



ASSESSMENT OF EU SUPPORT TO AGROECOLOGY IN FIVE AFRICAN COUNTRIES: SENEGAL, BURKINA FASO, DR CONGO, UGANDA, KENYA

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Policy Brief

Invest in Change: Agroecology as the EU's Path to Food Justice and Resilience

Audience: Decision-makers in EU Institutions, EU Delegations, and African Governments

While agroecology is increasingly recognized in EU policy frameworks as a transformative approach to achieve sustainable, just and resilient food systems, the lack of clear, binding EU guidelines and direct financing channels risks incoherent and ineffective implementation. The paradigmatic shift towards Global Gateway risks further undermining core agroecological values such as local ownership, biodiversity preservation, co-creation of knowledge, and the development of circular, place-based rural economies.

A new study **"Assessment of EU support to Agroecology in 5 African countries: Senegal, Burkina Faso, DRC, Uganda, Kenya"** investigates EU's support to agroecology and provides concrete recommendations to realise the transformational potential of EU's development support to agroecological transitions of food systems.

Summary of Key Recommendations

- **For EU Institutions:** Establish the agroecology framework and the operational guide on mainstreaming to protect agroecology within the paradigmatic shift of Global Gateway. This should build on the HLPE 13 agroecological principles with clear enforceable criteria and mandate the use of the Agroecology Coalition finance assessment tool¹.
- **For EU Delegations:** Open direct funding channels for local CSOs through national financing windows favouring grassroots CSO platforms while adapting implementing modalities and removing all barriers to their full participation.
- **For EU & African Governments:** Focus interventions on transformative elements of agroecology aiming at deeper system shifts in governance and market relations in EU value chain funding and introduce non-negotiable red lines such as the ban of agrottoxics exports.

Agroecology Gains Ground in EU Policy and Funding

Agroecology is increasingly recognised for its potential to address interconnected global crises—including biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, and public health—while simultaneously supporting resilient, equitable food systems. African countries have been progressively integrating agroecology into their national strategies. Initiatives like the National Agroecology Strategies (NASs) in Eastern and Southern Africa, as outlined by the Biovision Foundation (2024)², demonstrate how agroecology can serve as a cross-sectoral framework for boosting ecosystem health while

ensuring agricultural productivity, diversifying food and market systems and supporting healthy human diets, and is rooted in the 13 HLPE principles³ and the FAO's 10 elements⁴ of agroecology.

On the European side, the EU's commitment to agroecology as a development cooperation tool is anchored in the European Green Deal⁵ and the Farm to Fork Strategy⁶. Agroecology is now referenced across multiple EU policy documents and international declarations, including the 2024 EU Environmental Council conclusions and the G20 Agriculture Ministers' Declaration⁷. A new EU Agroecology Partnership funded by Horizon Europe (2024–2030)⁸ also reinforces this trend.

EU Financial Support Trends

The study examined EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) for agriculture as a share of total EU ODA to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), focusing on five countries: Kenya, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Between 2021 and 2023, an average of 31.63% of EU ODA for agriculture (sector code 310) in the five focus countries was managed by DG INTPA. This share varies by country—from 18.34% in Burkina Faso to 50.24% in DRC.

Most INTPA-supported projects are aligned with agroecology objectives, but alignment is often partial. Many interventions remain at early stages of transition (Gliessman Levels 1–2⁹), focusing on input substitution rather than systemic change. Others reach Level 3, redesigning agroecosystem processes and improving participation and social responsibility. Only a few adopt a food systems-level approach (Levels 4–5), which requires deeper systemic shifts in governance, equity, and market relations. A qualitative assessment using the Agroecology Coalition Finance Tool yielded moderate scores, pointing to room for improvement through clearer operational guidance.

The study anticipates that the forthcoming DG INTPA operational guide on mainstreaming agroecology will strengthen the integration of agroecology principles into projects under the Multi-annual Indicative Programmes (2021–2027 or 2024–2026). It expects a growing share of projects to meet at least one-third to one-half of the HLPE principles and to achieve Gliessman Level 3 or higher.

EU Delegations play a pivotal role in all four phases of the EU programming cycle—particularly in local contextualisation, implementation oversight, and policy alignment. Their direct engagement with local stakeholders, governments, and civil society enables them to champion context-sensitive policies and programmes. This influence, however, depends on strong guidance and commitments from EU headquarters, constructive negotiations with national governments, and proactive collaboration with civil society actors.

Key Bottlenecks in EU Agroecology Support

- **Lack of clear definitions and formal guidance:** While the EU references HLPE and FAO principles, there is no binding or operational definition of agroecology within EU external action. This results in a fragmented landscape where agroecology coexists with—and is diluted by—vague notions of “sustainable agriculture”, including approaches like sustainable intensification or regenerative farming that may not challenge socio-economic inequities and negative environmental impacts of industrial farming systems. Additionally, coordination across DGs (INTPA, AGRI, ENV, CLIMA, R&I) remains informal. This weakens the EU's ability to set red lines (e.g., against GMOs or monocultures) or consolidate agroecology as a strategic development priority.
- **Programming gaps at Delegation level:** The extent to which EU Delegations operationalise agroecology depends heavily on national political will, bilateral partnership initiatives (e.g. with France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Italy,

Luxemburg the Netherlands or Austria), and staff leadership. Without clear headquarters directives or national government buy-in, local uptake remains uneven.

- **Structural Barriers to Civil Society Access:** Across all five focus countries in the study, local civil society organisations and community-based organisations demonstrate that they can deliver on scaling farmer co-creation of knowledge, uptake of agroecology practices and creation of diverse local market systems. However, complex application procedures, reliance on international intermediaries (e.g., FAO, IFAD), and limited national CSO participation present barriers for increasing local impact, reach and ownership of EU agroecology support.
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Tension with the Global Gateway Agenda

Global Gateway is the new EU overarching strategy that guides EU external action, including development priorities. Climate change and energy are key thematic focuses of the Global Gateway and account for 50% of its flagship projects. On agriculture more specifically, this translates into an increased focus on investments in agri-food value chains. However, these investments tend to prioritise export-oriented and capital-intensive models, which often marginalise farmer-led, locally rooted agroecological systems. A growing concern lies in the potential misalignment between the foundational principles of agroecology and the current orientation of the Global Gateway, which increasingly channels support toward regional value chains tailored to international markets. Our analysis indicates that this shift is confirmed in the revised Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) and Action Plans for 2026–2027 under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

This trajectory threatens core agroecological values such as local ownership, biodiversity preservation, co-creation of knowledge, and the development of circular, place-based rural economies. Achieving meaningful agroecological transitions requires a rethinking of value chains—not merely in terms of economic performance, but with a strong emphasis on ecological integrity, social equity, and systemic resilience. This implies supporting territorially embedded markets and short supply chains instead of a single focus on export-focused ones; empowering farmer cooperatives, promoting women's leadership and participatory governance; prioritising Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) over corporate certification schemes, as advocated by IFOAM (2023)¹⁰; and aligning public and donor investments with policies that enable local processing, equitable market access, and socially embedded food systems. Without a clear shift in direction, the Global Gateway may inadvertently work against the very objectives agroecology seeks to achieve. The study however points to promising approaches to synergize and bridge the disconnect e.g. by supporting entrepreneurs and market system development initiatives, that integrate agroecology principles into agricultural value chains, privilege local, national and regional territorial markets and align to internationally recognized standards for responsible business conduct.

Opportunities to Strengthen Agroecology in the EU Development Strategy

In conclusion, despite EU policy frameworks increasingly acknowledging agroecology, the lack of clear definitions, binding guidelines, and direct financing channels risks hampering the transformational potential of EU development support in Africa.

In the next months, two processes will be key to strengthen agroecology in the EU development strategy. On the one hand, the forthcoming operational guide on mainstreaming agroecology within DG INTPA holds potential to provide stronger strategic direction. Its impact, however, will depend on the clarity of its definitions, the formalisation of its guidance, and the extent to which it distinguishes agroecology from other less transformative “green” approaches while setting red lines. On the other hand, the priority given in the next MFF to traditional areas of development interventions and modalities of delivery of its ODA, like grant support, have the potential to support agroecology. Indeed, the EU's traditional development interventions in promoting human development, social equity, youth engagement, gender

equality, and civil society participation provide important leverage points. These dimensions are central to agroecology and should be further protected in the future MFF.

In the longer term, the development of a clear and consistent EU policy framework for agroecology with emphasis on involvement and direct financing for local CSOs as well as clear safeguards for food sovereignty and biodiversity is essential to advance a just food systems transition. Such a policy framework would also serve as an opportunity to address wider EU policy coherence with agroecology principles. A concrete example of incoherence is the massive export of toxic pesticides (agrottoxics) to the Global South, while banned in European markets due to their harmful effect on health and environment.

Recommendations

1. For EU Institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council)

● Establish Binding Guidelines for Agroecology

- Develop a consistent EU policy framework for agroecology based on the 13 HLPE principles.
- Finalise and operationalise the forthcoming INTPA Agroecology Operational Guide with clear, enforceable criteria.
- Align all Global Gateway and MIP programming with these criteria to ensure transformative action and prevent greenwashing.
- Mandate the use of the Agroecology Coalition Finance Assessment Tool in project design and evaluation.

● Increase Accountability and Transparency

- Publicly disclose EU agroecology and broader agriculture finance portfolios and assessments.
- Enable parliamentary scrutiny and independent review of agroecology and agricultural support under the NDICI and Global Gateway.

2. For EU Delegations (EUDs)

● Open Direct Funding Channels for Local CSOs

- Create national agroecology funding windows managed by EUDs, specifically targeting farmer platforms, CSO networks, and women/youth-led initiatives.
- Remove restrictive co-financing and accreditation requirements that exclude grassroots actors.
- Adapt project size and duration to the needs and capacities of implementing organisations and grassroots initiatives.

● Reinforce the Role of EUDs in Driving Agroecology

- Retain policy dialogue, staffing, and budgeting capacity to advance agroecology.
- Build long-term partnerships with local actors and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues on the transition to agroecology.

3. For African Governments

● Support Transformative Agroecology in Value Chains

- Set national “red lines” to protect biodiversity, farmer-managed seed systems, and avoid dependency on external inputs.
- Integrate agroecology into national agricultural strategies and align with MIPs to ensure funding supports systemic change.
- Promote inclusive governance, equity in market relations, and co-creation of knowledge in agricultural development.

- **Prioritise Local Ownership and Systemic Change**

- Shift away from short-term pilot projects and technical fixes.
- Invest in agroecology education, participatory governance, and long-term support for locally led transformation.
- Support territorially embedded markets, short supply chains, and participatory guarantee systems (PGS) over corporate certification schemes.

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This policy brief highlights the findings of a study **“Assessment of EU support to Agroecology in 5 African countries: Senegal, Burkina Faso, DRC, Uganda, Kenya”** analysing EU Delegations’ engagement in agroecological transitions, highlighting key barriers, opportunities, and the impact of shifting EU political priorities. The study was commissioned by a consortium of European and African civil society organisations—ActionAid, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), Broederlijk Delen, Caritas Africa, Caritas Europa, CIDSE, DanChurchAid (DCA), Dreikönigsaktion der Katholischen Jungschar (DKA Austria), Entraide et Fraternité, the Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF), and Misereor.

1. <https://agroecology-coalition.org/agroecology-finance-assessment-tool/>
2. https://www.biovision.ch/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Infopool_NAS-Brief.pdf
3. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ff385e60-0693-40fe-9a6b-79bbef05202c/content>
4. <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/overview10elements/en/>
5. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-green-deal/>
6. https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en
7. <https://g7g20-documents.org/database/document/2024-g20-brazil-sherpa-track-agricultural-ministers-ministers-language-g20-agriculture-ministers-declaration>
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