



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Enabling Extension and Advisory Services to facilitate Innovations for Agroecology

E-discussion
and
Webinar on

29 September 2022

Background

The agrifood systems of today are affected by multiple challenges that if not properly addressed, may lead to significant environmental, social and economic impacts on farmer and consumer communities around the world. There is a global consensus that business-as-usual is not an option. Complex issues require innovative and sustainable solutions, transformative systems thinking and paradigm shifts. Agroecology is increasingly seen as one of the innovative approaches that can contribute to conservation of biodiversity, save resources and energy and ultimately support the sustainable agrifood systems transformation. Pluralistic Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) are best positioned to facilitate and accelerate innovations and transformative processes at the hearth of rural communities, bridging communities, organizations and decision-makers.

“This is a paradigm shift that moves us away from viewing nature as a threat that needs to be contained, and instead, enhances productivity in harmony with ecological processes so that farms become sustainable, resilient and productive. In other words, a system of agroecological production”;

Gilbert F. Hougbo President, IFAD, Scaling Up Agroecology to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
Proceedings of the Second FAO International Symposium, 3-5 April, 2018, Italy

The FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub describes agroecology as “a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. (...) Agroecology is concurrently a science, a set of practices and a social movement and has evolved as a concept over recent decades to expand in scope from a focus on fields and farms to encompass the entirety of agriculture and food systems. It now represents a transdisciplinary field that includes the ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption. (...) Ending poverty and achieving zero hunger, while ensuring inclusive growth and sustainably managing the planet’s natural resources, all in the context of climate change and biodiversity loss, will only be possible through holistic and integrated approaches that respect human rights”. (FAO)

“Ours is a mini world. There are maybe more than two hundred varieties [of crops] growing on our plot.”
Jagadish, Indian farmer, Via Campesina, 2021

Agroecology is knowledge-intensive and relies both on farmers’ knowledge and experience, and research and innovation. But in order to bring agroecological practices to life, rural producers need systematic support. This is where extension and advisory services (EAS) come in, to provide constant assistance and advice, empower producers to experiment and innovate with agroecological practices, and help document and scale up promising solutions. To do so, however, EAS providers, including public actors and knowledge and service providers, need to be aware of agroecological farming practices and have access to up-to-date science for sustainable solutions.

Are extension and advisory services ready to provide this needed and systematic support? In most of the cases the response is sadly no, although with an increasing pluralism in service providers we can also find actors who already work with agroecology. However, the EAS system as a whole needs to undergo a paradigm shift – to transcend the narrow narrative of increasing food production and commercialization, while prioritizing the experience and knowledge of rural producers and agroecosystemic sustainability (FAO, 2022).

What does facilitating agroecological innovations look like in practice?

Extension and advisory services should adopt a holistic approach and look at all forms of sustainability, including social inclusion. The EAS should become a key partner of rural producers and other actors in the agrifood systems to co-create tailored responses to local challenges, bridging traditional knowledge and science.

EAS providers should adopt a territorial approach, provide wide-ranging advice on agroecological practices, bridge modern science and practice with traditional and local knowledge, and promote horizontal exchanges that empower producers to co-create knowledge and identify locally derived and appropriate solutions. Diversified farming systems contribute to the achievement of food sovereignty, social and economic equity, and environmental sustainability (FAO, 2022).

“Through agroecological farming, we have been able to reduce our expenses and gain knowledge from other farmers during our Farmer Field School sessions, and how to implement their suggestions in our fields”,

Sowjanya Ekula, farmer from India, FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub

“If Agroecology makes sense, it is because it relies on social and cultural diversity to build a common project, a collective ambition, a universal choice, a choice for humanity”

Stéphane Le Foll Former Minister of Agriculture of France and Member of French Parliament, Scaling Up Agroecology to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Proceedings of the Second FAO International Symposium, 3-5 April, 2018, Italy

About the initiative

FAO promotes extension and advisory services that put producers and sustainability at the center of the innovation process, and hence are aligned with the main principles of agroecological philosophy. As it is quite a new area, efforts are needed to enable EAS to support effective and efficient agroecology approaches. That is why FAO is hosting an e-discussion and a webinar on this topic, to share experiences and knowledge, document good practices and kick off a global dialogue on EAS and agroecology.

The e-discussion will be conducted in September 2022 and will be focused on the following key questions:

- **What are the experiences of extension and advisory services (public agencies, NGOs, producer organizations, private companies and others) in facilitating agroecological innovations? What good practices and lessons learnt are there?**
- **What should EAS start doing, do differently or stop doing to effectively support innovative agroecological approaches?**
- **What capacities do EAS providers need to effectively facilitate agroecological innovations?**
- **What policy and institutional support is needed for EAS to be at the frontline of promoting sustainable agroecology practices?**

The **e-discussion** will have a simple and easy-to-use format of a Google document where everybody will be able to contribute and see contributions of others. More information can be found [here](#).

The **webinar**, planned for 29 September 2022 will bring together insights from the e-discussion and will:

- **Identify critical issues, challenges and barriers to effective scaling up of agroecological innovations by EAS**
- **Propose improvements of the enabling environment, such as policy options, financial mechanisms and successful business models**

Practitioners, experts and policy makers from around the world are warmly invited to take part in this dialogue and share their experiences, views and concerns on these issues.

Target audience

- Practitioners from donor agencies, NGOs, EAS and agroecology agencies, civil society and private sector
- Academia experts and EAS
- Policy makers
- Farmer representatives

More about how to make EAS transition to agroecology possible can be found here: [Enabling extension and advisory services to promote agroecology](#) (FAO, 2022).

References: FAO. 2022.

Enabling extension and advisory services to promote agroecology. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8221en/cb8221en.pdf>

FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub. <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/home/en/>