

# Engaging Policymakers and Making the Case for Agroecology

## Lessons from the 2023 Biovision Partner Meeting



At Biovision Foundation's quinquennial Partner Meeting held in Arusha in September 2023, Biovision's partners from civil society, research, academia and the private sector participated in two thematic sessions on policy advocacy that shed light on known best practices and effective strategies for engaging with policymakers and making the case for agroecology as a holistic solution to food systems issues. This summary highlights the main messages and learnings of the participant groups.



**Policy advocacy requires strategy and skill.** Organizations involved in policy advocacy will benefit from capacity building on stakeholder engagement tactics and facilitation of policymaking processes.



**Multistakeholder platforms enable relevant actors to co-develop policies with policymakers.** They create opportunities for farmers, civil society and entrepreneurs to have a seat at the table. They also improve coordination and grow the agroecology movement.



**CSOs and grassroots organizations need long-term financial support to successfully influence policy.** Policy advocacy requires patience and consistency. The process of sensitizing stakeholders, convening them and influencing policymaking is protracted and often non-linear. The turnover of legislators and government executives often causes setbacks for advocacy initiatives and can even restart the whole process.



**Evidence is instrumental for convincing policymakers,** who are particularly interested in evidence of agroecological practices providing solutions to key policy issues like food security, climate change mitigation, employment creation and economic growth. Evidence is also needed to demonstrate the viability of agroecological approaches for large scale production and for creating market opportunities, including in the input sector.



**Farmers, civil society and funding partners should work together to generate evidence,** even if it is anecdotal. There is a general lack of documented evidence from East Africa showing the benefits of agroecology. Advocacy partners can collaborate on generating, collecting and synthesizing evidence on agroecological practices, so they don't solely depend on empirical research.



**Policymakers tend to respond well to arguments for agroecology that can benefit them,** for example, by furthering their own policy agenda or improving their prospects for reelection. Hence the importance of identifying and emphasizing mutual benefit and aligning key messages with government priorities.



**Advocates should seize all available opportunities and shortcuts to institutionalize agroecology.** While developing policies and laws is an impactful approach, it is also a long and resource-intensive process. There can be other ways of achieving the same goal. One approach is to adopt a national agroecology strategy. Another one is to mainstream agroecology into existing legislation and policy processes.



**Bringing policymakers to demonstration farms helps to convince them about agroecology.** The principles and practices of agroecology are better understood through real life examples. Yet, there are still limited opportunities for policymakers to learn about agroecology in practice. More demonstration farms should be established for this purpose.



**Identify champions who can help convince policymakers.** This includes farmers successfully practicing agroecology or officials who can advocate from the within government.



**Build personal relationships with high-level individuals.** Once their goodwill is earned, they can help to garner support for agroecology in government and lubricate the policymaking process. While it can be difficult for CSOs to gain access to high-level officials and policymakers, those who have succeeded in doing so advise to get to know the “door openers”.



**“Leave no one behind”** is a central principle of policy advocacy. All relevant stakeholders will grow their impact by partnering to build a common understanding of the issues and advocating in a coordinated way. Relevant stakeholders include farmers, CSOs, academia, research organizations, consumer groups and private sector.



**Join forces with advocates for organic agriculture.** The use of organic inputs and natural methods of pest control are among a number of connecting points between agroecology and organic agriculture. Agroecology can be framed as part of the transition towards fully organic farming.



**Advocate for the allocation of funds for agroecology within government budgets** at national and sub-national levels. This strategic approach ensures availability of funds for agroecology and that supportive policies get implemented.

