



The agroecology newsletter

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New information technologies, key to the agro-ecological transition



RICH IN DIVERSITY, West African agriculture is facing major challenges: food insecurity, climate change and soil degradation in particular. Agricultural systems are key to the economy and must reinvent themselves to meet these challenges. In this context, new information technologies are essential to accelerate the agro-ecological transition and guarantee a sustainable future.

Digital technologies, particularly collaborative platforms, can transform regional agriculture. They facilitate the exchange of information between producers, researchers and decision-makers, enabling knowledge to be disseminated effectively and on a large scale. These platforms offer real-time data on climate, agricultural risks and best practices, supporting more sustainable agriculture. However, to maximise their impact in West Africa, it is essential to take local languages into account. By integrating multilingual interfaces and content adapted to regional dialects, these digital tools become more accessible to producers.

WhatsApp, which is widely used in West Africa, is a particularly effective tool. It enables farmers to communicate easily,

exchange practical advice and receive training and information on crop management. Thanks to its simplicity and low cost of use, WhatsApp is a fast and accessible way of informing and training farmers, even in remote rural areas.

However, for these technologies to have a real impact, investment must be made in digital education and in training producers in the use of collaborative tools. The inclusion of young people and women, who are often marginalised, must be at the heart of this transition. Facilitating access to these technologies will promote more sustainable and inclusive agriculture.

The future of West African agriculture therefore depends in part on the ability to combine traditional knowledge with technological innovations. Collaboration between governments, the private sector, NGOs and local communities is essential to guarantee universal access to these innovations. By capitalising on these technologies, West Africa can build a resilient and sustainable agriculture capable of meeting the food and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

Mrs Massandjé TOURÉ-LITSÉ,
Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture,
Ecowas Commission

The numbers...

By 2024:

**270 trainers
2,250 learners
6,350 producers
290 extension workers**

**had benefited
from agroecology training
provided by project leaders
and EAP stakeholders**

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WhatsApp becomes an innovative training tool for vulnerable women

In Niger, the Institut privé de formation agricole (IPF) in Kaoura-Matamèye in the Zinder region offers training in agro-ecology and agribusiness to 300 young people and women, plus 36 trainers, including twelve (12) female trainers from nine (09) women's groups producing and processing agricultural and livestock products.

Given the size of the groups (270 members), their unpredictable availability due to the many activities they carry out and their dispersed location, training for the women is organised every Monday at the IPF in cohorts of around fifty people. It covers a range of topics such as market garden production, livestock rearing, agri-food crafts, the use of non-meat feed based on local products for livestock and poultry, community life, management and so on.

In addition to the on-site training provided to the learners, the WhatsApp application is used by their peers to provide home-based training in the local Hausa language to the most vulnerable women in their association. This approach offers vulnerable women a number of advantages: it saves them time, reduces their mobility, combines their activities with capacity-building and knowledge acquisition, and enables

them to share their knowledge with their children and neighbours. The women are then asked to provide feedback on a practical case study to check that the innovation itineraries taught are being followed and to gather information on successes and failures. The IPF examines, explains and, where necessary, confirms these failures, which are sometimes linked to specific agro-ecological factors. In this way, the IPF makes readjustments adapted to the specific situation of each experiment, and innovates through an approach of co-construction of knowledge based on the concrete results of tested innovations.

The major constraint of this distance learning is the acquisition of a mobile phone and access to the connection. However, the IPF and the groups have set up a financial mechanism based on a contribution of 100 FCFA per person per week. This enables the women to buy phones on credit from IPF and repay in instalments from the income generated by their income-generating activities. The financial support provided by IPF is gradually repaid in kind by each beneficiary.

Boost yam and cassava yields with improved short-term fallow

In Côte d'Ivoire, the project to improve sustainable yam and maize-based production systems in the sub-prefectures of Tieningboué, Kouassi-kouassikro, Dabakala and Laoudi Bâ is being run by a partnership between CSRS (Swiss Centre for Scientific Research in Côte d'Ivoire) – AGINNOV SARL and producers' cooperatives. It aims to improve the incomes of yam, cassava and maize producers in the Béré region of Côte d'Ivoire. Yam is a tuber that is known to be cultivated on a shifting basis because of its high organic matter re-

quirements and cultivation practices that destroy soil and vegetation.

A crop rotation system combining *Cajanus* and short (one to two years maximum; By way of comparison, shifting cultivation of yams requires fallow periods of at least five (05) years to obtain high yields) fallow with *Mucuna* is used to make production on the farm more sedentary while increasing yields. The starting point is an experiment on so-called "dead" soils because of their high degree of poverty due



to several years of cultivation without restoration of fertility. In general, these soils of ¼ to ½ ha or 1 ha at most are completely abandoned. The project recovers them for the benefit of the women, in the form of donations approved by the village chief. Initially, the soil is amended with compost and sown with maize. Yields were increased fivefold compared with previous harvests. In the second year, *Cajanus* or *Mucuna* is then combined with maize to boost soil fertility. In the third year, the yam is planted and enters the crop rotation cycle. Yields triple or quadruple, from 5 tonnes per ½ ha to 15 tonnes. They rise from 10 to 11 tonnes per hectare

to 35–40 tonnes when the plant support system, consisting of poles or horizontal steel wires carried by supports, is properly installed along the ridge lines. Cassava yields reach 57.5 tonnes per hectare when integrated into the rotation system. *Mucuna* and crop residues from other associated crops are more than enough to provide the organic matter and nutrients they need.

Producers and traders are delighted with the results, as they can now obtain yam tubers that are less perishable and easy to load onto lorries for export, thanks to their regular, sugar-loaf morphology.

Review of the regional forum on agroecology and organic farming

With the support of ECOWAS and Action Aid Nigeria, the Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa (3AO) and the West Africa Organic Network (WAfrONet) organised a special edition of the regional forum on the theme: “Transforming sustainable food and nutrition systems for food sovereignty in West Africa through the promotion of organic agriculture and agroecology”. It was held from 21 to 24 October 2024 in Abuja, Nigeria.

The forum brought together nearly 400 participants from various sectors to discuss the policies, mechanisms and instruments needed to finance sustainable food and nutrition systems, with the aim of strengthening food sovereignty in West Africa through agro-ecology and organic farming.

The participants proposed developing a common regional vision for these practices, integrated into policies such as ECOWAP and the PAU (UEMOA Agricultural Policy), and strengthening mechanisms for controlling synthetic pesticides while promoting quality organic inputs. They also recommended mobilising green funds and endogenous fi-

nancing via regional institutions to support farmers’ organisations and local communities.

The forum stressed the need to harmonise the certification of agro-ecological and organic products, while developing inclusive value chains to improve their access to the market. It also called for capacity-building for stakeholders through specific training in universities and educational centres, with greater support for women and young people to ensure they have access to resources and technologies.

Lastly, the participants stressed the importance of advocating the integration of agro-ecology and organic farming into national and regional policies, by launching campaigns to reduce the use of synthetic pesticides and by encouraging the organisation of annual consultations alternating between face-to-face and virtual meetings. These recommendations are aimed at speeding up the agro-ecological transition in the region, while meeting the climatic and socio-economic challenges.

The final statement of conclusions is not yet available.



Publications

The website of the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food gets a makeover!

Discover a brand new interface, modern, intuitive and designed to offer you an enriched experience. Whether you're a regular visitor or new to the site, this redesign has been designed to better meet your needs and make your browsing experience even more enjoyable. Find out all the latest news about the agency and its projects: <https://www.araa.org/fr>.

You will also find on the website the page dedicated to the Agroecology Programme in West Africa, as well as all the publications and reports produced since the start-up: <https://www.araa.org/fr/projets/programme-agroecologie-en-afrique-de-louest-pae>

3AO launches its collaborative digital platform for the agro-ecological transition

Discover 3AO Hub, the new collaborative digital platform dedicated to the agro-ecological transition in West Africa! This platform offers you a unique space to connect players

involved in agroecology, share knowledge and solutions, and benefit from methodological support to help your projects evolve. Take advantage of a powerful search engine to explore a rich knowledge base and enhance your skills. Increase the visibility of your organisation and your actions thanks to a customisable presentation sheet. Join 3AO Hub today and play an active part in the region's agro-ecological transformation! <https://www.3aohub.org/fr/1/home.html>

Visit to an EAP site in Diogo, Senegal

ECOWAS representatives in the field of the partnership project between the Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (CNCR), the Institut Sénégalais de Recherche Agricole (ISRA) and the Centre de formation de la direction de la Protection des végétaux (CF/DPV). In less than three minutes, find out more about his achievements in the video produced by FENAB (Fédération nationale pour l'agriculture biologique). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLnUsR8ryC8> (2')

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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