



Food Policy Forum for Change – Members Exchange

Key Messages

On the 14th of April 2021, the Food Policy Forum for Change organized a virtual exchange with the aim to give its members the opportunity to get to know each other. During the event, two country case studies were discussed: Andhra Pradesh in India, presented by *Vijay Kumar Thallam*, and Tunisia, presented by *Samia Maamer*. Both Dr. Kumar and Ms. Maamer reported on their decades of work as policy makers and shared experiences of the challenges and successes of food system transformation in their countries. In India, the move towards agroecological farming approaches was originally motivated as a response to the crisis in farmer livelihoods. However, through time other aspects, such as consumer health and the nutritional value of organic food, added further interest in these approaches. Additionally, Dr. Kumar emphasized that agroecological approaches entail advantages in terms of fiscal savings due to the lower cost of fertilizer subsidies as well as water savings, because of more efficient irrigation systems. Including such arguments in the current discourse can help to incentivize sustainable policy change in places where stakeholders are hesitant about agroecology. In Tunisia, the increased interest in organic agriculture started as a way to generate income and help the country's economy. As with India, this interest also extended eventually to include broader health and environmental aspects as well. For instance, more recently there are efforts to introduce agro- and ecotourism components within these initiatives. To create incentives for organic farming, the country relies on a certification system that is subsidized by the government and which has received international recognition.

The discussions in this Member Exchange pointed out that it is always important to identify champions of Agroecology, create group dynamics and promote synergies between policy sectors. The experience in both countries also underscores the need to identify a specific theme that can serve as a starting point to mobilize people and resources towards agroecological approaches (e.g. concerns on farmer livelihoods in India, and national income in Tunisia). Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen research in emerging areas where Agroecology has an advantage over other farming methods and promote this information at the national and international level, in order to convince and change people's mentalities with the right arguments and a clear, coherent message. At the same time, it was mentioned how every country has its own policy processes and (sub)national contexts that bring different challenges and which need to be taken into account. In Tunisia for example, the vision of organic farming is ever-changing and local awareness raising and training did not only focus on technical aspects of farming methods but included social and culinary aspects.

Discussion outcomes

In the second part of the event, participants discussed ideas on how the Food Policy Forum for Change can support the needs of its members and their food system transformation processes. Amongst other things, the following activities were proposed:

- Organize exchanges on specific niche topics where agroecology has a real advantage compared to other forms of agriculture (e.g. fiscal savings, efficient water use in arid zones, restoration of degraded land)
- Facilitate media exposure of champions by involving journalists and news platforms in the Forum



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- Use the international network the forum has created to support national fora and policy processes
- Organize field visits for policy makers members of the forum to showcase alternative agricultural systems that can make food systems more sustainable (e.g. to India or Tunisia).
- Create an exchange/volunteer/intern programme where policy makers can spend time with policy makers in other countries learning about food system transformation.
- Set up a “Best picture” competition to gather inspiring examples of agroecology from the field
- Initiate a social media challenge by nominating members to share stories of their work
- Engage in bilateral interactions with policy makers to start building the trust needed
- Engage directly on one-to-one conversations with the forum members to clarify better the support that the forum can provide to them.

Participants’ take away messages

At the end of the event, we asked participants to write in the meeting’s chat box the main message/lesson learnt they take with them from the discussion in the session. Below we cite their answers:

- “Listening to the Tunisian experience was very rewarding”
- “The necessity to have a vision over the long run, not to be afraid to think 20 years ahead”
- “We need to consolidate the message, create consistent and coherent information (at the national but also international level)”
- “The importance of using the same language and connect agricultural topics to our senses (e.g. through field visits) as part of the journey”
- The importance of “building solidarity among champions”
- The importance of “identifying and finding champions of agroecological transformation that can inspire other policy makers and to create solidarity among each other”
- The necessity to “identify champions and to have more direct contact with the forum members”
- “Visualize a common message of agroecology in order to be on the same page”
- “Group mechanisms as a process - if one changes, others adapt”

This webinar has been organised as part of the Food Policy Forum for Change initiative. For more information, please visit <https://www.agroecology-pool.org/policy-forum/> or email food.policy.forum@biovision.ch