

28 April, 2012

Dear Dr. Steinfeld and livestock dialogue team,

We very much welcome the initiative you have taken towards developing and implementing a Global Agenda of Action (GAA) in support of sustainable livestock sector development. Indeed, we believe such a multi-stakeholder process is extremely urgent in light of the far-reaching implications of the growth of the world's livestock populations – far exceeding human population growth – for the limited resources of the planet. The issue needs to be discussed from all angles, at the highest levels, and given the utmost priority globally, including at the upcoming Rio+20 Summit.

We are writing to you as representatives and supporters of the largest stakeholder group in livestock development: pastoralists and small-scale livestock keepers in Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere. In this regard, we note a significant difference between FAO's and our partners' perspective of a strategic pathway towards a sustainable livestock sector at a global level. Small-scale livestock keepers' and pastoralists' priorities for livestock development focus on sustainable livelihoods, poverty alleviation and the maintenance of a healthy and bio-diverse environment, whereas FAO's perspective appears to centre on "providing enough livestock sourced foods at low prices to as many people as possible", at least as reflected in the way the GAA has been framed. As we will try to elaborate below, at the practical level there are tensions and even contradictions between achieving both goals.

Since this is a complex subject, we are analysing the rationale/concept of the GAA sentence by sentence.

**"A Global Agenda of Action will focus on the improvement of resource-use efficiency in the livestock sector to support livelihoods, long-term food security and economic growth while safeguarding other environmental and public health outcomes."**

This sentence contains the "buzzwords" that are also at the core of our concerns: resource-use efficiency, livelihoods, food security, environmental and public health. However, it is not clear how the current thematic structure of the GAA will address these issues, as it has adopted a rather technical "metric" approach that focuses on productivity improvements but seems to ignore (but here we stand to be corrected!) related environmental, institutional, trade and power issues. The situation is more complex than can be expressed by metrics: depending on how "resource use efficiency" is defined, large industrial production units achieving economies of scale tend to come out on top; however these have multiple draw-backs and externalities with respect to livelihood support, long-term food security, the environment and public health, in addition to biodiversity and animal welfare. How can these parameters be figured into the definition of "resource use efficiency"?

Furthermore recent research (<http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ejdr/journal/v22/n5/abs/ejdr201041a.html>) indicates how, in the drylands characterised by high levels of unpredictability and resource variability and where a substantial proportion of the world's livestock are reared, a much broader and nuanced understanding (than just a technical metric approach) to increasing productivity is required. A carefully tailored approach to increasing productivity is required that accommodates and responds to the specificities of different environmental, economic and societal systems.

*Our opinion: we argue that resource-use efficiency can be achieved in a more sustainable way through optimising farming systems as a whole rather than through maximising the specialised production of single products (meat, milk, eggs etc). This requires a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach towards agro-ecological production systems - in which farmers' & pastoralists' innovations are essential and can be supported by appropriate support mechanisms. In the dry lands of Africa for example pastoralism is such an integrated farming system. This system pro-actively harnesses*

*resource variability, characteristic of the drylands, to maximise productivity (see article above) largely through institutional innovation rather than costly external inputs. The value of pastoralism as a land use and livelihood system able to generate economic wealth while supporting millions of people directly and indirectly through the value chain with a very low “carbon footprint” is increasingly being recognised by policy makers (e.g. the AU Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa). In this regard, we think that the focus of the GAA in the drylands of Africa, for example, should be more on maximizing the benefits of pastoralism as an existing livestock approach rather than on seeking to introduce alternatives that history has shown us rarely achieve their intended objectives. An interesting read on this is the recently published CAADP policy brief: “Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa: diverse livelihood pathways” (<http://www.future-agricultures.org/policy-engagement/caadp/7680-new-caadp-policy-briefs>). This policy brief stresses the need to work through existing frameworks such as the AU Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa, to protect pastoralist’s access to rangelands and key resource areas, to take account of local circumstances and to involve pastoralists themselves.*

**“A Global Agenda of Action is being built around the notion that demand growth for livestock products will likely continue for decades to come, as incomes and human populations continue to grow.”**

Yes, demand for livestock products will certainly grow, but does this automatically mean it needs to be satisfied? We can see a mind-shift in this respect in various western countries. Humans have ravenous appetites for many things whose supply is finite (for instance oil), so demand must also be regulated by means of pricing and by internalizing all costs, including environmental and social costs. The current level of livestock product pricing (poultry, pig, dairy) does not do this. There is evidence that livestock products from large-scale intensive farming units are currently so cheap only because of subsidies for inputs (especially feed), and because many farmers are tied into contracts that force them to produce below their costs. Furthermore, little attention appears to be taken of the carbon footprint of supplying these industrial units with feed (e.g. the costs of producing and shipping soya from Brazil to feed pigs in the Netherlands!).

*Our opinion: We argue that – especially in rich societies - small amounts of meat are sufficient to fulfil dietary requirements. We also argue that it is inconsistent from the perspective of wise resource management to concentrate our efforts on keeping prices for livestock products as low as possible. Paying a fair price to the producer that also covers all externalities would do much to revitalize rural economies and actually reduce the flow of rural migrants into cities and thereby the number of urban people that need to be fed. It would also contribute to rural income and biodiversity conservation.*

**“Such growth will need to be accommodated within the context of a finite and sometimes dwindling natural resource base, and will be faced with the need to respond to climate change, both adapting and mitigating.”**

Yes, we agree unconditionally.

**“Demand growth also presents opportunities for social and economic development that many developing countries would not want to miss. “**

Yes, in theory this is right and this is the way it should be. But there is no ‘silver bullet’ to achieve this. Instead of designing an overall strategy, there is a need to look at what works - and what does not - in various livestock keeping systems. Livestock keepers’ voices are essential in this process. There are numerous examples of ways to support smallholder farmers and pastoralists by

optimising their production systems in a holistic manner - of which livestock is an integral part - leading to increased income and wellbeing and better environmental management.

Meanwhile, there is limited evidence for this actually happening through the mere introduction of specialized and large-scale livestock keeping units. Research on the impacts of the Livestock Revolution in Brazil, China, Thailand and India indicate smallholders have rarely, if at all, benefitted from the phenomenal growth in the poultry and pig sector (see <http://www.pastoralpeoples.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Livestock-from-asset-to-liability-11.pdf>.) There is also evidence that the conventional development approaches that have been preached for the last half century – based on the adoption of high performing livestock breeds and specialized management systems – often result in failure. By contrast, people who stick to their low input breeds that are well-adapted to the characteristics of the environment in which they are reared, are often much better off economically and turn a profit.

*Our opinion: We believe that research into how to translate the demand for livestock products into opportunities for social and equitable development for pastoralists and smallholder livestock keepers is urgently required and should be prioritized by donors. In this respect, we feel it is critical that the voices of these groups be pro-actively sought and the necessary support given to enable them to participate in an informed manner in debates whose outcomes will have a profound impact on their lives and livelihoods – the GAA process as a multi-stakeholder effort should ensure this happens.*

**“In addition, the livestock sector provides numerous opportunities for enhanced food security and livelihood support.”**

Yes, it does, but the approaches need to be different than those that have been promoted by mainstream development, as mentioned above. Livestock keepers themselves have articulated their needs through identifying a set of Livestock Keepers’ Rights that have been endorsed by governments in the context of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) – see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livestock\\_Keepers%27\\_Rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livestock_Keepers%27_Rights), [http://www.pastoralpeoples.org/docs/Declaration\\_on\\_LKRs\\_with\\_initial%20signatories\\_6.pdf](http://www.pastoralpeoples.org/docs/Declaration_on_LKRs_with_initial%20signatories_6.pdf), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1823t/i1823t13.pdf>

**“To ensure that such multiple promises for the livestock sector to contribute to society’s environmental, social, economic and health objectives materialize, concerted sector stakeholder action needs to be mobilized towards the necessary changes in regulatory frameworks, policies, technologies, and supporting investments.”**

We agree with the basic tenet of this phrase. The word “concerted stakeholder action” is key here. Livestock keepers from around the world are ready for concerted action and to participate in developing regulatory frameworks and policies or to start implementing the ones that already exist (such as the AU Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa). They need a voice and a role in any processes that determine the future of livestock keeping.

## **Our requests**

- 1. Representation and participation of smallholder livestock keepers and pastoralists, in the GAA process is absolutely essential to be able to call this a genuine multi-stakeholder platform. For this to be feasible, there must be appropriate communication measures that translate the results of the discussions into easy to understand language without jargon, and a consultative approach that genuinely enables informed participation rather than token consultation (e.g. issues of time, scale, language have to be considered).**

2. The process towards a Sustainable Livestock Sector cannot be reduced to technical issues but needs to be seen in its social, environmental and political context. Livestock keepers are necessary for sustainable models of livestock production. They need to be in a position to obtain fair remuneration and the linkage between the demand for livestock products and livelihoods needs to be researched and elucidated, so that appropriate policy frameworks can be created and existing ones implemented.
3. In exploring the routes towards sustainable intensification the agro-ecology approach must be taken into account: optimising farming systems as a whole rather than through maximising the specialised production of single products (meat, milk, eggs etc). This requires a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach towards agro-ecological production systems.
4. An overall strategy needs to recognise and explicitly accommodate differentiation between various livestock keeping systems, and include on-the-ground experiences of what works - and what does not - in each of them.
5. In these processes farmers' & pastoralists' innovations and priorities are essential and need to be effectively supported by appropriate policy mechanisms.

**In conclusion:** Including the voices and priorities of smallholder farmers and pastoralists is absolutely essential in the GAA effort – as the GAA was essentially designed as a multi-stakeholder process. Moreover, more research is required into how to translate the demand for livestock products into opportunities for social and equitable development for pastoralists and smallholder livestock keepers. This should be prioritized by donors.

## Signatories

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