TAFS

Transitions to Agroecological Food Systems: a case for policy support

Concept Note

June, 2021

This concept note is the result of a collective effort from more than thirty researchers. They are part of five platforms in partnership for research and training (PPAL, GovInn, Malica, Isa and Spad)[1] and researchers from the CGIAR involved in the Transformative Partnership Platform (TPP) on Agroecology[2].

Context

Low and medium-income countries face a number of inter-linked sustainability challenges. In particular, food systems have to provide food and nutrition security, decent jobs and incomes and to adapt to climate change, in a context where government budgets are constrained. Agroecological approaches are increasingly recognised as relevant solutions for ensuring sustainable food production and food security (HLPE 2019).

Yet, sustainability challenges associated to food systems are common but their relative importance as well as the dynamics of agroecological transition (AET) are context specific.

[1] These platforms or dP are Cirad's main modality of collaboration with its partners in several projects and actions of research, training and development in three continents (Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America). The five TAFS dP are: **PP-AL**: Public policy and rural development in Latin America - https://www.pp-al.org/en; **MALICA**: Market and Agricultural linking chains in Asia – https://www.malica.org/; **GOVINN**: Public policy and governance in southern Africa - http://governanceinnovation.org/; **ISA**: Information for food security - https://www.dp-isa.org/; **SPAD**: Highland Sustainable Production System in Madagascar www.dp-spad.org

[2] https://glfx.globallandscapesforum.org/topics/21467/page/TPP-home

Countries face very different issues like the need to reduce the use of agrochemicals (e.g. Vietnam), to strengthen ecological intensification of traditional production systems (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa), or to scale up scattered agroecological experiences (e.g. Brazil).

Across contrasting farming and sustainability context worldwide, social actors are mobilizing to promote agroecology in order to meet the major challenges of sustainable development, such as food security, halting biodiversity loss, employment and climate change adaptation. Whether on a national or territorial scale, public action initiatives are experimenting the development of food systems based on agroecological practices.

Nevertheless, these initiatives are quite diverse (oriented towards production or consumption, trade promotion, environmental protection, value chain dynamics at national or territorial levels) and do not provide a systemic agroecological centred response to the challenges of production, employment, environment and public health. Moreover, these initiatives remain limited, often on a very localized spatial and temporal scales. At present, multiple discourses support agroecology, however, it has not reached a level of credibility that would allow the development of policies that form the basis for transforming food systems towards greater sustainability and resilience at the speed required. In many countries, the decision to move towards an agroecological transition is a major break with the policy directions taken for several decades, based on the green revolution.

While public policies are key drivers to support and enable the transition to agroecological food systems, little is known about how these policies should be constructed to be effective. Most research projects focus on assessing agroecological practices at the farm level, and there is no generic framework for analyzing how public policies might facilitate or hinder the agroecological transition. In addition of addressing this core level of analysis, the TAFS proposal also deals with public policies and food systems.

Objectives

The main objective of the TAFS project is to engage with policy makers and provide them with convincing arguments grounded on scientific evidence, field data and concrete experiences, on the appropriate ways to promote agroecological transitions through public policies at different levels.

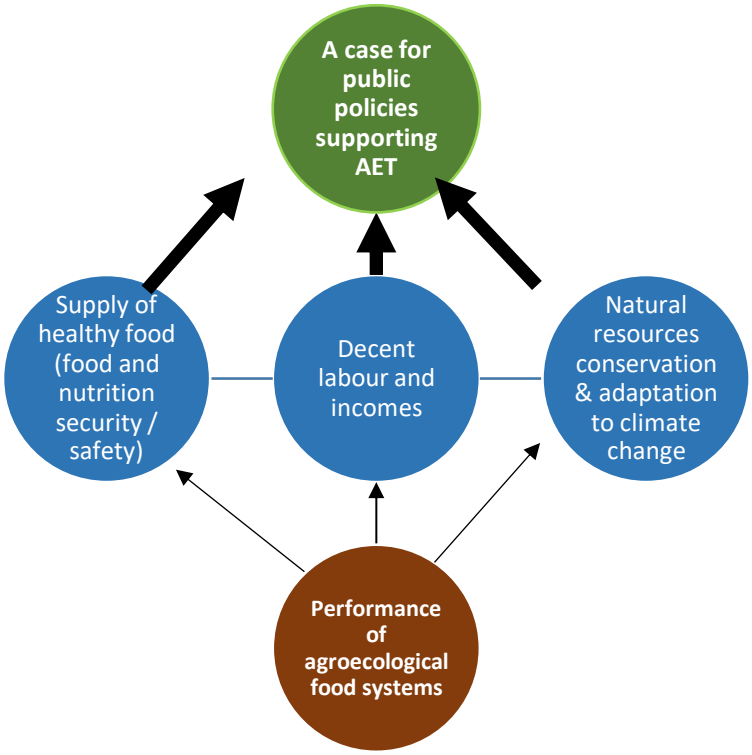
The project consists in producing and sharing knowledge based on new evidence and on-going experiences about the contribution of agroecological food systems on three key dimensions: i) year-round supply of sufficient, affordable, diversified, nutritious and healthy food for rural and urban population; ii) generation of decent jobs and incomes for farmers and; iii) sound management of natural resources at the farm and territorial level in the context of climate change (Figure 1).

The different action-research activities (see Figure 2), will be deployed at the national and territorial levels in at least 11 target countries on three continents (Africa: Burkina Faso,

Madagascar, Mali, Senegal, South Africa; Asia: Laos, Vietnam and India; Latin America: Argentina, Brazil and Colombia), showing a diversity of situations in terms of agroecological transition policies and institutional trajectories.

TAFS project action-research is grounded in strong and strategic collaborations including four CIRAD research units and five research and training partnership platforms or dP (PPAL, GovInn, Malica, Isa and Spad), three CGIAR centers (IFPRI, CIFOR-ICRAF and Alliance CIAT-Bioversity) and the NGO Biovision. In each country, we will also work with local organizations actively engaging on agroecology (farmer groups, NGOs, private sector, etc.).

Figure 1 - Filling knowledge gaps to make a case for agroecological transitions to sustainable food systems



Methodology

Through the different case studies, the project will analyse a diversity of socio-ecological and productive contexts with regard to agroecological practices and trajectories. The wide range of countries and contexts will facilitate the co-construction of a comprehensive understanding and knowledge about the diversity of AET processes and how related adapted policy frames may support sustainable food systems in the short and long term. The aim is not to compare performances of agroecological food systems between countries. Rather, the methodological

challenge is to use common tools to reveal evidence on the sustainability of agroecological food systems, in order to nourish policy processes and discussions based on desirable futures defined by stakeholders.

Research sites selection

The case studies and related food and production systems will be selected at the territorial level[3] by considering:

- The diversity of production systems with regard to a range of AE and conventional practices;
- The presence of innovative food systems and AET dynamics (especially their consideration by public policies);
- The existing data on AET.

The project will focus on some production systems based on the following criteria:

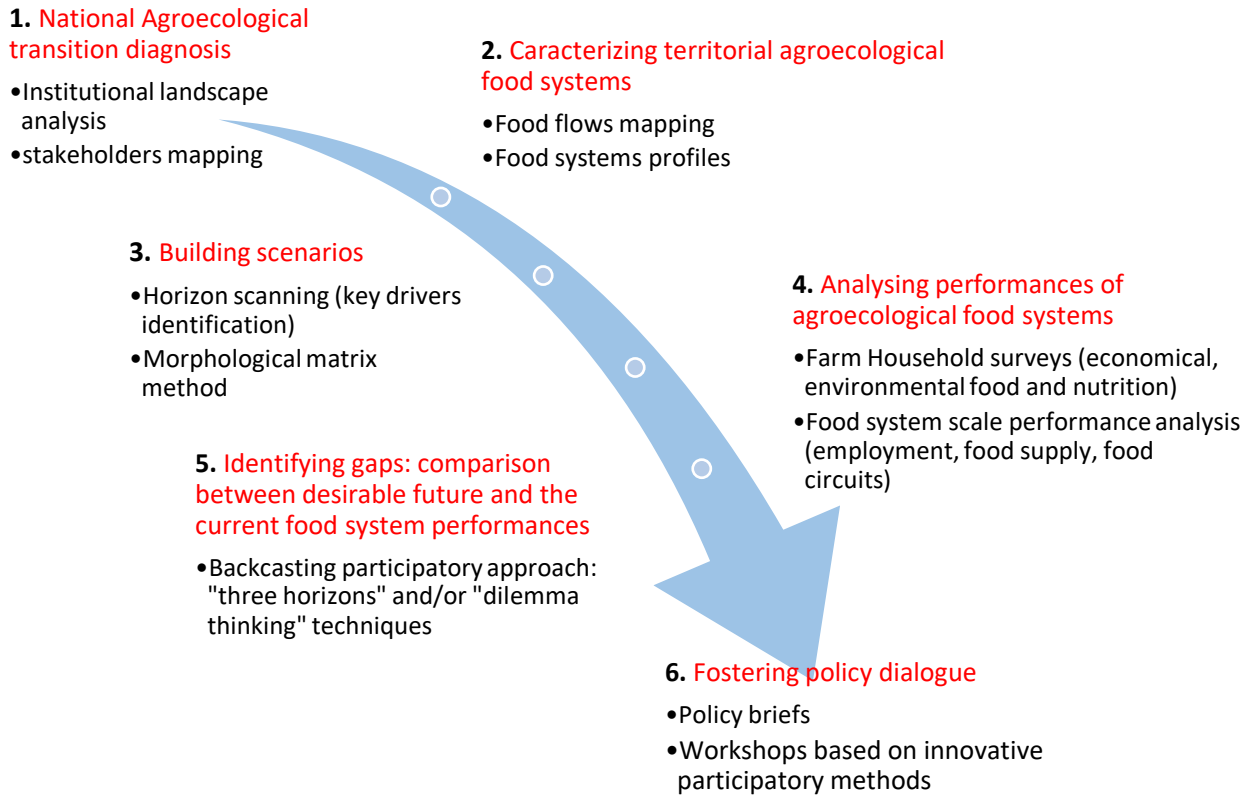
- Focus on family farming (Bélières et al. 2015), considering it includes the most economically vulnerable farmers and represents the vast majority of farmers in the targeted countries;
- Focus on farmers engaged in AE technical and organizational innovations and their relation to upstream and downstream activities;
- A diversity of socio ecological contexts allowing the development of a typology of different models of AET;
- The possibility to set core elements of comparison between AET (including the consideration of qualitative indicators) with regard to conventional systems of production.

Research design

The research design includes six interconnected stages with a diversity of research instruments (see figure 2). The engagement with both policy makers and local stakeholders will start from step 1, at the beginning of the project, and will continue all along the project until step 6 dedicated to policy dialogue.

[3] A territory is defined "as a space of governance for human activities where future projects are conceived and implemented. A territory is governed and influenced by a community of actors dealing with common challenges by defining appropriated actions and policies" (TP4D 2018).

Figure 2 - Step by step analytical process



- ***Step 1. Analysis of AET at the national level***

The first step will document what agroecology means in each country and the degree of institutionalisation of the whole concept and principles. It will help to select territories that are representative of current dynamics and to set the baseline needed for subsequent steps (food systems mapping, scenarios and policy dialogue). For this purpose, specific initiatives and current policies related to AET at the national level will be identified with different stakeholders (e.g. government and civil society representatives, and farmers and their organisations).

Several questions will be addressed such as: what are the visions and narratives of AET and the related food systems? How sustainability challenges and AET are framed? What are the social forces promoting and opposing AET? What kind of public action supporting AET has already been developed and what was the rationale for such development?

Institutional landscape analysis and stakeholders mapping are some of the possible tools to be used to answer these questions.

The outcomes from step 1 includes a clear and comparable baseline characterizing the different visions of AET, the nature of sustainability challenges, the existing initiatives and

policies as well as the types of agroecological practices[4] and associated food systems. Step 1 will also facilitate the selection of one or two territories across countries for an in-depth analysis.

- ***Step 2. Food systems and actors mapping at the territorial level***

Paying attention to sustainability challenges, this step will facilitate a deep-dive and understanding of territorial and on-ground realities by characterizing the existing food systems based on AE practices at a higher resolution and analysing how supporting (or not) policies translate on the ground. The different actors engaged in local initiatives and public interventions in favour of agroecology within the different segments of local food systems will be identified as well as existing forms of policy dialogue (e.g. stakeholder platforms).

Step 2, is grounded on participatory action research to co-develop with local stakeholders' food systems profiles that clearly describes food flows (access to safe, diverse and nutritious food), agricultural and food related labour markets opportunities, conflicts or synergies with natural resources and biodiversity. In addition, it is crucial to understand how national and multi-scale policies are implemented at the local food system level. The outcome of this step will be a typology of territorial agroecological food systems, including the characterisation of production, upstream and downstream activities, stakeholders, and governance structures. These results will be shared and discussed through local and cross-country dialogue platforms with policy makers, farmers' and consumers' organisations, NGOs, etc.

- ***Step 3. Participatory Scenario building at territorial level***

In step 3, plausible futures across territories and countries will be developed. The typology of territorial agroecological food systems (step 2) will support that development. The co-creation of such plausible futures -whether desirable or feared- will reinforce the relative importance of the multiple dimensions of sustainable development. Food systems at territorial level will be influenced by external drivers of changes and direct drivers of change. External driving forces (or drivers of change) influence all food systems and non-food systems; these are for example climate change, and the global political, economic and social contexts. Direct driving forces are specific to food systems and the territory (e.g. agroindustrial system, cropping systems, livestock systems, emerging local actors, etc.). The scientific team will synthetize the external and direct driving forces identified in step 2 and will integrated it with local stakeholders' knowledge and expertise in order to build assumptions for the future. Some driving forces will be related to local agrifood systems, but others will be related to national and global contexts. Most driving forces will be the same in the different territories, but assumptions for the future will probably vary from one territory to another. Different methods will be used to identify key driving forces and building scenarios with a diversity of stakeholders, including local actors, government representatives in charge of implementing national policies and researchers (e.g. horizon scanning, morphological analysis).

[4] Wezel (2014).

- ***Step 4. Assessment of current performances of agroecological food systems***

The indicators of performance and specific tools for their evaluation will be established through a participatory process with local actors, taking into account the outcomes of the food systems diagnoses and the main issues identified at previous stages. As this process will be context-specific, the whole range of socio economic and environmental performances will not be examined in all the selected territories. A selection of indicators and methodologies adapted to each territory will be made in order to analyse the performances at two levels:

- At the production systems level, with reference to existing typology of main production systems if any, socio-economic and environmental performances will be assessed through farm household surveys. These surveys will be representative at the territorial level and will particularly look at household production, food consumption, labour, incomes, and natural resources management. Regarding employment performance, work quantity and quality indicators related to the main AE practices will be designed. Further, the Olympe software will allow integrating a range of socio-economical performances indicators and facilitate research-policy linkages (Penot 2004); they might also include contamination and biodiversity levels indicators.
- At the food system level, surveys with households and enterprises will be elaborated regarding a) employment dimensions of upstream and downstream activities (characteristics and labour content); b) natural resources management outcomes of these activities; c) food security and safety performance (food prices, food quality and food circuits and change in distribution systems).

The outcome of these activities will be an assessment of the current economic and environmental performances and food security/safety performances of the territorial agroecological food systems.

- ***Step 5. Identification of obstacles and opportunities to move from current practices toward desirable future***

In this step, the current performances of local food systems will be put into perspective with a desirable future that stakeholders would like to achieve among the plausible scenarios identified in step 3. Further work with the designed scenarios will be implemented in workshops using different techniques, such as "three horizons" or "dilemma thinking". Backcasting participatory exercises will be used to identify the obstacles, opportunities and pathways from the current situation to the desirable sustainable food systems.

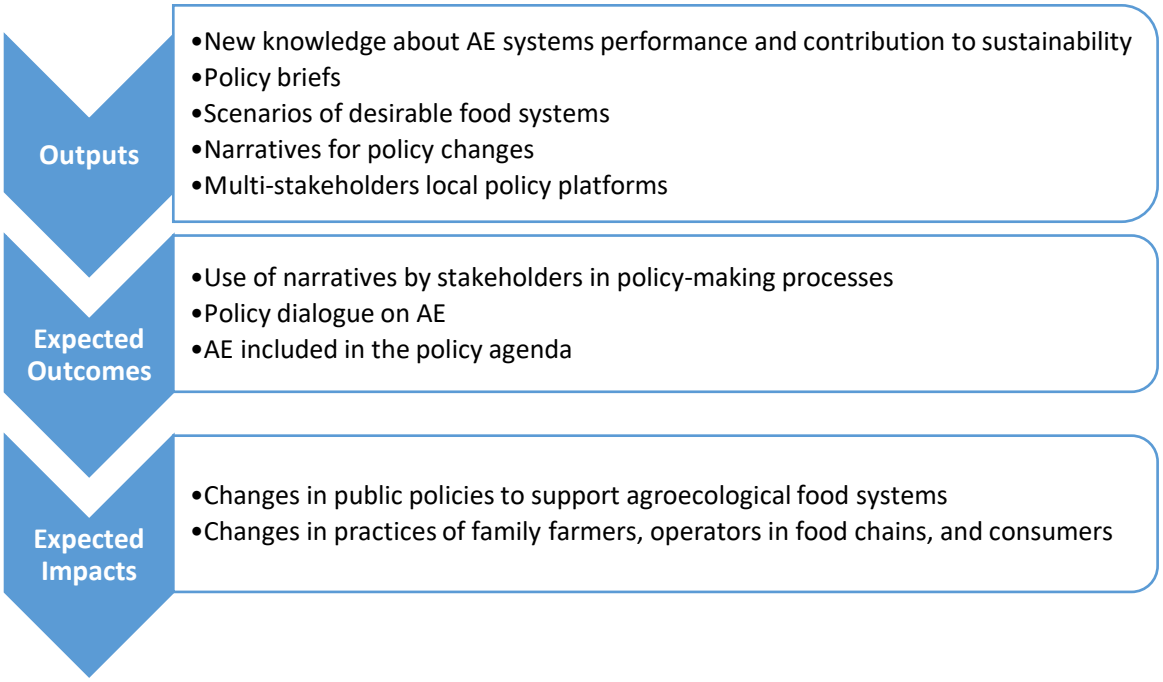
The outcome of this activity will be the identification of concrete situations and actions to overcome the obstacles identified or to seize opportunities, i.e. an action plan for food systems based on AET in the selected territories.

- ***Step 6. Policy dialogue with stakeholders and policy makers at the territory and national level***

Policy dialogue at this stage will help to identify policy instruments to overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities identified in Step 5 with regard to: a) the supply of affordable, nutritious and healthy food; b) the generation of decent labour and incomes for households and; c) the sound management of natural resources. This process will contribute to the formulation of public policies, inform specific policy design and the drafting of principles fostering the AE transition. It will help to revisit the existing national visions (step 1).

The production of policy briefs including the results of the work done in the previous steps will feed into the dialogue with the stakeholders who are engaged in the policy making. Workshops based on innovative participatory methods will be organized within existing policy dialogue platforms or new ones to be created. The outcome of this last task will be the elaboration of arguments, narratives and advocacy actions to influence the policy-making processes.

Expected results



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Contacts : Eric Sabourin sabourin@cirad.fr; Arlène Alpha arlene.alpha@cirad.fr; Sara Mercandalli sara.mercandalli@cirad.fr ; Stéphane Guéneau stephane.gueneau@cirad.fr