

Jobs perspectives in agroecology

More employment, better income

Factsheet

The global population is growing, especially in Africa – and with it the demand for food. At the same time, we are reaching planetary boundaries: climate change and the loss of biodiversity are limiting conventional agriculture. Based on its 13 principles, the agroecological transformation describes a path towards resilient, productive, and equitable agri-food systems. Agroecology offers solutions for individual farmers as well as for entire societies to address the above-mentioned challenges. It contributes significantly to sustainability in land use, consumption, and nutrition (multiple-benefit strategy).

At the same time, it creates an important basis for more jobs and decent working conditions. In turn this leads to better income, as well as an increased quality of life in rural areas, particularly for women and young people. Agroecology emphasises participation and fairness while promoting flourishing locally embedded markets. The promotion of local markets, as well as the recycling of resources in local circular economies, create additional and secure income opportunities in decent jobs with fair wages. Agroecology subsequently contributes to the promotion of sustainable rural areas and counteracts the rural exodus.



Source: Adapted illustration (Welthunger.org, 2021; iPES Food, 2016)



1

Creating more and better jobs

In **Mozambique**, the economic situation of hundreds of women has improved since they focus on new markets and local value creation in the production of the African superfood baobab. They were supported by the “Green Innovation Centre”, a German founded initiative active in Mozambique, as well as 15 other countries in Africa and Asia supporting the dissemination and integration of innovations in the agricultural sector and with it job creation (**Green Innovation Centres for the agriculture and food sector (GIC)**). In **Colombia**, small-scale producers in remote areas have organised themselves and formed alliances with various public and private partners. Together they produce in a more sustainable way, for example by cooling milk with solar plants or producing certified organic fruit and vegetable. They thus increase their market value, achieve higher prices and have been able to build a long-term regional buyer network. This creates high-quality “green jobs” in the agricultural sector (**Promoting sustainable rural economic development (PRODES II)**). These examples show how the focus on sustainability and the promotion of local markets can improve the job and wage situation in rural areas.

Opportunities

Agroecology promotes value (chain) creation and fosters opportunities for innovative business models and decentralised solutions, e.g. through local specialisations in vegetable cultivation, tree nurseries, the production of feed, seeds or fertilizers, but also through consulting services, sorting, cleaning and packaging of goods, further processing, transport, trade or marketing. New jobs are created everywhere along the emerging value chains. In addition, there are further employment opportunities in related sectors, such as landscape conservation, securing ecosystem services and ecotourism. Agroecology also favours innovative start-ups, including those that do not require large pieces of land, e.g. production of mushrooms, honey, compost. This creates the opportunity, especially for young people, to get real prospects through modern and future-oriented jobs – instead of migrating to the cities in frustration. Agroecology also stimulates locally adapted mechanisation and renewable energy solutions. This opens up new education and training opportunities, but also creates jobs in sales, consulting and maintenance. In addition to more and diverse employment opportunities, the social dimension of agroecology aims to improve working conditions and to establish fair relationships between producers and consumers. This involves questions of legal certainty, occupational safety and health care, good working conditions and adequate living wages.

Challenges

Agroecological practices are often more labour-intensive compared to conventional agriculture, as they largely dispense the use of chemical agents. This is both an opportunity and a challenge, because the new jobs should be economically and socially attractive, especially for young people, so that there is no gap in generational exchange. For this, however, agroecological practices and approaches must pay off economically as well and / or be funded or compensated accordingly. High food and input prices (especially for chemical fertilizers) tend to increase the competitiveness of (labour-intensive) agroecological practices. If the „true“ (environmental) costs of various currently used practices and forms of land use are taken into account, the economic balance changes in favour of agroecology especially in the long term. A reallocation of existing funding structures, e.g. subsidies in agriculture, would also change the comparative analysis in favour of agroecological practices. These levers must be used advantageously in the sense of „more sustainability“.



➤ [Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector \(GIC\)](#)

➤ [Sustainable Rural Economic Development in Columbia \(PRODES II\)](#)

2

Strengthening rural areas in a sustainable way



Soils can be destroyed by overexploitation, but they took millennia to form, and take a long time to recover. This makes it even more important to protect and renew them. This can be done, among other things, through sustainable land use (**Global Project Soil Protection and Rehabilitation of Degraded Soil for Food Security (ProSoil)**). Such practices take local nutrient cycles and the ecosystem into account and are locally adapted. This preserves the soil and enhances its qualities. At the same time it can create new income opportunities, for example through the production and sale of compost for soil improvement. To develop local markets around agroecology, it is important that stakeholders involved can inform themselves. In **India**, stakeholders from the civil society, public sector, academia and the private sector exchange ideas on the national and regional level, identifying and creating incentive structures for such local business models (**Support to Agroecological Transformation Processes in India (SuATI)**). In **Mexico** there is a cross-sectoral exchange of knowledge on the value of biodiversity for agriculture (**Mainstreaming of biodiversity within Mexican agriculture (IKI-IBA)**). The holistic approach offers many opportunities to strengthen rural areas and rural populations.

Opportunities

Agroecology promotes diverse production systems, not only to protect nature. In addition to the natural environment, it strengthens farms and the regional economy, as they become more resilient to crop failures or more independent of price fluctuations of imported goods such as fertilizer or food, for example. The reduced risks make incomes safer and more stable. At the same time, farmers are less dependent on external inputs because they use locally produced compost as fertilizer, tree seedlings from the region or local seeds for soil protection. This reduces their production costs, which in turn allows for higher net revenues. This applies to small-scale farmers as well as to regional cooperatives. Even large farms can reduce high costs of water consumption through agroecological practices, or even save them altogether, as well as avoid general externalised (environmental) costs.



Challenges

Demand is in the end the main driver for production. At present, societal consumption habits are anything but sustainable. The demand for agroecological products can be promoted by good arguments, such as the reference to higher quality or environmental protection. Awareness among consumers and producers is, however, required. This can be achieved, for example, by highlighting the value of traditional diets in their diversity. It is also important to stimulate local demand through favourable conditions, such as public procurement, school meals, the promotion of local farmers' markets and much more. After all, producers and consumers need to understand (and taste) the difference and benefits of agroecological compared to conventional agriculture.

- [Global Project Soil Protection and Rehabilitation of Degraded Soil for Food Security \(ProSoil\)](#)
- [Support to Agroecological Transformation Processes in India \(SuATI\)](#)
- [Mainstreaming of Biodiversity within the Mexican Agricultural Sector \(IKI-IBA\)](#)



3

Improving education, promoting inclusion

In Africa, half of the population lives from agriculture, but only 0.2 percent of agricultural land is managed organically. So far, the necessary knowledge about how to produce, process and market organic products has often been lacking. The Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture seeks to fill these gaps by establishing five regional knowledge hubs in Africa. This makes it possible to build up technical and professional competences, improve supra-regional networking and promote low-cost and participatory certifications (**Global Project Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture in Africa (KCOA)**). Knowledge and skills not only strengthen organic agriculture, but also create local perspectives far beyond the agricultural sector. New jobs and sustainable employment opportunities are created in sub-Saharan Africa through targeted promotion and combination of innovations, qualification, business models in new value chains and more diverse cultivation practices as part of the integrated approach to employment promotion in rural areas (**Global Project on Rural Employment with a Focus on Youth**).

Opportunities

An essential part of agroecology is to involve all stakeholders and jointly design solutions that enable a holistic transformation. This is especially true for vulnerable groups. Agroecology recognises indigenous knowledge and actively integrates it. Women earn an additional income by processing agricultural (by-)products or through home gardens. Young people can shape and advance structural change through innovative and sustainable business models. To this end, women, and young people should be involved in political dialogue and decision-making processes. The participatory approach of agroecology enables possibilities for integrating previously excluded groups, actively involving them and securing their access to resources.

Challenges

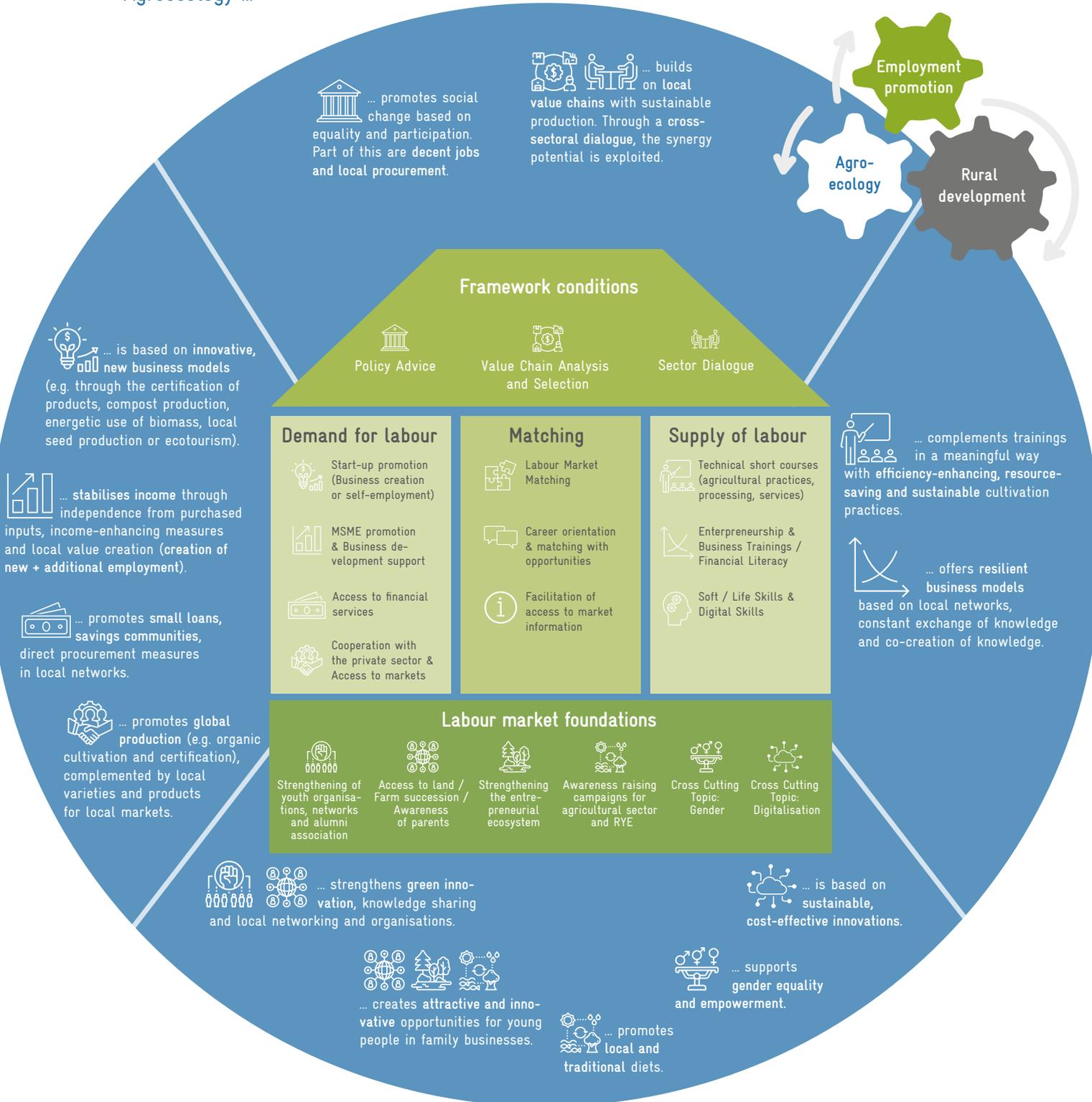
In agroecology, solutions are sought that fit the respective context, instead of abandoning regional specifics in favour of global or apparent efficiency gains. This takes time and requires specific knowledge. Therefore, agroecology and its principles should be included in vocational education plans and curricula. It is not easy for young people, and often for women as well, to gain access to productive resources such as knowledge, water, land or financing. Nor do they easily have access to networks or contacts to decision-makers. Successful implementation therefore requires both rapid improvements and a long breath. This must be taken into account from the very beginning when promoting agroecology and productive employment.



- [Global Project Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture in Africa \(KCOA\)](#)
- [Global Project on Rural Employment with a Focus on Youth](#)

Agroecology creates new, additional employment and increases the income of the rural population, especially young people and women.

Agroecology ...



Source: Adapted illustration based on "Adapted Integrated Approach to Employment Promotion" (What works in Rural Youth Employment Promotion, GIZ 2020)

4

Conclusion

Good agroecological approaches offer triple-wins: they are ecologically sustainable, socially just and they open economic prospects for income and jobs. The examples show the opportunities of agroecological approaches: new income and employment opportunities arise in particular through the promotion of innovation and attractive jobs for young people and women in rural areas. As a systemic approach, agroecology addresses employment promotion through income and job creation at the

individual farm level, resilience and sustainability at the regional landscape level, but also education and participation as well as conducive conditions at the societal level. However, further analysis is needed to identify employment effects even more precisely and to develop them in a targeted manner. Further studies can find answers to which factors have what effect and in what way they must be designed so that agroecological business models are as competitive as possible.



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