

1ST EASTERN AFRICA AGROECOLOGY CONFERENCE:

Transforming Food Systems for Responsible Production,
Consumption and Social Wellbeing

CONCEPT NOTE

By

Biovision Africa Trust &
Organizing Partners¹

Date:

21st-24th March 2023

Venue:

Safari Park Hotel,
Nairobi, Kenya



¹ Organizing partners: Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock, KOAN, ISFAA, BIBA and PELUM Kenya

1. Introduction and Context

Global challenges, such as food insecurity, deteriorating health, biodiversity loss, disease and pest resistance which have been exacerbated by climate change continue to be felt with phenomenal consequences especially in Africa. In addition, shocks such as the recent COVID-19 have further negatively impacted key livelihood indices such as the Food Price Index which recorded a 26.8 per cent rise in 2021 relative to 2019. The Russia-Ukraine and its effects on export capacity, fuel and fertilizer shortages, as well as landmine contamination, have ravaged agricultural systems and sent shockwaves through global markets This is despite investments by governments, development partners and multi-national corporations in agriculture in pursuit of industrial optimization and economic short-term gains.

World hunger has been on the rise since 2015 and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reports that the number of food-insecure people rose by 318 million in 2020, 86 million of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of food insecurity with a staggering 66 percent of the population being affected. The Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study, an African Union Commission Initiative has demonstrated a direct link between poor nutrition and economic development, estimating that countries lose between 2 and 16 per cent of their annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because of childhood stunting. Additionally, malnutrition is linked to poverty, low levels of education and poor access to health, including reproductive health services and family planning. For Africa, these challenges threaten the realisation of the African Union (AU)'s Agenda 2063 'The Africa We Want'.

The AU has thus renewed commitment to actions towards strengthening resilience in food and nutrition security on the African continent and to strengthening agri-food systems. As such, the leadership of the African Union and African Heads of State and Government has declared 2022 the Year of Nutrition for Africa. In the context of strengthening Resilience in Nutrition and Food Security on the African Continent the theme reads as: Strengthening Agro-Food Systems, Health and Social Protection Systems for the Acceleration of Human, Social and Economic Capital Development. This builds on the outcomes of the Year of Action on Nutrition 2021, and the Nutrition for Growth and UN Food Systems Summit, to motivate the global community to step up and match this action.



Growing Sustainably

To develop trust in agroecology as a basis for transitioning food systems, evidence should be assembled and shared. Based on evidence of successful interventions in the field and in trade around the world, the Eastern Africa conference organizers believe that agroecology and ecological organic production systems hold the future of the region's food systems.

The health effects of pesticide misuse have become one of the major public health problems worldwide. In developing countries, frequent exposure to pesticides by farmers and farm workers is a serious concern. This results in both short-term (acute) and long-term (chronic) illnesses. The misuse has been documented most recently in a study by Route to Food Initiative indicating results of pesticide misuse in Murang'a and Kirinyaga counties in Kenya.

A major transformation of food systems is needed to achieve food and nutrition security globally in the context of a changing climate. It is now extensively recognised as the phenomenon and has severe negative impacts on livelihoods and food systems worldwide and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Strohmaier et al., 2016). This has been highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and the Special Report on Climate Change and Land (IPCC, 2018; IPCC, 2019).

The challenges with low soil fertility, erosion, contamination and diminishing agricultural land require long term and sustainable approaches to resolve. Such approaches include the Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA)/ agroecological approaches.

2. The 2023 Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference

This conference aims to invoke consciousness and motivate regional and continental communities to dialogue how to invest in interventions which can ameliorate the negative impacts of the current unsustainable food systems by transitioning towards more environmentally friendly solutions with long-term vision and planning.

The conference will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, at Safari Park Hotel from 21st - 24th March 2023 and will include exhibitions, plenary and breakout sessions as well as field excursions to agroecological enterprises. The conference will be a hybrid event comprising in-person attendance and livestreaming for on-line participants.

Rationale of the Conference

1. This conference comes after the 1st International Conference on Agroecology Transforming Agriculture & Food Systems in Africa with Theme: Reducing Synthetic Fertilizers and Pesticides by scaling up Agroecology and Promoting Ecological Organic Trade held from 18th-21st June 2019 in the same hotel in Nairobi organized by BvAT, IFOAM Organics International and World Food Preservation Center® LLC. The conference will provide opportunity to share lessons learned and actions taken so far.
2. The conference comes up following the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) to share national and regional food systems transformation paths in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).
3. The conference provides a platform for key proponents of Agroecology at which discussions and inspirations for dynamic transition towards agroecology-based food systems in terms of production, consumption, and markets can be held by diverse actors.
4. The conference provides opportunity for decision-makers, private and public players to show how food systems can contribute to safe, equitable, resilient, and culturally diverse systems in terms of production, distribution, processing, consumption, farmer organization and markets and demystify the minimalist approach to agroecology.
5. Build case for a solid role for women and youth in the production of nutritious food by recognizing and engaging them as active partners in sustainable food systems.

Shared Vision

Access to sufficient and healthy food for all, produced in a way that respects the environment and provides fair income to producers.

Purpose of the conference

Contributing to the sustainable transformation of food systems towards responsible production, consumption, and markets in Eastern Africa, from farm to plate.

Conference title

1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference: Transforming Food Systems for Responsible Production, Consumption and Social Wellbeing.

Theme

Strengthening Resilience and Sustainability in Food Systems for Environmental and Social-Economic Development.

Conference sub-themes

1. Production, productivity, scaling up and sustainability of farming systems based on environmentally friendly technologies and methodologies.
2. Best practices towards food security, nutrition, consumption, and health: Soil health and farmer managed seed systems.
3. Women and youth in agroecology.
4. Ecological organic trade, markets, and economy.
5. Institutional and policy drivers for agroecology transformations.
6. Financing agroecological transformations.

Sub-theme 1: Production, productivity, scaling up and sustainability of farming systems based on environmentally friendly technologies and methodologies

It is increasingly recognized that food systems in Eastern Africa, as well as Africa in general, are not sustainable in their status; they contribute to carbon emissions and continue to contribute to the loss of biodiversity. Agroecological systems depend on integrated practices and technologies such as crop rotation, cover crops, water harvesting and conservation, and farmer managed seed systems. Broadly agroecology promotes food systems that conserve the environment, soil health and lead to sustainable agricultural efficiency. The agricultural sector is a key economic and social driver of development goals of most countries and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including direct contribution to the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP), country exports and employment. In Eastern Africa, despite the key role agriculture plays in development, it faces a myriad of challenges including smallholder farmers' inability to control pests and diseases, high cost of inputs as well as aging farmers. This thematic area invites presentations that show how successful agroecological cases address issues of food systems and how such cases can be promoted and scaled out to reach significant number of producers and consumers.

Sub-theme 2: Best practices towards food security, nutrition, consumption, and health: Soil health and farmer managed seed systems

Best practices in addressing food and nutrition insecurity including policy, systems and environmental change strategies required by diverse stakeholders to implement are urgently needed now than ever to avert large-scale future shortages. Beyond adequate production to ensure calories intake, proper nutrition ensures micronutrient availability and healthy diets. Unhealthy diets and lifestyles are closely linked to various non-communicable diseases associated with increased risk of chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, as well as higher health care costs, decreased academic achievement, lower productivity and widening health disparities. Food and nutrition insecurity came to the forefront of dialogues issues following the COVID-19 pandemic globally. The African Union recently announced the goal of ending hunger and increasing healthy eating by 2025 and declared 2021 the Year of Nutrition so that fewer Africans experience diet-related diseases. This sub-theme invites presentations and opportunities for sessions to discuss best practices in how to address food and nutrition insecurity in order to promote optimal health, reduce risk of chronic disease, and eliminate health inequities and disparities.

Sub-theme 3: Women and Youth in agroecology

Rural women are the backbone of agriculture and food security in most developing countries. Comprising 43 percent of the global agricultural labour force, women play a crucial part in all levels of global food production. Consequently, women being left out of agricultural advancement not only prevents them from progressing and achieving their goals, but also this affects their communities and especially in household food security. FAO estimates that if women were to have the same access to resources as men, agricultural yields could increase by as much as 20-30 percent, with the potential to reduce food insecurity for an astounding 100-150 million people globally. Presentations will be sought to show the contributions of women, their traditional knowledge, consumption patterns and household food security in agroecology and safe and healthy livelihoods.

Advancement in ICT provide opportunity for agro-ecology sector to contribute to stable and resilient food systems by addressing information gap. With around 50 percent of the world's population being youth and more so in the developing countries, the future of the world depends much on what they choose to do in food production. Digital technologies are providing solutions and innovation is imperative for inclusion of young people. Presentations at the conference will show the youth are unlocking the potential of food and agriculture by innovations geared towards reducing poverty, bridging the rural divide, creating employment and giving access to information, technology and market opportunities.

Sub-theme 4: Ecological organic trade, markets, and economy

Organic trade is rapidly growing globally. This demonstrates that organic products are moving from the "niche" space to mainstream markets. The total land under certified organic production worldwide has reached over 72.3 million ha and with Africa having about 2.0 million ha (FiBL and IFOAM Organics International, 2021). However, statistics on organic agriculture in Africa in general are extremely limited, illustrating the still relatively nascent status of the sector, despite its potential and a long tradition of the organic movement across the continent. Presentations on this thematic area will cover areas such as regulatory, business, and consumer environments; standards, certification and accreditation; stimulants and barriers to organic trade amongst others.

Sub-theme 5: Institutional and policy drivers for agroecology transformations

Globally, there is an increasing shift to overhaul and integrate policies affecting food by bringing together different actors to build common long-term goals and strategies around food policies. A key requirement is to review policies with negative consequences for adoption of agroecological practices and those that produce positive effects and stimulate adoption and scales up. Areas such as farmer managed seed systems, organic product identification and marketing, financing and investment environments, research into organic systems require policy and institutional grounding. These policies must be based on reliable, timely and locally relevant data and evidence on the multidimensional performance of agroecology. Presentations will show strategies of bringing together political decision-makers, and other actors involved in the development of policies, strategies and programmes related to food systems and how they contribute to national development goals and SDG goals including food and nutrition security and a healthy environment.

Sub-theme 6: Financing agroecological transformations

Agro-ecological transformations require changes in what is produced and how it is produced, processed, transported and consumed. Since food systems need to be transformed, the current financial architecture also needs to be re-designed and prepared to support such an agroecological transformation. Such changes not only require significant financial resources but also need to compete with conventional agriculture requirements. Presentations under this sub-theme will show funding models for initiatives that encourage a switch to agroecological systems, this includes Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS), business models that promote agroecological value chains, public-private and other types of partnerships, inclusive financial services and products, financial technology solutions, and resource mobilization tools and strategies that facilitate redesigning of agroecosystems and trigger food systems change.

Scope

- **Thematic scope:** Food systems transformation (including agriculture, nutrition, environment, markets, consumption) through agroecology
- **Geographic scope:** Eastern Africa countries

Expected Outcomes

1. **Embraced overall food systems transformation agenda** in Eastern Africa in line with agroecological principles and practices.
2. **Connected and strengthened ecosystem of organizations and initiatives** working towards food systems transformation based on agroecology.
3. **Advanced strategies and joint initiatives** on key levers for food systems transformation (knowledge generation & dissemination, policy reform, market systems development, investments - amongst others).
4. **Enhanced support and implementation** of agroecology-oriented policies from government institutions and other key stakeholders in the region.

Expected Outputs

1. Key challenges occasioned by rapid changes in agriculture and their impact on people, crops and the environment, and possible mitigation measures identified.
2. Awareness about the potential of agroecology for sustainable production, consumption and contribution to green economy created.
3. Successful examples and initiatives that show agroecology works showcased and amplified.
4. Opportunities for strengthening agroecology agenda and practice identified and action plans created
5. Conference report, conference resolutions, policy brief (or conference journal). Key elements of the conference declaration will be developed in advance and backed up during the conference.

Target Groups

The Conference will bring together over 500 participants (300 physical, 200 virtual) and 50 exhibitors from various countries who have a strong interest in the growth and development of agroecology. Specifically, the participants will include:

- Policy makers and governments, representatives from various related line Ministries (agriculture, health, environment, water, etc.) at national and regional levels
- Organizations and initiatives working towards food systems transformation
- Farmers and Farmer Organizations
- Civil Society Organizations including consumer associations
- Private sector
- Strategic partners and donor agencies
- Academia and research institutions
- Local, national, regional and international media

Format

- Pre-conference meetings and webinars
- Main conference (2 days, hybrid), consisting of:
 - i. Plenary sessions on food system transformation topics, with inspiring keynote presentations and panel discussions involving key stakeholders
 - ii. Break-out sessions along conference tracks with interactive formats (short presentations, panel discussions, fish-bowl discussions, World Cafés).
- Excursions to actors of agroecological value chains

3. Program Structure

Timing	Day 1: Pre-conference	Day 2: Conference	Day 3: Conference	Day 4: Excursions
Morning (9:00-12:30)	Arrivals / pre-conference meetings (self-organized)	Registrations Opening speeches Keynotes Exhibition visits	Breakout sessions (tracks aligned with sub-themes): 2 sessions with coffee break in-between Exhibition visits	Excursions on agroecology areas of best practices
Lunch		Lunch	Lunch	
Afternoon (14:00-17:30)		Breakout sessions (tracks aligned with sub-themes): 2 sessions with coffee break in-between exhibition visits	Plenary discussion and closing ceremony	
Dinner	Welcome reception	Gala dinner	Dinner (for on-boarders)	

4. Conference Organization

- Lead organization: Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT)
- Conference Organizing Committee (COC) consisting of key partners: Developing and approving the concept and budget, reviewing progress, approving adaptations, ensuring buy-in and outreach
- Four Sub-Committees
 - Themes and Abstracts
 - Budget and Fundraising
 - Communication and Publicity
 - Logistics and Field Visit

5. Proposed partners

The following are proposed partners but not limited. The conference invites more partners to join the conference:

- National agroecology movement organizations (NOAMs, PELUM, BIBA, Slow Food)
- African Union (AU)
- Relevant ministries (Agriculture, environment, Health, Trade, etc) in East African countries
- Regional Economic Communities (RECs)
- International organisations: FAO, UNEP
- International Coalitions and Movements such as AFSA, ISFAA, TPP, YALTA Initiative, INOFO, etc
- Donors: SDC, BMZ/GIZ, Biovision Foundation, SSNC, HIVOS, Heinrich Boll Foundation, Agroecology Fund amongst others

6. Budget

A total of USD 350,000 is estimated for the conference (Details in a separate document). The funds, including seed fund for the next conference, will be raised through various sources including:

- Development partner contributions and donations
- Participant registrations and exhibitions
- Project contributions
- Philanthropists
- In-kind contributions



Growing Sustainably

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