IFOAM

Position Paper

Approved by the IFOAM World Board in April, 2011

The Role of Smallholders in Organic Agriculture

Executive Summary

IFOAM recognizes the essential role of smallholders, especially in food production and sustainable rural economies, but it is clear that many smallholders are very poor, disadvantaged and have insufficient access to resources and support. This has to change.

IFOAM recognizes that smallholders have a fundamental role in the stewardship of biodiversity and regards Organic Agriculture based on the scientific discipline of agroecology as the most appropriate way to achieve ecological, agronomic and socio-economic intensification of smallholder agriculture.

IFOAM recognizes that major efforts are needed to improve smallholder farm productivity and calls for a much higher investment in pro-smallholder science, technology, infrastructure, services and innovation.

IFOAM calls for improved local, national and international policies to promote sustainable organic smallholder systems and businesses.

IFOAM recognizes the essential role of smallholders, especially in food production and sustainable rural economies.

Ninety percent of farms worldwide are less than two hectares, they provide employment to 1.3 billion people and dominate agriculture in developing countries. Smallholder agriculture is multifunctional, as it accounts for the majority of rural employment, most food production and the provision of ecosystem services, contributing to the preservation of natural resources and biological and cultural diversity in their rural settings. Smallholder farming is the backbone of agriculture and food security, not only throughout the developing world (where, like in many African countries, they represent the largest private sector activity), but also in several industrialized countries in Asia and Europe. It not only feeds families, but also generates jobs and catalyses the growth of rural businesses, particularly in the sector of micro and small enterprises. Smallholder agriculture is also important in urban settings, especially in Asia but increasingly in Africa and Latin America and

also in the industrialized world. Urban and periurban agriculture increases the amount and quality of food available to people living in cities, which is already over 50% of the world s population. Globally, almost 1 billion people practice urban agriculture and produce approximately 15% of the world's food.[1]

IFOAM recognizes that many smallholders are very poor, disadvantaged and have insufficient access to resources and support.[2] IFOAM also recognizes this has to change.

The differing access of smallholders to resources (education, capital, land, natural resources, goods and public services) and the lack of efficient information systems, training and technical assistance, generates differences in their incomes, innovation capacity, production and participation in markets. Seventy-five percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and have deficits in education, health and nutrition due to the lack of public services, limited exercising of their civil rights and uneven access to market opportunities. A main limitation of smallholder farming in developing countries is poverty and social exclusion, especially within indigenous populations. For women farmers the lack of access and control over resources accentuates problems further. Smallholder farmers, landless people, tenant farmers, agricultural workers and people living from traditional pastoralism, as well as fishing and hunting activities are among the most discriminated and vulnerable people in many parts of the world.

Currently there is insufficient support for smallholders and rural communities: Only 4% of official international aid for development is assigned to agriculture, and most national governments prioritise investments in large-scale agricultural development. This is severely undermining efforts to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs). For each of the challenges facing our food system we can consider three different perspectives on social justice: 2 fair shares, or equality of outcome; 2 fair play, or equality of opportunity; and 2 fair say, or autonomy and voice,[3] and in all of them smallholders and related populations have the greatest limitations.

IFOAM recognizes that smallholders have a fundamental role in the stewardship of biodiversity.

Biodiversity is produced, managed or conserved by smallholders. In the International Decade of Biodiversity[4] it is essential to highlight the importance of plant and animal genetic resources and agrobiodiversity as a whole. Only healthy rural communities, their cultures and their processes of continuous innovation and transformation can provide successful in situ conservation of genetic resources and assure that the benefits of biodiversity are felt by the poor.

Understanding and enhancing the role of biodiversity and the genetic resources and ecosystem functions it conveys is essential. Biodiversity underpins food security, sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem resilience, coping strategies for climate change, adequate nutritional requirements, insurance for the future and the management of biological processes needed for sustainable agricultural production.[5] Biodiversity conservation seeks to maintain the human life-support system provided by nature and the living resources essential for development.[6] And biodiversity conservation should ideally be integrated into innovative schemes for rural development that may take the form of various economic activities and modalities like agrotourism, quality seals and geographical indications, gastronomy,[7] on-farm processing, handicrafts and others.

The IFOAM Position on Seeds (2011) further addresses biodiversity in Organic Agriculture.

IFOAM regards Organic Agriculture based on the scientific discipline of agroecology as the most appropriate way to achieve ecological, agronomic and socio-economic intensification of smallholder agriculture.

With its techniques in soil, water and biodiversity conservation, as well as its integral and sustainable farm management, Organic Agriculture (OA) can be highly productive, achieve family food security and improve incomes. Organic farming systems are also more resilient than conventional systems that are highly dependent on external inputs, which are not only expensive and harm the environment but are increasingly being controlled by a handful of corporations throughout the food chains. IFOAM regards large-scale industrialized agriculture as a faulty model that disenfranchises people, limits diversity and severely degrades the environment. OA has well-established practices that simultaneously mitigate climate change, build resilient farming systems, reduce poverty and improve food security. OA emits much lower levels of greenhouse gases and quickly, affordably and effectively sequesters carbon in the soil. In addition, OA makes farms and people more resilient to climate change, mainly due to its water efficiency, resilience to extreme weather events and lower risk of crop failure. Finally, in order to conserve their traditions and be successful in the marketplace, organic smallholders organize themselves, strengthen their social structures, build innovative links and promote entrepreneurship.

IFOAM recognizes that major efforts are needed to improve smallholder farm productivity.

While most small farms tend to be highly productive when the whole farm business is taken into account (as opposed to individual crop yields only), many smallholder farmers are very poor, scraping by on marginal or de-

graded lands, using under-performing and often unsustainable farming systems that erode soils and deplete biodiversity. Poverty is also a driver of erosion and the over-exploitation of natural resources, rendering communities more vulnerable to food insecurity, climate change and natural disasters. Many millions therefore are unable to generate sufficient incomes to achieve an acceptable standard of living, and many more rural poor do not have access to land and other resources needed to feed themselves.

IFOAM's definition and principles[8] state that "OA combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved." OA should go beyond the simplistic guarantee that prohibited materials are not used in the production system (i.e. organic-by-default production of tropical crops or input substitution in intensive horticultural systems) to an integrated implementation of better and more productive systems, with measurable improvements in yield, ecosystem services and functional interactions between the different actors and components of a farming community. In its campaign[4] Powered by Nature, IFOAM stresses the importance of an ecological intensification for the optimization of the performance of ecosystem services. IFOAM is also collecting more comprehensive data of organic farmers worldwide, whether certified or not, in order to measure the real contribution of OA and the potential for growth and improvement.

IFOAM calls for a much higher investment in pro-smallholder science, technology, infrastructure, services and innovation.

Expensive and short-term solutions proposed by conventional agriculture will not reduce hunger and could worsen the social and environmental problems of many countries; this assessment is thoroughly substantiated in the IAASTD[9] report. IFOAM therefore urges local, regional and national authorities, as well as donor agencies and multinational organizations, to accelerate their efforts to promote OA as the most viable system, in order to empower smallholder communities and help them become more resilient.

Smallholders live in highly variable agroecosystems, and the technologies that may contribute to the improvement of yield and quality, as well as overall system sustainability, are generally site-specific and, in order to promote processes of rural innovation, require the participation of all relevant stakeholders from the design through the implementation and evaluation of research and development activities. The decline in public funding of agricultural science and technology research, as well as the concentration of private research in institutions generally interested in supplying inputs for very intensive and highly simplified agroecosystems not suitable for smallholders, have dramatically reduced the research and development that may provide more sustainable solutions to the problems faced by millions of people in rural areas. Moreover, throughout the developing world,

public investments in R&D have decreased as a percentage of GDP, and evidence from many countries shows that farm productivity increases at a slower rate when investment in research and development is reduced. Parts of this bleak scenario are the enormous deficit in investments in infrastructure and services (which is largely responsible for the great post-harvest losses or the higher transaction costs) and the essential need to revitalise agricultural extension services to make them more responsive to the needs of smallholders, including participatory and multi-actor collaboration methodologies.

IFOAM calls for improved local, national and international policies to promote sustainable organic smallholder systems and businesses.

Given that OA systems are equally applicable to subsistence farming and local markets as they are for international markets, IFOAM works towards the reduction of barriers and to establish mechanisms that support broader uptake so that OA can contribute more extensively to food security, climate resilience and rural development. This includes raising recognition and uptake of OA practices within the policies of governments at all levels, as well as facilitating the support of smallholders so that their systems are sustainable and consistently more productive and profitable. This support may take the form of dedicated instruments for improved extension, market incentives, micro-credit schemes, specific programs for the rural young, or access to land and participation in value chains where smallholders can flourish rather than be expelled.

With regards to organic guarantee systems, IFOAM calls on competent authorities worldwide to broaden their recognition of the various guarantee systems available and help them develop and improve. Organic certification of smallholder groups in developing countries is already a well-established alternative to standard certification procedures, and IFOAM promotes its practice and acceptance in other parts of the world, as well as encourages the further development of innovative alternatives like participatory guarantee systems. At the same time, IFOAM promotes the dialogue between the different certification schemes that have an impact on smallholder production in order to promote sustainable development in the regions where they are active and eliminate unnecessary or unfair requirements that may constitute barriers to trade, while promoting a culture of continuous improvement in any type of guarantee system.

IFOAM also wishes to stress the fact that, in a world where individualism tends to reign, rural communities dominated by smallholders and family farmers represent a vital counterpoint. They cherish communal values and provide fantastic opportunities for more sustainable types of business, often linked to the concept of cultural and territorial development. This approach requires autonomous decision-making and specific investment

decisions aimed at creating or maintaining sustainable jobs; infrastructural investment; development of the endogenous capacity of the regions; as well as support for local development initiatives. In this respect, IFOAM supports the declaration of an International Year of Family Farming by the United Nations system in order to promote discussion, analysis and advocacy. IFOAM is also concerned about the acceleration of land grab schemes by multinational companies in developing countries, and calls on national governments to watch these issues very carefully and search for a balance between foreign investment and the need to improve the livelihoods of rural people in a sustainable way.

Finally, in accordance with discussions in the United Nations Human Rights Council, there is also an urgent need to ensure that government policies are sufficiently well formulated in order to address the needs of the most vulnerable people working in rural areas. A better implementation of the human rights instruments protecting the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas is also urgently needed. But to further advance the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, there is a need to elaborate a new international human rights instrument, a Declaration or a Convention, to recognize in a single instrument the rights that have been enshrined in other international instruments, to increase coherence and visibility. It should also recognize new rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, such as the rights to land, to seeds and to the means of production. IFOAM calls on all sectors of civil society, business and government to take responsibility and action for a better world for smallholders and, therefore, for humankind.

Notes

1. Urban and peri-urban agriculture production is available both for self consumption and for sale and supply to the urban market. It is estimated (UNDP 1996; FAO 1999) that 200 million urban residents provide food for the market and 800 million urban dwellers are actively engaged in urban and peri- urban agriculture in one way or another. These urban farmers produce substantial amounts of food for urban consumers. A global estimate (data 1993) is that 15-20% of the world's food is produced in urban areas. In: Urban Agriculture For Sustainable Poverty Alleviation and Food Security (FAO, 2008).
2. "Hunger, like poverty, is still predominantly a rural problem, and amongst the rural population it is those who produce food who suffer disproportionately. ... The United Nations Millennium Development Project s Task Force on Hunger has shown that 80 percent of the world's hungry live in rural areas. Of the 1 billion people who suffer from extreme poverty in the world today, 75 percent live and work in rural areas ... . Today, 50 percent of the world's hungry are smallholder farmers who depend mainly or partly on agriculture for their livelihoods. Twenty percent of those suffering from hunger are landless families who survive as tenant farmers or poorly paid agricultural laborers and often have to migrate from one insecure, informal job to another. And 10 percent of the world's hungry live in rural communities from traditional fishing, hunting and herding activities. 70 percent of the world's hungry are women and a great majority of them are working in agriculture." Advisory Committee on the right to food. 2011. Preliminary study on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/16/63.
3. Food Justice. The report of the Food and Fairness Inquiry. Food Ethics Council. UK, 2010
4. The United Nations agreed to a Decade on Biodiversity from 2011 2020 at the global biodiversity meeting, called the Nagoya COP10, held in Japan in October 2010: www.decadeonbiodiversity.net. IFOAM had an active participation in Nagoya: www.ifoam.org/partners/advocacy/Biodiversity_Campaign.html.
5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research. 2011. Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture. FAO, Rome.
6. WRI-IUCN-UNEP. 1992. Global biodiversity strategy: guidelines for actions to save, study, and use Earth's biotic wealth sustainably and equitably. World Resources Institute (WRI), International Union Conservation Network (IUCN) and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Washington, D.C.
7. For example, Gastón Acurio, leader of Peru s gastronomic movement, considers that its philosophy requires that a plate shall (1) contain biodiversity; (2) include cultural diversity; (3) have a social commitment and (4) have environmental sustainability.
8. www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/principles/index.html
9. International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, www.agassessment.org.

IFOAM

IFOAM Head Office, Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5, 53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel.: +49-228-92650-10 Fax: +49-228-92650-99
headoffice@ifoam.org
www.ifoam.org

The Definition of Organic Agriculture

Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.

The Principles of Organic Agriculture

Organic Agriculture is based on the principles of health, ecology, fairness and care.

The Scope of Organic Agriculture

IFOAM regards any system that is based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture and uses organic methods, as 'Organic Agriculture' and any farmer practicing such a system as an 'organic farmer'. This includes various forms of certified and non-certified Organic Agriculture. Guarantee Systems may be for instance third party certification, including group certification, as well as participatory guarantee systems.

Standards & Regulations: That's Organic Worldwide

The IFOAM Family of Standards draws the line between organic and not organic. It contains all standards and regulations that have passed an equivalence assessment against a normative reference approved by IFOAM's membership. IFOAM encourages governments and standard users to recognize other standards in the Family as equivalent.

IFOAM Positions

IFOAM has developed positions on a range of topics. These include: Use of Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials in Organic Agriculture; The use of Organic Seed and Plant Propagation in Organic; The Role of Smallholders in Organic Agriculture; The Full Diversity of Organic Agriculture; The Role of Organic Agriculture in Mitigating Climate Change; Smallholder Group Certification for Organic Production and Processing; Position on Genetic Engineering and Genetically Modified Organisms; Organic Agriculture and Food Security; Organic Agriculture and Biodiversity.

IFOAM Policy Briefs

IFOAM has policy briefs on 'How Governments Can Regulate Imports of Organic Products Based on the Concepts of Harmonization and Equivalence' and 'PGS'.

IFOAM - Defining Organic Landmarks since 1972

IFOAM Head Office
Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5
53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel: +49-228-92650-10
Fax: +49-228-92650-99
headoffice@ifoam.org
www.ifoam.org