



# THE NOTES OF SUD

## Public Policies to Support the Agroecological Transition

Promoting and supporting peasant-based agroecology involves making public policies consistent. Models that harm agroecology cannot be supported at the same time.

Agroecology is a model that fits in with the territory where it is practiced. It is developed according to the environment and the knowledge of the local populations, and this dependence on its environment calls for holistic reflection.

**A**gro-industrial systems have reached their limits. They are responsible for one-third of greenhouse gases<sup>1</sup> and lead to significant environmental degradation (water and soil pollution, collapse of biodiversity) and serious health consequences that include a social disaster causing the marginalization of huge swathes of the population. Above all, they are unsuccessful in feeding humanity properly: 821 million people worldwide suffered from hunger in 2017, a tragic situation once again on the upswing.

Meanwhile, obesity is continuing to grow, affecting 13.2% of adults worldwide in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Faced with the failure of the agro-industrial model, a transition to agroecology would help overcome the various aforementioned limits by overhauling food systems to achieve a sustainable model that can feed people. This view is becoming increasingly shared, both locally (in particular by peasant organizations) and in the policies of some governments, and it is surfacing in international bodies such as the FAO.

Coordination SUD proposes a set of recommendations for supporting the agroecological transition.

While there's no single solution, the recommendations below outline various and often complementary approaches that can respond to the key issues of the transition and that will have to be adapted to national and territorial contexts. >>>



© Elodie Perrot/SCCF

1. Emile Frison, *De l'uniformité à la diversité*, IPES-Food, June 2016

2. FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture*, 2018.

## 1 DIRECT FINANCING TOWARD THE AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION AND PEASANT-BASED AGROECOLOGY

Transforming food systems involves starting up a change in model. Public and private financing allocated to agriculture must be redirected to support for peasant-based agroecology.

Public policies must promote the acquisition of other means of production such as agricultural equipment and organic fertilizers, which are crucial levers for the agroecological transition. Moreover, subsidies for pesticides distort prices and do not give incentive to the transition.

## 2 TRANSFORM GOVERNANCE

The development of agroecology is eminently linked to political and democratic transformation, especially at the local level. The agroecological transition is inseparable from respecting people's rights, strengthening their power to act, and enhancing their knowledge.

### Promote the approach through rights

Access to water, land, and seeds is one of the undeniable prerequisites for agroecology. Such access is essential for achieving the right to food<sup>3</sup> and must be governed according to an approach through rights. Peasant seeds must circulate freely among peasants, without being privatized or patented. Because agroecology is based on the conservation and development of diversity, seeds must be excluded from trade agreements. Exchange and sharing of seeds must be promoted by seed banks and seed fairs.

Recognizing the right to land is also necessary. This can involve different approaches depending on national legislative contexts, local customary rights, and past and present agrarian reforms. It's essential to be able to obtain land deeds and land tenure, without gender discrimination, in order to improve land sustainably and reach production of sufficient quantity and quality.

While the right to land is a prerequisite for the development of agroecology, integrating it into public policies can imply redistributive agrarian reforms. Clarification of private property deeds according to the Western notion is a possible solution, but a certain number of particular aspects must be taken into account. While the current dominant framework admittedly makes it possible to clarify individual or—more rarely—collective rights to land, this approach also encourages investments: those with the means buy, and those lacking funds sell. Sometimes it's better to look at customary and collective practices and systems, some categories of which allow for indivisible or non-transferable plots, without needing to enter into market dynamics. It's nevertheless necessary to take into account discriminations that certain groups, such as women, might be subject to within the systems and remedy them.

The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, adopted by the United Nations in December 2018, recognizes the rights to land, seeds, water, and food sovereignty. This recognition is crucial, because the agricultural transition cannot be carried out by peasants alone.

Finally, States must support the United Nations Committee on World Food Security as an inclusive and legitimate governance platform that promotes the approach through rights.

### Strengthen local communities' power to act in managing commons

Greater reflection is taking place on the theme of the governance of "commons," not only among researchers, but also in development institutions such as Agence Française de Développement. The issue is one of changing the basic paradigm, in order to think no longer in terms of owners but in terms of decisions and management.

The issue of land especially raises questions of strong governance that go hand-in-hand with the participative processes inherent to agroecology. Peasants' power to act can be increased by organizing spaces of dialog, exchange, and participation. In doing so, agroecology enables a transformation of power relations and offers new structures of power that are decentralized and adapted locally. To achieve this, it's crucial to recognize the right to consultation and to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all the inhabitants of the territory, and to extend it to beyond just indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup>

## 3 MAKE FOOD SYSTEMS ROOTED LOCALLY

Upscaling agroecology is possible only if producers can sell their production on local markets, within short circuits. A number of stimuli to develop agroecology have to be activated at the local level, but in doing so the creation of legislative and administrative framework to promote these initiatives should not be neglected.

### Support local initiatives for economic development

Support for networking and for the formation of peasant organizations, cooperatives, or other collective organizations is essential. This helps guarantee fair remuneration as well as direct management by peasants of their production and outlets.

Development of storage, transport, and processing infrastructure at the local level also helps strengthen markets and improve food sovereignty locally.

### Give priority to short circuits and fair trade

The marketing of products on local markets must be strengthened, by helping peasants to network with consumers and sell their production. This helps eliminate the need for intermediaries and contributes to local food and nutritional security, all the while limiting imported products.

3. Land security is interpreted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as a component to the right of food. *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant: Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Madagascar*, UN doc. E/C.12/MDG/CO/2.

4. On this topic, see: [carbonmarketwatch.org/publications/practitioners-guide-for-local-stakeholder-consultation-how-to-ensure-adequate-participation-in-climate-mitigation-actions/](https://carbonmarketwatch.org/publications/practitioners-guide-for-local-stakeholder-consultation-how-to-ensure-adequate-participation-in-climate-mitigation-actions/)





© Élodie Perron/SCOF

There must also be significant work to sensitize peasant organizations and the local population with regard to furthering local production and consumption. This comes with strengthening cohesion in the local area.

The development of public procurement from small-holder peasants working along agroecological principles can contribute to its growth. In Brazil, the Zero Hunger program helped spread a system making it possible for schools to be supplied from family farmers, by having the State pay 30% more for the products if they were produced through agroecology.<sup>5</sup> Here we find the obvious link between agroecology and food security, though it is important that producers do not lose their food sovereignty if the State imposes types of crops when it places orders.

Furthermore, enhancement of agroecological products must also be accompanied by work to put peasant organizations in relation with markets for quality products, thanks to value chains for organic, diversified, and fair products. The particularity of such value chains is that they offer more remunerative prices all the while strengthening the influence of peasant organizations in the value chains concerned.

### **Protect peasant networks against competition from international trade**

Large-scale implementation of agroecology requires not just a favorable economic environment: it's also important to limit competition from products that are imported at low cost (because they are subsidized and benefit from very low customs duties) and that destabilize local markets. This requires, at the international and national levels, an overhaul of international trade policies by guaranteeing that the sovereignty of developing countries is respected when trade agreements are designed and implemented, and by placing special attention on food sovereignty. It's also important to ensure that peasant organizations

are involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these agreements. In Senegal, for example, since the government froze imports of certain foods (poultry, onions, potatoes, and rice), national production has grown considerably.<sup>6</sup>

### **Adopt a holistic and local approach**

The holistic approach required for the agroecological transition also involves political measures that affect other sectors at the local level. Public policies that promote the spread of agroecology are policies that not only take into account the aspects of support to a practice or an agricultural system, but that also enhance development and a life of dignity in the local area. The approach must be multifaceted and include education; the creation of economic opportunities in the area; respect and promotion of local crop varieties, animal species, and seeds; environmental impacts (including on biodiversity) locally; and, finally, food sovereignty.

## **4 CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE UPON**

The climate change we are now experiencing poses multiple challenges that the agricultural and food sector must start taking up starting now. While the implementation of policies to fight climate change represents a challenge, it's also a great occasion to rethink all of our food systems, to make them rooted locally again, and to make them more equitable and fairer. Response to this challenge is urgent, as the IPCC report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C has put the spotlight on the effect of our food habits and the importance of transforming our lifestyles if we want to maintain the objectives set by the Paris Agreement.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, our food systems represent nearly one-third of GHS emissions.<sup>8</sup> >>>

5. Bruno Parmentier, *Faim Zéro. En finir avec la faim dans le monde*, La Découverte, 2014

6. See, for example: [www.inter-reseaux.org/publications/revue-grain-de-sel/48-mecanisation-et-motorisation/article/la-regulation-du-marche-de-l](http://www.inter-reseaux.org/publications/revue-grain-de-sel/48-mecanisation-et-motorisation/article/la-regulation-du-marche-de-l)

7. IPCC, 2018: "Summary for Policymakers". In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels*.

8. Émile Frison, *De l'uniformité à la diversité*, IPES-Food, June 2016

## Implement the Paris Agreement by supporting the agroecological transition

In the Paris Agreement, governments undertook to contain the rise in average temperature of the planet to below 2°C by the end of the century, and as close as possible to 1.5°C. The instruments for implementing this objective are the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), in which each State proposes a national scenario for emission reduction and possibly for adaptation, across sectors. The accumulated NDCs must make it possible to maintain the Paris Agreement objectives according to a bottom-up approach. It is essential to have a food-systems approach within the NDCs, which must therefore formulate transition methods for national food systems, in particular by supporting small-scale peasant agriculture and the agroecological transition of agricultural systems. The objective is to guarantee the food security of the poorest populations and to preserve the environment for current and future generations.

Climate financing for adaptation must also be increased and directed to peasants: in 2016, such financing represented less than 20% of total climate financing.<sup>9</sup>

## 5 TRANSFORM EVALUATION INDICATORS

A key element in developing public policies is the choice of evaluation indicators. By focusing on Gross Domestic Product, the Human Development Index (HDI), or agricultural production volumes, public policies unavoidably become oriented solely toward economic productivity objectives.

However, what responds to economic performance objectives does not take into account food security, fundamental rights, environmental impacts, or the well-being of local populations.

Furthermore, there is a lack of data on farmers who produce according to agroecological principles and on the family-farm sector in general. This leads to a bias when public policies are designed.

The evaluation indicators must reflect a holistic approach to food systems and take into account a group of dimensions at the local level, without negative impact on local populations and the environment. Furthermore, the public policies enacted must specifically aim for improvement of these indicators.

- From a social point of view, the indicators that orient public policies must take into account the four dimensions of food security (availability of food, physical and economic access, nutritional and health quality, and regularity of these three previous dimensions), access to land, water, training and financial services, as well as public health.

- From an environmental point of view, it is becoming crucial to include sustainability indicators: methane emissions, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide that stem from practices, conservation and restoration of soil fertility, water pollution and consumption, biodiversity, integrity of ecosystems, etc.

- From a political point of view, the power of people to act, and in particular women's participation in decision-making, must be taken into account when evaluating the indicators of whether agroecological food systems operate properly. A good public policy for agroecology must support peasant initiatives and encourage their creation, without taking the leadership in implementing agricultural projects. It's thus a question of encouraging the emergence of community initiatives by creating a favorable environment.

- Finally, from an economic point of view, quantitative and qualitative indicators must evaluate the impact of public policies, taking into account the jobs created and present income (which must be decent) as much as profitability and productivity. •

9. Oxfam International, *Climate Finance Shadow Report*, May 2018



This publication is produced by the Agriculture and food Commission (C2A) of Coordination SUD. As part of its mission to support the collective advocacy of its members, Coordination SUD has set up working committees. The Agriculture and food Commission (C2A) brings together international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food

and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security:

ActionAid France, Action Contre la Faim, Agter, Artisans du Monde, AVSF, CARI, CCFD - Terre Solidaire, CFSI, Commerce Équitable France, Gret, Iram, ISF Agrista, MADERA, Max Havelaar, Oxfam France, Réseau foi et Justice Afrique Europe, Secours Catholique - Caritas France, SOL and UNMFREO.

The C2A is in charge of the representation of Coordination SUD to institutions dealing with agriculture and food, such as the Interministerial Group on Food Security (GISA) and the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Contact Agriculture and food commission:

Carline Mainenti (AVSF)

Email: [c.mainenti@avsf.org](mailto:c.mainenti@avsf.org)

Website: [www.coordinationsud.org](http://www.coordinationsud.org)

Written by Sara Lickel (Secours Catholique - Caritas France), with contributions from Katia Roesch (AVSF), Hélène Botreau (Oxfam), and Laurent Levard (GRET)



C2A publications are produced with the support of the AFD. The viewpoints expressed in this document in no way represent the official point of view of the AFD.

