



## ***Joint Civil Society Statement for the 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry***

### **“Regional Civil Society Dialogue to Improve Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Development Policies in South East Asia.”**

Food Security Working Group

18 September, 2014

We, representatives from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) active in different Southeast Asia countries, have come together on 18 September 2014 to discuss ways to improve food security, agriculture and rural development policies in Southeast Asia. First of all we would like to commend efforts taken by the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry to increase their engagement with civil society, as confirmed in their conclusions released at their 34<sup>th</sup> meeting in Lao PDR. We stand ready to deepen this engagement and work constructively together to improve food security, agriculture and rural development policies in Southeast Asia.

We would also like to applaud efforts taken by ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry to develop relevant policy frameworks to improve food security, agriculture and rural development policies in the ASEAN region, and work jointly towards shared goals. In particular the past and near future adoption of the ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) framework (2015-2020), the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (2011-2015), and the Strategic Plan for ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (2016-2025) are singled out. We would like to encourage effective implementation of these policy frameworks, and adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress. In addition, we would like to call for enhanced inter-ministerial coordination in ASEAN countries to ensure that the multifaceted problems are effectively addressed. We would also like to call on governments to promote rule of law, establish accountability mechanisms, and fight corruption, to create an enabling environment for equitable policies.

The rest of our recommendations will centre around 5 topics that we have identified as priorities throughout the ASEAN region:

#### **1. Integrating nutrition into agricultural development policies and projects**

Investment in nutrition is important for national and regional development. Malnutrition has multiple causes and requires a multi-sectoral approach to effectively address it. Nutrition must be integrated into national agriculture and development policies and programs at the country and ASEAN level. We propose the following actions to the ASEAN ministers of agriculture: to ensure vertical and horizontal cooperation and inter-ministerial collaboration at the country as well as the ASEAN region level; to establish a participatory and consultative forum with multi-stakeholders including civil society for addressing

nutrition through agriculture and development; to implement nutrition sensitive and sustainable agriculture policies, practises and regulations which protect consumers, producers and environment; to empower communities, and especially women through equal access to information, social services, and development opportunities; and to diversify food production to support balanced diets.

## **2. Land tenure and natural resource governance**

We call upon the member states of ASEAN to recognise, secure and protect the legitimate rights of small holder farmers and peoples directly dependent on natural resources to have secure access and control over their land and natural resources. Member states should respect the sustainable customary and traditional land management practices of all rural communities. We call upon ASEAN member states to ensure a safe environment so that smallholder farmers and civil society organisations are able to organise and participate in land and natural resource governance at both the national and ASEAN level. We request ASEAN states to utilise international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, ILO 169 and UNDRIP to engage in national and ASEAN consultative processes with CSOs and rural communities with the aim of strengthening national land and natural resource management laws and administration mechanisms. These should include mechanisms that guarantee access to information and provide for independent judicial and/or non-judicial grievance mechanisms over infringements of land and natural resource. Both ASEAN member states and private corporations should incorporate the principles included in Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) as the basis of all consultations over land and natural resources. Member states should make specific efforts to recognise the land tenure rights of women.

## **3. Impact of trade liberalisation on smallholder farmers**

We recommend ASEAN ministers of agriculture to recognise the role of civil society such as farmers' organisations to engage in and monitor the implementation of ASEAN and national policies, budget allocation and expenditure, as well as the representation in free trade negotiations; to adopt gender-sensitive, equitable, pro-poor and protective regulations and mechanisms for smallholder farmers to encourage domestic trade and protect them from unfair practices by brokers; to review and adopt appropriate laws and regulations relating to agricultural inputs, direct access to markets, health and education; to promote local economies such as the establishment of localised economic zones; and to recognise a bigger role for producer cooperatives in the market value chain, especially of rural women.

In addition, we call on governments to increase capacity of human resources and infrastructure, such as the knowledge transfer and financial systems, to address negative and positive impacts of trade liberalisation; to raise awareness and impact of ASEAN integration among the agriculture sector and increase knowledge of the likely impact of ASEAN policies on the domestic market; to improve agricultural practices, crop productivity and agriculture support; to increase access to credit and financial knowledge of smallholder farmers; to adopt environmentally-sensitive laws to improve domestic food security and safety; and to formulate responsive and contextualised land laws and policies to promote the interests of vulnerable communities such as upland communities and female farmers.

#### **4. Rice reserves and policies**

We call on the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry to set up effective rice reserves at all levels, regional, national and local. We recommend considering support for rice reserve banks at village level, set up and sustained by the local people with support from the government, in partnership with CSOs. These village level rice reserves should have the possibility to support each other in case of calamities. We call for free trade of rice within and between ASEAN countries, meaning that monopolies and cartels who manipulate the price should be abolished. We call for appropriate linking of rice reserves at the local, national and regional level, and to set some common rules on how reserves should be managed at all levels. We call for transparency of the stocks that are kept by the different ASEAN Member States. We call for learning exchanges between different ASEAN countries on how they are managing rice reserves at different levels. We call on ministers to make an agreement among ASEAN Member States not to ban export of rice to other ASEAN countries, in times of food crises and price spikes. Preferential treatment should be given to trading with fellow ASEAN members. Rice policies should also encourage and support an increase in sustainable rice production.

#### **5. Responsible agricultural investments**

We recommend ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry to comply with the letter and spirit of domestic laws and international standards and norms, whichever is highest, including FPIC, RAI, VGGT, and the UN guidelines for Business and Human Rights; to ensure strong environmental and social standards on investments based on timely, transparent and meaningful consultation and participation of affected communities including women; to adhere to fair sharing of risks and benefits in contract farming and related arrangements with small holder farmers. Develop fair and transparent terms of trade, quality standards and pricing structures.

We further call on ministers to support small holder farmers by encouraging agricultural production through responsible contract schemes with private investors followed by appropriate regulation, monitoring and mechanisms through which farmers can raise and resolve disputes; to promote market works for small holder farmers and forest user groups, including women, and not in favour of large or foreign investors only. Farmers' choices to grow the most appropriate crops for their land and livelihood should be respected and supported through access to technology, information, finance and other agricultural inputs. We also recommend the adoption of a legal framework for investment to protect farmers' rights and increase incentives for investors to support farmers and monitor compliance by investors with promises made in this respect. Small holder farmers should be recognized as the most important source of investment in agriculture.

We would like to request and thank in advance ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry and Senior Officials to take our recommendations into account during their deliberations during the 36th Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry and Preparatory Senior Officials Meeting, and in the development of national and regional level policies and policy frameworks.