

# AGROECOLOGY

Agroecological training on biofertilisers improves women's livelihoods in Togo.

In the Plateaux region of Togo, the natural richness of the soil means that farming is the primary livelihood of those who live there. In the Kpélé Prefecture, in the south-west, the relatively mild climates and good rainfall should make it perfect for agriculture. However, the farming communities have witnessed a slow deterioration in soil fertility and yield quantity and quality in recent years.

## Poor soil quality means poor harvests and many living in poverty

For some time now, Kpélé has been witnessing land and soil degradation due to inappropriate agricultural practices, the use of chemical fertilizers, climate change and deforestation. Since 2004, Young Volunteers for the Environment (YVE), alongside the African Institute for Economic and Social Development (INADES) and the National Institute for Agricultural Training, has been working with rural communities in Kpélé to combat these effects. The aim is to restore the land to the community through sound, sustainable agroecological practices that will improve the socio-economic situation of local people, particularly women's groups.

**50% of the Togolese population live in poverty. In rural areas that figure rises to as high as 74% — the majority of whom are women.**

Restoring soils impoverished by the use of chemical fertilisers and boosting the harvest is the primary motivation behind the project. The end game is improving the living conditions of women in rural areas by providing support to women's groups in income-generating activities.



## Replacing chemical fertiliser with biofertiliser

Over time, chemical fertilisers no longer act as efficiently as they initially promise. The first uses are deceptively effective, but slowly they degrade the soil, stripping it of crucial nutrients vital to crop health. Crops grown using chemical fertilisers tend to retain chemical residues, which leads to health problems.

YVE promotes and trains young farmers in cultivation methods that allow for stronger yields with less soil fatigue and greater soil regeneration. Bokashi is a popular and effective biofertiliser. It is made by collecting locally available materials such as soil, rice husks, cow dung, bran, charcoal, ash, rock dust and molasses, and fermenting them over ten days to create a powerful nutrient-rich organic fertiliser. The use of the bokashi saw a significant increase in quality of produce.

**“At the beginning of the project, we were not very motivated. But as soon as the ginger germinated and we saw the very green colour of the leaves, we understood that the soil was alive again; and our production was very good despite the lack of water.”**  
- Dokli Massa, farmer from Kpélé



*Field preparation activities*

## Bokashi: cheap, sustainable and effective

The project works alongside several women's groups in the area, providing training in agroecological practices which improve soil quality and fertility. So far more than 200 women have been supported by the project and many have found success in the use of bokashi. One farmer experimented with two plots of land, one with bokashi and one without. Both crops grew, but the one with bokashi grew faster.

Bokashi is just one of many successful measures implemented into farming life in Kpélé. Field officers are also on hand to train on numerous other agroecological techniques such as crop rotation, intercropping, companion planting and agroforestry. Vital equipment to get farms running sustainably are provided too, such as motorised pumps for market gardening activities and breeding animals for small livestock production.

**“With biofertilizers, the crop keeps longer while with chemical fertilizers it rots quickly. The agroecological training has enabled me to improve my production of rice, beans, maize and vegetables. I am proud to eat healthily.**  
**Rose, farmer from Kpélé.**

## The result: independence and food security

The project's aim is simple: to restore arable land simply and organically and by doing so, improve the socio-economic situations of thousands of rural families. Several factors have contributed to the success of the project, including the commitment of group members and the fact

that, unlike chemical fertilizers, the production of biofertilizers and biopesticides does not require a lot of money. The response to the project has been overwhelmingly positive, with farmers relieved to find self-sufficiency in the practices and greater food security for their communities.

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