



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-sixth Session

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The Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

Executive Summary

Since the last COAG meeting in October 2016, GIAHS programme has carried out many activities including capacity building for the communities and sites already designated, disseminating GIAHS knowledge, designating new sites and collecting information on the implementation of action plans and monitoring of their impacts and strengthening collaboration and partnership within and outside FAO. All these activities have contributed to the achievement of successful outcomes, including increased number of the GIAHS sites, its geographic expansion and enhanced visibility. The importance of GIAHS, as well as the interest and opportunities generated by the programme, was highlighted during the GIAHS International Forum held on 19 April 2018 at FAO. This document aims at offering an overview of the main activities conducted by GIAHS since the last session of the COAG and proposing main actions to be undertaken in the future for scaling up the programme.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Provide its views with regard to the achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of the programme and acknowledge the work of FAO and countries on GIAHS.
- 2) Recognize the role of the Scientific Advisory Group of GIAHS
- 3) Request FAO and the Scientific Advisory Group to continue to develop and refine criteria and indicators for the designation of sites and the monitoring and evaluation of their Dynamic Conservation Plans.
- 4) Request FAO, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, to strengthen its work on GIAHS to contribute to the SDG agenda, through its impacts on sustainable agriculture, conservation of biodiversity, food security, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability and to develop a program of work with key performance indicators.
- 5) Invite countries to join the GIAHS program, and to support and strengthen economically and socially the existing sites through an integrated livelihoods support to the GIAHS farmers.

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I. Introduction

1. From generation to generation, agricultural systems and landscapes with specific features have been created and formed by those engaged in agriculture, such as farmers, pastoralists, fisher folks, and forest dwellers, based on diverse natural conditions and using locally adapted management practices. These systems finally have come to demonstrate remarkable characteristics not only of sustainable and resilient provision of foods, as well as other ecosystem services, but also of valuable agricultural biodiversity, ingenious traditional knowledge for resource management, cultures associated with agriculture and unique landscapes formed through farmers' interaction with the nature for many years.

2. In 2002, FAO started an initiative to recognize Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) and to safeguard these unique and remarkable systems of global importance supported by diverse biological resources, traditional knowledge and practices, local cultures and featured by their specific landscapes. This GIAHS Initiative was converted to the FAO GIAHS programme in 2015.

Overview of GIAHS Programme Development

3. Since its inception in 2002, the GIAHS Initiative has been developing a framework that engages communities and local and national governments, to identify, recognize, support and safeguard GIAHS and their livelihoods, agricultural and associated biodiversity, landscapes, knowledge systems and traditional cultures.

4. Due to the increased recognition of the GIAHS in many countries and international fora, the 148th session of the FAO Council agreed that the GIAHS should be vested with formal status within the FAO framework. This initiative was discussed in several governing bodies including the 24th session of the COAG in 2014 and finally led to the decision by the 39th FAO Conference in 2015 that the GIAHS was conceptually embedded into FAO's Strategic Framework (Strategic Objective 2 (SO2)), while contributing to all the other strategic objectives, and should be a FAO Corporate Programme.

5. As a FAO Corporate Programme, a new operation of the GIAHS programme started with a streamlined decision making processes and governance structure and a fully operational secretariat, in alignment with FAO's Strategic Framework. Since 2016, the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) has been providing independent scientific advice and guidance to the GIAHS programme operation.

II. Main programme activities since the last COAG meeting

Workshops and Training Courses for Capacity Building

6. Since the last COAG in 2016, four capacity building workshops and training courses at regional and global levels were held in China, Tanzania and FAO in Rome. The workshops aimed at disseminating GIAHS concept and its approach to mainly Sub-Sahara African and European regions, where there were only a few or no GIAHS sites at that time. Two training courses held in China were to enhance the capacity of GIAHS stakeholders from countries with potential GIAHS sites. In addition to the regional and global events, national workshops on GIAHS were held in Algeria, Tunisia¹ and Spain². With the participants from various backgrounds these events have contributed to deepening understanding of GIAHS and enhancing capacity of many stakeholders to conduct GIAHS related activities in the respective countries. As a result, as of September 2018, there are 52 designated

¹ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/899455/>

² <http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/1103812/>

GIAHS sites in 21 countries³ which reflect a wide variety of agricultural production systems and landscapes in different parts of the world.

Scientific Advisory Group

7. A Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) composed of seven recognized independent members from different regions, designated by the FAO Director General for a two year period, was established in 2016. The SAG held six sessions. The secretariat, in consultation with the SAG has developed new terms of reference and rules of procedure for the nomination of members of SAG. In the new procedures, the current practice that SAG members are selected by FAO based on their personal capacity will be maintained to retain the independence of the expert body. This principle follows the nomination procedures adopted by other FAO expert groups such as JECFA⁴ and Jmpr⁵. Since the current SAG membership will terminate by the end of 2018, FAO will start the nomination process of the new SAG experts in due time to ensure continuity.

8. The SAG also developed a set of guidelines for GIAHS designation procedures to optimize the assessment of GIAHS proposals and made significant revisions on the GIAHS selection criteria and application format to streamline and harmonize processes and to reflect GIAHS concepts more appropriately.

9. The experiences of SAG evaluation process from the many GIAHS proposals revealed the fact that there is still a need to continue technical assistance for member countries to identify potential GIAHS sites, to improve the quality of proposals and to better implement and monitor action plans for a more dynamic conservation⁶.

GIAHS site designation

10. Fourteen new GIAHS sites in eight countries were designated during the biennium. Among the newly designated sites, Chinampa agricultural system in Mexico marked the first GIAHS site in North America⁷. Two sites in Spain, namely salt production in Valle Salado de Añana and raisin production in La Axarquía, Malaga became the first sites in Europe⁸.

Promotion and establishment of national frameworks and the Nationally Important Agricultural Systems (NIAHS)

11. Several countries have already established their own institutional frameworks to coordinate national GIAHS strategies and actions. These include frameworks such as “GIAHS National Committee”, composed of relevant ministries, Academia and Research, Farmers’ representatives and other main stakeholders. Some countries also established special expert committees to designate national candidates that could apply for GIAHS designation. These committees have proved to be effective in facilitating coordination and formulation of the relevant policies necessary for operation of GIAHS at national level.

12. Some countries developed national registry systems of unique and traditional agricultural systems, based on concepts similar to GIAHS, which are often named “Nationally Important Agricultural Systems (NIAHS)”. The GIAHS Secretariat has been encouraging the establishment of such national systems in a number of countries such as Chile and Ecuador. The experiences and

³ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/giahs-sites/en/>

⁴ Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives

⁵ Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on Pesticide Residues

⁶ “Dynamic conservation” aims at conservation of the GIAHS site, adaptation of the site to the contemporary socio-economic conditions, and development without changing the core elements of the GIAHS site.

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/1013106/>

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/1069926/>

lessons learned from operating these systems can produce positive impacts in adopting new policies that integrate elements of agricultural heritage into their development plans.

GIAHS International Forum for experience sharing and certificate award

13. The GIAHS International Forum was held on 19 April 2018 at FAO Headquarters⁹. The objectives for the Forum were to share lessons learned through GIAHS designation processes and implementation of action plans and to award GIAHS sites designated since 2016 with the GIAHS certificate. With the participation of 400 representatives from the newly designated sites and countries, NGOs, International Organizations, experts and partners, the Forum provided the participants with comprehensive information on the current activities and the future perspectives to expand and strengthen the programme.

14. On the occasion of this Forum, a GIAHS exhibition was organized at FAO HQ, giving newly designated GIAHS sites the opportunity to showcase their agricultural products as well as to allow FAO staff and country representatives to learn more about GIAHS sites.

15. The Forum was also an occasion to launch a new communication strategy, with the aim of strengthening the GIAHS image and improve outreach. FAO launched a new GIAHS visual identity and a new logo. The new communication strategy will allow the programme to achieve a wider visibility at the global level, giving the opportunity to member countries and to GIAHS partners to be recognized by a common visual identity. With the same intent, a new GIAHS Booklet was released¹⁰, a corporate GIAHS video was created¹¹ and the GIAHS website¹² was revamped.

Effective action plan implementation and monitoring

16. In view of the importance of action plans, GIAHS Secretariat conducted a global survey on the current states of the GIAHS sites and the impacts of action plans. The outcome of this survey showed the need to take proactive action on capacity building to facilitate effective formulation and implementation of the action plans.

17. As the first attempt to promote this activity, a workshop was organized to exchange experiences of action plan implementation and monitoring in June 2017 by inviting delegates from the Oasis GIAHS sites in North Africa¹³. The workshop succeeded in deepening mutual understanding of various actions taken in each GIAHS site to deal with issues faced by each Oasis GIAHS site. It was also found that the meeting among the GIAHS sites with the similar type of agricultural systems would create effective outcomes.

Development of partnerships

18. GIAHS Secretariat had a joint meeting with UNESCO World Heritage Centre on January 2018. Both parties agreed on joint actions to pursue more effective heritage conservation and development¹⁴. GIAHS Secretariat have been working closely with Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), United Nations University (UNU) and University of Florence and starting collaboration with non-governmental organizations such as Slow Food, AIAPP¹⁵ and World Rural Forum, to strengthen GIAHS activities in the relevant countries and fields.

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/forum/en/>

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/3/BU482en/bu482en.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzp5NgJ2-dK7AaJGsX75JHKUBnZt0Afw>

¹² <http://www.fao.org/giahs/en/>

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/899686/>

¹⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/BU482en/bu482en.pdf>

¹⁵ Associazione Italiana di Architettura del Paesaggio

Support from and collaboration with member countries

19. Given the fact that the GIAHS programme is only partially funded by FAO regular budget (a P5 and G4 positions), voluntary contribution from member countries (China and Japan) have been key to support programme operations, including the organization of SAG sessions, capacity building activities, communication and the organization of the GIAHS International Forum. In this regard, and in response to the request from a donor government (China), an evaluation of the trust fund project was conducted by an independent evaluator. The evaluation found that the project activities greatly contributed to disseminating the value and the concept of GIAHS at global level, and the project has proven to be a useful instrument in pursuance of FAO's Strategic Objective 2. MoUs were signed in 2016 and 2017 with member countries (Italy and Spain, respectively) to promote collaborative actions for promoting GIAHS in these countries¹⁶.

20. In view of the increasing demands faced by the programme, a reinforcement of the Secretariat through extrabudgetary resources would be instrumental in meeting the expectations, expand the coverage and impact of GIAHS and ensure consistent leadership. The GIAHS Secretariat could be staffed as follows: a D1, a P4 and G4 positions. The difference between the current cost and the proposed cost for the new structure should be subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources. This would facilitate the development of a more comprehensive action plan for the expansion and enhancement of the GIAHS programme with a set of key performance indicators.

GIAHS Programme from a global perspective

Qualitative Impacts of GIAHS Programme

21. The GIAHS programme has promoted public understanding, awareness, national and international recognition of the significance of an integrated approach which requires several combined key elements for sustainable agriculture and the roles played by family farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities.

22. The GIAHS programme has become a catalyst to promote mind-set changes of many stakeholders including farmers, researchers, policy makers and consumers to re-evaluate and give more positive values to such major GIAHS elements as traditional agricultural practices and knowledge, sustainability, better livelihoods and agrobiodiversity.

23. The GIAHS Programme has successfully gained recognition as an effective mean to provide incentives to activate rural economy and development, promote resilience of agricultural production and shed light on traditional knowledge and practices related to sustainable use of agricultural resources. The multifaceted nature of the GIAHS approach enables its contribution to the FAO's overall support to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal such as SDG 1, 2, 6, 14 and 15.

III. Basic Direction of Future Programme Operation

Geographic expansion of GIAHS sites and countries

24. The geographic expansion of the GIAHS sites could be further pursued by increasing the number of GIAHS holding countries since it can be assumed that there are many unidentified agricultural systems that have valuable characteristic deserving GIAHS and could have many benefits through recognition. This may require coordinated capacity building activities with more focused technical assistance schemes based on lessons learned and experiences from GIAHS sites. At the same

¹⁶ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/447206/icode/>;
<http://www.fao.org/giahs/news/detail-events/en/c/1013105/>

time, the SAG will continue to develop the criteria and associated indicators in order to strengthen the designation process while ensuring the highest quality of submissions.

Increase attention to the formulation of effective Action Plans and their implementation and monitoring

25. Given that the ultimate goal of GIAHS designation is to achieve dynamic conservation of the sites and the primary responsibility for this rests upon member countries, the Secretariat will encourage stakeholders in GIAHS countries and sites to promote the formulation of effective action plans, their implementation and monitoring of their impacts through a predefined and simple set of indicators. Development of guidance and its dissemination through workshops and training courses that discuss effective measures for action plans and how to conduct monitoring could be useful for GIAHS countries to improve their capacity in pursuing this objective.

Incentivize countries to support the livelihoods of the farmers and producers engaged in the existing GIAHS

26. This can be done by mapping and summarizing examples or best-practices of how to utilize GIAHS as an effective tool to reduce poverty and inequalities; promote peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges among GIAHS sites to enhance best practices; promote farmers knowledge and tools to sustainable practices to increase production and productivity; undertake Value chain analysis on the value chains related to the GIAHS site; undertake livelihood analysis of the strengths and challenges of GIAHS sites as a mechanism to reduce poverty and inequalities; undertake capacity development and institutional analysis to support producer's organizations in business management, natural resources management, access to markets, social policies and rural finance; build consumer's awareness/campaigns of the benefits and advantages of consuming products from GIAHS sites.

Strengthen scientific approach and knowledge uptake.

27. Collection of objective and scientific evidence (in natural, economic and social fields) to understand the basis for remarkable and unique features of GIAHS sites should be strengthened to review the current states of sites and consider any necessary action for good management of the site. Promotion of scientific approach will also be effective in sharing and multiplying the beneficial experiences gained in GIAHS sites to other agricultural production areas to address various challenges faced by famers in many parts of the world.

Strengthen communication and outreach activities

28. Outreach activities should be enhanced to disseminate general GIAHS concept and specific information on the designated GIAHS sites, including their unique characteristics from the perspectives of traditional knowledge, agro ecological approach, culture, landscapes, impacts arising from designation through GIAHS homepage, booklets, brochures and visual images.

IV. Suggested Action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Provide its views with regard to the achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of the programme and acknowledge the work of FAO and countries on GIAHS.
- 2) Recognize the role of the Scientific Advisory Group of GIAHS.
- 3) Request FAO and the Scientific Advisory Group to continue to develop and refine criteria and indicators for the designation of sites and the monitoring and evaluation of their Dynamic Conservation Plans.
- 4) Request FAO, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, to strengthen its work on GIAHS to contribute to sustainable agriculture, conservation of biodiversity, food security and environmental sustainability and to develop a program of work with key performance indicators.

- 5) Invite countries to join the GIAHS program and,
- 6) To support and strengthen economically and socially the existing sites through an integrated livelihoods support to the GIAHS farmers.