



Effective platforms in support of agroecology



Deploying agroecology as a comprehensive and coherent response to the many challenges facing West Africa in developing sustainable local food systems remains a huge challenge. Agroecology has the potential to address food security, promote sustainable agricultural and food systems responsive to climate change, protect natural resources, enhance community and household resilience, ensure food safety and foster economic and trade competitiveness. However, a deep and lasting transformation of agriculture, in the broadest sense, cannot be achieved without a change in the approaches and practices of all the institutions and players in the agricultural sector and rural development. To achieve this, it is essential to produce and promote knowledge and know-how, structure the dialogue between research and users, between research and advisory support, integrate the complexity of farming systems, adopt a territorial approach, etc. Agroecology networks, platforms, alliances and consultation frameworks are essential and strategic tools in this respect, at various levels. Nearly 120 entities involved in agroecology and operating through multi-stakeholder configurations (POs, research, advisory services, private sector, local authorities, etc.) have been identified and consulted in the region. This diagnosis and resulting proposals are based on that analysis.

Platforms and consultation frameworks to underpin strong policy orientations

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This complexity naturally opens the door to multiple definitions of agroecology. On the one hand, agroecology is not a doctrine, and on the other, it can be broken down into multiple processes and itineraries depending on agro-climatic conditions, environmental and market potential, farm history, local dynamics and so on. Adding the notion of transition—from traditional or conventional farming systems to agroecological systems—make it easier to understand the challenges encountered in defining and characterizing systems that meet the fundamentals of agroecology.

This exercise is all the more important given the proliferation of alternative approaches to conventional agriculture: sustainable agriculture, integrated agriculture, climate-smart agriculture, ecologically intensification, permaculture, etc. These approaches aim to meet some or all of the challenges listed above.

Agroecology is based on a holistic approach to a region's food system. It encompasses, in a systemic way, the management of animal, plant and human ecosystems; crop and livestock production; land-use planning; responses to climate change; human nutrition; sustainable management of biodiversity; value chain development; and other dimensions relevant to sustainable food systems.

In this context, it is essential that all stakeholders (governments, regional institutions, local authorities, producer organizations, research, training and advisory institutions, local development players, value chain players, etc.) develop a shared understanding and common objectives and principles. Multi-stakeholder exchange platforms play an essential role in this regard.

It is therefore essential to adopt a guiding framework, or even legislation, for the deployment of agroecology. This will help avoid the proliferation of disparate approaches, especially those driven by funding opportunities in the context climate adaptation. The need for such a framework also arises at regional level, with the understanding that it must accommodate the diversity of national situations. In fact, the regional level - which complements national efforts - is well-positioned to build an enabling environment through mutualization of research and training capacities, capitalizing on and disseminating best practices, biopesticides homologation, labelling agroecological products, promoting

regional trade in processed agroecological products, etc.

The ongoing revision of ECOWAP presents a unique opportunity to address these issues and build consensus at both regional and national policy and programme levels. Inclusive consultations are key to formulating clear public orientations and ensuring effective and efficient implementation of policy decisions.

Beyond direct stakeholders, such frameworks should involve the various ministries linked to various dimensions of agroecology-based food systems: economy and finance, industry, vocational training, research, environment and natural resource management, health and food safety, etc.

Identity, operations and governance

Many structures are already involved in promoting agroecology. Often established since the early 2000s, they are frequently face significant governance challenges. These include unclear organisational identity due to limited understanding of agroecology and related concepts. Some entities are poorly rooted locally, or their members are not actively engaged. These weaknesses affect grassroots



associations as well as broader organizations, including multi-stakeholder platforms and consultation frameworks.

More broadly, skills and capacity gaps manifest in difficulties with strategic planning, resource mobilization (both internal and external), alignment of actions and means, governance body management, renewal processes, and accountability mechanisms toward members and partners. These deficiencies compromise the credibility of the organizations, their ability to fulfil their missions, and their influence on public policy.

As such, significant investment is needed in two areas:

- Strengthening stakeholders' capacities in strategic planning and results-based management in agroecology (shared vision and mission, concerted action plans), along with logistical and organizational support to improve governance and operational modalities. This includes conducting a diagnostic and developing a strategic plan encompassing vision, identity, governance, skills management and training, and capacity building (experience-sharing, mentoring, coaching, co-construction, etc.);
- Strengthening national platforms and consultation frameworks so that they become reliable interlocutors with national and international partners. This involves defining a charter that clarifies partnership principles, roles, responsibilities, and commitments of the member entities. Adherence to such a charter provides external partners with the guarantees necessary for strong and sustainable partnerships.

Differentiated support based on the level of structuring

Support needs for structuring platforms vary significantly depending on their administrative, technical, and financial maturity. Three main scenarios emerge:

- Some platforms lack sufficient administrative, technical, or financial organisation. These require comprehensive support to build their internal structures and implement their action plans.
- Others are structurally in place but face functional issues. These need assistance to identify operational bottlenecks and define targeted support plans.
- Well-structured and functional platforms should be supported in scaling up their activities and encouraged to share best practices with the other categories. This cross-learning approach helps disseminate effective organisational, technical, and financial practices across the network.

The use of appropriate diagnostic and institutional evaluation tools will help refine this classification and tailor support to each platform's specific situation.

Technical and methodological approach to agroecology

Analyses have shown a wide diversity of concepts, methods, approaches, and intervention tools within and across organizations. These disparities stem from differing understandings of agroecology and the range of external partners involved.

To improve the effectiveness of interventions, it is essential to create coherence around the approaches and methods agreed upon through national and regional consultations. To this end, it is necessary to:

- Support national platforms or organizations through training or thematic seminars;
- Foster collaboration with research institutes specializing in agroecology to develop and adapt proven practices to different national contexts, in line with objectives, target groups, and expected outcomes;
- Strengthen the Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa (3AO) at the regional level (UEMOA, ECOWAS, CILSS) to coordinate efforts in capitalization, dissemination of knowledge, and training on agroecological approaches and methods. The 3AO should also advocate for the creation of a shared tool to assess the effectiveness of agroecological methods and approaches. This tool would provide evidence for policymakers and other stakeholders in selecting recommended methods;
- Provide technical and financial support to build the skills and resources needed by institutional technical staff to implement agroecological programmes.

Connecting, synergizing and coordinating actions

The variety of agroecological initiatives offers major potential for transforming food systems. To scale up impact, coordinated actions are required in different areas:

- Support local and national platforms to conduct stakeholder and partnership mapping. This will help identify complementarities and synergies to foster partnerships and exchanges of experience;
- Introduce incentive mechanisms, such as calls for proposals with favourable co-financing rates, for initiatives that bring together diverse actors (producer organizations, research, training institutions, local authorities, etc.);
- Strengthen coordination structures with qualified human resources capable of managing inter-actor relations and strategic alignment.

Communication and targets

Effective and targeted communication is crucial for the development of agroecology. It supports positive messaging, counters misconceptions, and facilitates knowledge-sharing. Three priority actions are recommended:

- Support the development of communication strategies and plans that define objectives, communication channels, content formats, and target audiences;
- Strengthen the communication capacities of organizations (written and visual materials, social media, knowledge-sharing platforms);
- Enhance the capacity of stakeholders to align programme objectives with co-constructed communication goals. This includes enabling beneficiaries to contribute to the creation and dissemination of information, ensuring the relevance of target audiences, and reinforcing their role in information production;
- Develop tools and methods to assess the impact of communication activities

Financing and partnership development

Funding remains a major concern for national and regional structures. Internal resources are often insufficient to cover operational costs, while external funding tends to prioritize short-term impact-driven activities over long-term institutional support. Building capacity in this area is crucial to ensure financial sustainability, including:

- Developing advocacy skills to secure public budget allocations and mobilize diverse sources of funding;
- Supporting platforms in developing high-quality and distinctive products and services to better position their service offerings and attract funding;
- Assisting organizations in formulating a financing strategy and a sustainability plan to ensure continuity of operations and retention of qualified personnel.

To find out more

ECOWAS Commission, Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food, Study on the status of existing national and regional networks and platforms for agroecology and sustainable agriculture; mapping of the initiatives and organizations involved

(Document available in French only)

and proposals for strengthening a network of agroecology stakeholders in West Africa. Final report. 2023.

<https://araa.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/202304%20-%20Rapport%20Final%20EdL%20plateformes.pdf>

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