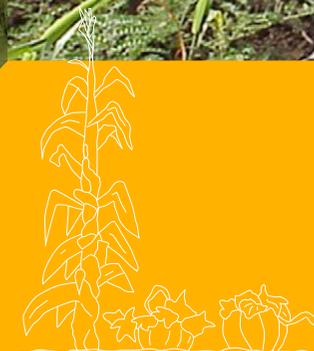




Strengthening FAO's commitment to agroecology

Janneke Bruil, Colin Anderson, Annelie Bernhart
and Michel Pimbert



Reclaiming
**Diversity &
Citizenship**

This publication is based on research carried out by a team working on agroecology transitions. This work is supported by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience of Coventry University (CAWR) and the AgroEcology Fund.

Written by Janneke Bruil, Colin Anderson, Annelie Bernhart and Michel Pimbert.

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AgroecologyNow! is a research, action and communications project convened by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience that focuses on understanding and supporting the societal transformations necessary to enable agroecology as a model for sustainable and just food systems. It is based on the commitment to co-producing and mobilising knowledge with civil society organisations, intergovernmental bodies, policy-makers, researchers and food producers to advance societal transformations for agroecology. Our work especially stresses the importance of [People's Knowledge](#) in societal transformation and using participatory, transdisciplinary and action-oriented approaches to research. Visit us at www.agroecologynow.com to download publications, follow our events, watch videos and to learn more.

In developing this publication, we have collaborated closely with Cultivate!, an international collective that catalyses the transition to healthy food and farming rooted in agroecology.

Contact: Colin Anderson colin.anderson@coventry.ac.uk

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The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) is driving innovative, transdisciplinary research on the understanding and development of socially just and resilient food and water systems internationally. Unique to this University Research Centre is the incorporation of citizen-generated knowledge - the participation of farmers, water users and other citizens in transdisciplinary research, using holistic approaches which cross many disciplinary boundaries among the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences.

The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR)
Coventry University
Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane
Coventry, CV8 3LG
United Kingdom

E-mail: CAWROffice@coventry.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0) 2477 651 601
Web: <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/agroecology-water-resilience/>

The *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* seeks to encourage debate outside mainstream policy and conceptual frameworks on the future of food, farming, land use and human well-being. The opportunities and constraints to regenerating local food systems and economies based on social and ecological diversity, justice, human rights, inclusive democracy, and active forms of citizenship are explored in this Series. Contributors to the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series* are encouraged to reflect deeply on their ways of working and outcomes of their research, highlighting implications for policy, knowledge, organisations, and practice.

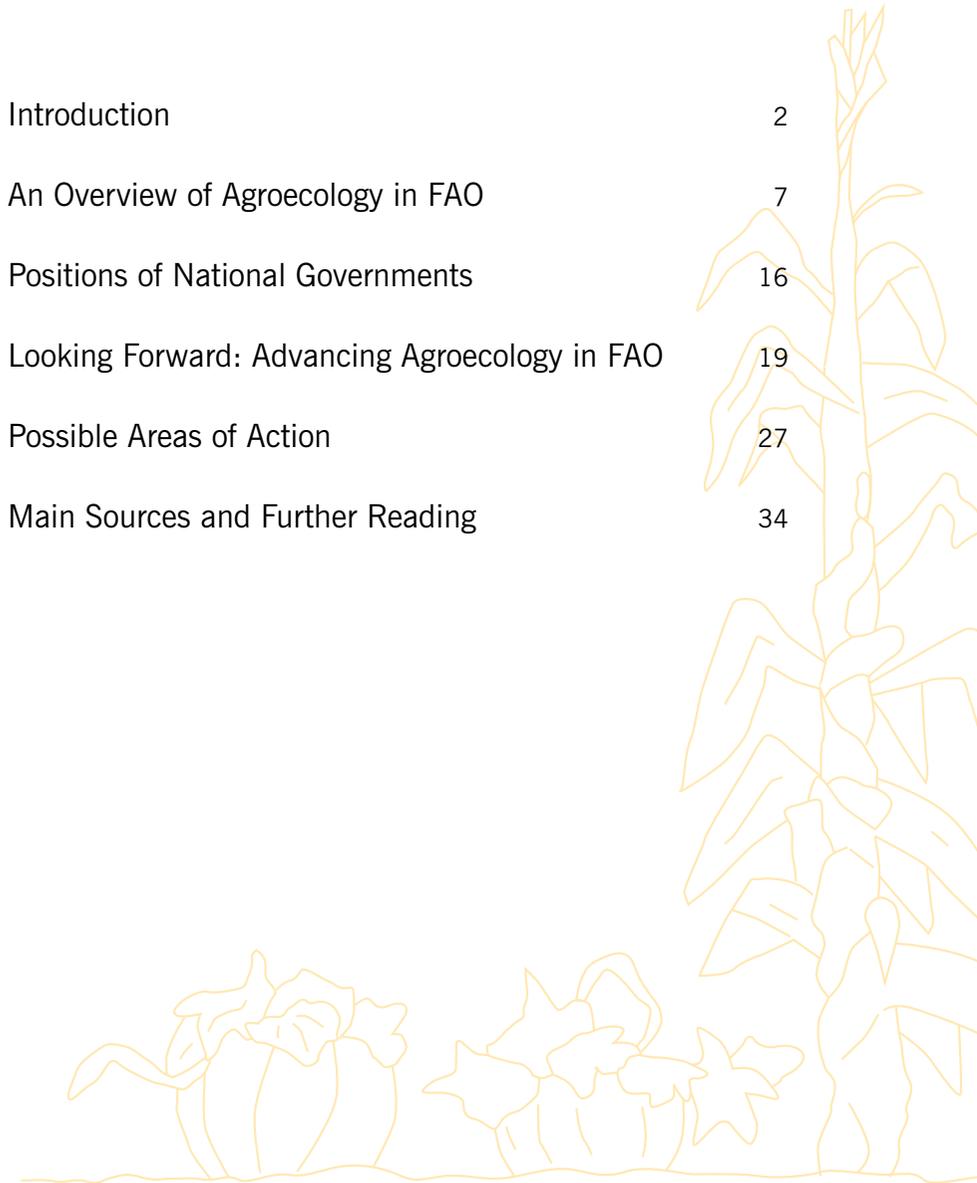
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Professor Michel Pimbert is the coordinator and editor in chief of the *Reclaiming Diversity and Citizenship Series*.

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Introduction

Between 2014 and 2018, FAO's global dialogue on agroecology has brought together more than 1400 participants from 170 countries in six regional symposia, taking the global political debate about agroecology to a new level. This briefing examines the FAO agroecology process, highlighting the opportunities, challenges and risks for civil society, donors, academics and others of working to strengthen FAO's commitment to agroecology.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) aims to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. It is funded and governed by nation-states. FAO provides basic research, information gathering and dissemination, formulation of policy recommendations, provision of technical assistance, and assistance to governments.

Because of its global role in shaping the narratives around agricultural development, in advising governments and in directing resources, FAO has been an important political arena for civil society, who have been advocating for support to agroecology for many years.

FAO has historically played a major role in promoting green revolution technologies and the industrialisation of agriculture around the world. This role continues today (Box 1).

FAO's agenda has always been influenced by the powerful lobbies including corporations and the national governments promoting large-scale, specialised, export oriented, technology-centred and corporate-led agriculture. Despite the continued influence of these actors in FAO,

What is agroecology?

Agroecology is based on the application of ecological principles for the design and management of sustainable food systems while placing farmers and citizens at the center of the governance of food. Thus, agroecology is being driven largely from the bottom up by civil society and social movements and is supported by allied researchers, politicians and other actors, including FAO. It presents a clear and convincing alternative to the current emphasis on large scale, industrialised, specialised and technology-led agricultural development.



Women in Chimborazo, Ecuador take time to exchange findings as they are experimenting with agroecology.

Photo: Janneke Bruil

agroecology has emerged in parallel as an alternative development paradigm that is now taking hold within FAO.

While it normally takes 10-15 years for any new area of work to enter FAO's system, agroecology was adopted unusually fast. With the contradictions and shortcomings of the large-scale intensive model of agriculture become apparent and as the stark realities of climate change, biodiversity loss and global inequity set in, agroecology is now viewed in a more favourable light.

BOX 1

The Green Revolution and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

FAO's interest in agroecology should be understood in the context of continued support for the green revolution approach, heavily influenced by powerful interests in governments and agri-business. Agroecology around the globe is currently very poorly supported by government and institutions. For example, funding for agroecology research and development is estimated to be less than 1% of total spending.

FAO was referred to by the current Director-General Graziano da Silva as the "Cathedral of the Green Revolution" (video 1). Today, Green Revolution technologies and approaches (e.g. chemical fertilizer, patented seeds and pesticide-based agriculture) are still advocated as the preferred pathway for agricultural development.

There is also much enthusiasm in FAO over what is being referred to as a "fourth industrial revolution". This vision is based on the notion that next generation biotechnologies will re-engineer plants and animals. Precision farming will further entrench the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Global food systems will rely on smart robots, blockchain and the 'internet of things' to manufacture synthetic foods for personalised nutrition.

This capital-intensive technology-focused approach is almost entirely incompatible with agroecology and detrimental to the agricultural producers because:

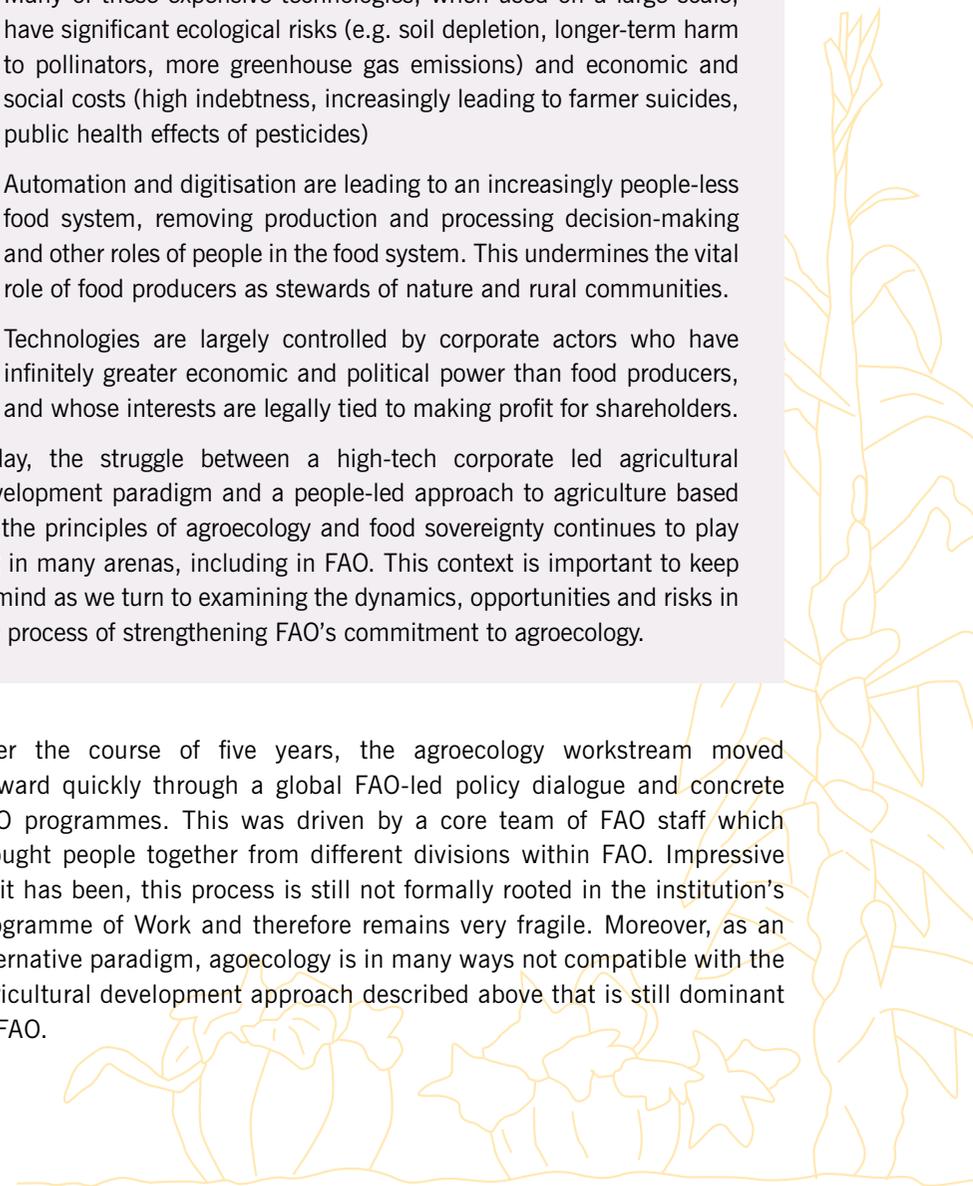
- It renders smallholder food producers dependent on expensive external inputs (e.g chemical fertilizers, patented seeds)
- Many of these expensive technologies, when used on a large scale, have significant ecological risks (e.g. soil depletion, longer-term harm to pollinators, more greenhouse gas emissions) and economic and social costs (high indebtedness, increasingly leading to farmer suicides, public health effects of pesticides)
- Automation and digitisation are leading to an increasingly people-less food system, removing production and processing decision-making and other roles of people in the food system. This undermines the vital role of food producers as stewards of nature and rural communities.
- Technologies are largely controlled by corporate actors who have infinitely greater economic and political power than food producers, and whose interests are legally tied to making profit for shareholders.

Today, the struggle between a high-tech corporate led agricultural development paradigm and a people-led approach to agriculture based on the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty continues to play out in many arenas, including in FAO. This context is important to keep in mind as we turn to examining the dynamics, opportunities and risks in the process of strengthening FAO's commitment to agroecology.

In this context, it has been a combination of external support (from civil society, academics and friendly governments) and an internal commitment in FAO that has helped to advance agroecology in FAO.

In 2014, there was a pressing need for FAO to engage in agroecology. First, because agroecology was growing as a well-developed, existing reality on the ground; second, because many countries already had laws, policies and programs for agroecology and FAO needed to follow; and third because a wide alliance of actors was calling for an institutional commitment to agroecology from FAO.

Over the course of five years, the agroecology workstream moved forward quickly through a global FAO-led policy dialogue and concrete FAO programmes. This was driven by a core team of FAO staff which brought people together from different divisions within FAO. Impressive as it has been, this process is still not formally rooted in the institution's Programme of Work and therefore remains very fragile. Moreover, as an alternative paradigm, agroecology is in many ways not compatible with the agricultural development approach described above that is still dominant in FAO.



This briefing examines opportunities to further strengthen FAO's commitment to agroecology. It draws primarily from FAO policy documents and from conversations with civil society representatives and from our experiences as participants in FAO's global dialogue on agroecology, including regional and international symposia in 2014-2018.

When reference is made to farmers or producers in this briefing, this includes all categories of producers of food, feed and fibre, including crop cultivators, pastoralists, fishers, forest dwellers, urban farmers and gardeners, and indigenous peoples.



Women farmers cultivate a diversity of crops to reduce risks in dryland farming (Telengana, India).

Photo: Pastapur Yesu

1

An Overview of Agroecology in FAO

Agroecology in FAO from 2014 to 2018

In 2014, after the [1st International Symposium on Agroecology](#) at FAO in Rome, a group of visionary staff from different FAO departments set in motion a [four-year process of political dialogue](#) about the benefits of agroecology covering all regions of the world.

This effort was supported by Director-General Graziano da Silva and culminated in the [2018 2nd Symposium on Agroecology](#). This was attended by some 700 participants and proved to be a critical step forward to strengthen FAO's commitment to agroecology.

The bold language used at the Symposium represented an unprecedented recognition for agroecology at the intergovernmental level. One reason for the new language could be that civil society had a much stronger presence at the 2nd Symposium in 2018 than four years earlier.

The discourse and language used by FAO at the Symposium also reflected a shift away a focus on technologies towards a greater recognition of the agency of food producers. For example, FAO Director-General Graziano emphasised that family farmers must remain central in bringing agroecology to scale and added that, "when we speak of agroecology, we are not speaking of strictly technical matters."

Similarly, the [Chair's Summary](#) of the 2nd Symposium points at the centrality of farmers in agroecology, by calling for a legal and regulatory framework that ensures "transformative change" that "respects, protects

and fulfils farmers' rights and promotes access to productive resources such as land, water and seeds." The Chair recognised that "it is critical to ensure the active participation of family farmers, in particular small scale food producers, women and youth, as historical subjects of agroecology."

The Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative

At the 2018 Symposium, FAO proposed a '[Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative](#)', which aims to accompany and support national agroecology transition processes by:

- 1) generating and co-creating knowledge and conducting capacity-building and training activities;
- 2) assisting countries in the development of policies for agroecology and
- 3) supporting networks and platforms for knowledge exchange and dialogue.

The Initiative is explicitly aligned with other initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Decade of Family Farming, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth and the UN Rome-based Agencies collaboration on Home Grown School Meals.

Importantly, the Scaling Up Initiative asserts that agroecology "empowers people to be critical agents of change in the transformation of their food systems". It points out that policies that promote high-input, resource-intensive agricultural production systems need to be changed to create a level playing field for agroecology.

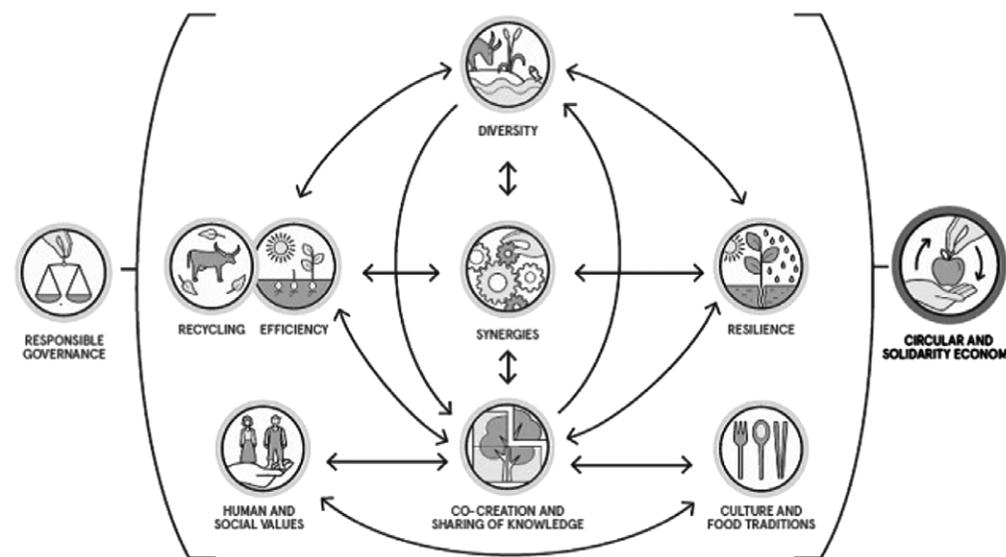
The Scaling Up Initiative also emphasises the holistic nature of agroecology, expressed in FAO's '[10 Elements of agroecology](#)' (figure 1). The elements are a reference point in FAO's agroecology work and they point at the social, cultural, ecological and political aspects of agroecology. These are often separated in the work of institutions who tend to emphasise only environmental or economic dimensions failing to acknowledge the complex, integrated and circular nature of agroecosystem-based food production that is so embedded in agroecology.

For example, the element "Co-creation and Knowledge Sharing" explicitly acknowledges the importance of "traditional, indigenous, practical and local

FIGURE 1

FAO's 10 elements of agroecology.

Source: FAO, 2018



knowledge of producers" which can be combined with scientific knowledge. The "Responsible Governance" element calls for 'inclusive governance' and focuses on the empowerment and agency of food producers. Mentioning social justice explicitly, it also notes the necessity to ensure access and control over land and natural resources for family farmers.

In July 2018, FAO started an internal UN process to broaden the participation in the Agroecology Scaling Up Initiative to all the other social, cultural and economic UN agencies and conventions, including those on climate change (UNFCCC), biodiversity (CBD) and desertification (UNCCD). FAO plans to work with external actors to implement the Scaling Up Initiative, such as national governments and civil society organisations. The Scaling Up Initiative is aimed at collaborations that generate enabling policy and economic support to farmers practicing agroecology.

Agroecology in FAO's current programmes

The publication [FAO's work on Agroecology, a pathway towards the SDGs](#), which was launched at the 2nd Symposium, highlights various programs across FAO that it regards as supportive of agroecology.

According to the document, FAO implements several agroecology-oriented initiatives that reflect a diversity of approaches in different regions of the world. The report presents, for instance, FAO's support of farmer field schools that operate in a spirit of farmer-to-farmer exchange and horizontal learning. Another specific program mentioned in FAO's work on agroecology is the Forest and Farm Facility, which focuses on South-to-South capacity building for farmer cooperatives aimed at enhancing political as well as practical capacities for agroecology.

Some of these programs may have the potential to enable more deep or transformative changes by focusing on the agency of food producers and emphasising empowerment, capacity building and the development of collective organising structures. But, the agroecological character of other initiatives mentioned in the document is less clear.

For example, the Mountain Partnership Label initiative, also highlighted in the booklet, seeks to help food producers add value to culturally unique crops, while increasing yield and price. These market and productivity focused initiatives seem to represent technocratic approaches which may not be aligned with the holistic nature of agroecology. Specifically, such linear value chain approaches raise questions about the risk of exclusion, how they relate to the 'web-like' structure of territorial markets for agroecology, and how, and by whom, crops for commercialisation are selected, especially if their original use was linked to cultural purposes, rather than high market value.

FAO's [Medium Term Plan 2018 – 2021, including the Program and Budget for 2018-2019](#), is an important document that reveals how agroecology is currently integrated in FAO's overall orientation. It outlines strategic planning and spending priorities for the next three years. Agroecology is only mentioned five times in 148 pages and these remarks are vague, mostly referring to agroecology as a "production technique" rather than an alternative paradigm for food and agriculture and often alongside a stronger focus on biotechnology and other green revolution approaches".



Knowledge sharing is at the heart of agroecology in Brazil.

Photo: Leonardo van den Berg

Despite the fact that agroecology is only marginal in the document in name, an examination of the top five programmatic areas in the 2018-2019 budget reveals how agroecology could be well suited to contribute to, and be supported by, FAO's Medium Term Plan (table 1). For example, there is growing evidence that agroecology can significantly "contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition" (budget item one) through the strengthening of dietary diversity in territorial food systems. Furthermore, a number of studies have shown how farms practicing agroecology are much more resilient in the face of crises (budget item 4), including natural disasters. However, FAO's current Plan does not yet recognise or support the central role of agroecology in achieving these goals.

Each year, FAO identifies 10 higher priority areas towards which to funnel small but important amounts of funding. In 2018-2019, FAO allocated \$3.1 million USD to increase technical capacity for "sustainable agricultural production, particularly at country level, including agroecology, genetic resources and governance." Two other 'priority areas' identified in FAO's budget that are potentially relevant for agroecology are climate change adaptation and mitigation (\$ 3.7 million USD), and food systems, including nutrition and food safety (and \$ 2.8 million USD). Agroecology is however not mentioned explicitly under either of these priority spending areas.

In other places, there are hints of strategies that could be supportive of agroecology. For example, the Medium Term Plan highlights the participation of civil society and producer organisations in decision making as important for enabling more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems. The empowerment of smallholders and family farmers and especially women and youth is mentioned throughout the document.

In summary, there are some strategies in the Medium Term Plan that are either implicitly supportive of agroecology or in rarer cases explicitly mention agroecology. Yet, there is yet to be a clear and dedicated focus on agroecology in these important planning and budgetary documents.

TABLE 1 FAO top five budget allocations in Program and Budget for 2018-2019

Budget item # (header row)	Budget (in millions)
1. Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition	\$82,128
2. Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable	\$196,952
3. Reduce rural poverty	\$66,207
4. Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems	\$105,399
5. Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises	\$54,136

Progress in FAO's Governance

The Committee on Agriculture, or COAG, is one of FAO's high-level governing bodies providing overall policy and regulatory guidance. The Report of the 2016 session of COAG makes only one passing explicit reference to agroecology. While there are other, less explicit references to agroecology in



Strong (women) producer organisations are key in making farmers' voices heard in decision making spaces (Phalombe, Malawi).

Photo: Sven Torfinn/ActionAid

the document¹, up to 2016, agroecology has clearly been only marginally on the radar of this governing body.

This changed at the October 2018 COAG meeting, when 192 members of FAO endorsed the 10 elements and requested that FAO develop action plans with partners (e.g. UN Agencies, civil society, researchers, private sector). After discussing a paper developed by FAO's agroecology team entitled '[Agroecology: from advocacy to action](#)', COAG urged FAO to:

- develop metrics, tools and protocols to evaluate the contribution of 'agroecology and other approaches' to the transformation of sustainable agriculture and food systems;

¹ The 2016 COAG report highlights citizen science and expertise as relevant for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management. It also encourages the development of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), which promote outstanding landscapes that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage with 'creative economies' such as territorial markets, and landscape management by indigenous peoples and rural communities.

- assist countries and regions to engage in the transition processes by catalysing scientific evidence and co-creation of knowledge to facilitate the dissemination of agroecology;
- provide policy and technical support to countries, upon their demands, including capacity development of smallholders and family farmers
- to prepare a draft resolution to further integrate ‘sustainable agricultural approaches, including agroecology’ in future planning activities.

Although various countries insisted that the focus on agroecology was too narrow and managed to include the various references to ‘other approaches’ (including biotechnology), this resolution effectively secures long-term international commitment and country support for agroecology within FAO, even after the pending departure of Graziano da Silva. If this commitment is explicitly connected to the [Decade of Family Farming](#), it will help ensure global political support for agroecology over the next 10 years.

Keeping food producers at the centre

It is clear that agroecology is working its way up in FAO. But so far, agroecology has been all but absent in the institution’s strategies and budgetary allocations. The 10 elements, the Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative and the COAG resolution are promising developments. In addition, FAO supports various positive initiatives, but some of them are not very well-aligned with the 10 elements.

The meaning of the term ‘agroecology’, across all levels in FAO, is uneven and often used in ways that reduce it to a technical package rather than supporting the transformative social, economic, cultural, ecological and political shift it implies. Although there are some progressive interpretations of agroecology in the FAO space, it is often perceived as a technical issue that requires the knowledge of external experts, whereas civil society knowledge and agency in practice are considered an add-on.

The greatest impact of the recent agroecology process in FAO may be that it helped to amplify a particular discourse on agroecology that emphasises its transformative nature. In the words of Maria Noel Salgado (Movement for Agroecology in Latin America): “FAO, as a UN institution, is sending a message to sectors, countries, and regions that had never talked about

agroecology before”. Thus, FAO’s work on agroecology has helped to bring visibility and legitimacy to the already existing articulation and practice of agroecology as a transformative pathway.

Another important achievement of the agroecology process, according to Mauro Conti of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) secretariat, is that civil society is now officially recognised as a source of technical expertise in intergovernmental processes on agroecology. They are now called upon by FAO as advisors ‘on the ground’. In order to play this role and build credibility, civil society is seeking ways to better document their case studies, knowledge and experiences.

It will now be critical to see how the Scaling Up Initiative will translate into concrete initiatives. Mauro Conti pointed out that “we must continue to push for keeping civil society’s expertise integrated in FAO’s projects under the Scaling Up Initiative.”



2

Positions of National Governments

Supportive governments

The Friends of Agroecology is the informal group of countries that have provided financial and political support for FAO's agroecology process over the years, raising awareness among each other and reaching out to other countries. It consists of France, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Senegal, Kenya, Algeria, Mexico, China and Japan. This group is fluid and efforts are being made to enroll additional governments, for example including Uruguay, Peru and India.

Agroecology at the national level*

Some of the Friends of Agroecology are making progress in their own countries. Highlights include:

France has been very vocal about its support for agroecology. It has its own agroecology transition law and a dedicated research program led by INRA and CIRAD on agroecology. It also committed 8 million euro in support of a new agroecology initiative in West Africa.

Brazil has strongly supported agroecology over the past years. It is still progressive overall, although long-term support for agroecology is now on the line with the change in government. Brazil has already started to reallocate the national budget, thereby under-resourcing agroecology mechanisms. Movements are expecting dramatic cutbacks to support for agroecology in the coming years.

Italy made progress at the municipal level with the Milan Pact but otherwise has not been very outspoken in its support.

In Uruguay, the parliament has adopted a national plan for agroecology for 2 years. Even if there is no budget right now, the plan is a major political step forward that needs to be institutionalised so it can transcend current political processes and remain supported by future governments.

Senegal is working on a network of agroecological cities to promote sustainable food systems and President Macky Sall announced early 2019 that agroecology would become a guiding principle in the country's development strategy.

In India (the State of Andhra Pradesh) the Zero Budget Natural Farming program is committed to move towards 6 million agroecological farmers, improve resilience to climate change and make Andhra Pradesh a Green State by 2027 on 8 million hectares. For having the world's best laws and policies promoting agroecology, Sikkim State was awarded the Future Policy Award (FPA) 2018 by the FAO.

China is supporting farmers in 129,000 villages in their transition to agroecology.

Austria is a supporter of agroecology because of its strong connections with agricultural tradition and landscape.

* In all of these cases, the policies and programmes for agroecology implemented by governments may not necessarily be transformative or progressive. We list these here as indications of commitments to agroecology and have not evaluated the qualities of the policies – this is not an endorsement of the policies and programmes, which requires further scrutiny.

The 'Friends of Agroecology' are potential allies for civil society, but it is not clear if all of these governments can really be considered 'champions' of a transformative agroecology. It will be important to work with these governments to deepen their understanding and commitment to agroecology. Another challenge is to pressure and encourage the countries that have not been very explicit about their support to speak out in favour of agroecology.

It is important to state again that caution is warranted, as some countries among the 'Friends' may in fact not be very progressive and even have problematic positions that are not aligned with the transformative and holistic nature of agroecology.

Opposing governments

The USA has been the main obstructive government for agroecology. Canada and Australia have also been identified as problematic. The justice and human rights aspects of agroecology are generally blocked in FAO by the USA, as they fear this could threaten the status and profits of multinationals in agribusiness, pharmaceutical and other sectors, etc. Within the EU, the Netherlands is a promotor of the fourth industrial revolution and regarded by many as an opponent of agroecology, even though it presents itself as part of the group of Friends of Agroecology. Similarly, Germany, the UK and other countries have not explicitly spoken out in support of agroecology and may indeed be implicitly working to undermine its development.

These countries tend to promote Sustainable Intensification, Climate Smart Agriculture, and Genetically Modified Organisms as part of a political agenda of essentially capital-intensive, Green Revolution-style industrial agriculture and food systems, avoiding any substantial shift from the status quo. Thus, they occasionally make concessions to adopt agroecology as one component of a broader approach, but resist providing dedicated funding for agroecology as such, and often insist on supporting agroecology as a technical practice, rather than a substantial shift in food systems.



Women hold extensive knowledge of how to select, grow and use different crops and varieties.

Photo: Michel Pimbert

3

Looking Forward: Advancing Agroecology in FAO

There are several opportunities to strengthen FAO's commitment to agroecology. However, this process could also be stalled in various ways. Below, we first highlight the main obstacles, followed by a selection of the most important opportunities and entry points.

Biggest obstacles

Several threats to advancing agroecology in FAO were identified by our interviewees.

First, there is a risk that the impact of adverse policies on agroecology, is underestimated. Agroecology cannot reach its full potential if the policies that are hampering it (such as current trade and investment policies and state subsidies for 'improved' seeds and chemical inputs) are not addressed.

Next, the political influence of the private sector, especially agribusiness, should be considered to be a major threat to agroecology. These actors either marginalise agroecology, discredit it or contain it, calling it a subset of so-called 'green lines of production' for which, they claim, there are only elite niche markets, composed especially of rich consumers from Europe. This reflects what Maria Noel Salgado (MAELA/IPC) refers to as the 'nichification' of agroecology which undermines its widespread scaling up and its capacity to contribute to reducing hunger and food insecurity.

Along similar lines, efforts are increasing, by both FAO and governments, to legitimise the possibility of coexistence and integration between agroecology and industrial agriculture or to conflate it with Climate Smart Agriculture and sustainable intensification. There is no clear message from FAO about what needs to be prioritised to address hunger, malnutrition and climate change, just presenting all options as a menu from which governments can pick and choose and adapt it to their context. This ignores the fact that industrial agriculture and the related policy frameworks present crippling barriers to agroecology and have been a major cause of the crises in the food system in the first place.

One example of how FAO promotes the peaceful coexistence between different (and adverse) approaches is FAO's response to climate change. It promotes climate smart agriculture as the main strategy to address climate change through agriculture, but seems to work on agroecology in an almost climate-blind way – failing to emphasise its contribution to both mitigate climate change by absorbing CO₂ and address the impacts of climate change through adaptation. Moreover, FAO facilitates countries' access to climate finance for climate smart agriculture but not for agroecology.

The emphasis of some governments on the concept of innovation (referred to by some as the 'new mantra' under which the illusion of coexistence takes shape) may derail the understanding of agroecology away from the centrality of small scale farmers. This focus on innovation is grounded in resistance to agroecology among governments who mistakenly perceive agroecology as purely reliant on traditional knowledge and/ or who have vested interest in high-tech solutions such as GMOs, precision farming and digital farming. To prevent this, an approach and discourse oriented on human rights and the role of farmers seems key – rather than a discourse focused on climate change and the environment (which may warrant more technical responses).

Combined, these obstacles both undermine agroecology and distort the concept of agroecology through the appropriation of agroecology and funding priorities which fail to authentically reflect the 10 Elements of Agroecology or other more holistic, social and political interpretations.

All these issues come together in the lack of safeguards in the governance mechanism of the agroecology work in FAO to ensure a holistic, transformative approach. An important step would be to ensure some level of accountability of the actors who want to partner with FAO on agroecology under the Scaling Up Initiative. From this perspective, two important questions emerge: What



For indigenous peoples, such as these pastoralists in the south Peruvian Andes, the cultural aspect of food is of great importance.

Photo: Timmi Tilman

safeguards and processes can be put into place to ensure commitments to follow the 10 elements holistically? What are the governance mechanisms that will ensure effective participation of civil society, and the holistic application of these elements? A light, flexible and participatory safeguard mechanism is needed to ensure transparency and accountability, and to avoid co-optation while enabling the advancement of agroecology.

Finally, a major challenge for the effective participation of civil society is that both FAO and many farmer organisations are not aware of (or able to fully leverage) the capacities, skills and potential of food producers and civil society, and how valuable their knowledge and practices are to others around the world. They lack the capacity, funding, training and political spaces to document and present their experiences, positions and proposals or to participate effectively in governance (e.g. in FAO processes). It is difficult to generate evidence and to document agroecology because resources for research and case studies is generally oriented towards large scale projects. Moreover, in debates on agroecology, an inclusion strategy for actors in fisheries and pastoralism is often lacking. Mauro Conti (IPC) highlights the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) or Veterinarians without Borders as groups who could provide relevant insights on themes such as livestock diversity, which has proven to be much more complex and costly than crop diversity.

Opportunities and entry points

1) Work at the national level

Important work remains to be done at the country level to advance agroecology in FAO. In addition to maintaining efforts to influence permanent representatives in Rome, work is needed to influence national governments at home. This could be reinforced with communications and media support by highlighting the progressive overall messages from the Chair's Summary of the 2nd FAO agroecology symposium, and other FAO documents such as those mentioned above. Current funding for agroecology is minuscule in comparison to funding devoted to research and development supporting agribusiness.

For civil society, it could be more strategic to isolate the 'obstructive' governments rather than trying to convince them of the merits of agroecology. This could be approached by supporting progressive countries to be more vocal about their positions while convincing the countries that are undecided to put forward the most progressive position possible.

Less outspoken countries may be convinced that, within the broader work of FAO, agroecology needs more support. While there is a lot of debate on the centrality of agroecological approaches to drive the transition to more sustainable food and farming systems, there are many countries that would possibly agree that it is at least part of the solution.

Therefore, in terms of negotiating with obstructive governments, interviewees proposed to make the strategic point that, besides all the support going to agribusiness, there needs to be some support to agroecological projects. In other words, there may be a need to, "play the game of the two windows in FAO", in the words of Maria Noel Salgado, referring to the way FAO and governments try to simultaneously support the agribusiness and agroecology models. As part of this 'game', in the short term the window for agroecology and peasant and indigenous family farming needs to be opened further so that it can gain legitimacy and more evidence can be generated of the effectiveness of agroecology (video page 15). At the same time however, civil society needs to continue to challenge the industrial model and be clear that in the long term agroecology cannot be regarded as only one of many alternatives, because it cannot 'co-exist' with agribusiness and industrial agriculture.

A number of leverage points have proven effective in gaining support for agroecology amongst governments and these may also be used to convince other countries. One crucial aspect has been the recognition that agroecology provides a systems approach (as opposed to a single sector focus) that can offer a response to the complexity of the world's crises today, understanding that there are no easy solutions.

Another important point, especially for Europe, has been that agroecology addresses the concerns about how to deal with both climate change and migration; agroecology can help address the need to create jobs and viable livelihoods in rural areas of countries in the global south facing climate change and thus reduce the risk of migration to places such as Europe. Similarly, agroecological pathways to sustainable livelihoods can play an important role in reducing South-South migration and the risks of social conflicts and human insecurity in African, Asian and Latin American countries.

For many Asian countries, the issues of pollution of water, soils and air have been important entry points for agroecology, as is bringing a different approach to addressing persistent malnutrition, public health problems and food insecurity. In that sense, agroecology can be presented as an excellent way to achieve the Right to Food which is becoming an increasingly recognised framework to address food and nutrition insecurity amongst national governments.

There is also growing awareness among policy makers that subsidising fertilizers and pesticides is too expensive for governments, and that efforts should be directed at promoting a different model based on locally produced and regenerative inputs, knowledge of the ecosystem, and a landscape approach.

Even in some of the countries that are not in favour of agroecology, various national initiatives could provide entry points for agroecology, such as those related to agroforestry, composting or the improvement of on-farm biodiversity. It would be strategic to identify these as agroecology-friendly initiatives and mechanisms to demonstrate how agroecology is achieving positive results, leading to new innovations and offers a viable alternative. Linking agroecology to existing policy interests of national governments while increasing the visibility of successful initiatives would help to legitimise agroecology and ease resistance within governments.



Additionally, FAO's [Regional Initiatives](#) that are potentially agroecology-friendly can be used to further boost countries' support for agroecology at a national level. They include for example: Africa's Commitment to End Hunger by 2025, the Zero Hunger Challenge in Asia and the Pacific and the Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative for the achievement of SDGs 1, 2 & 3.

2) Opportunities at FAO

Several ongoing agroecology-related processes at FAO provide opportunities to advance agroecology. While it is beyond the scope of this brief to analyse these in detail, we briefly present each in the following points:

- The work of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), notably the [High Level Panel of Experts \(HLPE\) Report on Agroecological Approaches and Other Innovations](#). One challenge will be ensuring that a good set of recommendations for agroecology will be included in the final report to be released in 2019.
- The [Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#) that are currently being developed within the CFS and are a crucial process in which to advance agroecology-related elements. The Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS is already developing a strategy to do so, and to ensure consistency with strategies to input into the HLPE report on agroecology.
- The [Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform](#) is an FAO-facilitated platform that held a large 'multi-stakeholder' event in May 2018. A number of governments seem to prefer the biodiversity platform over other the agroecology process for advancing sustainable agriculture. Some governments consider it a "safer" space because the presence of civil society is not as strong. In any case, biodiversity is an important component of agroecology and FAO's agroecology team has been exploring ways to connect the two processes.
- FAO's [Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture](#) (SFA). The Vision encompasses five key principles that FAO is using to support countries to transition agricultural and food systems towards sustainability. Although it does not make a direct reference to agroecology (and some of their tools raise questions regarding compatibility with agroecology), its holistic approach and its commitment to building on traditional

knowledge potentially provides an additional process through which advance agroecology through FAO.

- The [Country Programming Frameworks \(CPF\)](#) provide a strategic opportunity to influence FAO to financially support agroecological transitions at a territorial scale. They are negotiated every four years between FAO and national governments. On the basis of the CPF, Technical Cooperation Programs (TCP) can be developed for financial support from FAO. Theoretically, a TCP could be developed to support CSO efforts to scale-out or scale-up agroecological approaches. This could become even more relevant in the future at the country level, since more money is expected to be channelled through the CPF. Building local FAO capacity and commitment on agroecology is important since TCP cannot support projects without major technical input from FAO.
- The [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security \(VGGT\)](#) can be used to strategically link land governance issues to agroecology, using the VGGT-related processes already in place. Most of the processes



Youth caucus meets at the Nyeleni International Forum on Agroecology in Mali. 2015.

Photo Credit: Colin Anderson.



Growing millet, a nutritious traditional staple crop in India.

Photo: Pastapur Yesu

related to the VGGT have proven to be effective in strengthening the legitimacy, credibility and influence of CSO in their countries. There are different 'technical guides' about how to implement aspects of the VGGT, and FAO is considering developing an additional guide around aspects of land use, including agroecology. In fact, agroecology is also mentioned explicitly in the VGGT, although with weak emphasis on its importance.

- FAO's [knowledge hub on agroecology](#) is planning to produce an analytical framework for innovative monitoring and evaluation (outputs, results and impacts) of agroecology, which aims to provide evidence of the extent to which agroecology helps to achieve the SGDs and FAO Strategic Objectives. This reference framework will reflect the multidimensional approach of agroecology including its social, economic and environmental dimensions. Thus, it would be strategic for civil society to provide case studies and evidence of the effectiveness of their approaches to FAO, so as to make political claims through their practical expertise.
- Lastly, various instruments exist that can play a role in the promotion of agroecology by FAO and its member states. Table 2 presents a selection of these.

TABLE 2

Existing governance spaces and normative instruments relevant for agroecology.

Source: Catalysing Dialogue and Cooperation to Scale Up Agroecology (FAO, 2018)

Governance Spaces	Normative Instruments
Committee on World Food Security	<p>Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security</p> <p>Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security</p> <p>The principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems</p>
Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture	<p>The Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</p> <p>The Global Plan of Action for Forest Genetic Resources</p> <p>The Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources</p> <p>Voluntary Guidelines for Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Policies, Programmes and National and Regional Plans of Action on Nutrition</p>
Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
Committee on Fisheries	Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries
Global Soil Partnership	

4

Possible Areas of Action

Following the assessment above, this section presents possible actions (for civil society, donors, academics and others) to help leverage the agroecological transition through increased support from FAO.

Participation of Food Producers in Global Decision Making

- Raise awareness within FAO and governments on the technical expertise and agroecological knowledge of food producers, and how social learning and horizontal organising processes also lead to greater impact at a technical level.
- Create openings and enhance skills for producers to participate in FAO decision making, so that they can contribute content to the Scaling Up Initiative and propose and advocate positions in FAO's regional conferences and projects. Support capacity development of social movement spokespersons to participate effectively in policy processes and to lobby researchers, decision makers and FAO technical staff.
- Enable further strategic reflection on how best to engage with FAO, especially drawing lessons from past advocacy work such as in the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM). In that space, a great diversity of social movements (organised in the IPC) articulated an agenda for food sovereignty, access to land, territories, water, seeds, support for agroecology and circular and solidary economies. From this process, they emerged as protagonists on these issues at the level of global food governance. This merits reflection



Principles of agroecology are also relevant for artisanal fisherfolk.

Photo: Janneke Bruil

among a broader group of civil society actors: What went well and what did not, and why? What lessons can be learnt? How can these lessons inform the strategies of social movements and their allies in the new political landscape on agroecology, so that they can continue to defend their political positions effectively?

National Level Advocacy

- Collect intelligence at the country level in order to have a better understanding what the context-specific levers are for advancing agroecology, and to provide a systematised identification of those levers at the country level. This could be carried out by a combination of food producers, social movements, NGOs, researchers and foundations.
- Identify existing national initiatives and mechanisms that could be supportive of agroecology: finding ongoing agroecology work that is good, innovative, and not overtly threatening, and building on these to increase visibility and decrease resistance in the countries whose governments are not yet 'on board'.

- Organise national events that follow-up on FAO seminars for upscaling agroecology. This should happen in an open, public way, together with governments and academics so that they become aware of and possibly committed to the need for inclusive food governance and the role of small scale producers in agroecology.
- Get progressive countries to be more vocal while convincing the countries that are undecided to put forward the most progressive position possible.

Finance for Agroecology

- Reach out to governments about the need to invest in agroecology, based on the argument that there is no other viable option for sustainable and resilient food systems. It is crucial that governments can collaborate with private funders in supporting agroecology, as it would enable the advance of agroecology at a larger scale.
- Prioritise Africa. Africa needs prominent support now to resist the turn towards another Green Revolution.
- Engage the small scale private sector especially solidarity economy initiatives through supporting agroecology incubators and start-ups and reducing policy and regulatory barriers to their effectiveness.
- Put pressure on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support agroecology work, possibly in collaboration with FAO. Donors or civil society can encourage other funders such as GEF to 'work with FAO'; and when they are approached, FAO can potentially co-fund agroecology initiatives.

Knowledge Building

- Support documentation and horizontal (South-South) exchange of lessons learned in emblematic initiatives, specifically around civil society expertise and holistic approaches, while working closely with researchers who support rather than undermine or challenge the knowledge and leadership of food producers.



Atelier Paysan in France works with small scale farmers to develop appropriate tools and mechanisation.

Photo: Janneke Bruil

- Learn from (and support) concrete territorial initiatives between different kinds of actors (producer organisations, other civil society organisations, researchers, foundations, local decision makers...) which can offer important evidence to show that agroecology can work at a larger scale, especially when it comes to economic evidence.
- Provide input to FAO's knowledge hub. FAO wants to modify the knowledge hub, because they feel that it is too centred on what FAO is doing. The agroecology team is looking for ideas and guidance so that it becomes more of a mirror of what is happening around agroecology outside of FAO.

Communication

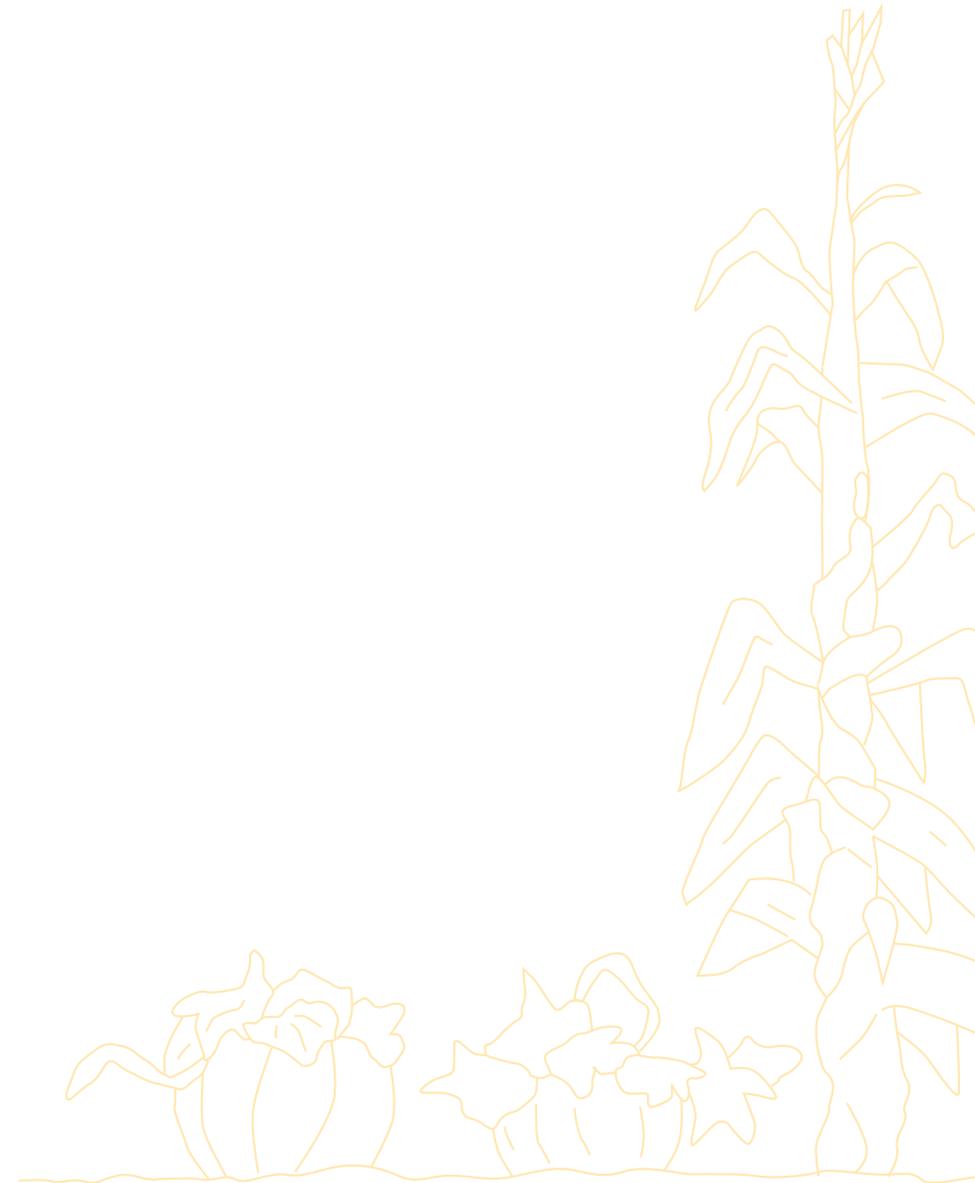
- Support new communication activities engaging the public so people become more aware of the various benefits of agroecology and how they can engage with it. For example by developing apps to make available a map of local agroecological markets, restaurants, selling points available to citizens (such as the [Guide to Agroecological Products](#) in Ecuador).



Members of the Korean Women Peasants Association are practicing agroecology.

Photo: Hyo Jeong Kim

- Focus on children. In the next 10 years we must change the dominant way of thinking. Start from schools: educate millions about agroecology and its multiple benefits, including the provision of healthy foods and diets.
- Spread new narratives. It is important to demonstrate and explain agroecology, to new audiences: children, and schools, women, or students and staff at universities. There is a persistent narrative that presents a people-focus versus technology focus. Specific assumptions underlying the dominant narratives (inevitability of urban migration, number of future meat eaters etc.) can be put under scrutiny to encourage more forward thinking, and to share convincing visions and narratives that support agroecology.



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AgroecologyNow! is an initiative convened by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience working with partners including in social movements, civil society, governments and research institutions to promote a transformative agroecology for food sovereignty and social justice: www.agroecologynow.com

