Policy Brief: Promoting Agroecological Practices for Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Resilience in Togo

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Executive Summary

Agriculture plays a vital role in Togo's economy, contributing 38% to GDP and employing over 40% of the workforce. However, the sector is under significant pressure from soil degradation, unsustainable farming practices, and the impacts of climate change. These factors have led to declining yields, increasing food insecurity, and greater vulnerability among smallholder farmers. As climate variability, including droughts and erratic rainfall, intensifies, the need for sustainable farming solutions is more critical than ever.

Agroecological practices, which promote environmentally friendly and sustainable farming methods, offer a promising solution. By focusing on restoring soil health, conserving water, and building resilience to climate shocks, agroecology has the potential to revitalize agriculture in Togo. Despite its benefits, the adoption of agroecological practices remains limited due to inadequate policy support, restricted access to organic inputs, insufficient market infrastructure, and weak technical knowledge.

This policy brief outlines several key recommendations to promote agroecological practices in Togo:

- Integrate Agroecology into National Agricultural Policies
  To scale agroecological practices, Togo must revise its national agricultural strategy to fully incorporate sustainable approaches like agroforestry, organic fertilization, and crop diversification. This will require increased government funding, policy incentives, and farmer training programs.

- Improve Access to Organic Inputs
  Smallholder farmers need better access to organic inputs such as compost and bio-fertilizers. Establishing regional production hubs and providing financial incentives can facilitate the transition to more sustainable inputs.

- Strengthen Farmer Training and Extension Services
  Practical training programs and demonstration farms are essential for equipping farmers with the skills to adopt agroecological practices. Establishing Farmer Field Schools and fostering peer-to-peer learning networks can help bridge the knowledge gap.

- Develop Market Access for Agroecological Products
  Developing certification systems and improving market infrastructure, such as storage and transportation, will help farmers access premium markets. Public procurement programs that prioritize agroecological products can also create stable demand.

Introduction

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of Togo, contributing significantly to GDP and employment. However, the sector faces numerous challenges. Despite employing 40.7% of the workforce and contributing 38% to GDP, poverty remains high among farming households (Esso-Hanam Atake et al., 2020). This stems from the agricultural sector being under pressure from soil degradation, unsustainable farming practices, and the growing impacts of climate change. In fact, the vulnerability of Togo to climate change is becoming increasingly apparent, with more frequent droughts, unpredictable rainfall, and flooding posing significant threats to agricultural productivity. As a result, many smallholder farmers face declining yields, increasing food insecurity, and a rising vulnerability to environmental shocks (World Bank, 2021).

Agroecological practices, which promote sustainable and environmentally friendly farming methods, offer a pathway to addressing these challenges. Agroecology focuses on restoring soil health, conserving water, promoting biodiversity, and building resilience to climate change (Zenda & Rudolph, 2024). However, the adoption of agroecological practices in Togo remains limited due to barriers such as inadequate policy support, restricted access to organic inputs, and insufficient market

infrastructure (GIZ, 2020). This policy brief highlights key policy options and recommendations to promote the widespread adoption of agroecological practices in Togo, to ensure a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector for the future.

Sustainable Farming and Environmental Conservation through Agroecology

In Togo's Savannah Region, a transformative agroecological initiative has revolutionized traditional farming practices in the Oti and Tandjoaré Districts. This project has empowered 1,500 beneficiaries to adopt environmentally friendly farming methods through the promotion of organic manure use and sustainable soil management techniques. The results have been remarkable: agroecological fields have seen productivity rise to 3 tonnes/hectare, while over 1,000 hectares of soil have been recovered through erosion control. The initiative's encompassing approach, including the establishment of a botanical garden, installation of solar-powered boreholes, and training of 24 nursery growers, has improved soil fertility and conserved biodiversity and enhanced water accessibility (1).

Key Policy Messages

- Agroecology is essential for sustainable agriculture in Togo, helping to restore soil health, increase productivity, and build resilience to climate change.
- Integrating agroecology into national policies will provide the necessary framework and incentives for widespread adoption of sustainable farming practices.
- Improving access to organic inputs and farmer training is critical for equipping smallholder farmers with the tools and knowledge to transition to environmentally friendly practices.
- Developing market access for agroecological products will create financial incentives for farmers, enhancing their livelihoods and promoting sustainable agricultural growth.

Gaps and Barriers

Despite the potential of agroecological practices to transform Togo's agricultural sector, several gaps and barriers hinder their widespread adoption:

Limited Policy Support for Agroecology
The national agricultural policies of Togo largely focus on conventional farming practices, prioritizing short-term yield increases over long-term sustainability. Agroecology is yet to be fully integrated into national strategies, leading to inadequate funding and institutional support for the promotion of sustainable farming practices. As a result, farmers lack the necessary policy incentives to transition to agroecology.

Restricted Access to Organic Inputs
Smallholder farmers in Togo face challenges in accessing organic inputs such as compost, bio-fertilizers, and organic pest management solutions. The distribution networks for these inputs are underdeveloped, particularly in rural and remote areas. This has made it difficult for farmers to reduce their reliance on chemical fertilizers and adopt agroecological practices effectively.

Inadequate Technical Knowledge and Training
Many farmers and agricultural extension officers in Togo lack the technical expertise required to implement agroecological methods. While some initiatives have introduced agroecology, there remains a significant knowledge gap. There is also insufficient investment in farmer training programs and demonstration farms, limiting opportunities for hands-on learning and knowledge-sharing among farmers.

Weak Market Infrastructure for Agroecological Products
Farmers practicing agroecology often struggle to access markets that value sustainably produced goods. There is a lack of certification systems for organic and agroecological products, which makes it difficult for farmers to differentiate their products and receive premium prices. In addition, market

infrastructure, such as storage facilities and transportation networks, remains underdeveloped, contributing to post-harvest losses and limited market access.

Policy Options and Recommendations

Integrate Agroecology into National Agricultural Policies

To promote widespread adoption of agroecology, the government needs to fully incorporate agroecological practices into Togo's national agricultural strategy. This will provide the institutional support necessary to scale up sustainable farming practices.

Recommended Actions

- Revise national agricultural policies to include agroecological approaches such as crop diversification, agroforestry, and organic fertilization.
- Increase government funding for agroecological research and farmer training programs.
- Provide financial incentives, such as subsidies or tax breaks, for farmers who adopt agroecological practices.

A policy framework that supports agroecology will create an enabling environment for farmers to adopt sustainable practices, resulting in improved soil health, increased crop yields, and greater climate resilience.

Example:
The Togolese government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, partners with local NGOs and international development organizations to revise the national agricultural strategy. Agroecological practices such as agroforestry, crop rotation, and organic farming are included in the new policy framework. To encourage adoption, financial incentives are introduced, such as a 20% subsidy for farmers who transition to organic farming and agroecological practices. Extension officers trained in agroecology are deployed in rural areas like the Savannah and Kara regions to provide farmers with technical assistance and ongoing support.

Key Implementers:

National Government (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries):

- *Lead the revision of agricultural policies to include agroecological practices. Allocate funds for policy incentives and support the implementation of the revised framework.*
- *Train extension officers on agroecological methods and create financial incentives for farmers adopting sustainable practices.*

Local Governments (Regional and District Agricultural Offices):

- *Ensure local-level implementation of the national agroecological policy framework.*
- *Support regional training programs and provide logistical support to extension officers working with farmers.*

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- *Collaborate with the government to support advocacy efforts, provide technical support, and assist farmers in adopting agroecological practices.*

Research Institutions:

- *Conduct research to identify region-specific agroecological techniques and provide data to inform the policy revisions and implementation.*

Improve Access to Organic Inputs and Resources

Expanding access to organic inputs, such as compost, bio-fertilizers, and organic pest control solutions, is critical to enabling farmers to transition away from chemical inputs and adopt agroecological methods.

Recommended Actions

- Establish regional production hubs for organic inputs to ensure that compost, bio-fertilizers, and other inputs are readily available and affordable.
- Provide financial incentives and subsidies for the use of organic inputs, particularly for smallholder farmers in rural areas.
- Strengthen the distribution networks for organic inputs, ensuring that farmers in remote regions have easy access.

Improved access to organic inputs will facilitate the adoption of agroecological practices, leading to healthier soils, increased agricultural productivity, and reduced environmental degradation.

Example:
The Ministry of Agriculture collaborates with local cooperatives and private sector companies to establish regional compost production centers in key agricultural areas such as Maritime and Plateaux regions. These centers produce organic compost and bio-fertilizers from locally sourced materials, reducing costs for smallholder farmers. The government provides a 50% subsidy on organic inputs for the first three years to encourage farmers to transition away from chemical inputs. In addition, a mobile distribution network is set up to ensure that remote farmers can access these organic inputs easily.

Key Implementers:

National Government (Ministry of Agriculture):

- *Provide funding and subsidies for the establishment of organic input production centers in key agricultural regions.*
- *Develop policies that incentivize the use of organic inputs, such as compost, bio-fertilizers, and organic pest control solutions.*

Private Sector (Local Agribusinesses, Entrepreneurs):

- *Set up compost production facilities and bio-fertilizer manufacturing units, supplying smallholder farmers with organic inputs.*

Farmer Cooperatives:

- *Organize collective purchasing of organic inputs to make them more affordable for smallholder farmers.*
- *Facilitate distribution networks to reach farmers in remote areas.*

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- *Provide training and technical assistance on the production and use of organic inputs, particularly in rural areas.*

Strengthen Farmer Training and Extension Services

Equipping farmers and extension officers with the necessary technical skills is essential for the successful adoption of agroecological practices. This can be achieved through targeted training programs and the establishment of demonstration farms.

Recommended Actions

- Increase funding for agroecological training programs, focusing on practical, hands-on education for farmers and extension officers.
- Establish Farmer Field Schools and demonstration farms where farmers can learn agroecological techniques such as composting, water conservation, and agroforestry.
- Foster farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing networks to enhance the spread of agroecological practices across communities.

With better access to technical training and practical experience, farmers will be more confident and capable of adopting agroecological practices, leading to more sustainable and productive farming systems.

Example:
The government of Togo partners with research institutions and NGOs to establish 10 Farmer Field Schools across the country, focusing on practical agroecological training. These schools are set up in agricultural zones such as Central and Savanes regions, where smallholder farmers are trained in water conservation techniques, organic pest management, and agroforestry. Demonstration plots are established to allow farmers to see the benefits of agroecology firsthand. In addition, farmer cooperatives are encouraged to create peer-learning networks, where experienced agroecological practitioners share their knowledge with new farmers.

Key Implementers:

National Government (Ministry of Agriculture):

- *Allocate resources for the creation of Farmer Field Schools and the training of extension officers in agroecological practices.*
- *Develop national curricula for agroecological training and coordinate with local governments to ensure these programs are widely implemented.*

Research Institutions (e.g., University of Lomé):

- *Develop and implement agroecological training programs in collaboration with government agencies and NGOs.*

Local Governments (Regional and District Agricultural Offices):

- *Support the establishment of Farmer Field Schools and demonstration farms in key agricultural regions.*

Farmer Cooperatives:

- *Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and organize workshops for members on agroecological practices.*

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- *Collaborate with the government and research institutions to provide practical, hands-on training and organize farmer-to-farmer knowledge-sharing programs.*

Develop Market Access for Agroecological Products

Creating market opportunities for agroecological products is crucial to incentivizing farmers to adopt sustainable practices. Improved market infrastructure, certification systems, and public procurement programs can help build demand for sustainably produced goods.

Recommended Actions

- Establish low-cost certification systems, such as a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), to certify agroecological products and allow farmers to access premium markets.

- Develop public procurement programs that prioritize agroecological products for use in schools, hospitals, and other public institutions.
- Invest in market infrastructure, including cold storage, transportation, and processing facilities, to improve access to markets and reduce post-harvest losses.

Stronger market access and infrastructure will provide farmers with financial incentives to adopt agroecological practices, ensuring a stable and profitable market for their sustainably produced goods.

Example:
The Ministry of Trade, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, introduces a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for organic certification in Togo's rural areas, particularly in the Plateaux and Kara regions. This low-cost certification system allows smallholder farmers practicing agroecology to certify their products collectively, reducing certification costs. Additionally, the government launches a public procurement program requiring that 20% of food purchased for schools, hospitals, and public institutions come from certified agroecological farmers. Cold storage facilities and processing plants are built in key agricultural hubs, ensuring that agroecological products can reach urban markets in Lomé and Atakpamé without spoilage.

Key Implementers:

National Government (Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Agriculture):

- *Develop and implement a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for agroecological product certification.*
- *Lead public procurement programs that prioritize agroecological products for schools, hospitals, and public institutions.*
- *Invest in infrastructure such as cold storage and transportation networks to support agroecological markets.*

Local Governments (Regional Market Authorities):

- *Facilitate the establishment of agroecological marketplaces in rural and urban areas to connect farmers with buyers.*

Farmer Cooperatives and Associations:

- *Assist farmers in obtaining certification for agroecological products and organizing collective marketing efforts.*

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- *Provide technical support to farmers for certification and market access.*
- *Assist with raising consumer awareness about the benefits of agroecological products and certification systems.*

Private Sector (Retailers, Distributors):

- *Partner with farmers and cooperatives to source and distribute certified agroecological products to domestic and international markets.*

Conclusion

The agricultural sector in Togo faces pressing challenges, including soil degradation, unsustainable farming practices, and the growing impacts of climate change. Such challenges threaten the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the country's food security. Agroecological practices offer a sustainable solution by promoting farming techniques that restore soil health, conserve biodiversity, and build resilience to climate shocks. However, for agroecology to take root in Togo, strategic interventions are needed.

These policy options will empower smallholder farmers to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices, increase their productivity, and enhance their ability to adapt to climate change. Implementing these recommendations will benefit the environment and improve the livelihoods of rural communities, ensuring that Togo's agricultural sector is positioned to meet future challenges while contributing to the country's overall economic development and food security.

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Footnotes

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