

# Agroecological Transition and International Co-operation in West Africa:

**A CALL FOR URGENT ACTION**



Document prepared by  
***AZIONE TERRÆ*: Coalition for Agroecological  
Transition**

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## AZIONE TERRÆ: Coalition for Agroecological Transition is composed by:



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## PREFACE

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**This paper is the output of a process of exchange**, undertaken by a group of International Cooperation NGOs, which have been working in West Africa for many years, and Italian and European networks active in the agroecological transition, linked to farmers organisations, research institutions, CSOs.

**It is meant as a contribution** to review international cooperation in one of the most critical areas of the planet, which we want to share with all the people, associations, institutions involved on these issues.

**It is a call to urgent action**, to meet the complex challenges that the current crisis poses, which we address to international cooperation agencies and all the stakeholders in the Region.

**It is an invitation** to mobilize all available resources in support of immediate and effective responses in a systemic and long-term perspective.

# SUMMARY

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<b>1. A CRITICAL SCENARIO .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. AGROECOLOGY RESPONSE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1 LAND .....	3
3.2 SEEDS.....	3
3.3 MARKETS .....	4
3.4 SERVICES.....	5
3.5 WOMEN.....	6
3.6 YOUTH .....	7
<b>4. PROGRAMMES, ACTORS, FINANCIAL TOOLS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NOTES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>16</b>

## 1. A CRITICAL SCENARIO

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**West Africa, particularly in the Sahelian belt, is currently experiencing a severe crisis where the greatest global challenges of our time meet:** climate change<sup>1</sup>, population growth<sup>2</sup>, social inequalities<sup>3</sup>, human rights violation. An explosive mix that ignites a number of disruptive processes across the region: conflicts and insecurity, international and internal migrations, a massive exodus from rural areas to urban centres unprepared to receive the flows<sup>4</sup>, recurrent food crises, insufficient job and income opportunities.

**It is a picture aggravated by the lack of recognition of the role and rights of women<sup>5</sup>, and by the absence of prospects for young people.** In this context, the increase in "livelihood insecurity" and the loosening of social cohesion, in areas of limited state control, furthers the entry of armed jihadist movements creating, as a consequence a growing instability, the basis for a "securization" of the governance<sup>6</sup>, as is the case of the G5Sahel and the Sahel Alliance conditioning intervention and development policies in the area<sup>7</sup>, to the point of structuring them. **The arrival of Covid-19 is expected to aggravate this scenario.** The epidemic, and the measures taken by governments to contain its spread, are already limiting even more access to food, work and income for the most vulnerable sectors of the population, projecting their negative impact in the medium-long term.

**International cooperation**, despite counting on important financial resources to allocate in the region, **lacks a strategy that meets these challenges** and appears to be focused on emergency as a central if not exclusive response, with an approach of short-term humanitarian aid and militarization of conflict management.

**In a context where the majority of the population lives in rural areas**, where it gets the resources for food security and income generation, **land it's not recognized as the foundation to build up a systemic response to the crisis**, capable of holding together its different fronts towards the objectives of Sustainable Development indicated by the United Nations 2030 Agenda. This underestimation of the land and its role can lead to the marginalization of the Sahelian food systems, that are able, thanks to their supply chains, to produce, transform and market up to 80% of the food needed in the region, such as cereals, oilseeds, roots and tubers, legumes, oil and sugar. Therefore, the conditions to disconnect urban markets from the rural systems would be created, increasing the dependence on import, with negative effects on the employment opportunities for young people, on the increase in poverty and socio-economic gap<sup>8</sup>, on the deprivation of rights and eventually on the growth and spread of conflicts across the region.

## 2. AGROECOLOGY RESPONSE

**Agroecology is an integrated approach** that applies ecological and social principles to the management and design of agricultural and food systems. It focuses on the **transition towards sustainable and resilient models**, centred on the development of biodiversity and functional interactions between plants, animals, people, minimizing the need for external inputs<sup>9</sup>.

It **promotes cooperation between producers, civil society, research and institutions** to carry out direct actions, supported by adequate public policies, using participatory tools to contribute to the co-creation of knowledge between the peasant world and the scientific community.

**It is an approach that requires continuous experimentation** by farmers and technicians, in constant evolution with the variation of the internal and external factors of the agro-ecosystem, aiming at producing a complex variety of goods while improving the quality of the environment and diversifying income opportunities<sup>10</sup>.

Within this vision, **health** is an issue of **utmost importance**, pursued by eliminating the risks of contamination related to the use of herbicides and pesticides, by improving the nutritional values of the products, by containing the onset of diseases as Covid-19, related to intensive farming and the destruction of natural habitats caused by industrial agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, Agroecology has gained increasing international recognition and it **was included in 2019 by FAO as a key strategy in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda**. Seen as an integrated approach, and not the sum of single methods and techniques, Agroecology is regarded as a more effective means for the creation of resilient territorial food systems than sectoral models and techniques (such as climate-smart agriculture). **In West Africa, it is supported by important regional and international networks**, such as ROPPA, *Réseaux de Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique del Ouest*<sup>12</sup>, and the 3AO (Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa), a platform created in 2018 in Dakar by peasant organizations, institutes of research and universities, international NGOs and social movements<sup>13</sup>.

Thanks to its systemic approach, and its ability to mobilize different actors and stakeholders, Agroecology can promote inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies for food production and natural resources management also in West Africa and the Sahel.

**It's contribution can therefore proves decisive to overcome the crisis in the region, by implementing strategies which are appropriate to the specific conditions of the Sahelian context:** favouring family and peasant businesses, enhancing the role of women and young people, strengthening associative models adequate to guarantee participation and representation of all the stakeholders, and to facilitate dialogue with the institutions from the local, to the national and regional levels.

In this framework, **special effort should be directed to widen the support to public policies consistent with the agro-ecological vision**, on priority issues such as: the distribution and access to primary resources; the protection of biodiversity and the heritage of traditional seeds and their intellectual property; the recognition of peasant knowledge; the commercial protection of local

products and the promotion of territorial markets; the development of agriculture also in urban and peri-urban areas; the development of research and investments needed to sustain the ongoing transition.

### 3. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

#### 3.1 LAND

**Land**, as a continuum of agriculture and grazing soils, forests, waters, **for Sahelian people is life**, link with their roots, means of production, source of essential services, condition for resilience. However, it's also an **increasingly scarce resource, getting less accessible day after day for the most vulnerable**: youth, women, migrants, minorities. That's due, **on the environmental side**, to desertification, soils erosion, salinization and deforestation, as a consequence of climate changes and unsustainable practices. **On the social side**, to the combined effect of farms fragmentation and concentration: the first for the fast-growing demographic pressure, the second for land grabbing, biomass production for energy, and other speculative trends. All these elements, exasperated by migration processes, both national and regional, and by urbanisation, have the worst impact on the frail sector of the population, emphasising inequality, with regard to access, and insecurity, with regard to land law.

Agroecology can address all these elements as interdependent drivers of crisis of a single socio-environmental system, by developing the **following actions** as part of a comprehensive approach:

- a) **Recovery and sustainable management of natural resources** (soil, forests, waters), and **agro-forestry-pastoral systems**, to develop integrated and multi-functional local economies in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, collection of wild plants, fishing and ecosystem services supply<sup>14</sup>.
- b) **The development of inclusive and accountable land and water governance tools**, with particular emphasis on community management arrangements and sustainable financing mechanisms (guarantee funds).
- c) **Capacity building for conflict management and solving, concerning natural resources**, including interstate transhumance axes, and support to the intercommunal and national initiatives on land policies, laws and committees for inclusion and peace<sup>15</sup>.

#### 3.2 SEEDS

Building up the resilience of the agro-food systems, in a context of unpredictable climate variability, needs the **development of decentralised and participatory standards of genetic investigation and dissemination**, within a wider vision of biodiversity promotion from the seed to the landscape and recognition of the value of traditional seeds varieties.<sup>16</sup>

In this perspective, it is necessary to promote a paradigm shift in the agricultural research and dissemination system, while at the same time promoting the evolution of policies in support of it. **The theme of agrobiodiversity at all its levels, from seeds to knowledge related to them, must become transversal in rural development projects** as now enshrined in international agreements such as the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). **The issues of sustainable use of agrobiodiversity (art. 6) and farmers' rights (art. 9)- the**

**cornerstones of the Treaty- should be read as axes on which to guide agricultural development and cooperation policies** to reduce the negative effect of current modernization policies in southern countries. In this perspective, a greater exchange between Europe and West African countries would be desirable in order to present and enhance the openings that Europe has been making in recent years on the issue of agrobiodiversity.

As stated in *The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, ITPGRF, which Italy strongly supports<sup>17</sup>, we find it necessary to **develop actions** aimed at:

- a) **Securing farmers full access to national genetic resources**, by supporting on field evaluation and reproduction.
- b) **Development of programmes of participatory seed selection and circulation by creating “seeds systems” on a local scale.**
- c) **Promotion of community management of such genetic resources** through *Community Seed Banks*<sup>18</sup>, focusing on gender equity, and securing its safety by adequate training processes.
- d) **Support to investigation and valuing of *Neglected and Underutilised Species/NUS***<sup>19</sup>, as an important means for the diversification of agro-systems and diets.
- e) **Promote exchanges on regional and international policies** relating to the management of agrobiodiversity with the aim of raising awareness of the changes taking place in the European Union.
- f) **Develop appropriate training programmes** aimed both at the staff of the organisations involved and at local, regional and national institutions to support the coherent implementation of these lines of action in the development and implementation of policies, programmes and projects.

### 3.3 MARKETS

**Access to markets and terms of trade** that small farmers and their organisations would be able to manage, and not to suffer, is a **key condition for them to take full advantage of the varied production of goods**, which is typical of both Agroecology and family-based agriculture in West Africa. **“Territorial markets”**<sup>20</sup>, linked to local, national and regional agro-systems, (as les *marchés hebdomadaires*<sup>21</sup>, an existing and consolidated good experience to be protected and replicated), **play a crucial role in food security, biodiversity conservation and nutrition**, as in the exchange of information and knowledge, development of social relations, women involvement. Above all, they leave added value to farmers and other local economic stakeholders, making all of them less vulnerable to the volatility of global markets. Within the latter, however, it is important to gain room especially for non-food goods, in full respect of the principles of fairness and justice, rewarding the work of their producers.

For all these reasons Agroecology regards **territorial markets as a key resource in the West African region**: both the rural ones, that often cross the borders of different states, and the urban, that act as a bridge between countryside and town, producers and consumers. In the perspective of valuing local produces and the supply of healthy food, by reinforcing links with farmers and their organisations through the **following actions**:

- a) **Quali-quantitative investigations on family-based farms** (*Exploitations Familiales/EF*) and **farmers associations**, by developing existing tools, as the “*Observatoire on EF*” and the methodology of markets participatory research implemented by ROPPA<sup>22</sup>, for policy making, investments development and EF capacity building, including higher awareness and knowledge of food value chains.
- b) **Analysis and promotion of the potential for access to national and international markets of agro-ecological products**, with high added value for the economy of local communities and vulnerable people (such as spices, herbal plants for food supplements, nutraceuticals, organic herbal medicines, cosmetics.)
- c) **Development of direct links between producers and consumers**, through a variety of initiatives capable of intercepting different targets and needs, such as *CSA/Community Supported Agriculture*<sup>23</sup>, catering system, agro-ecological and organic fairs, retail marketing networks.
- d) **Promotion of agreements between producers’ associations and public institutions**, within the framework of social protection policies, for the delivery of meals to schools, nursing homes, prisons, hospital, including urban mobility plans to facilitate the transport of food to cities and towns.
- e) **Support to municipalities in upgrading markets infrastructures and services**, to improve sanitary conditions, reduce environmental impact, recover and recycle solid and liquid waste, including carcasses, for agriculture use.

### 3.4 SERVICES

**Agro-ecological transition needs innovative services that take into account gender equality and dignified job**, to support the producers in terms of rights and work intensification. **Such innovations should encourage the reduction of external inputs and foster an advanced service economy as an employment opportunity for the younger generations**, by creating new professional profiles. This process requires a **strong contribution from research and training, adapted to new needs**. The tertiary function of agriculture with educational and recreational services<sup>24</sup> should be also taken in account, with a view to foster joint ventures between farmers and private operators, as well as the development of context-appropriate certification systems, to attest the added value of agro-ecological production

Italy thanks to its vocation, and high consideration for agro-biodiversity and quality products, as well as to their system of research, innovation and services for small farmers, can play a crucial role in this field, by enhancing a multi-actoral European-African partnership<sup>25</sup> to develop the following actions:

- a) **Development of participatory research** both for the diagnosis and for follow-up of the functioning of ecosystems and the design of innovative Agroecology services.
- b) **Support to the implementation of Agroecology services**, in the following fields:

- information (such as tools of *Information and Communication Technology* for production and marketing)
  - credit and insurance
  - mechanization and transformation (by combining traditional and innovative techniques, using renewable energies, with the aim at promoting local products)
  - Production of organic and eco-friendly inputs for soil fertilising and animal and plants protection.
- c) **Feasibility analysis and promotion of tertiary services**, such as didactics and agritourism, to be delivered by farms especially in urban and peri-urban areas, in partnership with local association and private business.
- d) **Support to producers' associations for the development of integrated supply chains**, for inputs and equipment purchase, products promotion and marketing, improvement of qualitative standards, traceability procedures and certification, also by using alternative approaches such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).

### 3.5 WOMEN

In West Africa **women play a central role in food production, environmental care, rural economies**. On the contrary, their participation to decision-making processes is still marginal, making difficult to bring out their practices, needs, visions, in a context where their rights are barely recognised, and often violate. **Women are the majority among agricultural producers but concerning access to land they are the most penalised social group**. They play a crucial role in food sovereignty and family nutrition: however, this economy of life leaves no trace in public policies, which are still set in patriarchal models of gender inequality. That's why **a fair appreciation of their crucial contribution to agro-ecological transition must go hand in hand with the full recognition of their rights**, as indicated by the CEDAW (*Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General, Recommendation n.34 on the rights of rural women, 2016*<sup>26</sup>)

Agroecology can address these challenges thanks to a comprehensive response that keeps together the complementary paths of social, economic, political empowerment, through the **following actions**:

- a) **Promotion of collective women actors and women public spaces** that would be able to both bring new agro-ecological practices and visions and keep a high level of attention on women rights.
- b) **Development of Income Generating Activities (IGAs) and economic enterprises** with women groups, that would include basic and functional literacy, support to a wide range of activities from production, to conservation, transformation, marketing, business management and credit promotion.
- c) **Support to advocacy initiatives** aimed at changing public policies concerning rights and representation of girls and women.

- d) **Development of women representation** in farmers associations, institutions, land commissions.
- e) **Removal of the obstacles that limit and prevent women from access to resources**, with especial regard to land, water, credit, technology.

### 3.6 YOUTH

**Recognition and enhancement of the role of young people is a pre-condition to counteract their migration from rural areas**, for lack of employment opportunities and poor access to productive resources. As ROPPA points out in the third report of the Observatory of Family Farms ("*Regards de Jeunes ruraux ouest-africains sur l'exploitation familiale*")<sup>27</sup>, it is necessary to understand what the aspirations of young people in rural areas are and to mobilise ourselves in supporting them, training them, consolidating their projects, and accompanying them until the marketing of their products, in order to guarantee them a decent income.

To make staying on the land attractive, and foster intergenerational replacement, it is crucial to **engage concertation processes** in families and communities, CSOs, and PAs, **while promoting job creation and income generating activities, based on skills and capacities development**.

Agroecology can bring a decisive contribution to these processes, according to the **following lines of actions**:

- a) **Skills development**, through training and technical support on agroecology and business management, including cooperatives; training exchanges with other areas and Countries, including Europe; medium term mentoring programmes for young farmers.
- b) **Job creation in agro-forestry-pastoral projects** that would include products transformation, and access to market, ensuring decent working conditions.
- c) **Access to natural resources, technologies, and *ad hoc* financing channels** (grants for startup, credit, incentives and subsidies).
- d) **Development of concertation among groups of young people** living in the same area and support to advocacy initiatives toward local administrations.

## 4. PROGRAMMES, ACTORS, FINANCIAL TOOLS

**The organizations that sign this document have been calling** for a long time, together with movements of farmers and activists from all over the world, **for the transformation of the unsustainable model of development, which also in West Africa is responsible for a serious crisis of the system**. A crisis that is bound to worsen, unless a **significant change of route** is undertaken, capable of igniting an ecological and social transition process. In this process, all the stakeholders should be put in a position to make their contribution, and the role of the "public space" between state and market, where the civil society operates and is present, should be fully recognized.

**In launching this appeal, the signatory organisations are therefore committed to supporting this process starting from their daily actions and projects**, strengthening the coordination of interventions and making their resources and knowledge available, which are also the result of a **long and fruitful experience of collaboration with the whole "Italian system" of international cooperation.**

This cooperation has grown over the years and continues today in all the countries of the region, in different forms and with different instruments: from projects co-financed or entrusted by AICS; to programmes of delegated cooperation with trust funds (*Desert* in Niger); to consortium programmes in Senegal and Burkina Faso with foundations of banking origin<sup>28</sup> and with decentralised cooperation (Piedmont Region, Municipality of Turin, Tuscany Region, Emilia Romagna Region, Municipality of Milan and Lombardy Region, Veneto Region, Province of Bolzano; to university cooperation programmes (University of Turin, Univ.Rome3, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna of Pisa).

It is a framework that is completed, finally, with initiatives alongside local partners in the framework of programmes supported by the EU, national cooperations (e.g. DFID/UK, Luxembourg Cooperation...), and UN system organisations, with which numerous interventions have been implemented or are being implemented to support farmers' and research-action organisations and support resilient agro-ecological transition systems in agro-pastoral and agricultural areas (low impact rice-growing, horticulture, pastoralism).

This set of experiences already underway is taken as a test bench of the proposals indicated in the document, with **the awareness that the transition will be favoured by a sum of policies oriented towards consistent objectives, to be applied at different stages, from projects to programs that encourage the widest participation of all stakeholders in the implementation of the programs defined by the Global Sustainable Development Partnerships**<sup>29</sup>.

Unfortunately, **the available funding and the ongoing initiatives**, although appreciable, **do not look adequate to the requirements of an effective change of development's model**, especially with regard to the **agro-ecological transition**<sup>30</sup>. On a quantitative level, investments in agriculture and health make up only 7% of the expenditure from Public Development Cooperation in Italy. Although our Country combines the experience and the skills to play a strategic role at international level in sectors such as agriculture and food security (OECD Peer Review, 2019), the measures taken on nutrition, agriculture, agro-industry at bilateral and multilateral don't seem to coincide with the compliance, integration and mainstreaming strategy in the MAECI<sup>31</sup> Triennial Planning and Guidance Document (DTPI)<sup>32</sup>, which to date, however, makes no explicit reference to Agroecology, unlike to other international and national cooperation agencies that have formally adopted it.

To overcome these limits, **the dialogue with the civil society should be encouraged and developed**, following the commitments already undertaken by MAECI, as required by the Nairobi Declaration in the context of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation<sup>33</sup>. These

commitments need to be adapted to the change of context and should take into account the guidelines for action proposed by this document, with adequate attention to the processes of analysis and participatory evaluation of the transformative pathways of Agroecology.

**Within this frame of reference**, with a sense of urgency and aiming at enhancing the role of the "Italy system" in the wider context of European co-operation, we propose to develop integrated Multi-Country programs, or Country-programs as part of a Regional Strategy, that would include West Africa Countries classified as high priority by AICS<sup>34</sup> (Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal), alongside Countries of lower priority (Mali, Gambia, Guinea and Guinea Bissau). Three-four years programmes, open to renewal and extension, which should foster the aggregation of a variety of actors sharing a strong commitment to support the agro-ecological transition from different side: peasant movements, research institutes, NGOs, civil society networks, diaspora, businesses, local authorities, foundations, international cooperation agencies.

The **tool and mechanism** we suggest as adequate to this purpose are:

- Realisation of a new **Programme for the Agroecological Transition of the Italian Cooperation**, under the coordination of AICS, which would resume and enhance in the current context the experiences and the lessons learned by the Italia-CILSS Fund<sup>35</sup>.
- Re-orientation of the **Trust Fund for Africa** for the most vulnerable groups, focusing on the protection and cooperation for local and migrant communities in the holistic perspective of Agroecology, as well as on the enhancement of the contribution of the diaspora to transformative processes.
- Definition of an **Inter-ministerial program (AICS and Ministry of the Environment)** in high environmentally vulnerable and sensible areas, focusing on the support of pastoral systems and the valuing of fish resources, both marine, in the Gulf of Guinea, and fluvial, within the framework of the Italian commitment to the fight against desertification and of the bilateral environmental cooperation.
- Promotion of an **Italian initiative for Agroecology within the European Cooperation**, with special focus on the agriculture pillar of the Africa-Europe Alliance, which is currently under negotiation, and it's consistent with the EU Comprehensive Strategy for Africa. An initiative that is even more urgent as a response to the COVID 19 pandemic
- Still **in the European context, Activation of Delegated Cooperation and Multilateral Mechanisms**, with particular reference to the new planning of the EU Green Deal, the European Biodiversity Strategy 2030, Sustainable Finance, the External Investment Plan (EIP) in Africa and the Circular Economy Action Plan, which has "food" at its centre.
- The creation of a **Coordination Platform for University Cooperation with Sahel**, supported by MAECI and MIUR<sup>36</sup>, which would include actions aimed at agro-ecological training for farmers, technicians and cooperation personnel. This platform should create synergies with other existing actors and initiatives at European level on transdisciplinary issues and using all available financial instruments, e.g., the new framework program for research and technological development Horizon Europe ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme_en)).

**We believe that only building up a common vision and mobilising the Italian and European system as a whole, will help make transition to agroecology a reality in West Africa, by concretising these and other proposals that will come out in a wider exchange and dialogue with all interested people, associations and institutions.**

## NOTES

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### 1. A critical scenario

<sup>1</sup> According to the IPCC, the Sahel area has undergone the highest rainfall reduction on the planet since 1980. The projections to 2030 are further worsening, with an increase in the variability of the rains, an increase in temperatures and the frequency of droughts

<sup>2</sup> In the G5s countries where about 50% of the population is under 15, population growth in the rural area between 2018 and 2040 is projected to increase around 200%, from 80 to 160 million people. The population growth is estimated to bring over 32.5 million young people to the job market over the next 20 years. World demographic prospects for UNDESA, 2017 and 2019.

<sup>3</sup> About 40% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line and 56% do not have access to basic health services. The level of the Human Development Index (HDI) for Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger relegates them under 182 places in the global ranking (UNDP database), while income inequality (Gini Index) oscillates between 33 in Mali to over 40 of Senegal

<sup>4</sup> The percentage of the population in rural areas varies from 36% in the Gambia and 49% in Senegal to 57% in Guinea Bissau, 64% in Guinea, about 70% in Mali and Burkina Faso and 83% in Niger. The annual urbanization rate fluctuates from 4 to 8%, higher in low urbanization countries (World Bank 2018)

<sup>5</sup> Women have a predominant role in the food system for the off-farm component with over 70% of female employment (The Sahel and West Africa Club, OECD 2017). Only about 28% of girls and women over 15 years old have completed primary schools and only 9% have completed secondary schools. The denial of rights is evidenced, among others, by the high rate of early marriages and of maternal mortality (Kwasi et al, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> Security policies in Sahel-Saharan Africa have been characterized by the absence of a long-term strategic vision, capable of orienting policy interventions on the vulnerabilities and elements of structural fragility at the origin of regional instability. The attention paid to the short-term objectives of the fight against terrorism and the fight against regional trafficking, supported by the conviction that a strengthening of the military presence could contain the diffusion of Islamic radicalism, has strongly limited the civil dimension of intervention, undersized in terms of human and financial resources. The aid destined to the Sahel-Saharan States has concerned, above all, military supplies, the reform of the security sector, the strengthening of peacekeeping and response capacities to regional crises, to the detriment of development assistance and the promotion of virtuous governance practices (Casola, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Sahel Alliance was launched by EU, France, Germany, World Bank, UNDP, Italy, Spain UK, Luxembourg, Denmark, , Danimarca and Netherland to support G5 Sahel Countries: Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger e Chad

<sup>8</sup> A study by the ISS (Kwasi et al 2019) comparing different scenarios for the Sahel by 2040 shows that among 5 clusters of possible actions, the one on agriculture, which is the economic and cultural backbone of the Sahel, has the highest impact in terms of poverty reduction and income increase indicators, and together with actions on education and governance it contributes greatly to the improvement of human development indicators. In a complementary way,

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other studies (E.Quak, 2018) show that there is a need to focus on inclusive systems and innovation to create employment and sustainable development opportunities, especially in food systems

## 2. Agroecology response

<sup>9</sup> ESR Approach (Efficiency/Substitution/Redesign) play a key role in groecological transition. It involves three steps:  
- The first step, Efficiency, starts with adopting more efficient use of inputs, such as optimal use of fertiliser with minimal waste.

- In the second step, Substitution, certain inputs considered to be harmful to the environment are replaced by more benign ones. The replacement of outdated technologies with more efficient ones falls into this category.

- In the final step Redesign, a systems management approach is adopted to reduce the need for inputs in the first place. This means “the design of agro-ecosystems to deliver the optimum amount of ecosystem services to aid food, fibre and oil production whilst ensuring that agricultural production processes improve natural capital” (Pretty, 2016). These ecologically redesigned/designed systems aim to minimise problems and dependence on purchased inputs, increase resilience, and enable self-maintenance, self-regulation, sustainability, and ability to provide the needed ecosystem services and support for achieving the well-being of all”. (LUPG, Transition)

<sup>10</sup> The specific features that characterize the agroecological approach deserve a particular attention and consideration especially if the aim is to promote the ecological conversion of agroecosystems. In this respect it is important to consider that agroecological systems are:

Highly knowledge-intensive differently from the conventional agriculture practices, which are highly standardized and replicable through a blueprint approach even in rather different environmental conditions (e.g. planting spacing, types and periodicity of fertilizers and herbicides, etc.).

Constantly evolving: agroecological systems are dynamic and able to evolve according to the changes of external (e.g. climate change, economic trends, etc.) and internal (e.g. growth of trees in an agroforestry systems, recovery of soil fertility, ecc.) factors. Furthermore, it is important to take into consideration that, in order to reach a satisfactory equilibrium, agroecological systems normally require at least 4-5 years.

Multifunctional: differently from conventional agroecosystems, where incomes are normally guaranteed by the production and commercialization of few (or even a single) products, agroecological systems are able to produce a diversified array of products (e.g. staple crops, cash crops, fodder, fibres, medicinal plants, fuelwood, timber, organic fertilizers, etc.) and deliver many different services (e.g. pollination, preservation of the hydrological cycle, valorization of the landscape, etc.).

Another important feature of agroecological systems is the multiplier effect of benefits enjoyed when agroecological practices are adopted in neighbouring farms or at the landscape scale.

<sup>11</sup> Zoonotic spillover occurs as a result of complex dynamics linking human and natural ecosystems, with socio-economic and structural conditions determining whether or not a spillover event becomes an outbreak, and an outbreak an epidemic or pandemic.

The risks are increased by industrial agriculture through two main pathways. Firstly, intensive livestock production amplifies the risks of diseases emerging and spreading. The probability of outbreaks of high-impact animal diseases is increased by the confinement of large numbers of animals in small spaces, narrowed genetic diversity, fast animal turnover, and habitat fragmentation through expansion of livestock production.

Secondly, risks are amplified by enhanced human-wildlife interaction, which can be exacerbated by habitat destruction due to commercial agriculture, unchecked urbanization, and land and resource grabs. As a leading zoonotic disease expert stated: "Destroy landscapes, and the species you are left with are the ones humans get the diseases from." As documented in the CBD/WHO 2015 Report, the spread of pathogens is exacerbated by climate change, ecosystem destruction and land use change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the removal of essential protective barriers.

Though evidence on the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak is still inconclusive, it is thought to have occurred through a combination of the pathways described above, i.e., the amplification of wildlife diseases through intermediate hosts. Factory farms have also been identified as a potential transmission point. (IPES Food 2020...)” Vedi **International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food)** [COVID-19 and the crisis in food systems: Symptoms, causes, and potential solutions](#)

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<sup>12</sup> ROPPA, was founded in 2000, in Cotonou. It's a network of farmers organisations and coordinates the initiative of 15 national platforms of West Africa. Since its creation, stood out for the defense and promotion of family farming. A clear choice that in more recent years has been joined by a coherent and convinced adherence to Agroecology's principles and practices, that are now supported and disseminated by ROPPA in all the 15 countries in which it operates and is present.

<sup>13</sup> The 3AO platform was created during a meeting organized in August 2018 jointly by ROPPA and IPES-Food (network of international experts on sustainable food systems) which was attended by 31 national, regional and international organizations and during which the objectives have been defined and the nascent Alliance's action plan prepared. 3AO's goal is to promote and support the agroecological transition in West Africa to ensure sustainable and resilient livelihoods adapted to the challenges of agriculture in different local contexts. Through a series of concrete and agreed actions 3AO creates synergies at different levels and between different actors to strengthen research and advocacy efforts in favor of Agroecology, promoting, at the same time, visibility to the agroecological movement in West Africa. The action plan is based on five fundamental principles: - Improve and strengthen the governance of food systems and redirect funding in agriculture; - Maximize the sharing of knowledge between science and traditional farming knowledge: participatory research and consolidation of knowledge; - Consolidate Agroecology networks by mobilizing civil society for this purpose; - Strengthen the systems of exchange of knowledge and training opportunities between farmers; - Develop and strengthen local food systems, the partnerships based on solidarity between subjects in different local contexts and improve access to markets. The activities are monitored by a steering committee whose members include representatives of ROPPA, IPES FOOD, AFSA (Alliance for food sovereignty in Africa), ENDA Pronat (Environmental development action for the natural promotion of lands), CIRAD (agronomic research for development) and Action Against Hunger. Each activity is managed by a lead organization that benefits from the knowledge and skills of a support group, which is defined from time to time and is made up of some of the other member organizations.

### 3. Guidelines for action

<sup>14</sup> Agroecology enhances the supply of ecosystem services, such as pollination, and che andrebbero incoraggiati e conteggiati da parte degli stati e delle collettività territoriali (quali impollinazione, preservation of the hydrogeological cycle, landscape valuing, biodiversity conservation, etc). The supply of this kind of services should be encouraged and counted by the territorial communities.

<sup>15</sup> Conflicts over natural resources are partly explained by demographic and environmental dynamics and partly by instability of access and land rights (see above). Our working group on Agroecology has developed good practices both on resilient land management with concrete examples of careful water and land management in West Africa and on the field of access to rights, particularly related to land law insecurity.

<sup>16</sup> Local seed varieties, in the Sahel as in the rest of the world, represent the legacy of meticulous experimentation and selection carried out by farming communities along several centuries. The local seed varieties planted today are the result of a long co-evolution of plants and agroecosystems are characterized by a high-level adaptability within the pedoclimatic context where they are planted. They are also an irreplaceable source of genetic diversity and a precious resource in the context of unpredictable climatic conditions at the local scale. As an example, in a single village of Mali or Burkina Faso it is possible to find up to 25 different sorghum varieties. Moreover, local varieties fulfil appropriately the nutritional needs of the local communities, represent a cornerstone of local traditions and a priceless cultural and biological heritage.

<sup>17</sup> Contributo Italiano al ITPGRFA (2015) Core budget 1.126.735\$, Partecipazione paesi del Sud 26.678\$, Progetti speciali 3.174.362\$, BS Fondo 6.269.485\$;  
[https://rapponuroma.esteri.it/rapp\\_onu\\_roma/it/ambasciata/news/dall\\_ambasciata/2015/11/trattato-internazionale-sulle-risorse.html](https://rapponuroma.esteri.it/rapp_onu_roma/it/ambasciata/news/dall_ambasciata/2015/11/trattato-internazionale-sulle-risorse.html)

<sup>18</sup> The Cds (Community Seed Banks) have been established in many parts of the world since the early 1980s, with various legal forms and functions. Among the primary objectives is to overcome the loss of agrobiodiversity and to facilitate access to seeds adapted to local conditions not adequately available on the market, often based on a participatory management model and facilitating the participatory improvement of the seeds themselves. Several CDS case studies and analyses have been published in recent years. However, they play an important role in European societies for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources and in all those cases where farmers do not have easy access to public germplasm banks. The Cds have structures dedicated to the conservation of seeds and/or areas to

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cultivate collections and aim to preserve genetic diversity and make seeds available. These structures can be centralized or have a decentralized approach that allows several people to store seeds and manage collections. Cds are managed by a community. These communities can be informal networks or formalized legal entities composed of several members. Seed Houses belong to the informal seed system (e.g., civil society organisations). However, they belong neither to the primary sector (public) nor to the secondary sector (private for commercial/market activities). The community manages the Seed House to achieve certain common goals based on shared values and collective norms, creating a specific culture and identity. These standards may regulate access to seed, knowledge and information, but also the way in which objectives are developed or any other determinant factor for the functioning of the community.

<sup>19</sup> Neglected and underused" edible species (NUS) are those to which little attention is paid or which are completely ignored by agricultural research. These are wild or semi-domesticated varieties and non-woody forest species (tubers, cereals, fruits, pulses and spices). Having long been neglected by traditional agricultural science for a variety of agronomic, genetic, economic, social and cultural reasons, these crops are now increasingly recognised for their potential role in mitigating risks in agricultural production systems. In recent decades, the importance of NUS in improving nutrition, generating income, maintaining the health of the ecosystem and empowering the poor and fragile as well as promoting cultural diversity has been reassessed. (see [https://www.biodiversityinternational.org/fileadmin/migrated/uploads/tx\\_news/Fighting\\_poverty\\_hunger\\_and\\_malnutrition\\_with\\_neglected\\_and\\_underutilized\\_species\\_NUS\\_1671\\_03.pdf](https://www.biodiversityinternational.org/fileadmin/migrated/uploads/tx_news/Fighting_poverty_hunger_and_malnutrition_with_neglected_and_underutilized_species_NUS_1671_03.pdf))

<sup>20</sup> The recommendations '*Connecting Smallholders to Markets*', approved by the Committee on World Food Security-CFS, in 2016, recognize that "territorial markets", even if ignored by most existing analyzes and statistics, are an essential part of food security in the South World Country, especially West Africa. Such markets are linked to local food systems, national and Regional, involve women and youth, provide access to fresh food for consumers, and leave an important autonomy margin for local economies stakeholders. Territorial markets play a wide range of functions, beyond the economic field: in the social, fostering interaction, dialogue and exchange of information, in the cultural, by spreading knowledge on food and the ways of its preparation and cooking, in the ecologic, by conserving local varieties, reducing waste and packaging. The link with territory, that is the key feature of this kind of markets, allows to revive local economy and to establish horizontal relationships among the different stakeholders involved in the comercio transactions (see [http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ENG-ConnectingSmallholdersToMarkets\\_web.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ENG-ConnectingSmallholdersToMarkets_web.pdf)).

<sup>21</sup> "Weekly markets". Markets in Africa follow 4 patterns: they can be made daily, every 2- 4 days, every week, settimanali. All markets in Sahelian countries influenced by Islamic culture have a weekly frequency, according to Islamic calendar. The market of Diaobè in Southern Senegal, which joins producers, merchants and consumers from Guinea, Guinea Biassu, Mauritania and Mali, generates an average income of 1 million FCFA for the local municipality, in terms of sites and services rental.

<sup>22</sup> ROPPA's Observatory on EF aims at collecting and systematising information on the structure and functioning of the family farms in terms of production and marketing. Such information is used both for providing ROPPA's National Platforms with crucial data to support advocacy on the policies regarding the EF and providing the EFs with essential tools to manage their business. The process of data collection-processing is carried out in three steps: 1) Workshop to present the Observatory in a selected municipal or regional area; 2) Realisation of a study on the socio-cultural and economic features of the area, and selection among the farmers of the "territorial promoters" in charge of the on field data-collection; 3) Territorial promoters training; 4) Data collection and processing; 5) Workshop to return and share the results of the investigation.

<sup>23</sup> Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared, through a longterm, binding agreement. The CSA experience originated in Japan in the early 70s on the initiative of Teruo Ichiraku (1906-1994), philosopher and leader of the agricultural movement.

(<http://urgenci.net/csa-history/>). Urgency (<http://urgenci.net/>) is the international organization that facilitates the connections between existing national and local CSA networks through the shared belief in the core values of Agroecology: Food Sovereignty, Solidarity Economy and Biodiversity; the network involves 2 million members in 30 countries. Agroecology is an essential element of the CSA experience and ranks first among the founding principles defined at the 3rd European conference on CSA held in Ostrava (Czech Rep.) on September 17, 2016

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([http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/European-CSA-Declaration\\_final-1.pdf](http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/European-CSA-Declaration_final-1.pdf)) which expressly refers to the Agroecology International Forum Declaration of Nyeleni (Mali, 27/02/2015). On 18/02/2015 in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), during a meeting between NGOs and local actors involved in Agroecology, the Réseau de L'Ouest Afrique de Producteurs et Consommateurs (ROAPC) was born; since then there have been many initiatives to promote the emergence and development of CSAs in West Africa. The most active countries in this regard are Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Benin.

<sup>24</sup> The agricultural enterprise, which in Italy and Europe also takes on a tertiary function including recreational, cultural and educational services, is still in its infancy in West Africa. However, in view of the strategic importance of educational activities in the agricultural sector for the formation of consumer awareness on the ecological and ethical aspects of the agro-food chain and the potential in urban areas and in contexts with a high tourist vocation, this is an area to be explored in order to facilitate the discovery of agriculture and cultural, historical, environmental and gastronomic traditions. This will make food (production and processing) and sustainable agri-environmental management an innovative and concrete option with positive impacts on income generation and employment opportunities.

<sup>25</sup> An example of partnership between Italian and local actors of various kinds, (Peasant Organizations, Italian NGOs, Foundations) with the specific focus on agroecological transition in West Africa is represented by an initiative implemented in Burkina Faso since 2014 by the NGOs ACRA, CISV, LVIA, MANI TESE, the Watinoma Association and the Slow Food Foundation with Six farmers' organizations with the support of 28 Foundations of banking origin united in the "Fondations pour l'Afrique Burkina Faso (FPA-BF)". Among the various actions carried out are: awareness raising, capacity building through training on agroecological practices and study trips, testing of agroecological practices, support for the transformation and conservation of agricultural products, facilitation of the marketing of eco-bio products and advocacy. (<https://www.fondazioniforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Axe-agro%C3%A9cologie-web.pdf>)

<sup>26</sup> The CEDAW general recommendation n.34 /2016, ad opera del Comitato per l'eliminazione della discriminazione nei confronti delle donne (CEDAW), interprets with particular attention the art. 14 of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and it's the only provision in a human rights international treaty which especially addresses the condition of rural women. It focuses mostly in developing countries, even though some of the recommendation address also the condition of rural women in the most advanced ones. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/835897>

#### 4. Programmes, actors, financial tools

<sup>27</sup> The report is under preparation. For a more detailed discussion of the subject see ROPPA, "*Strategie regionale de insertion de jeunes dans le secteur agro-sylvo-pastoral et alieutique 2019-2023*", in [http://www.roppa-afrique.org/IMG/pdf/roppa - strategie\\_emploi\\_jeunes-3bdef.pdf](http://www.roppa-afrique.org/IMG/pdf/roppa_-_strategie_emploi_jeunes-3bdef.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.fondazionecribiella.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/IT/D/9%252F5%252F1%252FD.58cb447b1d3540c8b06f/P/BLOB%3AID%3D2988/E/pdf> Programma sostenuto dalle fondazioni di origine bancaria associate all'ACRI nel programma "Fondazioni for Africa Burkina Faso"

<sup>29</sup> The implementation of Global Sustainable Development Partnerships is recommended and supported by the UN AGENDA 2030 for Sustainable Development. According to the Agenda, such partnerships should rely on a composite network of actors of Bilateral and Multilateral System and CSO. In Italy the National System of international cooperation counts also in the UN Agencies based in Rome: FAO, WFP, IFAD. <https://documenti.camera.it/Leg18/Dossier/Pdf/UE0017.Pdf>

<sup>30</sup> The public development aid destined in 2017 to research, training and technical assistance amounted only to 14 % of total aid for Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa. Only a few donors, among them France, Swiss, Germany, FAO, IFAD, recognize Agroecology agroecologia c as a key solution to build upon sustainable food systems.

<sup>31</sup> MAECI/Ministero Affari Esteri e Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation)

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<sup>32</sup> The three-year strategic document 2019-2021 has been approved by the Interministerial Committee for Development Cooperation. The final approval is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers. The process is in progress <https://www.aics.gov.it/news/2020/59023/> The previous Strategic Plan is for years 2017-2019 [https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2018/02/doc\\_triennale\\_2017-2019\\_27.07.2017.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2018/02/doc_triennale_2017-2019_27.07.2017.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=25321>

<sup>34</sup> AICS/Agenzia Italiana di Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation).

<sup>35</sup> Italy CILSS Fund: a mechanism addressing local development of a number of regions affected by high level of social and environmental vulnerability ("ZARESI"), in four Sahelian countries: Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal. The programme involved the Italian Cooperation for a period of over 10 years, in early 2000. The Programme supported by the Fund is based on

- "A multiannual, multisectoral, multi-actor articulation on food security, sustained by technological knowledge and geographic information systems aimed at monitoring and preventing environmental and sociale crisis;
- A synergic action among cooperation's actors (international and governmental agencies, decentralised cooperation, NGO), to foster a process of political-administrative decentralisation of territory and development management;
- Reworking and integrating previous interventions and approaches in the perspective of local development" e" (Dansero, 2013)

<sup>36</sup> MIUR/Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (Ministry of Education, University and Research).

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