



# The agroecology newsletter

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## Towards an agro-ecological transformation of agricultural and food systems



DESPITE ITS NATURAL RESOURCES, cultural wealth and diversity, the region continues to face food insecurity, climate change, rural poverty and biodiversity loss. In the face of these challenges, agroecology offers a sustainable transformation of agricultural and food systems.

Agroecology goes beyond the simple framework of agricultural methods.

It represents a philosophy, a commitment and an opportunity for West Africa to take back control of its agricultural destiny.

By improving agricultural productivity through environmentally-friendly practices, agroecology contributes to food security for a growing population, against a backdrop of climate change leading to drought and flooding. Agroecology strengthens farmers' resilience through adapted practices, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

By creating economic opportunities for rural populations, agroecological transition reduces poverty and improves livelihoods. By reducing the use of harmful chemicals, it simultaneously acts on the health of exposed populations, on food safety and on biodiversity as a whole.

Agroecology stimulates innovation and encourages research into more sustainable practices adapted to specific needs, such as small-scale family farming and communal land systems.

This transformation of our farming systems requires a firm commitment and cooperation between governments, local communities, organizations and players in the agricultural sector. Although fraught with challenges, it offers an unprecedented opportunity. It's time to take bold steps to realize this ambition for sustainability, food security and shared prosperity.

West Africa can become a model of agroecological success, inspiring other regions of the world to follow this ambitious path. Now is the time to turn this vision into reality, to create a better, more sustainable future for the region.

**Mrs Massandjé Touré-Litsé,**  
**Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture,**  
**Ecowas Commission**

### The number...

60

**this is the number of participants who contributed to the regional workshop on financing agro-ecology on September 18 and 19, 2023. The conclusions of this workshop will be published in the next edition of the newsletter.**

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## In debate

### Is there a consensus on agroecology in West Africa?

The concept of agroecology in West Africa is attracting growing interest and popularity. However, there is no absolute consensus on the subject, as opinions and approaches may vary according to local contexts, political priorities, available resources and the specific socio-economic dynamics of each country.

Many farmers, civil society organizations, researchers and policy-makers in West Africa recognize the potential benefits of agroecology. This concept emphasizes the mobilization of ecological principles and processes in a holistic way in agricultural production or, more broadly, in agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries production. Many sustainable agricultural practices, aimed at strengthening the resilience of farming systems in the face of the challenges of climate change, soil degradation and food security, have already proved their worth in different ecosystems across the region.

However, challenges remain. Some stakeholders are reluctant to change their production methods, fearing short-term yield losses or lacking access to resources to adopt agroecological practices. In addition, agricultural policies and support systems do not always promote or fully inte-

grate agroecology.

It is important to emphasize that agroecology does not claim to be the only solution to all agricultural problems, and some experts stress the need for integrated approaches adapted to local specificities. Dialogue and collaboration between different stakeholders, including farmers, researchers, policy-makers and civil society organizations, is essential to promote agroecology effectively and inclusively in West Africa.

By working together on these different aspects, we can transform agriculture and improve our food supply in West Africa for a more sustainable, productive and resilient food system. While many countries are already recognizing the potential benefits of this approach to agriculture, and are putting in place policies and programs to promote it, the transition to large-scale agroecological systems remains a complex challenge that requires ongoing collaboration between the players involved. Capitalizing on and sharing knowledge of practices that are often isolated and insufficiently documented is a key factor in scaling up agroecological approaches.

## Echoes from the field

### Participatory research in Benin: when agroecological innovation from research is reinvented by producers

The partnership project between the Fédération de l'Union des producteurs du Bénin (FUPRO-Bénin), the Institut des recherches agricoles du Bénin (INRAB) and

Sol Consult Africa (SolCA), located in central Benin in the Sudano-Guinean zone and supported by the PAE, promotes participatory research. It involves producers faced with the





challenges of impoverishing their farmland and increasingly difficult access to chemical inputs for food crops. Among other agroecological approaches, the partnership is developing conservation agriculture based on the use of fertilizer plants and crop associations.

One innovation involves the use of *Crotalaria juncea* as a stake for yam plants to combat deforestation. This innovation was quickly adopted by yam growers, who used it as a stake and fertilizer. Planted at the start of winter, these plants quickly become strong enough to support the yam plants. Once they have reached a certain maturity,

they become more robust and offer a lot of foliage. Some of them are then cut back to leave one or two plants at most. The cut plants are laid out in mats on the yam mounds, where their litter decomposes and improves the fertility of the mounds, boosting field productivity. This reinvention of a farmer-introduced innovation by researchers validates the imperative need for research protocols to be co-designed by researchers and farmers to meet producers' real needs. It demonstrates that, in addition to their own know-how, farmers can innovate to solve their problems using exogenous knowledge and products.

## Initiatives

### Burkina Faso: agroecology charter dissemination workshop

With the aim of disseminating Burkina Faso's agroecology charter to national agroecology stakeholders, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Resources and Fisheries organized a dissemination workshop financed by the West African Agroecology Program (PAE), on Friday September 15, 2023, in Koudougou. According to Mr. Adama Sawadogo, PAE's National Correspondent at the Ministry of Agriculture, the charter is a reference and federating document, useful for the smooth operation of nearly 300 agroecology players in Burkina Faso. "For things to get better, they [the actors] recognized the importance of drawing up this charter to guide their behavior, and direct how to go about it so that agroecological practices are scaled up effectively".

Scaling up will make it possible to popularize practices specific to certain localities. "We are in different agro-climatic zones. There are certain practices that are highly

visible in the North, Centre-North and Sahel, but which are not promoted in the West. Once we have this agroecological charter, it's essential that all the players involved are aware of it", added Mr. Sawadogo.

Toussain Sampo, Director of Agricultural Production Promotion, hopes that this charter, which sets out the principles to be upheld for more virtuous agriculture through the adoption of agroecological techniques, will give new impetus to agroecology in Burkina Faso.

To find out more about the National Strategy for the Development of Agroecology in Burkina Faso (SND-AE) 2023–2027: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/bkf217823.pdf>

## Events on the agenda

### Promoting Agroecology: an inspiring field mission to Ghana

A field mission recently took place in Kumasi, Ghana, highlighting efforts to promote agroecological approaches in the region. The mission was the culmination of a workshop organized by ECOWAS as part of its Programme Agroécologie en Afrique de l'Ouest (PAE), co-funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Union (EU).

The workshop brought together the PAE National Correspondents —focal points in the Member States—, the Alliance pour l'Agroécologie en Afrique de l'Ouest (3AO) and the Program Coordination Unit (ARAA). It enabled

the players to take stock of 2023 activities and to plan 2024 program activities at national level, notably for the establishment of sustainable national consultation frameworks on agro-ecological transitions. But it was the field mission that attracted the most attention, highlighting concrete agroecological practices in the field and inspiring initiatives underway.

During the field mission, participants had the opportunity to visit demonstration sites of the EAP-supported partnership project in Ghana, formed between CNTA (Centre of No-Till Agriculture), CRI (Crop Research Institute)

and NAFFAWAG (National Farmers and Fishermen Award Winners Association). They were able to observe a variety of agroecological practices in action, including a maize variety adapted to climate change (*Opeaburo*), maize relay cropping with *Canavalia*, improved fallow with *Mucuna* and mulching residues on plots.

CNTA also demonstrated its farm mechanization system for covering the soil with straw, showing how technology can be put to work for agroecology.

To find out more about CNTA, click on this link: <https://centrefornotill.org>

## “We need to better organize synergies between different types of stocks, school canteen programs, and programs targeting sustainable and agroecological production”

Alain Sy Traoré, Director of Agriculture and Rural Development,  
at the workshop “Stockage de proximité : premier rempart face aux crises”.  
Lomé, November 14–18, 2023.

*The agroecology reduces carbon emissions, protects soils and biodiversity, cares for women, men, ensures their food and provides them with the livelihoods to protect, educate and care for their children, the future generations.*



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