



Multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks for the inclusion of agroecology in public policy

Introduction

The multi-stakeholder National Consultation Frameworks for Agroecology (NCFs) were established at the initiative of the National Correspondents (CNs) of the ECOWAS Agroecology Programme for West Africa (AEP). They are intended to play a key role in the cooperation between agroecology stakeholders at the national level and in the formulation of public policy proposals. In addition, the Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa (3AO) is at the centre-point of the coordination and cooperation between stakeholders at regional level. Chaired by ROPPA, it got a support from AEP to perform numerous activities of regional scope including facilitation of exchanges, consultations, networking and advocacy for the sake of agroecology and sustainable agriculture.

This two-part note is one of seven (07) thematic ones resulting from the capitalisation of the ECOWAS Agroecology Programme in West Africa (AEP). The first part is a wrap-up of NCFs establishment and operation, lessons learnt from them and recommendations for their growth by improving their effectiveness in terms of advocacy and their guaranteed sustainability. In the second one, the note shows a summary of the activities and functioning of Alliance 3AO, lessons learnt

about its role in public policy development and recommendations for ECOWAS with view to reinforcing the Alliance.

The analysis is based on a review of various works related to AEP and the 3AO Alliance, interviews with key stakeholders in agroecology at the regional level, case studies carried out in six (06) countries in the region (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo) and the conclusions of a regional workshop to discuss the provisional outputs.



Setting up of national multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks (NCFs)

As for the six (06) countries in which the study was conducted, a fairly precise assessment can be made on the establishment and operation of the national multi-stakeholder consultation framework set up with the support of AEP. The analysis is exclusively focused on these six (06) countries, even though some useful information were got on other countries through AEP reports as well as National Correspondents and interviews at large scale

Summary of experiences

An analysis of NCF implementation shows some characteristics that can be classified as per the main following criteria.

BACKGROUND OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

NCFs establishment took place in various conditions with some specificities to each one of the countries.



FORMER AGROECOLOGY RANK IN AGRICULTURAL POLICIES.

In the early 2000s, it was very weak or even marginal, even though certain concepts (sustainable agriculture, climate-smart agriculture, etc.) and certain issues (deforestation, vulnerability to climate change) have begun to feature in agricultural policies over the last twenty years. Agroecology is often integrated to specific projects, without being at the heart of strategies and regulations. However, there are countries where attention of decision-makers are drawn to organic farming and agro-ecology as far as agricultural policies are concerned.



ORGANISATION OF AGROECOLOGY STAKEHOLDERS. In some countries, they are organised within platforms and federations specifically devoted to agroecology or organic farming. Those networks have been active for several years while in some others countries there was no national structure representing agroecology players.



CONSULTATION MECHANISMS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND AGROECOLOGY STAKEHOLDERS. Except Senegal, where the national platform for agroecology and organic agriculture (PNAEB) has been active for several years, there are no such consultation mechanisms elsewhere.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NCF

In the West African sub-region as a whole, nine consultation frameworks had been established by the end of 2024. The operating charter and actions plan are about to be signed in Cape Verde and Togo, whereas the documents are still being drafted in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali and Niger. Ahead of these initial stages, NCF is carrying out activities in some countries but it is not very active in others.

REPRESENTATIVENESS

Broadly speaking, NCF appears to be fairly representative and includes the main agroecology stakeholders, such as ministries, research and agricultural training institutes, advisory institutions, professional farming organisations, NGOs and other civil society stakeholders and, if existing, agroecology stakeholders platforms. As per the case, NCF also includes economic stakeholders from sectors different from producers' one or technical and financial partners. However, in some countries, major civil society players do not seem to be represented at this stage.

As far as ministries and public institutions are concerned, NCF could provide a framework for cross-sectoral dialogue insofar as several ministries are represented on it (in particular the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment). Anyway, it appears that this forum, where discussions take place in full view of all stakeholders, is not a place favoured for such cross-sectoral dialogue.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER FRAMEWORKS AND PLATFORMS

In countries where federations or platforms of agroecology stakeholders exist, they are members of the NCF, with no apparent risk of duplication or competition, as NCF has the particularity of including public authorities, unlike federations and platforms. When stakeholder federations or platforms play an important role, there may be a risk of duplication or *de facto* competition, particularly for access to funding or in terms of mobilising stakeholders (as in Togo and Senegal).

GOVERNANCE

Broadly speaking, NCF governance is formalised with two main bodies (which may be referred to differently in various



countries): the members' assembly and the steering or executive committee. However, there are real differences in the way this governance operates and in the respective roles of the Ministry of Agriculture and the other members.

In some countries, the Ministry of Agriculture appears to be the main steering body. In others, the collective steering body is operational and multi-stakeholder governance is effective. In Senegal, the Plant Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture holds the chair, while the Secretariat General is held by a farmers' organisation named CNCR. The degree of involvement of ministries other than the Ministry of Agriculture seems to vary from a country to another. In the case of Nigeria, the Ministry of Environment is explicitly at the heart of the system, as it holds the vice-presidency, while the Ministry of Agriculture holds the presidency. In some countries, the creation of multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks at the sub-regional level is in progress.

FUNCTIONING AND DECISION-MAKING

The operating charter of NCF provides for decisions to be taken by consensus as well as by a simple majority in the event of disagreement. However, it seems that this issue has not always been discussed and decided in some countries, which seems to have led to unilateral and contested decisions.

PUBLIC POLICY ACTIVITIES

NCF usually stands as a framework for exchanges, training and coordination of stakeholders, but also for political dialogue with view to contributing to public policies promoting agroecology. Among the activities related to public policy, several NCFs have organised national consultations and workshops on public policy and agroecology.

In countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, NCF has also planned to work on drawing up a national agroecology development strategy or guidelines/strategic guide to facilitate the integration of agroecology into agricultural policy. In other countries, this type of activity was not carried out so far.

Effects and impacts

It is still early to assess all the effects and impacts of the introduction of NCFs. Two types of effect seem to be evident in some countries.

 **ORGANISATION OF AGROECOLOGY STAKEHOLDERS AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE.** In countries where stakeholders were not used to regularly hold meetings (internally between themselves as well as between agro-ecology stakeholders and public authorities), there is an initial effect in terms of gathering of agro-ecology stakeholders, sharing of experience and political dialogue.

 **POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO AGROECOLOGY.** The intervention of NCF seems to have strengthened the awareness raising on the integration of agroecology in national strategies and policies. In Senegal for example, it has helped to integrate livestock farming into the national debate on agroecology. In the same country, PNAEB experience led to the launch of a process to develop a national agroecology strategy. It was also decided to create a subsidy for organic inputs (10%) as well as for Aflasafe. In many other countries, there is apparently no real impact on the public policies implemented at this stage. However, in addition to AEP financial support to NCFs, which is the most important, some governments (Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria) are providing funding from national resources or by mobilising some projects funded by international cooperation.

Sustainability of NCF

The issue of NCF sustainability once AEP funding is over is a major concern in most countries. From this point of view, the matter of funding, based on the following decisive factors, is very important:

- ▶ the continuation of ECOWAS funding at the end of AEP;
- ▶ the institutionalisation of NCF and its integration in a national agroecology development strategy, enabling it to be eligible to public funding. That raises the question of the commitment of States;
- ▶ members' own subscriptions as the current example from Senegal, which implies both statutory accreditation of NCF and the commitment of Member States;
- ▶ definition and implementation of a long-term funding strategy. The provision of regular funding from public authorities as well as the members themselves can help to draw additional funding from potential donors.

Beside the financial concern, the sustainability of NCF, that is the sustainability of its actions, also basically depends strongly on the commitment of both public authorities' party and the one of the members themselves.

Lessons learnt

In a context where, as we can notice, agroecology is not at the heart of agricultural policies, even if changes have been observed within several years in certain countries, the creation of multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks for agroecology contributes to greater involvement of public authorities in the development of agroecology. In the cases where such forums do not already exist, this is an opportunity for agroecology stakeholders to have a meeting place and develop a collective identity. Lastly, the creation of a NCF under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture provides an opportunity for political dialogue on agroecology between the various stakeholders and the public authorities. The NCF could potentially also be a forum for inter-sectoral dialogue on agroecology. The multi-stakeholder and inter-sectoral dimension could contribute to the legitimacy and recognition of this framework.

With the exception of Senegal, NCFs have been established only recently. So it is still too early to assess their impact and sustainability. However a number of difficulties, often resulting from a relatively low level of activities, can already be identified. That raises questions about the sustainability of the consultation frameworks.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATION

In some countries, member participation gets a relatively moderate rate. This may be due to a lack of human resources, a lack of conviction that this type of framework reflects the existence of a genuine political will to promote agroecology, de facto competition with other platforms or dynamics, governance in which members are not sufficiently involved, a lack of shared vision of agroecology, and a need to build members' capacities in terms of participation in the development of public policies and advocacy. In addition, when the financial issue limits the NCF's activities, this also has an impact on the mobilisation of members.

FINANCING

The financial concern is a constraint for the development of activities. AEP funding is necessarily limited and there is often no additional fund available (government budget, cooperation agencies, membership fees). The funding problem partly raises the following issues : commitment of ECOWAS in future, long-term commitment of public sector (inclusion in the State budget), possibility (legal recognition) and willingness to make internal contributions and implement a complementary funding strategy.

POLITICAL WILL

When agricultural policy is fundamentally based on the promotion of intensification solutions resulting from the Green Revolution and if actions in favour of sustainable agriculture or agroecology appear to be marginal, there is some doubt as to the political will of the State beyond the achievements performed thanks to AEP funding, which may slow down the commitment of some stakeholders. On the other hand, the existence of the NCF can be a real opportunity to change the vision of decision-makers and public policies in favour of agroecology. However the pending challenge to meet is to know whether the existence of NCF will be enough to move agricultural policies away from the dominant model towards agroecology. The coherence of the different policies is prior, since support for agroecology may be very low in terms of resources compared with the ones made available to promote a model based on the green revolution (or even on deforestation), as is the case in many countries in the region.

Political changes, for their part, generate uncertainty and sometimes changes in the State's commitment to agroecology.

Political will also affects the design of NCF: is it simply a transmission tool for awareness raising, stakeholders capacity building and implementation of government guidelines? Or is it a genuine forum for political dialogue, designed to co-develop public policy and help stakeholders themselves, particularly professional farming organisations, to take responsibility for implementing policy guidelines? These views have implications for the governance of the NCF. From this point of view, while NCFs attachment to the Ministry of Agriculture may generate a degree of confidence in the State's long-term commitment, it may also constitute a limitation to more shared governance.



Public policy recommendations



› Holding the 1st session of the NCC in Benin.

The continuity, consolidation and growth of national multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks can be a major asset for the agroecology transition in the various countries of the region, insofar as their activities can help, on the one hand, to strengthen the stakeholders themselves, their activities and their cooperation and, on the other hand, to drive forward public policies in favour of agroecology that are as relevant and efficient as possible. To achieve this, a number of recommendations can be made.

- PUT IN PLACE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR THE NCFs**, enabling them to play an effective role in terms of capitalising on experience, stakeholders consultation, political dialogue, participation in drawing up and monitoring public policies, training, establishing partnerships for the development of agroecology, by means of stable budgetary resources and the implementation of strategies for seeking additional funding (cooperation agencies, taxation enabling the participation of certain sectors, membership fees, reserve funds fed by members to mitigate funding delays, etc.).
- ORGANISE, WHERE NECESSARY, A DEBATE ON THE DIFFERENT VISIONS OF AGROECOLOGY** and raise awareness of the systemic vision of agroecology and the principles defined by FAO.
- GIVE THE NCF LEGAL STATUS** or a formal place in the national agro-ecology development strategy.
- PUT IN PLACE, WHERE NECESSARY, A CLEAR MODE OF GOVERNANCE ALLOWING EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS**, including both public and non-governmental stakeholders, namely the professional agricultural organisations.
- ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF NCFs** within consultation frameworks at sub-national level (regions, states).
- BUILD THE CAPACITY OF STAKEHOLDERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FORMULATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES, TO MONITOR THESE POLICIES AND TO ADVOCATE.**
- ENSURING A BALANCE BETWEEN FAMILIES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COMPOSITION OF NCFs.**
- ENSURE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WOMEN EXPECTATIONS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE VARIOUS INITIATIVES.**
- PROMOTE EXCHANGES BETWEEN CCN MEMBERS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN THE REGION.**

As far as ECOWAS is concerned, the continuation of its financial and technical support at the end of AEP is relevant, not only because of the sake of the NCFs but also because of the uncertainties linked to their sustainability in certain countries. The principle of co-financing by ECOWAS could encourage the States and members of the NCFs to strengthen and operationalise the inclusive national agroecology strategy. At a technical level, ECOWAS could, in conjunction with 3AO, play a role in sharing experiences between the various NCFs in the region on progress and difficulties. This would enable other countries to benefit from the experience of the most advanced countries in terms of NCF operation and stimulate member participation. A first regional meeting on the topic, including representatives of the various families of NCFs stakeholders, could help to initiate a dynamic of this type. Complementary methods of distance exchange could also be envisaged. ECOWAS could also help to strengthen the commitment of the various States and facilitate exchanges on the topic at ministerial level.



› Abuja meeting on agroecology (October 2024).

The 3AO Regional Alliance

Activities and operations

The Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa (3AO) is a coordination and information relay platform made up of farmers' organisations, research institutes/universities, national and international NGOs and social movements. It aims at promoting and supporting an agroecology transition in West Africa. Through a series of actions, 3AO aims at strengthening synergies between different organisations and scales of actions to boost advocacy, movement visibility and the impact of agroecology initiatives. The Alliance activities are based on an evolving actions plan and an online collaborative space (see below).

When the 3AO alliance was created, it was envisaged that each initiative listed in its actions plan would be led by a "responsible" organisation, which would benefit from the financial support, expertise and experience of other organisations in the initiative "support group". The results of the initiatives are shared with all the stakeholders in the alliance, and can then be relayed to third-party groups.

The 3AO executive committee coordinates and monitors the initiatives. It includes representatives from ROPPA, IPES-Food, AFSA, Enda Pronat, CIRAD and Action Contre la Faim. The Alliance Secretariat is held by ROPPA.

Alliance 3AO is involved in implementing the PAE mainly through:

- › training young people in agroecology;
- › the setting up, with the support of CIRAD, of the 3AO Hub platform (<https://www.3aohub.org/fr/1/home.html>), as part of AEP and Fair Sahel Programme. This is a collaborative space for bringing together stakeholders, sharing knowledge and solutions, and providing methodological support for scaling up agroecology in West Africa. It includes a map of 3AO members and other key stakeholders in agroecology, and a database of knowledge on agroecology;
- › the organisation of a workshop on the training of producers in 2021;
- › the organisation of two regional agroecology forums, in December 2022 in Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and in October



2024 in Abuja (Nigeria). The latter forum was organised jointly with the WafroNet network. It has contributed to the formulation of recommendations for the promotion of agroecology in West Africa, for the attention of international and regional organisations (ECOWAS), States, farmers' organisations and local authorities;

- › support for regional advocacy initiatives in Burkina Faso and Senegal.

Lessons learnt

At regional level, Alliance 3AO is a centre-point in structuring the stakeholders involved in agroecology. The recommendations put forward at the end of the regional forums make help to envisage a structured set of regional, national and local public interventions in favour of agroecology. Specific proposals were also made as part of the advocacy work carried out in Senegal and Burkina Faso. The 3AO Hub platform already contains a number of relative resources on which stakeholders in the region can draw to formulate public policies, including on specific topics. It would be useful if the resources could be supplemented by other experiences, position papers and proposals on specific aspects. The link with WafroNet would appear to be coherent insofar as organic farming can be considered as a specific approach to agroecology, the challenges faced in developing agroecology and

organic farming are often similar, and there is every interest in designing public policies that integrate both.

The difficulties in implementing the activities are related to the points mentioned below.

- › **Animation, particularly that of thematic initiatives:** the organisations 'responsible' for the initiatives do not always seem to be able to get sufficiently involved, due to a lack of IT tools for effective thematic animation and a lack of other resources at 3AO level to support animation. The launch of the 3AO Hub platform should contribute to overall coordination. It is also important for the thematic coordination to be part of a timetable punctuated by deadlines that allow stakeholders to meet, take stock and share their thoughts and proposals more widely. From this point of view, the regular organisation of regional forums to promote this work can be a valuable asset, complementing more regular communications and remote exchanges.
- › **Sustainability,** insofar as the scheme relies on external funding that is limited in time. More sustainable funding mechanisms could be envisaged.
- › **The link between the regional dynamic and national dynamics.** This seems to vary from one country to another, which raises the question of resources and leadership. Alliance 3AO could play a role in making national consultation frameworks more operational and sustainable by organising, jointly with ECOWAS, the sharing of experience on this topic within the various countries.

Public policy recommendations



HELPING TO SET UP MORE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MECHANISMS.

- › As Alliance 3AO is an essential forum for structuring and strengthening agroecology stakeholders at regional level, it is desirable that regional funding should be sustainable, in addition to a strategy for seeking additional funding. It would seem appropriate for ECOWAS support to contribute to closer links with the WafroNet network and collaboration with the RESCAR-AOC network.



CREATE INITIATIVES FOR SHARING EXPERIENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES.

- › Joint actions could be envisaged between ECOWAS and the 3AO Alliance, particularly in terms of sharing experiences between the various national consultation frameworks, covering both public policies in favour of agro-ecology and the operation of the CCNs themselves.



For a more in-depth look at the topic, kindly see the *Thematic Report 5 "Multi-stakeholder consultation frameworks for the inclusion of agroecology in public policy"*, in AEP cross-cutting capitalisation study, and the three policy briefs produced as part of the Fair Sahel programme "The institutionalisation of agroecology in Burkina Faso: trajectory and challenges", "The integration of agroecology in public policies in Senegal" and "The weakness of public policies in support of agroecology in Mali".


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176
Acteurs

145
Projets



19
Documents



11
Vidéos