

# The scaling up of agroecology: spreading the hope for food sovereignty and resiliency

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A contribution to discussions at Rio+20  
on issues at the interface of hunger,  
agriculture, environment and social  
justice



**SOCLA**

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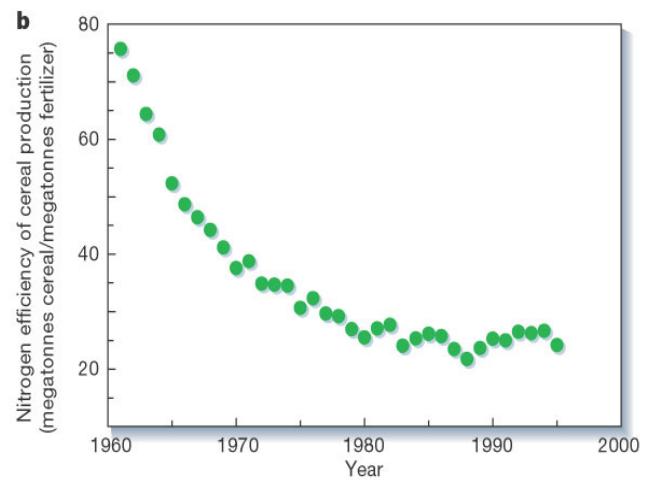
# The scaling up of agroecology: spreading the hope for food sovereignty and resiliency \*

## Why industrial agriculture is no longer viable?

The Green Revolution, the symbol of agricultural intensification not only failed to ensure safe and abundant food production for all people, but it was launched under the assumptions that abundant water and cheap energy to fuel modern agriculture would always be available and that climate would be stable and not change. Agrochemicals, fuel based mechanization and irrigation operations, the heart of industrial agriculture, are derived entirely from dwindling and ever more expensive fossil fuels. Climate extremes are becoming more frequent and violent and threaten genetically homogeneous modern monocultures now covering 80% of the 1500 million hectares of global arable land. Moreover industrial agriculture contributes with about 25-30% of GHG emissions, further altering weather patterns thus compromising the world's capacity to produce food in the future.

### The ecological footprint of Industrial agriculture

In some of the major grain production areas of the world, the rate of increase in cereal yields is declining as actual crop yields approach a ceiling for maximal yield potential (Figure 1). When the petroleum dependence and the ecological footprint of industrial agriculture are accounted for, serious questions about the social, economic and environmental sustainability of modern agricultural strategies. Intensification of agriculture via the use of high-yielding crop varieties, fertilization, irrigation

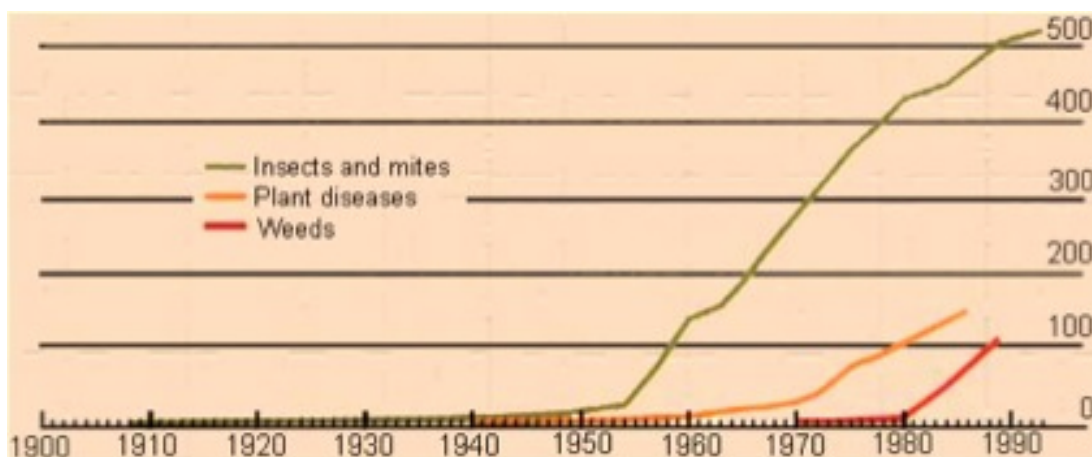


**Figure 1.** The law of diminishing returns: more inputs, less yields.

and pesticides impact heavily on natural resources with serious health and environmental implications. It has been estimated that the external costs of UK agriculture, to be at least 1.5 to 2 billion pounds each year. Using a similar framework of analysis the external costs in the US amount to nearly 13 billion pounds per year, arising from damage to water resources, soils, air, wildlife and biodiversity, and harm to human health. Additional annual costs of USD 3.7 billion arise from agency costs associated with programs to address these problems or encourage a transition towards more sustainable systems. The US pride about cheap food, is an illusion: consumers pay for food well beyond the grocery store.

<http://www.agron.iastate.edu/courses/agron515/eatearth.pdf>

\* This position paper draws from material used in the paper "It is possible to feed the world by scaling up agroecology" written by Miguel A Altieri for the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, May 2012".



**Figure 2.** The rapid development of resistance to pesticides by insects, pathogens and weeds.

Due to lack of ecological regulation mechanisms, monocultures are heavily dependent on pesticides. In the past 50 years the use of pesticides has increased dramatically worldwide and now amounts to some 2,6 million tons of pesticides per year with an annual value in the global market of more than US\$ 25 billion. In the US alone, 324 million kg of 600 different types of pesticides are used annually with indirect environmental (impacts on wildlife, pollinators, natural enemies, fisheries, water quality, etc.) and social costs (human poisoning and illnesses) reaching about \$8 billion each year. On top of this, 540 species of arthropods have developed resistance against more than 1000 different types of pesticides, which have been rendered useless to control such pests chemically (Figure 2).

<http://ipm.ncsu.edu/safety/factsheets/resistan.pdf>

Although there are many unanswered questions regarding the impact of the release of transgenic plants into the environment which already occupy > 180 million hectares worldwide, it is expected that biotech crops will exacerbate the problems of conventional agriculture and, by promoting monoculture, will also undermine ecological methods of farming. Transgenic crops developed for pest control emphasize the use of a single control mechanism, which has proven to fail over and over again with insects, pathogens and weeds. Thus transgenic crops are likely to increase the use of pesticides as a result of accelerated evolution of 'super weeds' and resistant insect pest strains. Transgenic crops also affect soil fauna potentially upsetting key soil processes such as nutrient cycling. Unwanted gene flow from transgenic crops

may compromise via genetic pollution crop biodiversity (i.e. maize) in centers of origin and domestication and therefore affect the associated systems of agricultural knowledge and practice along with the millenary ecological and evolutionary processes involved.

<http://www.colby.edu/biology/BI402B/Altieri%202000.pdf>

### Agribusiness and world hunger

Today there are about 1 billion hungry people in the planet, but hunger is caused by poverty (1/3 of the planet's population makes less than \$2 a day) and inequality (lack of access to land, seeds, etc.), not scarcity due to lack of production. The world already produces enough food to feed 9-10 billion people, the population peak expected by 2050. The bulk of industrially produced grain crops goes to biofuels and confined animals. Therefore the call to double food production by 2050 only applies if we continue to prioritize the growing population of livestock and automobiles over hungry people. Overly simplistic analyses in support of industrialized agriculture cite high yields and calculations of total food supply to illustrate its potential to alleviate hunger. However, it has been long understood that yields are a necessary but not sufficient condition to meeting people's food needs (Lappe et al. 1998). Seventy eight percent of all malnourished children under five who live in the Third World are in countries with food surpluses. There is already an abundant supply of food even while hunger grows worldwide. It is not supply that is the crucial factor, but distribution—whether people have sufficient "entitlements" through land, income, or support networks to secure a healthy diet. Rather than helping, too much food can actually add to hunger by undercutting prices



and destroying the economic viability of local agricultural systems. Farmers are not able to sell their produce in a way that allows them to cover costs, and so food may rot in the fields while people go hungry (Holt Gimenez and Patel 2009).

In addition roughly one-third of food produced for human consumption is wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year, enough to feed the entire African continent. Most of this food is wasted by consumers in Europe and North-America is 95-115 kg/year/per capita while this figure in Sub-Saharan Africa and South/Southeast Asia is only 6-11 kg/year.

[http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ags/publications/GFL\\_web.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ags/publications/GFL_web.pdf)

### *The concentration of global food production*

Solutions to hunger and food supply need to take into account distribution of food and access to income, land, seeds and other resources. Industrial agriculture has accelerated land and resource concentration in the hands of a few undermining the possibility of addressing the root causes of hunger. The concentration of global food production under the control of a few transnational corporations, bolstered by free trade agreements, structural adjustment policies, and subsidies for the overproduction of crop commodities, has created North-South food trade imbalances and import dependencies that underlie a growing food insecurity in many countries. Production of cash crop exports in exchange for food imports and the expansion of biofuels can undermine food self-sufficiency and threaten local ecosystems. This situation is aggravated by food insecure governments including China, Saudi Arabia and South Korea that rely on imports to feed their people which are snatching up vast areas of farmland (>80 millions hectares already transacted) abroad for their own offshore food production. Food corporations and private investors, hungry for profits in the midst of the deepening financial crisis, see

investment in foreign farmland as an important new source of revenue from the production of biomass.

[http://www.grain.org/bulletin\\_board/tags/221-land-grabbing](http://www.grain.org/bulletin_board/tags/221-land-grabbing)

### **Peasant agriculture: the basis for the new XXI Century agriculture**

There is no doubt that humanity needs an alternative agricultural development paradigm, one that encourages more ecologically, biodiverse, resilient, sustainable and socially just forms of agriculture. The basis for such new systems are the myriad of ecologically based agricultural styles developed by at least 75% of the 1,5 billion smallholders, family farmers and indigenous people on 350 million small farms which account for no less than 50 % of the global agricultural output for domestic consumption (ETC, 2009). Most of the food consumed today in the world is derived from 5,000 domesticated crop species and 1.9 million peasant-bred plant varieties mostly grown without agrochemicals (ETC, 2009). Industrial agriculture threatens this crop diversity through the replacement of native varieties with hybrid strains and the contamination of crop and wild species from the introduction of genetically modified organisms. As the global food supply relies on a diminishing variety of crops, it becomes vulnerable to pest outbreaks, the breeding of superbugs, and climate disruptions.



In Brazil there are about 4.8 million traditional family farmers (about 85 percent of the total number of farmers) that occupy 30 percent of the total agricultural land of the country. Such family farms control about 33 percent of the area sown to maize, 61 percent of that under beans, and 64 percent of that planted to cassava, thus producing 84 percent of the total cassava and 67 percent of all beans. Smallholder farmers in India possessing 2 hectares of land, make up about 78 percent of the country's farmers while owning only 33 percent of the land, but responsible for 41 percent of national grain production. Their contribution to both household



food security and to farm outputs is thus disproportionately high (Via Campesina 2010).

The majority of the world's peasant farmers tend small diversified farming systems which offer promising models for promoting biodiversity, conserving natural resources, sustaining yield without agrochemicals, providing ecological services and remarkable lessons about resiliency in the face of continuous environmental and economic change. For these reasons most agroecologists acknowledge that traditional agroecosystems have the potential to bring solutions to many uncertainties facing humanity in a peak oil era of global climate change and financial crisis (Altieri, 2004, Toledo and Barrera-Bassols, 2009). Undoubtedly, the ensemble of traditional crop management practices used by many resource-poor farmers which fit well to local conditions and can lead to the conservation and regeneration of the natural resource base represents a rich resource for modern workers seeking to create novel agroecosystems well adapted to the local agroecological and socioeconomic circumstances of smallholders.

Peasant practices and techniques tend to be knowledge-intensive rather than input-intensive, but clearly not all are effective or applicable, therefore modifications and adaptations may be necessary and this is where **agroecology** has played a key role in revitalizing the productivity of small farming systems. Since the 1980s thousands of projects launched by NGOs, farmers organizations and some University and research centers reaching hundreds of thousands of farmers, have applied general agroecological principles to customize agricultural technologies to local needs and circumstances, improving yields while conserving natural resources and biodiversity. The conventional technology transfer model breaks down in peasant regions as it is top down and based on a magic-bullet technology transfer approach incapable of understanding that new agroecological systems

require peoples' participation and need to be tailored and adapted in a site-specific way to highly variable and diverse farm conditions (Uphoff, 2002).

### How is the international community reacting?

The solutions for smallholder agriculture advocated by big bilateral donors, governments and the initiatives of private foundations have tended to center around the promotion of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which are costly for farmers and often resource depleting. This drive for a new 'Green Revolution' as exemplified by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has tended to sideline more sustainable, farmer led approaches. Others (CGIAR 2012, recent sustainable intensification report of FAO- (<http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/core-themes/theme/spi/scpi-home/framework/sustainable-intensification-in-fao/en/>), latest report of the expert Montpellier Panel - (<https://workspace.imperial.ac.uk/africanagriculturaldevelopment/Public/Montpellier%20Panel%20Report%202012.pdf>) have tried to co-opt agroecology by stating that it is an option that can be practiced along with other approaches such as transgenic crops, conservation farming, microdosing of fertilisers and herbicides, and integrated pest management. Of course in this way the term agro-ecology would be rendered meaningless, like sustainable agriculture, a concept devoid of meaning, and divorced from the reality of farmers, the politics of food and of the environment. As a science however, agroecology provides the productive basis for rural movements that promote food sovereignty and confront head on the root causes that perpetuate hunger, therefore it cannot be appropriated by conventional institutions. Agroecology does not need to be combined with other approaches. Without the need of hybrids and external agrochemical inputs, it has consistently proven capable of sustainably increasing productivity and has far greater potential for fighting hunger,



particularly during economic and climatically uncertain times, which in many areas are becoming the norm (Altieri et al 2011).

Despite these attempts, the realization of the contribution of peasant agriculture to food security in the midst of scenarios of climate change, economic and energy crisis led to the concepts of food sovereignty and agroecology to gain much worldwide attention in the last two decades. Two recent major international reports (IAASTD, 2009; de Schutter, 2010) state that in order to feed 9 billion people in 2050, we urgently need to adopt the most efficient farming systems and recommend for a fundamental shift towards agroecology as a way to boost food production and improve the situation of the poorest. Both reports based on broad consultations with scientists and extensive literature reviews contend that small-scale farmers can double food production within 10 years in critical regions by using agroecological methods already available. The future food challenge should be met using environmentally friendly and socially equitable technologies and methods, in a world with a shrinking arable land base (which is also being diverted to produce biofuels), with less and more expensive petroleum, increasingly limited supplies of

water and nitrogen, and within a scenario of a rapidly changing climate, social unrest and economic uncertainty (Godfray et al., 2010). The only agricultural systems that will be able to confront future challenges are agroecological systems that exhibit high levels of diversity, integration, efficiency, resiliency and productivity (Holt Gimenez and Patel, 2009).

### **What are agroecological production systems?**

As an applied science, agroecology uses ecological concepts and principles for the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems where external inputs are replaced by natural processes such as natural soil fertility and biological control (Altieri, 1995). Agroecology takes greater advantage of natural processes and beneficial on-farm interactions in order to reduce off-farm input use and to improve the efficiency of farming systems. Agroecological principles used in the design and management of agroecosystems (Table 1) enhances the functional biodiversity of agroecosystems which is integral to the maintenance of immune, metabolic and regulatory processes key for agroecosystem function (Gliessman, 1998).

**Table 1.** Agroecological principles for the design of biodiverse, energy efficient, resource-conserving and resilient farming systems

<i>Enhance the recycling of biomass</i> , with a view to optimizing organic matter decomposition and nutrient cycling over time.
<i>Strengthen the "immune system" of agricultural systems</i> through enhancement of functional biodiversity -- natural enemies, antagonists, etc.
<i>Provide the most favorable soil conditions</i> for plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and by enhancing soil biological activity.
<i>Minimize losses of energy, water, nutrients and genetic resources</i> by enhancing conservation and regeneration of soil and water resources and agrobiodiversity..
<i>Diversify species and genetic resources</i> in the agroecosystem over time and space at the field and landscape level
<i>Enhance beneficial biological interactions and synergies</i> among the components of agrobiodiversity, thereby promoting key ecological processes and services.

Agroecological principles take different technological forms depending on the biophysical and

socioeconomic circumstances of each farmer or region. A key principle of agroecology is the diversification of farming systems promoting mixtures of crop varieties, intercropping systems, agroforestry systems, livestock integration, etc. which potentiate the positive effects of biodiversity on productivity derived from the increasing effects of complementarity between plant-animal species translated in better use of sunlight, water, soil resources and natural regulation of pest populations. Promoted diversification schemes (Box 1) are multi-functional as their adoption usually means favorable changes in various components of the farming systems at the same time (Gliessman, 1998). In other words they function as an “ecological turntable” by activating key processes such as recycling, biological control, antagonisms, allelopathy, etc., essential for the sustainability and productivity of agroecosystems. Agroecological systems are not intensive in the use of capital, labor, or chemical inputs, but rather the efficiency of biological processes such as photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, solubilization of soil phosphorus, and the enhancement of biological activity above and below ground. The “inputs” of the system are the natural processes themselves, this is why agroecology is referred to as an “agriculture of processes”.



**Box 1. Temporal and spatial designs of diversified farming systems and their main agroecological effects**  
(Altieri 1995, Gliessman 1998)

**Crop Rotations:** Temporal diversity in the form of cereal-legume sequences. Nutrients are conserved and provided from one season to the next, and the life cycles of insect pests, diseases, and weeds are interrupted.

**Polycultures:** Cropping systems in which two or more crop species are planted within certain spatial proximity result in biological complementarities that improve nutrient use efficiency and pest regulation thus enhancing crop yield stability.

**Agroforestry Systems:** Trees grown together with annual crops in addition to modifying the microclimate, maintain and improve soil fertility as some trees contribute to nitrogen fixation and nutrient uptake from deep soil horizons while their litter helps replenish soil nutrients, maintain organic matter, and support complex soil food webs.

**Cover Crops and Mulching:** The use of pure or mixed stands of grass-legumes e.g., under fruit trees can reduce erosion and provide nutrients to the soil and enhance biological control of pests. Flattening cover crop mixtures on the soil surface in conservation farming is a strategy to reduce soil erosion and lower fluctuations in soil moisture and temperature, improve soil quality, and enhance weed suppression resulting in better crop performance.

**Crop-livestock mixtures:** High biomass output and optimal nutrient recycling can be achieved through crop-animal integration. Animal production that integrates fodder shrubs planted at high densities, intercropped with improved, highly-productive pastures and timber trees all combined in a system that can be directly grazed by livestock enhances total productivity without need of external inputs.

When designed and managed with agroecological principles, farming systems exhibit attributes of diversity, productivity, resilience and efficiency. Agroecological initiatives aim at transforming industrial agriculture partly by transitioning the existing food systems away from fossil fuel-based production largely for agroexport crops and biofuels towards an alternative agricultural paradigm that encourages local/national food production by small and family farmers based on local innovation, resources and solar energy. This implies access of peasants to land, seeds, water, credit and local markets, partly through the creation of supportive economic policies, financial incentives, market opportunities and agroecological technologies (Vía Campesina, 2010). Agroecological systems are deeply rooted in the ecological rationale of traditional small-scale agriculture, representing long established examples of successful agricultural systems characterized by a tremendous diversity of domesticated crop and animal species maintained and enhanced by ingenious soil, water and biodiversity management regimes, nourished by complex traditional knowledge systems (Koohafkan and Altieri, 2010).

### How does agroecology differ from other alternative agricultural approaches?

Organic agriculture is practiced in almost all countries of the world, and its share of agricultural land and farms is growing, reaching a certified area of more than 30 million hectares globally. Organic farming is a production system that sustains agricultural productivity by avoiding or largely excluding synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. FIBL scientists in Central Europe conducted a 21-year study of the agronomic and ecological performance of organic, and conventional farming systems. They found crop yields to be 20% lower in the organic systems, although input of fertilizer and energy was reduced by 31 to 53% and pesticide input by 98%. Researchers concluded that the enhanced soil fertility and higher biodiversity found in organic plots rendered these systems less dependent on external inputs. When practiced based on agroecological principles organic practices build up of soil organic matter and soil biota, \_ minimize pest, disease and weed damage, conserve of soil, water, and biodiversity resource, promote long-term agricultural productivity with produce of optimal nutritional value and quality.

<http://www.fibl.org/en.html>



Organic farming systems managed as monocultures that are in turn dependent on external biological and/or botanical (i.e. organic) inputs are not based on agroecological principles. This ‘input substitution’ approach essentially follows the same paradigm of conventional farming: that is, overcoming the limiting factor but this time with biological or organic inputs. Many of these “alternative inputs” have become commodified, therefore farmers continue to be dependent on input suppliers, cooperative or corporate (Rosset and Altieri, 1997). Agroecologists argue that organic farming systems that do not challenge the monoculture nature of plantations and rely on external inputs as well as on foreign and expensive certification seals, or fair-trade systems destined only for agro-export, offer little to small farmers who in turn become dependent on external inputs and foreign and volatile markets. By keeping farmers dependent on an input substitution approach, organic agriculture’s fine-tuning of input use does little to move farmers toward the productive redesign of agricultural ecosystems that would move them away from dependence on external inputs. Niche (organic and/or fair trade) markets for the rich in the North exhibit the same problems of any agro-export scheme that does not prioritize food sovereignty (defined here as ‘the right of people to produce, distribute and consume healthy food in and near their territory in ecologically sustainable manner’), often perpetuating dependence and at times hunger (Altieri 2010).

### Assessing the performance of agroecological projects

There are many competing visions on how to achieve new models of a biodiverse, resilient, productive and resource efficient agriculture that humanity desperately needs in the immediate future. Conservation (no or minimum tillage) agriculture, sustainable intensification production, transgenic crops, organic agriculture and agroecological systems are some of the proposed approaches, each claiming to serve as the durable foundation for a sustainable food production strategy. Although goals of all approaches may be similar, technologies proposed (high versus low input) methodologies (farmer-led versus market driven, top down versus bottom-up) and scales (large scale monocultures versus biodiverse small farms) are quite different and often antagonistic. However when one examines the basic attributes that a sustainable production system should exhibit

(Box 2), agroecological approaches certainly meet most of these attributes and requirements (Altieri, 2002; Gliessman, 1998; UK Food Group, 2010; Parrott and Marsden, 2002; Uphoff, 2002). Similarly by applying the set of questions listed in Table 2 to assess the potential of agricultural interventions in addressing pressing social, economic and ecological concerns, it is clear that most existing agroecological projects confirm that proposed management practices are contributing to sustainable livelihoods by improving the natural, human, social, physical and financial capital of target rural communities (Koohafkan et al., 2011).

**Table 2.** A set of guiding questions to assess if proposed agricultural systems are contributing to sustainable livelihoods (Koohafkan et al 2011)

1. Are they reducing poverty?
2. Are they based on rights and social equity?
3. Do they reduce social exclusion, particularly for women, minorities and indigenous people?
4. Do they protect access and rights to land, water and other natural resources?
5. Do they favor the redistribution (rather than the concentration) of productive resources?
6. Do they substantially increase food production and contribute to household food security and improved nutrition?
7. Do they enhance families’ water access and availability?
8. Do they regenerate and conserve soil, and increase (maintain) soil fertility?
9. Do they reduce soil loss/degradation and enhance soil regeneration and conservation?
10. Do practices maintain or enhance organic matter and the biological life and biodiversity of the soil?
11. Do they prevent pest and disease outbreaks?
12. Do they conserve and encourage agrobiodiversity?
13. Do they reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
14. Do they increase income opportunities and employment?
15. Do they reduce variation in agricultural production under climatic stress conditions?
16. Do they enhance farm diversification and resilience?
17. Do they reduce investment costs and farmers dependence on external inputs?
18. Do they increase the degree and effectiveness of farmer organizations?
19. Do they increase human capital formation?
20. Do they contribute to local/regional food sovereignty?

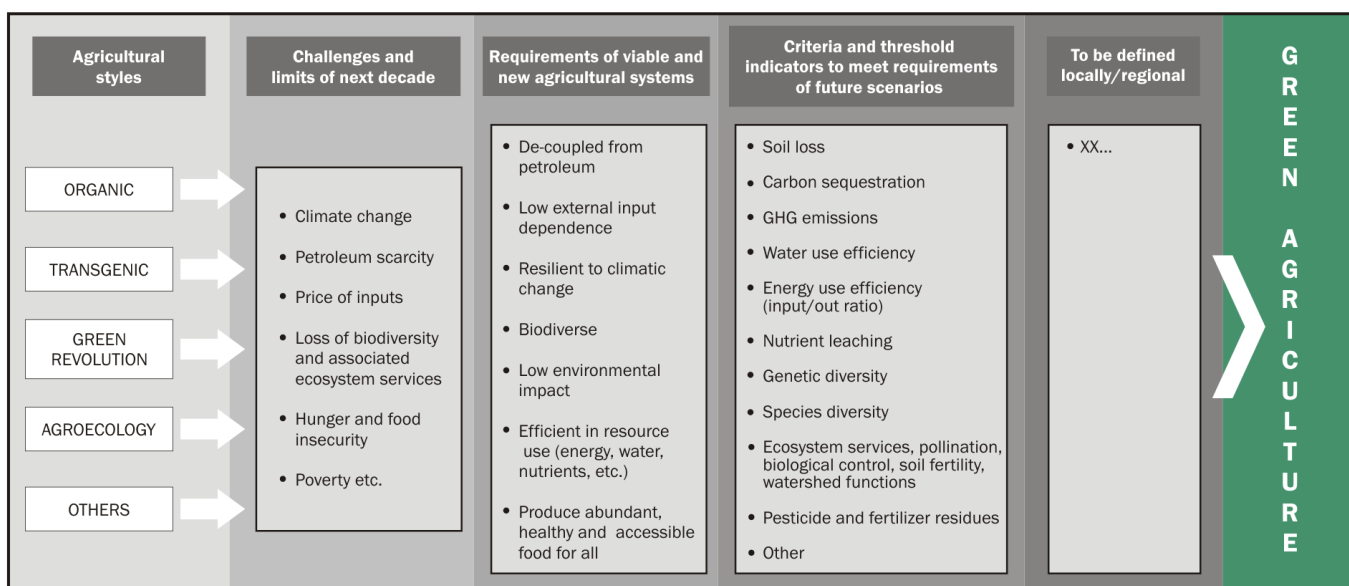
In order for an agricultural strategy to fit within the sustainability criteria, it must contain the basic requirements of a viable and durable agricultural system capable of confronting the challenges of the 21st century while carrying out its productive goals

**Box 2. Requirements of agroecologically based agricultural systems (Koohafkan et al., 2011)**

1. Use of local and improved crop varieties and livestock breeds so as to enhance genetic diversity and enhance adaptation to changing biotic and environmental conditions.
2. Avoid the unnecessary use of agrochemical and other technologies that adversely impact on the environment and on human health (e.g. heavy machineries, transgenic crops, etc.)
3. Efficient use of resources (nutrients, water, energy, etc.), reduced use of non-renewable energy and reduced farmer dependence on external inputs
4. Harness agroecological principals and processes such as nutrient cycling, biological nitrogen fixation, allelopathy, biological control via promotion of diversified farming systems and harnessing functional biodiversity
5. Making productive use of human capital in the form of traditional and modern scientific knowledge and skills to innovate and the use of social capital through recognition of cultural identity, participatory methods and farmer networks to enhance solidarity and exchange of innovations and technologies to resolve problems
6. Reduce the ecological footprint of production, distribution and consumption practices, thereby minimizing GHG emissions and soil and water pollution
7. Promoting practices that enhance clean water availability, carbon sequestration, and conservation of biodiversity, soil and water conservation, etc.
8. Enhanced adaptive capacity based on the premise that the key to coping with rapid and unforeseeable change is to strengthen the ability to adequately respond to change to sustain a balance between long-term adaptability and short-term efficiency
9. Strengthen adaptive capacity and resilience of the farming system by maintaining agroecosystem diversity, which not only allows various responses to change, but also ensures key functions on the farm
10. Recognition and dynamic conservation of agricultural heritage systems that allows social cohesion and a sense of pride and promote a sense of belonging and reduce migration

within certain limits in terms of environmental impact, land degradation levels, input and energy use, GHG emissions, etc. As depicted in Figure 3 threshold indicators may be defined that are site or region specific, thus their values will change according to prevailing environmental and socio-economic conditions. In the same region, threshold value ranges may be the same for an intensive large

scale system and a low-input small scale system as yields would be measured per unit of GHG emitted, per unit of energy or water used, per unit of N leached, etc. Without a doubt most monoculture based systems will surpass the threshold levels and therefore will not be considered sustainable and unfit for food provisioning in an ecologically and socially sound manner (Koohafkan et al 2011).



**Figure 3.** The basic requirements of a viable and durable agricultural system capable of confronting the challenges of the 21st century while carrying out its productive goals within certain thresholds established locally or regionally (Koohafkan et al 2011)

## The spread and productive/food security potential of agroecological systems

The first global assessment of agroecologically based projects and/or initiatives throughout the developing world was conducted by Pretty et al (2003) who documented clear increases in food production over some 29 million hectares, with nearly 9 million households benefiting from increased food diversity and security. Promoted sustainable agriculture practices led to 50-100% increases in per hectare cereal production (about 1.71 Mg per year per household – an increase of 73%) in rain-fed areas typical of small farmers living in marginal environments; that is an area of about 3.58 million hectares, cultivated by about 4.42 million farmers. In 14 projects where root crops were main staples (potato, sweet potato and cassava), the 146,000 farms on 542,000 ha increased household food production by 17 t per year (increase of 150%). Such yield enhancements are a true breakthrough for achieving food security among farmers isolated from mainstream agricultural institutions. A re-examination of the data in 2010, the analysis demonstrates the extent to which 286 interventions in 57 “poor countries” covering 37 million ha (3 percent of the cultivated area in developing countries) have increased productivity on 12.6 million farms while improving ecosystem services. The average crop yield increase was 79 percent.

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-546-future-of-food-and-farming-report.pdf>

### Africa

There is a growing body of evidence emerging from Africa demonstrating that agroecological approaches can be highly effective in boosting production, incomes, food security and resilience to climate change and empowering communities (Christian Aid 2011). For example the UK Government’s Foresight Global Food and Farming project conducted an analysis of 40 projects and programs in 20 African countries where sustainable crop intensification was promoted during the 1990s–2000s. The cases included crop improvements, agroforestry and soil conservation, conservation agriculture, integrated pest management, horticulture, livestock and fodder crops, aquaculture and novel policies and partnerships. By early 2010, these projects had documented benefits for 10.39 million farmers and

their families and improvements on approximately 12.75 million ha. Food outputs by sustainable intensification via the use of new and improved varieties was significant as crop yields rose on average by 2.13-fold (Pretty et al., 2011). Most households substantially improved food production and household food security. In 95% of the projects where yield increases were the aim, cereal yields improved by 50–100%. Total farm food production increased in all. The additional positive impacts on natural, social and human capital are also helping to build the assets base so as to sustain these improvements in the future.

Although some of the reported yield gains reported in in the study depended on farmers having access to improved seeds, fertilizers and other inputs (which more than often is not the case) food outputs improved mainly by diversification with a range of new crops, livestock or fish that added to the existing staples or vegetables already being cultivated. These new system enterprises or components included: aquaculture for fish raising; small patches of land used for raised beds and vegetable cultivation; rehabilitation of formerly degraded land; fodder grasses and shrubs that provide food for livestock (and increase milk productivity); raising of chickens and zero-grazed sheep and goats; new crops or trees brought into rotations with maize or sorghum, adoption of short-maturing varieties (e.g. sweet potato and cassava) that permit the cultivation of two crops per year instead of one (Pretty et al 2011).

Another meta analysis conducted by UNEP–UNCTAD (2008) assessing 114 cases in Africa revealed that a conversion of farms to organic methods increased agricultural productivity by 116 per cent. In Kenya, maize yields increased by 71 % and bean yields by 158 %. Moreover, increased diversity in food crops available to farmers resulted in more varied diets and thus improved nutrition. Also the natural capital of farms (soil fertility, levels of agrobiodiversity, etc.) increased with time after conversion.

One of the most successful diversification strategies has been the promotion of tree-based agriculture. Agroforestry of maize associated with fast growing and N-fixing shrubs (e.g. Calliandra and Tephrosia) has spread among tens of thousands of farmers in Cameroon, Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Niger of maize associated with fast growing and N-fixing shrubs (e.g. Calliandra and Tephrosia) result in a maize production of 8 t compared with 5 t obtained under monoculture (Garrity 2010).

Another agroforestry system in Africa is one dominated by *Faidherbia* trees which improve crop yields, protect crops from dry winds and the land from water erosion. In the Zinder Regions of Niger, there are now about 4.8 million hectares of *Faidherbia*-dominated agroecosystems. The foliage and pods from the trees also provide much-needed fodder for cattle and goats during the long Sahelian dry seasons. Encouraged by the experience in Niger, about 500,000 farmers in Malawi and the southern highlands of Tanzania maintain *Faidherbia* trees in their maize fields (Reij and Smaling, 2008).

In southern Africa, Conservation Agriculture (CA) is an important innovation based on three agroecological practices: minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotations. These systems have spread in Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and other countries reaching no less than 50,000 farmers who have dramatically increased their maize yields to 3-4 MT/ha while conventional yields average between 0.5 and 0.7 MT/ha. Improved maize yields increase the amount of food available at the household level, but also increase income levels

## Asia

Pretty and Hine (2009) evaluated 16 agroecological projects/initiatives spread across eight Asian countries and found that some 2.86 million households have substantially improved total food production on 4.93 million hectares, resulting in greatly improved household food security. Proportional yield increases are greatest in rainfed systems, but irrigated systems have seen small cereal yield increases combined with added production from additional productive system components (such as fish in rice, vegetables on dykes).

The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is an agroecological methodology for increasing the productivity of irrigated rice by changing the management of plants, soil, water and nutrients (Stoop et al 2002). It has spread throughout China, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam reaching more than a million hectares with average yield increases of 20–30%. The benefits of SRI, which have been demonstrated in over 40 countries include: increased yield at times > 50%, up to 90% reduction in required seed, up to 50% savings in water. SRI principles and practices have also been adapted for rainfed rice as well as for other crops such as wheat,

sugarcane and teff, among others, with yield increases and associated economic benefits

(<http://sri.ciifad.cornell.edu/countries/cambodia/camcedacimpact03.pdf>)

On what probably can be considered the largest study undertaken on sustainable agriculture in Asia analyzes the work of MASIPAG a network of small-scale farmers, farmers' organizations, scientists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Comparing findings from 280 full organic farmers, 280 in conversion to organic agriculture and 280 conventional farmers, researchers found that food security is significantly higher for organic farmers (Bachmann et al., 2009). Results of the study summarized in Table 3 show good outcomes particularly for the poorest in rural areas. Full organic farmers eat a more diverse, nutritious and secure diet. Reported health outcomes are also substantially better for the organic group. The study reveals that the full organic farmers have considerably higher on-farm diversity, growing on average 50% more crops than conventional farmers, better soil fertility, less soil erosion, increased tolerance of crops to pests and diseases, and better farm management skills. The group also has, on average, higher net incomes.

**Table 3.** Main findings of the MASIPAG study on farmers practicing farmer-led sustainable agriculture (Bachmann et al. 2009)

<p><b>More food secure:</b> 88% of organic farmers find their food security better or much better than in 2000 compared to only 44% of conventional farmers. Of conventional farmers, 18% are worse off. Only 2% of full organic farmers are worse off.</p>
<p><b>Eating an increasingly diverse diet:</b> Organic farmers eat 68% more vegetables, 56% more fruit, 55% more protein rich staples and 40% more meat than in 2000. This is an increase between 2 and 3.7 times higher than for conventional farmers.</p>
<p><b>Producing a more diverse range of crops:</b> Organic farmers on average grow 50% more crop types than conventional farmers.</p>
<p><b>Experiencing better health outcomes:</b> In the full organic group 85% rate their health today better or much better than in 2000. In the reference group, only 32% rate it positively, while 56% see no change and 13% report worse health.</p>



## Latin America

Since the early 1980s rural producers in partnership with NGOs and other organizations, have promoted and implemented alternative, agroecological featuring resource-conserving yet highly productive systems, such as polycultures, agroforestry, and the integration of crops and livestock etc. (Altieri 2009).

An analysis of several agroecological field projects in operation during the 1990's (these initiatives now involve almost 100,000 farming families/units and cover more than 120,000 hectares of land) showed that traditional crop and animal combinations can often be adapted to increase productivity when the biological structuring of the farm is improved and labor and local resources are efficiently used (Altieri 2009). In fact, most agroecological technologies promoted by NGOs improve traditional agricultural yields increasing output per area of marginal land from 400–600 to 2000–2500 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> enhancing also the general agrobiodiversity and its associated positive effects on food security and environmental integrity. Some projects emphasizing green manures and other organic management techniques can increase maize yields from 1–1.5 t ha<sup>-1</sup> (a typical highland peasant yield) to 3–4 t ha<sup>-1</sup>.

An IFAD (2004) study which covered a total of 12 farmer organizations that comprise about 5150 farmers and close to 9800 hectares showed that small farmers who shifted to organic agricultural production in all cases obtained higher net revenues relative to their previous situation. Many of these farmers produce coffee and cacao under very complex and biodiverse agroforestry systems.

In the states of Parana and Santa Catarina, Brazil thousands of hillside family using cover crops minimize soil erosion and weed growth and exhibit positive effects on soil physical, chemical and biological properties (Petersen et al 1999). This is how an innovative organic minimum tillage system

emerged. By using cover crop mixtures including legumes and grasses mulch biomass can reach 8000 kg/ha and a mulch thickness of 10 cm leading to 75% or more inhibition of weed emergence. Maize yields have risen from 3 to 5 t ha<sup>-1</sup> and soybeans from 2.8 to 4.7 t ha<sup>-1</sup> without using herbicides or chemical fertilizers (Altieri et al 2011).

In Cuba, it is estimated that agroecological practices are used in 46–72% of the peasant farms producing over 70% of the domestic food production, e.g. 67% of roots and tubers, 94% of small livestock, 73% of rice, 80% of fruits and most of the honey, beans, cocoa, maize, tobacco, milk and meat production (Machin et al, 2010, Rosset et al 2011). As shown in Table 6 small farmers using agroecological methods obtain yields per hectare sufficient to feed about 15–20 people per year with energy efficiencies of no less than 10:1 (Funes Monzote, 2009). Another study conducted by Funes-Monzote et al. (2009) shows that small farmers using integrated crop-livestock farming systems were able to achieve a three-fold increase in milk production per unit of forage area (3.6 t/ha/year) as well as a seven-fold increase in energy efficiency. Energy output (21.3 GJ/ha/year) was tripled and protein output doubled (141.5 kg/ha/year) via diversification strategies of specialized livestock farms.

Perhaps the most widespread agroecological effort in Latin America promoted by NGOs and peasant organizations is the rescuing of traditional or local crop varieties (*variedades criollas*), their in-situ conservation via community seed banks and their exchange through hundreds of seed fairs (*ferias de semillas*) notoriously in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Brasil. For example in Nicaragua the project *Semillas de Identidad* which involves more than 35,000 families on 14,000 hectares have already recuperated and conserved 129 local varieties of maize and 144 of beans.

[http://www.swissaid.org.co/kolumbien/global/pdf/campa\\_a\\_28.05.08.pdf](http://www.swissaid.org.co/kolumbien/global/pdf/campa_a_28.05.08.pdf)



In Brasil, the Bionatur Network for Agro-ecological Seeds (Rede Bionatur de Sementes Agroecológicas) is one of the strategic tools that the Landless peasant movement (MST) has launched for the participatory breeding of seeds adapted to agroecological management and their dissemination among hundreds of thousands of peasants.

An increasing number of indigenous groups or cabildos in the Andean and MesoAmerican countries have adopted agroecology as a fundamental strategy for the conservation of their germplasm and the management of agriculture in their autonomous territory. These efforts are tied to their struggle to preserve their land and cultural identity. The Mesoamerican indigenous population includes about 12 million people. In Mexico, the peasant sector that still uses indigenous languages controls an area estimated at 28 million hectares.

### Agroecology and resiliency to climatic extremes

Of key importance for the future of agriculture are results from observations of agricultural performance after extreme climatic events which reveal that resiliency to climate disasters is closely linked to the level of on-farm biodiversity, a major feature of agroecological systems. A survey conducted in Central American hillsides after Hurricane Mitch showed that farmers using diversification practices such as cover crops, intercropping and agroforestry suffered less damage than their conventional monoculture neighbors. The study revealed that diversified plots had 20 to 40% more topsoil, greater soil moisture and less erosion and experienced lower economic losses than their conventional neighbors (Holt-Gimenez 2000). Similarly in Sotonusco, Chiapas, coffee systems exhibiting high levels of vegetational complexity and plant diversity suffered less damage from Hurricane Stan than more simplified coffee systems (Philpott *et*

In the case of coffee, the more shaded systems have also been shown to protect crops from decreasing precipitation and reduced soil water availability because the overstory tree cover is able to reduce soil evaporation and increase soil water infiltration (Lin 2007). Forty days after Hurricane Ike hit Cuba in 2008, researchers conducted a farm survey in the Provinces of Holguin and Las Tunas and found that diversified farms exhibited losses of 50% compared to 90 or 100% in neighboring monocultures. Likewise agroecologically managed farms showed a faster productive recovery (80–90%) 40 days after the hurricane than monoculture farms (Rosset *et al.* 2011).

Diversified farming systems such as agroforestry, silvopastoral and polycultural systems provide a variety of examples on how complex agroecosystems are able to adapt and resist the effects drought. Intercrops of sorghum and peanut, millet and peanut, and sorghum and millet exhibited greater yield stability and less productivity declines during a drought than in the case of monocultures (Natarajan and Willey 1986). In 2009 the valle del Cauca in Colombia experienced the driest year in a 40 year record. Intensive silvopastoral systems for livestock production combining fodder shrubs planted at high densities under trees and palms with improved pastures, not only provided environmental goods and services for livestock producers but also greater resilience to drought.

### Scaling up agroecological innovations

The cases reported above show that in Africa, Asia and Latin America there are many NGO and farmer led initiatives promoting agroecological projects that have demonstrated a positive impact on the livelihoods of small farming communities in various countries (Altieri *et al* 2011). Agroecological production is particularly well suited for smallholder



farmers, who comprise the majority of the rural poor. Resource-poor farmers using agroecological systems are less dependent on external resources and experience higher and more stable yields enhancing food security. Some of these farmers, who may devote part of their production for certified organic export production without sacrificing food security, exhibit significantly higher incomes than their conventional counterparts. Agroecological management makes conversion to organic production fairly easy, involving little risk and requires few, if any, fixed investments.

With so many proven on-farm social, productive and ecological benefits, the relatively limited adoption and dissemination of agroecological innovations begs two questions: (1) If agroecological systems are so profitable and efficient, why have they not been more widely disseminated and adopted? and (2) and how can agroecology be multiplied and scaled up? A number of constraints that discourage adoption and dissemination of agroecological practices thus impeding its widespread adoption. Barriers range from technical issues such as lack of information by farmers and extension agents to policy distortions, market failure, lack of land tenure and infrastructural problems. In order to further spread agroecology among farmers it is essential to overcome part or all of these constraints. Major reforms must be made in policies, institutions, and research and development agendas to make sure that agroecological alternatives are massively adopted, made equitably and broadly accessible, and multiplied so that their full benefit for sustainable food security can be realized. Farmers must have higher access to local-regional markets, government support such as credit, seeds and agroecological technologies. It should also be recognized that a major constraint to the spread of agroecology has been that powerful economic and institutional interests have backed research and development for the conventional agroindustrial approach, while research and development for

the conventional agroindustrial approach, while research and development for agroecology and sustainable approaches has in most countries been largely ignored or even ostracized (Altieri 2002).

In Latin America, a key factor in the expansion of localized agroecology efforts in several isolated rural areas was the Campesino a Campesino-CAC movement which uses a “peasant pedagogic method” that focuses on sharing experiences, strengthening local research and problem-solving capacities in a horizontal process of exchange of ideas and innovations among farmers. It was via the CAC method that soil conservation practices were introduced in Honduras, and hillside farmers adopting the various techniques tripled or quadrupled their yields from 400 kilograms per hectare to 1,200–1,600 kilograms. This tripling in per-hectare grain production ensured that the 1,200 families that initially participated in the program have ample grain supplies for the ensuing year. The adoption of velvet bean (*Mucuna pruriens*) which can fix up to 150 kg of nitrogen per ha as well as produce 35 tones of organic matter per year, helped tripled maize yields to 2500 kg/ha. Labor requirements for weeding were cut by 75% and herbicides eliminated entirely.

In the early 1990s organized social rural movements such as the Via Campesina, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and others massively adopted agroecology as a banner of their technological approach to achieve food sovereignty. What constitutes the soul of the Cuban agroecological revolution was the adoption via the CAC process of agroecological methods by 110,000 family farmers associated with the Asociacion Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP) who in less than a decade, controlling less than 35% of the land produce over 70% of the domestic food production, e.g. 67% of roots and tubers, 94% of small livestock, 73% of rice and 80% of fruits (Rosset et al 2011).

Successful scaling up of agroecology depends heavily on human capital enhancement and community empowerment through training and participatory methods that seriously take into account the needs, aspirations and circumstances of smallholders. In addition to the CAC process there are other initiatives to scale up agroecology which involve capacity building emphasizing training, farmer field schools, on-farm demonstrations, farmer to farmer exchanges, field visits and other marketing and policy initiatives.

### NGO led initiatives

Since the early 1980s, hundreds of agroecologically-based projects have been promoted by NGOs and church based groups throughout the developing world, which incorporate elements of both traditional knowledge and modern agricultural science. A variety of projects exist featuring resource-conserving yet highly productive systems, such as polycultures, agroforestry, soil conservation, water harvesting, biological pest control and the integration of crops and livestock, etc. Approaches to train farmers on agroecological methods and disseminate best practices include a great variety: field days, on-farm demonstrations, training of trainers, farmers cross-visits, etc. Much of the spread of cover cropping based conservation agriculture in southern Africa reaching > 50,000 farmers has been attained via one or more these methods.

### Inter-organization collaboration

One of the best examples of this approach are the Farmer Field School (FFS) which consist of a group-based learning process used by a number of governments, NGOs and international agencies collaborating in the promotion of agroecological method. The most successful FFS was promoted by the FAO Intercountry Programme for the Development and Application of Integrated Pest Control in Rice in South and South-East Asia launched in 1980. Farmers carried out experiential learning activities that helped them understand the ecology of their rice fields via simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. Thousands of farmers reported substantial and consistent reductions in pesticide use and in many cases there was also convincing increases in yield attributable to the effect of training. IPM Farmer Field School programs, at various levels of development, are being conducted in over 30 countries worldwide.

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/ad487e/ad487e02.htm>

### Developing local markets

There are thousands of initiatives throughout the world aimed at closing the circuits of production and consumption via development of local farmers markets and community supported agriculture. One of the most exciting examples is REDE ECOVIDA in southern Brasil, which consists of a space of articulation between organized family farmers, supportive NGOs and consumers whose objective is to promote agroecological alternatives and develop solidarious markets that tighten the circle between local producers and consumers, ensuring local food security and that the generated wealth remains in the community (van der Ploeg 2009). Presently Ecovida encompasses 180 municipalities and approximately 2,400 families of farmers (around 12,000 persons) organized in 270 groups, associations and cooperatives. They also include 30 NGOs and 10 ecological consumers' cooperatives. All kinds of agriculture products are cultivated and sold by the Ecovida members, including vegetables, cereals, fruits, juice, fruit-jelly, honey, milk, eggs and meat reaching thousands of consumers.

[http://www.ifoam.org/about\\_ifoam/standards/pgs\\_projects/pgs\\_projects/15649.php](http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs_projects/pgs_projects/15649.php)

### Government policies

Governments can launch policies that support and protect small farmers. The *Ministerio do Desenvolvimento Rural* (MDA) in BRasil has played a major role in supporting education and research projects, but most importantly has created important instruments for family farmers to have access to know-how, credit, markets, etc. One examples is the public purchasing programme *Programa de Aquisicao de Alimentos* (PAA) created in 2003. The program addresses the issue of lack of market access for the products of a large number of family farms. Family farms are therefore unable to reach their full earning potential. In the scope of four program lines, farmers are given a purchase guarantee for specific quantities at specific prices making the operations of thousands of small farms more economically viable.

[http://www.rural21.com/uploads/media/rural\\_2011\\_4\\_36-39\\_01.pdf](http://www.rural21.com/uploads/media/rural_2011_4_36-39_01.pdf)



## Political advocacy and action

With or without government support, major global peasant rural movements (such as the Via Campesina) have already initiated an agroecological revolution and have launched a strategy followed by millions of farmers to strengthen and promote agroecological models of food provision in the framework of food sovereignty. No less than 30% of the 10 million hectare territory controlled by the MST in Brasil is under agroecological management. Thousands of MST members have received agroecological theoretical and practical training on the many MST institutes such as the Latin American School of Agroecology established in an MST settlement in Lapa, state of Parana.

In addition to promoting capacity building and agroecological innovations on the ground, rural movements advocate for a more radical transformation of agriculture, one guided by the notion that ecological change in agriculture cannot be promoted without comparable changes in the social, political, cultural and economic arenas. The organized peasant and indigenous based agrarian movements (i.e. the Via Campesina) consider that only by changing the export-led, free-trade based, industrial agriculture model of large farms can the downward spiral of poverty, low wages, rural-urban migration, hunger and environmental degradation be halted. Most oppose the out-of-control trade liberalization as they consider it the main mechanism driving farmers off their land and the principal obstacle to local economic development and food sovereignty. These movements embrace the concept of food sovereignty, which constitutes an alternative to the current mainstream thinking on food production. The concept behind food sovereignty contrasts the neo-liberal approach that believes that international trade will solve the world's food problem. Instead, it focuses on local autonomy, local markets and community action for

access and control of land, water, agrobiodiversity, etc., which are of central importance for communities to be able to produce food locally (via Campesina 2010).

## The way forward

Thousands of projects throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America show convincingly that agroecology provides the scientific, technological and methodological basis to assist small holder farmers enhance crop production in a sustainable and resilient manner thus allowing them to provide for current and future food needs. Agroecological methods produce more food on less land, using less energy, less water while enhancing the natural resource base, providing ecological services and lowering outputs of greenhouse gases. Researchers at the University of Michigan compared yields of organic versus conventional production for a global dataset of 293 examples and estimated the average yield ratio (organic: non-organic) of different food categories for the developed and the developing world. For most food categories, the average yield ratio was slightly <1.0 for studies in the developed world and >1.0 for studies in the developing world (Table 4). This means that the global south has the agroecological potential to produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain the current human population, and potentially an even larger population, without increasing the agricultural land base. The reason why the potential resides in the South and not in the North, is because in developing countries still resides a large peasant-indigenous population, with a rich traditional agricultural knowledge and a broad genetic diversity which conforms the basis of resilient diversified agroecosystems.

[http://www.organicvalley.coop/fileadmin/pdf/organics\\_an\\_feed\\_world.pdf](http://www.organicvalley.coop/fileadmin/pdf/organics_an_feed_world.pdf)

**Table 4.** Global comparison of yields of organic versus conventional production using an average yield ratio (organic: non-organic). **1,0:** org.=conventional < **1,0:** conventional higher than organic. >**1,0:** organic higher than

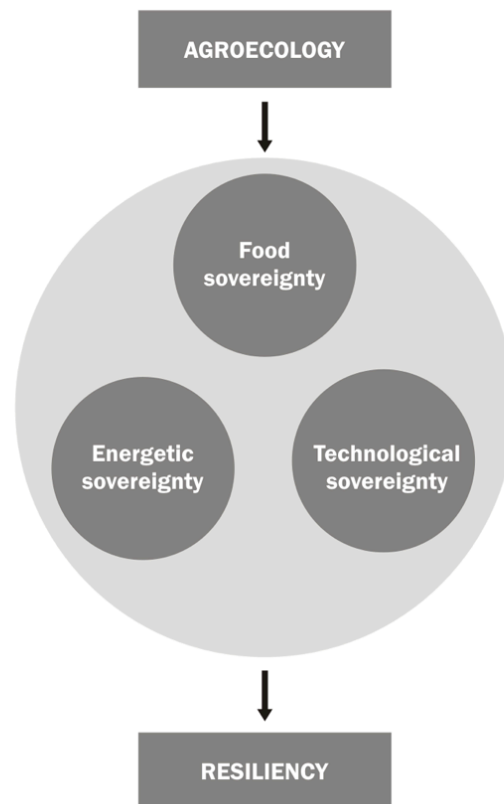
Food category	(A) World			(B) Developed countries			(C) Developing countries		
	N	Av.	S.E.	N	Av.	S.E.	N	Av.	S.E.
Grain products	171	1.312	0.06	69	0.928	0.02	102	1.573	0.09
Starchy roots	25	1.686	0.27	14	0.891	0.04	11	2.697	0.46
Sugars and sweeteners	2	1.005	0.02	2	1.005	0.02			
Legumes (pulses)	9	1.522	0.55	7	0.816	0.07	2	3.995	1.68
Oil crops and veg. oils	15	1.078	0.07	13	0.991	0.05	2	1.645	0.00
Vegetables	37	1.064	0.10	31	0.876	0.03	6	2.038	0.44
Fruits, excl. wine	7	2.080	0.43	2	0.955	0.04	5	2.530	0.46
All plant foods	266	1.325	0.05	138	0.914	0.02	128	1.736	0.09
Meat and offal	8	0.988	0.03	8	0.988	0.03			
Milk, excl. butter	18	1.434	0.24	13	0.949	0.04	5	2.694	0.57
Eggs	1	1.060		1	1.060				
All animal foods	27	1.288	0.16	22	0.968	0.02	5	2.694	0.57
All plant and animal foods	293	1.321	0.05	160	0.922	0.01	133	1.802	0.09

The evidence is overwhelming, so the question is what else is needed to convince policy makers and funders to take a brave stand and bid on agroecology? The issue seems to be political or ideological rather than evidence or science based. No matter what data is presented, governments and donors influenced by big interests marginalize agroecological approaches focusing on quick-fix, external input intensive ‘solutions’ and proprietary technologies such as transgenic crops and chemical fertilizers that not only pose serious environmental risks but have proven to be inaccessible and inappropriate to poor and small farmers that play a key role in global food security.

In addition to climate change, repeated food price spikes, shortages of good-quality land and water, and rising energy costs will prove major challenges to secure food security for all. This is why the agroecological strategy also aims at enhancing energy and technological sovereignty (Figure 4). Energy sovereignty is the right for all rural people to have access to or generate sufficient energy within ecological limits from sustainable sources. Technological sovereignty refers to the capacity to achieve the two other forms of sovereignty by optimizing agrobiodiversity designs that efficiently use local resources and encourage synergies that sponsor the functioning of agroecosystems. This new paradigm of the “three sovereignties” gives agroecology a greater scope as a tool to determine the minimum acceptable values for food production, biodiversity conservation, energy efficiency, etc., allowing rural communities to assess whether or not they are advancing towards a basic state of food, energy and technological sovereignty in a context of resiliency.

Governments have a major role to play such as providing incentives for farmers to adopt resource-conserving technologies and revive public agroecological research and extension programs suited to the needs and circumstances of smallholder farmers, their associations and networks. National governments need to increase poor people’s access to land, seeds, water and other resources vital pre-requisites for rural food security. All this must be accompanied by initiatives that enable the creation of, and access to, markets that return fair prices for small-scale producers, and protect peasants from global trade policies and dumping that do not safeguard the strategic position of domestic producers in national food systems.

It is time for the international community to recognize that there is no other more viable path to



**Figure 4.** The three types of sovereignty to be reached by an agricultural community or region by following agroecological principles and in the context of a resiliency strategy (Altieri et al 2011)

food production in the XXI Century than agroecology. Developing a resilient agriculture will require technologies and practices that build on agro-ecological knowledge and enable smallholder farmers to counter environmental degradation and climate change in ways that maintain sustainable agricultural livelihoods. The need to scale up the agroecological approach is long overdue and in fact is the most robust pathway food provisioning pathway for humanity to take under current and predicted and difficult climate, energy, financial and social scenarios. Whether the potential and spread of local agroecological innovations described above, is scaled up to reach all the small farmers of a region cannot be left only to the political will of governments. It will largely depend on the ability of the various actors (including consumers) and organizations involved in the agroecological revolution to make the necessary alliances to exert pressure so that farmers can gain increasing access to agroecological knowledge as well as to land, seeds, government services, solidarious markets, and so on. Rural social movements understand that dismantling the industrial agrifood complex and restoring local food systems must be accompanied by the construction of agroecological alternatives that suit the needs of small-scale producers and the low-income non-farming population while opposing

corporate control over production and consumption (Vanderploeg 2009). Of key importance will be the formulation of an agroecological research agenda with the active participation of farmers in the process of technological innovation and dissemination through Campesino Campesino models where researchers, extension workers and NGO technicians can play a major facilitating role (Altieri and Toledo 2011).

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