



ON THE ROAD TO AGENDA 2030 WATER, AGRO-ECOLOGY, TERRITORIALISATION OF POLICIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

« SESAME » MAIN OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Seven North-South "SESAME" seminars were organised from 2013 to 2022 to foster dialogue and debate on the cross-cutting issue of natural resources, agriculture and climate change as well as on alternative strategies to be promoted in the North and South of the Mediterranean and the Sahara. The 7th edition, "On the road to Dakar", focused on the theme of water and agricultural and rural development, was held at the end of October 2021. Seven important observations/recommendations on this priority theme of "Dakar" emerged from these North/South crossroads.

1/ The 2020-2030 decade will be decisive at all levels: climate action, SDGs... In this context, **a battle must be waged at the international level and in society to increase understanding of the decisive importance of water and the multiple roles of agriculture**, as well as the need to move from "doing" or "not doing" to "**doing with**": with nature, with people and with territories. The breakthrough of agro-ecology and the territorialisation of policies are recent advances to be highlighted. The current global crisis is a window of opportunity to be seized in order to achieve large-scale transformations.

2/ The strategic and political discourse on water must now include soil. In the world of water, there is a tendency to talk only about water, forgetting the substratum, which is the soil. Soil artificialisation and degradation through erosion and salinisation is a serious problem. Conserving and improving soils means storing water better so that it can be used when it is lacking and reducing losses through evaporation ; it means increasing infiltration and the supply of water to dams and water tables and significantly raising low water levels; and it means reducing erosion, silting and erosive flooding.

3/ Agriculture, an essential intermediary in the integrated management of water and soil, is much more than just another sector. Its food function, the large number of jobs involved, its vulnerability to climate change and its multiple roles, including that of a "carbon pump", have led the IPCC to stress its **unique importance**. It has a major role to play in achieving the 2030 Agenda: improving soil fertility and conserving water. It will thus become more resilient, reduce demand for irrigation water, produce more goods and services, and thus **strengthen our collective security - food, water and climate -**. The widespread-development of sustainable land management, conservation agriculture, agroforestry and other sustainable integrated farming systems is of strategic importance.

4/ Mobilise water and irrigation for the rural world and the rural world for water. ^{3/4} of the world's poorest people are rural people who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture is not possible without water, and in many rural areas, water is increasingly in short supply. In many parts of the world, **small-scale irrigation** now plays a decisive role in providing jobs, maintaining social stability and sustaining the rural environment. The "**multi-use**" and "**multi-solution**" **reinforcement of water resources** and the **development of small-scale irrigation**, when possible and carried out under the right conditions, give agriculture and territories resilience to droughts and sustainability. They are also a **powerful means of achieving SDG 2** (target 2.3: "**double agricultural productivity and smallholder incomes by 2030**") and **SDG 1** (no poverty). In the Sahel, where water resource mobilisation technologies, accessible to small-scale producers, can be promoted for the development of small-scale irrigation on a good scale (> 1 million ha), the mobilisation of water resources and the resulting economic development largely determine the achievement of many of the SDGs, including SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 6 (access to drinking water...) and SDG 16 (peace).

If water must better serve the rural world, conversely, **rural people can and must better serve water**. Gravity irrigation can ensure groundwater recharge and the transition to water-saving irrigation can reduce pressure on the environment while improving agricultural income. If they are made responsible and paid to restore degraded land and common goods, rural people will be less poor and will contribute to "bringing back water" where it has disappeared or is tending to disappear. The challenge of climate change requires new **strategies with a double gain upstream** (rural development) / **downstream** (restoration of a positive hydrology), especially in rural mountains that are victims of vicious circles of great poverty and ecosystem degradation.

5/ The "living territories", the territorialisation of policies, governance and the positive articulations and contaminations to be established between levels (from local to national). Agricultural and rural transformation requires the convergent mobilization of many actors and a coherent **reconstruction of collective and public action**. The joint attainment of SDGs 2 (zero hunger, sustainable agriculture), 6 (water), 13 (climate) and 15 (terrestrial and aquatic life - fresh water -, biodiversity) conditions **the capacity of the "living" and the bio-economy to serve as a basis and lever for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda**.

The **"living territory"** is a space where local actors - local authorities and rural communities, agricultural leaders and innovative farmers, NGOs, etc. - can agree on the transitions to be carried out and on **territorial projects** that can combine a wide range of actions. **Public and private action, adapted to each context, will find efficiency and coherence**. The necessary "change of gear" requires **action at several levels**, from the local to the national, via the region and the watershed, and to succeed in **contaminating each other in a positive way between levels**. Political agreements must be reached and laws, strategies, planning and public support must be made consistent and adapted as necessary.

6/ Men and women: capacity building and social capital are the key to the sustainability of territories. Over time, rural people have been able to develop valuable individual and collective know-how in terms of natural resource management, knowledge that is too often ignored. Today, they need to be considered, to be listened to better and to take collective responsibility. Rural transformation, through the adoption of the territorial approach, implies that they can define plan and finance actions by inserting them into a strategic territorial vision and managing them, which presupposes inclusive governance mechanisms. All of this requires **genuine consultation and the necessary time, which is still rarely the case**. The management of shared resources as common goods - irrigation water, pastoral resources - justifies **community institutions for territorial management** with sufficient prerogatives and capacities. Where appropriate, the reality of land and water uses in collective management areas must be clarified and recognised and such institutions set up.

7/ Supporting transitions also means financing the 'soft' and the services rendered by rural people to water, the environment and the climate. Rural transformation implies financing animation, intermediation, training, territorial projects and many other actions and not only infrastructures. New economic tools would gain from being introduced as a complement in order to finance what is of major general interest for water and which the market does not remunerate. With **aid for conversion to agroecology**, many farmers would take the risk of change. **Payments for environmental services** would be very useful, for example to compensate for the costs of temporarily resting certain pastures, to reward the increase of soil carbon stock, or to mobilise farmers in dry periods to restore degraded common goods (ponds, lowlands, etc.).

Agricultural and rural transformation will only take place on a large scale if all those who can and should contribute to it have the capacity to invest and find it in their interest to act.

Contact: Guillaume Benoit, member of the French Academy of Agriculture, general rapporteur of the SESAME seminars guillaumebenoit01@gmail.com

Documents from the 7 SESAME seminars on the Agropolis international website <https://urlz.fr/gH2R>