

Part I – Overview

Agroecology as a Key Pillar of A National Food Policy

Prepared by Colin Anderson, *Michel Pimbert, Patrick Mulvany, Priscilla Claeys and Chris Maughan - with the Policies and Institutions Group at The Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience*

www.coventry.ac.uk/cawr

www.agroecologynow.com

Email: colin.anderson@coventry.ac.uk with questions or comments.

Introduction

Agroecological approaches to agriculture and food systems improve rural livelihoods, regenerate ecologies and increase the resilience of communities, while providing healthy and sustainable food. Policy support for agroecology in the UK has been piecemeal and many policies undermine the potential for developing agroecology in the UK. The National Food Strategy is an opportunity for the UK to participate in the growing global recognition of agroecology as a model for agricultural development and contributor to sustainable diets. For agroecology to thrive in the UK, there needs to be concerted investment and an enabling policy and regulatory environment to begin to, over the long term, transition to a more sustainable food system through agroecology. It needs to be addressed not just from the perspective of food production, but as a whole food system approach, linked to supportive policies and legislation for sustainable diets, education, research, equity/inclusion, the development of nested markets and environmental legislation (including access of food producers to natural resources including land, seeds and biodiversity).

What is agroecology?

Agroecology emphasises the application of ecological concepts to the design and management of sustainable agricultural production systems (Gliessman, 2014).

“Agroecology favour[s] the use of natural processes, limit the use of purchased inputs, promote closed cycles with minimal negative externalities and stress the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes that develop knowledge and practice through experience, as well as more conventional scientific methods, and address social inequalities. Agroecological approaches recognize that agrifood systems are coupled social–ecological systems from food

production to consumption and involve science, practice and a social movement, as well as their holistic integration, to address FSN.” - (HLPE, 2019)

Agroecology is linked to the notion of food sovereignty and based on the affirmation of the right to food and the agency of food producers and citizens to have control over food practice and policy (Nyéléni Movement for Food Sovereignty, 2015).

Agroecology is a particularly important and promising approach for family farmers and other smallholder and medium scale agricultural producers who are vital stewards of biodiversity, the environment and food security. In recognition of this potential, researchers, policy-makers and civil society organisations at national and international levels are converging around to consider how to scale up agroecology in the transition towards sustainable food systems.

Between 2014 and 2017, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation has facilitated a global dialogue on agroecology, bringing together more than 1400 participants from 170 countries in six regional symposia, taking the political debate about agroecology to a new level (FAO, 2018a). At the October 2018 COAG meeting – one of the highest governing bodies of FAO – 192 members of FAO adopted a [resolution](#) (FAO, 2018b) to request that FAO develop action plans with partners to scale up agroecology around the world. Further, in 2019 the High Level Panel of Experts published a report promoting Agroecological Approaches and Other Innovations for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems that Enhance Food and Nutrition Security (HLPE, 2019).

A growing number of governments are getting behind agroecology. For example, the Friends of Agroecology is an informal group of countries that work together and have provided financial and political support for FAO’s agroecology process over the years. It consists of France, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Senegal, Kenya, Algeria, Mexico, China and Japan. The French government, who has made agroecology the central plank of their agriculture policy describes agroecology as having triples performance (Guillou et al., 2013; Lamine, 2017):

1. Environmental
2. Economic advantages, improving yield and efficiency – especially for small-medium family farms
3. Societal - beneficial to society at large including health and nutritional benefits

These multiple benefits are presented in more detail in a second submission of evidence – Part II.

Supporting Agroecology in the National Food Strategy

A recent paper we have published at CAWR (Anderson et al., 2019) proposes a framework to foster the economic, political, cultural and social environment in the UK that can support the development of agroecology as a part of a national strategy. This framework recognises that, while agroecology shows great potential that there are a range of ‘lock-ins’ and disabling factors that prevent its development. Yet, evidence from across the world shows a range of enabling

factors that can support the scaling up and out of agroecology. We identified six primary domains that are critical to consider in the agroecological transformations: Access to Natural Ecosystems; Knowledge; Markets; Networks; Equity; and Narratives (figure 1). When these domains are shifted towards enabling dynamics for agroecology, supported by public policy and strong civil society organising, the potential for sustainability and food and nutrition security grows. Indeed, agroecology will only be effectively supported within an integrated and democratic food policy strategy that puts people and nature at the centre (A People's Food Policy, 2017). We would welcome an opportunity to provide further evidence and inputs around strategies to effectively support agroecological transitions.

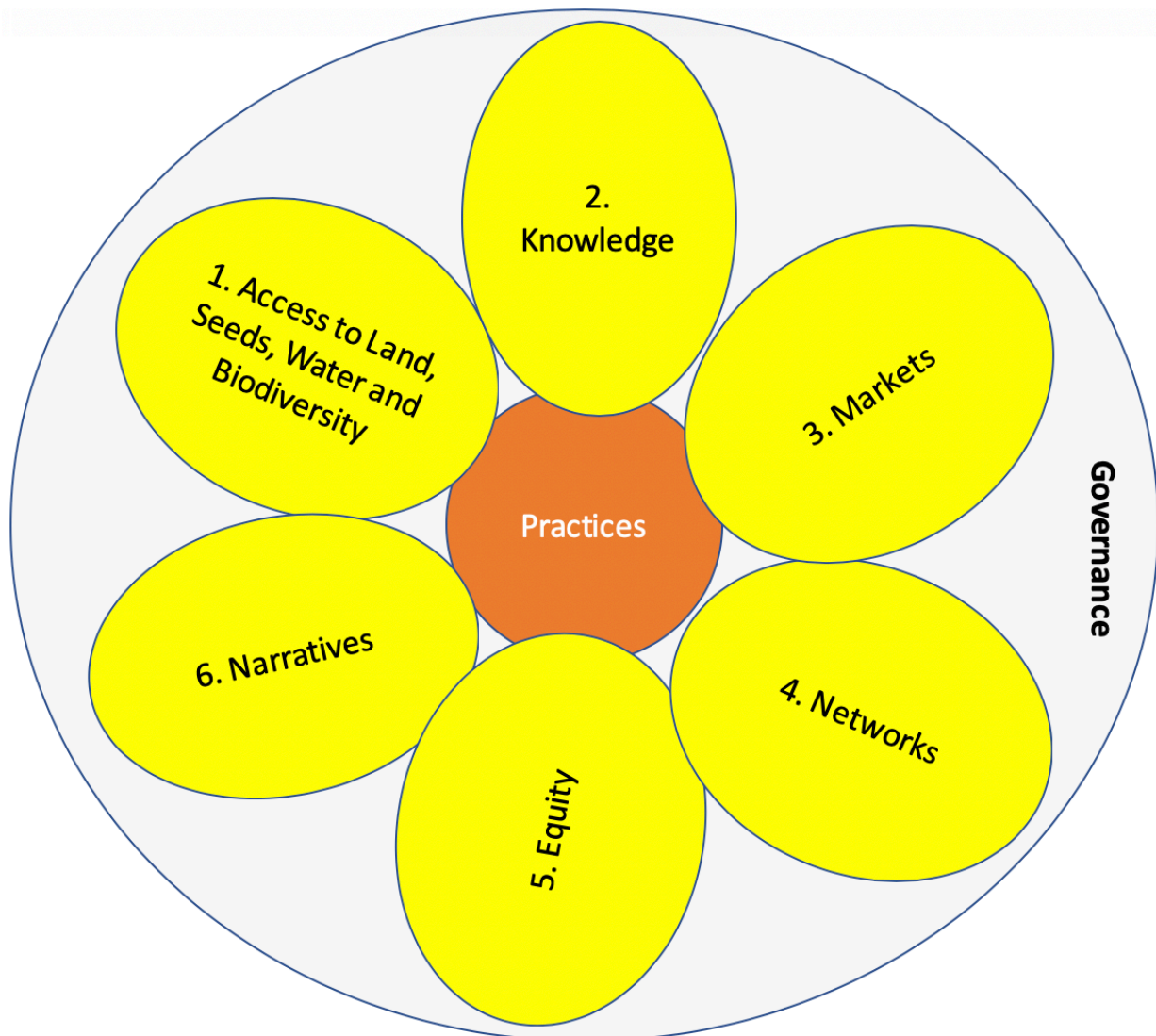


Figure 1 - Domains of transformation for sustainable food systems through agroecology. These domains are a determining factor in shaping the depth of agroecological production practices and are influenced by, and in turn influence, processes of governance.

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