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“Agroecology Dialogue Series”

Beyond the farm: Exploring the synergies between the agroecology and conservation communities

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Date & Time: Thursday, 15 September 2022 – 9.00-17.00 CEST.

Location: Hybrid, with the option to attend in person at own travel costs at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland or online via Zoom.

The Agroecology Dialogue Series is an initiative of FAO and the Biovision Foundation to support the Coalition for food systems transformation through Agroecology (Agroecology Coalition).

Abstract

This dialogue intends to connect the conservation and agroecology communities to explore opportunities and limitations of agroecology to address conservation needs beyond the farm. Thus, it will look beyond classical on-farm conservation angles (e.g. conservation of local crop varieties and crop wild relatives). Instead, it will discuss the contributions of agroecology to mitigate species decline and ecosystem degradation in the landscape, which are less explicitly recognised within existing narratives of the agroecology or conservation communities. The dialogue will identify concrete pathways to increase synergies between the agroecology and conservation communities in food system transformation through policy reform, knowledge creation and investment.

Background

This dialogue will build on the past efforts to connect agroecology and biodiversity conservation topics (e.g., CFS 49 side event, FAO events). Various frameworks have been outlined to advance either agroecological food system transformation and/or biodiversity conservation: (e.g., post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), commitments on achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), implementation of the UN Decade of Ecosystem restoration, and the CFS' Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches). The potential of these efforts for transforming our food systems will depend on synergies and collaborative action, evidence mobilization, an enabling policy environment, and the increased availability of resources. At the same time, there are growing concerns that competing interests from conservation approaches might negate the upscale of agroecological approaches.

The current pressures from our food systems on nature remain a significant source of degradation and biodiversity loss

- Our global food system has played a key role in exacerbating the climate and biodiversity crisis.
- Between 18 to 33% of agricultural lands currently have insufficient biodiversity: this degrades ecosystem functions, creates unacceptable risk for food security, and compromises the resilience and sustainability sought ^[1]



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- There is increasing recognition of the importance of transforming food systems for reducing pressures on biodiversity, preventing the transgression of planetary boundaries, and in strategies to mitigate and adapt toward climate change.
- Different actors in the food system have put forward a wide range of sustainable agricultural approaches. Yet, a systemic view of food system transformation is gaining recognition as the way forward to solve some of our more pressing environmental and social issues.
- Given the diversity of sustainable agricultural approaches that have been brought forward, there is a need to clarify the many terminologies, assess the evidence that underpins them, and understand their real contributions to biodiversity conservation under different local and regional contexts.

Agroecological transformation of food systems can contribute to biodiversity conservation beyond the farm

- Agroecology is recognized as one of the approaches that can drive food system transformation towards sustainability. World Conservation Congress, for instance, in its WCC-2020-Res-007 Resolution calls for the recognition of agroecological practices as nature-based solutions.
- Agroecology explicitly promotes the sustainable use of biodiversity on-farm, the importance of species and genetically diverse production systems, and the benefits of rich diets. By planning and managing diversity, agroecological approaches enhance the provisioning of ecosystem services, including pollination and soil health, upon which agricultural production depends.
- However, the contributions of agroecology to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems beyond the farm are less explicitly recognized within existing narratives of the agroecology or conservation communities.
- Such contributions include for instance:
 - o Increasing resources (e.g., food, shelter, etc.), habitat area, and functional connectivity for locally and globally endangered species
 - o Reducing edge effects, leakages, and runoffs to the landscape and protected areas
 - o Maintaining complexity by embedding natural habitat in agricultural landscapes
 - o Reducing leakages and runoffs to the landscape (in particular aquatic ecosystems)
 - o Maintaining overall ecosystem processes (e.g., pollination, nutrient cycling, water cycling) that are crucial for maintaining overall ecosystem integrity and that underpin the services of ecosystems to society

Objectives

Thus, the objectives of this dialogue are

- 1) To explore and raise awareness of the potential of agroecology for the conservation of biodiversity beyond the farm.
- 2) To explore concrete pathways to increase synergies and collaboration between the agroecology and conservation communities in food system transformation through policy reform, knowledge creation, and investments.



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Discussion groups:

During the dialogue, participants will be divided in breakout groups to discuss the following themes:

Group 1: Contributions of agroecology to biodiversity in landscapes of conservation priority or with high vegetation cover

Group 2: Contributions of agroecology to biodiversity in modified landscapes

Group 3: Synergies between agroecology, restoration and regeneration at the landscape level

Group 4: Governance approaches to enhance synergies between agroecology & conservation in the landscape

Group 5: Agroecology as a nature-based solution

Group 6: Investment frameworks & partnerships for enhancing synergies between agroecology & conservation in the landscape

Insights from projects and case studies

During the event examples of programmes and projects implementing agroecological approaches that provide wider biodiversity conservation benefits will be presented. These include (*indicative titles*):

- Assessing biodiversity in agricultural landscapes (Ludovic Larbodiére, IUCN)
- Research experiences in agroecology and biodiversity conservation (Thomas Wanger - Westlake University, China)
- Agroecology and conservation experiences in la Reserva Natural el Hatico (Juan Jose Molina - Hacienda el Hatico, Colombia)
- Improving biodiversity in coffee landscapes (Marion Hammerl - Lake Constance Foundation, Germany)

Relevant resources

- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Science briefs on targets, goals and monitoring in support of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework negotiations. 2022. CBD/WG2020/4/INF/2/Rev.2. Available from: <https://geobon.org/science-briefs/?hilite=science+briefs+post-2020>
- World Conservation Congress resolution on “Developing agroecological practices as nature-based solutions”
https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2020_RES_007_EN.pdf
- World Conservation Congress resolution on “Transforming global food systems through sustainable land management that is aligned to the UN SDGs”
https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2020_RES_003_EN.pdf
- <https://www.iucn.org/theme/global-policy/our-work/convention-biological-diversity-cbd/post-2020-global-biodiversity-framework/post-2020-resources>
- <https://www.iucn.org/resources/position-paper/iucn-position-paper-oewg-4>
- <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-017-En.pdf>