variations have been the main drivers for rising food prices. As a result, the current food crisis brought agriculture back to the top of the international agenda and renewed optimism for the farming community in terms of investment opportunities in agriculture. This situation was the result of decades of decreasing food prices and underinvestment in agriculture.

Today, agriculture is faced with daunting challenges from rising population, shifting food demands, economic growth, bioenergy demands and sustainability due to strained natural resources. After more than twenty years of neglect of agricultural policies such as research and development funding, extension services, lack of access to credit, problems of land availability and infrastructure, the needs are great. Having essentially ignored or withdrawn from agricultural and rural development, it is high time for public policy makers worldwide, to think carefully through a new agricultural model which would be "people-centred and knowledge-based".

This new shift in thinking would be based on a model aimed at producing an integrated and global long term vision with all the stakeholders to achieve food and nutrition security. In fact, the agricultural sector in each part of the world, should aim at contributing to the overall economic balance. However, it is worth noting that a globally sustainable system should comprise a mosaic of site specific solutions. While this principle must seem simple, the implications are profound and require significant changes to the current way of doing things.

The fundamental role of agriculture is both to feed people and to secure livelihoods for producers throughout the world. The success of this role depends upon appropriate investments in agriculture and also upon changing ways of doing business.

It also should be based on a conducive policy environment for agricultural investment, proper infrastructure and sound funding. Investment in agriculture is key to economic development in particular in developing countries. Attracting investment in agriculture requires a stable long-term commitment and a fundamental change in attitude of governments to work closely with all civil society stakeholders. In other words, there is a need for "a public private integrated development approach to agriculture". Therefore, it is crucial to put the right policies and regulations mechanisms in place in a sustainable way.

Stimulating innovation and knowledge is an important element in modernising agriculture. Therefore, the issue of sound resource allocation is critical for improved agricultural development. Rural poverty and hunger will be alleviated, through the transformation of subsistence farmers into small scale entrepreneurs.

This should be done through a host of measures such as: incentives for business to work more with small-holder farmers (selling inputs and sourcing products), measures to encourage youth to stay in rural areas and set up in farming, special programs to recognise women's contribution and critical role, support for local authorities' actions (services/infrastructure), greater facilitation for NGOs in working with farmers to innovate and build other capacities, increase funding for research and extension services that are farmer-centred, the development of value-added processing/storage to reduce post-harvest losses and create off-farm jobs.

Besides, farming must be adapted in accordance with socio-economic conditions, the intended final use for harvested produce (subsistence, local markets, global value chains.) and the characteristics of soils, planted varieties, local climatic conditions and others. Such a broad range of concerns requires expert management by skilled and informed farmers. Policy makers should provide the enabling environment to bolster farmers' ability to implement the best practices.

Here are a few points on which Major Groups could provide guidance on to policy makers:

- What are the basic skills that farmers need in order to be able to select, test and implement practices and technologies that are best suited to their needs?
- How can different forms of training and education be better integrated and coordinated in order to support continual skill-building among rural and agricultural populations?
- How can policies support access to a full range of expertise, ranging from traditional knowledge to modern technologies, and related information on their particular advantages and disadvantages in order to allow farmers to make informed decisions?
- Knowledge is useful only if farmers can access the elements needed to implement a given solution. What policy instruments support the availability of the tools and technique associated with various approaches? How can the scientific community interact with the farming community in this regard?
- How can agricultural policy be shifted to supporting specific outcomes rather than dictating specific farming practices?
- What measures and tools can reduce and manage risk in the agricultural value chain and/or distribute it more diffusely across the value chain?
- How can new investments be encouraged into agriculture to alleviate supply chain shortages and generate economic and rural development?
- How can farmers better organise themselves (in co-ops, in commodity supply chains, etc.) in order to reap greater benefits from the revenues generated by the agricultural value chain?

You can channel your comments to:

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