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CBTF

*UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force
on Trade, Environment and Development*

Best Practices for Organic Policy

**What developing country Governments can do
to promote the organic agriculture sector**

Prepared under the CBTF Project
“Promoting Production and Trading Opportunities
for Organic Agricultural Products in East Africa”



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Foreword

Organic agriculture is a production system based on an agro-ecosystem management approach that utilizes both traditional and scientific knowledge.

Organic agriculture offers developing countries a wide range of economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits. Global markets for certified organic products have been growing rapidly over the past two decades. In 2006, sales were estimated to have reached some 30 billion euros, a 20% increase over 2005, and are expected to increase to 52 billion euros by 2012. While sales are concentrated in North America and Europe, production is global, with developing countries producing and exporting ever-increasing shares. Due to expanding markets and price premiums, recent studies in Africa, Asia and Latin America indicate that organic farmers generally earn higher incomes than their conventional counterparts.

Modern organic techniques have the potential to maintain and even increase yields over the long term while improving soil fertility, biodiversity and other ecosystem services that underpin agriculture. Crop rotations in organic farming provide more habitats for biodiversity due to the resulting diversity of housing, breeding and nutritional supply. As synthetic agro-chemicals are prohibited in organic agriculture, its adoption can help prevent the recurrence of the estimated 3 million cases of acute severe pesticide poisoning and 300,000 deaths that result from agrochemical use in conventional agriculture every year. Organic systems have 57% lower nitrate leaching rates compared with other farming systems, and zero risk of surface water contamination. In terms of benefits for climate change, various studies have shown that organic farming uses 20-to-56% less energy per produced unit of crop dry matter than conventional agriculture, and that organic fields sequester three-to-eight more tons of carbon per hectare. By way of example, it is estimated that converting the United States' 160 million corn and soybean acres to organic production would sequester enough carbon to meet 73% of that country's Kyoto targets for CO₂ reduction.

Organic production is particularly well suited for smallholder farmers, who comprise the majority of the world's poor. It makes resource-poor farmers less dependent on external resources and helps them enjoy higher and more stable yields and incomes, which enhances food security. Moreover, organic agriculture in developing countries builds on and keeps alive farmers' rich heritage of traditional knowledge and traditional agricultural varieties. Organic farming has also been observed to strengthen communities and give youth an incentive to keep farming, thus reducing rural-urban migration.

This evidence clearly shows that organic agriculture is a promising trade and sustainable development opportunity and a powerful tool for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty reduction and the environment.

It was in recognition of this potential of organic agriculture that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) selected it as a priority issue to be addressed in the framework of the UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development (CBTF). Since 2004, CBTF efforts have focused on promoting production and trading opportunities for organic products in East Africa, including supporting, in cooperation with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM), the development and adoption in 2007 of the East African organic products standard (EAOPS). The EAOPS is the second regional organic standard after that of the European Union and the first ever to be developed through a region-wide public-private-NGO partnership process.

A key question faced by the CBTF is what developing-country policymakers can do to best reap the multifaceted benefits of organic agriculture. This study attempts to answer this question. It distills the lessons learnt from in-depth analysis of seven country case studies, among other sources, and makes a

number of clear and actionable recommendations. Among the key challenges are to demonstrate compliance with the organic standards (both public and private) of the importing markets in a cost-effective way; meet the quality and volume requirements of buyers; develop the domestic organic market; and build farmers' capacities in organic production techniques and documentation requirements for demonstrating compliance.

This study recommends that developing-country Governments should generally focus on playing a facilitating rather than a controlling role. They should engage in dialogue with their organic sectors to identify their most pressing needs and consider conducting an integrated assessment of the sector. Integrating organic agriculture into overall agricultural policies and poverty reduction strategies, and building organic agriculture supply capacities through education, research, extension services, local and regional market development and export facilitation, are key to realizing the benefits that organic agriculture offers.

The CBTF is fully committed to helping developing countries take full advantage of this exciting trade and sustainable development opportunity. We hope that the study will be a valuable tool to that end.



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