

AGROECOLOGY FOR FUTURE



A REPORT ON THE CONCEPT
OF AGROECOLOGY

Executive Summary

Background and scope of the report

Recently, agroecology has been attracting increasing interest as an alternative to industrialized agriculture. However, there is a lack of consistency in definitions of agroecology, ranging from an academic discipline to a movement for the socio-economic and ecological transformation of the whole food system.

This report was commissioned by the Romero Initiative (CIR). CIR has been dedicated to promoting labor rights and human rights in Central American countries since 1981. CIR's work focuses on supporting grassroots movements and organizations in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras as well as on campaigning and educational work in Germany. In the spirit of its name giver, Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was murdered in 1980, the Romero Initiative is committed to a holistic change towards a just economic and social system in which people can work and live in dignified conditions and companies act responsibly and ecologically. The aim of CIR is to establish agroecology as a focus in campaign work and to develop concrete demands, particularly with regard to the need for an international political framework to promote and support agroecological production.

The aim of this report is to develop a comprehensive understanding of agroecology to do justice to its origins in the social and environmental movements, as well as to develop aspects and criteria for public communication and campaign work. The research should also provide recommendations and political demands for the promotion of agroecological production and pose questions on the impact of agroecology for local communities.

Defining agroecology

Having a definition for agroecology is complex — mostly it is described as a concept that is science, practice, and movement. With growing opposition against the environmental and social impacts of the industrialized production model, agroecology developed strongly as a social and political movement. Social movements underline the need for a strong connection to be made between agroecology, the right to food and food sovereignty, highlighting that peasant rights are the basis for agroecology. In 2019 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provided a framework for implementing agroecology and shaping policies with the definition of the *Ten Elements of Agroecology* and the *13 Principles of Agroecology* developed by the High Level Panel of Experts. These definitions are internationally agreed upon.

Since peasant agroecology entails a comprehensive view, it is suggested not to narrow down agroecology into one definition or legislation. Instead, it is recommended that within their campaign work for agroecology and in public communication, human rights organizations refer to the agreed Food and Agriculture Organization's *Ten Elements of Agroecology* and the *13 Principles* developed by the High Level Panel of Experts. In order to respect the Global South's perspective and emphasize its role, the *Nyéléni Declaration* with its principles of peasant agroecology should be highlighted.

Status quo of agroecology

Since 2018, the concept and practice of agroecology have become more and more international and also gained institutional recognition. The focus of agroecology still remains on the Global South, where agroecology has already been practiced for some decades. Many initiatives implementing agroecology underpin the potential of building local and resilient food systems, contributing to food sovereignty. However, there is a clear lack of funding. In the Global South, social and political issues are the main drivers for the development of agroecology with strong engagement of peasants, indigenous people, and social movements. Mainly supported by the Landless Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST), the agroecological movement in Southern Brazil grew strong and achieved positive results, enhancing food sovereignty for the people within the region.

This implementation of agroecology in Brazil was mainly achieved through a collective action involving different actors and organizations. Political programs, for example the *Política Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica* (National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production), were established, which led to a further development of agroecological production. Another policy supporting small-scale farmers is the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (National School Meals Program). Those programs can serve as good examples and encourage policy makers to build upon these experiences.

In Germany, agroecological initiatives have emerged in recent years, nevertheless, a coherent understanding of agroecology is missing so far. In France concerns exist within the organic farming organizations. On the one hand, agroecology is seen as an extension of organic farming including socio-ecological criteria. On the other hand, a softening of the high, firmly defined standards of organic farming is feared. So far, political efforts by the German government have been limited mainly to the area of development policy as a contribution to global food security.

Political processes within the EU impacting agroecology

Referring to the comprehensive nature of agroecology, a coherent agricultural and food policy must be implemented in order to facilitate political action in all relevant fields, concerning seeds legislation, access to land and water, biodiversity, climate change, health and education.

As part of the European Green Deal in 2020 the European Commission released the *Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy* for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system as well as the *Biodiversity Strategy*. With view of the upcoming parliamentary election in 2024 it will be essential to defend these measures within the European Green Deal and related strategies, since they are coming increasingly under attack by the food industry lobbying hard for their interests.

The announced *EU Legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems*¹ is going to be the major piece of legislation of the F2F-Strategy and should be presented in a timely manner.

It can be acknowledged that the F2F-Strategy presents a food system approach from primary production to the consumer, recognizing the complexity of food and associated challenges. The included targets for pesticides, fertilizers and organic farming are significant.

Nevertheless, the F2F-Strategy remains embedded in an outdated framework. A major shortcoming of the Farm to Fork Strategy is the predominant promotion of technological approaches like precision farming and the digital transformation of farms, rather than promoting public policies and agroecology. It is alarming that new genomic techniques are seen as a path to improve sustainability along the food supply chain and to reach goals within the F2F-Strategy as well as in the biodiversity Strategy. In order to counteract the concentration of power by the multinational agriculture and food industry, the following political measures must also be taken into account:

- The revision of the *EU Genetic Engineering Legislation*
- The revision of the *EU Seed Marketing Legislation*
- The *Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation* (SUR)

The *common agricultural policy* (CAP) of the EU can be seen as the main policy to implement the F2F and Biodiversity Strategy. Despite this central role, the common agricultural policy is so far not aligned with both strategies. A groundbreaking step would be to cancel any funding per hectare and instead apply the principle of “public money for public goods.”

The right to food should be a core target of the common agricultural policy with the principles of agroecology representing the binding reference. Any future common agricultural policy must support a model of production and distribution that adhere to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* (UNDROP).

¹ https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/legislative-framework_en

As the private sector has a key role to play in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal the EU must provide a strong *Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive* (CSDDD).

Overall, for European policies embracing the transition to agroecology implies a reduction of global environmental and social footprint of the European agriculture and food systems. Public policies, particularly the F2F and CAP, should challenge the current model and nurture diverse and decentralized forms of agroecology-based food production. This will guarantee access to quality food, the survival of European farms, fair income for farmers, and protect peasants' rights.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE4EU	Agroecology for Europe Project
BMZ	German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CAPA	Centro de Apoio ao Pequeno Agricultor, support center for smallholders in Brazil
CFS	United Nations Committee on World Food Security
CIDSE	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité, Organization for international development and solidarity
CIR	Romero Initiative (CIR)
CSDDD	EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
EAFRD	European agricultural fund for rural development
EAKEN	European Agroecology Knowledge Exchange Network
ECVC	European Coordination Via Campesina
F2F	Farm to Fork strategy
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FSFS	Legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems
FSN	Food Security and Nutrition
GMO	Genetically Modified Organisms
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
HVE	Haute Valeur Environnementale, High Environmental Value Standard
IAASTD	International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPES-Food	International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Landless Movement Brazil
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGTs	New Genomic Techniques
Nyéléni Declaration	Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PAA	Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos, Food Purchase Program (Brazil)
PNAE	Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar, Nationales Schulspeisungsprogramm (Brasilien)
PNAPO	Política Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica, National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (Brazil)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SUR	Sustainable Use Regulation
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
ZKL	Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft, Commission on the Future of Agriculture

Introduction

In order to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement to keep the global temperature increase below 1.5 °C, the European agricultural and food system needs to be transformed. Numerous scientific reports – including IPCC(International Panel on Climate Change) Special Reports² and the IPBES(Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) Biodiversity Assessment³ – comprehensively prove that “business as usual” in agricultural production is not an option – neither for planetary nor human health.

The industrial agricultural model based on the concept of the Green Revolution of raising yields through the massive use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is coming under enormous pressure to justify itself and is no longer seen as the solution for the world’s problems of poverty, hunger and environmental challenges.

In 2008, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) has underlined the need for a paradigm shift, calling for action at multiple levels in support of agroecology. The report mandated by the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) assigns the concept of agroecology a central role in shaping future agriculture, recognizing that small-scale farmers and their traditional knowledge play a key role for food security.⁴ Globally, agroecology has arrived more and more at the center of the scientific and political debate as it is discussed and promoted as an alternative agricultural and food system at the United Nations level. Two high-level symposia of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2014 and 2018 with state representatives and several hundred experts from farming, science, civil society and the private sector resulted in two declarations with commitments to the implementation of agroecology and the definition of the *Ten Elements of Agroecology*⁵.

Social movements and peasant initiatives in the Global South have been advocating for decades to put people at the center of agriculture and to rise up against an industrial agricultural model driven by corporate interests. In Southern Brazil, for example, a strong agroecology movement developed within the social and political struggle on land rights.

Recently, agroecology has been attracting increased interest as an alternative to industrialized agriculture. However, there is a lack of consistency in definitions of agroecology, ranging from an academic discipline to a movement for the socio-economic and ecological transformation of the whole food system.

The aim of this report is to develop a comprehensive understanding of agroecology to do justice to its origins in the social and environmental movements, as well as to develop aspects and criteria for public communication and campaign work. The research should also provide recommendations and political demands for the promotion of agroecological production and pose questions on the impact of agroecology for local communities.

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/11/SRCCL-Full-Report-Compiled-191128.pdf>

³ <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment>

⁴ <https://www.weltagrarbericht.de/fileadmin/files/weltagrarbericht/IAASTDBerichte/GlobalSDM.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/3/i9037en/i9037en.pdf>

I. Defining agroecology

Having a definition of agroecology is complex — mostly it is described as a concept that is **science, practice, and movement**. It is seen as a holistic concept highlighting the interaction between all areas. Agroecology is recognized as having the potential to facilitate the transformation in agriculture required to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Within science, agroecology is more and more defined as a holistic approach and has developed from an academic discipline with a focus on the ecology of agricultural systems to an agroecosystem management approach to farming, and more recently, towards a concept to shape whole food systems.

At the United Nations level, agroecology is promoted as an alternative to existing production models, emphasized as a feasible approach to progress towards global food and nutrition security. In 2019, the FAO provided the definition of the *Ten Elements of Agroecology* and the *13 principles developed by the High Level Panel of Experts* (HLPE), a framework for implementing agroecology and shaping policies. These definitions are internationally agreed upon.

Civil society organizations are calling for a step-by-step implementation of agroecological principles in all related policies. The elements are based on various key frameworks for agroecology, including the *Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology* (2015)⁶, the Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (International Development and Solidarity Cooperation CIDSE) *Principles of Agroecology* (2018)⁷ and the *FAO's 10 elements of agroecology* (2018).

With growing opposition against the environmental and social impacts of the industrialized production model, agroecology developed strongly as a social and political movement. Social movements underline the need for a **strong connection to be made between agroecology, the right to food and food sovereignty**.

1.1 Agroecology: A concept from the Global South

Millions of small-scale farmers and indigenous people have developed a deep understanding of the interrelation between food production and the environment. Many family farming systems are based on diversified production, closed nutrient cycles, reduced use of external inputs and sharing of traditional knowledge. Although not always described as agroecology, agroecological production methods have a long tradition in many countries of the Global South.

Today agroecology can be considered as a reaction to the negative consequences of the so-called Green Revolution, such as the increased use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, especially in countries of the Global South. Peasants and family farmers produce around 70-80 % of the food consumed worldwide⁸. However, they also constitute more than 70 % of the global population facing hunger⁹. In many cases the industrialized production model driven by corporate interests threatens local food production, making people dependent on costly inputs as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, endangering health and livelihood of the families. As monocultures are occupying big cultivation areas, access to land is getting unfeasible and any land reform is suppressed. The absence of the right to land and seeds are main drivers of poverty and hunger.

Agroecology can be seen as an effective way to reduce production costs, by conserving natural resources and better remunerating the work of farmers in family farms. It has a strong social component, as it is able to reduce

⁶ <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf>

⁷ https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/EN_The_Principles_of_Agroecology_CIDSE_2018.pdf

⁸ <http://www.db.zs-intern.de/uploads/1644400674-2021WorldDevelopmentSmallFarms.pdf>

⁹ https://www.weltagrарbericht.de/fileadmin/files/weltagrарbericht/Neuaufgabe/WegeausderHungerkrise_klein.pdf

external inputs of pesticides and chemical fertilizers and conserve natural resources¹⁰, which means the financial burden on smallholders is decreased, allowing them to earn a living without falling into debt.

With growing opposition against the environmental and social impacts of the industrialized production model, agroecology developed out of a strong social and political movement. This **political dimension of agroecology** is becoming increasingly prominent. The aim is to transform agriculture in order to build locally relevant food systems that strengthen the economic viability of rural areas based on short marketing chains, and both fair and safe food production. This involves supporting diverse forms of smallholder food production and family farming, farmers and rural communities, food sovereignty, local knowledge, social justice, local identity and culture, and indigenous rights to seeds and breeds.

The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, Landless Movement) in Paraná, Brazil, emphasizes the social movement. “*We understand agroecology as a movement that involves environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects and the valuing of the knowledge of farmers and their dialogue with academic knowledge, with the aim of expanding the natural balance and making healthy food available to the whole population.*”¹¹

Social movements and peasant initiatives in Latin America have been advocating for decades to put people at the center of agriculture and to preserve and integrate indigenous knowledge in food production. It is the knowledge that allows the development of agroecological principles, for the development and management of culturally sensitive, socially just, economically viable and environmentally sustainable ecosystems, without dependence on agrochemicals. Agroecology is important for local communities to create food sovereignty¹².

In Latin America, agroecology is moving towards the promotion of local self-sufficiency, the conservation of agrobiodiversity, the production of healthy food and the political empowerment of peasant organizations. It holds great potential for promoting social change towards sustainability and as an alternative to neoliberal policies and agribusiness. The agroecological approach positions farmers as protagonists in the generation of knowledge¹³.

Social movements underline the need for a strong connection to be made between agroecology, the right to food and food sovereignty.¹⁴ **“There is no food sovereignty without agroecology. And certainly, agroecology will not last without a food sovereignty policy that backs it up.”**¹⁵

In 2015, civil society actors from around the world gathered in the Nyéléni Centre in Mali to write the *Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology* (Nyéléni Declaration). According to the Nyéléni Declaration, agroecology is seen as necessary resistance against an economic system:

“Our diverse forms of smallholder food production based on agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas. Smallholders defend our dignity when we choose to produce in an agroecological way. Agroecology is the answer to how to transform and repair our material reality in a food system and rural world that has been devastated by industrial

¹⁰ Interview with Prof. Antonio Andrioli, Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS), Brazil

¹¹ Collective of Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural (ASSESOAR), Brazil

¹² Interview with Laureci Coradace Leal — Director of MST, Paraná, Brazil

¹³ Interview with Alejandro Aguirre Batres, CONGCOOP, Guatemala

¹⁴ Social movements defined food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty, February 2007).

¹⁵ <https://www.agroecologynow.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Farming-Matters-Agroecology-EN.pdf>: Ibrahima Coulibaly, CNOP (Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali), from Mali

food production and its so-called Green and Blue Revolutions¹⁶. We see agroecology as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life.”¹⁷

Common pillars and principles of agroecology were formulated. Compared to the FAO's 10 Elements of Agroecology the following aspects can be highlighted: **collective rights and access to the commons; spiritual and non-commodified connection to the land; challenging and transforming global power structures.**

Common pillars and principles of agroecology, Nyéléni Declaration

1. Fluid in application across territories
2. Ecological and low-input
3. Political, social, and determined by communities
4. Collective rights and access to the commons
5. Horizontality and diversity of learning
6. Spiritual and non-commodified connection to the land
7. Solidarity and collective action
8. Autonomous and fair, based upon a solidarity economy
9. Challenging and transforming global power structures
10. Equal power and remuneration across genders
11. Opportunities for rural youth

1.2 Peasant rights are the basis for agroecology

The *European Coordination of Via Campesina* (ECVC) highlights that peasant rights are the basis for agroecology. Peasant agroecology does not only concern agriculture, but the transformation of our society built upon collective rights, customs and laws acknowledging farmers and communities' rights to self-determination and autonomy.¹⁸

The ECVC is opposed to peasant agroecology being narrowed down to one definition or legislation. Instead, peasant agroecology should be viewed with its transversal nature and demand for societal change. Agroecology is a key element in achieving food sovereignty. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is context-specific, i.e., it will not involve the same practices in a flat semi-arid region as in a mountainous landscape. Rather, agroecology is a learning path towards more sustainable and diverse food systems in specific circumstances.

Agroecology is a process of individual and collective transformation. It is in continuous movement and combines key notions such as diversification, efficient circularity, cooperation and co-creation of knowledge, and relies on the deep links to social values and traditions.

¹⁶ Beginning in the 1960s, the Green and Blue Revolutions introduced new technologies in the so-called developing countries with the aim of increasing yields on land and in water. The Green Revolution referred to agriculture. High-yielding varieties were introduced and the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides was significantly increased. The Blue Revolution was aimed specifically at aquaculture, with the aim of improving the population's protein supply through fish and shrimp farming, which was often accompanied by water pollution or the destruction of mangrove forests.

¹⁷ <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf>

¹⁸ https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Agroecology_EN.pdf

1.3 From the science of sustainable agriculture to a holistic approach

In scientific literature, the term agroecology has been used for almost 100 years, initially in the context of agronomic techniques and questions of ecology. From the 1970s onwards, agroecology was increasingly understood as a collection of agricultural practices concerned with the **conservation and protection of agroecosystems**.

The most common definition of agroecology at that time was the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems, or the science of sustainable agriculture.¹⁹ As a practice, agroecology seeks ways to improve agricultural systems by creating beneficial biological interactions and synergies amongst the components of agroecosystems. As a science, agroecology is defined as the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems. A more recent definition focuses on the integration of research, education, action and change that brings **sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic and social**²⁰.

1.4 Agroecology: a science, a practice and a movement

With the politicization of the term, clear differences arose in the use and understanding of what agroecology is and what the concept constitutes. Based on an international comparison, Alexander Wezel et al. 2008 proposed to consider agroecology as an **interaction between science, practice and movements**. Agroecology is more and more defined as a holistic approach and developed from an academic discipline with a focus on the ecology of agricultural systems, to an agroecosystem management approach to farming. More recently, the concept is applied in a way that takes into account whole food systems instead of only parts of the production process²¹.

In Europe the association *Agroecology Europe* was established in 2016 and took up the definition of agroecology as a science, a practice and a social movement. As a science, it gives priority to action research, holistic and participatory approaches, and trans-disciplinarity that is inclusive of different knowledge systems. As a practice, it is based on sustainable use of local renewable resources, local farmers' knowledge and priorities, use of biodiversity to provide ecosystem services and resilience, and solutions that provide multiple benefits (environmental, economic, social) from local to global. As a movement, it defends smallholders and family farming, farmers and rural communities, food sovereignty, local and short food supply chains, diversity of indigenous seeds and breeds, healthy and quality food. Agroecology acknowledges that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and hence fosters interactions between actors in science, practice and movements, by facilitating knowledge sharing and action²².

1.5 Agroecology at the United Nations Level

Globally agroecology has arrived more and more at the center of the scientific and political debate as it is discussed and promoted as an alternative agricultural and food system at the United Nations level. Two high-level FAO symposia in 2014 and 2018 with representatives of states and several hundred experts from farming, science, civil society and the private sector resulted in two declarations with commitments to the benefits of agroecology and the definition of the *Ten Elements of Agroecology*. In 2019 a HLPE²³ report developed *13 principles* which list the practices and the concepts that must be applied for agroecological transition to take place²⁴.

¹⁹ <https://regabrasil.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/agroecology-the-science-of-sustainable-agriculture-altieri.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/21683565.2018.1432329?needAccess=true&role=button>

²¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41699743_Agroecology_as_a_Science_a_Movement_and_a_Practice

²² Agroecology Europe: <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/our-approach/our-understanding-of-agroecology/>

²³ FAO: "High Level Panel of Experts" (HLPE) des UN-Welternährungsausschusses (CFS) zu "Agrarökologie und anderen innovativen Ansätzen," 2019.

²⁴ FAO HLPE Report 2019 36, "Agricultural practices can be classified along a spectrum and qualified as more or less 'agroecological,' depending on the extent to which: (i) they rely on ecological processes as opposed to the use of agrochemical

The FAO defines agroecology as a dynamic, transdisciplinary approach and sees it as a solution for combating soil degradation, conserving forests, water, air quality and biodiversity, eradicating hunger and decrease the global obesity epidemic.

“Agroecological approaches favour [sic!] the use of natural processes, limit the use of purchased inputs, promote closed cycles with minimal negative externalities and stress the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes that develop knowledge and practice through experience, as well as more conventional scientific methods, and address social inequalities. Agroecological approaches recognize [sic!] that agrifood systems are coupled social–ecological systems from food production to consumption and involve science, practice and a social movement, as well as their holistic integration, to address FSN [Food Security and Nutrition].”²⁵

FAO 10 ELEMENTS OF AGROECOLOGY: diversity, co-creation of knowledge, synergies, efficiency, recycling, resilience, human and social values, culture and food traditions, responsible governance, and circular and solidarity economy.

FAO/HLPE 13 PRINCIPLES: recycling, input reduction, soil health, animal health, biodiversity, synergy, economic diversification, co-creation of knowledge, social values and diets, fairness, connectivity, land and natural resource governance, participation.

These definitions are internationally agreed upon and provide guidance on implementing agroecology. For example, the declaration of the Coalition for Agroecology encompasses implementing agroecology according to the 13 principles from the HLPE. The coalition came out of the UN Food Systems Summit held in 2022 and currently counts over 40 member countries and numerous organizations.²⁶

Also, civil society organizations are referring to key frameworks for agroecology. This includes the *FAO’s 10 elements of agroecology*, just as the *Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology* and the *CIDSE Principles of Agroecology*.²⁷

1.6 Differences within the academic, political and local definitions

Comparing the definitions, differences occur mainly related to a different basis of the necessity to promote agroecological practices. Coming from the Global South, local definitions are strongly linked to peasants’ rights, since the struggle for accessing basic human rights (access to land, seed, water and the commons) has been prevalent for decades. Agroecology incorporates the defense of Human Rights. Agroecology developed clearly as a social and political movement due to the need to build alternatives and fight against the model of industrial agriculture.

With the definition of agroecology as a science, a practice and a movement, this important pillar has been acknowledged within science and politics, but differences in the valuing and also in appointing relevant principles of agroecology further exist.

For example, spirituality is also mentioned as an important pillar of agroecology by people from the Global South. Spirituality refers to the mystical part of agroecology and its connection with indigenous peoples, traditional

inputs; (ii) they are equitable, environmentally friendly, locally adapted and controlled; and (iii) they adopt a systemic approach, rather than focusing only on specific technical measures. Agroecology means working with nature and implies including more diversity. Agroecological practices involve (processes such as): nutrient cycling; biological nitrogen fixation; improvement of soil structure and health; water conservation; biodiversity conservation and habitat management techniques for crop-associated biodiversity; carbon sequestration; biological pest control and natural regulation of diseases; diversification, mixed cultivation, intercropping, species and cultivar mixtures; and waste management, reuse and recycling as inputs to the production process, for example use of manure and compost.”

²⁵ FAO: “High Level Panel of Experts” (HLPE) des UN-Welternährungsausschusses (CFS) zu “Agrarökologie und anderen innovativen Ansätzen,” 2019.

²⁶ <https://agroecology-coalition.org/>

²⁷ <https://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/position-paper-strengthening-agroecology/>

communities and peasants, who have a deep understanding of the connection with nature and with the flow of energy that connects humanity to its origins.

Compared to the FAO 10 elements of agroecology, the peasants' definition of agroecology in addition highlights the collective rights and access to the commons as well as challenging and transforming global power structures. Indicating that simply implementing some practices and changing some technologies is not sufficient, rather the application of agroecological principles and a redesign of farming systems is required.

It needs to be respected and communicated, that peasant farmers and indigenous people define agroecology as the essential alternative model. The term agroecology may not be misused by the industrial food and agricultural industry in "greenwashing" their activities as happened with the term "sustainable."

For example, more and more chemical companies like BASF, Bayer or Syngenta²⁸ started to market biologicals like bacteria or fungi, including RNAi, a technique of gene silencing, as alternative to chemical pest management systems. Also, in Brazil big companies merchandize biological pest control.²⁹

Using merely these technical approaches to save resources cannot be reconciled with the holistic concept of agroecology, which includes the independence of producers from the agricultural industry.

There is great risk that the industry is greenwashing and even misusing the concept of agroecology. CropLife International for example is offering a quiz on agroecology on its website, saying that agroecology is not a political movement and that it is not true that agroecology is about reducing pesticide applications.³⁰

II. Defining agroecology: A recommendation for European human rights organizations

For campaign work on agroecology and public communication it is recommended that Human Rights Organizations refer to the agreed upon *FAO Ten Elements of Agroecology* and the *13 principles* developed by the HLPE. In order to respect and strengthen a Global South perspective the *Nyéléni Declaration* with its principles of peasant agroecology should be highlighted. In doing so, the organizations emphasize the strong political and social character of agroecology, questioning power relations and promoting agroecology as a resistant model against industrial agriculture.

In addition to the FAO definition, **peasant agroecology includes the principles on collective rights and access to the commons, spiritual and non-commodified connection to the land as well as challenging and transforming global power structures.**

The strong connection between agroecology, the Right to Food and food sovereignty should be underlined. In line with the definition of La Via Campesina, agroecology should be communicated as a living practice, a science and a socio-political movement. Human Rights Organizations should stress this **holistic and transformative character of the concept**, referring to the adaptation of agroecological practices to local conditions. Thereby the necessary reduction of production inputs (pesticides, synthetical fertilizers) should be stressed in order to overcome the current industrialized production methods and empower peasants' and indigenous peoples' rights to land, water, and seeds.

2.1 Important aspects for communicating agroecology

Generally, it should be highlighted that peasant rights are the basis for agroecology. This includes access to land, water and seed, as well as the overall right to food.

²⁸ <https://croplife.org/crop-protection/innovation-in-crop-protection-products/>

²⁹ <https://simbiose-agro.com.br/sobre#>; <https://fida.com.br/>; <http://www.bmforganicos.com.br/>

³⁰ <https://croplife.org/news/agroecology-quiz/>

Having food in quantity appropriate to different cultural customs is a basic human right. This means to guarantee that food reaches families' plates without contamination from synthetic pesticides, labor exploitation, violation of Human Rights and at a fair price. It is through family farming, indigenous and traditional communities that will make agroecological production abundant, diverse, fair and accessible.

Access to land is a political, social, environmental and economic right. A fair agrarian reform can promote agroecology and enhance a healthy, sustainable and resilient agriculture and food production. Seeds are essential for the composition of a diet that is nutritionally compatible with human needs. For decades peasant farmers and indigenous people from different parts of the world were responsible for the conservation, development and multiplication of seeds. Agroecological transition needs to protect peasant rights to save, use, exchange and sell their own seeds.

Agroecology is deeply linked to food sovereignty, the preservation of agrobiodiversity, the production of healthy food and the political empowerment of peasant organizations. The creation of cooperatives and local markets closes the cycle of agroecology by initiating fairer commercialization processes³¹.

ECVC emphasizes the need to point out the opposite perspectives regarding the use of new and high technology versus the concept of food sovereignty. The European Institutions are one of the main actors in proposing high technology and digitalization as a solution to the crises that the world faces today. Within the EU Green Deal and its F2F-Strategy it is stated that *“in this strategy, the 2030 targets for sustainable food production are challenging and ambitious for the agricultural sector, in which digital is a key to success.”* In this context can be seen legislative proposals involving gene editing which is widely hailed in as the “future” of genetic engineering including manipulation of livestock, crop plants and parts of the agroecosystem. Scaling up of genetic interventions, such as gene-silencing pesticides, synthetic nucleotides, new genomic techniques and their regulation, lab grown proteins, but also new carbon farming initiative³².

In this sense it is crucial to show that peasant agroecology is the true “carbon farming”, and that peasant seed systems are potentially better suited to adapt to climate change instead of investing and promoting on technofixes such as lab grown proteins. A genuine transition towards peasant agroecology and food sovereignty should be implemented by promoting small and medium-scale farming, peasants' rights and market regulation³³.

It also needs to be stressed, that through the combination of different crops, peasant agroecological production systems often produce higher yields than monocultures, even without the use of synthetical fertilizers or pesticides³⁴.

2.2 Positive impacts of agroecology for peasant farmers and local communities

Firstly, agroecology creates identity and adoption of culture. It brings together (local) knowledge of technologies and practices as a viable answer to produce healthy, abundant and diversified food. It allows local people to be the protagonists in developing and implementing production measures and empowers women to organize themselves for example within cooperatives.

Secondly, it represents a political defense of rights and practices for family and peasant farming. The different movements embody a tireless fight for the right to public policies for family farmers, so that the state provides the minimum conditions (credit, technical assistance, investments, institutional markets for the commercialization of food). This political defense represents an action of profound impact, in the many diverse regions of a country, at national and local level.

³¹ Interview with Jhony Luchman, CAPA, Brazil; Coletivo da Assesoar — Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural, Paraná, Brazil; Alejandro Aguirre Batres, Coordinación de ONG y cooperativas (CONGCOOP), Guatemala

³² In carbon farming, measures are taken to bind carbon in the soil in the long term by building up humus.

³³ Olcay Bingol and Ivan Mammana, European Coordination Via Campesina, Belgium

³⁴ <https://www.fian.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Artikel20Final20KASIS20Recktenwald.pdf>

Thirdly, agroecological practices defend territories and natural resources, promote the use of indigenous seeds as well as a diversity of cultivated plants contributing to biodiversity. The adoption of agroecological practices often results in lower production costs, by using fewer external inputs and contributes to the autonomy of small-scale farmers.

Another impact is, that agroecology promotes local markets and short commercialization circuits, establishing a direct connection between the farming family and the consumer family. This represents a reduction in costs and of the environmental footprint, aggregation of value (economic and social) and generation of income.

Finally, by incorporating a series of sustainable practices, agroecology is a more resilient model to fight climate change and an alternative for the mitigation of its effects³⁵.

III. Status quo of agroecology and future development

Worldwide there is an increasing interest in searching for more sustainable ways to produce food. Political initiatives for agroecology can be found in several countries — in Latin America (including Brazil), in Europe (including France), in Africa (Senegal and Mali) and in India. The Covid-19 crisis and the Russian war in Ukraine boost the demand for input-reduced alternatives in some countries.

Since 2018, the concept of agroecology became more and more international and gained institutional recognition, especially pushed by the FAO's *Scaling Up Agroecology* to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. According to Emile Frison, Coordinator of the Coalition for Agroecology, various on-going initiatives and policies attest to the potential of agroecological approaches to respond to the multiple challenges food systems are facing. The coalition was a result of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2022. Germany joined in July 2023. Their declaration refers to the 13 principles from the FAO's HLPE³⁶. Emile Frison underpins that agroecology has a clear advantage compared to other approaches, since it is internationally agreed upon. In addition, compared to other innovative approaches like climate smart agriculture or nutrition dense agriculture, agroecology has more advantages, because it addresses all aspects of food systems (health, environment, consumption) and contributes to a transformation of the whole system. Climate smart agriculture for instance only focuses on agricultural practices³⁷.

Sarah Schneider from Misereor also highlights the favorable impact of the FAO process, leading to a recognition of the concept of agroecology and engagement by the German Ministry of Development Cooperation as well as the Ministry of Agriculture. In Germany, the joint development of the position paper *Strengthening Agroecology* published by 59 organizations was important to get diverse actors on board and to clarify the overall understanding of agroecology. Many actors from civil society and the food system since then developed ownership of the issue³⁸.

Despite this worldwide recognition, the focus still remains on the Global South, where agroecology is already practiced for some decades. Many initiatives implementing agroecology underpin the potential of building local and resilient food systems, contributing to food sovereignty. Case studies from around the world demonstrate agroecology's capacity to provide “*immense economic, social, and food security benefits while ensuring climate justice and restoring soils and the environment*”³⁹. Several studies show that it is possible for communities, regions, and whole countries to redesign their food and farming systems. One main basis for transition was found in the willingness to question the assumptions of industrial agriculture.

³⁵ Interview with Jhony Luchman, CAPA, Brazil; Coletivo da Assesoar — Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural, Paraná, Brazil; Alejandro Aguirre Batres, Coordinación de ONG y cooperativas (CONGCOOP), Guatemala

³⁶ <https://agroecology-coalition.org/>

³⁷ Interview with Emile Frison, Coordinator of Coalition for Agroecology

³⁸ Interview with Sarah Schneider, Misereor

³⁹ <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/agroecology-case-studies>

Although the positive impacts of agroecology are globally spreading and numerous examples worldwide prove the importance for food security, there is a clear lack of finance. According to a publication from CIDSE, almost 80 % of funding provided by the EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) went to projects that are not supportive of agroecology and only 2.7 % went to projects partially supportive of agroecology. Within the Green Climate Fund, the world's largest fund mandated to support developing countries to reduce their GHG emissions and enhance their ability to respond to climate change, only 10.6 % funds agroecology projects⁴⁰.

An analysis conducted by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) showed that from the beginning of 2014 to September 2018, less than 10 % of the agricultural funding commitments went to agroecology-relevant projects⁴¹. The main part had a focus on individual agroecological practices, concentrate on increasing resource efficiency or substituting harmful inputs and practices, without needed pursuing complex systemic approaches. Agroecological approaches that also focus on a changed relationship between producers and consumers in the sense of a transformation of food systems have so far only been promoted in very few cases. Subsequently the Ministry engaged in strengthening agroecological commitments and in 2019 initiated regional ecological knowledge centers in East, West and Southern Africa to disseminate knowledge about organic agriculture and strengthen agroecological networks.

3.1 Experiences from the agroecological movement in southern Brazil

In the Global South, social and political issues are the main drivers of the development of agroecology with strong engagement of peasants, indigenous people, and social movements. In Paraná, in Southern Brazil, where the largest settlement of agrarian reform in Latin America is located, a strong agroecological movement emerged in the context of the agrarian reform of the 1990s. There, former landless people resisted to the return of agricultural practices that rely on pesticides and chemical fertilizers which made them dependent in the past.

Mainly supported by the MST, the agroecological movement grew strong and achieved, even during the years of political struggles induced by the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, positive developments enhancing food sovereignty for the people within the region.⁴²

This positive implementation of agroecology was mainly achieved through a collective action involving different actors and organizations, creating farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, farmer field schools, and farmer-led participatory research projects.

Social ties, organizational capacity and especially the role of women were strengthened through the process and are in turn empowering the agroecological transformation.

The development in Brazil is exemplary for real transition, including the implementation of policies promoting agroecological practices, especially the *Política Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica* (PNAPO, National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production PNAPO) established in 2012. PNAPO recognizes the need for food systems to connect production, processing, marketing and consumption while ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, circular economy and social justice. This policy was developed through intense civil society dialogue and helped advance the agroecological agenda in the country. All relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders were involved in creating critical spaces for participatory planning, implementation, and monitoring, leading to interdisciplinarity in policymaking.

3.2 Agroecology developing in Guatemala

In Guatemala as well, the political dimension of agroecology is increasing, since agroecological practices are more and more recognized as an alternative agricultural model to implement the right to food. Unlike in Brazil, the term

⁴⁰ <https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CIDSE-Agroecology-and-Finance-Briefing-Sept-2020-1.pdf>

⁴¹ https://www.agrarkoordination.de/fileadmin/dateiupload/PDF-Dateien/Positionspapiere/Agrarökologie2020_Bilanzpapier.pdf

⁴² <https://agrarkoordination.pageflow.io/land-ist-unser-leben#243386>

“agroecology” may not be overall known within the communities, but agroecological practices have been used for generations.

According to Alejandro Aguirre Batres from CONGCOOP, science has created this term as a reference to provide a more technical and scientific description, mainly coming from western cultures. In the Q’eqchi’ Maya community it remains connected to the environment and coexistence with Mother Earth. The Mayans believe that humans are a part of Mother Earth and should not change the ecosystem in which they live. According to their belief, all living beings within an environment are connected spiritually. Ancestral agricultural practices are of great importance. Today, they have become a means to survive, to resist, to preserve culture, ethnicity, seeds, and other elements of the cosmovision. In the view of indigenous people, agriculture is related to spirituality, a bond like mother and child, and involves knowledge, ancestral traditions and communication that is necessary for the human being and Mother Earth. For the growth of all living beings, other elements such as water, sunlight, air, soil and other factors are necessary.

At present, civil society and farmers organizations in Guatemala are working to strengthen agroecological activities in the communities. Just as in Brazil, there is an urgent need here to address the constant threat posed by agri-food systems. So far, the government of Guatemala shows no efforts of supporting agroecology, on the contrary, governmental institutions further promote the genetic modification programs of some seed varieties. According to CONGCOOP, it is worrying that maize seeds, which are a staple food for the inhabitants of the country, are already being modified and called “improved” with the support and funding of large companies, which are carrying out experiments without the consent of the population⁴³.

3.3 Agroecology in Europe

In Europe, too, agroecology is gaining more and more recognition. Agroecology for Europe (AE4EU) gives an overview over different initiatives and developments.⁴⁴ So far, within the EU the concept of agroecology is mainly conceived as a science than as a practice. To a lesser degree, it is also seen as a social movement.

In some countries agroecology has found its way into the legal texts. Other countries may have elements of it in their national policies, but they are not yet clearly defined. Within the *Projet agro-écologique pour la France* (Agroecological Project for France)⁴⁵ which in 2014 became the first law in the world to support agroecology, awareness of agroecology has increased. However, the use of pesticides in conventional agriculture could not be reduced. Altogether, funding was too low to support the implementation of agroecological policies and access to land was identified as a major challenge. Another obstacle has been the definition of the term “agroecology” and the differentiation or relationship to organic farming. France initiated a certification (High Environmental Value, Haute Valeur Environnementale, HVE) for agroecological products, which is below the standards of organic farming, and which was heavily criticized as being insufficient. The label does not include a pesticide phase-out, nor does it ban any particularly hazardous substances.⁴⁶

In Germany, agroecological initiatives have emerged in recent years, including food councils, community supported agriculture, community gardens and food cooperatives. Although these do not explicitly define themselves as “working agroecologically,” the concept of agroecology with its elements and principles is gaining more recognition. Nevertheless, a coherent understanding of agroecology is missing so far. As in France, concerns exist within organic farming organizations. On the one hand, agroecology is seen as an extension of organic farming to include socio-ecological criteria, such as issues of social inequality, gender justice and healthy nutrition. On the other hand, a softening of the high, firmly defined standards of organic farming is feared. Established concepts such as solidarity farming and direct marketing often already have organic certifications.

⁴³ Interview with Alejandro Aguirre Batres, CONGCOOP, Guatemala

⁴⁴ <https://www.ae4eu.eu/agroecology-in-europe/mapping/>

⁴⁵ <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/1604-aec-aeenfrance-dep-gb-bd1.pdf>

⁴⁶ Interview with Tamara Gripp, Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany

So far, there is no clear commitment of the German government to agroecology. The focus of supporting transitions to sustainable farming and food systems is on organic farming and the term agroecology is used much less in the existing strategies and schemes that promote sustainable farming. Political efforts by the German government have been limited mainly to political engagement for development cooperation as a contribution to global food security. In addition, German Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focus their lobbying on the international debate and the promotion of agroecology with funds from the BMZ. Shortly before the publication of this report, a review paper entitled "Trend reversal for agroecology in sight?" on the commitment of the current German government and respective national political demands was published and supported by 43 organizations. A recently established roundtable on agroecology and organic farming with civil society, development cooperation organizations and organic associations may develop and enhance the communication on agroecological principles.

Currently, the German government targets the promotion of agroecological approaches and supporting smallholder agriculture for food security as focal points of future development cooperation. However, civil society organizations worry about the current trend within the Ministry of Development and Cooperation to engage in multilateral approaches like the Global Alliance for Food Security, which does not reach small-scale farmers. They strongly demand backing the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and applying the CFS principles of inclusiveness.⁴⁷

What can be seen as positive is the more progressive development regarding the international promotion of agroecology within the German Ministry for agriculture, which specifically addresses agroecology and backs the CFS. For example, agroecology was integrated into Department 6 "EU Affairs, International Cooperation, Fisheries" and country dialogs were initiated, e.g. with Brazil.

Overall, experiences in implementing agroecology, especially within the Global South, reveal the need for a real change within the political framework. Since peasant agroecology entails a comprehensive view, political measures must ensure that peasant rights and access to seeds, land, water and to the commons are protected.

IV. International legal instruments to promote agroecology

The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* (UNDROP) is the main international legal text referred to in policies aiming to promote agroecology. UNDROP is closely linked to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and complements the existing human rights framework concerning land.

UNDROP was adopted in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly and protects a wide range of small-scale food producers. Right holders are protected both individually and collectively. This is important for agroecology since it implies the protection of collective management of natural resources, decision-making processes, and participation. The right to land and other natural resources are defined in Article 17 as following: "*the right to have access to, sustainably use and manage land and the water bodies, coastal seas, fisheries, pastures and forests therein, to achieve an adequate standard of living, to have a place to live in security, peace and dignity and to develop their cultures*"⁴⁸.

UNDROP provides a human rights framework for a transition to agroecology and supports the relationship between agroecology, the right to food, international environmental law and international human rights law.

⁴⁷ Interview with Lena Bassermann, TMG Research

⁴⁸ [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694#record-files-collapse-header: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas : resolution / adopted by the Human Rights Council on 28 September 2018](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694#record-files-collapse-header:United+Nations+Declaration+on+the+Rights+of+Peasants+and+Other+People+Working+in+Rural+Areas%3A+resolution+%2F+adopted+by+the+Human+Rights+Council+on+28+September+2018)

Peasant rights are the basis of agroecology and UNDROP keeps peasants, rural workers and communities at the center of every policy and law.

Overall, the implementation of UNDROP is the basis for agroecology, since it will contribute to the preservation of agrobiodiversity, preserving soil health and contributing to rural development and employment. As stated in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (in effect since 2004): “*The Contracting Parties recognize [sic!] the enormous contribution that the local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world, particularly those in the centres [sic!] of origin and crop diversity, have made and will continue to make for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources which constitute the basis of food and agriculture production throughout the world*”⁴⁹.

Some of the rights comprised in UNDROP essential for agroecology are the right to land, seeds, biodiversity, water for irrigation, the right to have access to and to sustainable use natural resources, the right to the conservation and protection of the environment, the right to adequate training suited to the specific agroecological environment and the right to food sovereignty.⁵⁰ Adopting these rights would enable the agroecological transformation of the food system and in turn, implementing agroecology would enhance the realization of the referred to rights. The right to land referenced in UNDROP refers to freedoms and entitlements, including the right to be free from forced evictions and displacements, which is often linked to monocropping extension and land-grabbing. UNDROP addresses states’ obligations to take measures of any kind against violating the right to land. Furthermore, states should stimulate sustainable production, including agroecological and organic production, whenever possible.⁵¹

Fulfilling the right to adequate food and the right to food sovereignty includes the state’s obligation to assure that peasants and other rural communities are involved in decision-making processes on food and agriculture policy, as well as to comply with the right to healthy and adequate food produced through ecological sound and sustainable methods that respect the cultures of the peasants and rural communities.⁵² Implementing UNDROP in addition means to guarantee the participation of peasants’ organizations while designing environmental standards that may affect them.⁵³ With this, UNDROP really strengthens the participation of peasants and communities in framework setting political processes, which can contribute to the development and strengthening of agroecological movements.

UNDROP is the first UN legal instrument in which agroecology is recognized. Agroecology relates to several principles named within international environmental law as a way to protect the environment and mitigate climate change as well as in the international human rights framework. Some principles to be named are: healthy environment, sustainable development, intergenerational equity, no transboundary harm, precautionary principle, participation in government decision-making, international cooperation.

Agroecology can contribute to the realization of the right to food and nutrition, achieving the necessary five dimensions: availability, accessibility, adequacy, sustainability and participation. Already in 2011 UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, urged states to encourage the transition to agroecology.

As highlighted in the *Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology in Nyéléni*, territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology, meaning that peoples and communities must have rights to access and control their lands, seeds, water and other natural resources they need to produce food, individually and collectively. The *Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests* adopted by the CFS in 2012 incorporate these important issues.

Although UNDROP is not legally binding, some parts have been incorporated into customary international law and international treaties and therefore impact the decisions of policy makers and judicial decisions relevant to

⁴⁹ <https://www.fao.org/3/i0510e/i0510e.pdf>

⁵⁰ https://www.fian.org/files/files/Agroecology_in_UNDROP.pdf

⁵¹ Article 16, UNDROP.

⁵² Article 14, UNDROP.

⁵³ Article 10, UNDROP.

agroecology. Within the EU only Luxemburg and Portugal adopted UNDROP so far. The EU must ensure that food and agricultural policies are in line with UNDROP to avoid any discrimination and really promote peasant agroecology.

V. Political measures to support agroecology

In order to develop the potential of agroecology according to the described elements and principles, a real change within the setting of the political framework is needed. For many years countries in the Global South were being kept dependent on food imports. This is apparent by the high food prices induced by the Russian war on Ukraine. But even before this crisis, food systems were under pressure, because of their focus on cultivation for export and neglect of domestic food production. **One main goal must be to foster local food systems and to reduce dependencies on food imports as well as on fossil fuels used for pesticide and fertilizer production.**

Small and medium-scale peasant farming is proven to be more resilient than most industrialized models, yet small and medium-scale farmers are subjected to political, social and economic conditions in which they simply cannot survive. Developments in Guatemala and Brazil show that peasant farmers are exposed to a spreading industrial agriculture that represses their rights and increases environmental damage. Across Europe, peasant and family farms are disappearing at an alarming rate and with them know-how, experience and opportunities to produce food sustainably.

Political measures and programs are needed that support small scale farmers and indigenous communities to build local, healthy and resilient food systems. This includes incentives to prevent people fleeing the countryside, to strengthen the role of women and to ensure their rights on land, water and seeds. The World Future Council together with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) put together a detailed list with policy measures that support or hinder the development of sustainable food systems, agroecology, and organic farming⁵⁴.

Brazil has already had some public policies that have strengthened and encouraged agroecological families. The main policy that strengthened indigenous families and communities was the *Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* (Food Purchase Program, PAA). The main aim of the program was to reduce hunger in the country. The logic of acquiring food from family farms and indigenous people and donating it to institutions and needy families established a dynamic of buying from economically vulnerable families and donating it to families in a situation of food insecurity. This policy needs to be taken up again in order to fight hunger and promote social development. Another policy supporting small-scale farmers is the *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* (National School Meals Program, PNAE). Currently, 30 % of school meals in public schools must come from family farming, preferably organic. Those programs can serve as good examples and encourage policy makers to build upon these experiences.

According to Jhony Luchman, coordinator of *Centro de Apoio ao Pequeno Agricultor* (Support Centre for Smallholders, CAPA) in Southern Brazil, specific credit and subsidy policies for families that are legally certified as organic may be very important for providing conditions for broad agroecological transition processes. In other words, families need this security and incentive to start this transition. Programs must be introduced to develop machinery and equipment compatible with the practices and management used by agroecology, with the objective of facilitating production and reducing the laboriousness of manual labor⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ World Future Council and IFOAM-Organics International, 2022, Interview questionnaire for sustainable food system stakeholders

⁵⁵ Interview with Jhony Luchmann, Centro de Apoio ao Pequeno Agricultor (CAPA), Brazil

There is also a need for government investment in rural infrastructure, more and socially appropriate agricultural extension, support for the processing and marketing of regionally and cooperatively produced products and the provision of credit to special groups such as rural women, rural youth, and organic farmers⁵⁶.

Since access to seeds and land are fundamental to foster food sovereignty and agroecology, programs are needed to promote agrobiodiversity, establish seed banks, and keep a legal basis for seed exchange and use, as well as to protect peasants against any land grabbing and selling out the land to industry⁵⁷.

Besides this national support, the European Union must be persuaded to abandon their export-oriented food production and to engage in an agroecological transformation, supporting family farming, reducing dependencies and create short supply chains. This would require, among other things, **a socially just and ecological EU agricultural reform based on the promotion of small farms, protecting biodiversity and saving the climate**. Implementing the necessary structures could have a role model function. Creating decentralized structures requires a fundamental shift in subsidies and market systems that favor fair production prices.

Experiences from Brazil and Guatemala show the necessity to challenge the industrial food system in order to pave the way for building local and territorial markets for agroecology. Implementing agroecology means bringing together different actors and organizations, creating farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, farmer field schools, and farmer-led participatory research projects. European policies must recognize the need for food systems to connect production, processing, marketing and consumption while ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, circular economy and social justice.

Overall, harmful subsidies that prohibit food sovereignty must be stopped. This includes **a clear rejection of any free trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur**, in the form in which it has been envisaged so far. The agreement in its current form is perpetuating and deepening the unjust, environmentally and climate-damaging trade relations with Latin America⁵⁸.

It also requires **a conversion in animal husbandry, with fewer animals kept**. This will decrease the damaging animal feed imports, mainly soy from Latin America, and help to reduce the pressure on arable land in the cultivating countries. The EU still imports up to 22 million tons of soy-based animal feed every year, including from South American countries, where deforestation, pesticide poisoning, and rights abuses are rampant⁵⁹.

Also, within the EU, concentration of land is a big problem that requires political action. Still 60 % of the cultivation area is used for animal feed production.⁶⁰ Sustainable and fair food systems need a shift in production and more cultivated land must be used for food production. Studies show that changing agricultural production and consumption habits towards nature-friendly agriculture and a more plant-based diet go hand in hand with climate and nature protection as well as food security. **Less meat, and instead more plant-based food, significantly reduces the amount of land required – both in Germany and abroad**. Thus, measures for nature conservation and climate protection can be implemented without putting food security at risk⁶¹.

Nevertheless, the agricultural industry campaigns strongly stick to the narrative of increasing food production within the EU in order to be able to feed the world. Nature conservation and climate protection were temporarily suspended and justified with food production shortage and food insecurity as a result of the Russian war.

In addition, there are attempts by the food industry to hinder the strategies within the EU Green Deal for food system transformation. A study carried out by Wageningen University and research commissioned by CropLife Europe released at the end of January 2022 concludes that the implementation of the F2F and Biodiversity

⁵⁶ Prof. Antonio Andrioli, Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS), Brazil

⁵⁷ Alejandro Aguirre Batres, CONGCOOP, Guatemala

⁵⁸ Prof. Antonio Andrioli

⁵⁹ https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_ExecSummary_EN.pdf

⁶⁰ https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/bodenatlas2015_iv.pdf

⁶¹ https://www.nabu.de/imperia/md/content/nabude/landwirtschaft/230113-nabu_flaechennutzungsstudie.pdf

strategies would doom the European agri-food sector to “*lower agricultural yields, to price increases, less European exports and more imports of agricultural products from outside Europe.*”⁶²

Agroecology Europe underlines that this study is based on a reductionist analysis of farming and food systems, and as such does not constitute a credible basis for questioning the objectives formulated in the EU F2F and Biodiversity strategies.

The study focuses only on crop production, excluding the potential impacts of the EU strategies on reducing livestock-keeping as well as changes in consumption patterns — two major areas to be transformed to achieve an agroecological transition in Europe⁶³.

In addition, scientific evidence shows that agroecological farming currently generates farm incomes that exceed those from conventional and industrial farms. Restoring soil life and optimizing the productive capacity of agroecosystems through nature-based processes leads to savings on input costs (fertilizers, pesticides) and comes together with less volatile prices and a greater diversity of productions, ensuring more stable yields over time.⁶⁴

According to ECVC, peasant agroecology is deeply related to public policies which need to enhance the role of agroecology to create a sustainable management of production-based resources in the context of climate change to create awareness among different actors in the food system. EU institutions need to implement public policies which can bring about real change and tackle the problems faced by small- and medium-scale farmers. This includes the need to ensure higher prices and income for farmers, the implementation of market regulation, limits to new speculative investments from investment funds and limits on industrial agriculture and livestock farming. To do this, EU institutions must be more ambitious with the measures and tools they are implementing in order to harness the potential of agroecology and meet the goals outlined in the *F2F-Strategy* and Green Deal.

VI. Political processes within the EU

The EU has made explicit commitments to policy coherence, aligning all policies with climate and development goals.⁶⁵ So far, policies are missing coherence in order to end hunger and malnutrition, to protect the environment and mitigate climate change. Contradictions, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies are obvious both within policies (i.e., the *Common Agricultural Policy*, CAP, of the EU) and between the different policies affecting food systems. Several EU trade agreements still call for increasing beef, pork, and dairy exports.

Overall, the *FAO 10 Elements* and *HLPE 13 principles of agroecology* should be used as a framework for designing policy interventions within Europe and globally. Referring to the comprehensive nature of agroecology, a coherent agricultural and food policy must be implemented in order to facilitate political action in all relevant fields, concerning seeds legislation, access to land and water, biodiversity, climate change, health and education.

For some time now, civil society organizations within the EU Food Policy Coalition⁶⁶ have been demanding the establishment of **a common EU food policy** that brings together all relevant policies affecting the production, distribution, and marketing of foods and to address contradictions between them. Building sustainable food systems requires coherence across policy areas as well as across governance levels, governance for transition and food democracy⁶⁷.

⁶² <https://www.wur.nl/en/news-wur/Show/Green-Deal-probably-leads-to-lower-agricultural-yields.htm>

⁶³ <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AEEU-Reaction-on-CropLife-Study-20220221.pdf>

⁶⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0743016718314608?via%3Dihub>

⁶⁵ Sustainable Development Goals, the 2015 Paris Agreement, EU's pledges on Policy Coherence for Development

⁶⁶ <https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/about-us/#ourvision>

⁶⁷ IPES-Food (2019). Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union: The policy reform and realignment that is required to build sustainable food systems in Europe

Recent developments on the EU policy level may pave the way towards more integrated food policies. At this stage, it is necessary to look in detail at which political processes do currently have the potential to have a positive impact on the promotion of agroecology and what needs to be adapted or added.

6.1 The European Green Deal – Towards more sustainable food systems

As part of the European Green Deal the European Commission released the *F2F*⁶⁸ and the *Biodiversity Strategy*⁶⁹ in 2020 for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system. Both strategies aim at guiding the EU towards more sustainable food systems. While the strategies are not binding, they may contain individual targets and legislative proposals that become binding.

The strategies can be contextualized as a policy open to recognizing and acknowledging the need to shift toward healthy and sustainable food systems, as well as the need for a Common Food Policy for Europe. With view on the upcoming parliamentary election in 2024, it will be essential to defend the measures within the European Green Deal and related strategies, since they are coming more and more under attack.

The announced *EU legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems* (FSFS)⁷⁰ is going to be the major legislation of the *F2F Strategy*. It contains common definitions and general principles and requirements for sustainable food systems and should ensure that policy measures are coherently aligned with sustainability and do not hinder each other. Currently, the FSFS process is being severely delayed and some interest groups and political decision-makers are using the geopolitical crisis to weaken the *F2F* strategy. The EU is urged to present the FSFS which was announced as a central component of the Green Deal in a timely manner. This framework law will represent a key political achievement and important legislation to fulfil EU international commitments⁷¹ and the European Green Deal.⁷² For the promotion of agroecology it will be very important that the framework includes a strong international dimension and promotes long term structural changes.

The *Biodiversity Strategy* shares some objectives with the *F2F* (reduction of pesticides, increasing ecological agriculture) and should include a section concerning agricultural production in order to reverse biodiversity loss — including agricultural biodiversity — due to intense agricultural practices, by supporting a transition towards agroecological practices.

6.2 The Farm to Fork Strategy

It can be acknowledged that the *F2F Strategy* presents a food system approach, from primary production to the consumer, recognizing the complexity of food and associated challenges. The included targets on pesticides, fertilizers and organic farming are significant. By 2030, a quarter of the cultivated area has to be managed ecologically, the use of synthetic fertilizer reduced by 20 % and the use of pesticides cut to half.

Nevertheless, the *F2F Strategy* remains embedded in an outdated framework.⁷³ It fails to recognize that issues such as pesticides, excess fertilization, biodiversity loss, labor exploitation, and unhealthy diets are essentially linked to the industrial food system. In order to change the political framework, it is indispensable that the causes of the current crises of the food systems and production models are addressed. This acknowledgement is fundamental for a real transition to agroecological practices, in order to overcome the current system and to adequately support small-scale producers and peasant agriculture. Neglecting this, the *F2F Strategy* will fall short in promoting agroecological practices. The strategy targets to increase agroecological methods but fails to define a systemic approach. **In order to promote agroecology, measures should be taken that go beyond organic farming and also include aspects such as agrobiodiversity and the shortening of long supply chains.**

⁶⁸ https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en

⁶⁹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/policy-documents/eu-biodiversity-strategy-for-2030-1>

⁷⁰ https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/legislative-framework_en

⁷¹ SDGs, the Paris Agreement on Climate and the recently agreed Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

⁷² https://iclei-europe.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Pdfs/sustainable_food_systems_Open_letter_to_von_der_Leyen.pdf

⁷³ <https://foodgovernance.com/eu-farm-to-fork-strategy-collective-response-from-food-sovereignty-scholars/>

Although the F2F Strategy contains a section on the global dimension entitled “*Promoting the Global Transition*”, the impacts of European agriculture and food systems outside Europe are considered only very brief. The strategy does not review international trade relations and does not address increasing market concentrations or the food systems externalities.

Concrete proposals are also needed to realize the right to adequate food, implement the peasants’ rights according to UNDROP, improve the working conditions of farm workers or the income of small-scale farmers within international food supply chains⁷⁴.

A major shortcoming of the F2F Strategy is the predominant promotion of high technology as precision farming and the digital transformation of farms, rather than promoting public policies and agroecology. It is alarming that New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) are seen as a path to improving sustainability along the food supply chain and to reach goals within the F2F as well as the biodiversity Strategy. The EU Commission states that: “*New innovative techniques, including biotechnology and the development of bio-based products, may play a role in increasing sustainability, provided they are safe for consumers and the environment while bringing benefits for society as a whole. They can also accelerate the process of reducing dependency on pesticides. In response to the request of Member States, the Commission is carrying out a study which will look at the potential of new genomic techniques to improve sustainability along the food supply chain*”⁷⁵.

New genetic engineering, including gene-editing, involves the same risks for the environment, biodiversity, farmers, animals and also for food sovereignty as conventional Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). These technologies are in no way compatible with the concept of agroecology and agrobiodiversity that the EU Commission claims to promote and protect. It is crucial to show that this can lead to a further consolidation of power and farm concentration, to the privatization of food systems and accelerating the disappearance of small-scale farmers that are the core of agroecology and a sustainable food systems approach.

In order to strongly campaign against any consolidation of power by the multinational agriculture and food industry the following policies need attention:

- The legislative proposal by the EU Commission to deregulate new genetic engineering methods. According to the EU Commission, in future only GMOs that are transgenic (i.e., in which “foreign” genetic material has been incorporated) should remain regulated under current EU genetic engineering law. With the legislative proposal that was presented in July 2023, there will be no traceability, no labelling obligation and no monitoring of new genetically modified plants. The precautionary principle enshrined in the EU would be cancelled as well as freedom of choice for farmers and consumers⁷⁶.
- Also in July 2023, the EU Commission published a proposal to revise European seed regulation (*EU Seed Marketing Legislation*⁷⁷). Peasants’ rights to save, use, exchange and sell their own seeds have been very much limited since the EU ratified UPOV 91⁷⁸ in 2005 which protects commercial varieties and seed industries⁷⁹. Although a revision of the seed marketing rules is urgently needed to foster the agroecological transition, a deregulation of GMOs and their marketing throughout the EU would have the opposite effect⁸⁰.

⁷⁴ https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Raising-the-ambition-on-global-aspects-of-the-EU-Farm-to-Fork-Strategy_250920.pdf

⁷⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381&from=EN>

⁷⁶ <https://www.abl->

[ev.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/AbL_ev/Gentechnikfrei/Hintergrund/KAB_2023_279_294_Volling_Freibrief_f%C3%BCr_die_neue_Gentechnik_-_widerstand_regt_sich.pdf](https://www.abl-ev.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/AbL_ev/Gentechnikfrei/Hintergrund/KAB_2023_279_294_Volling_Freibrief_f%C3%BCr_die_neue_Gentechnik_-_widerstand_regt_sich.pdf)

⁷⁷ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-european-green-deal/file-revision-of-legislation-on-seeds-plant-and-forest-reproductive-material>

⁷⁸ UPOV stands for Union Internationale pour la Protection des Obtentions Végétales (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants). UPOV 91 is an internationally ratified convention for the protection of new plant varieties.

⁷⁹ https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Publication_Incorporating-Peasants-Rights-to-Seeds-in-European-Law_EN.pdf

⁸⁰ https://www.martin-haeusling.eu/images/EU_reform_of_seeds_marketing_rules_study_digital.pdf

- Linked to the EU Green Deal is also the *Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation* (SUR). As industrial agriculture relies heavily on the use of pesticides, the EU pesticide legislation is a powerful tool to change the agricultural and food system in the EU and foster agroecological practices. In June 2022, the European Commission published a proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides, which has now been rejected by the European Parliament. The rejection of the pesticide regulation makes the targets of the F2F strategy to reduce the use of pesticides in the EU by 50 percent until 2030 unattainable. It will be important to continue to advocate for a strong regulation since there are many attempts by the industry and some EU member states to prevent this much needed regulation⁸¹.

6.3 The central role of the Common Agricultural Policy

The EU's CAP subsidizes agriculture and farmers within the EU and can be seen as the main policy in order to implement the *F2F and Biodiversity Strategy*. Despite the CAP's central role in achieving the EU's climate and environmental goals, it is so far not aligned with both strategies. Looking at the funding period (2023–2027), an adjustment of the National Strategic Plans is urgently necessary, and a new alignment is needed for changing the CAP after 2027.

In the current CAP, 60 % of the budget is still paid per hectare.⁸² Some 3 % of farms now own 52 % of EU farmland, and 20 % of farms receive 80 % of payments under the CAP.⁸³ More responsibility than before was transferred to the member states, which are obliged to establish their National Strategic Plans in order to fulfil the requirements of the Green Deal. Agroecology is listed as one of the primary recommendations within the eco-schemes, linked to the first pillar payments. Eco-schemes offer compensation to farmers that implement practices deemed beneficial for the climate and environment, beyond the requirements already covered by direct payments. Comparing the different National Strategic Plans, it becomes obvious that the implementation is often very incomplete. Although multidimensional eco-schemes are the most likely to deliver environmental benefits, they are only found in five countries⁸⁴.

6.4 The right to food should be a core target of the CAP

The Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Platform for Food Sovereignty has published key areas for reforming the CAP and related policies in order to support small-scale sustainable producers. The CAP must support a model of production and distribution that adheres to the UNDROF. The new CAP must facilitate more sustainable consumption, diets, and lifestyles that, e.g., encourage a level of meat and dairy product consumption that is aligned with sustainable livestock production models. The right to commonly owned knowledge, innovations, and healthy and accessible land and natural resources must be upheld. For example, restoring and preventing further loss of biodiversity, encouraging conservation and active use of genetic biodiversity, halting food and feed imports linked to deforestation. The CAP and other relevant policies must be subject to transparent and open decision-making processes that explicitly seek the participation of farmers, farm workers, pastoralists and other food producers that support agroecology in the development of National Strategic Plans⁸⁵.

ECVC and civil society organizations have called on the European institutions to implement concrete measures and change to sustainable and inclusive production models. In 2022, they presented 13 urgent actions with focus on food sovereignty, global solidarity and guaranteeing the rights of farmers and citizens. Importantly, these demands must not be implemented in a vacuum, but rather taken as a holistic roadmap to systemic change. The

⁸¹ <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AEEU-Position-Paper-SUR-Dec-2022.pdf>

⁸² https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-02/factsheet-newcap-environment-fairness_en_0.pdf

⁸³ https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_ExecSummary_EN.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://www.ae4eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Improving-eco-schemes-in-the-light-of-agroecology-Policy-Brief-Feb-2022-AE4EU.pdf>

⁸⁵ <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Nyeleni-Europe-More-farmers-better-food.pdf>

interdependence and interrelatedness of these demands reflects the interdependences and interrelatedness of the ecosystems, social systems, labor systems and economic systems that are key to feeding the world sustainably.⁸⁶

In line with this, the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food) has published policy proposals in order to leave behind the silo mentality and to create a Common Food Policy⁸⁷.

Currently the CAP is not appropriate to encourage agroecological approaches. It is not enough to replace one practice by another. The budget should be well-directed to facilitate a real transformation of the food system. There are already multiple actors on their way to filling this vision with life. In Germany the “Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft” (Commission on the Future of Agriculture, ZKL) developed recommendations for a future agriculture in a multi-stakeholder process. A groundbreaking step would be to cancel any funding per hectare and instead apply the principle of “public money for public goods.”

There is potential to transform the underlying funding structure of the CAP and effort must be directed to further demand a policy reform and realignment. The German Ministry of Agriculture under Minister Cem Özdemir proclaims to be open for structural changes within the CAP and should be targeted to engage a strong position within the EU policy process. The final communiqué of the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture held in January 2023 sent a promising vision for future food systems and must be the basis for policy decisions⁸⁸.

For any future CAP, the *Principles of Agroecology* should be the reference. More attention must be paid to farm renewal, access to land and extensive livestock farming and agroforestry. Research, innovation, and extension policies must be urgently reoriented towards low-input, diversified agroecological systems. Within the CAP, the EU should promote training in agroecological knowledge and establish mechanisms to train farmers on using more sustainable and resilient practices, fostering farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing as well as prepare advisory services to support farmers in the agroecological transition.

To enable an agroecological transition the EU is called on to develop a Common EU Food Policy to bring together the various sectoral policies that affect food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, and refocusing all actions on the transition to sustainability. The establishment of EU-wide and national food policy councils should be facilitated to strengthen movements that unify diverse food-system actors.

Strengthening the participation in framework-setting political processes:

Shifting to a Common Food Policy can mainly enhance public participation in policymaking processes. By involving a wider range of stakeholders, new powerful alliances can be built which challenge power dynamics and agribusiness lobbies.

In order to strengthen the participation of small-scale farmers and communities in the Global South, it is essential to create community policies involving organizations, associations, farmers and other relevant sectors. Experiences within the agroecological movement in southern Brazil show that building alliances between different actors can positively support agroecological development within communities. The building of cooperatives involving mainly women also lead to their empowerment, which in turn contributed to a further development of agroecology in the region. According to the *Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural* (Association for Rural Studies, Guidance and Assistance, ASSESOAR) collective, it is necessary to listen to the demands and needs of communities and farmers through training processes, dialogues, and spaces for representation and participation, for example within the different thematic councils. This process both supports and puts pressure on the government to create specific programs and policies of interest to civil society.

For a fair and democratic transition to peasant agroecology, training and fostering farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing must be facilitated. ECVC created a platform for facilitating Agroecological Knowledge Exchange around

⁸⁶ <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-11-24-EN-Rationale-to-Manifesto-agricultural-transition.pdf>

⁸⁷ https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/CFP_ExecSummary_EN.pdf

⁸⁸ https://gffa-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GFFA_2023_Final-Comminuque%CC%81_EN_com.pdf

Europe (EAKEN).⁸⁹ This is a network aimed at ensuring peasant-to-peasant exchange on agroecological practices and political knowledge. This network is also mapping agroecological training experiences all over Europe and is connected to the *La Via Campesina* Agroecology school network.

6.5 The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive

As the private sector has a key role to play in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal, the EU Commission is called on to provide a strong *Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive* (CSDDD).

On 23 February 2022, the EU Commission adopted a proposal that aims at fostering sustainable and responsible corporate behavior throughout global value chains. Companies will be required to avoid adverse impacts of their operations on human rights, such as child labor and exploitation of workers, and on the environment, for example pollution and biodiversity loss. The proposed directive was approved by the EU Parliament in June 2023, and the final details of the EU supply chain law are now being negotiated in the triologue between EU Commission, Council and Parliament.

The due diligence directive can be seen as an important step in order to protect human rights and the environment and is therefore appropriate and fundamental for promoting agroecology within the EU and the global south. Nevertheless, as already established within other agricultural and food policies, in order to really implement agroecology, it is vital to acknowledge the threats imposed by the current agri-business and counterbalance power dynamics.

It is positive to note that agriculture is defined within the directive as a high impact sector and therefore related companies (Group 2: 250+ employees and more than €40 million of turnover) have a corporate due diligence duty to identify, bring to an end, prevent, mitigate and account for negative human rights and environmental impacts in their own operations, subsidiaries and value chains. Unfortunately, small and medium size enterprises are not included within the directive, which means 99 % of EU companies are exempt. In addition, the due diligence obligation should include a meaningful and ongoing engagement, including mandatory and proactive consultation with workers, trade unions, local community members and other relevant or affected stakeholders.

Since land is considered as a globalized financial asset as well as an object of speculation, the financial sector is highly important to prevent against land grabbing. Knowing this, it is incomprehensible that the directive fails to define the financial sector as a high-impact sector too. The *Initiative Lieferkettengesetz* (German civil society coalition for a supply chain act) highlights the main shortcomings of the directive⁹⁰.

Nevertheless, the CSDDD can be a tool to increase awareness for agroecology and enforce responsibility within the industry, to protect the environmental basis and strengthen social justice together with the EU Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains⁹¹.

⁸⁹ <https://www.eaken.eurovia.org/eaken/>

⁹⁰ https://lieferkettengesetz.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CSO_statement_CSDDD_EN.pdf

⁹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/ip_22_7444

VII. Conclusions and policy demands

Embracing the transition to agroecology means that European policies must decrease the global environmental and social footprint of the European agriculture and food systems through ambitious legislative measures that reduce the demand for agro-commodities (such as soy, palm oil, inter alia) and biomass linked to deforestation, ecosystem degradation and human rights violations in all over the world.

Public policies, particularly the F2F and CAP should challenge the current model and nurture diverse and decentralized forms of agroecology-based food production. This will guarantee access to quality food, the survival of European farms, fair income for farmers, and protect agricultural workers.

In order to pave the way for a transition to agroecology, policy coherence is fundamental as addressed within the EU Green New Deal. The *FAO Ten Elements of Agroecology*, and the consolidated *13 agroecological principles* from the FAO Committee on Food Security HLPE frame the vision for what needs to be taken into account in all relevant policies to support agroecology, whether at international, European, national, regional or local levels. Agroecology is deeply linked to peasant rights, the right to food and food sovereignty. All EU policies related to agriculture and food systems must rely hereupon.

POLICY DEMANDS TO THE EU:

- Overall, the EU must ensure that **food and agricultural policies** are in line with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* (UNDROP) as well as the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) to avoid discrimination and prevent the violation of human, economic and social rights of small-scale farmers, agricultural and migrant workers and Indigenous Peoples. **Essential for agroecology are the right to land, seeds, biodiversity, and the right to food sovereignty.**
- The **EU development policy** should be reorientated towards agroecology in order to **build sustainable food systems in non-EU countries** and increase the budgeted amounts. This implies to **gradually stop the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides** in their projects. Initiatives should be led by and focused on smallholder woman farmers and small-scale food producers in particular.
- The EU is urged to protect the **peasants' rights to save, use, exchange and sell their own seeds** and **reform intellectual property laws on seeds** to protect farmers' and indigenous rights, to ban the patenting of seeds and to enforce the right to farm-saved seed globally.
- The **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) national strategic plans** should reflect the **goals of the Green Deal** and contribute to reaching the **targets of the F2F strategy**. Improvement of food systems and the *legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems* (FSFS) law must be addressed in accordance with the CAP and other trade laws. Therefore, the **CAP should set clear and rigorous objectives holding member states accountable to properly address current environmental and societal challenges, including negative impacts beyond Europe's borders.** CAP and the FSFS must ensure support towards a fair agroecological transition.
- The EU is urged to present the announced *legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems* (FSFS) as a central component of the Green Deal in a timely manner. The FSFS constitutes an important opportunity to call for a **coherent, fair and accountable EU Food Policy** to bring together the various sectoral policies that affect food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, and refocusing all actions on the transition to sustainability. The EU must start by establishing EU-wide, national and local **food policy councils** to strengthen the reterritorialization of food systems involving the entire food chain and ensuring a fair governance.
- Fulfilling the F2F strategy, EU policies need to support building of **local and territorial markets for agroecology**, designing **infrastructure** — including slaughterhouses, and other food processing infrastructures — marketing strategies and importantly public procurement that connects smallholder markets. **All strategies and infrastructures should give priority to and need to take into consideration the needs of women farmers.**
- In addition, the EU should produce a **dedicated action plan towards ensuring fresh, local and healthy food is made available to all citizens**, with particular attention being paid to the rights of socially or economically disadvantaged vulnerable citizens. Member states should pay specific attention to the

transformation of food systems to **promote healthy diets that are sustainably produced, have low environmental impacts and are socio-culturally acceptable and economically accessible for all.**

- The CAP and other relevant policies must be subject to **transparent and open decision-making processes** that explicitly seek the **participation of farmers, agricultural workers, fisher people, pastoralists and other food producers** that support agroecology. An **adequate system of governance** must be applied to diverse and different level food systems, promoting genuine food democracy and food justice.
- As part of the effort to fulfil the objectives of the CAP, the EU should promote and support **training in agroecological knowledge** and establish mechanisms to train farmers on using more sustainable and resilient practices, fostering farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, intergenerational, and experiential learning processes adapted to local conditions as well as prepare advisory services to support farmers within the agroecological transition.
- **EU internal market regulations, investment treaties and trade agreements** must be reviewed to adapt them to the current climate crisis and make sure they do not harm local food producers but rather guarantee their products are bought at a fair price that enables them to make a living. Trade regulations must strengthen **short supply chains that retain value for farmers and farm workers** in both Europe and in non-European countries in order to be conducive to **transition towards agroecological food systems.**
- Through reshaping its trade regulations, the EU should also adopt a **land directive** to implement **fair, democratic and sustainable land policies** and combat the economic, ecological and climate crises. This would enable the numerous new agroecological farmers to access land on their territory.
- The rejection of the pesticide regulation by the European Parliament makes the F2F strategy targets of reducing the use of pesticides in the EU by 50 per cent until 2030 unattainable. We call on the EU to adopt a strong ***EU Regulation for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides*** and to **phase out the routine use of chemical inputs including chemical fertilizers.** Realistically, phasing out such products is only possible via a **solid transition plan** elaborated together with farmers. This must include **area-based animal farming** ensuring herds are not exceeding the carrying capacity of land in terms of fodders and ensuring it can provide natural fertilizer to other farms without animal farming.
- The EU should **shift away from biotechnology** as a measure to increase sustainability and exclude it from the F2F strategy. The proposal put forward by the EU Commission to deregulate new genetic engineering processes must also be rejected. The cultivation of genetically modified, patent-protected crops drives farmers into dependency of large genetic engineering companies to whom they have to pay licence fees. **Genetic engineering must continue to be thoroughly regulated in accordance with the EU Genetic Engineering Act and in line with the precautionary principle.** The relation between these technologies and the interests and control by corporations should be assessed.
- The EU should develop **strong legislation** to ensure products traded on the EU market such as soy, palm oil, rubber, maize, beef, leather, coffee and cocoa are **free from deforestation and human rights violations.** Companies must exercise due diligence such as risk assessment and ensure ongoing obligations of monitoring and duty of vigilance. Therefore, a strong ***EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive*** and ***EU Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains*** must be implemented and defended against any dilution by the industry.
- The EU should ensure that international panels discussing food and agriculture take up the **UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) policy decisions and recommendations** (*CFS policy recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches*) and apply the *CFS principles of inclusiveness.*
- Policy measures and initiatives implementing agroecology already prove the **potential of building local and resilient food systems,** contributing to **food sovereignty.** Best practices can be found in the Global South, where agroecology has a long tradition. When formulating policies to implement agroecology, the EU should conduct **stakeholder consultations with practitioners and scientists from the Global South** in order to draw on existing knowledge and experiences.
- In order to ensure equitable water sharing and encourage water-efficient agricultural practices, the EU must set up an **assessment of best practice in water management** in Europe as soon as possible, followed by a **democratic definition of priorities for water use and allocation.** All stakeholders who use water should be involved, but care should be taken that the common interest prevails over private interest and profit. The EU must act to stop the capture of water by the most powerful actors. Crops and agricultural practices that require less water and those that are essential for a healthy diet, such as fruit and vegetables, should be encouraged.

CAP REFORM IN 2027

For the future CAP the principles of agroecology should represent the binding reference.

- According to its objective of ensuring the sustainability of agriculture in the EU, the future CAP reform should **dedicate its whole budget for the preservation of environmental services, mitigation of climate change and building socially and globally just agricultural food systems** applying the principle “public money for public goods.”
- **Agricultural subsidies** must be better distributed to benefit small and medium-sized farms and to encourage **more sustainable agricultural practices**. To do so the following measures should be established:
 - **Capping annual direct payments** at €60.000 per beneficiary **until the system of untargeted area-based payments is completely changed**, with compulsory redistribution of subsidies for smaller producers.
 - Giving **targeted support for young farmers and new entrants engaging in small-scale agroecology**, including a monthly allowance to allow progress towards a decent income.
 - Providing **incentives for sustainable livestock models and local sustainable feed production**, whilst avoiding simply transplanting industrial soybean production into Europe.
- Introducing a **direct payment measure for producers primarily supplying the European market**.
- A more targeted approach of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and **mandatory funding for urban-rural cooperation to develop short supply chains**. This includes the provision of funding for the infrastructure required to develop short supply chains, such as local storage, processing, and marketing facilities.
- Creating a tenth overall CAP objective on encouraging the **development of sustainable family farming in countries of the Global South**, and at the very least avoiding harm to local producers, as put forward by the Committee of the Regions.
- **Orienting farm advisory services towards a small-scale agroecological transition**, which would include farmer-to-farmer exchange programs. Supporting research and innovation that is embedded within agroecological and food sovereign systems and builds upon the many low-tech grassroots innovations already in existence.
- Ensuring that **CAP funds from Pillar 2 are not diverted to private insurance firms** under risk management measures by creating a **clear active farmer definition** that includes small-scale producers and excludes speculative investors and prevents the financialization of arable land.
- Implementing **import protection measures** to ensure that environmental and health standards match those adhered to by EU producers. **Prioritizing market regulations such as flexible supply management to prevent and address crises**, ensure decent prices, and stabilize income for small and medium-scale producers.
- Put in place a **strategy for a transition away from large-scale animal husbandry** and territorial plans to balance the number of livestock herds with the available land and needs for fodder. The EU should aim to limit how many animals livestock farmers can rear in order to benefit from subsidies. Fodder should ultimately be produced locally and pasture grazing should be favored.

VIII. List of interviews

Laureci Coradace Leal, Director of Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), Paraná, Brazil

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Sarah Schneider, Bischöfliches Hilfswerk MISEREOR, Germany

Ingrid Fritsche, World Future Council, Germany

Emile Frison, Coordinator of Agroecology Coalition

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