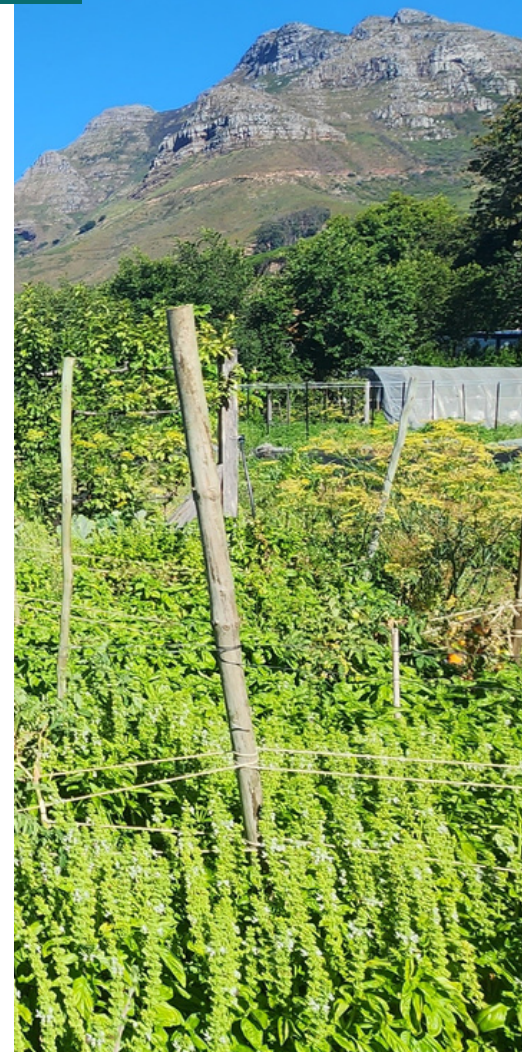




TAFS POLICY BRIEF #2

Learning from Local Initiatives for
Agroecological Development in South
Africa



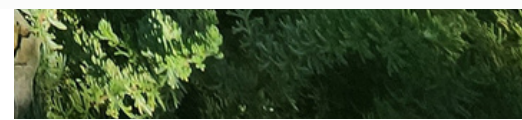
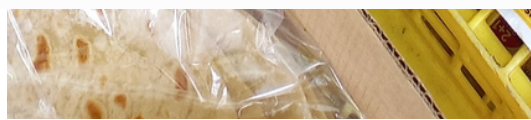
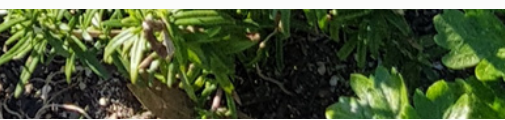
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SOUTHERN AFRICA
FOOD LAB





Synopsis

Transformation of food systems in line with agroecological principles remains marginal in South Africa. In spite of numerous policies, plans and programmes, limited change highlights the weak budgets, segmented interventions and lack of coordination. These problems reflect the power dynamics in the prevailing food system, which is dominated by large-scale conventional agriculture and food corporations.

At the national level, several social movements support agroecology, organic production and food sovereignty. These, however, lack the connection with consumers required to establish a coalition for change that could influence the political scene and lead to policy changes. Consumers are understandably focused on their current living conditions. As a result, no significant agroecological programmes are taking root nationwide.

Place-based approaches can catalyse local initiatives

Places provide the appropriate level to address regional challenges, opportunities, and restrictions since people live in places, not sectors. Places provide the means for networks of stakeholders to mobilise local resources and direct them toward projects with local significance, as well as the chance to create coalitions around shared interests. They are where players can coordinate and contest interests, allowing for the mobilisation of local resources in response to common problems (e.g. environmental sustainability, local development).

Build multi-actor coalitions to develop agroecological food systems pilots in specific locations. Such initiatives can facilitate agroecological transitions in local food systems, integrating sustainable agriculture practices, household and local food and nutrition security, small enterprise development in the bioeconomy, sustainable biodiversity conservation and use, climate change adaptation and landscape approaches. Different from a localisation approach, place-based initiatives recognise the potential role of local government and local actors in guiding place-based food systems towards economic inclusion, environmental sustainability and food and nutrition security.

Convene and facilitate partnerships at municipal level. For projects to be successful and sustainable, partnerships between local government, farmers, consumers and NGOs are crucial. Language and emphasis need to shift from “filtering down” to the local government level as the implementers, towards the co-development of policy and programming.

Encourage dialogue to align agendas within place-based initiatives. For example, there is potential for dialogue between conservation agriculture (CA) practices, biodiversity conservation and natural resource management (NRM).

Such dialogue could find opportunities to propel CA towards more sustainable agricultural practices.

Agroecological food system planning at municipal and district level enables multiple value additions. Municipalities are overwhelmed by existing mandates in the context of limited human and financial resources. Yet, opportunities exist for local governments to support more sustainable food systems. Local Economic Development (LED) can help employment creation, deployment of labour to build and maintain productive resources, waste management and land allocation, among other responsibilities.

Conservation Agriculture in the Rûens

Theewaterskloof and Cape Agulhas local municipalities (Overberg district)

Conservation Agriculture (CA) for winter grains production can be considered an example of “pragmatic adaptation”. Commercial farmers have increasingly adopted CA as a response to soil degradation, herbicide resistance and rising input costs. This change is not transformative: local embeddedness is weak; the profit-driven orientation based on economies of scale remains central and the industrialisation of agriculture is consolidated by heavy mechanisation and the surge of specialised contractors. However, it facilitates the awareness of sustainability issues and an incipient integration with biodiversity conservation and NRM occurs. This is the case through the development of natural corridors which is discussed with the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) and the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT), in connection with the idea of establishing an Overberg biosphere reserve. As such, although CA can only be adaptive at the farm level, it can contribute to other landscape-level approaches and inter-sector integration (grain and horticulture).

This calls for including food systems in drafting and revising the local development strategy, reflected in Integrated Development Programmes (IDP), and increased support for strategy design.

Place agroecology at the core of municipal resilience and adaptation strategies. Linking agroecological farming techniques, NRM and conservation as part of building resilience for people helps ensure they sustain their livelihoods and the environment around them. However, this requires rapidly translating knowledge about the relationship between biodiversity and human health and well-being into spatial planning, management, policymaking, and governance.



Facilitate collaboration between provincial and municipal authorities. As revealed by overlapping yet contrasting approaches (CA versus agroecology), there are tensions between provinces and municipalities which constrain multi-level governance. Emerging initiatives offer chances for collaboration, cross-sectoral coherence, and assimilation of agroecological values. Where appropriate, align place-based initiatives to District Development Model processes.

Meat Naturally Initiative in Matatiele

Matatiele local municipality (Alfred Nzo district)

Matatiele's economy is driven by consumption and government spending. Most agricultural products exit the area, and food is imported for consumption. Vertically integrated corporate feedlot and abattoir operations dominate the beef value chain in which communal livestock farmers are marginalised.

The Meat Naturally Initiative is a civil society-led rangeland restoration project started in 2013 and driven by Conservation South Africa and other partners. Its primary goal is to find solutions to sustain a supply of quality cattle off soundly managed rangelands without dependence on external funding and through this, to get herds into a healthier, more productive state.

The initiative opens space for the participation of marginalised producers and is premised on improving the share of value accruing to farmers in beef value chains. Biodiversity conservation is prioritised by integrating livestock management with diverse landscape management activities, including fire and water management, wetland and spring protection, alien clearing, grassland and biodiversity restoration, and catchment level actions.

New innovation mechanisms based on local knowledge and “pollinisation” can make a difference

Support farmer-to-farmer initiatives within and across place-based approaches.

A notable mechanism leveraging the capabilities of local knowledge has emerged through various farmer-to-farmer (campesino a campesino) initiatives developing in the past decades.

This, in effect, is the approach of several civil society actors, particularly the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) pollinators. However, it requires a mindset change in government-led programmes and an approach where experimentation and innovation become core mechanisms to co-produce socioecological knowledge. This is in contrast with the current way, where the extension officer is the purveyor of knowledge. Municipalities have an important role to play in providing spaces for exchange and technical support in the form of extension agents facilitating farmer-to-farmer learning, research facilities and other inputs.

Potential exists for SMMEs in the bioeconomy

Activate experiments for livelihoods within the circular and bio-economies. Potential exists for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in the bioeconomy to offer a comprehensive land management package to landowners incorporating diverse elements such as trail maintenance, veld management, sustainable wood cutting, biofuel production, firefighting and managing fire breaks, sustainable flower harvesting, follow-up clearing and reseedling of natural vegetation, potentially planting orchards, control plans, assessments of harvestable population stocks, and rangeland and livestock management. However, this needs investment and integrated support across departments and levels of government.

Integrate public employment programmes into ward priorities and IDPs. An emphasis on creating SMME opportunities in agriculture and the bioeconomy is needed. The Overberg offers a practical example of a route towards this and can be learned from and replicated elsewhere. Multi-actor engagement can promote transparency and learning to overcome existing challenges with the deployment of resources for public employment programmes.

Participatory Guarantee System and biodiversity conservation in Overstrand

Overstrand local municipality (Overberg district)

PGS is a second-party organic certification system that provides quality assurance based on diverse local actors (farmers, consumers, retailers and other actors in the local system) monitoring farms for compliance and providing support through periodic farm visits. The system is based on trust and social networks. It is cheaper and more accessible than third-party certification, with an emphasis on smallholder farmers and local markets.

The Overberg PGS procures organic fresh produce from local farmers and a community garden for a box scheme to consumers locally and in Cape Town. Wealthy consumers cross-subsidise cheaper boxes for resource-poor consumers. Initially, four organic farms joined up, with numbers growing to 12. Produce is delivered to storage at Stanford. The box is then assembled and delivered weekly to customers in Stanford, surrounding areas, and Cape Town. About 50% of sales are at the Oranjezicht Market at the Waterfront in Cape Town.

A transition to AE requires state support

The costs related to transitioning to new systems require state support. The transition to more sustainable systems and agroecological practices cannot rely only on market forces. Even if new practices could be certified and rewarded with premiums, local markets are generally not “ready”, and current experiences highlight important costs of transitioning to new systems. It is important to remember that past transitions (e.g. the adoption of the Green Revolution techniques) have always been heavily supported (subsidies and extension) and that governments will need to provide specific incentives.

Subsidies and support are required for the conversion from conventional to ecological production systems. The conversion times are estimated to be five to nine years, depending on the state of resources and types of production. However, conversion subsidies should be conditional on the explicit extension of activities to social justice and redress. It includes redistribution of land and other resources, multi-year financing, and support to enable SMMEs and cooperatives to establish, test and adapt business models (e.g. for sustainable food production, biodiversity conservation and land management).

Funding is required for public sector research and development, for input production and supply. Demand is outstripping supply in agroecological and organic input production and supply systems. The cost of inputs for these systems remains prohibitive for conversion. Funding is required for public sector research and development related to agroecological/organic production, crop breeding programmes for climate adaptation, bulk production of biofertiliser, and effective organic pest and disease management goods and services.

Agroecology Hubs and Woza Nami in eThekweni *eThekweni metropolitan municipality*

eThekweni Metro is South Africa's second largest city. Most food consumed in the municipal area is imported from outside. However, there are efforts to support local production, and the municipality has a network of hubs to service local farmers. Agroecological initiatives in the municipality are well-aligned with agroecological principles and associated practices, even though the initiatives are very small in relation to conventional agricultural support and other land uses such as settlement.

The SA Food Lab's Woza Nami project supports the transition towards full agroecological practice, extending principles and practice to small-scale farmers (individuals and collectives) and, through linkages, aggregation and nutrition education, building demand for such produce in neighbouring communities. The methodologies promote genuine participatory engagement with stakeholders and actively facilitate the development of innovative responses informed by appropriate knowledge and implemented through new partnerships. This has opened opportunities for local officials as new and stronger relationships have emerged with farmers and neighbouring communities.

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