PAFO–COLEACP INNOVATION SERIES:
Innovations and successes of African farmer-led businesses and SMEs

Session N°6
Promoting sustainable agriculture and agroecological practices: the key role of MSMEs and farmers organisations

30nd September 2021, 12:00-14:00 (GMT)

English-French interpretation available

1. Context

Today's food and farming systems have succeeded in supplying large volumes of foods to global markets but are generating negative outcomes on multiple fronts: widespread degradation of land, water and ecosystems; high Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions; biodiversity losses; persistent hunger and micro-nutrient deficiencies alongside the rapid rise of obesity and diet-related diseases; and livelihood stresses for farmers around the world.[1] Some of the current agricultural practices are clearly unsustainable.[2]

In this context, there is a consensus on the transition towards more sustainable food systems, able to preserve natural resources and adapt to climate change, while meeting the needs of growing rural and urban communities and satisfy changing consumer demands. It is therefore vital we learn how to produce differently.[3] There is growing recognition that the global food system needs a paradigm shift to feed the world without destroying the planet. A growing number of voices are calling for a complete transformation of our agricultural and food systems and are pointing to a transition to agroecology as a key pathway to tackle the challenges currently facing humankind. To preserve natural resources and adapt to climate change, meet the needs of growing rural and urban communities, and satisfy changing consumer demands, it is vital we learn how to produce differently.[4]

1 IPES-Food. 2016. From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems.

2 While there has been significant progress in increasing world food production, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that a further 50% increase in food production by 2050 will be needed to feed a growing world population a nutritious, safe, and sustainable diet. Increasing food available for consumption also relies on reducing food waste.

3 François-Xavier COTE, Emmanuelle POIRIER-MAGONA, Sylvain PERRET, Bruno RAPIDEL, Philippe ROUDIER, Marie-Cécile THIRION (dir.), La transition agro-écologique des agricultures du Sud, Agricultures et défis du monde, Versailles, Éditions Quæ, 2019

4 ibid

2. Agroecological approaches: a key contribution to sustainable food systems

Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. It seeks to optimise the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where it is produced. Agroecology is concurrently a science, a set of practices and a social movement and has evolved as a concept over recent decades to expand in scope from a focus on fields and farms to encompass the entirety of agriculture and food systems. It now represents a transdisciplinary field that includes the ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption.[5]

Agroecology encompasses a wide variety of practices, which are coherent with key principles of environment preservation, social fairness, and economic viability. Therefore, agroecology combines parameters of sound ecological management, like minimising the use of toxic chemicals by using on-farm renewable resources and privileging endogenous solutions to manage pests and disease, with an approach that upholds and secures farmers' livelihoods.[6] Agroecological innovations are based on the co-creation of knowledge, combining science with the traditional, practical and local knowledge of producers.[7] Agroecology is based on bottom-up and territorial processes, helping to deliver contextualised solutions to local problems.

Recent FAO Biovision findings[8] highlights the links between agroecology and climate change, by providing evidence on the technical (i.e. ecological and socio-economic) and policy potential of agroecology to build resilient food systems.

The core principles on which agroecological practices build (i.e.: diversity, efficient use of natural resources, nutrient recycling, natural regulation and synergies) characterise their inherent adaptation and resilience potential to climate change.[9] Encompassing aspects related to the three pillars of sustainable development (environment, social and economic), several sets of agroecological principles were developed by different actors so as to characterise inherent properties of agroecology and to ensure a common understanding.[10] FAO has identified ten interlinked and interdependent elements of agroecology[11] that include diversification; co-creation and sharing of knowledge; building synergies supporting multiple ecosystem services; efficiency; recycling; resilience of communities and ecosystems; protecting human and social values; supporting culture and food traditions; responsible governance and circular and solidarity economy. Building on these elements, and other key works, the report by The High Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on Food Security and Nutrition (2019)[12] further suggests a consolidated set of 13 agroecological principles organised around the broad categories of improving resource efficiency, strengthening resilience, and securing social equity/responsibility. The report also recommends to establish and use comprehensive performances measurement and

5 FAO. http://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/en/

6 The Untold Success Story: Agroecology in Africa Addresses Climate Change, Hunger, and Poverty. Oakland Institute. 2015.

7 Agroecology Europe. 2018. Our understanding of agroecology.

8 Leippert, F., Darmaun, M., Bernoux, M., and Mpheshea, M. 2020. The potential of agroecology to build climate-resilient livelihoods and food systems. Rome. FAO and Biovision

9 François-Xavier COTE, Emmanuelle POIRIER-MAGONA, Sylvain PERRET, Bruno RAPIDEL, Philippe ROUDIER, Marie-Cécile THIRION (dir.), La transition agro-écologique des agricultures du Sud, Agricultures et défis du monde, Versailles, Éditions Quæ, 2019.

10 Leippert, F., Darmaun, M., Bernoux, M. and Mpheshea, M. 2020. The potential of agroecology to build climate-resilient livelihoods and food systems. Rome. FAO and Biovision.

11 FAO. The 10 elements of Agroecology guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems. 2018.

12 Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by The High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. July 2019.

monitoring frameworks for food systems.

FAO and a large number of partners have developed the Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) that aims to measure the multi-dimensional performance of agroecological systems across the different dimensions of sustainability. It applies a stepwise approach at the household/farm level and collects information and provides results at a community and territorial scale.[13]

3. Unlocking business opportunities in agroecology

Growing scientific evidence and local experiences demonstrate how agroecology facilitates and contributes to the transition to food and agricultural systems that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially equitable. Around the world, farms, communities and regions are engaging in agroecological transitions, and delivering results. Approximately 30% of farms around the world are estimated to have redesigned their production systems around agroecological principles.[14]

There is an increasing amount of evidence showing the positive impacts of agroecology on the environment, on biodiversity, on farmers' incomes, on resilience, and on adaptation and mitigation to climate change.[15] Building on traditional knowledge and wider management skills passed down through generations also contributes to increased resilience. Knowledge co-creation and dissemination via advisory services and farmer-to-farmer approaches, are key to support development, improvement and uptake of agroecological practices as highlighted by field cases.[16]

Entrepreneurship development is expanding in the production and/or commercialisation of agroecological products, which contribute to sustainable rural development through preservation of their lands, the improvement of their quality of life, and the adoption of a natural and healthy food culture.

Environmental awareness, among both entrepreneurs and the general population, has a favorable influence on agroecological entrepreneurship. However, while agroecological systems draw on natural synergies and use locally-available resources, transitioning to this model entails costs for entrepreneurs who need support.

Various initiatives in support of agroecology benefit entrepreneurs and farmers in Africa. Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA) is an initiative with the goal to support young agripreneurs to apply agroecological principles and to co-create networks to contribute to increased sustainability of food systems and youth employment in Ethiopia, Kenya[17], Uganda, and Rwanda.

While agroecology promotes low use of external inputs, it is a very knowledge-intensive system. Transmission of this knowledge, adaptation to local contexts, and appropriation by farmers and government technicians, are essential steps for farmers and communities to reap the benefits of agroecology. The case studies demonstrate how the expansion of

13 FAO. 2019. TAPE Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation 2019 – Process of development and guidelines for application. Test version. Rome.

14 Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & IPES-Food. 2020. Money Flows: What is holding back investment in agroecological research for Africa? Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

15 Diversification through agroecology builds the natural capital of the farms. Higher levels of biological diversity and heterogeneity in these farms improves biogeochemical processes like nutrient and water cycling, increases stability as well as improves soil organic matter that adds to soil fertility and overall soil health. These processes are fundamental for resilience building and adaptation to climate change.

16 AFSA. AGROECOLOGY AND MARKETS – STORIES FROM THE FIELD - How wide are the agroecology ripples?

17 https://images.agri-profocus.nl/upload/YALTA_Mapping_final_Report__compressed1596175221.pdf

agroecological practices will generate a rapid, fair and inclusive development, that can be sustained for future generations. The Oakland 33 case studies highlight successes of agroecological agriculture across the African continent in the face of climate change, hunger, and poverty.[18]

An increasing number of countries and stakeholders from different backgrounds see agroecology and related approaches as a promising means for reaching adaptation and mitigation targets and to achieve an effective transformational change.

However, there are still barriers to the scaling-up of agroecology.[19] Access to knowledge and understanding of systemic agriculture approaches should be fostered across sectors, stakeholders and scales. Further comparative research on the multidimensional impacts of agroecology should be done.[20] Science and policy interfaces are necessary and the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) should be continued to ensure this interface, turning the submissions and recommendations into action. Donors, decision-makers and other stakeholders should embrace complexity, adopt a more systemic understanding of challenges and solutions to hedge against climate change, grasp environmental issues in a holistic way and move towards more policy coherence, by breaking silos. There is a need for developing agroecological curricula at colleges and universities as well as a network of decentralised centres of excellence on agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa.[21]

Agroecological transitions will require significant shifts in the enabling policy environment, with the need for strategies, policies, programs and other actions that are conducive to such transitions. At policy level, there is a global political recognition at the highest level and various initiatives, all key to support the farmers and private sector operators to upscale agroecological practices. Recently, this year at the One Planet Summit held on 11 January 2021, a new coalition, the International Agroecological Movement for Africa (IAM Africa) was launched.

The Special Session of the 48th Plenary of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (CFS 48) took place virtually endorsed the CFS Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches. The endorsement of the Policy Recommendations was moved from CFS 47 (held in February 2021) as their negotiations and completion was delayed due to COVID-19. Policy Recommendations include: (i) Lay or strengthen, as appropriate, the policy foundations for agroecological and other innovative approaches to contribute to sustainable agriculture; (ii) Establish, improve and apply comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring frameworks to encourage the adoption of agroecological approaches; (iii) Foster the transition to resilient and diversified sustainable agriculture and food systems through agroecological and other innovative approaches; (iv) Strengthen research, innovation, training, and education and foster knowledge co-creation, knowledge sharing and co-learning, on agroecological and other innovative approaches; and (v) Strengthen institutions for stakeholder engagement, create an enabling environment for empowering people most at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition.

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18 The Untold Success Story: Agroecology in Africa Addresses Climate Change, Hunger, and Poverty. Oakland Institute. 2015.

19 Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & IPES-Food. 2020. Money Flows: What is holding back investment in agroecological research for Africa? Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

20 The HLPE of the CFS report on agroecology (HLPE, 2019; Biovision, 2020), highlights that there are fewer investments in research on agroecological approaches, especially on the economic and social impacts of adopting agroecological approaches; the extent to which agroecological practices increase resilience in the face of climate; relative yields and performance of agroecological practices compared to other alternatives across contexts; and how to link agroecology to public policy.

21 Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & IPES-Food. 2020. Money Flows: What is holding back investment in agroecological research for Africa? Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development & International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

4. Key points for discussion on transitioning to agroecological practices

- How African MSMEs and farmers organisations can upscale more sustainable practices from farm to fork? What are the drivers of success?
- What obstacles do they face? What support do they need?
- What incentives can be provided to MSMEs and smallholders to transition and accelerate the adoption and implementation of agroecological practices?

PROGRAMME
30 September 2021 (12:00-14:00 GMT)

12:00-12:10 Introduction

Welcome:

- *Fatma Ben Rejeb, CEO, PAFO*

Moderator: *Isolina Boto, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEACP*

12:10-13:00 Panel: Successes of businesses

- *Gustav Dessogom Bakoundah, Director, Label d'Or and Jus Délices, Togo*
- *Olayemi Aganga, Co-founder, Maungo Craft, Bostwana*
- *Gora Ndiaye, Founder and Director, Ferme-École Agroécologique de Kaydara, Senegal*
- *Noël N'Guessan, Co-founder and Chief Technical Officer, LONO, Côte d'Ivoire*

13:00-13:20 Discussants

- Emile Frison, Member of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES), co-lead of UNFSS solution cluster Agroecology
- Christophe Larose, Head of Sector, Sustainable Agri-Food systems and Fisheries, DG INTPA, European Commission
- Charles Mulozi Olweny, Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, AFSA

13:20-13:50 Debate

13:50-14:00 Key takeaways and conclusion

- *Elizabeth Nsimadala, Pre*sident, PAFO
- Jeremy Knops, General Delega*te, COLEACP*