



Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema

Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

on the occasion of

World Food Day

16 October 2020

“Grow, nourish, sustain. Together”

This year’s World Food Day coincides with the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Food and Agriculture Organization. The FAO was born in the Canadian province of Quebec, the home to the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Decades of work by FAO and its partners have improved food security and therefore the livelihoods of billions of people. As the world recovers from COVID-19, it is more important than ever that we build back better and improve food systems, making them more resilient to shocks. As Parties to the CBD discuss the new post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be agreed at the UN Biodiversity Conference next year in Kunming, China, a central part of the discussions will be the role of biodiversity in supporting food systems that are resilient and sustainable.

Our current conventional methods of food production are undermining the health and productivity of our ecosystems. Food systems occupy nearly 40% of the ice-free surface of the Earth and thus represent important levers in the fight to protect biodiversity. Recognizing the role of biodiversity in underpinning the productivity and resilience of agricultural and other ecosystems is a critical first step towards transforming the way we produce food while guaranteeing food security. The recently released fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* outlines two important pathways to address these issues and move from business as usual towards transformative change.

Firstly, the sustainable agriculture transition suggests redesigning agricultural systems through agroecological and other innovative approaches to enhance productivity while minimizing negative impacts on biodiversity. This transition recognizes the role of biodiversity, including



pollinators, pest and disease control organisms, soil biodiversity and genetic diversity, as well as diversity in the landscape.

Secondly, the sustainable food systems transition enables sustainable and healthy diets with a greater emphasis on a diversity of foods, and more moderate consumption of meat and fish, as well as dramatic cuts in the waste involved in food supply and consumption. This transition recognizes the potential nutritional benefits from diverse foods and food systems, and the need to reduce demand-driven pressures globally while ensuring food security. Transitions in the way we manage fisheries and the oceans are also needed.

As we move towards these transitions, it is more important than ever to also recognise the need to support our food heroes. Farmers and workers throughout the food system are making sure that food makes its way from farm to fork even amid disruptions as unprecedented as the current COVID-19 crisis. These food heroes are also working to conserve biodiversity and use it sustainably as the basis for our food security.

Let me close by congratulating the FAO, on its 75th anniversary as we look forward to working together for many years to come.