Concept for a public hearing
to be held by the
Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development
of the German Bundestag
on Wednesday, 10 April 2024, from 09.30 to 12.00 hrs
on the topic of "Agroecology and seed banks"

I. Topic and objective:

The fight against hunger remains one of the greatest challenges. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global community set itself the goal of ending hunger by 2030, achieving food security and better nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG 2).

Successes have been attained in the fight against worldwide hunger over the past decades. The Millenium Development Goal (MDG) defined by the United Nations of halving world hunger by 2015 was only very narrowly missed. The proportion of undernourished individuals in the Global South dropped from 23.3 percent (reference years 1990-1992) to 12.9 percent (2014-2016). Increases in productivity in agriculture and along the whole food value chain were amongst the factors which contributed to this.

Since this point, however, the number of people suffering hunger and food insecurity has risen significantly once again. In 2015, 589 million people were affected; whilst, by 2022, the number had risen to 735 million. Thus, the number of people affected by hunger was lower than in 2021, but nevertheless 122 million higher than prior to the Covid pandemic.

In 2022, according to the most recent State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, just under 30 percent of the global population, equivalent to 2.4 billion people, did not have constant access to nutritious, safe and sufficient food – with Africa the most affected region.

Women and girls currently make up 60 percent of the undernourished and, in the Global South, the majority of those active in agriculture are female smallholder farmers. At present, we must assume that almost 600 million people will still be suffering from hunger in 2030. Agriculture is particularly affected by the impacts of the climate crisis. At the same time, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the global food system is responsible for up to 37 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions. In view of this difficult starting point, a comprehensive review of approaches to improving food security is needed.

The hearing is to concentrate on the two sub-topics of agroecology and international seed banks. The goal of the hearing is to examine on the one hand the contribution which agroecology can make to food security and, on the other, assess the importance of international seed banks for food security. On both these sub-topics, the hearing is intended to produce concrete recommendations for political measures to be taken by governments and parliaments.

II. Written statements

The experts are requested to send the Committee secretariat a written statement on the topic area to which they have been invited, including answers to the questions, by 2 April 2024. Naturally, experts are also free to comment on the other topic area. Submissions setting out general positions on the topic are also possible as an addition to this statement. The submissions provided will be distributed by the secretariat to Committee members in advance of the event as a basis for the deliberations during the hearing, and also published.

Should others who have carried out in-depth academic work on the subject also proactively submit documents to the secretariat before the deadline, these documents will likewise be distributed to the Committee members, but not published by the secretariat.

III. Number of experts per parliamentary group:

The SPD and CDU/CSU parliamentary groups can each nominate 2 experts, whilst Alliance 90/The Greens, the FDP and the AfD can nominate 1 expert each. The groupings have no right to nominate experts. This makes a total of 7 experts.

The parliamentary groups nominating the experts are asked to provide CVs of the experts before the invitations are issued by the AwZ secretariat. The experts must have a current professional link to the topic or have demonstrable expertise on it.

IV. Timeframe of the hearing

Four experts are to be nominated for topic area A and 3 for topic area B.

Around 80 minutes will be scheduled for topic area A and around 60 minutes for topic area B. Every expert will begin by giving an introductory statement lasting 4 minutes, which will be followed by two rounds of questions and answers per topic area.

Topic area A

- Introductory statements (4 x 4 minutes): 16 minutes.
- Questions (6 x 2 minutes, plus 6 x 1.5 minutes): 21 minutes.
- Answers (4 x 6 minutes, plus 4 x 5 minutes): 44 minutes.

Topic area B

- Introductory statements (3 x 4 minutes) 12 minutes.
- Questions (6 x 2 minutes, plus 6 x 1.5 minutes): 21 minutes
- Answers (3 x 6 minutes, plus 3 x 4 minutes): 30 minutes.

Organisational points

- The meeting will be shown on the German Bundestag's Parliamentary Television Channel and website.
- Guests will be granted access to the sitting.

V. List of questions

Topic area A
The agroecology approach for global food security: potentials, shortages, necessary measures

Questions:

A1.
What opportunities for increased yields, or risks of reduced yields, do you see in the short or long term through the use of agroecological cultivation methods?

A2.
What opportunities and risks do you see regarding land take caused by increased use of agroecological approaches?

A3.
What opportunities and risks do you see regarding biodiversity as a result of increased use of agroecological approaches?

A4.
What opportunities and risks do you see regarding the production of greenhouse emissions, as well as resilience to climate impacts, as a result of increased use of agroecological approaches?

A5.
What opportunities and risks do you see regarding the health of farmers and consumers as a result of increased use of agroecological approaches?

A6.
What opportunities and risks do you see regarding the impacts on employment, particularly of women, as a result of the increased use of agroecological approaches?

A7.
What development-cooperation measures do you believe would be particularly effective in supporting agroecological approaches in the partner countries of German development cooperation?

A8.
To what extent can optimisation of the agricultural methods already in use contribute to sustainably ensuring sufficient food for the population of the world?

A9.
In what way do the agroecology approach and approaches based on conventional, industrial-style agricultural production complement each other? Do they necessarily have to be seen as contradictory? Where can synergies occur?

A10.
What need for research do you see to strengthen agroecological approaches?

A11.
In the use of new plant breeding methods, do you view the opportunities or the risks as greater with regard to follow-on use of seeds for cultivation?

Topic area B
Seed banks and their importance in ensuring future global food security

Questions:
B1.
How important do you believe seed banks will be in terms of the capacity to sustainably feed humanity in the future? Do the financial and material resources allocated to seed banks correspond to this importance? What efficiency reserves exist in cooperation between seed banks and how can these be exploited?

B2.
What importance do seed banks have, alongside their crisis-reserve function? Are the seed banks also designed to be able to respond to acute shortages in the availability of seeds?

B3.
Is access to seed banks by public or private institutions and firms involved in food security, as well as by smallholder farmers, effectively regulated?

B4.
Are the seed banks sufficiently protected against exclusively commercial interests – which may be merely short term?

B5
What can or should the international community do to use seed banks more effectively in the interests of food security?

B6.
Are seed banks adequately protected physically against the impacts of climate change?

B7.
How do you view the importance of seed banks for the preservation of old varieties or the breeding of new varieties – which will hopefully not only bring higher yields, but also be more resilient to stress factors such as heat, drought or soil salination? What forms of research cooperation with commercial and non-commercial seed producers and research institutions exist and where do you see potential for optimisation?

B8.
What importance do local seed banks have and what approaches exist for cooperation with smallholder farmers? What role does seed play as a public good in the context of local food security?

B9.
What initiatives, projects or partnerships exist to improve cooperation with the Global South in the areas of seed preservation, research and technology transfer?