

Agroecology Approaches Towards Sustainable Agriculture and Food System: Reviewing and Exploring Selected Policies and Strategic Documents through an Agroecological Lens

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Abstract : The global food system is at a crossroads, which requires prompt action to minimize the effects of the crises. Agroecology is gaining prominence due to its contributions to sustainable food systems. To support efforts in mitigating the crises, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) established alternative approaches for sustainable agri-food systems. Agroecological elements and principles were developed to guide and support measures that countries need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs require the systemic integration of practices for a smart intensification or adaptation of traditional or industrial agriculture. As one of the countries working towards SDGs, the agricultural practices in Ethiopia need to be guided by these agroecological elements and principles. Aiming at the identification of challenging aspects of a sustainable agri-food system and the characterization of an enabling environment for agroecology, as well as exploring to what extent the existing policies and strategies support the agroecological transition process, five policy and strategy documents were reviewed. These documents are the Rural Development Policy and Strategy, the Environment Policy, the Biodiversity Policy, and the Soil Strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Using the Agroecology Criteria Tool (ACT), the contents were reviewed, focusing on agroecological requirements and the inclusion of sustainable practices. ACT is designed to support a self-assessment of elements supporting agroecology. For each element, binary values were assigned based on the inclusion of the minimum requirements index and then validated through discussion with the document owners. The results showed that the documents were well below the requirements for an agroecological transition of the agri-food system. The Rural Development Policy and Strategy only suffice to 83% in Human and Social Value. It does not support the transition concerning the other elements. The Biodiversity Policy and Soil Strategy suffice regarding the inclusion of Co-creation and Sharing of knowledge (100%), while the remaining elements were not considered sufficiently. In contrast, the Environment Policy supports the transition with three elements accounting for 100%. These are Resilience, Recycling, and Human and Social Care. However, when the four documents were combined, elements such as Synergies, Diversity, Efficiency, Human and Social value, Responsible governance, and Co-creation and Sharing of knowledge were identified as fully supportive (100%). This showed that the policies and strategies complemented one another to a certain extent. However, the evaluation results call for improvements concerning elements like Culture and food traditions, Circular and solidarity economy, Resilience, Recycling, and Regulation and balance since the majority of the elements were not sufficiently observed. Consequently, guidance for the smart intensification of local practices is needed, as well as traditional knowledge enriched with advanced technologies. Ethiopian agricultural and environmental policies and strategies should provide sufficient support and guidance for the intensification of sustainable practices and should provide a framework for an agroecological transition towards a sustainable agri-food system.

Keywords : agroecology, diversity, recycling, sustainable food system, transition

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