

Himalaya Key Messages

Over the last 10 years, Indian, Bhutanese and Nepalese policymakers have increasingly recognized the need to transition towards sustainable agricultural systems in order to preserve their natural resources and improve livelihoods for rural populations. Political commitment has been concretely implemented with varying degrees of intensity, including policies and programmes with specific budget to support organic farming and agroecology. However, agricultural budget allocation for organic and agroecological practices remain disproportionately low compared to those provided to conventional farming.

Since there are enough evidences that agroecology is an effective pathway that provides multiple solutions to problems such as poverty and food security, there is a need to spread and broaden the discussion. Germany wants to reduce the dependency on external synthetic inputs, increase climate resilience, find alternative marketing channels and promote greater empowerment of women. (**Prof. Dr. Claudia Warning**)

“Business as usual is no longer an option” emphasized the German Federal Minister of economic Cooperation and Development **Gerd Müller**. Germany set the goal to make a significant progress by 2023 on increasing small farmers’ income, adapting agriculture to climate change and provide food security for the poorest rural people in India.

The Himalayan region is a very fragile ecosystem and therefore it is also a fragile agroecosystem, so it is important to look at what is important within such fragility in the agroecosystem and what kind of agriculture we need to practice. (**Mr. H.E. Walter Lindner**)

Dr. Sundar Anbalagan, Executive Director of the Sikkim Organic Farming Development Agency, talked about the path to 100% organic in Sikkim. This state of India is only 7,000 squares kilometres in size. In the predominant cardamom cultivation, compared to the rest of the nation, chemicals have always been used in agriculture to some extent. The government committed itself to organic farming back in 2003 and designed the successful 'Sikkim Organic Mission' in 2010. The aim was on the one hand to protect the environment, on the other hand to stabilize the farmers' income.

Subsidies for synthetic fertilizers and pesticides were gradually reduced and organic alternatives made available instead. Seed testing laboratories were set up and organic farming was integrated into school curricula. Certification, with which the farmers were supported by the government, also played an important role. Today the sale and use of chemical pesticides are banned in Sikkim. The state has been completely organic since 2016. Hundreds of unemployed people found a new job in organic farming and tourism could be increased by 40 percent.

There is still a need for action in processing and marketing. The farmer-producer organizations had to be strengthened and the Sikkim organic logo had to be successfully brought onto the market.

Dr. Rajeshwar Singh Chandel, Executive Director in the Government of Himachal Pradesh, emphasized the need to focus on the well-being of farmers and the responsibility to the future generations. The government of Himachal Pradesh instituted the project, named Prakritik Kheti Khushhal Kisan Yonja (PK3Y), that enhances farm income in harmony with nature by adopting low-cost climate resilient natural systems and to realise the on-doubling income of the farmers through natural farming in alignment with the SDG 2.3.

In Himachal Pradesh, the government passed an agricultural programme in 2018 that aims to double farmers' incomes by 2022. This form of natural farming also completely dispenses with external organic fertilizers and uses preparations such as cow dung instead, which are supposed to enhance the activity of microbes and earthworms in the soil. 90% of the population of Himachal live in the countryside. Unlike in Sikkim, pesticides have long been used on a massive scale here. Over 80% of

farmers reported health problems as a result and 90% saw honeybees decline. Around 80,000 farmers have now switched to natural farming in whole or in part. The production costs could be reduced by up to 56% and yields increased up to 27%, according to Dr. Chandel. In addition, the plants are more drought-resistant and the products have a more intense taste. He hopes that natural farming will get traction in other parts of India as well.

Dominik Ziller, Vice President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), reported that 60 percent of the projects supported by IFAD already involved agroecology. A lot can be achieved by strengthening the influence of women and young people. *"For instance, the African producers have access to the European market,"* explained Ziller, *"but they often exported the raw materials instead of processing them themselves"*. It is important to generate more value in the country of origin. To do this, the products would have to meet the standards of the exporting country.

Organic farming is currently gaining momentum in Nepal, with the provincial level taking somewhat the leading seat. **Dr. Hari Bahadur KC** from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock emphasized how in recent years the Karnali Province government is promoting organic agriculture to transform the province into fully organic. Political willingness as well as a complete periodic plan are key strategy for policy formulation and for a successful transition into organic agriculture.

Ms. Anne-Sophie Poisot from FAO explained how *the scaling up agroecology initiative* was set up as a global United Nations wide partnership to promote agroecology among governments and across society as one holistic approach to achieve the sdgs. The use agroecology as a broad and inclusive concept that includes many approaches to sustainable agriculture, such as natural farming and organic agriculture, set the goal to support a family of approaches that aim to mimic nature and agriculture and to support social inclusiveness and care principles in order to restore resilience, ecosystems and food and nutrition security.

Kesang Tshomo, Manager of National Organic Flagship programme, from the Ministry of Agriculture in Bhutan, shared how Bhutan wants to achieve food self-sufficiency. Only 2.9 percent of Bhutan's area is used for agriculture - in a small-scale agricultural landscape with high production costs. Half of the food is currently imported from neighbouring countries. In 2012, the small mountainous state passed the plan for 100 % organic in 2020. With the current program, this goal is now to be achieved by 2023. To this end, farmers are given access to biological inputs and the marketing of the products is promoted - for example through the 'Bhutan Organic' label. Ms. Tshomo also emphasized the important role of culture and religion for the agricultural population.

"In Bhutan we don't have premium organic so we pay organic products for the same price of conventional products" said **Ms. Tshomo**. She highlighted the need to create awareness and promote organic agriculture within the international arena. She emphasized how government support can be the strongest and surest way to ensure the scaling up of agroecology in the mountains.

The former German Minister of Agriculture **Renate Künast** suggested setting up an international initiative or even an own **organic brand in the Himalayan region**, which would require a substantial change in the trade policies and investment, therefore more cooperation and international support for the Himalayas.

To conclude, **Mr. Philipp Knill**, Head of Division India and South Asia, from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, emphasized that the main challenges for an agroecological transition are to connect key stakeholders in an organised way and design tailored policies, as well as to construct a detailed holistic approach taking all relevant aspects into account. *"We should draw up a joint road map of the goals and concrete contributions we can provide in the Himalayan region"* he pointed out. Governments, parliaments, farmers and consumers would have to work together. Representatives from markets, the private sector and civil society - as well as from cultural and religious institutions.