AFSA
ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

AGROECOLOGY FUND

Regional Study on the Existence of Agroecological Enterprises and their Service Providers in East Africa

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Acronyms

AE	Agroecology
AEEs	Agroecological enterprises
ASDP	Agricultural Sector Development Programme
ASTGS	Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AFSA	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
EAC	East African Community
EAOM	East African Organic Map
EAOPS	East African Organic Products Standard
EOA-I	Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative
FBOs	Faith-Based Organizations
FGD	Focus group discussion
GCF	Green Climate Fund
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
ISFAA	Inter-Sectoral Forum on Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology
KIIs	Key informant interviews
KOAN	Kenya Organic Agriculture Network
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
NDP	National Development Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NOGAMU	National Organic Agriculture Movement of Uganda
PAs	Policy actors
PELUM	Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
RYAF	Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPs	Service Providers
TOAM	Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement
UOS	Uganda Organic Standard
YALTA	Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a regional study on Agroecological Enterprises (AEEs), Service Providers (SPs), Policy Actors and Institutions (PAs) in East Africa. Commissioned by Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) in partnership with Agroecology Fund (AEF), the study involved case studies of the situation and operational context for Agroecology (AE) in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. It was undertaken to generate recommendations, strategies and interventions for promoting AEEs, and its findings and recommendations will be used to mobilize relevant actors within in the region to create an enabling environment for AE.

The study was conducted by a team of four consultants, comprising national consultants for Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda and a lead (regional) consultant who also doubled as national consultant for Kenya. It was undertaken through a combination of desk review of literature, policies and reports and key informant interviews (KIIs), which were mostly conducted online in view of covid-19 related restrictions in force across the region at the time of the study. A total of 63 KIIs were conducted across the region. Focus group discussions (FGDs) that had been envisaged at the inception stage were ultimately not conducted due to connectivity and logistical challenges associated with organizing them online.

The report is divided into three sections. Section one introduces the study, explains its conceptual framework and provides an outline of the report. Section two presents the key findings of the study, organised by reference to the main issues specified in the Terms of Reference. Section three presents the main conclusions and recommendations.

The research found that AE practitioners in East Africa use a whole range of practices, and operate in rural, urban and peri-urban settings, but all have a shared commitment to agricultural production that privileges natural processes, local knowledge, seeds and crops, and in which farming and the pursuit of food and nutrition security constitutes part of a larger socio-ecological process. Organic farming is the common AE practice in the region.

The categories of farmers, AEE, SP, and PA used in the design of this research are not mutually exclusive, as most informants were found to fall into more than one category in what they do. Farmers who produce for the market are AEEs, but may also provide services such as training, and engage in policy advocacy to influence government in favour of AE. Many

service providers are also policy actors, as for instance NGOs which provide training and capacity building support, but also advocate for appropriate policies in support of AE.

Policies of the East African Community (EAC) as well as those of the four countries recognize the need for sustainable land management in agricultural production to preserve the integrity of ecosystems, and articulate commitments to sustainable agriculture and food production systems that resonate with imperatives of AE. However, government interventions in support of agricultural development in all the four countries are driven largely by industrial agriculture imperatives, with a focus on chemical inputs and certified seeds. This means that the uptake of AE in the region will depend in large measure on how those interested in promoting it navigate the policy context and mobilize farmers and other stakeholders to overcome the push for industrial agriculture.

A number of institutions and initiatives are actively engaged in promoting AE in the region, working at both regional and country levels. Most of the initiatives are spearheaded by NGOs with the support of donors, but governments in the four countries are also increasingly paying closer attention to AE. In recent years, the interest of governments in AE has been boosted by the African Union's Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I), which was piloted in three of the four countries[1] covered by this research and has established national platforms in all the four countries.

Thanks to these initiatives, there is increasing awareness about AE in the region, and the number of AEEs is growing, driven by the push for agribusiness in the agricultural sector, lifestyle changes that are creating increasing demands for organically produced foods among the urban middle class, and concerns about environmental and public health impacts of agrochemicals. But AEEs face a number of institutional and operational challenges with production, support services and marketing. A number of service providers work with AEEs, but there are few specialty service providers specifically targeting them. Thus, for instance in seeking funding, AEEs find themselves at a disadvantage competing with conventional farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. In marketing, consumers do not readily appreciate why they should pay more for organic produce, and in some cases local produce faces competition from cheap imports.

The study concludes that the policy and institutional context in East Africa is fairly supportive of AE both at the level of the EAC and in the four countries, even though it is only Uganda that has adopted an AE-specific policy, the National Organic Agriculture Policy. It notes, however, that the pro-AE policies are contradicted in practice by industrial agriculture approaches to modernization of agriculture, with emphasis on hybrid seeds, agro-chemicals and synthetic fertilizers.

1 Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

In order to improve the policy, institutional and operational context for AEEs in East Africa and to take full advantage of the opportunities of an integrated regional market, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. AEEs, SPs and Policy Actors on AE should create a common regional platform to advocate for changes in the policy and institutional context for AE in East Africa.

2. The common regional platform should work with national platforms to advocate for adoption of an AE specific policy by the EAC and in Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania, following the example of Uganda. In Kenya and Rwanda, the platforms should also push for establishment of national standards for organic produce.

3. The regional platform should work with the EAC on realizing the opportunities for AE within the framework of the Common Market, and push for establishment of the Agricultural Development Fund, with a funding stream directly targeting AEs.

4. In Uganda, AFSA, AEF and other actors should support the national AE platform to mobilize for dissemination of the National Organic Agriculture Policy, establishment of the Organic Agriculture Secretariat and enactment of the Organic Agriculture Act to ensure effective implementation of the Policy.

5. National AE platforms should engage governments to ensure that funding and other support provided to smallholder farmers provide for specific support for AE.

6. Development partners support to AE in the region should focus on enabling AE producers to transit into business through financing, improved productivity, post-harvest handling and storage, value addition, certification and market access.

7. The regional and national platforms should mobilize and advocate for innovative funding mechanisms for AE within the framework of climate financing, including through the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

8. AEEs should focus on fully developing the local, national and regional markets in East Africa, by creating public awareness about the value of organic produce in contributing to food and nutrition security while also preserving the integrity of ecosystems.

9. AFSA and AEF should spearhead reflection among AE actors and their supporters in East Africa about how to complement capacity building for AE with political mobilization to create the leverage needed to counter the influence of industrial agriculture actors on policies in the region.

1 Introduction

This report presents findings from a regional study on Agroecological enterprises (AEEs), service providers (SPs), Policy Actors and Institutions (PAs) in East Africa, based on case studies of Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The study was commissioned by Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) in partnership with Agroecology Fund (AEF) to deepen understanding of the situation and operational context for Agroecology (AE) in East Africa, as part of a broader undertaking to generate recommendations, strategies and interventions for promoting AEEs in Africa (see text box for specific objectives of the study).

The study is inspired by the conviction that successful uptake of AE depends on existence of an enabling environment and support framework that includes appropriate policies, institutions and access to funding. The findings and recommendations will be used to mobilize these three categories of actors within and across national borders to create an enabling environment for AE.

Specific objectives of study

1. To document and probe the current status and effectiveness of AEEs, businesses and service providers in East Africa;
2. To appraise the context and forces identified by entrepreneurs and service providers as affecting the business and investment environment for AE in the region
3. To recommend strategies and interventions for harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges to improve the context for sustainable AEEs in the region

The report is divided into three sections. Section one introduces the study, explains its conceptual framework and provides an outline of the report. Section two presents the key findings of the study, organised by reference to the main issues specified in the Terms of Reference. Section three presents the main conclusions and recommendations.

1.1. Conceptual framework

As a concept, the term AE defies exact definition as not only does it encapsulate "a transdisciplinary science, a set of practices and a social movement"[2] but it is also increasingly an inspiration for political mobilization around food sovereignty. In this report, the term is used to refer to approaches to agriculture and food production that,

> "favour the use of natural processes, limit the use of purchased inputs, promote closed cycles with minimal negative externalities and stress the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes … (and) recognize that agrifood systems are coupled social–ecological systems from food production to consumption and involve science, practice and a social movement, as well as their holistic integration, to address food and nutrition security"[3] **(HLPE, 2019).**

The research found that those who identify themselves as practising AE use a whole range of practices, and operate in rural, urban and peri-urban settings. What they have in common is an approach to agricultural production that privileges natural processes, local knowledge, seeds and crops, and in which farming and the pursuit of food and nutrition security constitutes part of a larger socio-ecological process underpinned by a commitment to sustainability.

Organic farming is the most common AE practice in the region, and there was no clear distinction among practitioners between organic farming and AE. Traditional farming methods used by a majority of smallholder farmers in rural East Africa employ AE practices to maintain soils and sustain production, even if the farmers produce mainly for subsistence and do not identify themselves as practitioners of AE[4]. It is instructive that even Uganda's National Organic Agriculture Policy, the only AE specific national policy in the region does not use the word "Agroecology".

The designation 'agroecological entrepreneur' refers to enterprises that are linked to these production systems at whatever point in the value chain, and include farmers that produce for the market. The categories of farmer, AEE, SP, and PA are not mutually exclusive, as most informants fall into more than one category in what they do. Farmers who produce for the market are AEEs, but may also provide services such as training, and engage in policy

2 HLPE, 2019:31

3 HLPE, 2019:39

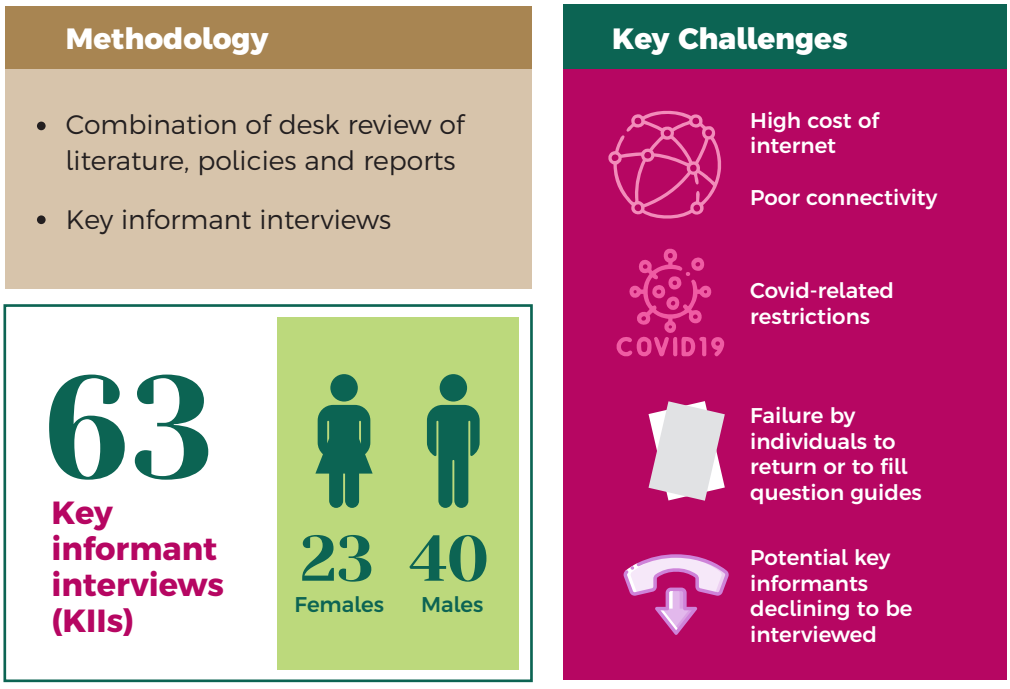
4 This is why the transition to AE (from industrial agriculture) spoken of in Europe does not apply in Africa).

advocacy to influence government in favour of AE. Aggregators are both entrepreneurs and service providers; while many service providers are also policy actors. A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fall into both the category of SPs (providing training and capacity building support) and the category of PAs as they also advocate for appropriate policies in support of AE. We have allocated the key informants to the categories based on how they self-identified, but also recognized their multiple roles where appropriate (see Table 1 below).

1.2. Note on methodology and challenges

The study was conducted by a team of four consultants, comprising national consultants for Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda and a lead (regional) consultant who also doubled as national consultant for Kenya. The methodology used was a combination of desk review of literature, policies and reports and key informant interviews. Policies on agriculture, climate change, and soil management were reviewed to identify entry points, opportunities and challenges to uptake of AE and promotion of AEEs.

A total of 63 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across the region (see **Table 1** for interviews conducted, and **Table 1A** for interviewees categorized by gender). Interviews were conducted online for the most part, first because there was no budget for field missions, and secondly due to Covid-19 related restrictions in force across the region. This proved a major challenge, although to varying degrees, with Tanzania the least problematic and Uganda the



most problematic as regards access to key informants.

Apart from technology related challenges with cost and connectivity, it was not easy to secure appointments for remote meetings or to get key informants to agree to fill out Question Guides in lieu of physical meetings. In many instances, individuals who agreed to fill out Question Guides did not return them or filled them out only partially. In such instances, there were no opportunities for follow up or clarification meetings. In Kenya, where there was a parallel country study going at the same time, some potential key informants declined to be interviewed for the regional study as they had been contacted by the consultants conducting the country study.

Table 1: Interviews conducted by Category

Country/Category	Farmers	AEEs	SPs	Policy Actors	Total interviews[1]
Kenya	4	1	9	5	12
Rwanda	6	6	6	3	15
Tanzania	7	16	18	4	29
Uganda	3	7	3	1	7
Total interviews by Category	**17**	**27**	**34**	**12**	**63**

Table 1A: Interviews categorized by Gender

Country/Category/ Gender	Farmers		AEEs		SPs		Policy Actors		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Kenya	1	1	-	2	1	9	2	6	2	10
Rwanda	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	7	8
Tanzania	4	3	9	7	7	11	1	3	12	17
Uganda	1	2	2	5	1	2	-	1	2	5
Region total Category & Gender	**9**	**9**	**14**	**17**	**12**	**25**	**4**	**12**	**23**	**40**

Although the researchers had planned to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs), in the end none was conducted. Attempts to organize one in Kenya were abandoned after several scheduled online meetings failed to take off due to connectivity challenges. Nevertheless, in the end the researchers managed through their own and AFSA in-country networks to generate relevant and comprehensive data sufficient to address the issues set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

2 Key Findings

The key issues canvassed in the ToR, and around which the main findings of the research are structured were respectively, the policy and institutional context for AEEs in the region; the opportunities and challenges that AEES face and their interactions with SPs and Policy experts; and the prospects for regional or cross-border engagement.

2.1. Policy and Institutional Context

A review of the policy context for Agroecology and sustainable food systems undertaken by AFSA in 2017 concluded that the East African Community (EAC) has made commendable progress in advancing AE and sustainable food systems, by developing supportive policies that can be harnessed to promote AE. These include the East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS)[5] adopted by the EAC in April 2007, under which the East African Organic Mark (EAOM) "works as a combination of a promotion and a guarantee to consumers and traders that produce was grown and processed following organic principles and is adapted to be appropriate in an East African context" (AFSA, 2017:34)[6].

Although this conclusion is generally correct, the devil is in the details. While policies of the EAC generally articulate commitments to sustainable agriculture and food production systems, the detailed provisions in strategy documents and investment plans tend to militate against imperatives of AE. For instance, the East African Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan 2019-2023 and the East African Community Regional Agricultural Investment Plan 2018-2025 clearly privilege industrial agriculture approaches committing governments to improve access by smallholder farmers to certified seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals. This apparent tension between policy commitments that resonate with AE imperatives and actual interventions that are inconsistent with AE are a common feature even at the level of the African Union (AU) and in national policies of member states.

5 Named EAS 456:2007.

6 Similar standards have been adopted by Uganda (Uganda Organic Standards – UOS) and Tanzania (Tancert Organic Standards).

Although only Uganda has a specific policy on organic agriculture[7], sector policies on agriculture, food and nutrition security, environment and natural resource management, and climate change adaptation in the other three countries contain provisions that may be used to push for AE. Sector policies demonstrate increasing awareness of the risks associated with chemical-based industrial agriculture, and call for adoption of nature-based solutions for agriculture to maintain the integrity of ecosystems. Moreover, small-scale farmers are increasingly making the link between food and nutrition security and food sovereignty, even where policies are silent.

Kenya's Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS) 2018-2028 does not mention Agroecology, but it prioritizes sustainable land, soil and water use, and climate smart agriculture, and calls for use of manure to improve organic matter content of the soil so as to ensure soil health and enhance moisture retention capacity of the soil[8]. In Rwanda, although the National Agriculture Policy does not make any direct reference to it, Agroecology is integral to realizing its objective of developing and promoting "a sustainable agricultural intensification and a resilient agriculture sector to counter environmental degradation and climate change in ways that maintain sustainable agricultural growth"[9].

In Tanzania, the Agricultural Sector Development Programme[10] aims to transform the agricultural sector towards higher productivity and commercialization, but through a strategy that recognizes the need to increase productivity "within sustainable production systems", and has 'sustainable water and land use management' as the first of four components. The priority investment areas within this component include land use planning and watershed management, and promotion of climate smart agriculture technologies and practices[11].

In Uganda, the focus of agricultural development under the Third National Development Plan[12] is on agro-industrialization. One of the priority interventions seeks to "promote sustainable land and environment management practices in line with Agroecological needs" by, inter alia, strengthening land, water and soil conservation practices; introducing and upscaling agro-forestry for mitigation and climate resilience; reducing agro-chemical pollution of water and land; and promoting climate smart agriculture[13]. The recent adoption by Government of the National Organic Agriculture Policy provides an enabling framework for actors to follow through on this.

7 National Organic Agriculture Policy published in December 2019.

8 Other national policies of relevance to AE in Kenya are: The Constitution of Kenya 2010, Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy, National Land Policy 2009, National Biotechnology Development Policy 2006, National Environment Policy 2013, Crops Act 2013, and Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Act, 2016.

9 p.12. The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda 2003, the Rwanda Environmental Policy 2003, and Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) are also relevant in this regard.

10 ASDP II 2017/18 – 2027/28.

11 Also relevant are Agriculture Policy 2013, the Livestock Policy 2006, and the Environmental Management (Biosafety) Regulations, 2009.

12 NDP III 2020/21 – 2024/25.

13 Other relevant policies in Uganda are the Constitution of Uganda, 1995, the National Land Policy, 2013, the National Agriculture Policy 2013, and the National Environment Statute 1995.

All these policies recognize the need for sustainable land management and approaches to agricultural production that preserve the integrity of ecosystems. They provide entry points for Agroecology. However, given that government interventions in support of agricultural development in all the four countries tend to privilege industrial agriculture imperatives, the uptake of AE in the region will ultimately depend on how those interested in promoting it navigate the policy context and mobilize farmers and other stakeholders to overcome the push for industrial agriculture.

Institutions and initiatives promoting Agroecology in East Africa

The role of institutions is critical in pushing back industrial agriculture and promoting agroecology. In this connection, the region is well placed, with a number of institutions and initiatives actively engaged in promoting agroecology at both regional and country levels. Most of the initiatives are spearheaded by NGOs supported by donors, but governments are also increasingly paying closer attention to agroecology. It is government institutions and initiatives that are most critical in ensuring adoption and uptake of agroecology.

Table 2 below highlights some of the major institutions and institutional arrangements working to promote agroecology in the region.

Table 2: Major governmental institutions for Agroecology in East Africa

Regional (EAC/ AUC)	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda
Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative	Inter-Sectoral Forum on Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology (ISFAA) launched in August 2020	National Platform for Organic Agriculture established in August, 2019	• Vice President's Office desk Biosafety Desk • Organic farming desks in Ministry of Agriculture offices	Organic Agriculture Secretariat to be established in Crops Directorate at MAAIF

Highlights of Findings

Number of Agroecology Enterprises growing due to push for agribusiness, lifestyle changes.

Service Providers support AEEs in training, advocacy, market linkages, research, input provision, financing, inspection and certification.

Not many speciality SPs targeting AEEs.

No financial SPs targeting AEEs.

Financial service providers' requirements often put the money out of reach for many AEEs.

2.2. AEEs presence, opportunities, challenges and interactions with Service Providers and Policy Experts

The number of AEEs is growing in East Africa, riding on the crest of the push for agribusiness in the agricultural sector and lifestyle changes that are creating increasing demands for organically produced foods, especially among the urban middle class. A directory published by Kenya Organic Agriculture Network (KOAN) in 2019 lists up to 150 AE actors including AEEs, SPs and NGOs (KOAN, 2019). The list includes 30 farmers (individuals and groups); 23 processors, traders and exporters; 19 input suppliers; 16 SPs; 5 markets; 5 foods stores; and 3 restaurants. NGOs and CBOs constitute the largest single category of actors with 44 listed. The Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM) has a total of 103 companies on its database[14], producing and trading in horticulture, oil and spices, coffee, cotton, fish and honey (TOAM, 2021). PELUM Uganda has a list of 59 members on its website, most of them NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs)[15].

SPs support AEEs in training and advocacy, market linkages, research, input provision, financing, inspection and certification. A small number of entrepreneurs (the study identified one each in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) are venturing into production of biofertilizers and biopesticides. In all the four countries, training and advocacy is done mostly by NGOs and donor funded projects. In Tanzania, the study identified up to 26 farmers associations that provide support for access to inputs and markets.

There are not many speciality SPs targeting AEEs. Most SPs that service the agroecology sector are those that serve the agricultural sector in general. As one SP in Kenya observed, "there are many services that organic farmers share with non-organic farmers, and for many of us targeting organic farmers alone might not make business sense"[16]. However, there are emerging areas of specialization such as supply of biopesticides and biofertilizers.

A number of agroecology farmers and entrepreneurs in

14 Accessible at www.kilimohai.org

15 https://www.pelumuganda.org/member-organisations/, accessed 7th April, 2021.

16 Online interview with Nairobi-based agricultural service provider, 12th March, 2021.

Kenya and Uganda mentioned funding as a constraint to their operations[17]. The study did not identify any financial service providers focusing specifically on AEEs, although a number of banks and financial institutions working with smallholder farmers do provide support to AEEs. The push for financiers to align their operations to imperatives of sustainability within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as concerns about promoting adaptation to climate change are incentivizing them to engage with AEEs.

Equity Bank and Samawati Capital, both of which are registered in Kenya but working in all the East African countries, are two financial service providers that fall into this category. At national level in all the four countries, most banks have financing windows for agriculture, which, although not giving any special consideration for agroecology, are potential sources of funding for AEEs.

But even where financial service providers are interested to support AEEs, their requirements, which are dictated largely by "the business case" often put the money out of reach for many AEEs. Their requirements about revenue turnover can be as high as US$ 100,000[18]. Financiers also prefer to deal with enterprises that have been operational for two to three years "to be sure that they have gone past the initial basic challenges that companies face"[19]. A majority of AE farmers and entrepreneurs are individuals with very small-scale operations, and not likely to meet these requirements.

AEEs with whom the researchers interacted called for targeted funding windows for agroecology as a speciality in the financial institutions that support agricultural development. AEEs have little chance against farmers practising conventional agriculture in competing for funds that governments establish for agriculture given the general policy preference for conventional agriculture. Actors wishing to support AEEs should look into the possibility of establishing pooling resources to establish agroecology specific funding frameworks, or to open AE specific funding windows with existing agriculture funding frameworks.

Dynamics of AEEs in East Africa

Figure 1 shows how the value chain for AE starts with smallholder farmers and outgrowers, and then flows in one of three principal directions, namely,

a) supply of products to certified processors or non-certified processors, or sale to small scale traders for instant cash;
b) sale to the AE farmers' cooperative or association, for onward sale to certified organic processors; or
c) operation within a vertically integrated farming enterprise certified to farm, process, and sell produce locally or in export markets

17 Two out of four farmers, and the one entrepreneur in Kenya; all the three farmers and four out of the seven entrepreneurs in Uganda.

18 For instance, Samawati Capital require that an enterprise has been in operation for more than 2 years and has a revenue turnover of at least US$ 100,000. Interview with Managing Director,12th March 2021.

19 ibid.

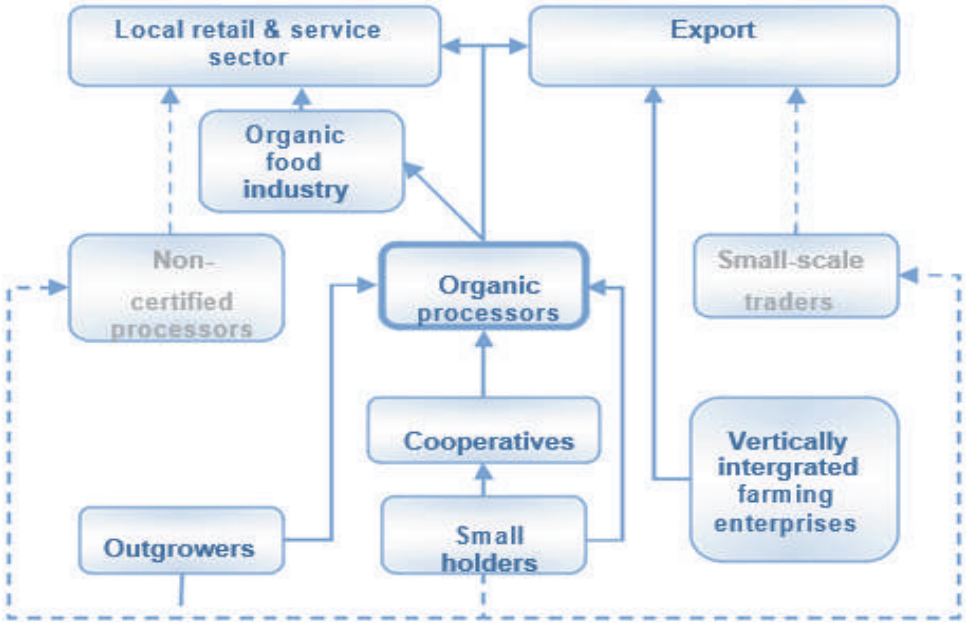


Figure 1: Organic product enterprise value chain (adopted from Belgium Technical Cooperation (2012))

Organic processors are the main market outlet for AE farmers, with many of whom they have supply agreements. Where such arrangements exist, the processors train farmers on organic practices, and assist them with inspection and certification, which can be quite costly and is often a hindrance to AE farmers breaking into AEEs[20]. Certified organic processors sell their produce to organic food industry for onward supply to retail and service outlets; or directly to retail and service outlets; or export to external markets.

Access to markets is another major challenge for AEEs. The main market for organic produce is among the urban middle class, far from the rural areas where many farmers are found. This may be good for farmers based in peri-urban areas, but they still have to grapple with transport, storage and other logistical costs, not to mention taxes and other fees needed to enable them display their produce for sale in urban areas. Increasingly, local AE producers in the region have to compete with organic produce from South Africa sold through local branches of South African supermarkets such as Game and Shoprite. In this connection, local AE produce is at a disadvantage as the farmers cannot compete with the prices quoted for the imported produce, thanks to lower production costs in South Africa. Export markets are the most lucrative, but accessing them is even more difficult on account of rigorous and expensive certification costs, volumes and other requirements that are way beyond the reach

20 According to Uganda's National Organic Agriculture Policy, "certification costs are still generally high with charges ranging between USD 4,000 and USD 7,000 on average per annum per commodity, as of 2015" (p.13)

of many AEEs.

To counter these challenges, AEEs in the region run periodic "earth markets" at specific locations; operate online marketing platforms or take advantage of aggregators, including by organizing their own aggregation through cooperatives and associations. Slow Food have ran earth markets in Molo, Nakuru County for 2 years now, which have proved quite popular, but they now realize sustainability demands that the markets are organized in major urban centres "where people do not produce their own food, and have money to buy the produce, as well as a willingness to pay more for value once they recognize it. KOAN[21], TOAM[22], and NOGAMU[23] all run online marketing platforms that link farmers with aggregators and consumers. A small number of AEEs, mainly aggregators target export markets.

The researchers interacted with a number of AEEs in the region that are successful and forward looking, who have a good understanding of the regional operational context in terms of both opportunities and constraints, and who can form a nucleus for reflection and action towards a regional approach to AE in East Africa. One AEE in Kirinyaga County in Central Kenya, a retired teacher turned farmer and entrepreneur who produces vegetables and fruits and breeds indigenous chicken, also runs a food outlet that offers indigenous dishes prepared using his produce. In Rwanda, Kigali Farm established in 2010 has become the largest supplier of oyster mushroom substrate and fresh mushroom in Rwanda, and has a footprint across the region. Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT) and the farmers supported by SWISSAID Tanzania are making great impact in promoting AE and have established good relations with relevant government departments at local and national levels. In Uganda, Mbale Ecological Association has established a niche for itself in the production and sale of biofertilizers and biopesticides. These and other promising AEEs in the region have immense potential, but they need support to engage across the region, to learn from and inspire each other and create leverage for policy influence to push back against industrial agriculture. They all called for support to convene them at regional level to reflect and strategize on how to scale up their operations with an eye on the regional market.

The researchers also interacted with sympathetic SPs and policy actors that could be useful in moving forward the agenda of promoting AEEs in the region. These include the focal point for ISFAA at the Ministry of Agriculture in Kenya; DUHAMIC ADRI and RYAF in Rwanda; the Crop Directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture and TOAM in Tanzania; and MAAIF (particularly the Organic Agriculture Secretariat when established), NOGAMU and PELUM in Uganda.

21 www.organicmarket.co.ke
22 https://kilimohai.org/marketplace/for-sale
23 https://www.nogamu.org/products

Gender Dimensions

Women are major players in AE, as it is practised mainly within the framework of smallholder agriculture, in which they are the main actors given their critical role in household food production. Youth are drawn to AE with the prospects of entrepreneurship, as their interest is to generate income through agribusiness. As a result, many interventions in support of AE target and benefit women and youth. Government initiatives in agriculture and agribusiness in all the four countries recognize the important role of women and youth in improving production and productivity, and commit to empower them as producers and entrepreneurs. In Tanzania, operational incubators supported by SWISSAID are all run by women.

There are youth specific AE interventions such as **Agri-Profocus** Initiative launched in Rwanda in March 2021 through a partnership between Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum (RYAF) and Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA), under the theme ***Promoting agroecology and Unlocking business opportunities for youth in Rwanda***. However, in general, youth in the region are more likely to be engaged in AE as entrepreneurs rather than as farmers, and as employees rather than owners of enterprises.

2.3. Regional Dimension: Challenges and Prospects

This research confirms that there is greater prospect for success and sustainability of AEEs in East Africa if they take a regional approach than if they limit their vision to the national level. The region provides opportunities for leveraging on comparative advantages of the different countries and offers a huge market for AE produce and services. This explains why implementation of the AU's Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) has taken a regional approach, using the EAC as the entry point.

Thanks to the EOA-I, cross-border trade in AE products is now possible in East Africa through official channels within the framework of East African Participatory Guarantee System, implementing East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS) using the East African Organic Mark (EAOM). Trade in AE products also occurs unofficially through informal cross-border channels that have connected communities across the national borders of East Africa since long before the formation of states.

There are immense opportunities for improving regional trade in AE products given the importance that the EAC gives to agricultural

Women are major key players

Youth are drawn by agribusiness aspect

Youth are more likely to be entrepreneurs than farmers; as employees than owners of enterprises

Greater prospect for success and sustainability of AEEs in East Africa if they take a regional approach than the national level.

Constraints

Conflicting messages from government policies and programmes

Lack of government investment in infrastructure and other incentives to attract processors

Inadequate access to financial and advisory services

Competition for markets for agroecology produce by cheap imports

Limited number of outlets for organic produce.

Poor location of agroecology poduce outlets.

trade as key component of the free movement of goods within the framework of the Common Market Protocol[24]. The Protocol commits the Member States to cooperate in agriculture and food security, including by establishing an Agricultural Development Fund, which will, among other things, "facilitate access to credit by all categories of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs, especially small-scale farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs"[25]. When established such a Fund should be able to provide the much needed financial resources to farmers and entrepreneurs.

The focus of the EAC on agriculture is a positive thing for AE, especially when viewed together with its concerns to ensure sustainable management of the environment and natural resources, and to promote adaptation to climate change. However, policy and institutional approach to improving agricultural productivity and its vision for cross-border agricultural trade is subject to the same pressures from the industrial agriculture lobby that affects national policies. A lot of education, awareness creation, capacity building and advocacy is needed among key policy actors in the EAC and within the member States for them to appreciate the value of investing in AE.

As things stand, the potential for working at the regional level to promote AE exists, but it is undermined by a number of constraints, among them: the mixed and conflicting messages from government policies and programmes about the way forward for agriculture; lack of government investment in infrastructure and other incentives to attract processors to rural areas; inadequate access to financial and advisory services and other support by AE producers and entrepreneurs; competition for markets for AE produce by cheap imports from countries where production costs are lower for farmers; and limited number of outlets for organic produce, most of which are located in high-income urban residential areas[26].

Nevertheless, there is scope for improving regional engagement on promotion of AEEs, by improving their access to SPs and creating an enabling policy environment for their operations. NGOs and development partners that have spearheaded awareness and capacity building of actors on AE in the region already have regional footprints and close links among them. The EAC provides a framework for strategizing and working regionally, and the Secretariat is quite open to engaging with both the private sector and NGOs in advancing the agenda of regional integration. AE producers, entrepreneurs and SPs should aim to think and act regionally, while also mobilizing to more effectively engage the EAC and through it the member States to meaningfully support AE.

24 Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Community Common Market, which came into force on 1st July 2010.

25 Article 45(6)(d).

26 e.g. Muthaiga, Lavington and Karen in Nairobi, and Oyster Bay in Dar es Salaam.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

This report presents the findings of a study that aimed to deepen understanding of the situation and operational context for AE in East Africa, based on case studies of Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The study makes the following conclusions:

1. The regional policy and institutional context is fairly supportive of AE, as the EAC is a major player in implementation of the AU's EOA-I, within the framework of which it adopted the EAOPS in 2007. Tanzania and Uganda have followed suit in adopting national standards for organic produce.

2. Although only Uganda has an AE-specific policy, the National Organic Agriculture Policy, all the four countries share a concern to promote good Agroecological practices for sustainable agriculture and to protect the health of soils and ecosystems, and their sector policies for agriculture, environment and natural resource management, and climate adaptation contain imperatives that are conducive to promotion of AE.

3. However, these pro-AE policies are contradicted in practice by the tendency of governments in the region to pursue industrial agriculture approaches to modernization of agriculture and improvement of food security that privilege the use of hybrid seeds and agro-chemicals and fertilizers.

4. There is increasing awareness about AE and its advantages, thanks largely to the efforts of NGOs, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and the private sector, and the number of AEEs and SPs is increasing in the region.

5. Many SPs that serve AEEs do so within the framework of support to agriculture generally and not with a specific focus on AE, although a number of AE-specific SPs were identified, such as those supplying biopesticides and biofertilizers.

6. The study did not identify any financial SPs that work specifically with AEEs, although a number of banks, financial institutions and investments firms serving the agricultural sector do provide support to AEEs. But even where financial SPs are available and express willingness to support AEEs, not many AE producers and entrepreneurs are able to meet their terms and conditions.

7. Interactions between AEEs, SPs and Policy Experts are not very structured in the region, but there have been efforts to establish national platforms bringing AE actors together, most of these formed within the framework of the AU's EOA-I. The Inter-Sectoral Forum on Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology (ISFAA) recently established in Kenya may serve as a good model for promoting more structured engagement among the different categories of AE actors, but it is still at formative stage.

8. Access to markets is a challenge that AE producers share with other small-scale farmers across the region, with infrastructure, taxes, storage, transport and other logistical costs among the main constraints.

9. There is immense and not yet fully exploited potential for AEEs in regional interactions and markets in East Africa, particularly within the framework of EAC Common Market.

10. There is general agreement among AEEs and SPs about the kind of support that AFSA, AEF and similar actors should provide to promote AE in the region. All emphasize the need for capacity development focused not so much on training and awareness building as on piloting of approaches, methodologies and technologies that can improve productivity and market access. But they also see the need for enhancing capacity of farmers, entrepreneurs and service providers to mobilize across the region to influence policies and programmes of the EAC, national governments and other development partners to push back on industrial agriculture and facilitate the practice of AE.

The study makes the following recommendations on the way forward:

1. AEEs, SPs and Policy Actors on AE should, with support from AFSA, AEF and other like-minded actors, create a common regional platform to work with national platforms to advocate for and influence changes in the policy and institutional context for AE in East Africa.

2. The common regional platform should work with national platforms to advocate for adoption of an AE specific policy by the EAC and in Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania, following the example of Uganda. In Kenya and Rwanda, the platforms should also push for establishment of national standards for organic produce.

3. The regional platform should work with the EAC on realizing the opportunities for AE within the framework of the Common Market. It should also work closely with the Agriculture and Food Security Sector at the EAC Secretariat to push for establishment and operationalization of the Agricultural Development Fund and to ensure that when established it shall have a funding stream directly targeting AEs.

4. In Uganda, AFSA, AEF and other like-minded actors should support the national AE platform to mobilize for dissemination of the National Organic Agriculture Policy, establishment of the Organic Agriculture Secretariat and enactment of the Organic Agriculture Act to ensure effective implementation of the Policy.

5. In each of the four countries, the national AE platform should facilitate AEEs to engage both decentralized/devolved and national governments to ensure that funding and other support provided to smallholder farmers provide for specific targeting of AE, making the case that not every smallholder is an AE farmer.

6. AFSA, AEF and other development partners supporting AE in the region should focus on availing skills and resources to enable AE producers' transit into business, with a focus on financing, improved productivity, post-harvest handling and storage, value addition, certification and market access, making the connection between ***kilimo uhai*** and ***kilimo faida***[27].

7. Given the contribution that AE can make to climate change, the regional and national platforms should mobilize and advocate for innovative funding mechanisms for AE within the framework of climate financing, including through the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

8. AEEs should focus on fully developing the local, national and regional markets in East Africa before thinking about exports abroad. In this connection, more awareness and training should be directed at the general public to make them appreciate the value of organic produce in contributing to food and nutrition security while also preserving the integrity of ecosystems.

9. AFSA and AEF should spearhead reflection among AE practitioners and their supporters in East Africa about how to complement capacity building for AE with political mobilization to create the leverage needed to counter the influence of industrial agriculture actors on policies in the region.

27 Kiswahili for 'organic agriculture' and 'agribusiness' respectively.

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(Footnotes)

1 Please note that the figures on this column (and in the Totals column in Table 1A) denote the actual number of individuals interviewed, and not the sum totals of the categories, as some informants may fall into more than one category.