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Webinar on the Recognition of Agroecology in the Rio Conventions

17 September 2024, 3pm CEST/UTC+2

PRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECT

For the presentation of the subject, please refer to :

- "Summary report on the Recognition of agroecology in the Rio Conventions: potential for scaling up". Adeline Derkimba (CARI), Manon Albagnac (CARI), François Grenade (Humundi), Alice Jandrain (Iles de Paix), Camille Rouaud (Minka International), June 2024, [English version](#)
- Webinar power-point presentations: [English version](#)

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS AND CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS¹

Do you see the entry point of nature-based solutions (NBS) as an opportunity or a risk, given that the current NBS framework seems to include many practices that many consider unsustainable?

We are aware that the concept of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) has been widely taken up by several stakeholders, including the private sector. It is a controversial concept, which does not enjoy consensus among civil society organizations, because it is sufficiently broad for a wide range of stakeholders to be able to identify with it without necessarily adhering to the social transformation aspects of agroecology. We have therefore taken the necessary precautions by referring to it in our Summary Note, justifying that it is the definition used by UNEP² that interested us in presenting our thoughts in a didactic way.

¹ This note has been automatically translated using Deepl.

² Sbn are "actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems that effectively and adaptively address social, economic and environmental challenges, while simultaneously ensuring human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits". [UNEP, 2022](#)

NBS alone, even if they focus solely on sustainable practices, are in any case not enough to guarantee an agroecological vision.

Regarding the visibility of agroecology (AE) in climate negotiations/actions, what do you see as the main obstacles?

The main obstacle to taking agroecology into account in the climate negotiations is linked to its transformative nature, which could affect vested interests (mainly in the private sector), well defended by certain Parties to the COP and their lobbying actions. The revolutionary side of AE does not please certain stakeholders who have power and do not wish to have any competition.

Furthermore, agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach, which is not always used in the same way by all the stakeholders (as defined by the HLPE, to which we refer). That may also explain why its use is more complex.

What purpose can this recognition of AE by the Conventions serve? Can the Conventions lead to transformative policies?

Conventions make it possible to obtain political commitments and implementation instruments. If AE is clearly stated, this gives it greater recognition, paving the way for better funding for AE. The Conventions can act as an amplifier to talk about AE and help push it up the national agenda. They allow the points of view of different stakeholders (politicians, civil society, international organisations, etc.) to be brought together and made audible, and legitimise the voice of the stakeholders who defend it. It is important to create a new narrative to guide actions, and mentioning AE in the Conventions contributes directly to this.

As part of the reporting by countries on the measures taken to implement the Conventions, are there any indicators that can be used to identify the sensitivity of the actions with regard to the agroecological approach? Could this be an opportunity worth exploring?

At the level of the UNCCD, the Parties to the Convention must report on the achievement of the 5 strategic objectives of the 2018-2030 Framework, using a system of common indicators. This reporting is done periodically, the last cycle having taken place in 2018. Some of these indicators can be used to monitor the agroecological transition. However, measuring one isolated indicator (e.g. land productivity) does not mean that the measures taken under the Convention are moving towards an agroecological transition.

At UNCBD level, there are no such indicators yet, but the *Agroecology coalition* is proposing to use the objectives of the ten-year plan (2022-2030) - the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework - in the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and to cross-reference them with the 13 HLPE principles relating to agroecology.

At the level of the Climate Convention, adaptation indicators are being developed by a working group, which should be able to include references to agroecological principles (soil health, diversification, etc.).

On the other hand, indicators imply a standardised dimension. However, AE is intended to be adaptable to all contexts, which may contradict certain indicators. What's more, the indicators used to monitor the agreements are often drawn up at a macro level, which can mask the diversity of actions on the ground and local dynamics.

Wouldn't a single Convention be more efficient, given the convergence of issues specific to the 3 Conventions?

The agroecological approach is a system-based approach. This principle also applies to the Conventions. The issues at stake in the three Conventions are interdependent. Biodiversity, climate and soil health influence each other. However, in our societies we are not used to working in a systemic way, and this requires learning and experimentation. We need to move away from working in silos, but that doesn't mean merging the three conventions.

Moreover, although the 3 Conventions deal with interconnected issues, they enable progress to be made on different subjects, and from the point of view of the diversity of the issues covered, a merger of the Conventions would not be relevant. Indeed, if the Conventions were to merge, drylands and biodiversity would probably be given less attention, with carbon issues likely to take precedence over the agenda. For example, within the Desertification Convention, the inclusion of land governance in the combat against desertification is a decision that has been described as historic. This decision might not have been taken in a Supra-Convention.

On the other hand, more synergies between the three Conventions are desirable. For example, following an evaluation of the UNCCD's implementation strategy, the following recommendations will be brought to COP16 in December 2024:

- Promote greater synergy and coordination at national level to implement the 3 Conventions.
- To promote greater collaboration and information sharing between the secretariats of the 3 Conventions, including the sharing of data collected by the three Conventions, joint scientific work, and improved access for countries to case studies and lessons learned from projects linking the three Conventions.

What roles do alliances of stakeholders and networks play in the recognition of agroecology?

Networks, and in general all alliances of committed stakeholders, clearly have a role to play in helping to gain recognition for agroecology. By putting forward a concerted, collective voice, they can gain legitimate recognition from decision-makers, which would be harder for an organisation to achieve on its own.

Agroecology requires a holistic approach, and there can never be too many stakeholders to promote it and push it up the international agenda. Whatever the networks, their actions are complementary. There are large, well-known networks bringing together stakeholders who already have access to influence international policies, and other networks such as Minka, which are younger or smaller, but which also have the advantage of giving a voice to small stakeholders, farmers' organisations, guarantee funds, etc. and which represent the plurality of stakeholders committed to agroecology, and those who cannot join larger coalitions.

The networks, and particularly the North/South networks, are making progress in advocating agroecology, which inevitably has a greater impact when it can be fuelled by feedback from experiences and concrete examples from the field, which demonstrate the legitimacy of agroecology in addressing global issues. We know that we need to continue demonstrating and proving the adaptability of agroecology to all local contexts and its relevance as a holistic approach that is not just limited to agricultural practices, something that is shared by many stakeholders in the field.

Mobilisation is also needed at other levels (from local to international) to ensure that pressure is brought to bear on all levels of power and to promote change. Humundi, for example, works directly to support farmers' organisations, which is an important lever for defending agroecological transitions. Support from governments is also essential, as this must not be left solely on the shoulders of farmers.

What is the state of implementation of these Conventions in the countries of the South in terms of Agroecological Transition and what are the prospects for greater stakeholder involvement?

Today, more than 40 countries have an AE policy, making it possible to develop AE strategies that can be used to implement the 3 Conventions.

For the UNCCD, nation implementation of the Convention is guided by the action plans for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). These provide targets and implementation measures, which are embodied in projects/programmes that propose quite a few guidelines (reforestation, etc.). However, there does not seem to be any specific focus on agroecology in this context. Through Désertif'actions 2022, CARI has developed a position paper to show how AE can contribute to NDT ([in ENG](#)).

The involvement of all stakeholders plays a key role, as the UNCCD framework is very open. Virtually all the decisions, and all the technical guides to help countries, mention the need to involve the relevant stakeholders, in particular CSOs. It is also up to CSOs at national and local level to take charge of the issues and get involved themselves. However, there is little representation of farmers' organizations.

Lastly, strategies for taking account of AE can be promoted through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs, for the Biodiversity Convention) and Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans (NDCs and NAPs, for the Climate Convention).

How can resistance to the Agroecological Transition be explained and addressed? What is the role of stakeholders in overcoming this resistance?

Including all stakeholders helps to reduce resistance. The main challenge is to overcome the "lack discourse" and make visible the fact that the problem is not linked to the lack but to the system.

It is necessary to recognise that the dominant discourse defends an industrial and productivity-oriented agriculture, anchored in a capitalist economy. This discourse emerged in the elitist, male-dominated scientific world of Europe and North America, was promoted in universities and

supported by European governments, and has guided scientific research for over a century, systematically devaluing peasant agriculture and peasant knowledge. This discourse constitutes a collective imaginary, based on beliefs, which takes time to deconstruct, just as it takes time to construct a new imaginary.

A first step towards building resistance is to bring all the stakeholders involved to the table, i.e. farmers, peasants and government officials responsible for monitoring and raising awareness in rural areas. It's important to build on their experiences, give them a voice and show the different ways forward.

A second way is to deconstruct the rhetoric of scarcity, according to which we need to produce more to feed the entire world population. At present, enough food is produced to feed the whole of humanity, yet a significant number of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition and are in a situation of food insecurity. A paradigm shift is needed, from "how to produce enough food" and "how to increase agricultural productivity" to "how to feed the whole of humanity in a way that respects planetary limits and human rights".

How have gender and intercultural perspectives been integrated into the 3 Conventions?

Agroecology reminds us of the central role of farmers and indigenous peoples in the combat against climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification. Their knowledge and ability to act on the ground is crucial, and their empowerment should be a priority for achieving the objectives of the 3 Conventions.

Gender issues are increasingly being considered within the Climate Convention but work still needs to be done to characterise local communities and the way they operate to better understand the obstacles and levers to the inclusion of women and young people.

At UNCBD level, the 1992 Convention already expressed the concern to protect the access of women and indigenous peoples to the ecosystems on which they depend for their survival and recognised their role in the protection and conservation of biodiversity. As the COPs have progressed, the diversity of relationships with the world and conceptions of nature has gained greater recognition.

The UNCCD sees gender equality as a springboard for achieving land degradation neutrality and equipping communities to combat drought and desertification. In 2017, at COP13 in China, the Parties to the Convention recognised the gaps in their work due to their limited gender perspectives. This led to the development of a dedicated action plan to ensure that gender equality plays a central role in building resilience to drought and achieving land degradation neutrality. The plan is intended to guide countries in improving women's access to resources. It is structured around the following four priority actions

- guaranteeing women's participation in decision-making
- eradicating poverty
- strengthen women's land rights, including access to resources
- improving women's access to knowledge and improved technologies

In this context, the [UNCCD secretariat](#) is actively generating knowledge and policy recommendations on how to take account of women in the context of desertification and drought.

What are the levers for increasing recognition of agroecology by the 3 Conventions?

Firstly, we need to support the development of a narrative that shows how AE contributes to the combat against land desertification, biodiversity loss and climate change. We need to develop evidence on the results of AE and its positive impacts on food systems, health, the combat against the degradation of land and natural resources, and so on. This concrete evidence of the effectiveness of AE must be promoted within the COPs. In this sense, the case studies are very important, and the networks/groups of EA stakeholders are a very useful link to be strengthened in the process.

By way of example, here is how civil society is involved in developing arguments in favour of agroecology for the UNCCD. Prior to the negotiations, the Parties to the Convention familiarise themselves with the preparatory documents for the COP and formulate the positions they wish to take on the subjects on the agenda. These positions are pooled within regional or influential groups. For example, France and Belgium help to formulate common positions within the European Union, which are then taken collectively to the COP. It is therefore necessary to engage in dialogue with national public authorities several months ahead of the COPs, to encourage them to bring agroecology to the negotiations. In addition, the decisions taken at the COPs are partly based on scientific information, particularly from the work of the SPI. The work programme of this interface should include an analysis of the contribution of agroecology to the objectives of the Convention. Finally, the Desertification Convention must go beyond the environmental framework and be an instrument for promoting synergy between the environmental and agricultural sectors. To achieve this, it is essential that the government teams responsible for monitoring the Convention and the negotiators' delegations include representatives from the ministries of agriculture (and other relevant sectors). Progress will be possible at COP16, with agricultural and food systems on the agenda.

On the other hand, the Member States have a role to play in supporting and defending the AE within the COPs.

Given the polysemous nature of agroecology, isn't it risky to use this term explicitly in a CBD text (the Global Biodiversity Framework)? Why use this one rather than another (sustainable intensification, nature-based solutions, etc.)?

Presenting agroecology as an innovative practice alongside sustainable intensification shows that there is still work to be done to distinguish sustainable intensification from the agroecological approach. It is this notion, which aims to advance the holistic dimension of agroecology, that we are defending. Once again, the visible use of agroecology in Conventions is helping to change the narrative.

Can't we see the opposite process? In other words, should we start by advocating that agroecology be recognised and considered in national and regional policies, and then make it a priority for discussion within the conventions? In Burkina Faso, for example, civil society has drawn up a national agroecology strategy that brings together civil society, the private sector and government structures.

A real breakthrough will be possible when several countries bring to the COP their experience of agroecological transition policies implemented at national level. That's why it's important to draw on the diversity of networks to make the case at different political levels, while ensuring that information flows between stakeholders. The dynamics can feed off each other. It is by taking AE to different levels that it will be able to assert itself; there is a complementarity between acting at national and international level.

In the countries of the South, specifically in Africa, farmers seem to be less aware of the various conventions and declarations of the United Nations. Do the organisers of this webinar have a programme to raise awareness among farmers' organisations at national level?

Many farmers' organisations and umbrella organisations are now active in promoting agroecology in the field, among their members, and in influencing national public policies. However, few farmers' or pastoralist organisations are accredited to the Desertification Convention, for example, even though they would be well placed to ensure better representation of the farming world. CSOs active within the UNCCD need to mobilise these farmers' and pastoralists' organisations and invite them to join this forum for dialogue. This can initially be done at the consultation meetings prior to the COPs, at the national workshops organised by civil society, and at the international Désertif'actions summit.

The NGO members of the Minka network work a great deal with farmers' organisations, which are already promoting agroecology, supported by numerous partner organisations.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SHARED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Quae has published a very interesting [Dictionary of Agroecology](#), which is free and available online.
- The FAO's AgroecologyLex, a database of legislative texts mentioning agroecology, lists around 250 texts.
- For your information, this month [AFSA](#) (the African Alliance for Food Sovereignty) will be launching a study on the place of agroecology in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs/CDNs) and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) of African countries.