NEWS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

8 March 2011

Eco-Farming Can Double Food Production in 10 Years, says new UN report

GENEVA – Small-scale farmers can double food production within 10 years in critical regions by using ecological methods, a new UN report* shows. Based on an extensive review of the recent scientific literature, the study calls for a fundamental shift towards agroecology as a way to boost food production and improve the situation of the poorest.

“To feed 9 billion people in 2050, we urgently need to adopt the most efficient farming techniques available,” says Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food and author of the report. “Today’s scientific evidence demonstrates that agroecological methods outperform the use of chemical fertilizers in boosting food production where the hungry live -- especially in unfavorable environments.”

Agroecology applies ecological science to the design of agricultural systems that can help put an end to food crises and address climate-change and poverty challenges. It enhances soils productivity and protects the crops against pests by relying on the natural environment such as beneficial trees, plants, animals and insects.

“To date, agroecological projects have shown an average crop yield increase of 80% in 57 developing countries, with an average increase of 116% for all African projects,” De Schutter says. “Recent projects conducted in 20 African countries demonstrated a doubling of crop yields over a period of 3-10 years.”

“Conventional farming relies on expensive inputs, fuels climate change and is not resilient to climatic shocks. It simply is not the best choice anymore today,” De Schutter stresses. “A large segment of the scientific community now acknowledges the positive impacts of agroecology on food production, poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation -- and this this is what is needed in a world of limited resources. Malawi, a country that launched a massive chemical fertilizer subsidy program a few years ago, is now implementing agroecology, benefiting more than 1.3 million of the poorest people, with maize yields increasing from 1 ton/ha to 2-3 tons/ha.”

The report also points out that projects in Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh recorded up to 92 % reduction in insecticide use for rice, leading to important savings for poor farmers. “Knowledge came to replace pesticides and fertilizers. This was a winning bet, and comparable results abound in other African, Asian and Latin American countries,” the independent expert notes.

“The approach is also gaining ground in developed countries such as United States, Germany or France,” he said. “However, despite its impressive potential in realizing the right to food for all, agroecology is still insufficiently backed by ambitious public policies and consequently hardly goes beyond the experimental stage.”

The report identifies a dozen of measures that States should implement to scale up agroecological practices.

“Agroecology is a knowledge-intensive approach. It requires public policies supporting agricultural research and participative extension services,” De Schutter says. “States and donors have a key role to play here. Private companies will not invest time and money in

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practices that cannot be rewarded by patents and which don't open markets for chemical products or improved seeds."

The Special Rapporteur on the right to food also urges States to support small-scale farmer's organizations, which demonstrated a great ability to disseminate the best agroecological practices among their members. "Strengthening social organization proves to be as impactful as distributing fertilizers. Small-scale farmers and scientists can create innovative practices when they partner", De Schutter explains.

"We won't solve hunger and stop climate change with industrial farming on large plantations. The solution lies in supporting small-scale farmers' knowledge and experimentation, and in raising incomes of smallholders so as to contribute to rural development."

"If key stakeholders support the measures identified in the report, we can see a doubling of food production within 5 to 10 years in some regions where the hungry live," De Schutter says. "Whether or not we will succeed this transition will depend on our ability to learn faster from recent innovations. We need to go fast if we want to avoid repeated food and climate disasters in the 21st century."

(*) The report "Agro-ecology and the right to food" was presented today before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. This document is available in English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Russian at: www.srfood.org and http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/annual.htm

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Olivier De Schutter was appointed the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in May 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization.

For more information on the mandate and work of the Special Rapporteur, visit: www.srfood.org or http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm

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