Agroecologically-conducive policies
A review of recent advances and remaining challenges

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The upcoming United Nations Food System Summit is amplifying the need for significant transformations towards more nutritious, biodiversity friendly, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive food systems. Agroecology – encompassing 13 principles that align with these food system transformation aspirations – has received much attention in recent years, notably through the UN Committee on Food Security’s High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE). Its 2019 report describes a call to action on transitions to agroecology. The report emphasizes that transitions to agroecology will be context specific, as countries and regions have their own future visions for agriculture and food systems, their own starting points, and will therefore define their unique transition pathways.

Recently endorsed by the CFS (48 Special Session – 4 June, 2021), the CFS “Policy recommendations on agroecological and other innovative approaches” are based on the HLPE report. Agroecological transitions will require significant shifts in the enabling policy environment, with the need for strategies, policies, programs and other actions that are conducive to such transitions.

Until now only a few countries have made the move to a bold, broad and orchestrated set of policy reforms resulting in specific and significant commitments to enable agroecological transition from inception to adoption of the full 13 principles. However, some countries did put in place significant policy measures in support of such transitions, that address directly or indirectly one or several of the principles of agroecology (e.g. promotion of biodiversity, reduction of chemical inputs in agriculture, fostering of smallholder farmer voice, etc.).

For a country that seeks to engage in an agroecological transition, the issue of the right policies for the right context is critical. First countries need to understand the broad array of policy measures available. Then, they can learn from other countries on what has worked, the effectiveness of the policy. Finally, they need to understand the conditions for a successful policy, meaning what were the elements that made the policy conducive to successful adoption and scale up of agroecology principles, including the underlying elements related to capacity, public funding, private costs and benefits, and norms.

This paper adapts the Food and Agriculture Policy Decision Analysis policy classification framework of FAO to assess how different policies (consumer oriented; producer oriented; market and food environment oriented; macro and trade oriented; and cross-cutting policies) can affect incentives (or disincentives) to apply agroecology principles. The framework is enriched by examples of policies and related actions taken by national, regional and city governments promoting one or more of the agroecological principles. The policy measures used are diverse, ranging from those directed at farmers themselves (e.g. credit facilities for agroecological farming), consumers (e.g. nutritional labeling), missing markets (e.g. direct procurement of organic foods, payments for biodiversity services) and trade (e.g. bans on imports of certain pesticides).

Many of the enabling policies reviewed here are new, with challenges for institutionalization (such as when linked to volatile political agendas) and often supported by limited budgets. The second step of the work ahead for countries would be to improve (ex-post) impact assessment and analyze the effects these policies have on positively transforming food systems.

This paper identifies critical scientific knowledge gaps for better formulating, implementing, monitoring and assessing the ensemble of enabling policies for agroecological transitions, based on the current and past experiences from different countries.

Similarly, as shown by the successful conclusion of the evidence-based and multistakeholder debates in CFS at international level, the study suggests that national level formal or informal mechanisms be instituted for convening key stakeholders around discussions of food and agriculture transformation for policy coherence, long term support and implementation at multiple levels (i.e. farm – national).

Therefore, we hope that this paper can appropriately feed into the UN Food System Summit discussions, as well as orient future research at global, regional and national levels on coherent multisectoral policies for agroecological transitions, an agenda that is linked to many key global issues (food security, nutrition, sustainable food systems, climate change, biodiversity, etc.) and therefore central to the implementation of the SDGs.

ABOUT THE TPP

The TPP on Agroecology is a community of scientists, practitioners and policy makers working to accelerate agroecological transitions. Since its official launch on 3 June, 2021, the TPP has begun addressing knowledge gaps across eight domains that will support various institutions and advocacy groups in key decision-making processes.