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# **BERLIN MEMORANDUM ON SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR SMALLHOLDERS**

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**Input for the Conference “Setting the Course for a World without Hunger –  
North-South Dialogue on the Role of the G7”**

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This paper is the result of a consultative process involving experts from diverse backgrounds (civil society, science and the private sector) and five countries (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Germany and India). It encompasses policy recommendations to the German G7 Presidency and other G7 nations on how to reorient their development policy on food security and agriculture.

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## **BERLIN MEMORANDUM ON SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR SMALLHOLDERS**

Competition for land and other natural resources is ever more fierce. Areas traditionally devoted to growing food crops are taken over for feed, fuel, and fibre production. Changes in food habits, particularly those towards more sophisticated urban demands conflict with consumption patterns of the rural majority. Inevitably, the increasing loss of productive land in combination with rural population growth is leading to smaller and less viable holdings, which then become vulnerable targets to the highly focused processes of industrial agriculture.

Smallholders, especially the women amongst them, are the least powerful bidders and thus easily outcompeted by commercial interests. This includes the fate of small-scale and marginal farmers, pastoralists, fisher folk, forest dwellers, gatherers, hunters, indigenous peoples and the rural landless. Their resilience is being disproportionately weakened. To disregard those who – based on their cultures, traditional knowledge, social cohesion, perseverance and ingenuity – still provide more than 70% of food in developing countries is clearly both, unacceptable *and* unwise. They are currently underpinning social cohesion through providing adequate nutrition, care for children, old people and the weakest in the community and are thus stabilizing rural society, and indeed safeguarding culture and tradition. Smallholders must be respected as agents of change towards locally adapted, diversified and feasible sustainable development.

### **Challenges for food and agriculture**

Agricultural production is based on knowledge, labour, natural resources and climatic conditions. High capital input industrialized agriculture is trying to cope with that dependence by additional financial, chemical and technological inputs. However, this approach is not widely available to most of the world's smallholders. Even if available, it often ends for them in the debt-trap and loss of their livelihoods.

Unsustainable agricultural practices are drivers of biodiversity loss, undermining the ability of ecosystems to maintain their supportive functions. Climate change is putting additional pressure on agriculture by increasing the number and strength of extreme weather events and by changing precipitation patterns and average temperature. Moreover, the livelihoods of the poor (“GDP of the poor”) depend largely on intact ecosystems and their services.

Reduced food production and water shortage on degraded land with additional pressures by climate change are depleting the food baskets of the poor. Reduced biodiversity of landraces and local breeds often translates into reduced diversity of diet, leading to hunger or malnutrition. Very often children and women are suffering the most from such economic losses, increased poverty and hunger. Hunger is no easy starting point for regaining hope, initiative and dignity.

### **Why give smallholders center stage?**

Smallholders play the most important role in world food and nutrition security as they produce the bulk of all food in developing countries, including 70% of all the millets, tubers, fruits and vegetables. While industrial scale monocultures are oriented towards production enhancement and bulk distribution, and have more capital, energy, policy support and subsidies at their disposal, the production patterns of smallholders need much less fossil energy inputs and use diverse crops, cultivars and breeds. This diversity increases resilience for all. Smallholders have demonstrated over many generations their ability to provide healthy nutrition and maintain intact ecosystems. Smallholders, being a large part of the population, are demanding their chance to be major contributors to their country's well-being, resilience and sovereignty.

## Framework for the way forward

### Ensure smallholders rights

Respect, protection and implementation of rights will have huge positive impacts on stability and decent livelihoods in rural areas. So far, not all governments and their institutions have formally recognized and implemented land tenure, water and seed rights of smallholders, particularly women who often face additional discrimination. Access to information, access to justice, participation and prior informed consent regarding decisions influencing smallholders' lives and communities will be major steps on the way forward. The move towards transparency and accountability should quickly reach the local level. Increased national efforts and donor contributions to capacity building and infrastructure are needed.

### Promote and integrate viable smallholder livelihoods and rural job opportunities

The lessons learned by the Millennium Development Goals should have taught the international community that rural areas are important: According to data from the UN Human Rights Commission, up to 80 per cent of the extremely poor and hungry live there. Land was in recent years largely seen as raw material for modern agricultural bulk production meant for cities and export, whilst rural people were seen as a labor force reserve available for the lowest income, precarious sector. Rural people do not have adequate infrastructure, administrative services, agricultural extension services and inclusion in research agendas. They face difficulties in benefitting from the formal market, let alone global trade. They rarely get decent rural jobs. The culture, vitality and social cohesion of rural communities and their socio-economic potential are weakened. This negative trend has to be stopped and reversed. With political will, financial resources and an integrated approach this can be done. Studies have shown that about two-thirds of all agricultural investments are made by smallholder farmers. Already today's smallholders engage in multiple activities in agriculture and beyond. Access to markets - based on fair prices, resilient production systems, appropriate financing and adapted insurance schemes can help create stable income and additional jobs. Small farms can go beyond the provision of low-cost raw materials. A larger part of the value chain can be located in rural areas, which will be created by rural entrepreneurs. The huge potential of rural areas for contributing to local, national and international sustainable development can be activated. Again, jobs and income opportunities, which complement existing livelihood activities, are the most important development objective for overcoming poverty in rural areas. Failure to achieve this will increase migration into the slums of rapidly growing urban areas with already existing job shortage and social problems. It is naive or irresponsible to assume that the creation of a sufficient number of decent jobs in urban areas for all rural migrants will be feasible in the short time frame available. Massive migration beyond national borders is neither available nor desirable. For all these reasons, development has to happen in both rural and urban areas. Investments by donors and the private sector are very important in this context if broken down into absorbable portions reaching the intended smallholder target groups.

### Strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development for smallholders

The shift in development policies has to be rooted in integrated natural resource management. It puts an end to the current trend, which focuses on the global market, operates on the economies of scale, only, and externalizes social and environmental costs of agricultural production. Such a new approach maintains the chances for future generations. It protects the rights and aspirations of all people, paying special attention to those who carry the burden of a long history of neglect, i.e. smallholders and women. It establishes participatory and decentralized planning, especially land use planning, water use efficiency and community led forest and pasture management. It diversifies production systems based on agro-ecological principles, reduces risks of crop failure and provides healthy nutrition. It better distributes the workload for farming families across seasons. It invites knowledge, practices and innovations of smallholder communities to contribute to improved natural resource management, such as making the best use of locally adapted landraces and animal breeds, developing appropriate technologies and addressing specific local conditions with integrated and systemic approaches. Success can be accelerated by national efforts, further replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), donors' contributions and private sector engagement.

*All three elements of the way forward need to be considered in an integrated and coherent legal, policy and investment framework.*

### **Why act now?**

There are solid, global studies available, such as the Stern Report regarding climate change and the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment regarding biological diversity, which show that the present lack of political will to face existing challenges, leads to exorbitant costs in the future. A rights-based approach, positive incentives for sustainable development and best practices are needed. They provide a crucial barrier against poverty, hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation, social unrest, economic collapses, disasters, resource conflicts and wars. It is a challenge worth our best efforts.