POST
BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK
EU SUPPORT
2020

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS. CONVERGENCE #55

TRANSFORMATION OF AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS FOR A FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KMGBF

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"TO TRANSFORM AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS, WE HAVE TO BREAK SILOS AND SHIFT TOWARDS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACHES THAT FOSTER COLLABORATION ACROSS THE VALUE-CHAIN TO ACHIEVE IMPACTFUL AND SCALABLE SOLUTIONS, LEADING TO MORE INCLUSIVE, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS."

- Chrissa Borja, Grow Asia

Participants of the Transforming Agri-food Systems workshop

Hugo Rivera Mendoza
Team Leader, Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework – EU Support Project (editor)

Danaé Moyano Rodriguez
Knowledge Management, Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework – EU Support Project (editor)

Saskia Van Crugten
Alesopi

Estelle Balian
Alesopi

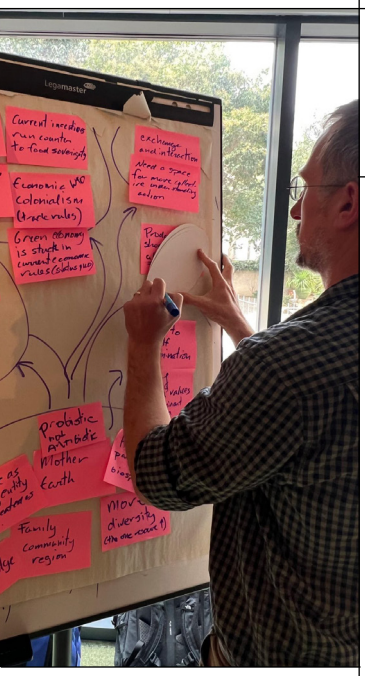
Current narratives on agriculture, food systems and sustainable development either focus on maximizing agricultural output or the preservation of biodiversity over economic impacts. This publication outlines how a new narrative can help reconcile these priorities, as discussed during the workshop "Transforming Agri-food Systems for People and Nature".

Finding new narratives for a sustainable future can help us achieve the vision of "Living in harmony with nature".

As a follow-up to the Montpellier Global Days, on March 21, 2024 a group of 24 experts worked together to identify the key elements of a new narrative that envisions transformed agri-food systems. Most of the targets of the KMGBF came up in their discussions. This reflects the experts' interconnected approach to biodiversity and sustainability as well as the robustness of the KMGBF.

A good way to address its implementation challenges is to focus on agri-food systems. The dominant narratives on the relationship between agriculture, food systems and sustainable development either focus on maximizing agricultural output – the "productivist model" – or prioritize the preservation of biodiversity over economic and social impacts – the "ecologic model". A new narrative emphasizing the interconnectedness of agri-food systems and biodiversity as founding principles for a sustainable future could help reconcile these objectives.

New ideas also emerged during the workshop related to agricultural value chains. These include promoting financial literacy among farmers, reducing intermediaries and enhancing ethical practices. Including them in the new narrative is a way to raise ambition in the implementation of the KMGBF.



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1. WHY IS A NEW NARRATIVE ON AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS IMPORTANT TO IMPLEMENT THE KMGBF?

A narrative is "a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values.[1]" Building a new narrative requires thinking outside the box, going beyond what currently exists, and making connections between different aspects of the same issue. It also calls for an interdisciplinary approach that combines different knowledge systems and practices to create new storylines showing how societies and economies could change to support sustainable development.

Since the definition of the 2030 Agenda, efforts have been made to help build a narrative on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), has for instance concentrated the construction of a narrative on agri-food systems in their relation to SDGs: "agri-food systems are essential to human survival and to a world free from hunger: without them, no SDG, including the eradication of hunger and poverty can be achieved.[2]" FAO's Strategic Framework adopted in July 2021 synthesizes their vision through four "betters": better production[3], better nutrition[4], a better environment[5] and a better life, leaving no one behind,[6] creating a simple and accessible narrative.

Narratives supporting the identification of food systems as entry points for transformative action across the SDGs exist, but work still needs to be done to strengthen the narratives that allow agri-food systems, the preservation of biodiversity and consumption needs to co-exist. Through a cross analysis of the targets of the KMGBF and the results of the "Transforming Agri-food Systems for People and Nature" workshop, we can see that the transformation of agri-food systems is also fundamental to achieve the CBD's ambitions, as it integrates several of its goals and targets.

According to FAO's definition, "Agri-food systems have three main components: (i) primary production; (ii) food distribution, linking production to consumption through food supply chains and transport networks; and (iii) household consumption.[7]" The key values and topics identified throughout the "Transforming Agri-food Systems for People and Nature" workshop, provide answers to each one of them.

2. PRODUCERS AT THE HEART OF FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION MODELS

A transformation of agri-food systems that focuses both on people and nature, requires the overall improvement of the working conditions of the men and women involved in every step of agricultural production. Workers must be empowered through the design and implementation of public policies that ensure they have access to the resources they need as well as support for carrying out sustainable practices. This calls for multi-stakeholder collaboration in order to implement integrated, producer-centered strategies effectively.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) BioTrade34 Principles and Criteria (BT P&C),[8] implemented in over 100 countries, has supported conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity and fair and equitable sharing of benefits through trade. This is enhanced by the Initiative's trade and biodiversity statistical tool, knowledge sharing and self-assessment tool, and a robust network of partners and practitioners that ensure trade of biodiversity goods and services is legal, traceable and sustainable.[9]

To enhance producers' capacities for building a sustainable agriculture model, one of the founding principles is to invest in knowledge transfer and capacity-building that promotes the integration of diverse knowledge systems. This includes traditional, indigenous and scientific knowledge. Combining these knowledge bases can help better understand the ecosystems, hence improving the sustainability and resilience of agri-food systems. The example of the Milpa Maya (Box 1) shows how diverse knowledge systems can be integrated in agricultural production.

Box 1 | The Milpa Maya

In 2022, the FAO recognized the Milpa Maya as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). This traditional agroforestry system, which has been in use for over 3,500 years, is widespread across the Yucatán Peninsula. It involves cultivating crops like maize, beans and squash alongside animal husbandry, and integrates forest species. Its cyclical management reduces the need for fertilizers and pesticides, promoting sustainable agriculture.

Source: https://www.fao.org/mexico/noticias/detail-events/es/c/1616723/

Furthermore, producers need to have access to new skills that help them grasp the importance of sustainable production in agriculture. This is the only way for them to lead the transformation towards fair and sustainable agri-food systems. On one hand, it is crucial to develop producers' soft skills such as leadership and communication. On the other, work must be done on the development of new standards that help them measure the success of their production. These standards must go beyond conventional economic indicators. To do this, BIOFIN Mexico uses the "number of women in managerial roles" within communities as a proxy for gender inclusive and sensitive practices.

Box 2 | Proyecto Margarita

Initiated by Danone, Proyecto Margarita, supports over 500 Mexican small-scale livestock farming families with training, technical assistance, and financing, securing the purchase of the milk in advance. The initiative, active for over 10 years, has tripled farmers' incomes and now supplies 25% of the milk used in Danone products. The project aims to improve living conditions for small producers while enhancing the quality and sustainability of milk production in western Mexico.

Source: www.proyectomargarita.org

"FARMERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES MUST BE PLACED AT THE HEART OF THIS TRANSFORMATION. THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ARE IMPLEMENTING ALL THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IS BEING OBTAINED, AND THEY ARE THE ONES FACING THE IMPACTS OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS."
- Irene Natukunda, GYBN Uganda

1. Oxford Languages

2. FAO AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS. Achieving the 2030 Agenda through empowerment of local communities. https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3dc9af0a-924d-4f24-bd1b-92459312da57/content/cc2063en.html

3. Better production seeks to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, by way of efficient and inclusive food and agriculture supply chains at the local level and beyond. In doing so, it promotes resilient and sustainable agri-food systems in a changing climate and environment.

4. Better nutrition aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition in all its forms, including promoting nutritious food and increasing access to healthy diets.

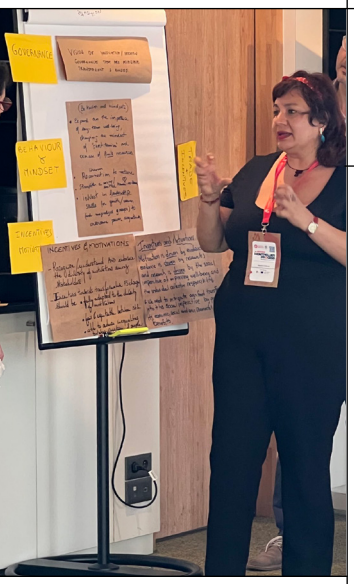
5. Better environment aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and combat climate change (reduce, reuse, recycle, residual management) through more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems.

6. A better life aims to promote inclusive economic growth by reducing inequalities (between urban and rural areas, rich and poor countries, men and women).

7. FAO, 2021. In Brief to The State of Food and Agriculture 2021. Making agri-food systems more resilient to shocks and stresses. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7351en

8. https://unctad.org/topic/trade-and-environment/biotrade/principles-and-criteria

9. https://4post2020bd.net/resources/transformative-actions-47-empowering-change-unleashing-policy-innovation-towards-global-sustainable-consumption/



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3. REIMAGINING PEOPLE-CENTERED VALUE CHAINS AND TRADE POLICIES

The transformation of agri-food systems calls for fair and equitable distribution of resources, benefits and knowledge amongst all of those involved in the process, from production to consumption. How can this happen? First, through the development of fair and sustainable value chains and trade policies. Second, by increasing the producer's involvement in both of these components.

Value chains must be reimagined in such a way that they prioritize genetic diversity, fairness, and sustainability. This calls for:
+ the reduction of intermediaries,
+ the support of direct market access for producers,
+ the respect of environmental and social standards.

Sustainable and equitable financial and trade policies that place producers at their core, call for reforms that protect them from volatile markets and support sustainable production methods. Involving the financial sector is therefore crucial since new and innovative financial models and mechanisms that support the transformation of agri-food systems are needed. There is an overarching need for:
+ aligning investments to sustainability criteria. Under the BIOFIN initiative, UNDP Colombia developed a study[10] that evaluates the impact of agricultural incentives on biodiversity. It identifies the financial and policy instruments that contribute to biodiversity loss, particularly through the intensification of agricultural activities, and suggests ways to reform them to align with conservation goals.
+ ensuring producers' access to financial services, such as access to non-reimbursable resources to collaborate with initiatives from women farmers' groups, providing them with technical support to make proper use of the resources, including training on how to market the products.
+ supporting the development and the transition to agroecological practices.[11]

Furthermore, rethinking value chains calls for the creation of tailored incentives that drive stakeholders towards sustainability by recognizing the different motivations to do so, promoting equity and encouraging practices that contribute to the sustainability of agri-food systems. One way to do this is by introducing proper procurement practices as shown in the example in Box 3.

Box 3 | The Eco-Advance Project, UNEP

The Ecolabels and Sustainable Public Procurement (Eco-Advance) project is exploring how public procurement can support the drive for sustainable markets. It aims to increase the use of sustainable public procurement (SPP) and Type-1 Ecolabels as tools to improve climate mitigation, biodiversity, and resource protection, through ambitious ecolabels, improved policy and legal frameworks, increased engagement of the private sector, as well as regional and global exchange. The project helps create incentives for cleaner production focusing on high impact sectors by addressing a major barrier to changing consumption and production patterns.

Source: https://www.unep.org/ecoadvance-ecolabels-and-sustainable-public-procurement-eco-advance-project

Labelling specific products as being toxic or dangerous is another incentive to drive stakeholders towards sustainability.

Box 4 | Ley de Etiquetado Frontal

Introduced in several latin american countries, the "ley de etiquetado frontal", or "front of package labelling law", has been successful in slowly driving down the demand on products such as sweetened beverages. In countries such as Argentina, this law promotes the right to health and to clear and truthful information on the content of critical nutrients in packaged foods and soft drinks.

Source: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/salud/ley-de-promocion-de-la-alimentacion-saludable

"WE, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, ARE PROMOTING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS A WAY TO OVERCOME POVERTY. BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION HAS TO AND CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND FOOD SECURITY."
- Esther Camac Ramírez, Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas

4. CREATING AN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS VIRTUOUS AND SAFE CYCLE

People must be at the heart of the transformation of agri-food systems. It is important to take into account the needs and the position of producers and distributors, but it is as important to ensure greater involvement of consumers. Consumers are indeed fundamental drivers of change in the agricultural sector. Respecting their rights and needs has an inevitable impact on the production and distribution of agricultural products.

Shifts in public policy and business practices can make sustainable choices more available, accessible, and affordable for consumers, unlocking behaviour change at a systemic level. The modification of individual behaviours can lead to major transformation in societal mind-sets, helping move towards sustainability. Efforts must be made and resources invested to promote sustainable safe consumption patterns, help reduce food waste and foster a deeper connection with nature through food and other agricultural products.

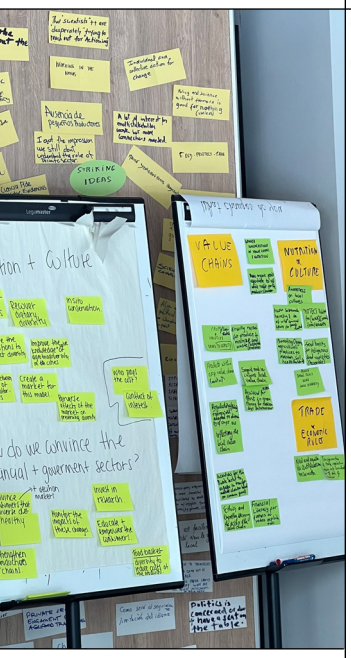
The UN approach to health and the environment - One Health or Planetary Health - requires to clearly identify disciplinary and sectoral boundaries to develop collaborative and jointly constructed health and environmental policies involving communities of citizens, scientists, public health, and other administrative bodies as part of a new social-ecological health governance. The traditional vision of citizens, education, communities, practitioners and decision-makers must be overcome to move towards a shared understanding of knowledge, representations and values carried by the various stakeholders.[12]

Agricultural practices that enhance biodiversity and contribute to dietary diversity also help promote mental and physical health. This places the interconnection of nature and people's health at the core of the new narrative.

10. https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/

11. Agroecology is the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to manage interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment for food security and nutrition. https://www.fao.org/agroecology/knowledge/practices/en/

12. https://4post2020bd.net/resources/expertise-on-28-emerging-infectious-diseases/



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Box 5 | The Montpellier Process

In 2021 individuals and institutions working at the science-policy interface and with a common concern about the systemic challenges for food systems transformation launched the Montpellier Process and decided to focus on food systems as central to its core objectives of Feed, Care, Protect, while recognizing interactions with other systems such as climate and environment, health, energy, etc. They aim to build "risky safe spaces" to advance the needed dialogue, progress, and impact of Science-Policy Interfaces on the Global Goals.

Source: https://montpellierglobaldays.umontpellier.fr/files/2024/01/MGD2023_NSP_DossierInitiative_Janvier2024.pdf

A better consideration of people's relationship to nature through agriculture also stresses the importance of integrating cultural values and nutritional needs into agri-food systems. Protecting and promoting traditional or indigenous food varieties, ensuring access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods, and recognizing the role of traditional knowledge and values in sustaining biodiversity play a part in consumers' empowerment, but also motivates change in production models. This generates an agri-food virtuous and safe cycle that places people at the heart of each step of the transformation of agri-food systems.

5. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR RECONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR FOOD

The idea of an agri-food systems virtuous and safe cycle emphasizes the need for integrated approaches that consider the interconnections between agriculture, food systems and biodiversity. The underlying principle is therefore the need for respecting all forms of life and ecosystems, by acknowledging people's dependency on the biosphere and prioritizing production methods that maintain the health and vitality of the planet, which are also the ones that produce/account for healthier and safer products to consumers. This could be made possible by adopting approaches such as agroecology, climate-smart agriculture and nature-based solutions that contribute to ecosystems' health and resilience.

Another way of promoting a more respectful relationship to nature through food, is by focusing and valorising the specificities of local contexts. By empowering local communities so that they can actively participate in tailoring agri-food policies, it is also possible to recognize the different scales of localization, from the individual household, to the regional levels including with sub-national authorities. Such changes should be promoted at the educational and family level.

Box 6 | Opportunities and Synergies for Implementing the KMGBF in Latina America and the Caribbean

In the frame of a collaboration between the Post-2020 project and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), high-level experts from the LAC region met in Santiago, Chile in November 2023, to propose approaches for the implementation of the KMGBF. In relation to Target 10 and agri-food systems, the main challenges identified included the need to reform agricultural economic incentives, develop gender and sustainability indicators, implement a comprehensive system of traceability for agrochemicals and strengthen the regulation of the use of agrotoxics. In terms of concrete actions, they also recommended promoting genetic diversity, soil conservation, and to advance on production chains free of deforestation. As ways to reach these objectives, they recommended establishing certification and monitoring systems, developing inclusive policies involving local and indigenous communities, and promoting food sovereignty through the rescue of traditional food systems, as well as cross-sectoral collaboration and raising awareness of the financial sector on the benefits of sustainable agriculture.

Source: https://4post2020bd.net/resources/transformative-actions-52-oportunidades-y-sinergias-para-la-implementation-del-plan-para-la-biodiversidad-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe/

The greater involvement of local communities underlines the importance of developing more transparent and accessible governance, so that everyone can participate in the decision-making processes that concern them. Scaling-up new agri-food systems governance models can also be a way to highlight the intrinsic need for cross sector collaboration. Embracing diversity and inclusivity through new governance models is a way to foster innovation and adaptability in agri-food systems.

Contributors

This publication is based on the results of the "Transforming Agri-Food Systems for Nature and People: Building a New Narrative" workshop that took place in Montpellier, France on March 21, 2024. Participants were informed of the results and were invited to participate in drafting this document.

The following participants actively contributed to drafting this document.

Camila Cosse Braslavsky, Consumers International
Alonso Martinez, BIOFIN Mexico
Roxana Salazar, AMBIO SOCIEDAD CIVIL Costa Rica
Charlie Worthington, Consumers International

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@4POST2020BD

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THIS PUBLICATION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION. ITS CONTENTS ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE POST 2020 BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK EU SUPPORT PROJECT, EXPERTISE FRANCE, THE EUROPEAN UNION OR THE EXPERTS CONSULTED.

Funded by the European Union

Implemented by EXPERTISE FRANCE GROUPE AFD

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