

## Scientists' Open Letter to FAO Director General Graziano da Silva, in Support of the February 2015 Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology

24 June 2015

Dear Director General da Silva,

As scientists and scholars working in sustainable agriculture and food systems, we are writing to support and bring to your attention the recent *Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology*<sup>1</sup>, dated 27 February 2015. The Declaration affirms that agroecology can produce food in ecologically sustainable and socially just ways, and can “generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas.”

The Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration resulted from a historic meeting in Nyéléni, Mali of “delegates representing diverse organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers including peasants, indigenous peoples and communities (including hunters and gatherers), family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people.” Together, they represented those who produce as much as 70 percent of the world’s food, as recognized in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)’s 2014 *State of Food and Agriculture* report.

In September 2014, many of us wrote to you in the Scientists’ Support Letter for the International Symposium on Agroecology. We would like to reiterate that agroecology as a science, practice and social movement fosters an uncommonly promising synthesis of knowledge across many domains. In agroecology, traditional and experiential knowledge comes together with scientific knowledge, both social and natural, to animate a transdisciplinary, action-oriented approach to agriculture. This synergy fosters the sustainable production of healthy, diverse foods and provides a stable livelihood to farmers, while decreasing the impacts of agriculture on biodiversity, soils, waterways and climate. Applying principles of ecology to the design and management of such systems, it considers the food system as a socioecological system – encompassing economic, cultural and political dimensions while facilitating both sustainability and justice.

We find it disappointing, then, that agroecology is only mentioned once in the FAO Medium Term Plan<sup>2</sup>, while “climate-smart” agriculture and various articulations of so-called sustainable intensification are mentioned throughout. Quoting from our previous letter, “no approach can be scientifically assessed as ‘sustainable’ according to most established definitions of sustainability” without incorporating “distributive and procedural justice.” Climate-smart

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, the “Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration.”

<sup>2</sup> “The Director-General’s Medium Term Plan 2014-17 (reviewed) and Programme of Work and Budget 2016-17,” dated June 2015, retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm710e>.

agriculture and sustainable intensification lack the elements of procedural and distributive justice found in agroecology and food sovereignty, and so their ability to effectively address climate change and sustainability are scientifically questionable. We instead strongly encourage the FAO to seek to build on the Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration, in particular, to build on its incorporation of sovereignty, rights and justice as key elements of a rational approach to a sustainable and food-secure system that promotes human dignity. At least, a greater focus on agroecology within FAO's strategic planning would seem to be appropriate given the three regional agroecology meetings in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia to be held this year under the FAO's auspices. The pertinence of agroecology in FAO's work is particularly clear today with the first Regional Agroecology Meeting to be held shortly in Brasilia.

### **THE NYÉLÉNI AGROECOLOGY DECLARATION'S COMMON PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES**

Given our support for a comprehensive socio-ecological approach to agroecology, we call on the FAO to give strong regard to the recent Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration, particularly its Common Pillars and Principles of Agroecology. In the previous letter, we encouraged the FAO member states and the international community to build on the proceedings of the FAO International Symposium on Agroecology to launch a U.N.-wide initiative on agroecology. We reiterate that call here, and propose that the Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration offers a unique opportunity to serve as one of the foundations of such an initiative. As a document drafted by a wide array of civil society constituencies, it represents the uniting potential of agroecology. It is a logical basis for continued conversations around building agroecology as a potential pillar of work within the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and to provide guidance for the relevant FAO workstreams that will develop at national, regional and global levels in the future, following FAO's commitment to integrate the knowledge exchanged during the 2014 International Agroecology Symposium into its internal work. Further, it can contribute substantially to inform the discussions and negotiations about agriculture within the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Adding to our previous call, we believe that the FAO 2015 regional symposia on agroecology are important opportunities for progressing the agroecological agenda, but realizing those opportunities will require positive actions. We therefore call on the FAO central administration, the regional and relevant national offices, as well as member states to make sure that:

- The terms of reference of all the regional symposia (objectives, methodology, scope, expected outcomes, detailed program) are, or continue to be, developed with active participation and reflect the priorities of autonomous diverse organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, as represented through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC);

- The regional symposia duly take into account and build on the Nyéléni Agroecology Declaration, and that their outcomes are consistent with it. This notably implies avoiding the reduction and cooptation of agroecology as a narrow set of technologies to fine-tune and further consolidate the industrial food system through concepts such as “climate-smart agriculture” or “sustainable intensification.”

Moreover, we call upon the FAO and member states to also plan the organization of two additional regional symposia on agroecology in Europe and North America before the organization of the 2016 FAO Regional Conferences.

The Regional Meetings will be exciting fora for advancing the agenda of agroecology in collaboration with scientists and farmers. We stand ready, as scholars, to aid the FAO and the world’s small-scale food producers and consumers, peasants, indigenous peoples and communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people, providing whatever knowledge and analysis we can to advance a comprehensive agenda on agroecology in the context of world food security, with particular attention to the four pillars of the food system: social, economic, environmental and cultural. We would be happy to contribute scientific analyses from our various established research projects relevant to the principles and pillars of the Nyéléni Declaration in particular, and look forward to helping build on the “dialogue of knowledges<sup>3</sup>” that is at the heart of agroecology in order that we all may advance forward towards a sustainable, agroecological, food-secure and food-sovereign future.

**Signed,**

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<sup>3</sup> “Dialogue of knowledges” is the translation of a specific term from social movements, “dialogo de saberes,” meaning a dialogue between different forms of knowledge/ways of knowing. Retrieve from [https://www.academia.edu/5817512/Di%C3%A1logo\\_de\\_saberes\\_in\\_La\\_V%C3%ADa\\_Campesina\\_food\\_sovereignty\\_and\\_agroecology\\_by\\_Mar%C3%ADa\\_Elena\\_Mart%C3%ADnez-Torres\\_and\\_Peter\\_M.\\_Rosset.\\_Journal\\_of\\_Peasant\\_Studies\\_2014](https://www.academia.edu/5817512/Di%C3%A1logo_de_saberes_in_La_V%C3%ADa_Campesina_food_sovereignty_and_agroecology_by_Mar%C3%ADa_Elena_Mart%C3%ADnez-Torres_and_Peter_M._Rosset._Journal_of_Peasant_Studies_2014).

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