

AGROECOLOGY: POLICY PATHWAYS TO A PESTICIDE-FREE FUTURE

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and French will be provided



Ernest Aubeé



Cecilia Elizondo



Marta Isabel
Ferreira



Lidia
García-García



Vijay Kumar



Ana María
Suárez Franco



Simplicé Davo
Vodouhe

Speaker Details:

English:

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Farmers are successfully replacing highly hazardous pesticides with agroecology in countries around the world and thriving by co-creating healthy, resilient communities, grounded in principles of equity, collectivity, and food sovereignty.

In this webinar, policymakers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe share their experiences in developing and implementing public policies and initiatives that support these transitions from pesticide dependence to agroecology and that offer the opportunity to transform our food systems. Join us in learning about the wide diversity of policy approaches supporting agroecological transitions underway today in Argentina, Mexico, Spain, India, Benin and West Africa, with initiatives ranging from the local to national to region-wide programs.



Lidia García-García

Professor at Polytechnic University of Valencia, Member of Coordination Team of the Right to Food Observatory, Agrifood Technician with Valencia Center for Social Innovation

Motivations and Background

The city of Valencia is working hard towards an agroecological transition. The **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2015** was the city's definite commitment to developing public policies for a more sustainable, healthier local food system—more just, more inclusive, and more resilient. The **Municipal Food Council of Valencia** is an innovative governance space composed of members of Valencia's food system—political parties, local and regional public administrations, private sector, producers and agricultural unions, academia, and civil society organizations, among others.

What's Being Done?

- **L'Horta de València** (peri-urban agricultural system) and the historic irrigation system have been named a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Site (GIAHS) by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2019.
- **Responsible public food purchases**, such as at school canteens.
- **Short food supply chains**, such as **Ecotira**, a wholesale market for organic and local producers and **farmers' markets** in the city.
- **Agrolab**: A public accelerator of sustainable triple impact (economic, social, and environmental) agri-food systems ventures.
- **Enable the Right to Food**: Distribution of agroecological baskets to vulnerable folks.
- Linkages between the **food system and climate change**.
- **Urban Agenda 2030**: Accelerate pilot projects to advance urban agroecological transition.

Overcoming Challenges

- The group has faced many challenges but has been successful in overcoming them.
- Focus on **creating an inclusive space** that accounts for the diversity of stakeholders with varying levels of access to information, resources, and experience in participation.
- **Development of professional trust** between all of the participating entities to find synergy and coordinate efforts beyond political or other ideologies.
- Maintaining **internal and external communication** between all stakeholders and citizens.
- Developing a **common language** to be made a part of public and political discourse. This includes words like agroecology, food sovereignty, and the right to food.
- **Coordinating human and economic resources** from all entities to promote public-social and public-private alliances.

"Little things bring large victories and that gives us hope. So, my deepest gratitude to the organization and to all my colleagues who also presented."

Cecilia Elizondo

Academic Staff, Agroecology Group, El Colegio de La Frontera Sur

Motivations and Background

In Mexico, the transformation of the agri-food system through **public policy reform** by an **intersectoral working group** has started under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Worldwide, the food system is breaking down due to agricultural practices with high environmental costs. There is an epidemic of malnutrition, overnutrition, and obesity that we need to work together to solve. There is a need not only for healthy food through the gradual elimination of agrochemicals but also a system that addresses broader policies about commercialization, distribution, and supply. This includes establishing goals of sustainable production and promoting agroecology, cooperative practices, local seeds, and bio-inputs.

What's Being Done?

- Implementation of an **agroecological transition plan** that addresses everything from production to plate, including the supply chain, environment, and consumer behavior.
- **Technical support strategy** to reduce emissions and to strengthen the capacity of young people to learn from the knowledge of peasants, traditional agriculture, and small and medium-scale farmers.
- Approval of a law for the **promotion and protection of native corn** (April 2020).
- Presidential decree for the gradual **prohibition of glyphosate** (total elimination by 2024).
- **Prohibition of the import of transgenic corn.**
- **Front-of-package labeling**, a presidential **campaign for healthy eating**, and **food guides** at the local and regional levels.
- **Updating the food-based guidelines** for adequate nutrition, which will include the ecological footprint of food.
- The Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Public Health have added **curricula for children of all ages.**
- **Public training platforms** for government technicians and the general public on agroecology, healthy diets, and bio-inputs.
- An **action guide** was created for work centers in collaboration with the Secretary of Labor on behalf of field workers.
- Development of the **Sembrando Vida (Planting Life) Program** for the planting of more than a million trees.

"This is a comprehensive action plan for the whole agri-food system and takes care of everything that pertains to it, including the school system, the healthcare system, and the environment. Transforming the agri-food system means attending to all related programs."

Davo Simplicite Vodouhe

Professor at the University of Abomey-Calavi and Advisor to the Benin Government's Organic Action Plan

Background

Benin is developing a **national strategy to promote ecological and organic agriculture**. It was the first producer of conventional cotton in West Africa, but organic cotton has been developing in parallel since 1994. This cotton is grown without the use of chemical inputs.

What's Being Done?

- **Signed international conventions** to avoid the use of highly hazardous pesticides.
- Initiatives promoted by **technical and financial partners**.
- Political authorities are personally involved in the **Agroeco, EOAI, and TAERA projects**.
- Support by the **Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries**.
- Deputies of the National Assembly recommended to the Minister of Agriculture to find a place for ecological and organic agriculture. The **President of the Republic** decided to create a **national strategy** to guide the promotion of ecological and organic agriculture.
- **Establishment of a commission** composed of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Health, civil society, and agriculture research.
- **Benin Organization for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture (OBEPAB)** is an NGO that promotes ecological and organic agriculture in Benin.
- Action by the African Union in **nine countries with pilot programs** to promote organic and ecological agriculture with partners Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) and NGO Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC).
- Many **networks** that operate in Benin in favor of ecological and organic agriculture, including the Ecosystem-Based Adaptation Project (PABE), West African Organic Network (WAFRONET), and African Organic Network (AFRONET).

Lessons Learned

- Decisions for change required **strong political will** with involvement from political authorities at the highest level, as well as the Head of State himself.
- **Successful results in the market** can further convince those in politics.
- **Technical and financial partners** have been important for promoting organic and ecological agriculture.
- **Formal and informal advocacy** have contributed significantly.

"Lessons about the transition to organic and ecological agriculture can be drawn from our experiences since these decisions were not made overnight."

Marta Isabel Ferreira

Minister of Family Agriculture, Province of Misiones, Argentina

Background and History

Misiones is the second smallest province in Argentina but has 52% of the country's biodiversity, which is a great responsibility. A key part of conservation is responsible food production. The province also has the largest number of young people and family farmers in Argentina. The **30,000 farming families** are key to the objective of achieving food sovereignty and environmental sustainability. In the 1990s, the value of traditional products such as yerba mate, tea, and tobacco went through a deep crisis. In response, in 1995, six farming families began an unprecedented experiment, direct marketing everything produced in the fields without middlemen. Known as the **Ferías Francas (Free Festivals)**, this was key to giving family farmers the visibility they now have. Since 2003, changes in government and politics have led to more legislative proposals to support agroecology and food sovereignty.

What's Being Done?

- The Misiones Parliament has been generating **legislation and public policies for the sector of family farmers**, all with an agroecological approach.
- **Agroecological Production Act** (2014): Once this was passed, the term "agroecological production" was used instead of "natural production." Certification by participatory systems and the development of guides are central to the proposal. The province is also in the process of certifying the farms.
- **Native Seed Protection Act**: Food sovereignty cannot be achieved if the region does not focus on producing its own seeds. The province now produces and distributes corn, beans, rice, and some vegetable seeds to farmers.
- July 26th has been instituted as the **Provincial Day of Native and Creole Seeds**.
- **Family Farming Act**: Establishes that family agriculture is a model of productive economic, environmental, and social development.
- **School Garden Act**: Proposes the creation of gardens in all educational institutions so that children learn to produce food and revalue family farmers. The gardens are used as pedagogical instruments in schools.
- **Provincial Food Sovereignty Program**: Proposes the formation of a training course to create young people who are territorial facilitators of food sovereignty.
- **Urban Agriculture**: A law passed this year (2021) promotes urban agriculture in the most populated centers of the province.

"This is the rich legislation in my province directed at family farmers, which is the majority of people in Misiones, compared to the rest of the provinces in Argentina."

Vijay Kumar

Advisor to Government of Andhra Pradesh for Agriculture & Cooperation

What's Being Done?

- **Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) Program's** Vision for 2031 is to have all 8 million farmers and farmworkers practicing natural farming.
- Starting from 40,656 farmers in 704 villages in 2016, the APCNF Program now has **750,000 farmers and farmworkers from 3,730 villages** participating.
- By changing one farmer, others in the village transition as well. The APCNF program identifies community resource persons and champions them in the community. By year 3, >80% of farmers in a village are enrolled in natural farming. In **5-8 years, the entire village becomes a "bio-village."**
- The APCNF Program has many **national and international collaborators**, including other governments (Rwanda, Kenya, and Mexico), CONABIO (Mexico), Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), National Resource Organization to NITI Aayog on Natural Farming, co-founder National Coalition for Natural Farming, state governments, and national civil society institutions.

Natural Farming

- **Universal principles** are year-long soil cover with living roots, minimal soil disturbance, diverse crops and trees, livestock integration, biostimulants, indigenous seed, increasing the amount and diversity of organic residues, and pest management through better agronomic practices and botanical extracts.
- **No synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides** are used.
- The **cost of cultivation is reduced and there is an increase in net income** for farmers. Natural farming farms reported better soil health, crop health, resilience, economic empowerment of farmers, and dignity of labor.
- **Women are key to the success of natural farming**, upholding values of program management, transparency, collective action, peer learning, farming and consumption plans, and inclusivity of the poorest.
- Natural farming is **knowledge-intensive, rather than input-intensive**. The most effective dissemination is farmer to farmer.
- By incorporating crop diversity, **food and nutrition diversity increases**. They aim to include 5-7 food groups in the household diet by creating a mini food forest in homestead gardens.
- There is a **universal coverage strategy** that focuses on the landless and farmworkers.
- Increase in **biodiversity**, including earthworms, beneficial insects, and birds.

"Natural farming is a holistic land management practice that leverages the power of photosynthesis in plants to close the carbon cycle and build soil health, crop resilience, and nutrient density."

Ernest Aubee

Head, Agriculture Division, ECOWAS Commission

New Policy Directions

Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) in the 2025 ECOWAP (Economic Community of West Africa Agricultural Policy) Strategic Policy Framework is an integrated approach for the transformation and reorientation of farming systems aimed at sustainably and equitably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes, enhancing adaptation and resilience to climate variability and change or reducing greenhouse gas emissions wherever possible and appropriate. In West Africa, there is the promotion of regional food and nutrition objectives in line with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, **Agenda 2063/Malabo Declaration**, and **Economic Community of West Africa Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP)**.

Importance of Agroecology and Vision for the Future

- **Food and nutrition security** and improving **food quality and safety**.
- **Agroecology** can help in addressing a number of **health** and lifestyle changes (e.g. diabetes, aflatoxin-related illnesses).
- **Environmental sustainability**: The protection of both flora and fauna from pesticide poisoning, protection of biodiversity and water resources.
- Promotion of **rural livelihoods** by encouraging regenerative farming.
- **Limiting greenhouse gas emissions** and climate change variability.
- **Increasing the awareness** of nutritional, health, economic and environmental benefits.
- Establishing a **regulatory framework** for EOA in ECOWAS member states and regionally.
- **Increasing production levels** for EOA products and **creating a niche market**.
- **Building capacity** for all aspects of the EOA value chain.

What's Being Done?

- Interventions for Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) include a project for the **diffusion of best practices** for intensification and sustainable agriculture, **Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative**, and **Ecological and Organic Agriculture Knowledge Hub**.
- **Networks** include West Africa Organic Network (WAFRONET), African Organic Network (AFRONET), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).
- Some **challenges** that have to be overcome by regional initiatives include the financing of basic EOA structure, lack of appropriate policies and regulations, lack of awareness about the opportunities and benefits, a lack of strong standard-setting bodies to guide the sector, private sector engagement, and the strong conventional agriculture lobby.

"The vision for the future is to have a healthy and well-fed population in West Africa that will live in prosperity and peace."

Ana María Suárez Franco

Permanent Representative of FIAN in Geneva/Accountability Coordinator

Facilitating the Agroecological Transition

These are **key regulatory elements** to facilitate the transition to agroecology.

1. A **human rights framework** for transition measures.
 - **Protects people's human dignity and nature over profit.** States have obligations (respect, protect, and fulfill, non-discrimination, etc.) and need to be held accountable. Using legal language could support people's struggles in advocacy with authorities.
2. The **transition to agroecology.**
 - Begin with **banning the import and export of highly hazardous pesticides** (HHPs) and banned pesticides and establishing **pesticide-free zones.** Highly hazardous pesticides and banned pesticides have known harmful effects on human, environmental, and ecosystem health.
 - Adopt **binding transition plans** (deadlines, incentives, sanctions, and participation of small food producers).
 - Establish **monitoring and liability mechanisms.**
3. **Following the transition.**
 - Ban other pesticides and **extend pesticide-free zones.**
 - Provide small-scale food producers with **support and extension services for agroecology** (knowledge exchanges).
4. Measure ways to **ensure sustainable agroecology.**
 - **Raise awareness among consumers** on the benefits of agroecology.
 - Ensure **access to markets** at fair prices.
 - **Support local markets and circular economies** (food sovereignty, resilience, and local social fabric).
 - Use own or **participatory certification systems.**
5. **Keeping agroecology.**
 - **Measures against corporate capture** and clear rules on conflicts of interest.
 - Support and recognize **peasants' and Indigenous people's scientific innovations** relevant to ensuring the transition to pesticide-free food systems.
 - **Budgetary measures** to ensure support to long-lasting agroecology.

Learn More

FIAN published a paper that describes this framework in much more detail. The full-length paper can be found here: <https://www.fian.org/en/struggle/nopesticidesinourfood>

"This is a living document representing the ideas that we built together, for the future that we and our families and communities deserve, which is a pesticide-free environment and food systems."

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