

Summary of discussions from the reflective seminar Agroecology & crises

Agroecology: a relevant approach to reduce risks, manage emergencies and deal with the consequences of crises?

Brussels, February 6, 2025

On the occasion of its fifth anniversary, the Minka network organized an international seminar in Brussels to explore a crucial question: **Is agroecology a relevant approach to reduce risks, manage emergencies and deal with the consequences of crises?** Bringing together experts from development cooperation, humanitarian work, research and the institutional sector, this moment of collective reflection provided a unique opportunity to cross perspectives on a topic that lies at the heart of current global concerns.

Introduction and theoretical framework

Vincent Oury, president of the Minka network, opened the seminar by recalling the network's mission: supporting sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems through agroecology and family farming, by focusing on the pooling of knowledge, the production of field knowledge and advocacy.

Camille Rouaud, the network's coordinator, then presented the conceptual framework. Agroecology, far more than a collection of farming techniques, is a **systemic approach**, encompassing science, practice, and social movement, aimed at ensuring sustainable food systems while respecting the environment and fostering social peace. As such, it aligns naturally with the **Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus**, by striving to build bridges between these traditionally siloed areas of intervention.

- **Development** : Agroecology strengthens the resilience of communities in the face of shocks (climatic, economic, etc.), reduces dependence on costly inputs, promotes local circuits and promotes participatory governance and social cohesion.
- **Humanitarian**: Less explored, the potential of agroecology is real to provide solutions to displaced populations (e.g. vegetable gardens, techniques adapted to precarious contexts) and direct emergency interventions towards more sustainable reconstruction (e.g. choice of supplies).
- **Peacebuilding**: By promoting inclusive and sustainable management of resources (land, water, energy, etc.), it can alleviate tensions and prevent conflicts.

The seminar was structured around three key questions, explored via case studies and the analyses of a panel of experts moderated by Benoît De Waegeneer (Humundi): Geneviève Gauthier (Mission inclusion, Canada), Abdoulaye Ouedraogo (SPONG/APIIL, Burkina Faso), Wim Schalenbourg (DGD, Belgium), François Grunewald (Groupe URD, France), and Michael Hauser (University of Boku, Austria).

Reflection 1 – Agroecology and territorial sensitivity

Is a territory in agroecological transition more resilient in the face of crises?

Yaye Mbayang Touré (FONGS, Senegal) showed how, in the face of systemic crises in **Senegal**, agroecology has strengthened resilience by reducing dependence on inputs, diversifying local food crops and improving resource management. Despite persistent obstacles (financing, time, cultural resistance, etc.), advocacy has enabled notable political progress (e.g. subsidies for organic inputs, university training).

Manon Albagnac (CARI, France) presented a study on the role of agroecology in the face of **droughts**. By acting on the vulnerability (defined as the degree of sensitivity reduced by the level of resilience) rather than on hazard, agroecological practices (such as the use of resistant varieties, agroforestry, optimization of irrigation, economic diversification) strengthen the capacity of territories to get through these episodes.

The panel highlighted: the importance of adaptation **to the local context** (F. Grunewald), from **governance** and the **cooperation between stakeholders** (M. Hauser), from the **social justice** and the **inclusion of women and IDPs** (G. Gauthier), of the crucial but complex role of **donors** in the Nexus approach (W. Schalenbourg), and **concrete community initiatives** as a lever for change, even in the context of conflict (A. Ouedraogo).

Reflection 2 – Agroecology and humanitarian interventions

How can humanitarian actors integrate agroecological principles?

Olivier Genard (Îles de Paix) raised a key dilemma: the agroecological transition demands time and stability, conditions often lacking in crisis contexts marked by multiple challenges (e.g. displacement, survival imperatives, limited access to land). In such settings, is it realistic to pursue a full agroecological transition? Or should we instead **focus on mobilizing specific principles and techniques** adapted to emergency situations?

Bader Mahaman Dioula (Action Contre la Faim) demonstrated that such integration is indeed possible, highlighting ACF initiatives that **incorporate agroecological practices to bridge emergency response and sustainable development**. Notable examples include the RESILAC project (Lake Chad region), featuring agricultural recovery efforts, land restoration, and negotiated land access for displaced populations—as well as interventions in Bangladesh, such as drainage systems and fruit-based agroforestry to address recurrent flooding. The key factors behind the success of these initiatives are long-term engagement, robust advocacy efforts, and the use of targeted incentive measures.

The panelists insisted on the need for **better Humanitarian-Development connection** (M. Hauser), the importance of **land mediation** and empowerment in the face of aid (A. Ouedraogo), the need for development actors to **stay engaged**, even in crisis zones (W. Schalenbourg), and the relevance of agroecology including in **displaced persons camps** to restore perspectives (G. Gauthier). F. Grunewald

recalled the political dimension and the need to support local agricultural systems, even in the context of conflicts (e.g. Gaza, Ukraine).

Reflection 3 – Agroecology and integration of Internally Displaced People (IDP)

Can agroecology facilitate the integration of IDPs and the most vulnerable?

Victor Beaume (Caritas International) showed, through examples in **Palestine** and in **Uganda** (where access to land is facilitated for refugees), that agroecology can be a powerful lever for integration, social cohesion and prevention of food crises, especially in the face of declining humanitarian funding. He stressed the importance of strengthening local civil societies and guaranteeing human rights.

Safiatou Ouedraogo (APIL-ONG) presented APIL's **integrated approach in the North-Central region of Burkina Faso**. It begins with humanitarian assistance, followed by agroecology training tailored to spatial constraints. The approach also includes land access advocacy—leading to the restoration of 700 hectares using zaï and half-moon techniques, shared between IDPs and host communities. In addition, APIL supports socio-economic integration through market gardening and income-generating activities, while fostering social cohesion through mediation and the mobilization of peace ambassadors.

The panel confirmed the potential of agroecology for the most vulnerable people. G. Gauthier insisted on **securing women's access to land** once it is fertilized. W. Schalenbourg recalled the importance of an approach **sensitive to conflict**. A. Ouedraogo highlighted the role of **agroecological centers** as demonstration sites to convince communities. Due to specific stakes involved in crises (e.g. land pressure, restricted areas), Mr. Hauser noted that the **crisis can paradoxically accelerate the adoption of agroecological practices**. F. Grunewald concluded on the rapid effectiveness of certain regeneration techniques and the cost of ignorance regarding the potential of agroecology.

Summary by the great witness

Émile Frison (IPES-Food, Agroecology Coalition) closed the day by reaffirming the strategic relevance of agroecology. Recalling the **13 principles established by the HLPE**, he emphasized its proven benefits: **diversification for climate and economic resilience** (as illustrated by the post-Hurricane Mitch recovery), **soil regeneration, improved health outcomes**, and the strengthening of **short supply chains**, among others. He highlighted the striking case of Andhra Pradesh (India), where Natural Farming has led to a 11% increase in yields, a 50% rise in net income, and a 30% reduction in health-related costs. Agroecology, he argued, bridges traditional knowledge and modern science, and has the potential to **attract younger generations**. The main barrier remains the influence of the agro-industrial lobby. His conclusion was unequivocal: in the face of today's multiple crises, is there a better alternative than agroecology? In his view, the answer is clearly no—making a **strong case for supporting agroecological approaches in crisis-affected regions**.

General conclusion

This seminar demonstrated, through concrete examples and high-level exchanges, that agroecology is a relevant lever for crisis management. It **strengthens resilience upstream** (through preparedness and reduced vulnerability) and **offers sustainable solutions downstream** (in recovery and reintegration), provided it is conceived as a cross-cutting, inclusive approach, tailored to local contexts and backed by long-term political and financial commitment.

The Minka network thanks all the speakers, participants and partners.