

Regional Symposium on Agroecology for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia

23-25 November 2016 - Budapest

Recommendations from the participants

Background

Agroecology is based on principles such as biomass recycling, circular system of food production, soil health and preservation, natural inputs (sun radiation, air, water and nutrients) optimization, loss minimization, conserve biological and genetic diversity and enforcement of biological interactions in agroecosystem components. It relies on a localised value chain, locally-available natural resources and knowledge, with a strong focus on participatory action research to achieve context-specific and socially-accepted innovations within farming systems. It is multi-disciplinary, drawing on agronomy, ecology, economy and social sciences and therefore developing agroecological programmes and policies requires a multistakeholder approach bringing together agriculture, environment and social perspectives. Agroecology can make an important contribution to the transition to more sustainable food systems. Its practices, research and policies have seen exponential growth worldwide in the last decade.

Recognizing the role that agroecology can play in achieving food security and reducing malnutrition in the framework of Sustainable Food and Agriculture, FAO organized the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in Rome in September 2014. Following this International symposium, FAO has taken the initiative of convening multi-stakeholder Symposia at the regional level¹.

These regional symposia focused on disseminating the key messages from the global symposium, collecting and exchanging scientific and practical knowledge and successful cases of applying agroecology at the local and regional levels, and on identifying needs for policy, capacity development and enabling environment for the promotion and application of agroecology and provided a set of recommendations.

The Regional Symposium on Agroecology for Europe and Central Asia

On 23, 24 and 25 November 2016 more than 180 participants from 41 countries representing governments, civil society, research and the private sector have attended in the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in Europe and Central Asia hosted by the Government of Hungary and sponsored by the Government of France. The meeting was jointly organized by the Government of Hungary and FAO.

The Symposium was opened by **H.E. Sándor Fazekas**, Minister of Agriculture of Hungary, **H.E. José Graziano Da Silva**, Director-General of FAO, **H.E. Serge Tomasi** Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome and **Aldo Longo**, Director for General Aspects of Rural Development and Research, DG Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission. This High level segment insisted on the importance on shifting current systems towards more sustainable food and agricultural systems.

H.E. Sándor Fazekas, Minister of Agriculture of Hungary stated:

“Agroecology is a prerequisite for sustainable agriculture, protection of biodiversity, sustainable natural resource management and supporting rural development. Agroecology can contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and will lead us to solutions for the most urgent global challenges of our time. All that we are aiming for can be achieved together if we cooperate and align our actions, including member state governments, civil society actors, private sector, academia and research institutes. Countries in our region could certainly benefit from the development of agroecology.”

H.E. José Graziano Da Silva, Director-General of FAO highlighted the importance of exploring the transformative potential of agroecology:

“Business as usual is not an option. We have to innovate and transform agriculture. We need to be more productive using less resources. We need to generate less environmental impact. And we have to go beyond

¹ Latin America and the Caribbean Seminar, June 2015 Brasilia, Brazil and September 2016 La Paz, Bolivia; Asia and the Pacific Seminar, November 2015, Bangkok, Thailand; and Kunming China August 2016; Sub-Saharan Africa Seminar, November 2015, Dakar, Senegal

sustainable intensification. Increasing the efficiency of farming (with precision input, improved seeds and other techniques) is certainly important. But it is not enough to reduce the environmental footprint of agriculture. In many parts of the world, the demand for agricultural products is still growing rapidly. New areas are still being cleared for agriculture at record rates, even with successful intensification. Current techniques are reducing damage only at the margins. To tackle this situation we need better coordination on farm and non-farm resource management. And we need an integrated approach that agroecology can offer. FAO is committed to explore all the potential of agroecology in this regard.”

Speakers and participants from governments, civil society, research and the private sector have identified the following key propositions to develop Agroecology Europe and Central Asian brought up the key concepts and Challenge of agroecology in Europe in Central Asia, debated within six modules:

1. Concepts and challenges of agroecology
2. Agroecological systems and practices
3. Research, innovation and knowledge sharing for agroecological transitions
4. Agroecology at the core of ecosystem services-ecological and social challenges
5. Valuing agroecology and sustainable food systems
6. Transformative policies and processes

The participants of the Symposium endorsed the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I) Public policies to develop agroecology and promote transition

1. Develop scientific and citizen led data supporting the potential of agroecology to create jobs and the need to analyse and systematise the experiences so to measure (quantify and qualify) the social, ecologic and economic implications of agroecology both at the farm scale and for upstream and downstream jobs.
2. Improve and develop a policy and economic framework within agricultural policies that supports and allows farmers to implement agroecological practices and make the transition to agroecological farming systems in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and in other food and agricultural related policies and programs throughout the Region. Direct payments should be made depended upon protecting and enhancing biodiversity.
3. Promote the establishment of Food Policy Councils at local, regional and national level to foster and allow consumers and food producers participation in decision making processes around the food system, markets and trade.
4. Improve knowledge and evidence base for the needed policy, incentives, market regulatory mechanisms, tariffs to create the needed enabling environment to allow the transition to agroecology.
5. FAO should include agroecology in its work done in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to ensure decent rural employment opportunities that ensure a living wage, security in the workplace, access to social protection and respect for fundamental human rights.
6. Develop and collaborate with international mechanisms recognising collective peasant rights, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas, currently negotiated in the United Nations Human Rights Council.
7. Enhance the role of agroecology in sensitive regions, specifically in Central Asia, to sustainable management of natural resources in the context of climate change to create awareness among different stakeholders (policy makers, researchers, private sector, farmers, Civil Society

Organizations, and individuals).

8. Promote research in order to better identify, quantify and qualify those policies that disincentives agroecology. Making sure that True Costing work informs all relevant decisions that impact directly or indirectly agriculture and food systems.
9. Encourage the region to identify flagship countries piloting agroecology and allowing for the multi stakeholder development of knowledge and the adoption of agroecology principles.

II) Agroecology and sustainable food systems

10. Extend the dialog between health, nutrition, ecology, trade and agriculture actors to support the development of agroecological sustainable and healthy food systems.
11. Facilitate a shift from linear food systems to circular ones that mimic natural cycles and reduce carbon and ecological footprints of food and agriculture, - ensuring that circular systems are designed to replace specialised and centralised supply chains with resilient and decentralised webs of food and energy systems that are integrated with sustainable water and waste management systems.
12. Agroecology principles should be formulated and used as the principle guideline to transform and improve the current food system, be based on participation, alliances and put food producers at the centre.
13. Develop specific policies and programs to enhance public procurement based on short and local supply chain principles that provide fresh, nutritious, affordable food, which is produced in a sustainable manner and builds local and regional economies.
14. Develop public and long term financial measures, training and knowledge exchange in improving short supply chains which favour small-scale producers, such as direct marketing and value adding, peasant markets, micro-dairy, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives and Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), give financial and infrastructure support for collective local food processing units and support sanitary rules for proximity markets which are adapted to the conditions of local markets.
15. Implement the policy recommendations on ‘Connecting smallholders to markets’ recently negotiated in the Committee on World Food Security at national level.

III) Agroecology and natural resources in a changing climate: water, land, biodiversity and territories

16. Promote policies, practices, research and awareness creation material to achieve the transformative potential of agroecology to address the urgency of adapting, mitigating and reversing climate change.
17. Contribute to the agroecological transition through territorial approaches and organize pilot farm network acting according to the principles and methods of agroecology and sharing their practices and techniques.
18. Ensure, recognize, respect and uphold small-scale food producers, family farmers and communities’, in particular women’s, youths’ and indigenous and nomadic peoples’, rights to land, water, seeds, inland and coastal waters, forests, commons, biodiversity and territory, also promoting the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale fisheries (VGSSF) and Farmers’ Rights as stated in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).

19. Close collaborate with the Commission on Genetic Resources and seek synergies with other relevant processes like Convention on Biodiversity
20. Develop national and regional plans for agroecological pathways to sustainable food systems and natural resource management that support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNFCCC Paris Agreement.
21. Support the participative development of adequate criteria for assessing and valuing agroecological systems and sustainable food systems, and promote their widespread sharing among all actors.
22. Facilitate the development and implementation of agroecological practices also for aquaculture and fish pond systems based on agroecological principles and study options for better integrating aquaculture, pastoralism, livestock and crop systems within territories in order to recycle resources.
23. FAO should reinforce its processes and strengthen its partnerships to prioritize agroecology in the framework of its Strategic Framework especially in the relevant delivery mechanisms (MWAs, CPFs and RIs), and implement the recommendations from the Committee of Agriculture (COAG) and regional conferences and enhances activities especially linked to Climate Change and Biodiversity.

IV) Research, innovation, knowledge sharing and agroecological movements

24. Knowledge transmission requires redesign educational programs to integrate agroecology in the curriculum of non-formal and formal education (in primary and higher education), following the principles of the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).
25. Support knowledge exchange in particular horizontal exchange between food producers (farmer to farmer and Farmer Field Schools (FFS) methods), adapting advisory services and extension services to agroecology with specific attention to climate change adaptation and mitigation.
26. Recognise, value, support and document ancestral knowledge and modern innovations, traditions, pastoralists and peasants' local wisdom. Include participatory action research, the co-production of oral and written knowledge and cultural practices that addresses the true needs of communities, and particularly considers the needs of women, indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups, and youth. Ensure that innovations and the products of research remain in the public and collective domains according to Article 9 in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).
27. Develop mechanisms and bridges among different agroecology knowledge platforms and websites including the European Innovation Partnership Network and FAO.
28. Promote and support agroecological practices that reduce external inputs – specifically seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, animal feed and, fossil fuels enhancing the capacity of soil and agroecosystem health to close cycles and maintain productivity, stability and resilience.
29. Document impacts of agroecology on farm income, productivity and livelihoods of farmers and develop better data on the evidence base on externalities like social and environmental costs and benefits of agroecological systems, possibly including collaboration with the True Cost Accounting work.
30. Create awareness material on the concept of innovation to include conceptual, methodological, social and institutional in addition to technical innovations.
31. Strengthen public research: allocate more funds for public research in this field, favour interdisciplinary research better connecting agricultural, ecological and social sciences. Facilitate changes in research organisations (incentives and rewards, ways of working and the training of scientists and professionals) and enable farmers and citizens' participation in research including

in their community and in governance of research: setting upstream research priorities, the allocation of funds, and participation in production of knowledge and in risk assessments.

32. Strengthen self-managed research: strengthen farmers and extension services networks for research and horizontal spread of agricultural innovations, strengthen the capacity of farmers and citizens to facilitate transdisciplinary innovations that bridge different knowledge systems and give farmers and citizens enough material security and paid time to engage in and participate in the whole research cycle, including in the evaluation of research programs and institutes.
33. Organic agriculture is largely rooted in agroecological approaches, both in principles and actual practices, and most of the organic farmers respond to an ecological mission as part of their social undertaking. We recommend that Agroecology and organic farming are considered in their synergies and co-evolution.
34. Participatory research and knowledge sharing require openness in the exchange of data. Preserving the public nature of knowledge and environmental data is required for the development of agroecology.
35. Develop nutrition sensitive interventions and for example design legume inclusive diversification of food and fodder cropping systems based on agroecological principles and practices to improve soil health as an agroecological contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to number 1, 2, 15 and 17.
36. Recognize and strengthen farmer seed and livestock systems and reinforce their contributions to agroecology.
37. Promote research on the institutional processes and governance of agroecology.