

Family Farmers: Rebuilding Agriculture and Transforming Food Systems

Conference Declaration from Sustaining Family Farming in Asia-Pacific through inclusive farmer-driven approaches, October 6-7, 2020, Virtual Zoom Conference¹

From October 6-7, 2020, we, 180 women and men representatives of family farmers, farmer organizations, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples, public and private stakeholders and advocates from 12 countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, gathered in a virtual conference on Sustainable Family Farming in Asia-Pacific through inclusive, family-driven approaches. Together, we tackled the key contributions, roles, challenges and strategies of farming families, especially in responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic and ending hunger and poverty as part of the global Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Decade of Family Farming.

We laud the heroic efforts of small farmers, farmworkers, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, rural women and young farmers in this pandemic as they persevered to supply healthy food to their households and communities. Agriculture was even touted as among the most resilient sectors amid this crisis. But long before the pandemic, 80% of the world's food producers were already small family farmers, half of whom were women. Ironically, they also comprise half of the world's poor and hungry.

However, we also recognize how family farmers in Asia-Pacific suffered tremendous losses from the Covid-19 crisis. Food systems were heavily affected with disruptions in the food supply chains and markets. Unable to market most of their products, these family farmers had low to no income. They had poor access to affordable farm inputs, adequate support services and access to credit. Their land rights are likewise threatened with the loss of income and a stagnation of tenure security programs. Land pawning may surge with family farmers unable to pay off their debts pitted against returning overseas migrant workers who may want to buy land as an alternative source of livelihood. Small food-producing households, particularly women-headed households, were often overlooked in government assistance programs.

The Covid-19 crisis put importance on the existential role of small farming families on local food systems for a country's survival. Hence, we as a collective in support of family farmers in Asia-Pacific, strongly believe that ***Family farmers should be at the center of rebuilding agriculture and transforming food systems.*** For this to happen in this Decade of Family Farming, we assert that:

Family farmers need secured land rights and access to land, forests, waters, and pasturelands. Without secure land and resource rights, any development for family farmers and rural sectors may be lost. Land and other asset reform programs which were suspended or hindered by the pandemic should be implemented and completed for its target beneficiaries. Municipal or local fishing waters need to be defined and delineated and reserved for small fisherfolks. Ancestral lands and commons should be protected and the rights of Indigenous communities recognized and respected. Women's land rights through reformed titling or inheritance laws should be recognized. Land legislation should recognize the right of young farmers determined to make the land productive to also own lands. Governments should apply the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of land, waters, forests and fisheries (VGGT) and the Responsible Agricultural Investments (RAI) principles developed at the Committee on World Food Security. Further, immediately repeal laws, policies and programmes rolled out in the name of COVID-19 response or economic recovery that are detrimental to or undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples, small farmers, farm workers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, rural women and young farmers. These land rights defenders must be protected from killings, illegal detention and unjust accusations for asserting their rights over land and natural resources.

Family farmers need better control, access to and management of their productive resources to ensure sustainable, climate-resilient agro-ecological systems in farms, fisheries, forests and pasturelands. The mobility restrictions imposed even on agricultural inputs and services emphasized the problem of relying on imported inputs for producing crops. It emphasized the importance of small food producers' having immediate access to affordable and quality seeds, inputs, water resources and other support services and facilities. Thus, supply of seeds and other planting materials should be locally available or produced. Governments and development partners should invest through adequate financial, technical support in agroecological and climate-resilient food

production with family farmers. Extractive or destructive activities on the environment should be avoided. Investments in agriculture should not harm the environment or the welfare of farming families and communities.

Family farmers need better access to sustainable investments and local markets with shorter supply, market and value chains and improved relationships and inclusive governance within the food systems. To counter major disruptions in the food supply chains and markets, a viable solution is to invest in more local market hubs to shorten the supply chain from family farmers to consumers. This not only provides more opportunity for local growth but also helps reduce transport emissions which is important in battling climate change. The capacity of small producers to directly engage consumers through online or onsite marketing platforms should be enhanced as per the new normal. Assistance for local facilities for storage, processing and distribution should be available at community levels more. Family farmers need responsible and sustainable agricultural investments that protect their rights, preserve traditional Indigenous culture, knowledge and practices and that are equally beneficial to the country and to local family farming communities. Relationships within food systems between producers, suppliers, traders and consumers should be reviewed if they are fair or harmful to family farmers. Women likewise need access to collateral-free financing.

Family farmers need to strengthen and expand agricultural cooperatives and associations. Strong farmers organizations are crucial to influence policies and forward advocacy. Family farmers need to organize bigger and better cooperatives and economic entities to achieve economies of scale, consolidate their volume of production, their skills and local knowledge and amplify their voices in negotiations for better policies and fairer trade.

Women's rights and work in food systems and at home should be strongly recognized and valued. Household agriculture in Covid time highlighted the value of women's work in agriculture which is 50-90% of farm work across Asia from farming to marketing on top of care work and household management. With women's multiple roles, it is important to provide more women-friendly tools and technologies as well as extension services for women. Governments must also address the rise in domestic violence against women and children in this crisis.

The youth should be supported to thrive in agriculture. Young farmers play an important role in advancing agriculture, particularly sustainable agroecological practices. With farmers getting older and the youth less interested in agriculture, we are faced with the decreasing number of next generation farmers. We need to change the perspective of the youth that farming is an unappealing and unprofitable form of livelihood. This can be done through viable programs and innovative methods with new technologies and entrepreneurship support. The youth should also be encouraged to participate in governance mechanisms from local to global levels.

We, therefore, call on governments to respond to these needs through policies and programs under their National Action Plans that will strengthen sustainable family farming systems and to support the establishment and strengthening of inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches and mechanisms for the UN Decade of Family Farming, such as the National Committees on Family Farming. We strongly urge Asia-Pacific governments for broader democratic space and involvement of family farming organizations and CSOs in designing and implementing UNDF plans and programs.

We also reiterate the calls for governments to recognize the role and contribution of herders and pastoralists in agriculture and sustainable development and for the United Nations to declare an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists that will draw attention to the challenges they face.

We vow to bring these demands to global discussions and platforms, such as the Virtual meeting of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) this October and a physical meeting in February 2021, the World Forestry Congress in May 2021, as well as the Global Food Systems Summit in September 2021. We urge all stakeholders to work for a better normal in food systems by transforming it into something more people-centered, equitable, inclusive and sustainable with farming families in the lead of building back better. #

¹ Coming from the Regional Forum results of *Sustaining Family Farming in Asia-Pacific through inclusive farmer-driven approaches*, October 6-7, 2020, Virtual Zoom organized under the Community-based Initiative 2 platform convened by the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) and the People's Campaign for Agrarian Reform Network (AR Now!), together with the International Land Coalition Asia and the Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI). Analysis and recommendations of other previous consultations and conferences were also drawn from namely 1) Asian Farmers Policy Agenda for the International Decade on Family Farming 2019-2028; 2) ANGOC Statement on Protecting Land Rights and Ensuring Food Security in the Time of COVID, September 2020; 3) Asia Pacific Women Farmers Forum Declaration, October 2017.