

SEPTEMBER 2020

BRINGING AGROECOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES TO LIGHT IN WEST AFRICA



SUMMARY OF THE WEBINAR ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2020



ON 7 SEPTEMBER, IPES-FOOD WAS JOINED BY MORE THAN 130 PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE WORLD, AND KEY EXPERTS FROM WEST AFRICA.

Moderators

Emile Frison, panel member, IPES-Food

Mamadou Goïta, panel member, IPES-Food

Speakers

Dr. Papa Seck, former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Equipment of Senegal

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Prof. Assétou Founè Samaké, former Minister of Scientific Research and Innovation of Mali

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Mamadou Goïta, panel member, IPES-Food

Céline Perodeaud, Project Manager, IPES-Food

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Aurélien Lakoussan, Coordinator, CRCOPR/ ROPPA

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Famara Diedhiou, West Africa Program Officer, AFSA

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The webinar marked the launch of IPES-Food's latest report, 'The Added Value(s) of Agroecology: Unlocking the potential for transition in West Africa.' The report draws on 3 years of collaborative research with more than 100 partners in the region. Emile Frison opened the discussion by recalling the current global context: the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on poverty and food insecurity, as well as the increasing impacts of climate change and its stresses on the productive and regenerative capacity of our ecosystems.

To redress these issues, agroecology provides a compelling response to these challenges by 1) building climate resilience in durable and affordable ways; 2) reducing reliance on expensive chemical inputs; 3) building on farmer-to-farmer and inter-generational knowledge exchange; and 4) improving the resilience of rural areas through job creation and rural development.

"It is in our interest to promote agroecology since tomorrow must be better than today. We need an agricultural solidarity among generations - one that promotes a new form of agriculture, founded and supported by agroecology."

Ambassador Papa Seck explained that agroecology is a set of technological innovations that preserves the environment in order to promote ecosystem sustainability. Even though there is an erroneous belief that food quantity will decrease under agroecology, food systems are facing a quality, not a quantity issue. Dr Seck also pointed to the challenges of long supply chains supplying our food systems, and that agroecology can serve to redress these.



Professor Samaké emphasized the importance of the “Nature-Human” relationship and how agroecology is in fact rooted in cultural and indigenous knowledge passed on by families for generations. She highlighted the need to bring together the knowledge of indigenous Africans with scientific research and to share knowledge horizontally to reinforce the uptake of agroecology. Research and science should work in tandem with indigenous knowledge in order not to deviate from the core principles and practices of agroecology.

Dr Mamadou Goïta, co-author of the IPES-Food report, discussed the importance of considering the broader challenges in global food systems, and understanding agroecology as a part of a much bigger picture. Dr Goïta raised the disconnect between research findings and policy-making, highlighting that while many reports have emerged from the African context, their findings have not been translated into applicable policies in support of agroecology.

"Agroecology is closely linked to food systems and ensures their sustainability. It improves the productivity and also the quality of food. We must assist West African countries to better define the parameters of their agricultural policies, through agroecology. This new 2020 report by IPES-Food shows us the way forward."

- Mamadou Goïta, IPES-Food



Céline Perodeaud (IPES-Food), introduced the report and explained that agroecology is well-adapted to the West African region since it is highly applicable for the family farms that are still prevalent in the region. Agroecology does not require large land areas, has low up-front costs, and little to no recurring costs, because big machinery, commercial seeds, and chemical pesticides and fertilizers are not needed.

Agroecological systems create job opportunities in rural areas, avoiding massive flows of out-migration. However, agroecology faces a number of obstacles in West Africa, including the lack of financing, linked to low political buy-in, due to the longer timeframes for delivering positive results.

Famara Diédhiou from the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) explained how COVID-19 has exposed the flaws of long food supply chains and the importance of food sovereignty in Africa. He argued that the food supply should not be as import and transport-dependent, and that Africa has the means to produce enough food to feed itself. Current food insecurity and lack of access to food should be addressed, instead of focusing solely on increasing production.

Aurélien Lakoussan from ROPPA underlined the importance of ensuring the quality and consistency of agroecological products, highlighting that in order to create a stable market for these products, farmers need to systematically deliver high quality products. This requires proper financing of agroecological family farms and support from all stakeholders and governments.

"This IPES-Food report is the fruit of three years of research, investigation and collaboration among more than 100 actors and organizations that promote sustainable food systems in West Africa."

- Céline Perodeaud, IPES-Food



Q&A | During the discussion portion of the webinar, participants underlined the importance of agroecology for creating rural employment and the need to embrace African roots and traditions instead of always turning to the West for inspiration. They highlighted the association of agroecological products with high end markets and the need for steps to increase accessibility to agroecological foods, by making them more affordable for consumers.

A number of participants questioned why governments have not taken action to support agroecology despite its benefits. Lastly, a representative from ECOWAS emphasized their interest in acting on the results and recommendations proposed in IPES-Food's report, and reiterated ECOWAS's willingness to reinforce coordination with the many stakeholders involved in the scaling up of agroecology in the region.

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THE ADDED VALUE(S) OF AGROECOLOGY:

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL FOR
TRANSITION IN WEST AFRICA

