

**Opening Statement to 14 May 2019 Joint Session of the Committee on
Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to Trócaire and PELUM
(Uganda's) work.**

9 May 2019

Chairperson and Committee Members, thank you for inviting Trócaire and PELUM (Uganda) to address you today. The invite follows on from the publication of Trócaire's policy report *Food Democracy: Feeding the World Sustainably* <https://www.trocaire.org/resources/policyandadvocacy/food-democracy-feeding-world-sustainably-0>

This report was published to coincide with last October's Conference *Transformation Pathways for Developing Country Agriculture* organised by the Irish Forum for International Agricultural Development (IFIAD). Trócaire is an IFIAD steering committee member and we were very pleased that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine opened the Conference.

I will introduce Trócaire's current strategic plan and the macro context that informs our approach to work on agriculture and food. PELUM (Uganda) will then speak to their work on agroecology and evidence of its social equity and resilience building properties. Despite the huge potential of agroecological approaches, the policy enabling environment to support agroecology is still weak, and my colleague will close with recommendations for the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine to consider.

Our aim is to encourage Ireland – through its engagement with the Rome-based food agencies (FAO, IFAD and the WFP) and through its official development assistance programme to increase and deepen its engagement and support for agroecology.

Trócaire's approach

Trócaire's vision is for a just and peaceful world where peoples' dignity is ensured and rights are respected; where basic needs are met and resources are shared equitably; where people have control over their own lives and those in power act for the common good. Trócaire's current strategic plan pursues this vision by prioritising three key areas of work, womens empowerment, humanitarian preparedness and response and resource rights. The first outcome under our resource rights goal addresses the sustainable use and management of natural resources. In 2018, programmes in 10 countries

(DRC, Guatemala, Kenya, Malawi, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zimbabwe) supported poor rural households to become nutrition secure and have better economic, social and environmental futures through maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base on which they depend.

In a macro environment where:

- the numbers of people living in hunger are again rising, a disproportionate number of whom are small scale family farmers
- small scale farmers continue to deliver up to three quarters of food consumed in a large part of the developing world but on a declining share of farmland
- there is rapid urbanisation but insufficient non-agricultural work and
- the resource base is being degraded undermining farmers resilience to deal with climate change and related extreme weather events

Trócaire's agricultural and food interventions are concerned with identifying what agriculture and food approaches are best placed to reconcile responses to the multiple and interconnected challenges of food security, nutritional adequacy, environmental protection and social equity. With rising hunger and malnutrition, land degradation, rapid urbanisation, the climate crisis and unprecedented rates of biodiversity loss, there is an urgent need to re-frame agricultural and food policies to ensure they are adequate to tackling poverty and hunger, to increasing small scale farmers' resilience to climate change, and to promoting biodiversity.

Based on Trócaire's own country programme experience and the growing compendium of research that examines these and related issues our interventions are increasingly based on agroecological approaches. In essence agroecology is about agro-ecosystems mimicking the biodiversity and functioning of natural ecosystems. Such agricultural systems can be productive, pest resistant, nutrient conserving and resilient to shocks and stresses. Practices include integrating trees with livestock and crops, producing food from forests, growing several crops together in one plot and using locally adapted and genetically diverse crops and livestock. These practices combine local indigenous knowledge with modern ecological science to generate good yields as well as other multifunctional benefits.

Across Trócaire programme countries agroecological practice adoption is growing with a wider diversity of food types grown by households being

documented. We are particularly pleased to be joined today by PELUM (Uganda). In Uganda 17 new communities in 2018 mapped their wild food resources and made plans for their protection. Thousands more households are accessing water for food production through rain water harvesting and solar pumping systems.

PELUM Uganda

PELUM Uganda has been working since 1995 to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the sustainability of rural communities through ecological land use management. Working collaboratively with like-minded organisations we share skills and knowledge about good practices and techniques, undertake research and demonstration projects and advocate for policies that better support small-scale farmers. PELUM Uganda is part of a 12-country-strong association of civil society organisations in eastern, central and southern Africa. Our (PELUM Uganda) current strategic plan (2017 - 2021) focuses on the following thematic areas:

- Sustainable farming systems (with specific focus on widely promoting climate resilient agroecological systems, farmer managed seed systems, traditional/indigenous and wild foods and local innovations in agriculture)
- Agricultural market development and
- Advocacy towards policy makers at national level and linkages to regional and continental processes for an enabling policy environment which supports smallholder farmers rights and the advancement of agroecology

PELUM Uganda is one of 5 Trócaire partners implementing a 5 year project on securing resource rights for smallholder farmers in Eastern and Northern Uganda. PELUM Uganda is providing technical capacity support on agroecology to the 4 local implementing partners working with 48,000 smallholder farmers. The project applies participatory approaches such as Climate Resilient Agroecosystems Model and Gender Action Learning Systems methodology to facilitate gender responsive, inclusive and sustainable management of natural and agricultural ecosystems in the context of climate change. PELUM Uganda is the new Country Lead Organisation for the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative¹ and co-host of the Eastern Africa Knowledge Hub on organic farming.

¹ <https://eoai-africa.org/>

Agriculture is critical to Uganda's economy and fast growing population. The majority of the population live in rural areas and are directly dependent on agricultural livelihoods. Agriculture employs approximately 69% of the labour force, 77% of whom are women, mostly residing in the rural areas. However, the sector performance in terms of production and productivity is being negatively impacted by specific challenges. Key amongst these is soil and land degradation. According to the International Fertiliser Development Centre (2010) Uganda is one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with the highest rates of soil degradation leading to a loss of 12% in GDP.

Ambitions to transform the agriculture sector from a largely 'subsistence' to more commercial oriented agriculture largely fail to recognise the shortcomings of this approach in terms of delivering inclusive socio economic development especially for poor smallholder farmers or strengthening their resilience to the growing challenges related to climate change. Other negative linkages relate to the practice of commercial agriculture on large aggregated land holdings. In a context where diverse tenurial systems exist the potential for unlawful land evictions of vulnerable smallholder farmers² and encroachment onto communally held lands and natural ecosystems (forests and swamps³) that offer key ecosystem services for now and future generations represent significant threats in terms of poverty and conflict.

There exists an ever growing evidence base, both globally and nationally that agroecological production systems deliver a more inclusive and sustainable path to rural agricultural transformation. A long term (2005 to 2015) comparative assessment⁴ conducted by Misereor in Uganda revealed that locally adapted means to sustainable farm management (agroecology) offer more viable alternatives for smallholder farmers than conventional/ industrial farming (contract out-grower schemes or conventional farming). Farmers that were practicing agroecological farming exhibited more resilience to market fluctuations, pest and disease outbreaks and harsh climatic conditions compared to their conventional counterparts. As a result, smallholder agroecological farmers were more food/nutrition secure (dietary diversity) and had higher incomes (less expenditure on food, labour, inputs and treatment for basic ailments).

² <https://witnessradio.org/at-last-kaweeri-coffee-land-eviction-case-is-set-for-hearing/>

³ <https://ugandaradionetwork.com/story/sugarcane-growing-takes-toll-on-busoga-wetlands>

⁴ <https://www.cidse.org/publications/just-food/food-and-climate/sustainable-agriculture-key-to-inclusive-rural-transformation.html>

Conclusion and recommendations

In the context of the multidimensional social, economic and environmental challenges faced by small scale farmers in Uganda and across Trócaire programme countries and the potential of agroecological approaches to significantly respond to these challenges, realising this potential requires supportive public policies and investments. Trócaire's report '*Food Democracy: Feeding the World Sustainably*' outlines factors that currently impede the widespread adoption of agroecological approaches while also noting initiatives that could enable the scaling up of agroecological systems.

Support for agroecology is highly compatible with progressing the transformative and sustainable ambition of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goal 2.4 specifically seeks to "*ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other natural disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality*".

There is growing importance attached in policy discourses from the FAO to Ireland's new international development policy '*A Better World*' to the role agroecology can play in effectively responding to diverse social, economic and environmental challenges, including delivering on the right to adequate food for all, promoting biodiversity, resilience to climate and fiscal shocks and greater social equity.

Just as Ireland took a lead role in ensuring agreement of the Sustainable Development Goals, Trócaire believes Ireland is well placed to take similar leadership on sustainable agricultural systems, in particular agroecologically based agricultural and food systems, and welcomes this opportunity to invite the Committee to consider the following recommendations:

1. to engage the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with responsibility for the Diaspora and International Development on the relevance of agroecology in tackling the multiple challenges outlined in SDG 2.4 and its wider potentiality to contribute to Agenda 2030
2. enquire from the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade how Ireland is advancing the EU Consensus on Development commitment to

supporting agroecological practices and actions to reduce post-harvest losses and food waste, as well as to protect soils, conserve water resources, halt, prevent and reverse deforestation, and maintain biodiversity and healthy ecosystems

3. enquire from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, which leads Ireland's relationship with the UN Rome based food agencies, how Ireland is actively supporting the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) led Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative
4. enquire from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine how Ireland is contributing to an effective policy convergence process and timely conclusion to the Committee on World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts report on " Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition"
5. promote the integration of agroecology into research and development strategies with particular reference to the rollout of the food intervention priority in Ireland's new international development policy *A Better World*
6. encourage budget support for agroecological innovations, research and practices in Uganda and other priority partner countries

We thank the Committee for their attention and welcome your questions.