



Policy debate on

Agroecology

20 March 2018

European Parliament

Opportunities and challenges for European development policy

MEETING MINUTES

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a **transformation of food and agriculture systems**. The scale of change needed is ambitious. Agroecology could significantly contribute to this transition.
2. Ensuring **sufficient and adequate funding**, i.a. through the development cooperation of the EU and its member states, is vital to scaling up agroecology.
3. Inclusive **partnerships and people-centred approaches**, as well as enabling **national and international policy frameworks**, are fundamental for supporting the agroecological transition.
4. **Investments in research** are needed to enable better monitoring and measurement of the positive economic, social, health and environmental impacts of agroecology.
5. **Mainstreaming agroecology in training of farmers** and scaling up of successful practices is crucial.

MINUTES

In her introductory remarks, **MEP Maria Heubuch** highlighted the vast potential of Agroecology. Its multiple ecological, social and economic benefits have been proven - yet it has hardly been supported in development cooperation so far. The EU and its Member States have committed to support agroecology in the Consensus for Development. Now this commitment needs to be fulfilled and implemented. The policy roundtable is thus very timely as it is organized in the run-up to the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, held at the FAO Headquarters on 3-5 April 2018 in Rome.

MEP Bodgan Wenta illustrated how rapid population growth and climate change put pressure on food systems. Therefore, new ways of ensuring food security in order to reach SDG2 are needed. Agroecology can help to build resilience, decrease vulnerabilities and provide financial security for farmers. The EU has expressed its support to agroecology in the Consensus. Development cooperation is crucial for addressing poverty in rural areas, as 75% of the global poor live in rural areas.

Rodrigo de Lapuerta, Director of FAO Liaison Office in Brussels recalled that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the Paris Agreement have placed key issues such as climate change, food security and agriculture at the center of the global development agenda. In this context, Agroecology could significantly contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2.

Emile Frison, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES Food), illustrated the economic, environmental, and nutritional and health, social and cultural benefits of diversified agroecological systems. He also pointed out the knowledge intensive nature of agroecology. Despite this potential, eight lock-ins that characterise the current food systems still prevent change towards the virtuous cycle of diversified agroecological systems:

1. Concentration of power;
2. Export orientation;
3. Expectation of cheap food;
4. Feed the world narratives;
5. Compartmentalised thinking;
6. Short-term thinking;
7. Measures of success;
8. Path dependency.

All these points must be appropriately tackled in order to successfully achieve a paradigm shift in food systems, as well as a real transition in both industrialised and subsistence agriculture towards diversified agroecological practices and sustainability.

Click here to access the IPES [report 'From Uniformity to Diversity: A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems'](#). Click here to view [Emile Frison's presentation](#).

Caterina Batello, FAO's Team Leader on Ecosystem Management and Agroecology, highlighted that Agroecology offers an answer to the transformative call of the 2030 Agenda and the Zero Hunger Challenge. Since 2014, FAO has been leading the Global Dialogue on agroecology, an inter-sectorial dialogue with 1400 participants from over 160 countries identifying gaps and opportunities for the future of agroecology. However, the entry point is different for each region: in Asia, the key concern is the environment, while in South America

social aspects have been brought to the forefront and in Europe public policies on food systems and innovative models for public-private partnership and the links between farmers and consumers have been highlighted. Building on this large consultation process, FAO's Scaling Up Agroecology initiative offers a "platform for dialogue on agroecology and opportunity to build fruitful partnerships with experts". The initiative will encompass four areas of work for the period 2018-2028:

- Knowledge and innovation for sustainable food and agricultural systems;
- Policy processes for transformation of food and agricultural systems;
- Fostering inclusive and equitable food and agricultural systems;
- Building partnerships and integrating agroecology into the UN system.

Click here to view [Caterina Batello's presentation](#).

Professor **Michel Pimbert**, Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience - Coventry University, shared the findings of his research on the UK Development Aid portfolio for agroecology. The share of UK's aid devoted to agroecological projects since 2010 amounts to less than 5% of UK's agricultural aid and less than 0.5% of total UK's aid budget. Over 90% of UK's aid budget for agriculture supports a model of agricultural development that depends on externally-purchased inputs (e.g. hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides) and on linking farmers to long value chains and global markets. Professor Pimbert called for a radical re-prioritisation of UK ODA in favour of agroecological research and development and highlighted that this shift is urgently required to ensure consistency with the SDGs. Assuming that other European countries provide as little ODA for agroecology, such a re-prioritisation may be needed for European development aid as well. Further research is needed but can only be conducted if the EU and its member states comply with the International Aid Transparency Initiative standards on aid data transparency.

Click here to access the research paper titled "[Absent Agroecology Aid: on UK Agricultural Development Assistance since 2010](#)". Click here to view [Michel Pimbert's presentation](#).

Million Belay, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), presented the promising results of a 15-year long agroecological case study in Tigray (Ethiopia), which following its success got extended across the country. The presented long-term data from Tigray showcased the benefits of organic composts' usage in comparison to chemical fertiliser, which translated into positive impacts not only on harvest and yields, but also on several SDG' indicators. He pointed out that the applicability and feasibility of agroecological practices are not restricted to small-scale farming, and stressed that agroecology can and should be scaled-up.

Mr Belay referred to the eight lock-ins that prevent the transition to sustainable food systems. The policy space for Agroecology is currently very narrow; the EU could support in opening up such policy space. CSOs working towards the transition of food systems also need support.

Click here to view [Million Belay's presentation](#).

Leonard Mizzi, Acting Director for Planet and Prosperity, European Commission Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) outlined the EU's commitment to contribute to sustainable food production in the face of environmental degradation, growing resource scarcity and climate change. Mr. Mizzi explained that support to agro-ecological practices and sustainable agriculture is embedded in both the EU's Agenda for Change and the new European Consensus on Development.

After pointing to the conceptual flexibility and diversity surrounding agroecology, he emphasised that a significant challenge lies in the metrics for measurement of environmental sustainability. Mr. Mizzi also pointed to a forthcoming "state of play" about ongoing EU actions, to next steps and upcoming milestones.

Click here to view [Leonard Mizzi's presentation](#).

Sébastien Subsol, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France pointed out that agroecology has been recently reconfirmed as one of the policy priorities of France's development cooperation. Additionally, a specific national policy focuses on fostering and supporting the transition towards agroecological practices and models of production. On the international level, France works on agroecology with FAO, and regional organisations such as ECOWAS. Mr. Subsol emphasised that inclusiveness is key in advancing the agroecology agenda: hence, it is important to work closely with local governments, farmers' organisations and CSOs. More and better evidence of the positive impacts of agroecology on multiple areas (including food security and employment) is needed in order to get policy makers in partner countries on board and eventually enable the scaling-up of agroecology.

Click here to view [Sébastien Subsol's presentation](#).

Stefan Schmitz, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, explained that food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development remain key priorities of Germany's development policy (representing about 20% of Germany's ODA). He also highlighted the need for a transformation of food systems towards greater sustainability, and emphasised that greening the farm economy is not enough. A people-centred and people driven bottom-up approach must be combined with supportive policy frameworks at both national and international levels. Mr. Schmitz also pointed out that, in addition to 15 Green Innovation Centers serving as knowledge hubs, BMZ has been working to develop 2-3 agroecology knowledge centres, which would function as catalysts for the dissemination of successful agroecological practices in Africa.

Q&A

The presentations were followed by a short debate with the audience, which included representatives from EU Member States, regional organizations, academia and civil society.

Dr. Jonas Hemou, Special Representative to the European Union of the Economic Community of Western African States (**ECOWAS**) emphasized that “agroecology is no longer a possible choice, it is a necessity”. He also highlighted the need to scale-up investments in agroecology education, capacity-building and extension services. The importance of mainstreaming agroecology in both national and regional policies, and of properly tailoring those policies to the local populations’ needs, was also stressed.

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) Europe’s co-director pointed out that scientific evidence supporting agroecology’s multiple positive impacts is already available. He also raised the relevant question of how to ensure policy coherence for agroecology at local, national, regional and global level.

The Fair Trade Advocacy Office’s Executive Director referred to the farmers’ income and the affordability dimension of agroecology, questioning whether or not sufficient incentives enabling small-scale farmers to shift towards agroecology are currently available.

A representative from **La Via Campesina** stressed that the knowledge needed to ensure the agroecological transition is already available on the ground, and that it can be transmitted from farmer to farmer and shared through the relevant networks (including those belonging to La Via Campesina). The need to put peasants at the heart of the agroecology agenda was particularly emphasized.

AgriCord’s representative pointed out that the transition to agroecology will entail a real transformation, not only of farming practices, but also in terms of markets, land and other productive resources. Subsidies will be needed in order to adequately fund this transformation. The question of agroecology’s attractiveness for youth and its potential for youth employment creation was also raised.

While a representative from **Slow Food** stressed the need to “fight the productivity obsession” in agriculture, **France’s delegate to AGRIFAO** reminded that agroecology can indeed be innovative and attractive for youth, and highlighted that “integrated solutions are what we need”.

In reacting to the audience’s inputs, **Mr. Schmitz** reiterated that indeed both public and private investments, coupled with ODA, are needed to act as “catalytic force” to drive the agroecology transition.

Mr. Mizzi agreed that ensuring policy coherence is crucial, and pointed out the possibility of looking into the agroecology dimension in the Policy Coherence for Development report 2019. He stressed the importance of getting the G7 and G20 on board in order to advance the agroecology agenda. He also reminded that the European Fund for Sustainable Development has an Agribusiness investment window, and pointed out that mobilizing resources from Development Finance Institutions' (DFIs) to support bankable agroecology projects could be a promising pathway for advancing the agroecology agenda.

Last but not least, **Mr. Frison** wrapped up the roundtable by reiterating the essential role that both education and participatory research can and should play in supporting the transition towards agroecology.

LIST OF REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS

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Isabelle BARCHET, Action Aid

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