



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Agroecology Dialogue Series

Dialogue 1: The interface between agroecology and territorial approaches for food systems transformation

Background paper

This background paper offers brief insights into promising areas for joint action at the interface between agroecology and territorial approaches to food systems transformation. It serves as an information note for participants in the dialogue.

Agroecology as a game-changer to achieve sustainable food systems transformation

The integrated nature of agroecology¹ means that the agroecological transition must harness nature's resources while minimizing adverse environmental effects and improving farmer–consumer connectivity, knowledge co-creation and inclusive relationships among food-system actors. The urgency of the agroecological transformation of agricultural and food systems to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was one of the game-changing solutions discussed at the United Nations Food Systems Summit at the end of 2021, which also saw the creation of the Agroecology Coalition.

A growing interest in territorial approaches for impactful action

Territorial approaches are defined as implementation processes that “help identify and prioritise the most pressing local challenges, while negotiating and coordinating sustainable solutions that take into account the social, political, economic, ecological and cultural dimensions of a particular place”.ⁱ They are characterized as people-centred, place-specific, multisectoral, multiscale, multiactor, multidimensional, flexible and integrative.ⁱⁱ Territory- and landscape-based approaches have gradually gained recognition for being more effective and sustainable, tailored to local socioeconomic and ecological conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, the territorial approach proposes a framework that recognizes the physical, environmental, human, financial, institutional and cultural resources that combine to constitute the heritage and development potential of each locality or territory.^{iv}

¹ According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “agroecology is an integrated approach which simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It aims to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into account the social aspects that must be addressed for a sustainable and equitable food system”. It sets out [10 interdependent elements](#)^[i] or [13 principles](#), that connect all relevant components of a productive food system.

Reconnecting agroecosystems on a territorial basis to foster impulse-tailored transformation

Territorial approaches are viewed as an appropriate scale and useful methodology for ensuring the implementation of adapted and tailored actions to accelerate the agroecological transition.^v

Scaling the agroecological transition to territorial level allows multiple challenges to be tackled in a multidimensional way, integrating different domains, involving relevant stakeholders and working on different levels, from farms to ecosystems, territories and beyond. Not only do **ecological processes such as ecosystem services and natural resource management take place at this level, but the territory is recognized as one of the smallest scales for coordinated and institutional action** on governance, social organization and markets.

Territorial approaches promote a paradigm shift

Beyond changing the scale of implementation, the success of the transition depends on a profound change of approach and vision.^{vi} Thinking of the agroecological transition in terms of **transforming a territory implies a paradigm shift that looks not only at farmers, but also at all of the actors with whom they will interact, both directly and indirectly**. This shift requires a redefinition of space and development^{vii} within the territorial context. Indeed, territorial approaches also encourage a shift from an impact-oriented approach to a process-oriented one^{viii} through concrete activities based on connection. They must also be aligned with the aspirations and needs of the user communities in a territory, **linking the urban and the rural and using both top-down and bottom-up approaches.**^{ix}

A global call to accelerate the agroecological transition through territorial approaches

While it is recognized that agroecology is based on territorial processes providing holistic and long-term solutions^x, **most actions to transform food systems to date have focused largely on the technical aspects of production at farm level**^{xi}. The recommendations of the regional dialogues promoted by FAO from 2015 to 2018 are clear and call for the implementation of territorial approaches **for effective transition and impact**. This is supported by the scientific community, which suggests moving from micro farm level to the territorial level to achieve a holistic agroecological transition.

Exploring the interface between agroecology and territorial approaches

Agroecology and territorial approaches both work in an integrated way on multiple levels. They aim to put people at the heart of the action through good governance and the empowerment of communities. The dialogue will explore the interface between the agroecology and territorial approaches, engaging participants in a first round of discussions and reflection to:

1. Identify the **complementarities** between agroecology and territorial approaches.

We plan to look at the commonalities of the two concepts and pinpoint potential interface overlaps and divergences to figure out where and how synergies can be fostered.

2. Discuss the **role(s) to be played in transformation** to accelerate the agroecological transition.

We intend to weigh and gather evidence of how the connection between agroecology and a territorial approach can help to address the common challenges of food systems transformation based on concrete case studies and experience sharing.

During the second part of the day, participants will be invited to take part in working-group sessions to further discuss specific topics to do with the interface. The outcomes will be presented to all attendees in a marketplace exercise designed to serve as the basis for drawing up the policy brief.

- **Governance aspects that are multi-sectoral and /or multi-scale**

Territorial approaches are a tool for linking and connecting stakeholders, sectors and dimensions with the capacity to calibrate the balance of power between the state, the market and civil society to achieve the coherent management of a territory^{xii}. The participants will brainstorm on possible governance mechanism transfers and experiences from territorial approaches to agroecology to overcome challenges and facilitate multi-scale agroecological processes towards food systems transformation.

- **Stakeholders, or the who in the interface between Agroecology and Territorial Approaches**

Rethinking the set of actors involved in the dynamics of a territory can change the line, nature and scope of actions when trying to transform a food system. Consider the potential role(s), representativeness and added value of engaging agroecological stakeholders in territorial actions for transformation.

- **Policy Instruments for Upscaling Territorial Agroecological Transformation**

The development of appropriate policies is a key element in the success of and long-term support for the transition of food systems. Participants will be invited to brainstorm on the needs, existing mechanisms and potential synergies of the interface to engage policymakers and line up effective and supportive policies that trigger agroecological transformation.

- **Enabling Conditions to facilitate agroecological transformation at the territorial level**

Beyond policies and governance, key enabling conditions and drivers such as investment and research action can spark and foster agroecological transformation. Let us explore what these enabling conditions are and when they should be brought into play at the interface to achieve a food systems transformation.

Key case studies

Brazil – ECOVIDA Rede de Agroecologia was formed with the goal of promoting healthy food production and consumption. It has succeeded in encouraging more than 4,500 families to produce without pesticides. The ECOVIDA network is horizontal, decentralized and based on the organizational frameworks of family farmers, associations or cooperatives. These organizations liaise with consumer associations, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations and other institutions within a specific area. Read more [here](#).

Italy – The Biodistrict of Parma was created in 2018 with a view to matching supply from small producers with demand from alternative food networks. Biodistricts can be defined as local organic production systems that are closely connected with other economic, environmental and sociocultural elements. The researchers on the ground promote a territorial approach that fosters the transition to sustainable agriculture. Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

Lao People's Democratic Republic – Project EFICAS aims to develop innovative methods and intervention approaches to support farmers' transition to sustainable and climate-smart food systems. It has helped to enhance farmers' understanding of landscape management in response to challenges and needs that arise. It has also introduced participatory and dynamic retroactive monitoring for the adaptation of land use. Read more [here](#).

Madagascar – The Organic Farming Territories (OFT) are formally promoted through the national policy and legislation on organic agriculture in Madagascar a tool for the development of sustainable agriculture at the national level. The aim is to support the progressive development of organic farming

and agroecology within the framework of "collective territory projects" led by the various local actors.
Read more [here](#).

Recommended readings:

Bergez J-E., Audouin E., Therond O. [Agroecological Transitions: From Theory to Practice in Local Participatory Design](#)

CIRAD. *TP4D – Fostering territorial perspective for development. Towards a wider alliance*

GIZ. [Territorial Approaches for Sustainable Development. Stocktaking on Territorial Approaches - Experiences and Lessons](#)

Piroux, M., & al. [Territorial mechanisms: common goods for undertaking the agroecological transition](#)

Notes

ⁱ GIZ. 2021. *Territorial Approaches for Sustainable Development. Stocktaking on Territorial Approaches - Experiences and Lessons*. Bonn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

ⁱⁱ CIRAD. 2019. *TP4D – Fostering territorial perspective for development. Towards a wider alliance*. Montpellier, France.

ⁱⁱⁱ GIZ. 2021. *Territorial Approaches for Sustainable Development. Stocktaking on Territorial Approaches - Experiences and Lessons*. Bonn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

^{iv} FAO. 2017. *Landscapes for Life : Approaches to Landscape Management for Sustainable Food and Agriculture*. Rome, Italy.

^v Sabourin, E., Le Coq, J.-F., Freguin-Gresh, S., Marzin, J., Bonin, M., Patrouilleau, M., Vázquez Moreno, L.L. & Niederle, P. 2018. Public policies to support agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Perspectives*, 45: 4. Montpellier, France: CIRAD.

^{vi} Lamine, C., Magda, D. & Amiot, M.-J. 2019. Crossing Sociological, Ecological, and Nutritional Perspectives on Agrifood Systems Transitions: Towards a Transdisciplinary Territorial Approach. *Sustainability*, 11: 1284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051284>

^{vii} Piroux, M., Tonneau, J.-P. & Pocard, R. 2018. Territorial mechanisms: common goods for undertaking the agroecological transition. In: *The agroecological transition of agricultural systems in the Global South*. Versailles, France: Quæ.

^{viii} Lamine, C., Magda, D. & Amiot, M.-J. 2019. Crossing Sociological, Ecological, and Nutritional Perspectives on Agrifood Systems Transitions: Towards a Transdisciplinary Territorial Approach. *Sustainability*, 11: 1284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051284>

^{ix} CIRAD. 2019. *TP4D – Fostering territorial perspective for development. Towards a wider alliance*. Montpellier, France.

^x FAO. 2018. *The 10 elements of Agroecology: Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems*. Rome, Italy.

^{xi} FAO. 2018. *Catalysing dialogue and cooperation to scale up agroecology: Outcomes of the FAO regional seminars on agroecology – summary*. Rome, Italy.

^{xii} CIRAD. 2019. *TP4D – Fostering territorial perspective for development. Towards a wider alliance*. Montpellier, France.