

RIGHT TO FOOD: “AGROECOLOGY OUTPERFORMS INDUSTRIAL FARMING FOR GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY,” SAYS AN EXPERT

BRUSSELS (22 June 2010) – “Governments and international agencies urgently need to boost ecological farming techniques to increase food production and save the climate,” said UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, while presenting the findings at an international meeting on agroecology held in Brussels on 21 and 22 June, 2010.¹ Along with 25 of the world’s most renowned experts on agroecology, the UN expert urged the international community to re-think current agricultural policies and build on the potential of agroecology.

“One year ago, Heads of States at the G20 gathering in Italy committed to mobilizing \$22 billion over a period of three years to improve global food security. This was welcome news, but the most pressing issue regarding reinvestment in agriculture is not how much, but how,” Olivier De Schutter said. “Today, most efforts are made towards large-scale investments in land – including many instances of land grabbing – and towards a ‘Green Revolution’ model to boost food production: improved seeds, chemical fertilisers and machines,” the Special Rapporteur remarked. “But scant attention has been paid to agroecological methods that have been shown to improve food production and farmers’ incomes, while at the same time protecting the soil, water, and climate.”

The widest study ever conducted on agroecological approaches (Jules Pretty, Essex University, UK) covered 286 projects in 57 developing countries, representing a total surface of 37 million hectares: the average crop yield gain was 79%. Concrete examples of ‘agroecological success stories’ abound in Africa. In Tanzania, the Western provinces of Shinyanga and Tabora used to be known as the ‘Desert of Tanzania’. However, the use of agroforestry techniques and participatory processes allowed some 350,000 hectares of land to be rehabilitated in two decades. Profits per household rose by as much as USD 500 a year. Similar techniques are used in Malawi, where some 100,000 smallholders in 2005 benefited to some degree from the use of fertilizer trees.

“With more than a billion hungry people on the planet, and the climate disruptions ahead of us, we must rapidly scale up these sustainable techniques,” De Schutter said. “Even if it makes the task more complex, we have to find a way of addressing global hunger, climate change, and the depletion of natural resources, all at the same time. Anything short of this would be an exercise in futility.”

The experts gathering in Brussels identified the policies that could develop agroecological approaches to the scale needed to feed the world in 2050. They based their work on the experiences of countries that have pro-agroecology policies – such as Cuba or Brazil – as well as on the successful experiences from international research centres such as the World Agroforestry Center in Nairobi, and on the programmes of La Via Campesina, the transnational peasant movement, which runs agroecology training programmes. “We can scale up these

¹ The international seminar “The contribution of agroecological approaches to meet 2050 global food needs” was held in Brussels on 21 and 22 June, 2010. Convened under the auspices of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Prof. Olivier De Schutter, it brought together agroecology experts, decision makers at national and international levels, and representatives of farmer organizations.

sustainable models of agriculture, and ensure that they work for the benefit of the poorest farmers. What is needed now is political will to move from successful pilot projects to nation-wide policies,” the UN Special Rapporteur said. In conclusion, he announced that he would ask the Committee on World Food Security – what should become in time the ‘Security Council’ for food security – to work during its October session on the policy levers to scale up agroecology. “This is the best option we have today. We can’t afford not to use it.”