United Nations Decade on Biodiversity

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS

On the occasion of

WORLD FOOD DAY

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"Climate is changing. Food and agriculture must too."

The world is facing profound challenges to meet the future needs for food of a growing population. These challenges are exacerbated by climate change, and the loss of biodiversity that sustains agricultural production. Fortunately, there are solutions. By pursuing sustainable agricultural practices, we can better ensure food security and good nutrition for all.

With the global population expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, more food will be needed to feed an expanding population, including helping some 800 million people who suffer from chronic undernourishment. And climate change is expected to reduce the yields of the main crops which form the backbone of our food systems.

An increase in production must ensure the sustainability of agriculture and ecosystem services if we are to meet the demands of improving yields without compromising the very natural resources that ensure the long-term viability of food systems. This will require, among other things, sustainable agricultural techniques, raising yields on existing farmland and reducing food loss as well as food waste. In addition, sustainable agriculture must be complemented by sustainability in energy use, manufacturing, transportation and other economic sectors that also have significant environmental impacts. Thus the challenge before us is to identify ways to produce the food we need while adapting to climate change, mitigating its effects, and ensuring that biodiversity is not harmed as production is increased.

As outlined in the fourth *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, pathways that simultaneously achieve the goals of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and realising human development goals require a combination of measures, including: increases in productivity and the efficiency of use of land, water, fertilizers and other inputs; better use of biodiversity in agricultural production and the wider landscape; measures to reduce post-harvest losses; and, measures to reduce food waste and promoting sustainable diets. To achieve this, a range of stakeholders (producers, consumers, private and public sectors), will need to be engaged to promote these measures and achieve mainstreaming across sectors.

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
United Nations Environment Programme
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1N9, Canada
Tel : +1 514 288 2220 Fax : +1 514 288 6588
secretariat@cbd.int www.cbd.int

Adopting sustainable practices and integrating full consideration of biodiversity into production systems can contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and also benefit production. In fact, sustainable agricultural practices can lead to considerable productivity and income gains for smallholders, while simultaneously increasing the resilience of their agricultural activities and income to extreme and variable weather. Examples of sustainable agriculture practices include crop rotation, zero tillage, integrated pest management, agro-forestry, integrated plant nutrient management, integrated crop and fish/livestock systems, and soil and water conservation measures. These practices all help to reduce soil degradation. Healthy soils form the basis for farming and long-term food security, and provide an important contribution to sequestering carbon. Sustainable soil management approaches are particularly important, as they improve agricultural productivity, incomes and resilience while simultaneously restoring the health of watersheds and land.

Major transformations to food systems are also crucial to achieving sustainability. First, as previously noted, food loss and waste needs to be reduced: roughly a third of harvested food is lost either in the food transport and transformation chain (primarily in developing countries) or in the home (primarily in developed countries). Second, diverse diets combined with global convergence to moderate levels of calorie and meat consumption would improve health and food security in many areas and also substantially reduce impacts on biodiversity. Third, there is a need for improved management of agriculture, aquaculture and wild capture fisheries. Changes in management of crops and livestock could substantially reduce both water consumption and pollution. Significant reductions in fishing pressure and changes in fishing techniques in most marine fisheries would lead to rebuilding of fisheries over the next one to two decades.

Addressing these issues requires making the case that biodiversity needs to be at the centre of agriculture. To that end, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference[1] that will be held in Cancun, Mexico in December 2016 will address the mainstreaming and integration of biodiversity across relevant sectors, including agriculture. The goal is to ensure that the positive or negative impacts of policies affecting biodiversity and ecosystem services are considered during their design and implementation.

Many organizations, including FAO and its International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, contribute to the Convention on Biological Diversity to build coordinated approaches for food security and sustainable agriculture. Increasing cooperation between the biodiversity community and agriculture sector is critical to achieving both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The work under the Convention on agricultural biodiversity can contribute to the achievement of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 2 *("End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture")* and Aichi Biodiversity Targets 7 (Sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and forestry) and 13 (Genetic diversity maintained).

Together, the world can conserve and sustainably use biodiversity while adapting to climate change, mitigating its effects and preventing the further degradation of soils. On World Food Day, let us take the first step towards these changes.

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[1] Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing, Cancun, 4 to 17 December 2016.