



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



working for Zero Hunger

Agroecology in Europe and Central Asia

Supporting countries to achieve the SDGs

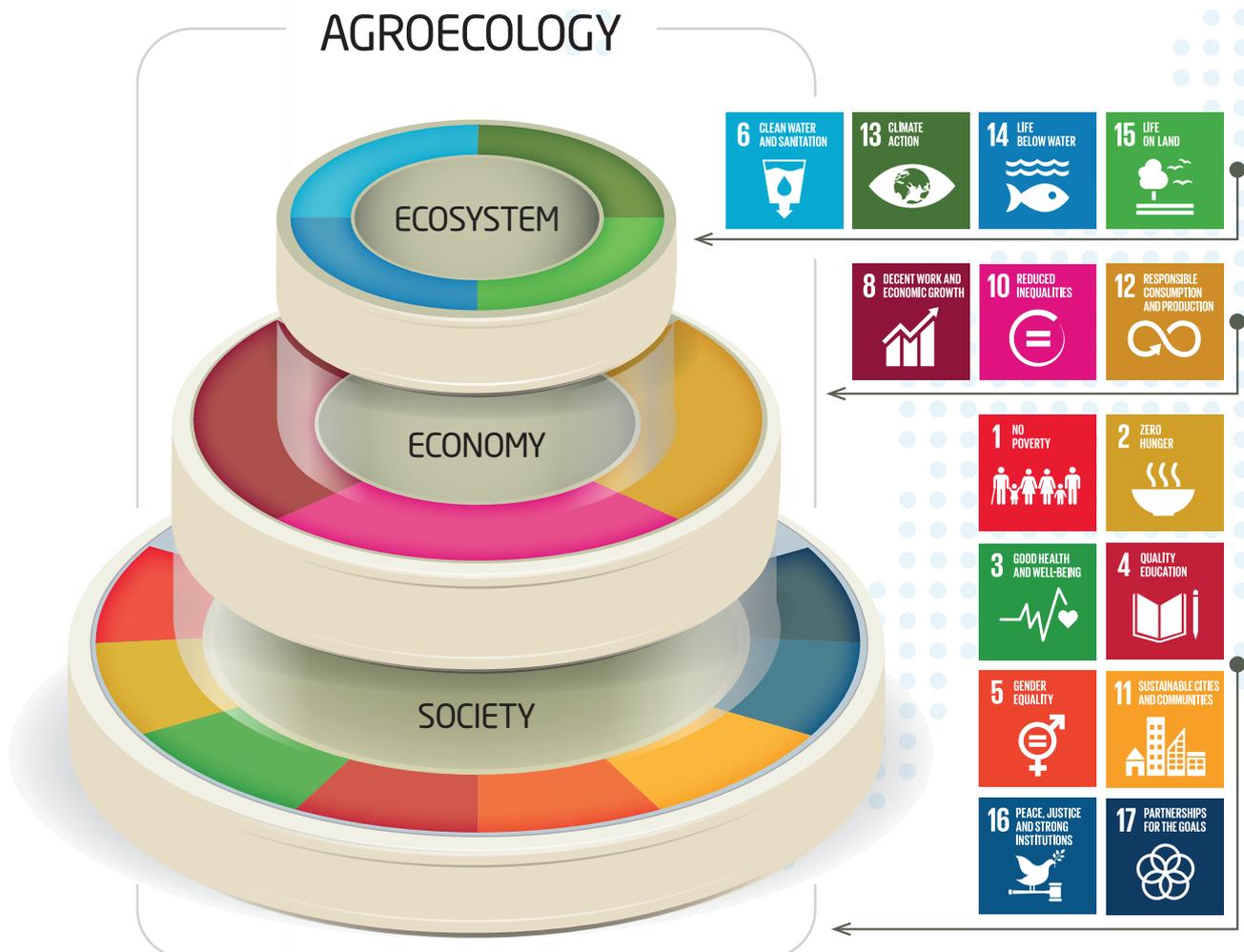


Agroecology and FAO

Today's food and agricultural systems have succeeded in supplying large volumes of food to global markets. However, high-external input, resource-intensive agricultural systems have caused massive deforestation, water scarcities, biodiversity loss, soil depletion and high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Despite significant recent progress, hunger and extreme poverty persist as critical global challenges. Even where poverty has been reduced, pervasive inequalities remain, hindering the eradication of poverty.

Agroecology is a key part of the global response to this problem, offering a unique approach to meeting significant increases in our future food needs while ensuring that no one is left behind. Agroecology is rooted in agricultural heritage systems that are based on family farming. It contributes to building resilient food systems, starting with greater integration of biodiversity into agricultural production systems and landscapes. By diversifying production, agroecology also contributes to diversified and healthy diets. It replaces costly external inputs with the management of local biodiversity and ecosystem services, based on the combined knowledge of family farmers and science, and contributes to more resilient communities, by creating off-farm job opportunities.

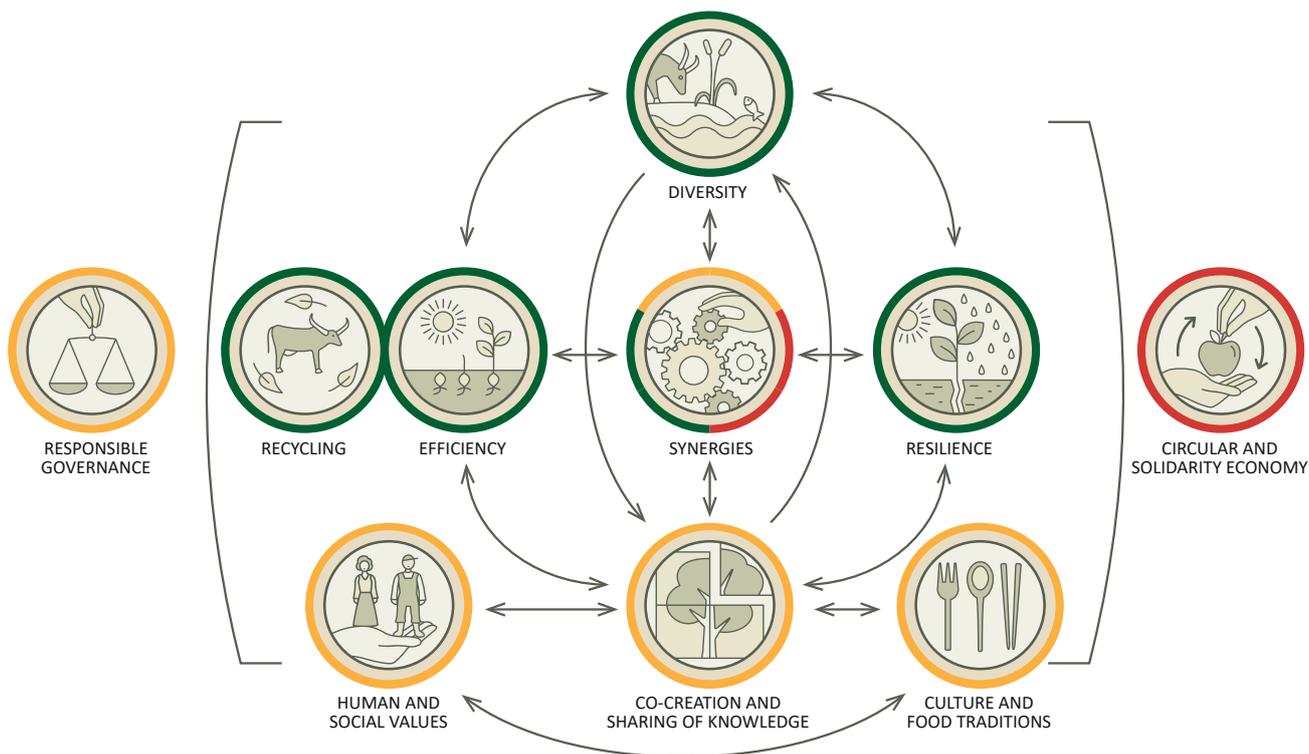
Also, agroecology provides an opportunity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal targets in an integrated way and, simultaneously, to address challenges throughout Europe and Central Asia (ECA) related to climate change, environmental degradation, nutrition, health, and socio-economics.



Agroecology in the region

Agroecology pays careful attention to the design of diversified systems that selectively combine annual and perennial crops, livestock and aquatic animals, trees, soils, water and other components on farms and agricultural landscapes to enhance synergies in the context of an increasingly changing climate. Agroecology seeks to address gender inequalities by creating opportunities for women. Globally, women make up almost half of the agricultural workforce.

THE 10 ELEMENTS OF AGROECOLOGY AND THE REGIONAL INITIATIVES



Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction

Agroecology is people-centred, knowledge-intensive and rooted to sustainability. Bringing farmers back to the centre of the food system has the potential to achieve a world without hunger.



Improving Agrifood Trade and Market Integration

Access to markets is always a bottleneck for farmers. Promoting different and innovative market channels, including local markets and public procurement programs, is at the core of agroecological systems.



Sustainable, climate-resilient natural resource management

Agroecology delivers sustainable and climate-smart food systems, helping farmers to improve the use of natural resources. Diversified agroecological systems are more resilient and have a greater capacity to resist pest and disease attacks and to recover from disturbances, including extreme weather events such as droughts and floods.

Road map for the ECA region

Build a base of evidence for policymakers

- Identify successful agroecological cases, best practices and experiences in the country.
- Map the status of the legal framework for agroecology.
- Collect and analyse data on the benefits of the agroecological system at national and regional levels.
- Produce guidance and technical documents for policymakers.

Strengthen networks and promote the sharing of knowledge within the region

- Map relevant stakeholders in the region.
- Create national and regional platforms.
- Strengthen education and knowledge generation on agroecology at all levels.
- Strengthen rural extension services.
- Promote a safe environment for the co-creation and sharing of knowledge.

Develop projects at the national level

- Identify priority countries and potential donors.
- Redesign agricultural production systems.
- Optimize biological processes and reduce the use of external inputs in the food system.
- Increase biodiversity, recycle byproducts and diversify landscapes in food production.
- Establish new markets as incentives for agricultural producers to produce biodiverse, local food and to invest in improving their agricultural production systems.

Develop new policies on agroecology

- Develop integrated legal frameworks, policies and governance systems to enable agroecological transition at local and national levels.

Implementing agroecology at the national Level

Identify successful agroecological cases, best practices and experiences in the country

Map the strengths and constraints of successful agroecological cases

- Identify why they are successful and how this can be replicated through policies in other regions.
- Define how policies can be designed to support them.
- Map the constraints that are limiting their growth.
- Identify which policies need to be adjusted to overcome these barriers.

Develop new policies and proposals to enable an agroecological transition at the national level

Moving forward together - mainstreaming agroecology in Europe and Central Asia

Agroecology offers a unique approach to meeting the needs of future generations while ensuring that no one is left behind. At its heart, agroecology focuses on family and smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples, fisher folks, mountain farmers and pastoralists. It seeks to transform food and agriculture systems by addressing the root causes of problems and providing holistic and long-term solutions based on the co-creation of knowledge, sharing and innovation, including the combination of multi-disciplinary science with local, traditional, indigenous and practical knowledge.

Although not a new concept, agroecology is today gaining interest worldwide among a wide range of actors as an effective answer to climate change and the interrelated challenges that face food systems. Agroecology finds expression in the practices of food producers, in grassroots social processes for sustainability, and in the public policies of many countries around the world.

In this context, FAO in Europe and Central Asia will:

- Support and promote research and data collection on agroecology at the national level.
- Provide policy support and guidance, by request, to develop and implement agroecology plans and policies.
- Implement national projects, upon request.
- Implement the Scaling up Agroecology Initiative in ECA countries.
- Contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming.
- Contribute to the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition.
- Keep a close relationship with civil society organizations and producers' organizations.
- Enhance dialogue with all relevant stakeholders.

The legal framework on agroecology in ECA countries

Public policies are essential for scaling up agroecology, which already has been done in a number of countries. Currently, eight countries* in the region have specific policies to support and promote agroecology, and many other countries have policies that indirectly support agroecological systems and can promote agroecological transition. It is important to map these policies and evaluate how they can be boosted.

* <http://www.fao.org/agroecology/policies-legislations>
Denmark, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Italy and Russia

More on agroecology

Agroecology is a living concept, and together, we can help realize its full potential. Investing in knowledge and innovation is key. Farmers need to be placed in the centre of co-innovation systems, allowing a process that combines both scientific and traditional knowledge to complement and reinforce each other. It is important to foster the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of practices, creating opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

Key points:

- Agroecology relies on ecosystem services to improve productivity.
- The knowledge and practices of farmers and food producers from all over the world are at the core of agroecology.
- Agroecology can address the root causes of hunger, poverty and inequality.
- Agroecology combines farmers' knowledge with modern science in innovative ways.
- Agroecology provides local solutions for global challenges.
- Agroecology relies on the interactions among plants, animals, humans and the environment to build sustainable and fair food systems.
- Agroecological approaches are vital for the challenges we face today and tomorrow.
- Agroecology uses fewer external resources, reducing costs and negative environmental impacts.

Box 1. An agroecological farm in Hungary

MagosVölgy Ecological Farm was established in 2013 by Judit and Zoltán Dezsény, a young urban-to-rural migrant couple. The development of the farm was complicated but worth it. At MagosVölgy, the goal is to create a farm shaped by the principles of sustainability – an agriculturally oriented, small-scale, ethical enterprise that utilizes local resources, creates values and synergies, builds communities, feeds people, provides livelihoods and perspective, and bridges the urban and rural world. The farm's primary market outlet for vegetables is through community supported agriculture (CSA). The farming system, in combination with marketing via CSA, creates a higher income than other farming systems and could provide a livelihood for three or four people per hectare. Additionally, it provides a diverse diet for a great number of people. This whole story is available here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-br442e.pdf>.

Box 2. The bio-district experience in Italy

In 2009, the Italian Association for Organic Agriculture launched the first bio-district in Italy. A bio-district is a geographical area where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources. One of the strengths of bio-districts are their short value chains. Direct marketing accounts for 75 percent of the bio-district's economic flow. Bio-districts represent an innovative approach to sustainable, integrated and participatory territorial development. An assessment of the socio-economic and environmental impact of bio-districts shows that the demand for organic products is growing, and the overall shortening of the supply chain has generated loyal customers. Bio-district producers also have reported that selling has never been so easy – indicating that the short supply chain is a solid market channel. This whole story is available here: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bt402e.pdf>.

