

Implementing Sustainable Development: Proposals by the Farmers Increasing resources for rural development and sustainable agriculture

Agriculture is directly linked to implementing very many principles of Agenda 21, including: poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, management of natural resources, energy, freshwater, health, education, trade and market access, as well as technology transfer and capacity building. It is therefore essential to stop the drain of resources away from agriculture, whether it be from national budgets or from international development funds. Sustainable agriculture, rural development and agricultural research should be given the priority it so badly needs to achieve the UN targets to reduce by half the number of people living in poverty.

Strengthening participatory decision-making processes

Implementation would be strengthened if all levels of government created the necessary framework for multi-stakeholder participation processes. Sustainable development policies would be more efficient and successful if all stakeholders are involved and committed through a bottom-up decision-making approach. A proper policy development can only be achieved if the people who make practical decisions are involved about how to use resources in a wise and sustainable way. It is important to package sustainable development not as a demand or imposition of society on farmers, for which farmers would bear the cost, but as a necessity and methodology to also sustain the welfare and incomes of farmers.

For this, effective partnerships among stakeholders have to be built. However, effective partnerships are partnerships among equals, and today, farmers are unequal players. The involvement of vulnerable groups such as women in the decision-making processes is highly important. They are often insufficiently represented in the working groups that draw up the regional plans. Women need to have access to rights and entitlements.

It is important to stress that the multi-stakeholder process needs to strictly limit the participation to the direct community of interest. However, it can also give a say to people from outside this community who do not bear any cost of the resulting policies or negotiations.

Increasing market access to farmers

In the context of globalisation of the food market, farmers in developing countries need to improve access to their own local markets. Development aid programs have to be conducted accordingly. Creating a level playing field in the global marketplace will provide the necessary incentives and leeway for farmers and especially the small ones to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices, avoiding this way their desperate acts of survival at the expense of sustainable development due to distortions in international trade.

Partnerships

Food security –

Food security must be one of the priorities of the WSSD. In order to achieve food security, farmers need policies that focus on access to land and secure land tenure arrangements, on access to water and secure water rights, access to genetic resources and to credit at prices that they can afford.

Access to natural resources –

Natural resources have to be accessible to the poor, which in the farm sector means secure rights to land, water and genetic resources. For this, there is a need to develop public-private partnerships. However, the public sector has to remain the custodian of the natural resources. Integrated management of the natural resources including river basin and watershed strategies, involving all stakeholders and users from the grassroots in decision-making processes, as well as protecting and recognizing the indigenous knowledge, is essential.

Governance –

The mainstreaming of sustainable agriculture has yet to be attained. Many countries lack an institutional and policy framework that functions effectively to support sustainable development. Absence of basic institutional framework and policy incentives are major impediments for economic survival of family farms. Investment for integrated rural development plans (economic and social infrastructure, enterprise development, capacity building for local governance) should be enhanced in partnership with local authorities, farmers' organisations and the private and public sector.

Capacity building –

Many farmers are still not organised well enough to be able to participate, as effective partners on sustainable development and its implementation, or their governments are still not very open to such participation. More resources need to be put by national and local authorities into building up the capacity of farmers' organisations to contribute to self-help development, and in establishing stakeholder consultation processes.

Technical assistance –

Implementation of sustainable development would also benefit from more effective partnerships to strengthen the knowledge base, and improve the dissemination of information and knowledge through farm-to-farm technical assistance programs for example. Public-private partnerships could be envisaged in basic sustainable agricultural techniques.

Research and development - The public sector has the responsibility to continue to do basic research and enhance partnerships between farmers and the scientific community to work on specific issues such as renewable energy sources, fight against desertification and its negative effects, biotechnologies, and protection of biodiversity, recirculating of nitrogen and phosphorus from towns and cities back to agriculture. Public funding for research therefore needs to be increased in order to bring solutions to these issues. Cooperation with indigenous populations is essential in terms of using adequate technologies in accordance with their traditional knowledge.

International organisations

Establishing a capacity-building fund: The UN and the Bretton Woods organisations, working with major groups, should set up in each region a capacity-building fund for major groups. This is essential to strengthen the ability of farmers and other major groups to take more responsibility for sustainable development in their sector. Arrangements for accountability and equitable distribution are a prerequisite for the development of such a fund.

Providing institutional framework: The UN should consolidate the multi-stakeholder dialogues by establishing an institutional structure to facilitate the building of partnerships among major groups and with governments for strengthening the implementation of Agenda 21. This structure should ensure that national governments work effectively and in a transparent way with the representative organisations of the “major groups” such as the farmers group within their respective countries.

A resolution on peace and stability: Sustainable development cannot be achieved without peace and stability. We therefore call upon the UN to pass a resolution to support “partnerships for peace” both within and between major groups. This resolution would state that, even in parts of the world where governments are in conflict, civil society organisations should not be prevented from meeting and cooperating if they wish to do so.