Public consultation for a joint EU-Africa strategy

IFOAM's contribution

IFOAM is pleased to contribute to the consultation on a "joint strategy" between the European Union and the African Union.

In Africa, the livelihoods of about 60% of the population depend on agriculture. An EU-Africa strategy should therefore target specific support on increasing the competitiveness and productivity of African agriculture through policies and programs to improve the functioning of national and regional input and output markets, including the development of rural infrastructure and the promotion of Organic Agriculture.

Organic Agriculture is a holistic production management system, which enhances agro-ecosystem health, utilizing both traditional and scientific knowledge. Organic farming practices deliberately integrate traditional farming practices and make use of locally available resources. As such they are highly relevant to a majority of African farmers.

The benefits of Organic Agriculture in Africa

Organic farming contributes to the Millennium Development Goals of improved health and food security, environmental conservation, and economic development in Africa by:

- Combating poverty through increasing and stabilizing yields in semi-arid lands, reducing debt and increasing returns for labor invested: The use of manures, composts and mulches that increase both water infiltration and retention in the soil both fertilize crops and help them reach maturity when rains stop early. Framers are spared from the burden of debt often arising from taking external agricultural inputs on credit.

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Labor demand by organic fertilization methods is well rewarded by higher yields.

- Combating desertification: Ground cover and soil quality are improved and help to reduce soil erosion, to increase water uptake, and to raise the water table, thus restoring and maintaining springs.
- Improving pest control: The risk of pest and disease build-ups is reduced by organic methods as compared to chemicals, although migratory pests may still be a challenge.
- Coping with HIV/AIDS: Patients can strengthen their immune system with sufficient and healthy food, and extend their lifespan and economic activities by many years.
- Strengthening social systems: Organic Agriculture builds on local traditional knowledge, supports smallholder farm development, and suits women farmers' requirements.
- Maximizing environmental services: By conserving biodiversity, improving soils and avoiding chemical inputs that contaminate ecosystems.

Examples of successful development projects in Africa

The EPOPA Project (Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa): EPOPA is a SIDA-funded project which aims to give African smallholder farmers a better livelihood through developing local and international organic markets. Countries involved in the project include Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.
More than 27,000 smallholder farmers of Uganda and Tanzania get a premium price for their organic crop. In general, yields increase because of the better practices. At the same time, the agricultural sector is constantly exposed to innovative and environmentally sound organic farming techniques, leading to abundant local spin off developments.

SEKEM, an Egypt-based initiative that was established in 1977, combines the application of biodynamic principles to agricultural production with a wide range of social, economic and environmental objectives. SEKEM's most impressive impact is on cotton production.

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Through the Egyptian Biodynamic Association in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, farmers have been trained in a new method of pest control, which led to a ban of crop dusting throughout Egypt. By 2000, pesticide use in Egyptian cotton fields had fallen by over 90%, around 80% of cotton was being produced organically and average yields had increased by nearly 30%.

Recommendations

On the basis of benefits of Organic Agriculture in Africa presented, we call on the European commission to implement the three following approaches to support and expand Organic Agriculture in Africa:

- A development approach for resource-poor communities, mainly for self-sufficiency and community development.
- An income generation approach, giving farmers access to a premium market (local, regional and international markets for organic produce).
- A nature conservation approach, where Organic Agriculture is seen as a toll for nature conservation and natural resource management.

About IFOAM

IFOAM is the worldwide umbrella organization of organic agriculture movements, with some 750 member organizations in over 100 countries. IFOAM's mission is leading, uniting and assisting the organic movement in its full diversity with the goal of the worldwide adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems that are based on the principles of Organic Agriculture.

For more information visit our website www.ifoam.org or contact IFOAM Head Office (headoffice@ifoam.org) or the IFOAM EU Group (info@ifoam-eu.org).

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