

Bioalamessin: A Successful Meeting Point

5 years ago, Ms Hundelele Nana Epouse Adjahoto's only, source of organically grown produce was the backyard garden at her home in the Togolese capital Lomé.

She has always desired to ensure her family only consumed organic food. But she couldn't grow much in volumes or variety and had no way of confirming the origin of food grown in the city markets. In her words, "I couldn't grow all the vegetables at the same time."

The supply of safe, healthy fresh produce on her family's table was erratic. Until she came to learn of BIOALAMESSIN. "The system is very well organised and responsive. The products are of good quality," says Adjahoto.

BIOALAMESSIN, is a weekly, organic food market in Lomé Togo. An initiative of an agroecology enterprise, Experta Togo that is changing the story for organic farming in the country.

At a designated sales point in the Dekawolossime market in Lomé and via an online platform, the market brings together two groups who have previously had trouble finding each other. Togolese Agro ecology farmers/ organic food producers from rural areas and organic food consumers in urban area.

With advantages such as availability of land and existence of well

established farmers organisations, as well as widespread awareness on the nutritional superiority of organic food, Togo is an African agro ecology success story in waiting. But until recently there was no specific market where producers could converge or consumers could access all organic products.

This was the challenge Experta Togo sought to address with BIOALAMESSIN farmers market.

Today the initiative has branched out to include trainings for producers on better organic farming practices, and rolled out similar markets in two other towns.

The result is smooth running system of organic farm to table that reaches over 1000 Togolese.

For farmers like Kpakpo Yawo Mawuli, the initiative was a breath of life for his struggling farm. "In the

past we had difficulties in selling our products regularly. But since we have a partnership with BIOALAMESSIN, our expectations are fulfilled. Our products are delivered at prices that allow us to make more profit from our activity. Among other things, we benefit from better visibility, exchange visits with other producers, training and information sessions for those involved in organic farming, advice on compliance with organic farming standards and the GSP certification guide," he said.

Success stories of agro ecological enterprise like Experta Togo's BIOALAMESSIN farmers market, only highlight the potential for organic food markets in Africa. Not to skip over the challenges that present. If anything, the odds seem stacked against the industry.

For instance, agro ecological methods require labour, which is in



Customers who came to shop at the organic market



Gnakou Mamilani Director General Experta Togo Agro



Head of GSP within IFOAM, Ms Cornelia Kirshner and the national GSP facilitator

short supply for the agro entrepreneurs under Experta Togo.

The general attitudes towards traditional farming as well as enmasse, rural urban migration of what would have been the next generation of agro ecologists can be blamed for this.

There are also the issues with the organic farms being little islands in a sea of chemical and pesticide ridden land. The adoption of agro ecological farming is still by few and far between within the country's arable areas. Farmers still face the challenges of transporting, storing and packaging fresh produce resulting in food wastage. Not to forget lack of access to funds and the impact of climate change, in a country where most of the farming relies on rain.

But the footfall at BIOALAMESSIN's three locations proves the market was ripe and the farmers ready regardless.

Organic agriculture initiatives and organisations seem to be the guiding

beacon for these agro ecological initiatives seeking to join the success stories. Especially since political will in Togo to implement policies that ensure food sovereignty and ultimately security is low. For Experta Togo, it was both financial and technical support over the years with various partners in the agro ecology cause.

With BIOALAMESSIN, farmers have been able to increase their production volume of organic food. The Togolese farmers producing under the initiative could very well be the nation's first wave of agroecological entrepreneurs. They have also been able to expand their farms, employ

workers at the farms and pay fair wages for the work.

"One thing is to produce, the other is to be able to sell your products at prices close to the cost of production. I started organic production in 2008 and the big difficulty I had until 2019 was selling the products at prices that should allow me and my team to live from our production. Towards the end of 2019, thanks to a friend, I came into contact with the first person in charge of the BIOALAMESSIN initiative, who had to visit my farm. The prices he offered for my products are very comforting and the revenue from the first delivery was a breath of fresh air for the farm. I must admit that thanks to this collaboration with BIOALAMESSIN my farm has sold its products at interesting prices to this day," says Komlan Toussin, one of the producers under the initiative.

BIOALAMESSIN has 20 active producers all practicing safe food production methods and another five still converting their farms to zero pesticide and harmful chemical use. Though absolute food sovereignty still a long term goal, initiatives like this are one step in the right direction. The farmers and the consumers of organic food have a meeting point.



GSP farm visit