Call to action

Climate change affects agriculture across the globe. The increase of extreme weather events will have a devastating effect on agriculture and consequently on reduction of poverty and hunger, especially in Africa. Central to agriculture are healthy soils and sufficient water, which are both threatened by human influence. Therefore, we call every farmer, politician and consumer to focus on climate smart agriculture. This approach consists of three pillars: adaptation, production and mitigation. These broad concepts have been our guideline in formulating focal points.

More than 300 participants from around the globe have formulated the following ***call to action***. Let this guide our road towards a sustainable and inclusive food system. We acknowledge that solutions need to be context-specific and fit local realities. While gathering many participants to share their opinions is great, there is no one-fits-all solution. Local farmers should always be involved in designing solutions. **We, the world rural youth, are ready to engage and take up our role in a path to sustainable food systems.**

Adaptation

Adaptation should be supported in the most vulnerable regions since they are already experiencing negative effects of climate change, although they did not contribute to it. These measures should be developed with a "community-centered" approach (e.g., the PIP approach). Farming communities need to have ownership of the proposed measures and need to have the possibility to develop their own strategies. To do so, we call for:

1. An improvement of weather forecasting and farming advice services. This entails new technical developments in remote sensing and mobile services for dissemination of valuable information to farmers.

2. Improved land tenure rights and representation of farming communities. Farmers will only invest in their land and adapt their practices if they feel confident that they can farm the land for a longer period of time. The "tragedy of the commons" and countless land grabbing events have shown us that proper land rights are needed. Young men and women need to be given special attention in formulating legislation to purchase land.

3. Improved water management options, such as rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation, make crop growth possible during drought periods.

4. Development of new cultivars, and promotion of the use of neglected and underutilized species (NUS) adapted to local conditions and the occurrence of extreme weather events.

5. Crop diversification practices and promotion of agroecology and agroforestry for reduced total farm loss, improved farm incomes and food security among households.

6. National and regional plans backed by governments to support the implementation of climate smart agriculture practices.

7. An increased use of cover crops because they have multiple benefits: reducing erosion, N fixation and regreening.

Mitigation

Agriculture contributes a substantial amount to anthropogenic emissions, but also has a huge potential to reduce emissions and store carbon in soils. The international community's aim to limit global warming to 1,5 ºC can only be reached if youth is involved. Therefore, we call for:

1. A wide development and promotion of renewable energies such as from solar and biogas for food production, irrigation, cooling, processing and storing.

2. An upscale of the market for “carbon credits” to compensate farmers in their actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, it is too difficult for this essential group to participate in this system.

3. A re-evaluation of the global peatlands. More carbon is stored in peatlands than forest. The biggest peatland in the world is the Congo Basin, which needs to be preserved. Large drainage activities of these ecosystems in Europe and Asia have demonstrated the environmental damage this can cause, and the big losses generated if these lands are not conserved. Protection of peat areas is needed, while ensuring that compensation is given for preventing emissions.

4. Revalue the ecosystem services of existing forests and other ecosystems, including their carbon stocks and biodiversity, to decrease deforestation.

5. Implementation of agroforestry and agroecological systems, which can sequester substantial amounts of carbon while diversifying income and increasing resilience. In addition, municipal planning should be revised to include better management of waste and increased green areas.

6. A critical reflection on our food system by consumers around the globe and a commitment to change diets. The large portion of animal products in Western diets and the large food waste, are incompatible with a sustainable food system.

7. Improved access to highly digestible feed for ruminants, which reduces methane emissions, making sure adapted fodder production does not compete with other key crops.

8. Minimizing agricultural waste and recycling everything that contains nutrients.

9. Clear policies, which avoid overexploitation of agricultural land and thus fallow periods.

Production

We call for an eradication of hunger and malnutrition by increasing sustainable food production in quantitative and qualitative terms. To do so, we call for:

1. Better access to inputs, including quality seeds and machinery, adapted to local needs.

2. Value and support the broad diversity of agricultural practices and systems. Youth is passionate about high tech systems, such as hydroponic, and embraces traditional techniques as agroforestry.

3. Youth needs to be encouraged and supported to try out new practices and innovate. We acknowledge that the first step to change is trying, with both failing and succeeding. The focus should therefore be on building local capacity so youth can start innovating.

4. Means to implement innovative cropping systems, ranging from established systems (intercropping, agroforestry, agroecology, crop rotation, etc.) to newer systems that employ remote sensing and smart management software.

5. Improved access to financial services, which should allow farmers to invest in machinery, technology, land and other key inputs. In many countries, farmers are the driving force behind the economy; every dollar invested in education will yield much more economic return in the future.

6. Fair markets, which incentivise farmers to increase their production sustainably. This development should go hand in hand with the establishment of cooperatives ensuring a stronger position of farmers.

7. Farmers to be well trained, given the necessary skills and the opportunity to be an active part of national inclusive economic development. Focus should be given to South-South knowledge exchange.

8. Research into the improvement of local livestock and livestock management.

9. Support the building of supply chains of affordable water and agriculture products and technologies. This will contribute to less dependence on large Western multinationals, ensuring seed sovereignty.

Pathway for youth empowerment

The world has never been so young. Young people grow up in a new age, where technology makes it possible to be connected with peers worldwide. This event is one of the products of this technical revolution: more than 1500 young people from which 50% from Africa registered for our conference. Young people can therefore be a meaningful attribution to the discourse:

1. We are digital natives and are eager to try new (digital) techniques to practice.

2. We are connected with people across the country and globe.

3. We represent the larger part of the population even more so on the African continent.

4. We are up to date with new research and techniques, which can help in a knowledge transfer. While at the same time, the older generation's experience can help fulfil the aspirations of younger generations towards our common goal.

5. We are ready to innovate.

However, youth empowerment in agriculture does not have the high priority it should have. Agriculture will forever be a crucial sector. The idea that youth are not interested in agriculture should be debunked, but there are obstacles to be overcome:

1. Youth lack access to land and financial resources, which prevents them from starting their own farms and developing them.

2. Youth is rarely involved in decision making from the household level to larger political institutions and companies.

3. Youth needs better prospects of financial security to remain in the farming sector. . Agriculture needs to be seen as an investment and business opportunity.

4. Youth are outcompeted by large agricultural firms and multinationals. Localization of production and commercialization of small-holder farmers and businesses should be prioritized.

Our commitments

On behalf of IAAS and CSAYN, we have started the following actions to begin implementing this approach:

1. We are setting up a “think tank” focused on solving pressing environmental issues. This think tank will consist of young people across the globe.

2. We continue to be involved in the “Village Concept Projects” in Nepal, Zimbabwe, Morocco and Indonesia. These initiatives are youth-led projects part of IAAS, which strive to develop rural areas and empower their communities.

3. We are raising awareness and sharing knowledge in podcasts, interviews, social media campaigns, and challenges. An example is our participation in the “Food System Dialogues”.

4. We are actively engaging with partners across the globe, where we offer our help in the form of labour and knowledge.

5. We endorse climate smart agriculture and members, who return to farming, want to actively showcase these ideas.