



CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Common Ground Dialogue for Mainstreaming Sustainable Agriculture in Eastern and Southern Africa

Theme: Promoting Sustainable Farming Approaches for Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Food Production

October 17 - 18, 2023

Speke Resort Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda

1 Introduction

Healthy food systems need healthy landscapes. Unfortunately, with the green revolution where the intensification of production was incentivized, agriculture has been intensified and scaled up, becoming the leading driver of global land-use change and biodiversity loss. This has compromised the ecosystem services they provide as pollination, pest control, nutrient cycling, water purification and climate regulation. Agricultural landscapes depend on these ecosystem services, and therefore, these environmental hazards threaten the viability and sustainability of agriculture and livestock production.

Agricultural policy in most countries continues to reward unsustainable practices. The dominant agricultural development paradigm of the past century has focused on maximizing production to the highest extent possible, primarily through five technologies: fertilizers, pesticides, mechanization, improved seeds and breeds, and irrigation. Adoption of these technologies has been supported by public subsidies, which exceeded US\$780 billion in 2019. This paradigm has considered agriculture as any other industrial activity with standardized processes, ignoring the dependence of agriculture on soil and ecosystems, and, as a result depleted soil fertility, degraded soil, and above ground biodiversity, as well as undermined the resilience and the long-term viability of farming systems.

The report on sustainable development depicts that unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are root causes of the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These crises, and related environmental degradation, threaten human well-being and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If we continue the prevailing development pathway, the Earth's finite capacity will be unable to sustain the livelihoods of current and future generations. The increasing dependence on natural resources exacerbates the



pressure on sensitive ecosystems and ultimately affects both humanity and the economy. Therefore, transforming our relationship with nature is key to a sustainable future¹.

A significant contribution towards such re-balancing can be made through Nature-based Solutions (NbS), which secure significant benefits to humans, society, and environment through simultaneously working to sustain and support the ecosystems. NbS are based on the notion that when ecosystems are healthy and well-managed, they provide essential benefits and services to people, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, securing safe water resources, making air safer to breathe, and providing increased food security. The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, together with other development organizations have been promoting NbS to transform food systems for people and planet from either subsistence or industrial agriculture to a diversified farming system, which allows biodiversity to thrive.

Aware that farming bears the biggest brunt of climate change and noting that smallholder farmers contribute to the biggest share of global food production while their food production systems are highly threatened by climate change, the **Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA)** resolved - during her second Council of Patron Ministers (CPM) meeting that took place on 18th May 2023 - that the ministers will promote climate smart agriculture innovations for enhanced productivity, resilience, and livelihoods and promote integrated water and soil productivity innovations in the 15 ASARECA countries. In the same vein, the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF) resolved - during her last 5th farmers congress that took place in 2021 - to focus more on sustainable production systems and build resilient for smallholder farmers.

Therefore, IUCN in partnership with ASARECA is convening a Common Ground Regional Dialogue that aims to promote sustainable farming (agroecological and regenerative) approach to restore and conserve biodiversity in agricultural landscapes as well as sustainably enhancing food production in East and Southern Africa. IUCN and ASARECA are leveraging on existing partnerships, experience in different food security summits and policy support agendas on matters relating to the sustainability of agriculture in the global, continental, and regional context.

The IKEA Foundation, Pernod Ricard, and the French Development Agency (Afd) funded IUCN to implement a regional project for “accelerating the global transition to sustainable agriculture **“for mainstreaming land health in sustainable agriculture, as a Nature-based Solution to food and water insecurity, climate change and other societal challenges”**”. It builds the consensus between conservation and agriculture actors over the conservation benefits of sustainable

¹ Sustainable development report 2022. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>



farming, the value of these benefits to society, as well as possible trade-offs, and suitable rewards and other incentives that can promote environmental stewardship.

In previous months, IUCN in Rwanda and Tanzania held inception workshops which were followed by common ground dialogues at the National level (24th February in Tanzania, and 27th April 2023) on sustainable agriculture to demonstrate how Nature Based Solutions (NBS) can boost on-farm biodiversity, conserve off-farm biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, and safeguard against habitat loss by maintaining the long-term viability and productivity of existing land. These workshops convened conservation and agriculture actors by creating a platform for learning, dialogue, knowledge-sharing on good practices and interaction with key stakeholders in the sector to inform the project on priority areas. These national events resulted in cross-cutting interventions for promoting environmental and climate change aspects, land use planning, and investing in climate financing, that are aligned to national environmental and agriculture-related policies.

2 Objectives of the Regional dialogue

Following the common ground dialogues held at national levels in Rwanda and Tanzania, IUCN in East and Southern Africa Region (ESARO) with funding from IKEA Foundation is organising a Regional Common Ground Dialogue, on mainstreaming sustainable (encompassing agro-ecology and regenerative) agriculture in order to demonstrate how Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) can boost on-farm biodiversity, land productivity, conserve off-farm biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, and safeguard against habitat loss by maintaining long-term viability and productivity. It falls under the series of Common Ground Dialogues to be organised at global level in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

The specific objectives of the Dialogue are:

- to serve as a platform for sharing of experiences, good practices, and lessons learned from national contexts from various ESARO countries;
- to identify best practices and priority actions in transforming food systems that should be promoted and implemented at both regional and national levels;
- to bring together ASARECA members in food systems, Governments and private sector players/ actors to support and work jointly with IUCN in fostering sustainable agriculture initiatives;
- to call for improved land health through sustainable agriculture for improved plant & human health, and well-being;



- to show the position of IUCN in transitioning to sustainable agriculture using NbS Standards and principles together with associated assessment tools at regional, national and local levels;
- to aspire how sustainable agriculture using NbS approach can improve farmers' livelihoods, making their production more resilient and improving their incomes by stabilizing yields in the long run and reducing costly inputs;
- to demonstrate how increased land health generates, indirectly, wider societal benefits (e.g. by restoring ecosystems, contributing to climate regulation, water availability and supply, risk reduction, protection of cultural and aesthetic values, soil microbial activity, and generating several other ecosystem services);
- commitments by stakeholders to sustainable agriculture by applying NbS are put forward and monitored through dialogues between conservation and agriculture actors.

At the end of the Dialogue, a regional position paper will be released to show the state of sustainable agriculture and provide key recommendations on the way forward. In addition, the final report of the Dialogue will be produced and shared with the participants.

3 Proposed outcomes

The dialogue will contribute to the following outcomes:

Outcome 1. IUCN's position on sustainable agriculture (SA) through NbS for land health is shared and understood by partners, actors, and stakeholders.

Outcome 2: Commitment to integrate SA to ensure better action in different country contexts.

Outcome 3: Gather evidence-based contributions on sustainable agriculture by each country's experience for knowledge sharing and adoption as good practice. Each country will champion successful solutions/initiatives to address national sustainability issues.

Outcome 4: A diagnostic on the most prominent sustainability issues in the region is shared and some potentials are highlighted.

4 Expected participants

The key stakeholders from ESARO, i.e.:

- Concerned Ministries and other Public Institutions
- Research Community
- International Organization/ Development Partners
- NGOs/ Civil Societies



- Private sector
- Farmer organizations
- Banks and financial institutions
- Other concerned parties

5 Key Speakers

Government of Uganda

1. Hon. Bwino Fred, Minister of State Agriculture, Animal industry and fisheries (MAAIF)
2. Representative of Maj. Gen. (Rtd) David Kyomukama, PS MAAIF
3. Commissioner Agricultural Production, MAAIF
4. Mrs Maureen Aneno representing Mr. Mugabi Stephen, Director Environment Affairs
5. Dr. Baguma Yona, Director General of NARO

ASARECA

1. Dr Enock Warinda, ASARECA Executive Director
2. Dr Abasi Kigozi representing Mr. Moses Odeke, Acting Head of Programs

IUCN

1. Charles Oluchina, Regional Programme Coordinator
2. Innocent Kabenga, Regional Head of Land systems
3. Moses Egaru, IUCN Uganda Country Representative

Rwanda

1. Kagenza Jean Marie Vianney, Coordinator of GCF-funded 'Green Gicumbi' to strengthen district's climate resilience, Ministry of Environment, MOE
2. Dr Vicky Ruganzu, Acting Integrated Soil Fertility Management Program Coordinator Principal Research Fellow, Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB)

Tanzania

1. Stephen Ruvuga, Executive Director - National Network of Farmer's Groups

Malawi

1. Dr Yusuf Mkungula, Principal secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change
2. Getrude Kambauwa, Director of Land Resources Conservation, Ministry of Agriculture



Agriculture Research and Extensions Organizations under ASARECA

1. Dr Evans Ilatsia, Deputy Director General - Livestock KALRO, Kenya
2. Dr Joel Meliyo, Researcher, TARI-Tanzania
3. Dr Willy Irakoze, Director of Research in ISABU, Burundi

6 Panel discussions topics

Panel Discussion 1:

In the context of sustainable food systems and the achievement of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), UN food systems summit emphasized on rising levels of hunger and malnutrition while our food systems affect biodiversity loss, pollution, and carbon emissions. This session will discuss the obstacles and challenges that countries are facing and to reaffirm political will and maintain momentum toward an environmental and sustainable food systems with agro-ecological, regenerative, and resilient agriculture approaches.

Addressing issues of food insecurity and environmental hazards towards healthy and sustainable food systems: agroecology, and regenerative agriculture

- *How are food systems influencing and being impacted by climate change?*
- *What are the opportunities and challenges for transitioning to sustainable agriculture from traditional farming in the country/Region?*
- *How are the current enabling policy environment and institutional arrangements related to sustainable agriculture in your country?*
- *What is the current level of sustainable agriculture initiatives in the Region?*
- *Role of nature-based solutions (NbS) in agroecology and sustainable food systems and how to achieve scale?*
- *What are **financing opportunities** for sustainable agriculture and what can be done to boost it?*

Questions and Answers

Panel discussion 2:

Knowledge sharing on the best practices:

- Incorporation of sustainable agriculture policy actions in the national extension systems.
- National agroecology initiatives and actors and how they contribute to accelerate sustainable agriculture in climate change era.



- Sharing experiences: Case studies from country specificity

Group Questions:

- Engage in conversation to jointly identify possible key messages and best practices for scaling up sustainable agriculture in agricultural landscapes.
- Integrating roles of all actors and identify priority commitments for government, CSOs and private sector and farmers in achieving sustainable agriculture