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Rome, 14 October 2019/ACP/EU/FAO: European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, and Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Qu Dongyu, today signed a new agreement which will see the EU provide an additional €9 million to support the UN agency's work in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

In particular, the funding will boost the efforts of countries in the targeted regions to bring about sustainable changes in agricultural policies and practices to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and natural resources.

FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu stated: "Our support for more biodiversity and better quality food is decisive for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. Agriculture and biodiversity are strongly intertwined. The agricultural sector depends heavily on biodiversity, yet it is also a contributor to biodiversity loss. This new programme will help overcome the socio-economic and political barriers that prevent countries and farmers from adopting ecosystem-based agricultural practices and approaches to biodiversity and chemical management."

Commissioner Mimica said: "Nature is under threat - the world needs more sustainable agricultural practices that boost food security, poverty reduction and economic growth, while preserving the planet's precious natural resources. I am very glad to be announcing this additional funding just two days before World Food Day. It is a further example of the EU's firm commitment to work with its ACP partner countries on these very aims."

Patrick I. Gomes, Secretary General of the ACP Group of States, said: "I welcome this new project, which is of great importance for ACP countries. Conserving biodiversity and reducing the pressure on natural resources and ecosystems, while also tackling climate change, has never been more important for our diets, our health, our planet and our survival."

Today's contract is part of a broader EU support programme promoting environmental sustainability in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries via stronger environmental governance and the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements like the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The programme will also address some of the most unsustainable practices in agriculture, such as the use of highly hazardous pesticides, and scale up ecosystem-based practices and approaches that favour natural pest control and protect pollinators and other beneficial organisms. Examples include agro-ecosystem-based approaches, organic agriculture, land restoration and landscape management, agroforestry, integrated pest management, pesticide risk reduction and the conservation of local crop diversity.

Partnerships with the private sector and civil society will act as drivers towards more sustainable agricultural systems. In addition, regional and national institutions will be able to do more to design and implement agricultural policies that enhance biodiversity, while at the same time maintaining production and profitability.

Background

The gradual loss of vegetative cover due to poor land management practices has led to a dramatic degradation in land and water resources - and, in the most extreme cases, to desertification. Intensive farming patterns put additional pressure on natural resources, with global trends such as climate change, urbanisation and population growth adding to the problem. Each year 12 million hectares of land lose their productive capacity due to drought and desertification.

This capacity-building programme for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States is the product of a partnership between the European Commission, the ACP countries, the UN Environment Programme and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

It builds on the achievements of previous cooperation between the EU and ACP countries. It has reached over 3 200 beneficiaries from 35 ACP countries, including government officers, civil society, the private sector and rural communities.

The programme's first two phases have mainstreamed environmental management issues within institutions and national development plans in a large number of ACP countries. For instance, the programme has supported the disposal of tons of obsolete pesticides and strengthened pesticide risk assessment procedures in several ACP countries. It has positively influenced global dialogues on the need for good governance and policy coherence to protect biodiversity.

As a result, the agriculture sector has been able to implement more effectively the relevant conventions on biodiversity and chemical and waste management. At the same time, a strong case has emerged around the need for a more joined-up approach to addressing agriculture's environmental impact. This programme will therefore deliver important outcomes on biodiversity preservation, contributing significantly to global efforts ahead of the upcoming Conference of Parties of the CBD (COP 15) in 2020, and establish a robust foundation for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

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