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Title: Agroecology as a Solution to Climate Change and Economic Challenges

The National Agroecology Conference for Malawi, which was held from August 12th to 16th August 2024 at ecoLODgy in Bvumbwe, Thyolo, concluded successfully, with an important commitment in advancing sustainable agricultural practices in Malawi and improving food systems. Under the theme "Agroecology: Solution to Climate Change and Economic Challenges," the conference brought together over 100 participants, including representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, smallholder farmers, academia, as well as media and government officials from across Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Key Highlights of the Conference:

- 1. Agroecology for Climate Resilience:** The conference emphasized Agroecology as a solution for building resilience towards effects of climate change. Participants explored how Agroecological practices, such as crop diversification, organic fertilizers, and renewable energy sources enhance food security, nutritional balance as well as pest and disease control. Presentations highlighted the growing importance of integrating Agroecological principles and elements into Malawi's policies in the agricultural sector to combat the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation as well as under- and malnutrition.
- 2. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** One of the key objectives of the conference was fostering collaboration among stakeholders to promote Agroecological practices. Through presentations, field visits, and breakout sessions, participants shared experiences from various Agroecological interventions, including schools and community-based projects. The sharing and exchange of knowledge was pivotal in coming up with the action plan to address existing challenges and drive the Agroecology movement forward.
- 3. Policy Advocacy:** Presentations and discussions focused on policy gaps, including the need for Agroecology to be integrated into Malawi's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). It was agreed that national policies must be realigned to reflect Agroecological principles. Efforts should be made to ensure that smallholder farmers benefit from supportive policies and frameworks. There should be deliberate collaborative efforts to ensure our national policies support a sustainable

agricultural production and food system in order to achieve food sovereignty in the region.

4. **Empowerment of Farmers and Communities:** The field visits demonstrated the practical implementation of Agroecology at local levels. Participants experienced how communities are adopting permaculture, biogas production, and syntropic agroforestry to enhance sustainable farming practices. The importance of empowering farmers through access to knowledge, technology, agricultural inputs and support was a recurring theme throughout the conference.

Action Plan and Way Forward:

- **Strengthen Policy Implementation:** There is an urgent need to close the policy-implementation gap and ensure Agroecological principles are embedded in national agricultural policies. A strong call towards initiating the process of developing the National Agroecology Strategy for Malawi, to guide design, formulation and implementation of Malawian National policies.
- **Promote Agroecological Education:** Extension services should be strengthened, and knowledge-sharing platforms should be expanded to ensure that farmers and communities have access to information, tools and demonstration sites showcasing Agroecological practices. There is need for continuous sensitizations and awareness raising on production practices that protect the environment, restore ecosystems and smallholder farmers' food sovereignty.
- **Increase Collaboration:** Stakeholders are encouraged to continue building partnerships across sectors, including government, CSOs, and private institutions, to establish Agroecology at a national level. Strengthen the movement through inclusion and participation of the grassroots and local organizations including the youth and women, in order to amplify the local voices and their representation at national level aiming at informing decision making and influencing processes.
- **Commercialization of Agroecological products:** Agroecological products should be marketed more effectively to create diversified and profitable income streams for smallholder farmers, with a focus on value addition and market access. A call to ensure that there is support for structured markets, including territorial markets and value chains for Agroecological products, and a legal framework that protects production systems.

Conclusion: Moving forward, it is important that all stakeholders remain committed to the resolutions and action plans developed during the conference, to ensure there is support and widespread adoption of Agroecology in Malawi, ultimately leading to sustainable food systems and climate resilient communities.

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