CONSIDERING AGROECOLOGY IN THE RIO CONVENTIONS: potential for scaling up

SUMMARY NOTE
This summary is drawn from an analysis of the Rio Conventions, shared by three civil society organizations, members of the Minka International network, which advocate for an agroecological transition of agricultural and food production systems.

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Preamble

In June 1992, the Third United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro. This historic summit resulted in three Conventions drawn up by the States Parties, addressing three global issues: climate change, biodiversity erosion and desertification. Although the primary concern of these Conventions is environmental, agricultural and food issues underlie them, due to the impact of agriculture on the environment and the necessity to meet the food needs of the world population, considering the limits of available resources. Agroecology, as a holistic and integrated approach, offers transversal answers to these global challenges. Despite this, agroecology's place in the decisions negotiated by the Rio Conventions remains very limited.

At a time when environmental issues are becoming ever more pressing, reflected in increased political attention for these international works and discussions, strengthening agroecology within the Rio conventions is fundamental to drive the necessary transformation of food systems. These instruments guide national policies and define the framework for environmental financing, particularly by international institutions.

Days from the end of this year, as the three Conventions will meet, this paper aims to take stock of the place of agroecology in the three Rio Conventions, to provide keys to analysis and to propose avenues of reflection for a better integration of agroecology in the three Conventions.

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1 “Food systems are one of the main reasons we are failing to stay within our planet’s ecological boundaries.” António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, Speech at Columbia University: “The State of the Planet” in December 2020.
Global issues, Agroecology and the Rio Conventions

In the face of global challenges, increasingly alarming findings

Almost a decade ago, the United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, divided into 17 major objectives to be achieved to drastically reduce poverty and inequality by 2030, in a peaceful context and while preserving the planet. With 6 years to go, the state of play is alarming, as more than half of humanity has been left behind².

Agricultural and food systems are at the heart of the planetary challenges. Human activities have already transformed 70% of the Earth’s from its natural state³ and the figures pointing to the responsibility of agri-food systems in the destruction of the environment are startling. Indeed, food systems bear a significant responsibility for the massive deforestation of natural ecosystems, the use of fresh water and the depletion of soils⁴. They are the sources of around a third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions⁵, a cause and aggravating factor of climate change, while also being largely responsible for the collapse of biodiversity⁶. While the livelihoods of half of humanity depend directly on agricultural and food systems⁷, external input- and resource-intensive systems, continue to fail in their ambition to feed the world.

Paradoxically, agriculture is also a major victim of the damage it causes, being heavily impacted by soil impoverishment, climate change and the consequences of biodiversity erosion, all of which reducing agricultural yields. Yet solutions do exist. Agriculture is also an important lever for mitigating climate change⁸, and offers numerous opportunities for improving biodiversity and fighting against land degradation.

² “Halfway to the deadline for the 2030 Agenda, the SDG Progress Report; Special Edition shows we are leaving more than half the world behind. Progress on more than 50 per cent of targets of the SDGs is weak and insufficient; on 30 per cent, it has stalled or gone into reverse. These include key targets on poverty, hunger and climate⁹, Foreword by António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, in Report on the Sustainable Development Goals 2023: Special Edition, United Nations, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf
³ UNFCCC Global Land Outlook https://www.unccd.int/resources/global-land-outlook/glo2-summary-decision-makers
⁵ These include methane, particularly from intensive livestock farming, nitrous oxide from fertilizers, carbon dioxide from land-use change, input production, mechanization, food processing, transport and preparation, and so on.
⁶ The erosion of biodiversity is mainly linked to “the conversion of natural or semi-natural land to agricultural use, followed by the introduction of invasive alien species, including pests and diseases, and the place of varietal breeding in our societies”. FAO, Sustainable Agriculture and Biodiversity - Inextricable links: Revised version (Rome, Italy: FAO, 2018), 9-17, https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/3540089b-bdca-4b38-8cb3-1aa062bbe43.
⁷ FAO, 2023, “Estimating global and country-level employment in agrifood systems”.
⁸ These levers include adopting healthy, sustainable, meat-free diets, reducing dependence on synthetic inputs that are highly dependent on fossil fuels, and adopting practices that improve soil health and thus its carbon storage capacity.
Many stakeholders, such as farmers’ movements, NGOs and academics, support agroecology as a way of transforming agriculture to meet these environmental challenges, as well as those of public health and food and nutritional security. Agroecology is at the same time a science, a set of practices and a social movement. It is characterized by the application of ecological principles to agriculture practices, and by the regenerative use of natural resources and ecosystem services. It also promotes socially fair food systems in which people can exercise choice over the food they eat and the way it is produced. It has the advantage of proposing inclusive responses to environmental and human challenges, based on local and regional specificities. It proposes a coherent intervention approach to mitigate the effects of climate disruption and adapt to increasingly extreme and intense climatic hazards, by improving soil health, supporting the development and reconstruction of biodiversity, but also food security and the fight against inequalities. The local adaptations of agroecology practices make it a multifaceted option, adaptable to the climatic, economic, social conditions in which it is deployed. Practices based on agroecological principles have sometimes been in use for thousands of years.

They began to be studied and conceptualized in the 1980s, and part of the scientific community now recognizes agroecology as a field of study of its own, as well as its potential to address the negative externalities of agriculture. As a strong social movement, agroecology also aims to fight economic inequalities and the concentration of power in food systems. This social movement firmly anchors agroecology in "a political struggle to overcome inequalities of power and conflicts of interest in order to generate local knowledge, promote social justice, ensure the flourishing of culture and identity, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas." At the same time, agroecology is becoming an increasingly institutionalized concept within international arenas, and this is reflected in speeches and policy. The FAO’s collaborative work is one example, defining agroecology around 10 elements in 2018, as are those of HLPE defining 13 principles in 2019.

But despite a solid base of scientific knowledge, and numerous daily demonstrations of the relevance of agroecology to meet global challenges, the concrete commitment of governments (beyond speeches) to support agroecological transformation is long overdue. In this context, are there any clear guidelines within the international instruments of the Rio Conventions to facilitate the deployment of food systems that serve both populations and the environment?

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9 HLPE. 2019. “Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition”, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/48a4b168-485e-4da5-b324-b14f6d761dc0/content
10 Idem
11 Today, numerous calls for scientific projects are directing researchers towards a better understanding of agroecological processes and their impact on the world’s territories (EU - Horizon Europe, Desira, etc.).
12 HLPE, 2019, p.46.
13 Today, numerous calls for scientific projects are directing researchers towards a better understanding of agroecological processes and their effects on the world’s territories (EU - Horizon Europe, Desira, etc.).
15 HLPE, 2019, p.17
The Rio Conventions and the voluntary approach to environmental issues

The Rio Earth Summit led to the adoption of three international conventions: on climate change (UNFCCC), on combating desertification (UNCCD) and on biological diversity (UNCBD). The aim of these Conventions is to encourage States to adopt and implement the necessary policies for the desired changes. Regular intergovernmental meetings, the “Conferences of the Parties” (COPs), adopt decisions to define the objectives to be pursued, and monitor the progress of States in implementing their commitments.
Peripheral bodies made up of international experts associated with each Convention provide Parties with scientific, technical and thematic insights. The related documents (reports, studies, recommendations for decision-makers, etc.), provide guidelines for tackling the issues at stake. Their analyses, points of view and recommendations serve as a reference for the decisions taken at the COPs.

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<th>Focus on the three Rio Conventions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of signatories</td>
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<td>Overall objective</td>
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<td>Scientific expertise body</td>
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Various other ad hoc groups produce thematic reference elements for each of the Conventions.
While the Conventions are generally followed by their signatories, and actions are gradually being taken to implement them at different pace depending on the Parties, their weakness is that they only apply in compliance with existing international agreements and national legislation, with no sanctions in the event of non-application. As such, they take a proactive approach and propose general recommendations. Their implementation depends on the States, although they must justify their efforts to the Conventions, through various mechanisms.

### The challenges of recognizing agroecology in the Conventions

Recognition of agroecology by the Conventions would make an important contribution to shifting political paradigms at different levels, and to decompartmentalizing sectoral environment/agricultural policies. Its explicit mention in the Conventions would legitimize its recognition and help channel funding.

Thus, by promoting agroecology as a desirable solution, an object of consensus and political and scientific support at the highest levels, the Conventions can facilitate its scaling-up. Indeed, although the political works of the Conventions are non-binding, they are powerful instruments for constructing narratives that influence public opinion and national policies. Moreover, decisions taken at the COPs guide the financial choices of international institutions, which play an important role in financing global development and its issues. This power of action, linked to the explicit recognition of agroecology in the Rio Conventions, justifies further research about its mentions in the Conventions and in peripheral texts and works.
Discreet recognition of agroecology in the Rio Conventions\textsuperscript{16}

The term "agroecology" does not appear explicitly in any of the three founding texts of the Conventions. This may be explained by the fact that the term was not widely adopted by the international community in the early 1990s. As the term spread and gained legitimacy, it subsequently appeared in a number of COP decisions and peripheral texts.

**Agroecology in COP decisions: a very discreet presence**

Direct mention of agroecology varies greatly from one convention to another. While to date there is no such mention in the reports of the UNFCCC COPs, this is not the case for the other two conventions.

The term "agroecology" first appeared in 2014 in the UNCBD COP 12 report from Pyeongchang, which "Invites Parties to raise awareness on best practices of sustainable use, including agroecological approaches with positive impacts on the conservation of biodiversity in order to address pressures on biodiversity"\textsuperscript{17}. Two years later, COP 13 in Cancún "Encourages Parties to recognize the importance of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities for the sustainability of agriculture that is aligned with their world view (cosmovisión) and upholds diversification and ecological rotation and agroforestry, and to promote community and family farming, alongside agroecology, with a view to promoting sustainable production and improving nutrition"\textsuperscript{18}.

In Sharm el-Sheikh in 2018, COP 14 went further, recognizing the agroecological nature of indigenous peoples' farming systems and practices, and its potential for finding solutions to current unsustainable production and consumption practices\textsuperscript{19}. It also encourages the "Diversify farming systems and the resulting food resources and habitats of pollinators through home gardens and agroecological approaches, such as crop rotations, intercropping, agroforestry, integrated pest management, organic agriculture, and ecological intensification"\textsuperscript{20}.

\textsuperscript{16} The information in this section is based on a systematic analysis of COP decisions since 1992, and on an analysis of peripheral texts linked to the 3 Conventions.


Furthermore, in its Annex III, it offers an even clearer position for enshrining agroecology in the UNCBD, arguing that: "The full integration of indigenous knowledge systems and practices into the Convention would make it possible to draw on traditional agroecological farming systems for solutions to currently unsustainable production and consumption patterns"\textsuperscript{21}.

The 2022 Kunming-Montreal COP aimed to draw up the new global biodiversity framework for 2022-2030. Within this framework, and in line with previous COPs, agroecology is presented as an innovative approach\textsuperscript{22} contributing to "the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature’s contributions to people, including ecosystem services and functions”\textsuperscript{23}. This recognition is probably one of the clearest and most complete of the Rio Conventions.

At UNCCD level, it is necessary to wait until 2019, at COP 14 in New Delhi, for agroecology to appear, mentioned in two decisions. The first presents practical recommendations resulting from cooperation between the SPI and the other scientific panels, and encourages "[...] Recognizing the importance and diversity of indigenous and local knowledge and practices, also taking into account agroecological principles and practices"\textsuperscript{24}.

The second focuses on the promotion of practices to cope with drought, and invites "Parties to use a variety of technical approaches, such as sustainable land and water management, agroecological approaches, ecosystem restoration and watershed management, for addressing drought and increasing resilience of ecosystems and communities to extreme weather"\textsuperscript{25}. Unfortunately, this recognition proved ephemeral, as agroecology was subsequently totally absent from the decisions of COP 15 in 2022\textsuperscript{26}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ditto
  \item \textsuperscript{22} It should be noted that this is presented as an innovative approach alongside sustainable intensification and other biodiversity-friendly practices.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Target 10, "Global Biodiversity Framework from Kunming to Montreal. Draft decision proposed by the President" (Montreal (Canada): Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Environment Program, December 18, 2022), 11, https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/7a5e/1d9a/f8718d1a5dd9828dbae764053/cop-15-item9e-nonpaper-president-en.pdf
  \item \textsuperscript{26} It is worth noting that in 2021, in preparation for the World Summit on Food Systems, the UNCCD is proposing a publication introducing agroecological approaches to making food production systems more resilient. www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-10/AG2_Soil%20Health_final%20for%20web.pdf
\end{itemize}
Agroecology in peripheral COP texts: sporadic mentions

Outside the COPs, agroecology is gradually being mentioned - albeit sporadically - in a number of peripheral texts relating to the various conventions.

In UNFCCC, although agroecology does not appear in COP reports, the IPCC is more loquacious. In 2022, its report on impacts, adaptation and vulnerability stated that "Agroecological principles and practices, ecosystem-based management in fisheries and aquaculture, and other approaches that work with natural processes support food security, nutrition, health and well-being, livelihoods and biodiversity, sustainability and ecosystem services (high confidence)" [27]. The following year, the Summary for Policymakers of the IPCC report stated: "Examples of effective adaptation options include: cultivar improvements, on-farm water management and storage, soil moisture conservation, irrigation, agroforestry, community-based adaptation, farm and landscape level diversification in agriculture, sustainable land management approaches, use of agroecological principles and practices and other approaches that work with natural processes (high confidence)" [28].

In 2019, the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services mentions the term agroecology alongside "sustainable agricultural practices" in order to produce and consume sustainably [29].

In 2022, the Global Land Outlook (GLO), UNCCD’s flagship publication, highlights the role of today’s global food systems in land degradation: "Food systems are responsible for 80% of deforestation, 70% of freshwater use, and the single greatest cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss". The publication also mentions agroecology as a sustainable alternative, enabling agriculture to move from being the main cause of degradation to being the main driver of land and soil restoration: "Many traditional and modern food production practices can enable agriculture to pivot from being the primary cause of degradation to becoming the principal catalyst for land and soil restoration […] Sustainable food production alternatives, inspired by agroecological approaches, are affordable and effective" [30].

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29 "Options for sustainable agricultural production exist and continue to be developed, some having more impact than others on biodiversity and ecosystem functions (6.3.2.1). These options include integrated pest and nutrient management, organic farming, agroecological practices, soil and water conservation practices, environmentally friendly agriculture, agroforestry, silvo-pastoral systems, irrigation management, small plot systems and practices to improve animal welfare." (page 42) "Promote sustainable agricultural practices, including good agricultural practices, agroecology, as well as multifunctional landscape management and integrated cross-sectoral management" (page 46) IPBES, "Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services" (Zenodo, May 4, 2019), 42-46, https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.3831673
Slow recognition of agroecology, despite its proven relevance...

With an almost 30-year perspective on the Conventions, it is clear that the recognition of agroecology, although gradually gaining ground in terms of positioning, remains rather weak. Indeed, while agroecological practices are part of the solutions identified (among others), their systemic approach, constituted by political, social and cultural dimensions, is not promoted as a transformative societal model that can achieve or contribute to achieving the objectives set by the Conventions. For example, agroecology could be interpreted as a global approach in the UNCBD COP 13 and 14 reports, whereas it is only presented as one sustainable agricultural practice among others in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and in the 2019 IPBES report. Is this a step backwards? The disappearance of any mention of agroecology from the UNCCD texts at COP 15 could also suggest so...

However, from the perspective of global issues, agroecology offers concrete solutions in terms of:

> **Mitigation and adaptation to climate change.** Agroecology contributes to climate change mitigation by reducing emissions linked to the production of synthetic inputs and soil carbon losses linked to conventional practices, while promoting carbon sequestration. At the same time, agroecology is, by essence, an effective solution for adapting to climate variations, which is a priority for vulnerable groups, the very ones who have very little responsibility for GHG emissions.

> **Development and reconstruction of biodiversity.** By diversifying and combining different crops, integrating crop and livestock production, and promoting ecosystem services, agroecology supports ecosystems and biodiversity. By drawing on *in situ* genetic diversity, agroecology supports the natural adaptation of ecosystems, and through its integrated system, agroecology reduces pressure on ecosystems and supports biodiversity. Moreover, by promoting habitat continuity, agroecology also contributes to the development and protection of diversity.

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31 Climate Action Network Submission to the Sharm-el-Sheik joint work on implementation of action on Agriculture and Food Security, 2023.
32 *In situ* genetic resources are those found in natural ecosystems and habitats, in which they develop their characteristics.
Combating land degradation. Agroecology naturally contributes to improving soil fertility\(^{34}\), increasing biodiversity\(^{35}\) and thus the resilience of ecosystems\(^{36}\), preserving water resources\(^{37}\), protecting against strong winds, drought and erosion\(^{38}\), and so on. Ecological intensification also helps to avoid land-use change\(^{39}\), while promoting the development of ancillary services such as the supply of firewood, aromatic and medicinal plants, and providing a high-quality living environment\(^{40}\).

So how can we explain this difficulty in recognizing agroecology in the Conventions? Several avenues can be explored to help explain the timid references to agroecology in the Conventions:

- The term agroecology, originally carried by social and peasant movements, remains divisive, and its operationalization inherently challenges the major established interests, the very ones capable of organizing themselves to influence negotiations. Thus, because of their consensual nature, which aims to find the lowest common denominator between the Parties, the Conventions leave out direct references to agroecology, which do not achieve the necessary consensus.

- Although instruments exist to define agroecology, such as the FAO's 10 elements of agroecology and HLPE's 13 principles of agroecology, understanding the concept of agroecology itself remains open to debate and interpretation. The fact that it cannot be summed up in a replicable model is both a strength (in its flexibility of implementation in a variety of contexts) and a weakness (making it all the more difficult to achieve consensus on what it is, and to support it politically).

This observation leads to the adoption of a broader perspective on agroecology, going beyond the search for nominative mentions of the term, looking at the presence, within the conventions, of the principles that define agroecology. Indeed, the adoption of agroecology in its most integrative and systemic vision should necessarily lead to major systemic transformations, involving in particular the revision of economic agreements and global trade frameworks. It seems that the strategy of bringing in the agroecological approach “from below”, favoring a "small steps approach" via the integration of certain agroecological principles, is rather at work in the Conventions.

\(^{34}\) In particular, by enriching with organic matter (manure, compost, RCW, green manure, alluvium, etc.).
\(^{35}\) Soil fauna, adapted local varieties, spontaneous varietal diversity, pollinating insects, etc.
\(^{37}\) In particular by maintaining a microclimate and soil humidity (tiered cultivation, LCD techniques, etc.), and protecting groundwater from pollution (reduction of fertilizers, soil structure, etc.).
\(^{38}\) By planting hedgerows and permanent soil cover.
\(^{39}\) Agroecological intensification is an agricultural production method based on the sustainable use of ecosystem services. It enables high productivity to be achieved while at the same time amplifying the natural functionalities of agroecosystems over a given area. www.cariassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/1.-Agroecologie-et-Neutralite_Fr.FINAL_.pdf
\(^{40}\) https://desertif-actions.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/1.-Agroe%CC%81cologie-et-Neutralite%CC%81_Fr.FINAL_.pdf
Reflecting the principles of agroecology in the conventions: many entry points

While the presence of the term "agroecology" has symbolic value, the use of the term does not reflect the only opportunities offered by the Conventions to strengthen agroecology. It is therefore useful to change perspective and look for the elements within the three Conventions that pave the way for agroecology to be taken into account as a framework of values and actions.

In order to identify the indirect place of agroecology within the three Conventions, a possibility is to look through the constituent elements of the definition of agroecology. The HLPE proposes a concise set of 13 agroecological principles: recycling; reducing the use of inputs; soil health; animal health and welfare; biodiversity; synergy (managing interactions); economic diversification; co-creation of knowledge (embracing local knowledge and global science); social values and diets; fairness; connectivity; land and natural resource governance; and participation.

While considering the interdependencies and synergies between agroecological principles, and with a synthetic aim, this paper focuses on 3 notions that encompass several agroecological principles: (1) nature-based solutions, (2) inclusivity and (3) building resilience.

Highlighting nature-based solutions within Conventions

Based on their definition adopted by the 5th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, "nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits."

41 While the FAO’s elements of agroecology reflect a strong political consensus, the HLPE’s 13 principles of agroecology have a strong scientific legitimacy. Nevertheless, these two sets of principles are very similar, and reference to the HLPE’s 13 principles is often preferred by agroecology players, as they are more operational in nature and leave less room for interpretation.

42 HLPE, 2019, "Agroecological and other innovative approaches to sustainable agriculture and food systems that improve food security and nutrition", https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ff385e60-0693-40fe-9e6b-79bbe05202c/content
Nature-based solutions can be broken down into three types of action, which can be mobilized alone or in combination in territories: preserving functional ecosystems in good ecological condition; improving ecosystem management for sustainable use by human activities; restoring degraded ecosystems or creating new ones. These three types of actions are also at the heart of the concept of agroecology, since they are in line with several of the principles of agroecology as defined by the HLPE, and in particular the principles of 3-soil health, 5-biodiversity and 12-land and natural resources governance44.

It should be noted that the success of this term (Nature-based solutions) is due to two key factors. Firstly, its very vague nature, which allows every stakeholder to claim it as their own. Secondly, it lacks the social and political dimensions (that make it consensual), even if it does not trigger the necessary profound transformation of food systems. The aim here, therefore, is to demonstrate the similarities between agroecology and this approach, while highlighting the limits and pitfalls it conceals45.

At UNFCCC level, COP 28 calls on Parties to accelerate the use of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches. It also stresses that adaptation measures must be based on the “best available scientific knowledge” and on traditional and indigenous knowledge based on nature and ecosystems46. The Global Stocktake, the most important policy document of COP 28 in 2023, and the first major UNFCCC negotiated text to mention food47, encourages the implementation of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, alongside other solutions such as sustainable agriculture and land-use management48. In another section, it urges countries to increase ambitions and accelerate actions to achieve the 2030 targets, notably by accelerating the use of ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions49.

Within the framework of the UNCBD50, nature-based solutions constitute its foundation, even though ex situ conservation of biological diversity is recognized as necessary for its complementarity with in situ conservation51. Furthermore, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) recognizes that “nature-based solutions with biodiversity safeguards are an essential component of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction”52. It states that these solutions represent an estimated 37% of the mitigation measures needed to stay below 2°C warming, and assume positive impacts on biodiversity53.

44HLPE, 2019.
45 The purpose of this paper is not to conduct a semantic analysis of the term “nature-based solutions”, which is strongly questioned by civil society due to its recuperation by other actors with opposing interests.
46 Section 14
47 Food is mentioned twice in the preamble, and four times in the adaptation section.
48 Global Stocktake, Section 55
49 Global Stocktake, Section 63
50 UNCBD/SBSTTA/REC/23/02, November 28, 2019
53 Ditto
Within the framework of the UNCCD, nature-based solutions were introduced in 2019, at the COP14 ministerial roundtables, during which several countries mentioned them as a "response to environmental and social problems". Following COP14, the Convention was asked to further explore the topic of nature-based solutions by preparing a report on the coherence and concordance between sustainable land management, ecosystem-based adaptation, ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and nature-based solutions. The following year, the G20 meeting launched a global initiative to reduce land degradation and improve the conservation of terrestrial habitats. This initiative includes among its objectives the promotion of nature-based solutions and sustainable agricultural practices to restore land. In 2022, at COP15, the Parties introduced nature-based solutions in the decision on strengthening links with other relevant Conventions and institutions.

Ensuring equity, participation and social responsibility: the place of inclusion in Conventions

Leaving no one behind is a core value of the United Nations, reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The FAO echoes this principle in its drive "to eradicate poverty, discrimination, inequalities, and vulnerabilities undermining the potential of individuals and communities", notions essential "to build sustainable, equitable, and inclusive agrifood systems for everyone". The HLPE principles defining the basis of agroecology particularly illustrate the notions of inclusion, equity, participation and social responsibility: 8-Co-creation of knowledge, 9-Social values and types of food, 10-Equity, 11-Connectivity, 12-land and natural resources governance, 13-Participation.

Within the UNFCCC, the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) underlined in its final text at COP 27 (2022) "the input of smallholder farms, the importance of food security and equity". During COP 28, another important political decision established a framework to guide adaptation efforts by states. In this decision, food was selected as a theme to be covered, and section 9 of the text urges Parties to increase ambition and encourage adaptation action, by "increasing sustainable and regenerative production and equitable access to adequate food and nutrition for all".

54 UNCCD, 2019 COP14 report - Summary of the high-level segment, ministerial roundtable 1: land, climate and renewable energy.
56 https://www.unccd.int/our-work/flagship-initiatives/G20-Initiative
57 UNCCD, 2022 Decision 8/COP15
58 https://unsdg.un.org/fr/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind
63 https://unfccc.int/documents/636595
This openness to inclusivity through the prism of food security and nutrition, which also appears in the Preamble to the Paris Agreement\textsuperscript{64}, has no operational dimension, however, and is not very binding for the Parties.

The UNCBD rests on two pillars: the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, to protect the ecosystems on which present and future human societies depend, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.

Each of its pillars\textsuperscript{65}, as well as many UNCBD articles, targets and COP objectives, are based on human rights\textsuperscript{66}. First and foremost, the UNCBD seeks inclusiveness in the management of biodiversity, by ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits (monetary and non-monetary\textsuperscript{67}) arising from the utilization of genetic resources\textsuperscript{68}, the results of research and the commercial use of genetic resources\textsuperscript{69}. This sharing is to be achieved not only between States Parties, but also within countries with the “custodians of biodiversity”\textsuperscript{70}, i.e. the indigenous and local communities that hold the genetic resources and shared traditional knowledge, particularly women\textsuperscript{71}.

UNCBD values the role played by women and indigenous communities in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, recognizing the need to ensure their full participation at all levels of policy-making and implementation concerning biodiversity conservation, and to ensure that their rights are respected.

Finally, the UNCBD is based on the principle of solidarity, both between inhabitants of the same planet, recognizing on the one hand the special needs of developing countries\textsuperscript{72} and the need for financial and technical support to these countries\textsuperscript{73}, and on the other hand, supporting the intergenerational equity approach, which aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs\textsuperscript{74}. UNCBD’s inclusive narrative thus paves the way for agroecology.

\textsuperscript{64}Recognizing the fundamental priority of protecting food security and ending hunger, and the particular vulnerability of food production systems to the adverse effects of climate change, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/french_paris_agreement.pdf
\textsuperscript{65}For example, the first pillar corresponds to the “Diversity” (FAO 2018) and “Biodiversity” (HLPE 2019) principles. The second pillar can be found in the principles “Human and social values”, “Responsible governance” (FAO 2018), “Equity”, “Governance of land and natural resources” and “Participation” (HLPE 2019).
\textsuperscript{66}UNCCD, 2019, Decision 26/COP14
\textsuperscript{67}Nagoya Protocol, Preamble §6 and Nagoya Protocol, Article 5
\textsuperscript{68}UNCBD, Article 15, Nagoya Protocol, Article 5
\textsuperscript{70}The role of indigenous peoples is also recognized through the need to obtain their prior informed consent, prior to the acquisition, sharing and transfer of genetic resources and/or traditional knowledge, and that mutually agreed terms be established (Nagoya Protocol, articles 6, 7, 17, 18), taking into account their customary laws, protocols and procedures (Nagoya Protocol, article 12), and that they have the right to identify the rightful holders of their traditional knowledge within their communities (Nagoya Protocol, Preamble §24).
\textsuperscript{71}UNCBD, Preamble §16, §17, §19, Article 12, 16, 17
\textsuperscript{72}UNCBD, articles 8, 9, 18, 20, and COP 10, decision X/2, Preamble §10. These countries are understood in the broadest sense: developing countries, least developed countries, small island developing states, the most ecologically vulnerable countries, as well as countries with economies in transition.
\textsuperscript{73}COP15, decision 15/4, section C, 7
In 2019, at COP14, the Parties to the UNCCD adopted a landmark decision recognizing “that responsible land governance is a fundamental component of sustainable land management”\(^{75}\). The adoption of this decision represents the culmination of advocacy initiated by civil society as early as 2015, and which several Parties and observers to the Convention have gradually rallied around.

This decision encourages Parties to observe the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of national food security\(^{76}\), in their actions to combat desertification and drought, and to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). This decision introduces the notions of equity, social responsibility and inclusiveness more strongly within the UNCCD, as it calls on Parties to recognize legitimate land tenure rights, including customary rights, and to promote fair and inclusive local dispute resolution mechanisms. The decision also calls for the legal recognition of equal land use and ownership rights for women, and the promotion of measures to address their needs and concerns in the fight against desertification.

To support countries in implementing this decision, the UNCCD and FAO have produced a technical guide\(^{77}\) on the inclusion of voluntary guidelines on land tenure in achieving LDN. At COP 15 (2022), Parties were encouraged to refer to it and adopt the appropriate measures detailed in the guide to better take account of legitimate land rights in action plans, legal frameworks, etc.\(^{78}\) A study on the differentiated impacts of desertification and drought on women and men was also carried out in order to develop policy recommendations\(^{79}\). It concludes that women and other disadvantaged groups are more vulnerable to climate shocks because they have less access to resources to cope with and recover from damage, and recommends equal and meaningful participation of women and men in the governance of land and natural resources at national and landscape levels. It also recommends financial mechanisms that incorporate measures to improve women’s access to available financing\(^{80}\).


\(^{76}\) The voluntary guidelines on land tenure developed by the FAO were approved by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2012.

\(^{77}\) https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/2e6a24a8-e922-4980-bf89-59d652f330c0

\(^{78}\) Decision 27/COP15 (2022)

\(^{79}\)https://www.unccd.int/resources/brief/study-differentiated-impacts-dldd-women-and-men-summary-decision-makers

\(^{80}\) Ditto
Strengthening the resilience of communities, populations and ecosystems

The resilience of people, communities and ecosystems is essential to sustainable food and agricultural systems\(^{81}\). The resilience in question relates to "the capacity of interconnected social, economic and ecological systems to cope with a hazardous event, trend or disturbance, responding or reorganising in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure\(^{82}\). Resilience is the goal of a series of HLPE agroecological principles: 3-soil health, 4-animal health, 5-biodiversity, 6-synergies, 7-economic diversification. The literature indicates that one of the major factors in resilience is diversity\(^{83}\), whether in terms of genetic resources, production workshops, marketing channels, and so on. Agroecological systems, in which diversity is a key principle, are therefore more resilient\(^{84}\).

Within the framework of the UNFCCC, COP 28 was marked by the UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action, which aims to commit Parties to include agriculture and food systems in their nationally determined contributions\(^{85}\) and other national plans before COP 30 in 2025. Although not an official COP document, it has been signed by 159 Parties to the Convention and states that agriculture and food systems must adapt and transform as a matter of urgency, and that adaptation and resilience activities must be scaled up\(^{86}\).

Resilience is also a major concern for UNCBD. First of all, biodiversity resilience is one of the Convention's fundamental concerns. For example, within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework\(^{87}\), the primary objective is the resilience of all ecosystems and biodiversity\(^{88}\). Community resilience is also a concern present in the Convention, and in subsequent COP reports, recognizing that many local communities and indigenous peoples are closely and traditionally dependent on biological resources. The conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity is thus of the utmost importance in meeting the food, health and other needs of the planet’s ever-growing population, and access to and sharing of genetic resources and technology are therefore indispensable\(^{89}\).

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81 https://www.fao.org/agroecology/knowledge/10-elements/balance/fr/
85 Nationally determined contributions are the measures that States set themselves to achieve the objectives of the treaty.
88 This concern is also reflected in Target 8.
Finally, the resilience of human societies is also considered in Target 10 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework\(^9\), for which the sustainable management of agricultural, aquacultural, fisheries and forest areas is essential for the resilience of all production systems that depend on ecosystems and biodiversity.

Since its adoption, the UNCCD has sought to improve the resilience of populations and ecosystems, by reducing their vulnerability to land degradation and drought. Resilience is increasingly being considered within the UNCCD, and the framework is becoming clearer in relation to land degradation, especially in the context of the fight against drought. Thus, the UNCCD’s 2018-2030 strategy sets the objective of mitigating, adapting to and managing the effects of drought, in order to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems. Between 2018 and 2019, the Science-Policy Interface worked on the links between sustainable land management and drought mitigation, on several land use patterns (crops, pastures, forests). The report concludes that land management offers the potential to mitigate the effects of drought and increase the resilience of populations and ecosystems.

Strengthening the position of agroecology in the Rio Conventions: finding the right balance between symbolic presence and development opportunities

Mention of the term agroecology in the texts resulting from the three Rio Conventions remains very discreet and limited. Some of the principles of agroecology are quoted and recognized in the recommendations made to the Parties, as well as in the decisions taken at the COPs. This symbolic recognition is noteworthy, as it provides an interesting entry point for defending agroecology as a whole.

The transformative scope of agroecology lies in its systemic vision, based on the consideration of all its principles. As of today, this systemic approach is lacking in the three Conventions, and there is a risk that agroecology will be limited to a few agricultural practices that can be valorized among other innovative practices\textsuperscript{91}. Organizations committed to promoting agroecology must therefore mobilize to ensure that it is not assimilated to just another production practice, but is instead recognized as a coherent set of principles designed to guide the transformation of food systems.

To this end, civil society organizations active within the Rio Conventions can rely on the definitions of agroecology as a combination of principles, developed by HLPE, and/or the FAO (whose elements have been validated by UN member states). The inclusion of these principles in the Conventions’ reporting and evaluation frameworks could then represent a major step forward.

Agroecology can provide structuring solutions to the issues addressed by the three Conventions, and reinforce their synergies. This rapprochement between the Conventions would be particularly relevant in addressing the question of agricultural and food systems, through policy orientations integrating land, climate and biodiversity issues. The beginnings of this approach can be seen in the UNCBD\textsuperscript{92}, which no longer sees the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems in silo\textsuperscript{93}.

\textsuperscript{91} See IPES Food, Smoke and Mirrors, 2022 “Despite its transformative potential and conceptual maturity, agroecology is not used as an overarching framework for food system change in the three governance spaces studied here, nor are its multiple dimensions systematically referenced. Though references to agroecology have become more widespread, there are growing concerns that emerging global policy spaces and influential development actors are stripping the term of its political dimensions”. https://ipes-food.org/report/smoke-mirrors/

\textsuperscript{92} COP15, decision 15/4, targets 8, 10 and 11

\textsuperscript{93} COP15, decision 15/4, targets 2, 3, 12
This necessary synergy between the three Rio Conventions remains a demand of various actors, including CSOs, but also of the Parties themselves (in particular within the UNCCD94), to build the future of the planet.

Building bridges between different environmental issues is important, but so is highlighting the interdependence of food systems with health, agricultural and social challenges. Although the Rio Conventions were drawn up to meet environmental objectives, agriculture and food issues have gradually emerged and are now beginning to be taken into serious consideration. In this sense, by proposing a coherent approach, agroecology has multiple co-benefits for the environment, but also for agriculture and health. For those involved in promoting agroecology, it’s a question of using this opportunity to defend an ambitious agroecological transformation of food systems. However, the pathways to achieving desirable futures remain complex and the subject of debate among a wide range of stakeholders. So there is still a long way to go...

94 “Let us promote opportunities that support, as appropriate and applicable, the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement and the development of an ambitious post-2020 global framework for biodiversity, taking into account terrestrial solutions for climate action and biodiversity conservation and the mutually supportive implementation of the three Rio Conventions”, CNULCD, 2019, New Delhi Declaration.