

Highlights from the side event

Bioeconomy for a biodiversity-and-science-based sustainable development of food systems in Latin America and the Caribbean

6 July 2021

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a region rich in biodiversity and biological resources, which are the foundation for alternative non-fossil, knowledge-based bioeconomy that addresses food systems concerns such as enhancing resilience, adapting to climate change, providing ecosystems services as well as alternatives for rural livelihoods and more nutritious diets.

The side event, organized by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-ECLAC), UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Science in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Colombian UNESCO/UNITWIN Chair on Biotechnology and SDGs, and the Latin American and Caribbean Center for SDGs at Andes University in Colombia, brought together 255 participants from 23 countries in the Americas, Europe, and Africa, achieving gender balance (52% women) and significant participation of young people (50% under 50), from the academic and scientific sector (28%) and small and medium agriculture (20%).

There was an agreement concerning the importance —especially in a region with two centers of origin of agriculture— of promoting the sustainable use of agrobiodiversity as a central element in strategies to increase the resilience of agriculture in the face of climate change, to provide alternatives for rural livelihoods, and to diversify diets with nutritious foods. Also highlighted was the need to enhance ecosystems, reward good agri-environmental practices, promote crops rotation and good soil and water management practices, and work in the recovery of degraded soils (e.g. to increase carbon sink services).

Key points made focusing on solutions include

- Universities are institutions with exceptional capacity to convene various actors and sectors to conversations and projects that, from a more structured platform, could have a greater impact on the food policies of each region or country.
- Scientists, acting as a social movement can contribute to strengthening grassroots organizations in favor of fair and equitable access to culturally-and-bio-diverse food systems.
- The goal for 2030 is the resilience of agri-food systems. The impact of climate change on food production is growing. The way is a regenerative and profitable agriculture on a small and large scale.
- It is essential to promote participatory research for the empowerment of farmers in decision-making processes and thus build resilience and potentiate the use of agrobiodiversity with impacts on food security, adaptation, and mitigation.
- The biological resources of Latin America represent an opportunity for the sustainable development of food systems, and the circular bioeconomy offers concrete alternatives to transform these opportunities into concrete realities.
- A circular-bioeconomy-led transformation of food systems provides opportunities for agricultural diversification, increased local value-added, the introduction of biological inputs, the sustainable production of foods with high nutritional value, and contributes to climate action.

The panel concluded on the need for more **dialogue among traditional and modern scientific knowledge** (hybrid knowledge), **more assertive communication** (e.g. with consumers, among different bioeconomies and bioeconomy stakeholders), **building consensus** (e.g. between the scientific community and the private sector), and **promoting convergences** (e.g. public-private, incentives, investments, public policies).