

**Hemispheric Ministerial Process 2006-2007**

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**Promoting a National Policy for  
Agriculture and Rural Life:  
Introductory notes for a gradual inclusive progress**

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Document prepared by:

Lizardo de las Casas  
Javier Gatica  
Fabio Jiménez

Secretariat of the Ministerial Process and Ministerial Meetings  
“Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas”

## Contents

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- **The term “National Policy”**
- **Fundamental Bases for a National Policy**
- **Elements of a National Policy formation process**
- **A promotion strategy: making gradual inclusive progress**
- **References cited**

## The term “National Policy”

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*“A National Policy goes beyond the mandate of a particular government and seeks to be the expression of a vision shared by citizens regarding essential aspects that have to do with their way of life and with their forms of organization as a Nation”*

***“A National Policy for Chilean Agriculture for the Period 2000-2010”***

***Ricardo Lagos Escobar, President of the Republic of Chile 2002-2006***

*“The principle of a National Policy rests on three pillars. First, it transcends a government and therefore we defined it up to 2021. Second, it includes agricultural and forestry policies, those of a global nature, particularly in the economic field, and the multisectoral policies that are indispensable to ensure the performance of agriculture and rural life. And third, its design and implementation involve the public institutions and private and social organizations”*

***“National Policy for the Agri-food Sector and the Rural Milieu of Honduras 2004-2021”***

***Ricardo Maduro, President of the Republic of Honduras 2002-2006***

Until now, “public” or “government policies” have been the instruments most widely used to promote the development of agriculture and the rural milieu. Traditionally, a “public policy” or “government policy” has been thought of as a policy defined by one or more government institutions that adopt a technocratic approach <sup>1</sup> and regard policies as instruments that

basically include certain technical considerations, which are exogenous to the segment of society that they are intended to transform. This tends to make such policies unstable; their application, in the best of cases, is limited to the duration of a government, and more often

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<sup>1</sup> Under the technocratic approach, policymaking is restricted to a group of technicians, ministerial advisers or experts on the issues covered by those policies, without taking into consideration the actors directly involved, or the policymaking process itself. This approach relies on conceptual frameworks that do not reflect the complexity of phenomena involving a multiplicity of stakeholders and a diversity of interests, as in the case of agriculture and rural life. The document “The Politics of Public Policies” (2005) is based on the premise that “the processes of discussion, negotiation,

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approval and execution of policies may be at least as important as the specific content of the policies themselves.” It also argues that “a strictly technocratic approach to policymaking avoids the steps of discussion, negotiation, approval and execution, which form part of the chaotic world of politics.” The document supports the notion that political and policymaking processes are inseparable. If, in trying to propose policy changes, we ignore the link that exists between these, this may result in failed reforms and frustrated expectations.”

to the term of the particular minister and technical team responsible for promoting it.

As a result, the “public” or “government” policies implemented to date have not met the expectations of the stakeholders, as far as development is concerned. The lack of effectiveness of such policies has now become a matter of public debate, since they affect economic, environmental and socio-cultural interests and, in the long run, even the governance of a country.<sup>2</sup>

To address the stakeholders’ dissatisfaction and make the strategies and policies for agriculture and rural life more effective, the Ministers of Agriculture, in their First Ministerial Meeting “Agriculture and Rural Life in the

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<sup>2</sup> The document “National Consultation on the Millennium Development Goals–Final Report” (2006) states: “Consensus-building processes are proposed as alternatives to the traditional way of making decisions on public policy matters [...] In the traditional approach of governance, the competent authority designs and implements government policies unilaterally, after consulting (in the best of cases) some of the actors involved.” It continues by saying “Throughout the world, globalization and the democratization processes have multiplied the number of actors who have power to influence decision-making. This dispersion of power has eroded the effectiveness of traditional forms of governance. For this reason, public policies derived from this approach to decision-making tend to be perceived as arbitrary and/or inefficient, and therefore tend to generate opposition and acts of resistance by the actors affected. This often translates into paralysis and unstable public policies. Finally, it limits the effectiveness of democracy, and produces economic stagnation.”

Americas”, as part of the Summits process (Bavaro 2001) stated,

**“We consider it essential:[...] To create and strengthen institutional opportunities for dialogue among all levels of government, business and agricultural organizations and civil society, with a view to reaching agreement on strategies and commitments related to the management of agriculture and rural development, within a framework of transparency and accountability.”**

Acting on this concern, and in an effort to make these policies more effective, the Ministers of Agriculture made “Promoting National policies for agriculture and rural life” the slogan of their Third Ministerial Meeting (Guayaquil 2005). This ministerial commitment also called for a new, comprehensive and more inclusive term: a “National Policy” (Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil 2005 – AGRO 2003-2015 Plan).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the “AGRO Plan for Agriculture and Rural Life: Bavaro 2001 – Panama 2003 – Guayaquil 2005” see: (i) on page 35 the slogan of the Ministerial Hemispheric Agenda 2006-2007; (ii) on page 38, specific strategic actions defined in paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 of the Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil HMA4-2005; and, (iii) on page 80, two introductions to those definitions outlined in paragraphs 6 and 8 (cited above) of the Ministerial Agreement of Bavaro HMA1-2001.

Based on the political framework developed by the Heads of State and Government and their Ministers of Agriculture since 2001, this new concept of a “*National Policy*” has a distinct characteristic: it calls for the active involvement of stakeholders <sup>4</sup> whose interests are affected by those policies, complemented with inter-institutional and multisectoral coordination in a consensus-based “policy formation” process <sup>5</sup> (a

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<sup>4</sup> The document “Improving the Effectiveness of Strategies and Policies: an instrument for analysts, decision-makers and stakeholders in the field of agriculture and rural life” (2007) contains the conceptual framework of the AGRO Plan, the AGRO-Matrix, which differentiates among three types of stakeholders: members of the rural population who carry out agricultural and non-agricultural activities and make up the rural system; groups that participate in the different links of the agricultural value chains of the agri-food system (including food and non-food products) “from farm to table”; and, policy framers (decision-makers, analysts and senior authorities of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, as well as leaders of other interest groups of the rural and agri-food systems) who form the policy system.

<sup>5</sup> “Policy formation” is a concept proposed in “*Towards the Formation of an Inter-American Strategy for Agriculture*” (2000) which argues that formulation and implementation must no longer be, as was the case under the traditional technocratic approach, two processes separated in time and carried out by different groups. Instead, it suggests overcoming this discontinuity by adopting the alternative approach of social interaction, in which the ‘formulation or design of a strategy’ by a group of experts is replaced by ‘strategy formation’, as a collective process to build consensus and commitment, based on the active participation of the different stakeholders in a continuous process of reflection-

continuous and inclusive process of dialogue-agreement-commitment-implementation-monitoring-evaluation and updating of the policies).

More recently, in the Declaration of Mar del Plata, the Heads of State and of Government reaffirmed their “commitment to building a more solid and inclusive institutional framework...”, and consolidated their decision to support the agreements reached by the Ministers of Agriculture in the Plan of Action of the Fourth Summit of the Americas, making it a National Commitment to “support the implementation of the Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil in 2005, Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas (AGRO 2003-2015 Plan)”.

Those political decisions imply transcending the “technocratic approach” previously used to establish “public” or “government” policies, adopting an approach that involves greater “social interaction” based on a process of dialogue and consensus with the stakeholders of the relevant segment of society. This would help to give stability and continuity to the “rules of the game” of a society and to the decisions pursued through the policies; furthermore, the abovementioned political commitments contain a central message that may be summarized as the need to create a new institutional framework for the agriculture and rural life

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dialogue-action-learning that can only be undertaken by the stakeholders themselves, and cannot be delegated.

of the Americas <sup>6</sup> and a new form of social interaction as an essential part of it.

This new institutional framework should operate in two directions, based on the premise that overcoming rural poverty requires: (i) new “game rules” that recognize and acknowledge the close links existing between

agriculture and rural life; and, (ii) that the “players”, in turn, need institutional mechanisms for inter-institutional and multisectoral coordination that go beyond the limited sectoral approach of the organizations known as Ministries of agriculture, livestock and similar denominations.

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<sup>6</sup> The document “*Towards the Formation ...*” cited in note 5, argues that repositioning agriculture on the inter-American agenda for development and building its new institutional framework are necessary conditions for achieving the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu. It addresses the question of the new institutional framework recalling the words of Douglas C. North in his address in Stockholm, Sweden on December 9, 1993, when he received the Nobel Prize for Economics: “It is the interaction between institutions and organizations that shapes institutional evolution ... If institutions are the rules of the game, organizations and their entrepreneurs are the players”. On that basis, the document “Leadership, repositioning and new institutional framework for the agriculture of the Americas” (2000) outlines some elements for creating a new institutional framework based on a new concept of interaction between institutions, organizations and actors. These ideas have also been taken up at the Third Summit of the Americas (Quebec 2001) and the First Ministerial Meeting “Agriculture and Rural life in the Americas” (Bavaro 2001), and have gradually been enriched, providing the basis for the proposal to promote a National Policy for Agriculture and Rural Life, in the Third Ministerial Meeting of 2005.

## Fundamental Bases for a National Policy

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Based on the previous considerations, we may summarize that there are two basic references for a National Policy:

### **The political framework: dialogue, consensus and commitment of all stakeholders**

The political framework refers to the decisions made by the highest political authorities. An example at the hemispheric level is seen in the Declarations and Plans of Action of the last three Summits of the Americas (Quebec 2001, Monterrey 2004 and Mar del Plata 2005) and in the Hemispheric Ministerial Agreements of the three Ministerial Meetings (Bavaro 2001, Panama 2003 and Guayaquil 2005).

#### ✓ **The Heads of State and Government of the Americas instructed the Ministers of Agriculture:**

*“To promote dialogue involving government ministers, parliamentarians and civil society, in particular organizations linked to rural areas, as well as the scientific and academic communities, with the objective of promoting medium and long-term national strategies toward sustainable improvement in agriculture and rural life.”*

**Third Summit of the Americas, Quebec 2001**  
Paragraph 1, Section 10, Plan of Action

*“(…) to promote joint action by all the actors of the agricultural sector to work towards the improvement of agriculture and rural life that enables the implementation of the Plans of Action of the Summits of the Americas.”*

**Third Summit of the Americas, Quebec 2001**  
Paragraph 5 of Section 10, Plan of Action

#### ✓ **Based on these mandates the Ministers of Agriculture agreed:**

*“6. To create and strengthen institutional opportunities for dialogue among all levels of government, business and agricultural organizations and civil society, with a view to reaching agreement on strategies and commitments related to the management of agriculture and rural development, within a framework of transparency and accountability.”*

**Ministerial Agreement of Bavaro 2001**  
Paragraph 6 of the HMA1-2001

#### ✓ **Furthermore, the Ministers took another step forward with the Ministerial Hemispheric Agenda 2006-2007:**

*“Promoting National policies for Agriculture and Rural Life”*

**Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil 2005**  
Slogan of the Hemispheric Agenda 2006-2007

“10. To promote long-term national policies for the development of the agrifood sector and the rural milieu, taking into consideration existing international frameworks.”

**Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil 2005**  
Strategic Action 10 of the HMA4-2005

“11. Strengthen sectoral and multisectoral coordination to facilitate the implementation of government policies, for the improvement of agriculture and the quality of life of rural communities”.

**Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil 2005**  
Strategic Action 11 of the HMA4-2005

### **Conceptual framework for the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu: making the stakeholders visible <sup>7</sup>**

The conceptual framework refers to the concept of Agriculture and Rural Life that provides the context for a National Policy; in this regard, since the Ministerial Declaration of Bavaro in 2001, the Ministers of Agriculture have been developing a new concept for the sustainable development of agriculture and rural life, consolidated in the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan.

The conceptual framework of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan, expressed as the AGRO-Matrix, provides a new concept

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<sup>7</sup> See the document “Improving the effectiveness ...” cited in note 4.

of agriculture and rural life that facilitates a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of these, and contributes to the design of effective strategies and policies for the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu.

Two essential aspects must be distinguished within the AGRO-Matrix: (i) the two pillars of its structure; and (ii) the three components of the desired situation of agriculture and rural life.

The two pillars of its structure are: a *systemic concept* of agriculture and rural life, broken down into three categories or operational areas (rural territories, agricultural value chains and the national and international context) with the three corresponding systems (rural, agri-food and policy); and a *sustainable development approach* consisting of four dimensions or types of actions (production-trade, ecological-environmental, socio-cultural-human and political-institutional) carried out by the stakeholders in each of the three mentioned systems.

The three components of the desired situation needed to attain the Shared Vision 2015 are: the twelve purposes, the seven strategic objectives and the overarching objective which guides the strategies, policies and actions adopted.

Systemic Concept	Rural Territories	Agricultural Production-Trade Chains	National and International Context	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Sustainable development approach				
Production – Trade	I. Promoting competitive rural enterprises	II. Integrating chains and strengthening their competitiveness	III. Promoting an environment conducive to competitive agriculture	→ Competitiveness
Ecological – Environmental	IV. Being environmentally responsible in the rural areas	V. From farm to table: promoting integrated environmental management	VI. Participating in building an institutional environmental framework	→ Sustainability
Sociocultural - human	VII. Quality of life in rural communities: creating know-how and opportunity	VIII. Advancing learning and expertise in the chain	IX. Promoting policies to create capabilities and opportunities for the rural communities	→ Equity
Political - institutional	X. Strengthening public and private sector participation and coordinated action between them in the territories	XI. Strengthening dialogue and commitments among actors in the chain	XII. Promoting national policies and regional and hemispheric cooperation for agriculture and rural life	→ Governance
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Rural Prosperity + Food Security + International Positioning			OVERARCHING GOAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL MILIEU

In order to develop effective strategies and policies, the AGRO-Matrix also offers the possibility of differentiating among three types of stakeholders, corresponding to the three systems mentioned, whose different wishes, expectations and actions shape the development of agriculture and rural life. This underscores the need for their active involvement in policy formation process.

Two types of stakeholders are involved in the actions of generation, exchange, processing and consumption of economic, environmental, socio-cultural and institutional goods and services. One is comprised of a variety of

social manifestations of the rural population; the other consists of groups that are active in the links that make up agricultural value chains. These two types of actors have many interests at stake, which turn them into winners or losers as a result of the application of particular strategies and policies.

The third group of stakeholders is responsible for creating a favorable context for the effective implementation of actions by the other two groups mentioned. This third group includes policy framers in the national and

international spheres -analysts and authorities of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. However, in order to make the strategies and policies more effective, it is important to encourage a greater participation by the leaders of other interest groups that operate in the territories and within the chains. Based on the most recent experiences of some countries in the Americas, this increased stakeholder participation has been found to be necessary to give added stability to strategies and policies, in pursuit of the overarching goal of the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu.

3 CATEGORIES	Stakeholders in Rural Territories		Policy Makers in the National and International Context	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
4 DIMENSIONS	Stakeholders in the Agricultural Value Chains "from the farm to the table"			
Production – Trade	I. Promoting competitive rural enterprises	II. Integrating chains and strengthening their competitiveness	III. Promoting an environment conducive to competitive agriculture	→ Competitiveness
Ecological – Environmental	IV. Being environmentally responsible in the rural areas	V. From farm to table: promoting integrated environmental management	VI. Participating in building an institutional environmental framework	→ Sustainability
Sociocultural – human	VII. Quality of life in rural communities: creating know-how and opportunity	VIII. Advancing learning and expertise in the chain	IX. Promoting policies to create capabilities and opportunities for the rural communities	→ Equity
Political – institutional	X. Strengthening public and private sector participation and coordinated action between them in the territories	XI. Strengthening dialogue and commitments among actors in the chain	XII. Promoting national policies and regional and hemispheric cooperation for agriculture and rural life	→ Governance
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Rural Prosperity + Food Security + International Positioning			OVERARCHING GOAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL MILIEU

Refers to the sphere of activity in which the stakeholders generate, exchange, transform and consume economic, environmental, socio-cultural and institutional goods and services in the territories and chains.

Refers to the sphere of activity in which national and international policy makers establish the conditions ("rules of the game", treaties, laws, regulations, policies, plans, public spending, etc.) needed to make actions more effective.

communities, based on its two structural pillars (the systemic concept with its three operational areas or arenas for action and the sustainable development approach with its four dimensions or types of action, these two pillars together create the twelve cells of the AGRO-Matrix that serve to organize the strategies, policies, as well as the actions of the three groups of stakeholders and their results); and to synthesize the results of that analysis, in terms of the twelve purposes, the seven strategic objectives and the overarching objective: the sustainable development of agriculture and rural communities over time. This makes it possible to visualize the progress made towards the Shared

The AGRO-Matrix is, above all, a useful tool in two regards: to carry out an analysis of agriculture and rural

Vision to 2015, which guides the overall development process.

## Elements of a National Policy formation process

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Based on the previous points, we can say that the process of formation of a National Policy has two clearly differentiated elements: one distinctive characteristic and at least five necessary conditions.

### The distinctive characteristic

The distinctive characteristic of a “National Policy” is the **direct participation of the stakeholders in its definition as a national agreement**. This approach, based on the social interaction of the groups directly involved, provides a basis for a national agreement that gives stability and continuity to a national policy.

In this way, a “National Policy” ceases to be an instrument exogenous to the segment of society in question, something that is essential for the policies’ stability. The fact that such a policy is based on the consensus and commitments of the groups whose interests are affected, guarantees its continuity, without changes of government necessarily implying changes in the policy’s direction and/or content. Moreover, its review and updating will be the result of a systematic process of monitoring-evaluation-updating<sup>8</sup>, incorporated as part of the “policy formation” process”.

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<sup>8</sup> See the document “Information System for the Follow-up and Evaluation of Strategies and Policies for Agriculture and Rural Life: a gradual and modular proposal” (2007)

### Five Necessary Conditions for the formation process of a National Policy

In the process of designing a National Policy there are at least five necessary conditions to which attention should be paid:

- ✓ The establishment of **institutional mechanisms for dialogue** among main stakeholders (for example, the agricultural forums set up in Chile and Honduras<sup>9</sup>, comprising representatives of the three systems included in the AGRO-Matrix; the “Rural Dialogue” in Canada is another case in point.

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<sup>9</sup> The document “*Política de Estado para la Agricultura Chilena del año 2010: una experiencia a compartir* (A National Policy for Chilean Agriculture....”) explains that the second key to the Chilean experience lies in the composition of the Agricultural Forum, which meant reconciling the criteria of representativity with those of efficiency and efficacy. The Forum consisted of 15 members, 6 representing the executive and legislative branches and 9 representatives of the private, social and academic sectors and professional associations. For its part, the Honduran experience, described in the document “National Policy for the Agri-food sector and the Rural Milieu of Honduras 2004-2021: a shared partnership for the development of the countryside”, shows the importance given to stakeholders’ participation. The Honduran Agricultural Forum included 26 representatives of the three branches of Government (executive, legislative and judicial), various civil society organizations and observers of the international community.

- ✓ The development of a **long-term shared country vision** to give socio-political and economic-financial legitimacy to the policy and guarantee its stability over time, based on the country's situation, given that the stakeholders of agriculture and rural life are only a part of the national population and require the understanding of society as a whole.
- ✓ The **formalization of the national agreement** in one or several legislative instruments that will guarantee its continued application, even when governments change. An example of this is the "*Farm Bill*" of the United States of America.
- ✓ The presence of **organized stakeholders** in the rural territories (rural system) and throughout the agricultural value chains (agrifood system) to execute the different actions required to implement the policy.
- ✓ The development of **inclusive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** that make it possible to review and update the policy, based on the progress achieved vis à vis the purposes, strategic objectives and overarching objective as indicated in the AGRO-Matrix, and the shared vision, thereby ensuring its continued implementation (see the document "Information System for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Strategies and Policies for Agriculture and Rural Life: a modular and gradual proposal).

## A promotion strategy: making gradual inclusive progress

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This section is based on the few successful experiences available in the Americas, bearing in mind that this is a new and innovative approach in the field of policies for the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural milieu. However, the proposals that follow also takes into consideration other experiences showing that certain steps should not be ignored and that haste does not justify avoiding a full national policy formation process that respects the political cycles, the historical moments and the necessary maturation period, which is much longer than that of “government” policies.

Based on the above, we outline a proposal containing some guidelines aimed at facilitating the fulfillment of the Hemispheric Ministerial Agreement of Guayaquil 2005, regarding the definition of a strategy to promote national policies that respond to the specific characteristics of each country.

### **Resources for guidance**

The two basic references (political framework, defined by the Heads of State and Government and their Ministers of Agriculture; and, the conceptual framework as summarized in the AGRO-Matrix), offer an opportunity that countries did not have previously. In addition, the two elements of a National Policy formation process (the

distinctive characteristic and the necessary conditions) indicated in the previous section, provide resources to guide the definition of a strategy for promoting a National Policy for agriculture and rural life that responds to the historic moment of each country.

### **Awareness of the need for change: the starting point**

The task of promoting a National Policy begins by developing an awareness of the existing problems with regard to the effectiveness of “public” or “government” policies, from the perspective of the authorities and officials of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, the leaders of the rural territories and of the agricultural value chains. It is also useful for those groups to know that these problems have already been recognized by the top authorities of their countries in the highest political forum of the Americas.

In this regard, the suggestion is to begin by disseminating, among the different groups, the two fundamental bases mentioned previously: the hemispheric political framework and the conceptual framework for the sustainable development of agriculture and rural life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> To this end, the Secretariat of the Ministerial Process and its Ministerial Meeting has prepared and used the document “Improving effectiveness ...”, cited in footnote 4, in various

### **The political will of the highest national authority: the trigger of the process**

The efforts to develop an awareness of the need to change from “government policies” to “National Policies” should be accompanied by the consolidation of the aforementioned hemispheric political framework at the national level, i.e. the President or Head of State should assume the leadership in the process of dialogue, building consensus and commitment on the National Policy.

The political will displayed by the top authority – by the President, in the majority of countries - is essential to guarantee the participation of ministers and other government authorities with varied responsibilities, who are in some way linked to, or whose decisions affect, the performance of the country’s agriculture and rural life as well as the participation of the different leaders of the private, social and academic sectors. This initiative by the highest political authority is also necessary to send a clear message to the general population, regarding the importance and commitment of the country’s highest political authority to the formation process of the National Policy.<sup>11</sup>

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workshops with ministerial delegates, officials of the Ministries of Agriculture and other leaders of agriculture of different countries. A PowerPoint presentation used in those workshops is also available.

<sup>11</sup> The document “A National Policy for Chilean Agriculture ...” mentioned in footnote 9, explains that the first key to understanding the Chilean experience is the fact that the decision

Obtaining such a commitment from a country’s Head of State or Government may require efforts by the Minister of Agriculture, ideally accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Relations, given the latter’s involvement in the definition and follow-up of the mandates of the Summit of the Americas process.

### **Institutional mechanisms for dialogue, consensus and commitment: two levels for building consensus**

Once the country’s highest political authority has assumed the national leadership of the hemispheric political initiative, the next step is to consolidate that political will through a presidential national mandate or resolution, to provide legal backing to the creation of a first institutional mechanism that will represent the political level of dialogue and consensus between the public, private and social sectors.<sup>12</sup>

In defining the members who will form part of this first institutional mechanism for dialogue and consensus, it is essential to reconcile the criteria of representativity with

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to create a national policy came from the country’s highest political authority. The Honduran experience also shows that the President’s leadership was crucial in promoting dialogue and building consensus and commitment with the country’s National Policy.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 9 on the Agricultural Forums in Chile and Honduras.

those of effectiveness, to ensure that this political-institutional body achieves its objectives.

In that sense, the government ministers who participate in this political forum for dialogue and consensus should, at the very least, include those responsible for international and economic affairs and for agriculture itself; it is also necessary that they be accompanied by representatives of the legislative and judicial branches linked to the issues of agriculture and rural life. Meanwhile, the members who represent the private and social sectors should ensure the representativity of the different stakeholders involved.

It would also be very useful to include the participation of members of the most representative professional associations and of the academic and scientific sectors. This is contemplated by the Heads of State and Government in one of their mandates in Section 10 of the Plan of Action of the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City.<sup>13</sup>

That first level or space for political dialogue and consensus must be complemented with a technical-thematic level of dialogue and consensus. An example of this may be seen in the design of the National Policy of Honduras: the Honduran Agricultural Forum with its 26

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<sup>13</sup> See the “AGRO Plan...” cited in footnote 3, page 76, setting out the mandate of the Heads of State and Government.

members operated at the political level, while at the technical-thematic level 22 working groups were established (20 representing commodity groups, 1 representing small-scale farmers and one for gender equality). The number of members in each group ranged from 10 in the honey producers’ group, to the 50 members of the multisectoral panel on campesino issues.

### **The shared country vision: the framework for building a National Agreement**

The initial dialogue at the political level should take place in the context of a vision shared by society, specifying what the country wishes to achieve and providing a context that determines the viability of the proposals put forward by the stakeholders of agriculture and rural life. This shared country vision is developed using different methods and may have several forms of expression. In the case of Peru, for example, an ambitious consultation and discussion process was undertaken with experts and hundreds of citizens from around the country.<sup>14 15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The document *Peru: agenda y estrategia para el Siglo 21* (2000) (Peru: agenda and strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) explains that the Program Agenda: PERU, which lasted from 1993 to 2000, was implemented in three stages; during the second stage 1996-1999, “the central objective was to articulate a shared future vision, and a set of proposals [...] to advance towards prosperity and well being for all during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the outset, Agenda: PERU sought to act like a “conveyor belt” between the experts and ordinary citizens. [...] the methodology used is consistent with the democratic and participatory vision that forms the basis of the program. In that sense, the work was a two-way process. On the one hand, the results of the

In the case of Chile's State Policy, a framework defined by four components was used: (i) the country's Political Constitution; (ii) the definitions contained in the economic model enshrined in that same Constitution; (iii) the international agreements signed by the country; and, (iv) the country's fiscal situation.

The above is extremely important because the policies that countries wish to implement in relation to agriculture and rural life will require the resources that society as a whole contributes to the treasury via their taxes; similarly, society in general has a stake in these decisions because as consumers they must also contribute additional resources, beyond those provided by the groups directly involved in agriculture and rural life.

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consultations and discussions with experts were continuously compared with the opinions expressed by different groups of citizens in workshops, seminars, focus groups, opinion surveys and presentations by members of the Agenda: PERU team. On the other, these opinions were taken to the consultations with experts, thereby enriching the range of issues and points of view that were taken into consideration in their deliberations." The work involved hundreds of Peruvians in more than one hundred events organized in 25 cities.

<sup>15</sup> In the document "National Policy for the Agri-food Sector ..." mentioned in footnote 9, President Ricardo Maduro of Honduras (2002-2006) states: "My government has guided and facilitated the construction of a COUNTRY IMAGE AND VISION, to which all Hondurans should be committed. As part of that effort, we have facilitated the definition of the Vision of Agriculture and Rural Development, through a highly participatory process."

For this reason, one of the necessary conditions for a National Policy for Agriculture and Rural Life is the formalization of a National Agreement that is consistent with the long-term shared country vision, in order to give it socio-political and economic-financial legitimacy and to ensure its sustainability over time, based on the country's situation, since the actors of agriculture are only a part of the national population and require the understanding of society as a whole.

### **Gradual development of a National Policy**

Building a National Consensus to underpin the National Policy may be a *gradual inclusive* process. This is justified when faced with complex phenomena, a multiplicity of stakeholders and a diversity of interests, as in the case of agriculture and rural life. It is therefore important to recognize that in such cases, the situations of conflict and shared power are not the exception, suggesting the need to develop a climate of trust among the stakeholders. Initially, this means working on the points or areas of agreement among those groups, so that any differences may subsequently be addressed with special forms of negotiation.

In that sense, to ensure that the process is effective, it is important that negotiations among the groups be conducted in the context of a comprehensive shared country vision to *guide the social interaction process*.

### **Implementing and updating the National Policy**

A National Policy is a long-term initiative requiring a series of complementary decisions at different levels for its implementation. For example, in the case of the National Policy of Honduras four levels were defined. The *first level* is the National Policy itself, as the highest level of political decision-making. *Secondly*, the National Policy must be translated into strategic medium and short-term instruments, such as the Strategic Sectoral Agrifood Plan 2004-2006. *Thirdly*, its implementation requires an appropriate institutional framework that responds to the demands of that strategic plan; this is particularly important given the limited responsibilities of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock (animal health, technology and human capital) and also the need for continued and concerted action by the public, private and social sectors to cover aspects under the responsibility of other Secretariats (access to land, trade, financing, infrastructure and natural resources). And *fourth*, all the above should be translated into a new modality of budget programming that uses the Sector-wide Approach (SWAp), a methodology based on collaboration between the government and international cooperation agencies to rationalize the use of funds, according to the political and strategic priorities of the National Policy.

Finally, there is a level of monitoring and evaluation which provides additional information concerning the actions carried out, their impact on the performance of agriculture and the development of rural life, which may require the updating of the National Policy in order to ensure its

effectiveness with respect to the purposes, strategic objective and overarching objective as expressed in the AGRO-Matrix and in building the Shared Vision of agriculture and rural life.

### **The required technical support: the role of the Technical Secretariat**

The establishment of a Technical Secretariat is a necessary condition to facilitate the operation of the two levels of dialogue, consensus and commitment. The Secretariat's task is to contribute information that helps to standardize the knowledge of the different aspects to be considered. It also plays an important role in systematizing the dialogue and additional information contributed by the participating groups, and in validating the consistency of proposals based on the conceptual framework for the sustainable development of agriculture and rural life.

This task requires the Secretariat to disseminate and facilitate an understanding of the conceptual framework and its use as a tool for analysis and synthesis to support dialogue and consensus building processes.<sup>16</sup> It should also provide the methodological inputs required to build consensus.

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<sup>16</sup> In this regard see the document "Improving effectiveness ..." cited in note 4.

Finally, once a National Agreement has been reached to support the National Policy, it is necessary to develop an information system for the monitoring and evaluation of that policy, with the participation of the interest groups

involved, together with mechanisms to give continuity to the process of dialogue, negotiation, consensus and commitment and to make the necessary adjustments, according to the progress being made.

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