



Agriculture and Land Health Initiative

Initiation Note 28/04/2021



Background

The global population is 7.8 billion people and growing. Population growth and increasing per capita wealth is driving up the demand for food, while demand for biofuel, biomaterials and other commodities place further pressure on agricultural land. Globally we produce enough food for the population of 2050 – some 9 billion people – yet one third of this is lost or wasted.

By focusing on food production goals in isolation from other considerations, agriculture has become the leading driver of global land-use change and biodiversity loss (IPBES, 2019), while also contributing malnutrition, exacerbation of inequitable land and resource rights, and other undesirable outcomes. The environmental hazards generated by agriculture threaten the viability and sustainability of production. Land degradation, pollution of water sources, decline in pollinators and other hazards are already compromising the agriculture sector, while compromising ecosystem services like water supply and climate regulation.

Sustainable agriculture boosts on-farm biodiversity, conserves off-farm biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, mitigates habitat loss due to expansion of farmland, and safeguards long-term viability and resilient productivity for farmers' natural capital. Land health is therefore an effective concept for fostering dialogue between actors in the agriculture and conservation sectors, as demonstrated by IUCN's ["Common Ground"](#) report and related Common Ground dialogues.

Unfortunately, dialogue between the conservation and the agriculture sectors is most often conflictual, preventing consensus towards ambitious commitments. The lack of metrics to measure and monitor the multiple benefits of land health, and related ecosystem services provided to farmers and Society by the abundance of biodiversity, is also an important limitation.

Objective

This two-year initiative will **build commitments for accelerated action towards sustainable agriculture that secures land health as a Nature based Solution** to address major societal challenges (food security, climate change, biodiversity loss...). The initiative recognises that the solutions for sustainable agriculture (agroecological approaches, regenerative agriculture etc.) are well known, and already practiced on a considerable scale in some countries. The initiative will strengthen awareness on sustainable agriculture and will develop tools and methodologies to support its scaling up and mainstreaming in projects and policies.

This initiative will bring together actors from historically adversarial sectors around the table to take ambitious commitments, and will provide methodological support to design action and monitor impacts. By building a common ground over the conservation benefits of sustainable farming, this initiative will also indirectly pave the way for a constructive debate on more controversial issues.

Components

Outcome 1: International commitments to sustainable agriculture are put forward and monitored through dialogue between conservation and agriculture actors

- Convene and mediate in “Common ground dialogues” between conservation and agriculture actors (farmers, private businesses)
- Develop a charter and roadmap to encourage decision-makers’ ambitious commitments to action
- Encourage governments, companies and organisations to document the contribution of their actions in sustainable agriculture towards global goals for nature through the IUCN Contributions Platform

Outcome 2: Scientific evidence of the multiple benefits of sustainable agriculture is communicated widely

- Develop a comprehensive land health monitoring tool based on agrobiodiversity and socioeconomic indicators at the global/national, landscape, farm and soils levels
- Publish an in-depth economic study of the societal costs and benefits of transition to Agroecological approaches

Outcome 3: A portfolio of sustainable Agroecological projects is developed

- Develop an agroecology design tool for generating innovative projects
- Use the design tool to evaluate and enhance existing IUCN and partners’ investments and projects
- Support the engagement of diverse stakeholder groups (including farmers, women land users, indigenous peoples and youth) and build IUCN and partners’ capacities in using that tool.

IUCN’s added value

As a leader in conservation science, policy and practice, IUCN has an essential role to play in demonstrating the conservation value of sustainable agriculture and demonstrating how conservation outcomes can enhance agriculture: in other words, building concerted action to secure the mutual benefits for both Nature and people. The IUCN secretariat can provide leadership to its own constituency and can empower IUCN members to engage more effectively at the interface between agriculture and conservation, considering rights-based, gender-responsive commitments. This depends on facilitating and convening dialogue, strengthening evidence, building trust, and strengthening capacities, particularly among a growing caucus of supportive actors. It also depends on IUCN publicly supporting consensus building and reconciliation.