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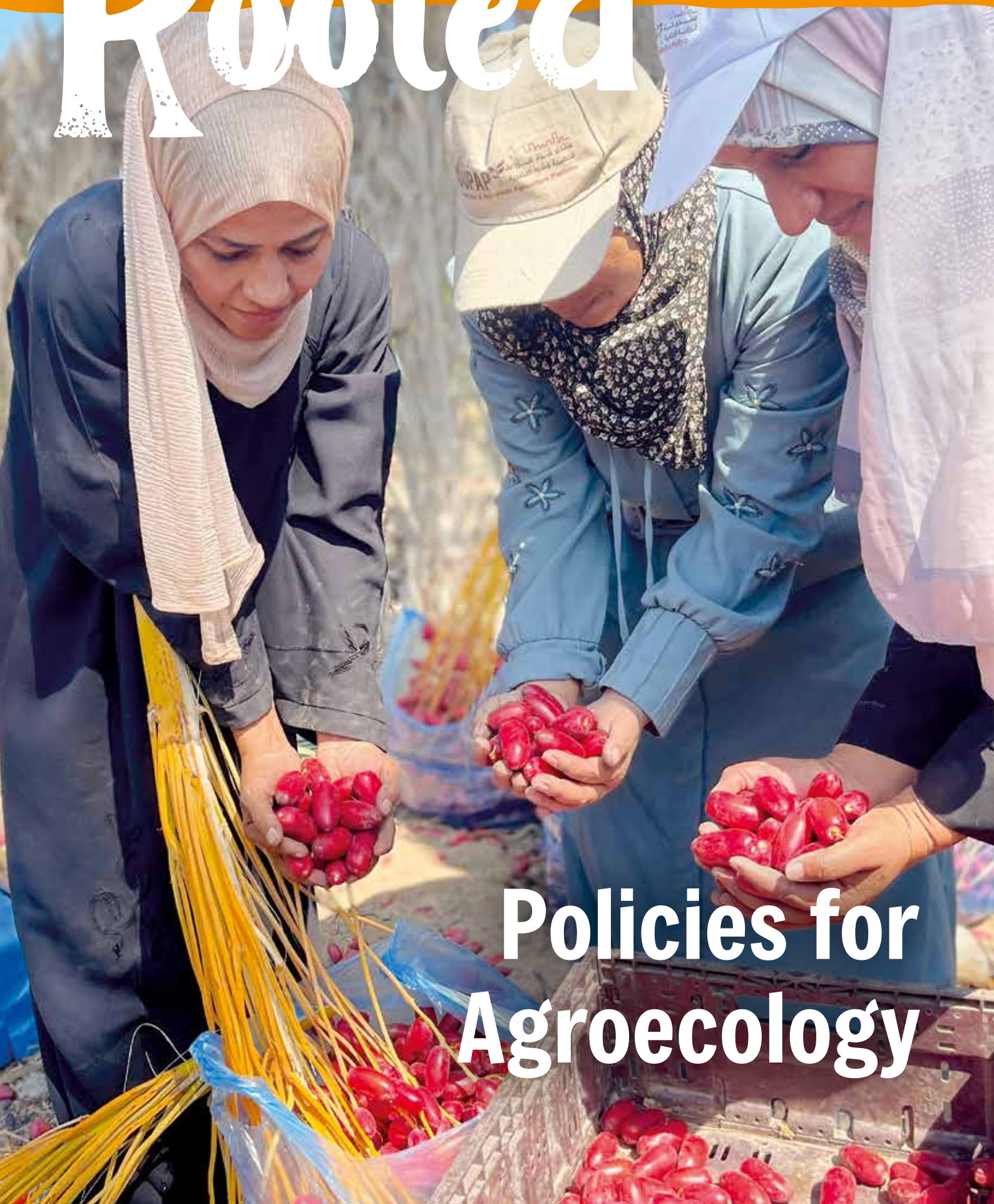
Rooted

in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty



Policies for Agroecology

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Colophon

This is the first issue of Rooted in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty. This magazine is a platform for the exchange of voices, perspectives and knowledge of food producers and others at the forefront of action to transform food systems.

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Photo: Janneke Bruil

Policies for agroecology to support healthy and just food systems

Agroecology continues to gain traction around the world. For millennia, peasants and Indigenous Peoples have led the way in showing the social and ecological benefits of the principles and practices that comprise what is now recognised as agroecology. Social movements have been rallying behind calls for the agroecological transformation of societies for several decades and academic research on agroecology has a history of about fifty years. But the turn to agroecology in policy has been much more recent, as this inaugural issue of Rooted magazine shows.

Recognising that agroecology can provide robust solutions to address a multitude of societal challenges, many countries are now designing policies in support of agroecology, with implementation happening at the municipal, subnational, national and international levels. As this remains relatively new terrain, many questions exist, including: What are these policies trying to achieve? What were the processes that led to their creation? What are the main drivers, and who are the key advocates? What are the pitfalls and what are the promises?

To begin to respond to these questions, this issue of *Rooted* magazine showcases trailblazing agroecological policies on every continent. These policies have each, in their own way, facilitated the development of agroecological food webs and enabled the transition away from industrial food and farming systems.

We explore how food system actors – including farmers, researchers, activists and policymakers – have shaped the creation and implementation of policies that enable agroecology. We also identify obstacles and structural challenges that hamper the adoption of agroecology

policy. There is a great deal to be learnt from the initiatives presented here, and we hope those insights can be used by others to inspire truly transformative policy processes.

Movements ignite policy change

One of the most important takeaways in this collection of experiences and perspectives is that without exception, action for transformative policy change at all levels – local, national and global – has been catalysed by strategic, broad-based, bottom-up movements of peasants, Indigenous Peoples and civil society actors.

The bolstering of and solidarity with international movements will continue to be crucial in this process. This is evident in Gaza (p. 6) where the ongoing genocide has, at the time of publication, left more than 42,000 dead and has destroyed the region's farmlands. In this issue, authors from Gaza and the UK take a heart-wrenching look back at the work of women-led urban agroecological food initiatives in Gaza that managed to take root before the genocide, in defiance of the illegal blockade that has been in place for decades. As the authors remind us: "Destruction and war neither annihilate us nor obliterate our learning. The history and resilience of Palestinians in Gaza provide some hope that a dignified agroecological future is still possible."

Other authors in this issue describe how sustained and organised grassroots pressure resulted in the development of national policy for agroecology in their countries. As the authors from Brazil's national agroecology movement (ANA) share (p. 32), for example, they orchestrated an ambitious, decentralised advocacy campaign that laid the groundwork for an effective campaign around the 2022 state and federal elections.

In many places, coalitions with other actors outside food production have been key. Farmers, civil society and government actors worked together for the adoption of trailblazing agroecological policy in Kenya's Muranga'a county (p. 22). Martin Muriuki, Faith Gikunda and Moritz Fegert share how they built coalitions, aligned with government priorities, and leveraged synergies with the public health sector.

In Canada (p. 49), Faris Ahmed describes how years of intersectional alliance building and strategising were crucial to achieving a National Food Policy for the country. In Zimbabwe (p. 36), as told by Nelson Mudzingwa and Simba Guzha, small-scale farmers were the first to plant the seeds for a national agroecology policy, and they continue to steer its development through ongoing education, mobilisation and engagement with the government. Proposals in Colombia (p. 46) for a national public policy on agroecology were, writes Ivonne Florez Pastor, the result of years of mobilisation and advocacy by a powerful alliance of peasant, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, youth and women's organisations.

In Brazil, Colombia, Canada and other places, timing was of the essence – newly elected governments often ran with an agroecology agenda, even though the foundation of it had been laid over many years.

In Colombia, agroecology policy proposals were made by a powerful alliance of peasant, the Indigenous, Afro-descendent, youth and women's organisations.

Photo: Juliana Castañeda

Regional and global policy frameworks

Declarations, agreements and legal frameworks adopted in regional and international fora can also provide important tools and support for agroecological advances. Around the world, there are promising tools being developed to stimulate policy change. In an interview (p. 25), Georgina M. Catacora-Vargas explains how the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) is used as a compelling avenue for promoting legal frameworks for peasants' rights, food sovereignty and agroecology.

Csilla Kiss and Lindy Binder describe how in Europe (p. 14), public procurement that favours small-scale organic and agroecological farmers can spur agroecological transformation in large cities like Copenhagen as well as in smaller municipalities. They illustrate how local *and* European policy that brings farmers, researchers, local policymakers and public procurers together holds the potential to transform food systems.

Million Belay (p. 17) argues that an African Food Policy supported by a region-wide food movement could provide policy coherence for national governments. Such regional and global policy frameworks can strengthen and support peasants' movements by establishing precedent and providing momentum for agroecology policy within countries.

Informal policies

Importantly, policies are not only developed by states, but people's agroecological processes, indigenous governance and commons initiatives are equally meaningful forms of policy co-creation (although they may clash with formal policies that are based on a capitalist logic).

Jessica Milgroom and Josh Brem-Wilson reflect (p. 31) on how communities and cultures have developed informal policies that are based on a shared set of values, which play a crucial role in shaping food systems. In fact, these are in some ways stronger than formal policies as they become part of the norms and fabric of society whereas policies often don't.

In fact, existing policies are often at odds with the kinds of norms and values of agroecology practitioners. This is illustrated by Sadaf Javed in her analysis of state-driven organic certification processes in the Indian Himalayas (p. 40), describing how they are designed to value yield above the quality and diversity inherent in indigenous and traditional food production practices.

From our interview with Irina Aguiari (p. 43), we learn about another case, where a thriving, politically autonomous food commons in the Italian countryside was destabilised by conflicting state policies and economic interests.

The need for a paradigm shift

A recurring thread throughout the experiences presented in this issue of *Rooted* is the challenge of the narrative of co-existence between agroecology and the industrial model of food production. In Switzerland (p. 28), as we learn in the article by Inea Lehner and Johanna Jacobi, a national Citizens' Assembly for Food Policy created active 'food citizens', but at the same time showed how change remains superficial when the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist food system are not questioned.

Similarly, authors from the civil society movement in Senegal (p. 10) caution that while the country has become a breeding ground for innovative agroecology initiatives, its dependence on international projects and programmes and the compartmentalisation of sectors are hampering a holistic, long-term vision on agriculture.

Leidy Casimiro-Rodriguez, Margarita Fernandez and Giraldo Martin from Cuba (p. 18) offer a fresh perspective on the country's well-documented impressive advances in agroecology, providing thoughts on how recent policy reforms can ensure it is more firmly anchored as a path towards food sovereignty.

These experiences point to the unavoidable fact that developing and implementing meaningful, long-lasting agroecological policies implies a major overhaul of the influence of agribusiness on food systems. Corporations seeking to maximise production and profits have a major say in policy making in many countries; they are bolstered by trade policies, hefty subsidies and a corporate-driven research agenda. Although many farmers and food producers would like to transition away from systems that entrap and impoverish them, they lack the supportive policies and substantial incentives to help them move in a different direction.

The way forward

The industrial food system is being challenged by a groundswell of movements around the world and has led to mass mobilisations by farmers and their allies. The need for policies that support more resilient and fair food systems is evident. The articles in this issue illustrate how agroecological actors have opened strategic policy inroads by building broad alliances and finding synergy with existing government policies and agendas, including mitigating climate change, improving public health and poverty alleviation.

This issue highlights how, in order to succeed, these policy processes must bring together multiple stakeholders and be participatory, consensual and autonomous. Food producers must be engaged leaders in this process – not only to help policymakers build an understanding of agroecology but ultimately to form the backbone of any policy. For the resulting policies to be effective in driving food systems change, they must recognise indigenous wisdom and rights and local knowledge, and be based on solutions that can be enacted by community members.

Diligent commitment to implementation and enforcement of the policies, including funding and infrastructure, must accompany the drafting and adoption of the policies. As we know, just having a policy is no guarantee for its implementation. Having a policy also means securing appropriate funding for its implementation.

Moreover, continued pressure and vigilance by grassroots movements has shown to be crucial for policies to achieve the intended aims, and ensuring appropriate resources remains important even after adoption of any policy. But this responsibility should not only be put on the shoulders of farmers and grassroots movements, as entire societies will benefit.

At this critical juncture in human history, it is essential that policy momentum for agroecology continues to grow. Agroecology policy is of a fractal nature: it often starts small and leads to successive replication at scale. The celebration and protection of both formal and informal policy in support of agroecology – whether it be at the community, national or global level – has the potential to harvest the political work of movement building towards a truly agroecological metamorphosis of our societies. ■

Authors: This article was written collectively by the members of the editorial board of Rooted.

What's next for Gaza's food systems?

Over the past five millennia, Gaza City's historically important old town and port have been repeatedly occupied, besieged, destroyed and rebuilt. Today, as a result of the war on Gaza and its 2.3 million residents, most of Gaza's infrastructure is destroyed while land and water are severely polluted. Food is used as a weapon of war and most Gazans are on the brink of starvation. At the time of writing, over 42,000 people are confirmed dead, with many more thousands buried under the rubble. The living, many with violently acquired injuries, are left traumatised. It is uncertain how Gaza will look in the future.

UWAF members collecting dates for mutual aid and processing in Deir Al Balah, September 2024.

Traditional farming played a pivotal role in the historical struggle to protect the land and in Palestinian resistance to Israeli settler occupation

Land, people and their food cultures under assault

Gaza's traditional food and farming system is known as 'baladi'. Cherished for the quality and nutritional value of its ingredients and products, baladi foods embody the region's cultural heritage and hospitality. Peasant farmers, or' fellaheen', and their 'baladi' farming systems have played a pivotal role in the historical struggle to protect the land against Israeli settler occupation. Due to the forced displacement of mainly farming families from historical Palestine in 1947-9 and again in 1967, Gaza's population mushroomed. Before the 2023/4 aggression, 74% of Gazans were already refugees. Most were landless: renting land or producing on rooftops in Gaza's eight densely populated refugee camps. Since the census of 2017, no land in Gaza has been zoned as rural, with farming taking place in and around cities, increasingly squeezed between urban expansion and the annexation of its border lands by Israel. Nonetheless, a quarter of the population derived their livelihoods from small-scale family farming, and three quarters of these farmers were women.

Since 2007, Gaza's concentrated population has lived under an illegal blockade, with security walls and fences restricting the incoming and outgoing movement of people and goods, including food and farming inputs. Access to the most fertile land along Gaza's borders was restricted by an Israeli no-go zone, placing a shocking 1/3 of total farmlands off limits. This zone was 'manned' by remote-controlled machine guns, ground sensors, and drones deployed along the 60-kilometre border. Those who strayed too close were often shot and their equipment confiscated or destroyed. Nonetheless, in a high-risk act of resistance, farmers continued to plant baladi crops such as wheat, barley, lentils and vegetables on their land. Biannual herbicide spraying by Israel over Gaza, allegedly for security purposes, damaged hundreds of acres of crops, and regular incursions with bulldozers destroyed many more acres of farmland and compacted fragile soils.

GEORGINA MCALLISTER, CHIARA TORNAGHI, AHMED SOURANI AND MUHAMMED ZIMMO

Nonetheless – or perhaps because of this – we wish to celebrate Gaza's rich food culture and the ongoing work of producers to care and provide. Destruction and war neither annihilate us nor obliterate our learning. The history and resilience of Palestinians in Gaza provides some hope that a dignified agroecological future is still possible.

Even before the current genocide, farmlands were already littered with the psychological and toxic legacy of explosives. For decades, airstrikes and ground invasions have deliberately and repeatedly targeted food and water infrastructure. This pattern intensified after 7 October 2023. As of May 2024, 49% of farmland had been destroyed, including nearly 50% of fruit trees intentionally ripped out; approximately 70% of Gaza's greenhouses partially or completely destroyed; and once-productive farmland heavily compacted by tanks and bulldozers - littered with bomb craters, heavy metals and unexploded ordinance that could take 14 years to clear.

To bolster autonomous food 'security' on limited land, intensive production methods were prioritised by Gaza's authorities, agronomists and NGOs alike. This quest for modernity demanded the importation of agricultural inputs, mostly from Israel due to its control over Gaza's borders and trade. In 2022, the Gaza Strip imported 4.6 million litres of synthetic fertiliser, over a million litres of herbicides and pesticides, and hundreds of thousands of tons of feed and input-dependent hybrid seeds from Israel. In 2022, the Occupied Palestinian Territory was Israel's third largest export market - a captive market worth US$4.6 billion to Israel.

20 product label statements for women-led products were issued in 2023 with fees waived, opening markets for foods processed by women

In this scenario, production costs in Gaza increased as farmers invested in imported inputs and technologies, making their produce more expensive than highly subsidised industrial imports from Israel. Even though embattled family farmers strived to defend baladi food and farming systems in the face of increasing industrialisation, the intensive use of agrichemicals depleted the soil life, and nitrate leaching also led to groundwater pollution -damaging the very life support systems that Gazans depended upon and will need again for their future survival and dignity.

Resilience on the road to an urban agroecology

For three years, until October 2023, we were part of a team of NGOs and universities from Gaza and the UK doing research together on Gaza's foodways. Our aim was to support a shift away from Palestine's dependent, industrialised agriculture and towards an alternative based on agroecology for food sovereignty at the urban and territorial level. Initially in Gaza City and Khan Yunis, our objective was to strengthen women-led urban agroecology research, practice, policy formulation and political participation.

Building networks for mutual learning and policy development was central to this work. In 2019, the Urban Women Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) was established by the Gaza Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP): a 300-strong, women-only space consisting of five self-organised forums of producers and processors spanning the Gaza Strip.

In response to market obstacles for small-scale producers and processors, in 2023 UWAF, with GUPAP, lobbied for the formal registration of baladi products, and launched its Community-led Solidarity Marketing initiative, collecting and distributing 18 tons of fresh and processed foods from 50 UWAF members to around 2,000 vulnerable families in Gaza.

In addition to practice-based farmer-to-farmer learning requested by members, within just days of the onslaught on Gaza, our first Arabic language professional diploma in Urban Agroecology & Food Sovereignty, hosted by the University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS), was due to welcome 30 students to become the thinkers, planners, farmers and movement builders of the future. This and other emerging initiatives were made impossible by the Israeli invasion after October 7th 2023.

But despite the ongoing destruction of lives, land and nature, important fragments of this work remain. While dispersed in makeshift shelters, exposed to ongoing attacks and the daily indignities of searching for food and water, remarkably, many of the UWAF members continue to organise - collecting data, producing food and setting up community kitchens. In June 2024, the women came together to produce the sweets traditionally eaten to celebrate Eid al Adha as a symbol of their steadfast commitment to their community and its cultural foodways. In the absence of any formal agricultural support or extension provision and of the now blocked food aid that once dominated, some of the women who are graduates in farming and food studies are establishing a community-led farming advisory service to support others in recovering their food and farming enterprises.

Most of us can only watch these unspeakable horrors, as well as the many acts of solidarity and bravery, from afar with: supporting these women with cash payments to continue their work, and realigning our contributions to their long task of recovery and healing. The diploma is being resurrected in response to an expressed desire by students to continue learning and to transform and rebuild their future. And plans to reconstruct Gaza's only baladi seed bank in Al Qarara are already underway, while people are working to get these seeds into the hands of more growers.

Today, it is baladi seed - saved and adapted over generations - that is traded, and the skills to grow this seed are highly valued. A new 'commons' currency, these seeds are carried throughout repeated displacement, and planted next to temporary shelters, in damaged greenhouses or on reclaimed land. This is a manifestation of the people of Gaza's collective care and steadfastness, and a statement of their resourcefulness, resistance and solidarity.

Contending 'day after' visions

As we inevitably gaze past the end of the war, two distinct, and we argue incompatible, visions are emerging for the future of food and farming in Gaza. The first, framed around climate-smart agriculture and artificial intelligence, is a technology and input-intensive, extractive, vertical and people-less food future dependent on global capital. This vision highlights the 'investment opportunities' that Gaza's destruction and reconstruction represents - transforming traditional foodways once and for all. One practical concern for us, related to this vision, is the viability of increasing dependence on imported and proprietary inputs whose entry can be refused or, as we have seen, cut off or destroyed as an act of war by Israel. Another concern is the concentration of power over the food system in the hands of international capital that connects agribusiness, biotech and the military industrial complex.

The other vision, one of agroecology based on baladi foodways, is diversified, place-based and people-centred with a commitment to a just recovery underpinned by principles of equity and sovereignty. It seeks to draw upon Gaza's own knowledge-intensive, highly adaptive, and richly interconnected foodways to heal relationships with the land. In this vision, there is a need to diversify through locally adapted polycultures. This requires enhancing soil fertility through nutrient cycling of Gaza's organic wastes, substituting synthetic fertilisers and pesticides with natural and locally-available alternatives, and reversing input dependence, rather than accelerating it. Importantly, there is a need for social and political transformation focused on improving ecological and human health and addressing issues of equity and participation in food systems governance. At the time of writing, the war continues to wreak havoc on Gaza's entire food system as well as its social fabric. It is not clear which of these two visions Gaza will choose (or even if this is within their gift). Emerging from this crisis, Gaza's demographics will have been changed forever. Women will carry the burden as breadwinners and carers for those with violently acquired injuries. A radical re-imagining is required to centre their knowledges, skills and needs and to honour their solidarity and steadfastness as they recover Gaza's foodways. ■

UWAF members identifying food system challenges and planning responses in Khan Yunis, June 2021.

Photo: GUPAP

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Civil society in Senegal spearheads policy for agroecology

Since 2018, the civil society-led Dynamique pour une Transition AgroEcologique au Sénégal (DyTAES) has made exciting progress in building a national agroecological movement and in the subsequent institutionalisation of agroecology in the country. However, a profound transformation of food systems still largely depends on including government support for local management of natural resources and greater financial and political autonomy for grassroots organisations.

PATRICK BOTTAZZI, ABSA MBODJ, JOAN BASTIDE, JEAN-MICHEL WALY SÉNE, SIDY TOUNKARA AND RAPHAËL BELMIN

In Senegal, as in the entire Sahel, food systems are facing enormous challenges. In response, civil society groups created DyTAES, a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue where actors working towards agroecological transition can pool their knowledge for more effective advocacy.

Cross-country mobilisation

In 2018, DyTAES launched an ambitious series of national consultations and mobilisations via 'caravans' that travelled the length and breadth of the country. Not only did these caravans succeed in raising collective awareness about the challenges facing rural communities, but they also identified and mobilised key agroecology stakeholders scattered across the country.

In 2022, the testimonies of local actors gathered during the caravan tours along with concrete proposals for action were presented to policymakers in a major report: 'Contribution to national policies for an agroecological transition in Senegal'. Since then, DyTAES has published policy papers on key issues including water, soil fertility, reducing dependence on chemical inputs, and sustainable food systems.

Towards the institutionalisation of agroecology?

Driven by a regional and global context that is increasingly influenced by sustainability issues, DyTAES' ongoing communication with ministries has begun to yield promising signs of change, both in official discourse and in the formulation of public policies and national programmes.

For example, agroecological foundations have started to appear in the country's official discourses – in the recent 'Emerging Senegal' environmental plan (PSE-VERT) as well as in the national strategy for food sovereignty

DyTAES leader Mariam Sow takes the floor in 2019 to unite agroecology stakeholders.

in 2016. At the legislative level, a recent land decree that encourages the securing of collective land and the introduction of a subsidy scheme for organic inputs are the most striking examples of this recent movement towards institutionalisation.

The reshuffling of ministerial boundaries in 2022 further consolidated this trend. The Ministry of Agriculture is now responsible for rural development and food sovereignty, while the Ministry of the Environment's portfolio includes sustainable development and the ecological transition. In addition, a focal point specifically dedicated to the agroecological transition has been appointed as the main contact for the DyTAES. Recently, with the arrival of the new government under President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a dialogue and potential collaboration between DyTAES and the Ministry of Agriculture is being established around the distribution of subsidised organic inputs.

Stimulating transformation at the heart of the regions

Since 2021, local versions of DyTAES (Dynamiques pour une Transition AgroEcologique Locale, or DyTAEL) have been set up in several departments. Conceived as living laboratories for local change, DyTAELs bring together a range of players, including farmers' organisations, NGOs, representatives of agroecological initiatives and local elected representatives. They function as departmental platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue, innovation, promotion, enhancement of farmers' knowledge, and advocacy.

The limits of a project-based approach

Despite these encouraging advances, the agroecology movement in Senegal faces major challenges. While it seems that a change in perception is happening at the heart of the official system, this is not enough to ensure

the transformation of local farming. In fact, agricultural regions are full of micro-projects that have no prospect of sustainability and, as a result, are sometimes abandoned.

Although initiated by national and local players, the country's agroecology movement, including DyTAES, remains relatively dependent on the support of international technical and financial partners. The resulting asymmetrical power relationships carry with them the risk that these partners will impose their own priorities and visions of agroecology. What's more, in the face of neoliberal policies, international organisations have limited negotiating capacity as they must maintain a position of neutrality for obvious reasons of diplomacy and non-interference. This configuration reduces the offensive capacity of joint advocacy in the face of certain systemic injustices.

On the government side too, the dependence on international projects and programmes, the compartmentalisation of various sectors, and the lack of an inter-ministerial coordination framework are hampering the implementation of the holistic, long-term policy vision that is necessary for agroecology. The outgoing government's agrarian policies were mainly focused on the productivity of commercial agriculture, which depends on synthetic inputs.

This dynamic has led to the use of the term 'projectorate' to underline the country's dependence on projects and the lack of capacity to build a sovereign long-term political vision. Ultimately, the governance of agroecology requires the greater involvement of farmers' organisations and, more broadly, citizens' organisations.

At local level, although the DyTAELs are promising, it is still too early to measure their real impact. Most of them are still in the early stages of organisational development, and their status, role and precise mandates must be clarified. While from a formal point of view, their autonomy gives them all the room they need to manoeuvre, in practice they are still dependent on the national DyTAES and its partners for technical and financial support.

In addition, strengthening the dynamics of agroecological transformation must go hand in hand with the DyTAELs' ability to work with local authorities. This alliance, if it is to be truly transformative, is likely to involve conflicts and bitter negotiations, given that community consensus offers its own challenges. The DyTAELs must not only help implement equitable and participatory mechanisms for

DyTAES caravan consultation in Linguère, Senegal.

Photo: Raphaël Belmin/CIRAD

managing natural resources but must also integrate into governance arrangements to strengthen the links between citizen activism and policy action. This is a prerequisite for the development of peasant agroecology.

Still a long way to go

Since the UN FAO proclaimed Senegal as a pilot country for the agroecological transition in West Africa in 2015, the country's civil society has managed to increase its influence, both locally and nationally. Thanks to the creation of DyTAES and DyTAELs, the Senegalese agroecology movement has established itself as a key player in national agrarian dialogue, forcing agroecology to be formally recognised in official discourse and gaining a foothold at the local level. Senegal has become a breeding ground for innovative initiatives and a laboratory for experimentation – on agroecological production, on governance, and on other interlinkages in the food system.

But significant systemic transformations are still needed to meet the challenges of food sovereignty. While the public debate is often limited to the greening of agricultural policies through superficial reforms, land and natural resource grabbing, particularly of water, is on the rise in Senegal and the rest of the Sahel. Far-reaching reforms are needed at both the national and local levels, specifically to facilitate access by family farms to productive resources and to marketing for their agroecological products.

The possibility of a sustainable, fair and equitable transformation of food systems in Senegal will require significant struggles in the years to come. The chances of success will depend mainly on the mobilisation of grassroots players, including farmers' organisations, consumers and other local initiatives. It will also depend on the openness of those in power to dialogue and to change. We look to the new government – in place since April 2024 – with great hope to see whether it will follow through with the reforms needed to continue along the agroecological path. ■

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Photo: Municipality of Torres Vedras

Public procurement powering agroecological transformation in Europe

European agriculture, societies and economies could be transformed if only a fraction of the continent's municipal procurement contracts were awarded to small-scale organic and agroecological farmers. European farmers, researchers, local policymakers and public procurers are coming together with this ambition in cities like Copenhagen.

Bureaucratic blockages

In many European cities, smaller organic and agroecological farmers are locked out of public procurement for schools, hospitals, prisons, elderly homes and universities. This results from their own limited administrative resources, as well as complicated logistics, required volumes, long delays in payment, and overemphasis on price as an award criterion by public authorities.

Another complicating factor is that procurement officers in public bodies are often responsible for purchasing a wide range of products and may lack detailed knowledge about food and farming. They may not know where to find organic producers, let alone small-scale agroecological growers, nor do they necessarily understand farmers' specific seasonal offers, needs and challenges. All these challenges combined mean that public procurers tend to order food from large industrial wholesalers.

Taking up the challenge of removing these barriers, local governments and public procurers at the frontline of green procurement practices across Europe are fostering collaborations with small-scale agroecological farmers. They are also benefiting from the support of socially engaged researchers. As a result, policy change is already happening in many cities and towns around Europe.

Copenhagen's vision for food system change

Among the frontrunners of green procurement in Europe is the city of Copenhagen. Every day, this city of 1,366,000 inhabitants serves 100,000 meals – consisting of close to 90 per cent organic food – in 1,000 publicly run institutions. It is noteworthy that organic food is made available at no increased cost for kitchens through reducing food waste, replacing animal products with plant-based products, especially proteins, and focusing on seasonality. A key driver of this achievement has been the municipality's ambitious food strategy.

The transition started in 2001 when the city realised it needed to take radical steps to protect its groundwater, which had become polluted by industrial farming around the city. This was a catalyst for the municipality to start procuring organic food, which created increased demand and encouraged local farms to convert to organic production. In 2019, building on this momentum, Copenhagen took its commitments to food system transformation to an even higher level through a visionary long-term food strategy that includes ambitious targets by 2025.

Copenhagen is making its tenders more accessible to small and medium-sized farmers and food businesses

Within the framework of this food strategy, the city has committed to providing sustainable meals for residents that combine health, taste and responsibility for the climate. It also promotes food literacy and democracy and strives to strengthen communities. Finally, the strategy ensures that Copenhagen is closely linked with its regional food system, including smaller-scale growers and food businesses.

Photo: Municipality of Copenhagen

Kids making lunch in Copenhagen

The city of Copenhagen's pioneering 'Food Schools' offer an inspiring model for food education and for linking cities with local farmers. At these public secondary schools, students help the chefs to prepare lunch before sitting down and eating as a community. Food also forms an integral part of the curricula for multiple subjects: for example, history class includes a module about the potato famine, and a math lesson involves calculations of the number of potatoes that can be grown per hectare. Copenhagen currently counts 20 'Food Schools', and an additional 7 are planned to open by 2025.

Revolutionising tenders

Now that nearly all the city's public food is organically sourced but not necessarily local, Copenhagen is looking to create partnerships with food producers in and around the city and is making its tenders accessible to small and medium-sized farmers and food businesses.

This is a major shift. Currently, just three large wholesalers supply the majority of food for public catering in Denmark. However, signalling a new direction, the municipality adjusted its award criteria for food tenders. Price now receives only 40% weighting, while the environment (green vehicles, packaging and environmental labels such as fair trade, organic and marine stewardship) accounts for 25 per cent, quality for 25 per cent, and diversity of fruits and vegetables for 10 per cent.

At the heart of the change, however, is a collaborative approach for designing tenders: public officials, professional catering and food service staff, wholesalers and growers are all involved. Importantly, a key step in Copenhagen's new tendering process is to assess whether smaller suppliers – who can generally only provide a fraction of the required volume – are keen to bid for part of the contract. At the same time, participating kitchens must confirm that they can accommodate food deliveries from multiple suppliers. If there is a green light on both fronts, the tender can be divided into smaller lots with separate contracts for vegetables, fruit, bread, dairy and meat suppliers.

EU rules on the free movement of goods and fair competition prohibit tenders that explicitly solicit 'local' goods, but the rules are more flexible when it comes to smaller lots. Procurement contracts for goods and services by municipalities below the threshold of €215,000 fall outside the scope of the European procurement directive 2014/24/EU. This means authorities have more flexibility in actively seeking to buy local goods when procuring, unless this is specifically prohibited in national law.

In the case of a recent organic potato procurement, Copenhagen overcame this obstacle through an innovative but legally sound tender that combines the supply of goods with an educational service. In practice, the organic farmer contracted by the municipality supplied potatoes to school kitchens and hosted field trips for students on his organic potato farm.

Building on these experiences, Copenhagen, together with the City of Ghent in Belgium and the network for Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), has developed an innovative Farm-to-fork toolkit to help other municipalities unlock tenders for small-scale producers across Europe (more information in Resources section on page 50 and 51). Strategies included range from tips on skilfully navigating existing EU legislation to adopting collaborative practices that help reduce farmers' administrative burdens.

Policy recommendations

With some political will, possibilities exist to increase public purchasing of local agroecological food within current European procurement regulation, but structural change is needed for a truly enabling policy environment. The European Food Policy Coalition, a platform of civil society and organisations working on sustainable food systems and supported by the Buy Better Food campaign and the COACH project, has come up with actionable minimum mandatory standards for public canteens across the EU, including procurement criteria, verification and enablers.

Among their recommendations is that at least 10 per cent of food in public procurement should originate from small-scale farmers (defined by turnover, agricultural area and number of employees). They also recommend that EU policymakers cooperate closely with local and regional governments to institutionalise sustainable public food procurement as part of a multi-level governance framework.

In addition, many of these actors are also calling for an EU-wide guarantee for food education as well as healthy, sustainable free school meals for all children, regardless of their economic background. These steps would be an effective way to implement the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy, which aims to make European food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly.

They could go far in creating a socially inclusive, healthy and just food system and eliminating the stigma of food aid programmes. And at the same time, small-scale agroecological farmers will benefit by gaining access to new markets with reduced administrative requirements, thus improving their livelihoods. These outcomes also resonate with the key demands of the farmers currently protesting across Europe. ■

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Five strategies for an African food policy

MILLION BELAY

Misleading narratives, typically influenced by external players, are shaping policy decisions in Africa, resulting in policies that often do not correspond with local needs and situations. Some of these narratives include the belief that Africa cannot feed itself without agrochemicals and genetically engineered seeds, that its agriculture must be reoriented to market demands, and that only knowledge derived from science is valid.

Photo: Jessica Milgroom

This predicament is worsened by policy incoherence and a lack of political space for social movements. Innovative ground-level solutions and realities are often overlooked, causing a gap between policy and practice. As movements, I believe we must engage in the following five policy advocacy strategies that together can ensure broad and coherent food policies for Africa:

1. **Articulating Africa's food system needs and ways to achieve them.** Promoting concepts and values like agroecology, food sovereignty and biodiversity is essential for creating a sustainable, equitable, and resilient food system in Africa.
2. **Challenging Africa's current food system approach.** It is important that we evaluate existing food policies and practices to identify and critique their weaknesses in terms of the values mentioned above.
3. **Proposing cohesive and interrelated food and farming policy proposals** that encompass land use, water management, seed sovereignty and market access. These policies must be mutually reinforcing and include measures and mechanisms that support smallholder farmers, promote agroecology and protect food system workers.
4. **Organising, campaigning and lobbying to reform Africa's food system** by engaging in public campaigns, writing policy papers, undertaking research and doing media work in broad coalitions.
5. **Building the foundations and pillars of an African food movement** shaped by people from across the food system. This involves investing in leadership development, capacity building and network strengthening based on values of solidarity, equity and justice.

These strategies need to be implemented at local, national and continental levels. Multiple voices must be included to make policies more inclusive and representative of all stakeholders and to promote a meaningful food policy paradigm shift in Africa.

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Bringing Cuban agroecology to the next level

Over the past three decades, the Cuban people have made great strides in scaling out and up the practice, science and movement of agroecology. This is often celebrated as an example. However, the adoption and durability of agroecology have been uneven across space and time. Recent policy reforms are laying the groundwork for the greater spread of agroecology across the entire food system on the path to food sovereignty.

LEIDY CASIMIRO, MARGARITA FERNANDEZ AND GIRALDO MARTIN

In this article, we briefly highlight some of the key programmes and policies that enabled agroecology to take hold in the early years of this transition. Then we describe the more recent reforms – including work towards a national public policy for agroecology.

The need to achieve food self sufficiency

Since Spanish colonisation, Cuban agriculture prioritised extensive monoculture production for export rather than production for food self sufficiency. This objective was achieved through the aggressive exploitation of people and natural resources. The Cuban Revolution of 1959, led by Fidel Castro, marked a political-economic shift towards a socialist government, prioritising science, education and social solidarity.

This led to a well-informed society, with strong research and agricultural institutions. The conventional agricultural approach was strengthened, with support from the Soviet Union, and in the 1980s Cuba had the highest use of pesticides, fertilisers and tractors in all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the consequent economic crisis, that the vulnerability of the conventional, export-oriented agricultural system became evident, and a shift towards national food production for greater food sovereignty became a matter of national security.

This economic crisis opened a political space that generated transformations in the agrifood sector with the objective of achieving food sovereignty, including: agrarian reforms, decentralisation of agrifood system planning to the municipal level, a national programme of urban agriculture, and the development of a Peasant to Peasant Movement with a decentralised structure that facilitated a horizontal exchange of knowledge, experiences and practices among the peasants themselves.

As a result of land reform policies at this time, there was a shift in agricultural land management from 80% state-owned in the early 1990s to over 70% – approximately 3.5 million hectares – in the hands of cooperatives and family farms today.

The national 'Urban, Suburban and Family Farming Programme' ensured availability and access to local, fresh and nutritious food in the cities. The Campesino a Campesino Movement, organized by the National Association of Small Farmers, is an impressive programme

Workshop on agroecology and permaculture at the biodigestor of the Finca del Medio farm in the province of Sancti Spiritus.

that has ensured that more than half of the Cuban peasantry, some 200,000 families, participate in a complex and continuous process of training and learning.

> *Cuban agroecology has developed in a fragmented way, rather than as a conscious transformation of food systems*

Many of these policies and initiatives are the result of bottom-up processes, driven by peasant families and the collective action of various institutions and researchers. However, it is important to note that Cuban agroecology has developed in a fragmented way, as a series of adjustments and substitutions rather than a conscious transformation of food system governance.

In fact, Cuba remains dependent on food imports, and the government continues to invest primarily in conventional agriculture. In the period from 2015 to 2018, investments in conventional agriculture exceeded US$ 3 billion, and 61% of Cuban food was imported. Despite there being political will in favor of decentralisation and agroecological transitions, it is difficult to move from discourse to practice after so many years of a conventional top-down approach.

The policy puzzle of decentralised decision making

In recent years there have been changes in the country's political-legal framework that favour the practice, management and governance of agroecology for food sovereignty, although still in a fragmented manner. Political, economic and social reforms as outlined in the 'Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution' (2011) and the new Constitution (2019) prioritise local development and grant more decision-making power to municipalities.

But after decades of highly centralised, top-down public governance, this transition is slow and requires training, awareness, transformations and innovations in governance and management, whereby citizen participation is increased and multi-actor and intersectoral platforms are an integral part of local governance. Some of these plans, strategies

Photo: Leidy Casimiro

Workshop on food cultures at the Finca del Medio farm.

and laws include a Municipal Development Strategy, a Policy for Local Development, a Climate Change Plan (Tarea Vida), a national policy on the use of bioproducts, programmes for the conservation of natural resources, incentives for soil conservation, and a new law on cooperatives, among others.

> *After decades of highly centralised governance, the transition is slow and requires innovations to increase citizen participation*

A recent policy achievement is the 2022 Food Security and Sovereignty and Nutrition Law, which obliges the state to ensure healthy and adequate food for its population. This law emerged from a joint FAO and European Union initiative that began in 2017 and used a participatory approach to formulate multisectoral food policies and integrate them into the government's sectoral plans and legislation.

The National Plan for Food Sovereignty and Food Security, which preceded this law, was prepared by 12 ministries, 150 technical experts and research centers, 11 NGOs, and 12 state enterprises. It includes policy recommendations for food sovereignty organised around four priority themes: reducing dependence on food imports and agricultural inputs; promoting food quality, safety and waste reduction; consolidating territorial food systems; and mobilising educational, cultural and communication systems around healthy eating.

However, this Plan and Law have little weight without an accompanying agroecology policy. An agroecology policy would provide the methodological and practical support to realise the aspirations of the Food Sovereignty Law.

Making a public policy for agroecology

The continued expansion of agroecology at the territorial and national levels requires the establishment of a public policy explicitly based on general agroecological principles that guarantee that the entire process, from field to table, is effective, sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

To do this, in 2023 a panel of diverse experts and professionals conducted an integrated assessment of the advances and barriers of agroecology in the country, looking at the technological, environmental, economic, scientific, educational, sociocultural and political dimensions.

A key barrier they found is the poor understanding of agroecology among decision makers and the public, and the lack of an agroecological approach in the training of professionals, government officials and scientists working in agriculture-related fields. Another barrier is the deterioration of rural conditions and livelihoods and a lack of

Principles to guide the development of a public policy on agroecology in Cuba

- The creation, revitalisation and conservation of rural livelihoods by providing favorable conditions for sustainable agricultural production, including a reduction in dependence on external inputs, the promotion of appropriate technologies for harnessing renewable energies, and the strengthening of socio-ecological resilience and a circular economy.
- Horizontal partnerships between farmers, researchers and educators for the exchange of knowledge, skills and innovations leading to ecosystem conservation.
- Greater integration of agroecosystems, creating synergies and complementarities that contribute to diversified sources of agricultural income.
- The promotion of local production, distribution and consumption networks that connect farmers and consumers and are based on trust and marketing at fair prices.
- The facilitation of ecological functions in agroecosystems, the incorporation of appropriate methodologies to address technological and socio-environmental complexity, and the recognition of ethics as a fundamental and transcendental value.
- The promotion of transdisciplinary and holistic food systems research that integrates local and peasant knowledge and cultures.
- Contribution to healthy, diversified, seasonal and culturally appropriate diets.
- Respect for gender, generational, racial, sexual and religious diversity, and the promotion of solidarity, social engagement and opportunities for rural, urban and culturally diverse people.
- Deepening self-esteem, sense of belonging and community empowerment by dignifying livelihoods and increasing socio-economic resilience.
- Decentralised governance and flexible local management of food systems.
- The articulation of a set of complementary public policies and the incorporation of their principles into the national education system.

recognition of the efficiency of family farming and peasant agricultural systems and their value to sustainability and food security.

In addition, a systemic approach to agrifood systems governance and management is lacking, and links between farmers and consumers are weak. Finally, the national certification system for agroecological production is not being implemented, and there is inadequate infrastructure for equipment, services and inputs to facilitate agroecological transitions.

Based on this assessment, the panel proposed, as an urgent next step, the creation of a legal space to articulate and implement a public policy on agroecology in Cuba. They suggested a set of principles as the basis for constructing this agroecology policy (see box above).

As a result, a decree-law is expected to be approved before the end of 2024. This public policy includes: financial incentives; the promotion of solidarity consumption to strengthen the link between producers and consumers; local certification schemes based on Participatory Guarantee Systems; and the incorporation of circular economy systems and agroecological tourism to generate employment and boost local economies, among others.

As such, the public policy on agroecology offers a new cross-cutting institutional framework that can respond to the ongoing social, ecological, economic and food crises as a result of the economic blockade, as well as the imminent challenges of climate change.

This means a groundbreaking public policy on agroecology is emerging. About 30 years of national experience with agroecological transition will be integrated into a policy framework that can accelerate a transformation of social and ecological processes in Cuba, contributing to sustainability and food sovereignty rooted in local identity and culture. ■

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Photo: Evans Ogeto

Murang'a goes agroecological: Trailblazing transformation in a Kenyan county

The Kenyan county of Murang'a has taken an encouraging first step using a policy framework that can strengthen agroecology at the subnational level. Its three key success factors – coalition-building, alignment with government priorities, and leveraging synergies with other sectors – can serve as inspiration for peer agroecological movements in Kenya, the East African region, and beyond.

MARTIN MURIUKI, FAITH GIKUNDA AND MORITZ FEGERT

Have you ever eaten an avocado from Africa? If so, you might have consumed one of Murang'a's top agricultural export products. Murang'a, located near Nairobi, is considered the capital's food basket. Agriculture is the primary economic activity, employing 57% of the county's population, and avocados are one of the major cash crops. But Murang'a is not only known for its avocados – the county is also a pioneer in agroecology policymaking.

In March 2023, the landmark Murang'a Agroecology Policy and Act was officially approved for the period 2022-2032. This policy framework aims to provide strong and

long-lasting political support to agroecological farmers, value chains and markets through a series of measures aligned with the 13 principles of agroecology. It notably uses economic diversification, social values & diets, and soil health as entry points to change farming practices and increase the production of agroecological products.

Food system in crisis

How did we reach this point? For decades, Murang'a farmers had been struggling with low agricultural production and productivity. Erratic weather patterns, pest and disease pressure, high post-harvest losses, soil degradation and diminishing available land pressed many smallholders into unsustainable practices, including a heavy reliance on chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Rising input prices caused additional financial stress, and a focus on cash crops meant that the cultivation of crops for household consumption was neglected.

As a result, despite the county's robust agricultural activities, poverty pervades. Today, an estimated 23% of the county's total population suffers from food poverty, and 19% of the county's children under five exhibit stunted growth.

Urgent measures were needed, and in 2021 a group of farmers, civil society organisations and representatives of the county government came together to seek joint solutions. This process was catalysed by the Institute for Culture and Ecology (ICE), a national NGO promoting environmental conservation and natural resource management through community-based initiatives, in partnership with Biovision, which advocates for healthier and more sustainable alternatives to local food systems in crisis.

Following a dialogue process based on coalition building, alignment with government priorities, and the leveraging of synergies with other sectors, the Murang'a government recognised agroecology as a promising alternative.

Alignment with county objectives

Under the initiative of ICE, a coalition was formed between the county government and multiple stakeholder groups along the food system value chain to champion the development of the agroecology policy framework.

This collaboration was institutionalised through the creation of the Murang'a Agroecology Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP), which comprises 43 institutions including the county government, civil society organisations, higher education institutions, farmers' organisations and the private sector. To kick off the process, stakeholders identified contextual 'pain points' – relating to climate, market trends and public health – to encourage the county government to support agroecology.

Climate challenges for local food systems

In recent years, Murang'a farmers have reported reduced yields, erratic rainfall patterns and increased pests and diseases. Building on scientific evidence about the effects of climate change on weather patterns, habitat ranges and crop planting dates, the coalition advocated for the widespread adoption of agroecological practices to address these impacts.

This call resonated strongly with the government's efforts to fight climate change. Concretely, the Murang'a Agroecology Policy recognises the risk that climate change brings for the county's agricultural sector in "reducing productivity in crops, livestock yields and fisheries production", and concludes that the agroecology policy framework "should therefore be able to address some of these shortcomings".

Riding on market trends

A focus on export markets for cash crops grown in an agroecological way was another key advocacy lever. Thanks to the coalition's efforts, Murang'a's authorities recognised the value of exporting agroecological products to foreign, mainly European, markets.

Let's look again at the example of avocados: according to official figures, Kenyan avocado exports grew steadily between 2015 and 2019, resulting in a 96.9% overall increase. The EU and the UK together accounted for 42% of Kenya's total organic avocado exports in 2019. There is thus great potential for further export growth of organic avocados targeting the EU market, while contributing to local sustainability.

There is no doubt that this economic argument helped to guarantee government support for linking avocado production with "national and internationally set market standards". This increased export market share will guarantee appropriate incomes to smallholder farmers in the county.

With the opening of these new markets, it remains to be seen whether farmers will sustain mixed farming rather than focusing solely on producing crops for export. Measures have been taken to incentivise local and subsistence production adjacent to the avocado orchards in order to spread risks and encourage diversification. An oversight board has also been created to monitor the environmental and social impacts of the expansion of export markets.

'Food Farmacies' for healthier diets

Agroecology can also benefit public health. The healthcare sector in low and middle-income countries is facing tremendous challenges, including rising expenditures and the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

According to the World Health Organisation, one of the five major risk factors for NCDs is unhealthy diets. In Kenya, Murang'a is among the counties with the highest proportion of deaths linked to NCDs (up to 55%). The county government has recognised public health as one of its highest priorities and plans to provide universal healthcare and health insurance coverage to all residents.

This context paved the way for the stakeholder coalition to promote agroecological practices as a means for producing and consuming more nutritious food and thereby

reducing health expenditures. The coalition kickstarted a fruitful dialogue with the county's health and nutrition departments, resulting in an innovative idea for 'food farmacies' that allow healthcare practitioners to prescribe agroecological food to treat and prevent lifestyle diseases and prevent future ones.

This initiative has triggered interest beyond Murang'a, and in the future residents of Nairobi will also receive local and indigenous agroecological food from Murang'a via these 'farmacies'.

Successes and learnings

The key learnings from the Murang'a process can serve as a blueprint for peer agroecology practitioners and experts advocating for policy support in their own countries. First, farmers must form the backbone of any agroecology policymaking process. Second, a leading local institution can be instrumental for defining and navigating a clear roadmap and thereby simplifying interactions with government authorities. Third, multi-stakeholder partnerships, given that they bring together a sufficient breadth of actors and expertise, are a powerful tool for driving change. Finally, a participatory approach before, during and after the adoption of an agroecology policy is key to guaranteeing continuous ownership, implementation and concrete outcomes along the food system value chain.

Farmers must form the backbone of any agroecology policymaking process

There were also challenges, mostly financial. As the Murang'a Agroecology Policy process was a first of its kind, there have been various unforeseen developments during its development and the current implementation, requiring many more resources than foreseen. The stakeholders were key in addressing the financial gaps by funding bits of the activities.

We believe the Murang'a case offers a strong model for agroecology advocates and researchers worldwide on how to position agroecology as a sustainable alternative to industrial food systems, and hope that it can inspire and guide agroecological movements around the world. ■

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Agroecology can be a means for producing and consuming healthier, more nutritious food.

Photo: Evans Ogeto

UNDROP: Lighting the way for peasants' rights

Photo: Serafín Vidal Ponce

"This declaration came at a very crucial time for the strengthening and supporting of peasants' movements in a context where rural areas are aging, cities and infrastructure are expanding on agricultural lands, trade practices are impoverishing peasant communities, and illegal activities and armed conflicts are eroding peasant territories." In 2018, the United Nations approved an international instrument that gives explicit rights to peasants and rural workers: UNDROP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. It was further strengthened in 2023. *Rooted* asked SOCLA President Georgina M. Catacora-Vargas to share her thoughts about its potential for peasants and rural workers around the world.

Georgina Catacora-Vargas

GEORGINA M. CATACORA-VARGAS is a Bolivian agroecologist, researcher and former negotiator in various UN processes. She works as professor of Agroecology at the Academic Peasant Unit 'Tiahuanacu' of the Bolivian Catholic University, and is the President of the Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology (SOCLA). For her, agroecology is a concrete and effective way to materialise hope, justice, and a healthy and joyful sense of wellbeing. Georgina feels deeply inspired by the strength and wisdom of women, children and youth, and she promotes the arts as an integral and transformative approach in her teaching and research.

In your eyes, what makes this declaration unique and unprecedented?

"Importantly, it is the very first UN instrument that clearly defines who we mean when we talk about 'peasants'. We often think of peasants solely as people who cultivate crops on a small scale. This is true and very important; however, peasants also include pastoralists, artisanal and small-scale fishers, gatherers, Indigenous People and others – whether sedentary, nomadic, semi-nomadic, with land, or landless – whose livelihoods are closely tied with the land and other components of ecosystems.

The definition of peasants also refers to women, youth and children. This comprehensive description of peasants is essential: for recognising all of these rights holders, for helping to ensure they are no longer ignored, and for acknowledging the dynamics that keep them in vulnerable and marginalised situations. Recognition is the first step towards justice and dignity.

UNDROP is also unprecedented in that it includes language on the "right to food sovereignty". This is quite remarkable! In general, governments have an aversion to the term 'food sovereignty'. This has to do with the inherent political implications of the power shifting that occurs when peasants exercise their rights to seeds, land, water, and the protection of their traditional knowledge, which are key aspects of food sovereignty.

From a human rights perspective, UNDROP contains other unique elements that have not been addressed before in any UN instrument. These include the recognition of agroecology as a means to achieve important peasants' rights, the right to be protected against the use of – and the right not to use – hazardous substances such as agrochemicals, and the right to be protected against human rights infringements arising from GMO-related activities."

What are the roots of UNDROP?

"Over the years, awareness has been growing about the essential socio-cultural roles of peasants, as well as their collective production capacity in terms of volume, diversity and outreach. We've seen increased discussions in international fora about the vulnerable situation and lack of protection for peasants and rural workers.

Recognition of the need to respect peasants' rights is long overdue. Peasants not only play an essential role in feeding the world; they also manage agroecosystems and preserve cultures connected with farming and food. The 2.4 billion peasants around the world produce up to 80% of all locally consumed food, mostly on small plots of land of under five hectares. Paradoxically, peasants suffer more material poverty, discrimination, and rights violations than any other population around the world.

UNDROP is the result of attempts to address these systemic injustices. It was born out of a rightful need and an ethical urgency to recognise, respect and dignify peasants and rural agricultural workers.

Thanks to the work of committed civil society and grassroots organisations including La Vía Campesina (LVC), the peasants' rights discussion was 'elevated' to the UN fora. The participation of peasants throughout the entire UNDROP drafting process allowed them to bring their specific struggles to the negotiating table. Thanks in part to their crucial contribution, UNDROP addresses many of the complex and interrelated challenges faced by peasants and rural workers."

How will UNDROP be useful for the agroecology movement, and vice-versa?

"Agroecology is recognised as both a right and a duty in the declaration, at different complementary levels. UNDROP explicitly mentions the role of agroecology in preserving livelihoods and traditional knowledge, in protecting land and so-called natural resources, and in the transition to sustainable agriculture. Moreover, other provisions of UNDROP are relevant to agroecological management and the positive impacts it fosters.

At the same time, the agroecological movement will be fundamental in the implementation of UNDROP. For instance, agroecology supports the fulfillment of peasants' rights by restoring the ecosystems upon which peasant livelihoods and identities are built. Furthermore, the technical and social processes promoted by agroecology contribute to achieving keystone rights: to food sovereignty, to resilience, to healthy food, to decent work and safe working conditions, and to many other rights covered by UNDROP. UNDROP and agroecological movements and processes are therefore mutually supportive."

Does this new agreement give you optimism about the coming years?

"Yes! UNDROP comes at a very crucial time for the strengthening and supporting of peasants' movements in a context where rural areas are aging, cities and infrastructure are expanding on agricultural lands, mainstream market and trade practices are impoverishing peasant communities, and illegal activities and armed conflicts are eroding peasant territories around the world. Moreover, climate change is devastating rural livelihoods, and there is insufficient institutional support for coping in the short term and adapting in the long term. These are enormous and intertwined issues that weaken and shrink peasantries. This in turn is very dangerous: without peasants, humanity will face unbearable food and cultural crises.

Even though the prediction that peasants will disappear has been around for many decades, they still show huge amounts of relevance and resilience. But we know resilience also has its limits. It is therefore very important to work on different levels – global, national and local – to strengthen, revive and dignify peasants, including women, children and youth. Let me share some specific examples in which UNDROP has played a supporting role.

There are already examples of how UNDROP has been used in practice. At the territorial level, elements in the declaration provided guidance to three Indigenous nations in Bolivia (Yampara, Khara Khara and Guaraní) in proposing a new regulatory instrument. This led to a departmental law that protects native varieties and landraces of maize and the associated knowledge, based on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and peasants. At the national level, in July 2023 Colombia recognised the country's peasants as rights holders and people deserving special protection.

Globally, the UN approved a special mechanism to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of UNDROP in September 2023. Around two months later, the first regional governmental consultation on the implementation of UNDROP in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Colombia. Also, various international grassroot groups, such as the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and La Vía Campesina, together with civil society organisations and committed scholars, are actively promoting UNDROP as a cross cutting instrument in different UN discussions.

The road ahead is long, but the stage is set for adopting human rights-based approaches that will help us to effectively address urgent global challenges. Promoting, protecting and implementing the rights of peasants is vital, and involves profound positive transformations including changing our values and the way we recognise and respect each other.

UNDROP and agroecology respectively provide the legal framework and the territorial experiences and evidence that will help us to move towards more just, dignified, and healthy livelihoods for peasants and, hence, for all humanity." ■

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*Interview by **Ann Doherty**, a farmer in the Netherlands and an editor of Rooted magazine. Contact: rooted@cultivatecollective.org.*
An elaborate analysis of UNDROP written by Georgina Catacora-Vargas is available in our sister magazines LEISA Revista de Agroecologia (Spanish) and in Agriculturas (Portuguese).

Lessons from Switzerland's Citizens' Assembly for Food Policy

People are increasingly alienated from their food, not to mention from the complex system that determines what ends up on our plates. And government policy generally fails to address the problems with our current food system, let alone facilitate the emergence of agroecological solutions. So, what happens when people are put in charge of creating food policy? The case of the Swiss Citizens' Assembly offers an inspiring model for creating active 'food citizens', but it also shows the limits to systemic transformation when a collective rejection of the capitalist food system is not on the table.

INEA LEHNER AND JOHANNA JACOBI

In 2022, a consortium of civil society organisations in Switzerland launched the Swiss Citizens' Assembly for Food Policy (SCAFP) with the aim of fostering a nation-wide discussion about the country's food system. The Swiss federal government, which had identified the transformation of food systems as a top priority in meeting the country's sustainable development commitments, provided both public and financial support for this process. We have analysed this process and the outcomes through the lens of agroecology.

Deep dive into the food system

To convene a citizens' assembly, people are randomly selected to demographically represent the population of a region (for instance a city or country) based on various factors (such as age and gender). Participants are then brought together to learn, discuss, and co-create policy recommendations on a particular theme.

Over the course of a six-month period between June and November 2022, some 80 randomly selected Swiss residents from across the country collaboratively addressed the SCAFP's guiding question: *What kind of Swiss food policy is needed to provide all citizens with healthy, sustainable, animal-friendly, and ethically produced food by 2030?*

Participants were divided into five thematic groups: environment, agricultural production, economic affairs, social affairs, and health. They were then briefed by experts before taking part in facilitated discussions around their designated theme.

They also visited a wide array of innovative agrifood initiatives around Switzerland, many of them based on agroecological principles and practices. Their excursions included an urban garden and community-based supermarket cooperative in Geneva, a polyculture farm in Appenzell, an agroforest in Fribourg, a mountain-based Community Supported Agriculture operation nestled in the

The kick-off meeting of the SCAFP in June 2022.

Alps of Graubünden, and a restaurant in the city of Bern that exclusively sources Swiss ingredients.

In November 2022, the assembly co-formulated and democratically approved an impressive 126 food policy recommendations for Switzerland. Participants were able to co-create these solutions and bring their voices into political debates. They claimed to have learned a great deal about the complexity of the food system and their own agency in it: "In the last six months I have felt for the first time that I have a place in this society, that I can play a positive role, and that my views and experiences also have a place," reflected one participant. This process showed that citizens' assemblies offer a promising avenue for people to engage personally with food system issues.

Shifts rather than seismic change

The outcomes of the assembly revealed that its participants overwhelmingly desire a more sustainable, just and healthy food system and that they recognise the shortcomings of the current model. Nonetheless, many policy recommendations focused on shifting consumer behaviour rather than proposing more systemic change.

We wondered whether the guidance of an alternative political framework – based, for example, on the principles of agroecology – could have led to more radical proposals? This provides food for thought: how can citizen's assemblies play a role in holistic and transformative food system change?

Constrained by capitalism

Ultimately, we believe that several factors limited the potential of the SCAFP to be truly transformative. Most importantly, the predominance of a capitalist-realist worldview – the acceptance of capitalism as the only viable political-economic system as the starting point of the Citizens' Assembly – restricted the ability of the participants to envision wider change.

For example, although they preferred alternative food initiatives emphasising sustainability and fairness – like the innovative food projects they visited during the excursions – they remained doubtful about their overall feasibility. They asked questions such as: Were these alternatives only successful due to their specific context? Were they scalable? Could they ever become mainstream? Could they really be profitable in the long run?

This capitalist realism was also apparent in participants' paradoxical views concerning the role of corporations in the food system. Whilst they criticised the immense power wielded by corporate actors and acknowledged their responsibility in exacerbating many food system problems and blocking change, they did not envision a food system without them.

Accordingly, they identified consumers as the primary agents and consumption as the primary act of food system transformation, and focused their recommendations on actions encouraging individual behaviour change. This focus

Photo: Katharina Boerlin

Excursion to the Surselva Community Supported Agriculture project in the Swiss Alps.

mirrors the capitalist conceptualisation of people as rational consumers, focused only on their self-interest, and impedes organised collective action.

Depoliticised dynamics

A second, related barrier to the assembly's transformative potential was the apolitical approach to many of the topics. Food system challenges were divorced from their political-economic causes and contexts, the power dynamics that shape them, and the divergent or even antagonistic interests of different actors. The SCAFP often sought to find an optimal, rational solution requiring compromise on all sides, rather than acknowledging that food system transformation will require addressing root causes (such as profit maximisation) and defending some interests (such as smallholder farmers) over others (like Syngenta shareholders).

These dynamics were evident in the context of food waste in the SCAFP recommendations. Food waste is driven largely by profit maximisation, and its existence benefits some actors while hurting others. For example, manufacturers can sell more food products if they set conservative expiration dates. Although the reform of this wasteful mechanism was addressed in the SCAFP recommendations, there was no talk of tackling the drivers of food waste – for instance through the decommodification of food. In retrospect, a more radical outcome would have required a political discussion about the winners and losers in the industrialised food system.

Agroecology at the core

Overall, the results of the SCAFP are encouraging and provide food for thought. Citizens' assemblies can create fertile ground for the collaborative exploration of the food system and the emergence of engaged food citizens that are passionate about shaping its transformation. However, to generate the radical policy proposals that encourage agroecological transformations, capitalist realism must be overcome and conversations about the food system must be (re)politicised.

To this end, the findings from the Swiss experience can certainly inform future citizens' assemblies for food policy. First, from the start organisers should integrate agroecological principles into the design and implementation of their citizens' assemblies. This will nurture a holistic understanding and approach to transforming the food system without shying away from the fundamentally political nature of this exercise.

Furthermore, organisers could draw on the work of Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire and the field of critical pedagogy to foster a participatory, dialogue-based learning and reflecting environment that promotes critical thinking about the destructive and oppressive nature of the dominant food system. With this approach, participants would be empowered to collaboratively develop informed, inclusive solutions that radically align with principles of social and agroecological sustainability, justice and health. ■

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How informal policies of care shape our food systems

JESSICA MILGROOM AND
JOSH BREM-WILSON

The term 'policy' conjures up the idea of a written document meant to guide people's behaviour. However, there is also a world of informal policies that guide people's everyday behaviour that is neither written nor necessarily explicit: norms, tacit rules, customs and practices. These informal policies shape our diverse food systems in important ways.

Photo: Jessica Milgroom

The agroecological stewardship of land, water, seeds and soil is governed by various tacit norms, rules and customs based on the values of inclusivity and care, as well as respect for and relationship with place. In agroecology, what happens in the food system – from the farm, forest or ocean to the plate and beyond – is largely determined by informal policies.

Informal 'policies' in agrarian or hunter-gatherer food cultures were often – and sometimes continue to be – based on values of solidarity and reciprocity. In many places, these values emerged from Indigenous cosmologies that explain people's place on this planet in relation to the spirit world and their sacred responsibility to take care of it and of each other. This resulted in social safety networks that ensured access to food and water for current as well as future generations. For example, in many cultures, customs of sharing water were based on practices that ensured that everyone had and would continue to have sufficient clean water. This general code of conduct was transmitted to children as values ("don't use more water than you need") or traditional practices dictating how many hours of irrigation water each plot in a particular watershed should receive.

Today, due to the pervasive extractive and individualistic nature of capitalism, many informal policies governing the stewardship of land and water in rural areas are no longer explicitly based on solidarity and reciprocity and social groups may not enact collective stewardship for a particular location. However, a group of people with shared food values may instead come together around community-based sites of agroecology such as a social movement or a farmer's market. These are important spaces for the reproduction of informal policies of agroecology, even if they are not land-based or place-based.

Formal policies are an important way to open new horizons for agroecology, and to facilitate the scaling up and out of agroecological practices via structural or economic incentives or through providing access to knowledge. However, in conversations about policies for agroecology, we must not forget the multitude of existing and evolving informal policies based on anti-capitalist values that give primacy to maintaining and reviving agrarian and food cultures, and to long-term relationships with the land and with each other.

Even in a formal policy environment hostile to agroecology, fostering and reproducing informal policies of care for others and for the earth in the food system can go a long way, whether you are a farmer, an eater or a policymaker.

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Photo: Cecília Figueiredo

Insights from agroecology policy advocacy across Brazil

After the 2016 coup in Brazil and the rise of the ultra-conservative right in 2018, official spaces for participatory governance at the federal level were dismantled. In this hostile political scenario, the National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA) sought to reposition itself politically in an effort to maintain a proactive role in the field of public policies.
ANA took a strategic decision in 2020 to focus its agroecology advocacy on the local level. This laid the groundwork for an effective campaign around the 2022 state and federal elections. Here, ANA shares some of its lessons learnt.

FLAVIA LONDRES, VIVIANE BROCHARDT AND MORGANA MASELLI

Mapping existing local policies

The starting point for any campaign in ANA is often the systematisation of what is already there. So in 2020, ANA identified existing municipal and state policies that supported agroecology and promoted food and nutrition sovereignty and security. The aim was to encourage the exchange of experiences about how these subnational policies were created and implemented, to reflect on their results and challenges, and to stimulate local advocacy.

This was very relevant; despite an abundance of proposals, negotiations and implementation experience related to local policies there was no systematic exchange of knowledge between these initiatives. Based on this inventory, ANA developed the 'Agroecology in the Elections' campaign in 2020. This included a survey and involved 34 researchers in each of Brazil's 26 states with links to state-level agroecology networks.

Through the survey, more than 700 diverse public policies affecting various parts of the food system were uncovered in 531 municipalities: from the protection of territorial rights to production, processing, distribution and disposal.

Based on this national survey, ANA published Agroecological Municipalities and Policies for the Future, which provides a summary of the main results and details of some of the policies. A model letter of commitment presented 36 policy proposals organised into 13 thematic fields and presented in an interactive map.

This document was presented and debated with mayors and city council candidates across the country. Through a nationwide effort, signatures of support were collected from 1,238 candidates for the 2020 municipal elections (14.4% of whom were in fact elected). Several of these candidates included proposals in their programmes, revealing the pedagogical dimension of this process.

Drafting municipal policies after the elections

In May 2021, ANA launched a 10-month advocacy campaign to ensure that the commitments made during the electoral period were fulfilled. Local ANA organisers were active in 39 municipalities spread across the country's 26 states. A team of regional communicators gave this work national visibility, and national online meetings were held every two months to monitor results and share learnings.

One direct result was the drafting of ten municipal agroecology policies, plans or similar legal instruments. For example, in the Borborema region of the state of Paraíba, connections were made between different municipal agriculture departments regarding the acquisition of creole seeds to distribute to farming families.

At the end of the campaign, a new online map highlighting 59 municipal-level policies at some stage in the cycle of drafting, implementing, monitoring and evaluation was launched, as a way to share lessons and inspiration for policy advocacy. Various other communication tools, such as educational booklets and animated videos, were also created and disseminated.

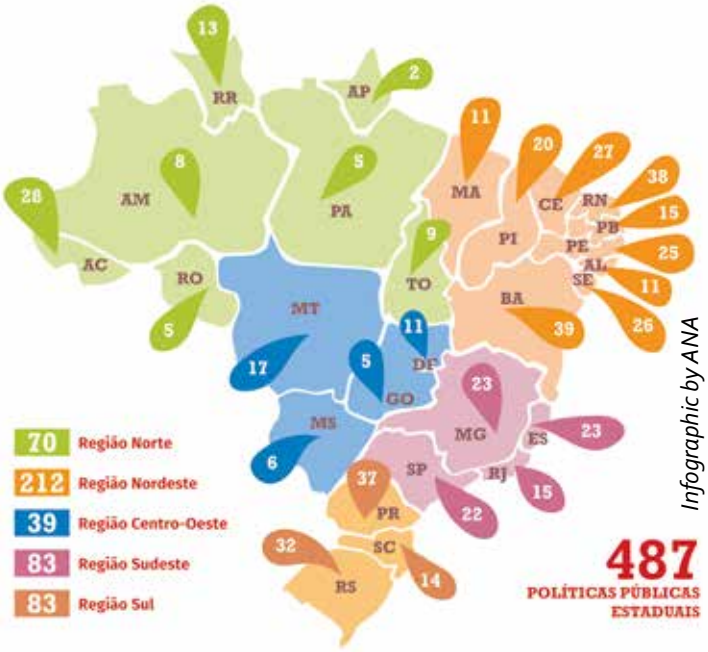
Success in the municipal campaigns motivated organisations to undertake a new campaign for the 2022 state and federal elections

These successful campaigns in turn motivated organisations and networks from all over the country to undertake a new political advocacy campaign for the 2022 state and federal elections. At the federal level, there was hope that Lula would be re-elected as president and that progressives would be voted into the federal Congress and Senate. The same challenge was posed in the states. ANA managed made good use of this strategic opportunity to project the agroecology agenda from the local into the national electoral debate.

ANA: A national force for agroecology

The emergence of the Brazilian National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA) in 2002 coincided with the election of President Lula for his first term in office. Since then, a large part of ANA's work has been around political advocacy, with farmers, researchers and activists joining the efforts. ANA has also participated intensively in institutional spaces for dialogue between the state and civil society at federal level, for the improvement and creation of various public policies to promote food and nutrition sovereignty and security and to support family farming and agroecology – including the famous National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (PNAPO), established in 2012.

ANA's website: **agroecologia.org.br**



487 State policies addressing agroecology and food and nutrition sovereignty and security were identified in the country's 26 states.

Agroecology in the 2022 state and federal elections

ANA launched its 'Agroecology in the 2022 Elections' campaign in a context of widespread polarisation in Brazilian society. The first step was to target state and federal candidates with a new proposed letter of commitment. Drawn up with contributions from ANA working groups and collectives and regional agroecology networks, this document presents a set of policy proposals for agroecology. The list of candidates committing to these proposals was updated weekly on the ANA website.

On the federal policy front, ANA established partnerships with universities in Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro and Berlin to carry out research for a publication on the establishment and subsequent dismantling of federal policies to support agroecology and food and nutrition sovereignty and security.

In the area of state policies, a research and mobilisation team carried out a survey of actions, policies, programmes and legislation addressing agroecology and food and nutrition sovereignty and security in all of the country's 26 states. Over the course of two months, 487 state policies were identified and summarised on a new online map. The survey also gave rise to a series of communication materials (including articles, podcasts and social media cards) and a publication analysing the state policies in the context of ANA's letter of commitment.

The next step in the campaign involved direct advocacy actions with state candidates. To this end, a wide range of local organisations held public events and activities with progressive candidates: agroecological fairs, lunches, stalls, public debates, walks, caravans and other creative live and virtual actions, which served to strengthen agroecology networks in many states.

As a direct result of these combined actions, 694 signatures for the ANA's letter of commitment were collected for the 2022 elections. Of the candidates who signed, 156 were elected in the federal district and in 21 states: one senator and 64 federal deputies at the federal level and five governors and 86 deputies at the state level. This means that over 10 per cent of the elected candidates signed a commitment to strengthening agroecology.

Lessons and challenges

ANA has learnt many lessons from these experiences. For one, the importance of identifying existing local policies and making them visible. This strategy helped to create an agenda with proposals consisting of viable measures that had already been successfully tried out somewhere in Brazil.

The national exchange of local strategies and actions brought immense benefits in terms of sharing learnings and inspiration. For the organising teams, analysis provided by the advocacy campaign was also an important resource for monitoring and evaluating the results of their actions. This analysis also played a fundamental role in democratising and broadening the reach of the learnings generated within the networks and organisations within the agroecological movement.

The promotion of communication from the territories that gave national visibility to local and very concrete examples, initiatives and realities has been very powerful. ANA's rooted communication strategy played an important role in disseminating knowledge about the reality of agroecology, its challenges and proposals to ever wider audiences. In this way, ANA contributes to confronting the ideological hegemony of agribusiness.

> *Over 10 per cent of the elected candidates committed explicitly to strengthening agroecology*

However, many challenges remain. One is related to the scale and reach of ANA's work and the size of Brazil, which has more than 5,000 municipalities. On the one hand, actions in pilot municipalities have the potential to generate references, learnings and inspiration; on the other hand, we have limited capacity to reach more significant segments of the population with our proposals and to influence election outcomes more robustly.

Despite the great efforts and important results of the campaign, parliamentarians and policy makers committed to agroecology still constitute a small minority in the country. Overcoming this challenge would require far greater resources than ANA has been able to secure. Large

Photo: Viviane Brochardt/ANA

The 2024 National Encounter on Agroecology (ENA) in Brazil.

gatherings and the movement of teams across different territories, for example, are strategies that could enhance the reach of the agroecological movement and strengthen popular mobilisation in defense of its proposals. Considering the size of Brazil, however, these activities are prohibitively expensive.

Another challenge is that ANA's political advocacy has primarily relied on communicators in civil society organisations, which are currently suffering from budget constraints that impact hiring. It is obviously very difficult to contest narratives if there are insufficient resources to develop and project alternatives.

Visions for the future

With the election of President Lula for a third term and the restoration of a democratic environment in Brazil, the institutional dialogue spaces between the state and civil society have been reestablished. ANA has sought to occupy these spaces and to resume active political advocacy at the federal level.

However, it must be said that these spaces are in constant contention, and the policies we fight for often do not advance at the pace we would like. It is important to consider that in the same elections where Lula prevailed, the country also elected the most conservative federal parliament in decades. Furthermore, Brazil has the largest agribusiness caucus in history, committed to serving the interests of agribusiness and large landholdings. This evidently impacts progressive agendas.

This situation reinforces the importance of grassroots, decentralised action in territories and municipalities. In this regard, ANA has been striving to keep local mobilisations alive. 2024 is a year of municipal elections in Brazil, and a new edition of the 'Agroecology in the Elections' initiative has been launched, with actions taking place in the runup to the October elections.

Among the most important challenges for this new phase is our need to conduct advocacy actions in a coordinated and synergistic manner, stimulating information flows and integration between levels, in order to increase the effectiveness of our policy advocacy. ■

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From lifeless soil to lush banana trees: How Zimbabwean farmers led the way towards a national agroecology policy

Nelson Mudzingwa transformed a piece of land into a paradise using agroecological practices, despite daunting environmental and social challenges in his corner of Zimbabwe. Together with NGO worker Simba Guzha, he shares how pioneering farmers can lead by example, amplifying agroecology and fostering groundbreaking changes in national policy.

A STORY NARRATED BY SIMBA GUZHA AND NELSON MUDZINGWA

Simba: I remember how a few years ago, I was watching Nelson gazing proudly into an iron barrel brimming with cow dung and organic materials on his small farm in Shashe, Zimbabwe. This simple construction perched on steel rods holds a beautiful metaphor of his farm's transformative journey into agroecology. Nelson dug out a fistful of earthy organic matter threaded with red worms. At the front of the barrel, caramel-coloured water dripped out of a small hole and was collected in a container. Nelson used both this precious liquid and the rich compost as organic fertiliser for his crops.

Nelson: That is true, the worms have helped bring many changes on our farm. When my wife and I bought our piece of land ten years ago, we never dreamt it could be transformed into such an island of prosperity. We have poured our hearts and souls into this land by using agroecological practices. Today, our fields are lush and productive, with indigenous fruit trees such as marula, musuma, matamba and mutohwe, and exotic species including banana, peaches, pawpaw, mango, avocado, mulberry, lemon and guava. We also grow diverse annual crops like sorghum, millet, maize, beans, cowpeas, groundnuts, sunflowers and sesame. And our chickens, goats and cattle produce manure to feed our crops.

Agroecological success stories like this one are now plentiful in Zimbabwe, thanks to the bottom-up movement for farmer-to-farmer learning and for national policy changes that was ignited by small-scale farmers like ourselves.

Drought and food insecurity

Simba: According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, approximately 70 per cent of the population in Zimbabwe relies on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. Most of these farmers are smallholder farmers

Nelson Mudzwinga in front of his fish pond, which is stocked with bream and catfish. The fertile water from the ponds is used to irrigate his crops.

like Nelson, cultivating less than one hectare of land and entirely dependent on rainwater for irrigation.

Farmers face numerous obstacles in this semi-arid country, including soil depletion, deforestation, biodiversity loss and pollution following many years of high-input farming. Zimbabwe has also been grappling with the effects of climate change, including erratic rainfall, water scarcity and extreme weather events. Most smallholder farmers struggle to produce enough to feed their families; statistics from the World Food Programme show that during the lean season of 2022/23, more than 3.8 million people in rural areas faced food insecurity.

At the same time, farming traditions in the country are social and cooperative. Farmers help out on each other's land during the growing season to ensure that everyone has good yields and set up joint savings clubs for the purchase of cows, eventually sharing the meat amongst community members. This is the foundation on which the agroecological movement was able to grow.

Spreading the seeds of agroecology

Nelson: We have lived through many of these challenges. Successive seasons marked by prolonged drought and soaring seed prices impacted our ability to secure an adequate harvest, which was devastating for my family. After hearing of other Shashe farmers who were successfully using agroecological practices, I took part in exchange visits where I learned about soil fertility management, crop diversification, seed saving, agroforestry, livestock integration, conservation agriculture, pest management, water harvesting and conservation, beekeeping and fish farming. I experimented with these techniques on our new piece of land.

> *As more farmers began to experiment with agroecology, the results on the ground became visible and the excitement grew*
> *- Nelson Mudzingwa*

We planted diverse crops, and we integrated trees into our agricultural landscape to provide shade, windbreaks, and additional income from tree products, including medicines. We implemented techniques such as rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation and adopted the practice of 'pfumfudza': deep watering and then mulching with grass to keep the soil moist.

Following promising improvements in soil health and increased yields, I and my fellow agroecological growers were eager to share and spread these agroecological practices

Nelson Mudzwinga pointing out the various agroecology principles that he puts into practice at his farm.

across the country. Through ZIMSOFF, the Zimbabwe Small Holder Organic Farmers' Forum, we started to organise workshops and awareness campaigns to educate farmers about the benefits of agroecology for ecological health, social equity, and economic prosperity. As more and more farmers – including women – began to experiment with agroecological practices, the tangible results on the ground became visible and the excitement grew.

Our efforts soon caught the attention of local government representatives, who were impressed by the tangible results we were achieving. Some of our farmers were invited to share their experiences and success stories at agricultural forums and conferences, where they spoke passionately about the potential of agroecology to transform Zimbabwe's agricultural sector.

Agroecology as a national pillar

Simba: Indeed, these agroecological breakthroughs on the ground also offered solutions to the country's agricultural crisis, and they eventually sparked interest at the national level. Wishing to revive Zimbabwe's former role as the breadbasket for Southern Africa, the government was open to taking bold policy action to transform the sector.

This marked the beginning of a cooperative and fruitful dialogue between farmers and national government officials. In 2022, Nelson and his community actively participated in the policy development process, advocating for holistic, nature-friendly and people-centred approaches to sustainability and the provision of guidance, resources and incentives for farmers to facilitate the switch to agroecology. As a result, the promotion of agroecology, sustainable livelihoods and ecosystems and climate smart agriculture became fundamental pillars within the government's National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF).

The integration of agroecology into national policy has taken some time. As the concept is relatively new for most policymakers, the first step was to focus on the cultivation of a deep understanding of its 13 principles using the HLPE framework. More specifically, we emphasised how an agroecological approach can address climate change and delink farmers from expensive agro-industrial inputs. This has taken place through a series of inclusive, multi-stakeholder policy development processes led by the Ministry of Agriculture and involving smallholder farmers like Nelson, as well as other groups with expertise in sustainable agriculture (including the Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre in Harare and VSO, which promotes agroecology across Africa).

> *This signals a new era: governmental and non-governmental actors co-creating a policy that can reshape the agricultural landscape - Simba Guzha*

Together, this range of actors shaped the NAPF's proposed Agroecology Promotion Policy and Strategy, which will hopefully be adopted in 2024. This inspiring plan not only prioritises the adoption and advancement of agroecological practices but also recognises the need for capacity building, research and investment in agroecology projects. The plan includes farmer-to-farmer exchanges matching conventional with agroecological growers, peer learnings to share knowledge, and wider government extension programmes focusing on upscaling and ensuring quality deliverables.

The goal is to create an enabling environment for farmers undergoing the transition from conventional farming methods to more sustainable and regenerative practices, while at the same time celebrating indigenous wisdom, local knowledge, and community-driven solutions. Importantly, it signals a new era of cooperation, uniting governmental and non-governmental actors in co-creating a policy that holds the potential to reshape the agricultural landscape.

Naturally, there have been hiccups and stumbling blocks along the road. Beneficiaries of conventional, input-intensive farming – including agrochemical producers who often have strong political affiliations – have resisted the proposed changes to policy frameworks. Balancing diverse stakeholder interests – farmers, agribusiness, environmental groups and consumers – has been challenging at times. And the juggling of competing priorities and demands by policymakers has led to periods when the process has taken a back seat. Ultimately however, the government's fundamental support for agricultural transformation and the demonstrated success of agroecology on the ground has resulted in a relatively smooth integration from practice into policy over the past two years.

Momentum for farmer-led movement building

Nelson: The incorporation of agroecology into the national policy framework has brought about a powerful wave of change in Zimbabwe, and we now find ourselves at the forefront of a movement that is shaping the future of the country's agriculture. The promotion of agroecology has become an essential part of my life. We are now working with our civil society partners to push for the adoption of Zimbabwe's agroecology policy through meetings with farmers and policymakers across the country. We have become trainers and mentors, sharing our knowledge and expertise with others in Shashe eager to adopt agroecological practices. The sense of community and collaboration has grown stronger as farmers from other regions have come together to exchange ideas, learn from each other's experiences, and collectively advocate for additional resources and support.

Advocating for the recognition and immense potential of agroecology has strengthened us both as smallholder farmers and as a community. We understand that we must continuously engage with the government to ensure the long-term success of this transformative farming approach.

Simba: From his freerange roadrunner chickens to his organic compost operations, Nelson's homestead radiates hope and abundance. It showcases the immense potential of agroecology for climate adaptation and community development, and serves as an inspiration to farmers and policymakers in Shashe and beyond. ■

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Photo: Tracey Sibanda

Caught between aspirations and anxiety: Himalayan farmers struggle with state-led organic certification

Farming in the rugged Himalayan mountains of the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand poses considerable challenges. For generations, small-scale farmers have depended on traditional agroecology-based practices known as 'Baraanaja' to sustain both themselves and the health of their soils. Ever since the government started to push for certified organic agriculture, and despite promises of increased revenue, farmers have experienced substantial hurdles to the safeguarding of their livelihoods, lands, and traditions.

SADAF JAVED

Government push for organic certification

Certified organic farming is gaining traction globally as a remedy to industrial agriculture, primarily because it promotes environmentally sustainable practices and creates livelihood opportunities for farmers. In recent years, the Indian government has enthusiastically embraced the organic movement, juxtaposing it with traditional Baraanaja agriculture which it considers 'unproductive' and pitching the conversion to organic production as 'innovative' and 'groundbreaking'.

Organic certification was first introduced in 2002 in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand through a series of World Bank projects, where agriculture production is popularly known as 'organic by default' due to the minimal use of chemicals by local farmers. It was piloted in the plains of the Terai region, where the availability of consolidated land and the ability to provide irrigation resulted in successful commercial cash crops, including bumper harvests of the renowned basmati rice. Buoyed by these promising results, the state government aggressively expanded the project – specifically targeting small, marginal and subsistence farmers – with the goal of transforming the entire state into a leading producer of organic produce.

Organic certification is being promoted and rolled out in Uttarakhand under various schemes funded by the federal government, including the Traditional Agricultural

Photo: Sadaf Javed

Farmers in a training on organic certification in the village of Dabar, in Garhwal district in Uttarakhand.

Development Scheme (Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yogna, or PKVY). This scheme utilises IFOAM-Organic International's Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) certification, which offers an alternative to third-party organic certification: it is based on principles agreed by the community and involves lower costs and less administration.

Whereas third-party certification often targets global markets, PGS opens local or domestic markets for small-scale farmers. The PKVY targets independent small-scale farmers who cultivate on average two hectares of land across the state. The government claims that initiatives like the PKVY will be instrumental in stabilising agriculture-based livelihoods and halting the rampant outmigration from the region's mountainous areas.

Under the scheme, the state designates specific agricultural land with an organic classification and assists in merging smallholder farms into groups or 'clusters'. These clusters focus on producing specific crops that can be used for commercial purposes, such as millet, lentils, vegetables, fruits or medicinal plants. Training is provided through facilitating agencies such as regional councils, as is guidance on organic input procurement, on-farm activities, and post-harvest management including marketing, all based on the logic of maximum yield per acre. Farmers also receive subsidies for material assistance, for example organic fertilisers and pesticides, manure, seeds, compost systems and vermicompost kits.

Baraanaja vs certified organic farming

The state government's recent integration of the Baraanaja model into Uttarakhand's PKVY scheme under the label of 'certified organic farming' has been disappointing for small and marginal farmers. Despite the professed reliance on "trust, social networks, knowledge exchange, and transparency" that is normally at the heart of PGS certification, the guidelines, procedures and instructions have undermined farmers' autonomy, their decision making power, and community dynamics.

For instance, to obtain the final certification (PGS-Organic) for their crops, farmers must spend at least three years in transition (PGS-Green). During this period, they are required to undergo peer reviews to ascertain their compliance with PGS guidelines for organic farming standards. This scrutiny by fellow farmers has led to heightened interpersonal tensions at the community level.

Traditional Baraanaja farming

Baraanaja, a multi-cropping system prevalent in the hilly state of Uttarakhand, India, involves cultivating a diverse range of cereals, pulses, grains and vegetables together. This agroecology-based farming approach serves multiple purposes: ensuring food security, supporting livestock needs, and promoting soil health and local ecology. The prominence of Baraanaja-style farming can be attributed to a local social movement known as Beej Bachao Andolan (Save the Seed Movement), which was inspired by the renowned Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand.

A farmer displaying her home-grown organic produce in Almora.

The cluster production model further exacerbates these challenges by forcing participating farmers to focus on cultivating a single common crop. This is risky for small-scale farmers, as they are more vulnerable to economic and climatic shocks when their other seasonal crops are marginalised. Moreover, the scheme overlooks the complex system of growing multiple crops that are essential for the local community and their livestock.

Unsurprisingly, this focus on yield over quality and diversity poses a significant threat to Baraanaja-based resilient multi-cropping farming systems. Anxiety among Baraanaja farmers is increasing, as they are forced to choose between the pursuit of economic gains or the preservation of their traditional agroecological practices.

Market challenges

Farmers also struggle with major gaps in the state's marketing strategies for organic produce. The transition to organic certification requires a minimum of three years; during this period, farmers are not allowed to sell their produce under the organic label. The government does not provide sufficient platforms to connect producers and consumers, so the only options are direct government procurement and occasional government-sponsored 'kisan melas' (farmers' markets). As a result, the nearest 'mandi', or local marketplace, which may be located up to 100 kilometers away from the organic farming clusters, is often the only option for small farmers wanting to sell their produce.

Dhan Singh, a certified farmer from Uttarakhand, explains: "The closest road to our village is 5 or 6 kilometers away, and to transport organic produce to the local market – approximately 20 to 25 kilometers away – I have to hire a minivan. The expenses incurred often outweigh the returns from the market."

How organic certification could really benefit farmers

The experiences of Uttarakhand farmers demonstrate that the state's rapid shift towards organic farming should not be based on a rigid model imposed from above, but instead should be nuanced, progressive and based on the individual contexts of farmers. As certified organic farming integrates farmers into global value chains, it is essential that the local context is considered. Local conditions, farmers' circumstances, and their involvement in – or exclusion from – agri-food value chains, greatly impact the opportunities and risks that are transmitted through the chain.

Policy measures that prioritise the needs of small-scale farmers, ensure ecological and financial security, and uphold the fundamental principles of food security and food sovereignty are urgently required. These policies should include the establishment and safeguarding of dedicated markets offering fair prices for organic agricultural products, the development of robust supply and marketing channels and farmer-producer organisations, and the provision of crop insurance and government-backed safety nets such as Minimum Support Price for organic produce.

Traditional staples such as rice and wheat should be supplemented with more nutritious crops like millet, and should be integrated into the government's public distribution system for poorer populations to safeguard their cultivation and increase livelihood-based opportunities. Additionally, farmer cooperatives and community-based seed banks at the village level should be encouraged to bolster diversity, resilience, autonomy, local food security and food sovereignty.

Finally, policymakers must be educated about the distinction between output-oriented organic farming and agroecological multi-cropping practices like Baraanaja. Traditional Baraanaja techniques, which are strongly related to family nutrition and to cultural practices, should be valued and preserved rather than transformed into monocropping-inspired initiatives. Organic farming can only flourish in an equitable and sustainable manner when the welfare of small-scale farmers, their livelihoods, and their communities is put first. ■

*Author: **Sadaf Javed** is a PhD candidate at Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA. A human geographer by training, her work looks at agricultural development initiatives and farmers' responses in India.*

The farm without masters in Italy

In the north of Italy, young urban activists and older farmers are experimenting with new governance models for food production in a farm without hierarchy. Over the past years, Irina Aguiari has been participating in the process as both an activist and a researcher. "This an emblematic case of how state policy interventions can unsettle a commoning project led by citizens."

Photo: Farm without Masters

How did the Farm Without Masters become a reality?

"Mondeggi is a 200-hectare estate in the hills around Florence that dates back to the Renaissance period. Historically, the estate was a focal point for the surrounding villages, and locals worked in its olive groves and vineyards. In the 1960s, the provincial government took over the property, replacing the traditional model of farming with intensive industrialised agriculture. The estate was abandoned in 2009, and several years later the city of Florence took ownership. In 2014, the city decided to sell the estate through a public auction, hoping to attract foreign buyers who would transform the ruin into a luxury tourism resort. During these years of disuse, the fields grew wild and the buildings slowly crumbled.

In the period just before the public auction was announced, a group of students from the faculty of agrarian studies in Florence discovered Mondeggi. They had been looking for unused public land where they could turn the theory from their agronomy studies into practice. Together with the local community, they came up with a plan to squat the land, regenerate the vineyards, olive groves and fields using agroecological practices, and restore the buildings as communal living for the students. It was a very peculiar experiment: young urban political activists sitting in assemblies with older farmers in their 60s and 70s, some of whose grandparents had collected olives or made wine there long ago."

Photo: Irina Aguiari

This commoning experience – the Farm without Masters – was not officially recognised. Repeated attempts by the students to enter into dialogue with the municipality – the easiest strategy for legalising their living situation and farming activities – met with no response. Instead, they focused on gaining popular support from the wider area. The very first activity organised by the students and the farmers was a collective olive gathering. They pressed the olives, sold the oil in peasant markets around Florence, and handed out leaflets explaining how the community was working to revive Mondeggi and prevent it from becoming a tourist resort.

Today, the Farm without Masters is firmly embedded in the local community. It works with two main assemblies: the original Mondeggi committee consisting of activists and farmers, which makes most of the political decisions, and the community of mostly younger people who focus on the communitarian aspect of living on the estate.

What happened when COVID struck and state regulations reached the community?

"In Italy, COVID-related measures were very disruptive. We had three months of 'strong lockdown': 1,000 people were dying every day and nobody was allowed to leave their homes. These governmental measures were heavily contested. Paradoxically, the community in Mondeggi found itself in a very safe spot: they had each other, they had crops in the field so they didn›t need to line up in the supermarket, and they could take the kids from the village to run around in the hills. This was confirmation that what they were doing was a viable alternative to mainstream living. Interestingly, this situation triggered some very intense discussions in the community about how to prioritise health and collective care in a different way th an what was being imposed by the government.

Irina Aguiari

Irina Aguiari is a researcher and PhD candidate at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence. She uses participatory methods to study grassroots food production through commoning practices in Italy. Irina became involved with the Mondeggi community when she moved to the nearby hills at the start of her PhD process. She initiated a participatory research project with the community in 2021, and has engaged in political assemblies, children's summer camps, activism and agriculture work at Mondeggi ever since. Contact: irina.aguiari@sns.it

In 2021, when things were getting back to normal in the outside world, the community received a proposal from the metropolitan area of Florence, which had still not succeeded in selling the land through the public auction. Their new idea was to renovate the estate in a participatory process with the community, using €50 million in economic support from the European Union as part of the country's post-Covid National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) to support food commons."

What was the municipality's intention?

"The following period was very curious. It was difficult for the community to untangle the intentions of the political actors and the goal of the proposed policies. The fact that the money came from the European Union was problematic, as within the community there is a lot of criticism of this institution. At the same time, they find the EU better than the fascist Italian government. It was not clear whether the state was using this funding to gain control of the Farm without Masters and get some free PR, or whether it genuinely hoped to expand and support local food systems.

The community had different opinions about the proposal: some saw co-designing as an opportunity to engage in and influence the process, and others felt complete distrust, particularly due to the huge sum of money being proposed. After long discussions, the community decided to participate in the government's plan, feeling that their lives and livelihoods at Mondeggi were at stake if they stepped out. However some community members however, disillusioned by the top-down process, ultimately chose to leave.

> *"During COVID, the community found itself in a very safe spot: they had each other, they had crops in the field so they didn't need to line up in the supermarket"*

The government sent a committee of technical people – civil engineers, architects and an economist – to assess the condition of the estate. This says a lot about the public authorities' vision; their focus was on the buildings and productive facilities instead of the natural and human communities. During the proposal drafting process, the community often found that the specific wording they had chosen to convey the social and non-profit essence of the project was systematically erased or weakened by the technical committee. So the process has not been without challenges"

Currently, the Mondeggi community and the metropolitan government of Florence are working on what the mayor calls "the renaissance of Mondeggi». This is the first time in Italy that any party in the political spectrum has supported an initiative like the Farm without Masters. After a long period of ambiguity, the remaining Mondeggians are cautiously optimistic that their commoning initiative can continue to take root and spread.

In the absence of official policy to protect such spaces and the threat that governments may try to intervene, how can initiatives like this survive and multiply?

"Over the years, due to the uncertain situation, Mondeggi community members focused on cultivating a different kind of stability through informal networks. Many grassroots groups view Mondeggi as an important example of political practice. They have created a strong community of informal policies and ideals without organising conferences or creating vertical structures. So in the event of an eviction, for example, the Mondeggi community could count on a massive popular response from the very wide peasant network they have built over the years. This is something that formal organisations, political parties, more traditional social movements, and even local authorities cannot replicate, as it is based on a completely different way of thinking and acting.

Size is also important for the long-term viability of such experiences. If communities involve too many people, at some point they will stop functioning. I think that staying small is a strength of commoning initiatives rather than a limitation; it is another way of thinking about individual relations within communities. Cultivating this intimate dimension is important, and it does not mean being isolated from the outside world."

The Farm without Masters hopes to show that establishing some kind of autonomy – be it with food, with other natural resources, or with different degrees of commoning – can answer most of the challenges that we face today, even in the Global North. We have learned an important way forward: people coming together and using their imaginations to create spaces of autonomy. ■

*Interview by **Ann Doherty**, a farmer and educator in the Netherlands and an editor of Rooted magazine.*
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From the territories to the state: Policymaking for agroecology in Colombia

Over the past two years, grassroots organisations, including peasant, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, youth and women from different regions of Colombia have traced a route of articulation and advocacy to promote agroecology as a national public policy. Through a dialogue in the territories, they built a collective proposal for a National Agroecology Plan, strengthening the agroecological movement in the process.

IVONNE FLOREZ PASTOR

Over the past 20 years, our organisation Tierra Libre has been working with rural and urban communities in the Cundinamarca, Caldas, Antioquia and Tolima territories. In recent years, one of our commitments has been the creation of a national agroecology movement.

Agriculture in Colombia

In the past decades, an industrial agricultural model based on the Green Revolution has been promoted In Colombia and throughout Latin America. This model, characterised by the use of genetically modified organisms, agrochemicals and mechanisation, favours agribusiness and is pushed by multinationals such as Bayer, Monsanto and Syngenta. This has affected peoples' autonomy in their production methods, in their cultural traditions related to the land, and in practices of seed conservation and community exchange (trueque, or barter).

The situation in Colombia is further aggravated by over 50 years of internal armed conflict that was rooted in territorial disputes, the absence of the state in rural areas, insecurity in the territories, and drug trafficking. The very high concentration of land ownership and its use for extensive cattle ranching also limits food production, particularly in underutilised and degraded agricultural soils.

Despite these challenges, our country has known different forms of resistance and struggle, that sought to strengthen people-led governance systems, community life plans and popular mandates.

Building the National Public Policy on Agroecology

In 2022, Colombia experienced a historic milestone with the election of a center-left government led by Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez as president and vice-president respectively. Their agenda is based on four main pillars:

- **Total Peace:** Aiming to turn the peace process into a state policy through dialogue and negotiation with all armed groups, along with the recognition of victimised communities.
- **Economic Justice:** Proposals for tax reform and other measures to ensure that the wealthiest sectors assume their fiscal responsibilities and increase public revenue.
- **Social Justice:** Aiming to broaden redistribution in favour of the most disadvantaged sectors, for example by prioritising initiatives such as 'Zero Hunger'.
- **Environmental Justice:** Focusing on the transition from an extractivist and carbonised economy to a sustainable one by promoting sustainable food production, energy transition and nature conservation.

Opening ceremony of the 2023 regional agroecology meeting in the Antioquia-Eje Cafetero region.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the innovation directorate started a dialogue to develop a public policy to support this agenda. This dialogue included an exchange on the political and technical aspects of agroecology and food sovereignty, and saw the participation of diverse NGOs, peasant and Indigenous communities, education institutions, business, and broader coalitions, for example the National Network of Family Farming (RENAF) and the Latin American Agroecological Movement (MAELA). The goal of our movements was to achieve an agroecology policy under the "Colombia World Power for Life" National Development Plan 2023-2026, which was under negotiation.

Towards a national public policy for agroecology

This was the lead-up to our first National Agroecology Meeting (ENA) in 2022, where we convened various actors involved in agroecology in order to establish a common agenda that would allow for significant transformations in rural Colombia. Since then, our approach has focused on integrating the knowledge, practices and know-how related to agroecology and other forms of agriculture for life, understanding these as diverse ways of integrating ecological thinking into peasant practices.

Throughout 2023, we organised regional agroecology meetings aimed at facilitating spaces for exchange and dialogue for grassroots organisations in the territories. These meetings identified socio-environmental conflicts and established common agendas at the local level to influence the national agroecology policy. The results of this process allowed us to collectively develop guidelines for a participatory, inclusive, consensual and autonomous public policy on agroecology.

Outcomes of the regional meetings

At the first meeting, in the Antioquia – Eje Cafetero region, 48 peasant, Indigenous and popular organisations exchanged their experiences. The declaration that resulted from this meeting states:

"Our territories have been hit by multiple social and environmental injustices, including hydroelectric projects, mining, monoculture forestry and agriculture under the Green Revolution model, extensive cattle ranching, urban expansion, and changes in agricultural land use among others. These generate a rupture in the socio-cultural dynamics of the communities; they also deepen inequality in access to land, affect food sovereignty and devastate the commons, destroying and polluting the environmental heritage. … Agroecology is a real possibility for cooling the

Exchange of seeds and products in Riosucio Caldas during the regional meeting in Antioquia – Eje Cafetero.

planet and counteracting the hunger experienced by a large part of the population of our country, by stimulating local agri-food systems and solidarity-based economic circuits." *ERA Antioquia Declaration, 2023*

The second regional meeting took place in the San Gabriel Agro-food Peasant Territory in the southwest of the country and was attended by 50 representatives of 28 peasant and urban organisations related to agroecology, urban agriculture and agriculture for life. The meeting highlighted the need for the recognition and inclusion of peasants by government institutions in order to strengthen agroecological processes.

The third regional meeting, in central Colombia, was held at the Latin American Agroecology Institute María Cano in Viotá, Cundinamarca and was attended by delegates from 48 organisations. Several proposals were made, including the promotion of a social dialogue at local, regional and national levels on issues such as the right to food and food sovereignty, comprehensive agrarian reform, campaigns on the effects of agrotoxins, and the diversification of agroecological production.

In the political realm, one of the main achievements was the establishment of a dialogue table between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the organisations that have historically championed agroecology and food sovereignty. Another notable accomplishment was the alignment of different sectoral proposals within the agroecology framework, as well as the creation of a regional agenda that can influence national policies.

Currently, the development of the National Agroecology Plan is underway. This plan aims to promote initiatives and strategies to support agroecological transitions at the regional and territorial levels, to ensure the human right to food, to boost the local economy, and to contribute to climate resilience and territorial development.

The art of walking together

Colombia needs to mobilise its diverse agroecological expressions rooted in the connection with the land and local identity. These expressions are driven by transformative actors in each territory who have established networks that must be recognised and promoted at the national level. Agroecology offers valuable practical experience that can form the basis for a national transition towards more sustainable farming and food practices.

At Tierra Libre, we believe in building from the ground up, using proposals rooted in the history of communities. At the same time, we recognise the importance of a broad coordination that integrates the diversity of agroecological processes and approaches and will allow for the implementation of coherent actions at the national level.

Some notable challenges from our experience to date include coordinating joint agendas among different youth, Indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant sectors; creating political advocacy strategies that endure regardless of the political orientation of the government in power; and developing joint actions with the academic sector, which has different methods and needs.

Nationally, challenges include the need for greater community-based organisation and the strengthening of territories to make advocacy and action more impactful. We must prioritise the articulation and unity of social movements as a fundamental political task to advance the transformations and changes the country seeks. ■

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It takes a movement to grow a food policy

FARIS AHMED

It takes a dynamic, deeply engaged, intersectional grassroots movement to produce transformative food policies. Governments will rarely create such policies on their own. This is particularly true in the case of policies for agroecology, a popular proposal emerging from decades of struggles for food sovereignty, food justice and power over our food system by social movements, family farmers and small-scale provisioners around the world.

Photo: Faris Ahmed

Afer a two-year research project, I concluded that the agroecological transition must be built on deep and broad-based alliances, a strong common cause, and the co-creation of the tools needed for the dismantling, redesign and piece-by-piece rebuilding of the food system. Without these foundational activities, agroecology will remain a distant and fragmented proposition in Canada, leading only to a series of inconsequential transitions rather than a system-wide transformation involving shifts in power.

In my conversations with experts, we identified promising policy levers to enable agroecology in specific sectors (particularly in climate change, environment, health and social protection) as well as at the provincial, municipal and bioregional levels. Nonetheless, the sum of these measures might not lead to transformative change, but rather to an incremental 'transition' that would keep us locked into business as usual.

My research showed how important it is for national movements to develop their own citizen's or people's policies. A broad-based food movement can then legitimately call for a clearly articulated agroecology strategy that is embedded in a comprehensive and joined up national food policy, integrating agroecology coherently into all major sectors and policy planks. For example, the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP), a Canadian civil society food policy initiative brought together food, climate, anti-poverty, Indigenous, health, and other movements to build A Peoples' Food Policy for Canada. Our efforts came to fruition in 2015, when newly-elected PM Justin Trudeau launched a National Food Policy in Canada, and later created a National Food Policy Advisory Council.

The lessons learned in Canada are universal. Around the world, we have seen the power of broad-based civil society and peasant farmer movements acting in solidarity, and gaining sovereignty over land, territories, waters and seeds. Beyond defending their rights, strong allied peoples' food movement can also be propositional, which is what it will take to move towards agroecology policies in North America.

As stated in my research report Growing Common Ground: "Transitions involve changes in practice, while transformation involves changes in power....Only when agroecology is seen as an essential vehicle for change by many movements acting together, can a more inclusive and broad-based platform for agroecology emerge."

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*Author: **Faris Ahmed** is an Ottawa-based consultant and author of Growing Common Ground. He is a Research Associate at the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (Canada), and a member of the Cultivate! Collective. Contact: faris@cultivatecollective.org*

Resources

A selection of recent reports, toolkits, manifestos, methodological frameworks, websites, films and webinars focused on policy for agroecology from partners around the world.

National Agroecology Strategies in Eastern and Southern Africa

Biovision Foundation, 2024

This outcome brief summarises key lessons from work on national strategies for an agroecological transformation in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia and from a peer-to-peer exchange organised by Biovision involving 25 decision makers from governments and civil society organisations in eight nations.

Sub-national initiatives on Agroecology

Agroecology Coalition, 2024

Various subnational governments have adopted agroecological strategies. In this blog, the Agroecology Coalition dives into the unique approaches and specificities of Sicily (Italy), Catalonia (Spain), and Murang'a County (Kenya). They conclude that providing services to farmers such as training, monitoring and evaluation tools and financial incentives is a key component of these local policies.

They Will Feed Us! A people's route to African food sovereignty

African regional Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism consultation space, 2023

This report provides a critical analysis conducted by African peasant and civil society organisations of the process and content of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and the 2023 Feed Africa Summit, which developed "national pathways" to underpin a corporate-led, industrial food system transformation in Africa. The assessment is based on case studies in five countries – Mali, Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Zambia and Morocco – to evaluate the coherence, effectiveness and inclusivity of the national pathways and compacts put forth by their respective governments.

From Plate to Planet: How local governments are driving action on climate change through food

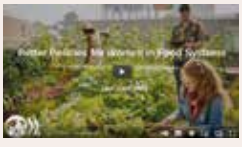
International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, 2023

Where national governments are falling short, local governments are pioneering some of the world's most ambitious policies around food and climate. This report highlights seven areas in which local governments are leveraging the climate potential of food system transformation.

Legal Guide on Farm-to-Fork Procurement

COACH (Collaborative Agri-food Chains project), 2023

For many years, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability has been facilitating knowledge exchanges between green municipalities across the world. As part of this work, the city of Copenhagen, in collaboration with Ghent in Belgium, developed an innovative legal Farm-to-fork toolkit on ways to unlock tenders for small-scale producers, building on good practices across Europe.



Webinar: Better Policies for Women in Food Systems

Network of Municipalities for Agroecology, Spain, 2023

A group within the Network of Municipalities for Agroecology in Spain has begun to interrogate the feminist perspective of local agri-food policies. Through a webinar, they present results from two research projects that respond to these questions based on concrete experiences. *Available only in Spanish*

Our Land is Our Life: Five National Land Policy Studies

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), 2023

This series of five national reports examines land policies and governance in five African countries: Senegal, Mali, Togo, Ghana and Cameroon. The reports are part of AFSA's "Our Land is Our Life" land rights initiative and offer recommendations for land rights advocacy, identifying key policy spaces, entry points, and actors.

Measuring agroecology: The Agroecology Finance Assessment tool

Agroecology Coalition, 2023

Over the past years, a group of researchers and organisations has been tracking funding flows for their contribution to an agroecological transformation of food systems. Together they have developed a methodological framework, using the HLPE's 13 principles of agroecology as a foundation. The framework uniquely outlines a set of 'red lines'.

Proposal for an EU Directive on Agricultural Land

European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), 2023

The right to land is threatened in Europe. As there is no European framework for land governance, ECVC has analysed the state of agricultural land and proposes concrete measures to ensure the realisation of the right to land in this comprehensive proposal for a directive.

Growing Common Ground: Pathways to agroecology policy in Canada

Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Waterloo, Canada, 2022

This report shares the results of the Agroecology Policy Research Initiative, a project that examines the state of agroecology policy in Canada. The report presents opportunities and levers of change that will advance policies and practices for agroecology.

Film: Foragers

Jumana Manna, 2022

Foragers depicts the impact of Israeli nature protection laws on the practice of foraging for wild edible plants in Palestine and Israel. The restrictions prohibit the collection of species including the artichoke-like 'akkoub and za'atar (thyme), and have resulted in fines and trials for hundreds of people caught collecting these native plants. For Palestinians, these laws constitute an ecological veil for legislation that further alienates them from their land, while Israeli state representatives insist on their scientific expertise and duty to protect.

UNDROP Training Modules

La Via Campesina and FIAN International, 2021

This series of popular education materials highlights how UNDROP (the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas) can be used to address and protect peasant rights to resources and means of production.

Agroecology Info Pool: the Policy Forum

Biovision Foundation, ongoing

The Agroecology Info Pool collects findings from agroecology projects and science and makes them publicly available to support a sustainable transformation of food systems. The Policy Forum of the Info Pool presents the latest updates on agroecology policy "for policy makers and shapers."

AgroecologyLex

UN Food and Agriculture Organization, ongoing

AgroecologyLex is a specialised database hosted by FAO on legal frameworks, policies and programmes concerning agroecology in different countries.

You are holding in your hands the first issue of Rooted in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty. This magazine is a platform for the exchange of voices, perspectives and knowledge of food producers and others at the forefront of action to transform food systems. A flagship global publication, it connects science, practice and movement, shifting narratives and strengthening agroecology for food sovereignty.

Rooted highlights lessons from real life that can provide useful guidance for other initiatives as well as for strategy and policymaking processes. *Rooted* builds on the rich history of its antecedent magazines, *Farming Matters* and *LEISA Newsletter*, which have captured knowledge from agroecological practice since 1984. *Rooted* collaborates closely with two regional agroecology magazines in Latin America: *LEISA Revista de Agroecologia* and *Agriculturas.*

Rooted is a collaboration between Cultivate!, the Latin American Association for Agroecology (SOCLA), the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), Agroecology Now! and the Institute for Agroecology at the University of Vermont (UVM-IfA).

The March 2025 issue of Rooted will bring stories on Health and Agroecology. Check our website for the Call for Contributions and subscribe for free to Rooted: www.rooted-magazine.org

October 2024

Rooted
in Agroecology and
Food Sovereignty

Photo: Faris Ahmed