

Concept Paper

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France/CGIAR Cooperation on Agricultural Research for Development

Workshop: Stepping Up to the Challenge of Agroecological Transition Through Agricultural Research for Development

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Call to Action

At the closing of the 2nd International Agroecology Symposium in Rome in April, 2018, FAO Director General José Graziano da Silva concluded:

“It is time to scale-up the implementation of agroecology. We have succeeded in moving from talking about what is agroecology, to now having specific targets to be achieved in the next few years... When we speak of agroecology, we are not speaking of strictly technical matters. I would like to stress the social aspect, so that when we say we are going to strengthen the role of agroecology... we are saying we are going to strengthen the role of family and small-scale farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, women and youth.”

The 26th Meeting of the FAO Committee on Agriculture, comprising over 100 Member States, recommended in October 2018 continuing application of *“agroecology... in support of the SDGs and [assistance to] countries and regions to engage more effectively in the transition process towards sustainable agriculture and food systems by:*

- *strengthening normative, science and evidence-based work on agroecology, developing metrics, tools and protocols to evaluate the contribution of agroecology and other approaches to transformation of sustainable agriculture and food systems;*
- *catalyzing scientific evidence and co-creation of knowledge and innovation to facilitate its dissemination; and*
- *providing policy and technical support to countries, upon their request, including capacity development of smallholders and family farmers.”¹*

During its 44th Plenary Session (9-13 October 2017), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) requested its High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) to produce a report on *“Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition”*, to be presented at CFS46 Plenary session in October 2019.

¹ Para. 15, Report of the 26th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (Rome, 1-5 October 2018).

Agroecology is hence no longer a niche topic championed by a community of engaged and enthusiastic producers, civil society activists or researchers. The world is calling for action that will deliver change in agriculture and food systems that is sustainable and inclusive and has large-scale impacts. To succeed, we will need a radically new definition of the performance of agri-food systems; well beyond only yield, performance has to address all the other ecosystem services and dis-services (externalities) generated by agricultural production. Performance must be reassessed in all agricultural production systems and most will have to go through an agro-ecological transition. Agro-ecological transition is not an option: it is an obligation, but will take place through a diversity of pathways, from different starting points in different contexts and at different paces.

Challenges for Research

Agricultural research systems must respond. The demands placed on them are clear: to contribute to the development, dissemination and application of knowledge and evidence that promotes this agro-ecological transition and supports transformation of agriculture and food systems for sustainable development. Rigorous approaches and tools are needed to evaluate how agro-ecological transitions can be generated in successful ways, how to support them and how to optimize tradeoffs among the different components – social, economic and environmental - of this extended notion of performance.

For research organizations, a critical associated challenge is then to assess how research can contribute to the changes needed. Research organizations need to be able to design research or R&D programs that are effective in supporting and mobilizing the complex changes needed to meet the multiple and interacting production, economic, social and environmental objectives of agro-ecological transitions, involving very diverse stakeholders at different scales. Without this, the case for further investment in research on agro-ecology will remain uncertain.

French-CGIAR Cooperation

Both the French agricultural research system and the CGIAR have invested significantly in research on agro-ecological transitions. While the scientific community in France frames the issues using the language of agro-ecology and the CG system speaks of landscape approaches and practices such as agroforestry, both are focused on research that integrates outcomes for production, governance, social inclusion, women's empowerment, water resource sustainability, soil health, biodiversity conservation and climate change resilience. Each manages portfolios of research on systems change in landscapes and agroecosystems and each has accumulated valuable evidence and lessons for how to assess the impacts of this research and the performance of agro-ecological transitions. However, significant challenges remain that cooperation between France and the CGIAR can help to address.

Agricultural research systems will be better able to respond to the call for action on transformation for sustainable development if the evidence base can be strengthened for:

- *the value proposition for agro-ecological and landscapes research, showing that benefits justify investment; and*
- *strategies and program design for agro-ecological research that are most effective in contributing to transformation in agricultural and food systems*

Currently, however, there is frequently a mismatch between methodologies used conventionally for performance assessment for technological change and the needs of performance assessment for agro-ecological and landscapes systems change. While progress has been made in overcoming this constraint, particularly by for example the CIRAD ImpresS program and through research on Agricultural Research for Development in complex systems,² a shared understanding of the state-of-the-art will strengthen the ability of both French and CGIAR research systems to develop, fund and implement agro-ecological research programs with greater impact.

Workshop Proposal

A two day workshop for approximately 40 participants is proposed to bring together French and CG researchers and institutional leaders working on systems change toward agro-ecological transition. Contributions will be invited from key French institutions - as Cirad, Inra and IRD- , CGIAR Research Programs focused on agroecosystems change, particularly WLE as well as CCAFS, FTA, GLDC and FISH, and a limited number of scientists from external organizations. The purpose of the workshop will be to:

1. *Develop a shared understanding of the objectives for agro-ecological and landscapes systems change;*
2. *develop a value proposition for research on agroecology and landscapes; and*
3. *identify priorities for agroecological research cooperation between France and the CGIAR to support transformation for sustainable development.*

The workshop will facilitate a scientific dialogue based on the following questions:

- *What have we learned about how agro-ecological transitions emerge?*
- *What implications does this understanding have for our commonly-held theories of change (our sets of default assumptions about how change happens that determine how we plan, carry out and value research for development)?*
- *Taking these implications into account (but not being limited by them), what modalities or research models in agricultural research for development are most likely to contribute to agro-ecological transitions based on a radically new approach to performance?*
- *How can research for development institutions support mainstream use of these modalities (including ways in which performance in agri-food systems is measured and how research for development interventions are evaluated)?*

The outputs from the workshop will include:

- *recommendations for France-CGIAR research cooperation and the wider scientific community;*
- *documented lessons on the theory of change for agricultural research for development for complex systems change as input to review and strengthening of organizational policies and strategies;*
- *possible joint initiatives and research projects.*

² Douthwaite B, et al. 2017. Agricultural research for development to intervene effectively in complex systems and the implications for research organizations. KIT Working Paper 2017:12. Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam.