

Report

National Meeting: "Agroecology, a way forward for Morocco"

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Hassan II International Centre for Environmental Education

Organized by the Network of Agro-ecological Initiatives in Morocco

(RIAM)

As part of the activities of the Mediterranean Multi-actor Network on

AgroEcology

(MEDAE)



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Introduction

Morocco, like the whole of North Africa, is facing increased water scarcity, soil degradation and biodiversity loss. In this fragile landscape, agroecology is emerging as a systemic approach capable of combining agricultural productivity, climate resilience and the preservation of natural resources.

The Network of Agroecological Initiatives in Morocco (RIAM), committed since 2013 to the promotion of **nature-based solutions**, organized a **National Meeting on Agroecology** as part of the activities of the Mediterranean multi-actor network on AgroEcology (MEDAE). This day is part of the **NATAE–Fostering Agroecology Transition in North Africa** project, led by the CIHEAM Montpellier and funded by the European Union.

This meeting brought together key actors of the agricultural sector, government representatives, agroecology experts, representatives, international organizations, farmers, consumers and members of civil society, with the main objective of responding to the issues and challenges of an agroecological transition in the face of the effects of climate change in Morocco and North Africa (chronic drought, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation).

Organized in workshops, round tables and testimonies, this meeting provided an opportunity to debate and share experiences around the need for Moroccan agriculture to adopt resilient and more sustainable agroecological values and practices.

The objective of this day was to:

- To share with a wide audience the principles and foundations of nature-based solutions in agriculture and agroecology.
- Promote the sharing of best practices and the latest innovations in the field of agroecology.
- Encourage cooperation and networking between different actors to strengthen the resilience of agriculture and contribute to its sustainability through nature-based solutions.
- To reflect on the place of agroecology in public policies, while encouraging an enriching sharing of experiences and knowledge within the agricultural community.

Inaugural Conference "The Challenges of Agriculture in Morocco in a Context of Drought and Climate Change"

Prof. Larbi ZAGDOUNI

Agriculture in Morocco is a key sector of the economy and society. However, it faces challenges related to climate change, including the scarcity of water resources and the variability of rainfall. Per capita water availability has declined sharply, increasing pressure on irrigation systems and crops, especially in drylands.

In this context, there are many challenges: preserving natural resources, strengthening the resilience of farms, ensuring sustainable water management, and adapting public policies to support a transition to more sustainable and climate-adapted agricultural practices.

It would also be essential to rethink agricultural systems taking into account the ecological, climatic, cultural and economic specificities of each region, in order to promote sustainable, efficient and resilient agriculture.

Panel 1: Agroecology in Morocco, a new look at agricultural practices. History and foundations with a diversity of actors

Speakers:

- Representative of RIAM
- THM Representative
- Representative of the Crédit Agricole Foundation for Sustainable Development
- Representative of the M6 Foundation for the Protection of the Environment
- ADA Representative
- FAO Representative

The panel highlighted the importance of agroecology as a sustainable agricultural approach, at the crossroads of traditional knowledge and scientific innovations, in a Moroccan context marked by major environmental challenges (climate change, water scarcity). The speakers recalled that several ancestral agricultural practices, derived from local peasant knowledge,

already reflect the principles of agroecology, in particular the sustainable management of soil and water, as well as the diversity of crops.

RIAM plays a central role in promoting these practices, supporting farmers with technical training and promoting knowledge sharing. RIAM has also developed Participatory Guarantee Systems (SPGs), which are locally-oriented quality assurance systems. They certify producers on the basis of active participation of the relevant stakeholders (producers/consumers) and are built on a basis of trust, networks and knowledge exchange (IFOAM definition, 2008).

FAO also supports the agroecological transition in Morocco by collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture to integrate agroecology into public policies and by supporting pilot projects and demonstration farms, such as those integrated into the 'Generation Green' strategy. At the same time, it strengthens local capacities, by providing technical and scientific support through partnerships with institutions such as INRA and Moroccan universities. In addition, FAO plays a key role in the revitalization of fragile ecosystems, including oasis ecosystems, by promoting agroecological practices adapted to local specificities. This approach integrates its agroecological policy research and development efforts, and directly links aspects of ecosystem management to the transformation of agricultural practices. These practices make it possible to preserve biodiversity, fight against desertification and maintain agroecological balances in territories that are highly threatened by climate change and anthropogenic pressure.

The Crédit Agricole du Maroc Foundation for Sustainable Development (FCAMDD) is actively involved in supporting and financing agroecological initiatives in Morocco, in particular those carried out by the RIAM, such as the Participatory Guarantee System, in partnership with CIRAD. Among the flagship actions, organized with the RIAM, the Foundation has initiated since 2016 a cycle of itinerant caravans and workshops (often referred to as "knowledge caravans" or "field actions") whose objective is to promote agroecological practices through training and the implementation of farm diagnoses and exchanges between stakeholders.

On the other hand, the association Terre & Humanisme Maroc (THM) has played a pioneering role in promoting the first agroecological initiatives in Morocco since the early 2000s. Inspired by Pierre Rabhi's agroecological approach, THM has supported farmers and rural communities in their transition to sustainable agriculture, respectful of the environment and people. However, in its early days, agroecology was not recognized by public agricultural policies, which limited

access to funding and institutional support for their pilot projects. However, THM continued to carry out concrete actions on the ground, and over time, contributed to the emergence of a dialogue on agroecology in the political and societal spheres. Today, as agroecology gains recognition in Morocco, THM continues to be a key player in this process, while overcoming the challenges of resistance to change and lack of financial support.

Finally, the participants discussed the prospects for integrating agroecology into agricultural public policies, while identifying obstacles such as the lack of technical support, difficulties in accessing markets, and resistance to change. The importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation, including public authorities, civil society, researchers and international partners, was highlighted to strengthen this dynamic. Agroecology is not just a set of agricultural techniques; it is a holistic approach that seeks to reconcile agricultural productivity, ecosystem resilience, and social justice. It becomes particularly relevant in a context of growing water crisis, such as in Morocco.

Panel 2: Feedback on resilient practices and sustainability of agricultural systems: Testimonials from agroecological initiatives

Speakers:

- Zineb Benrahmoune Idrissi "Zineb's Gardens", Shoul
- Redouane Khellouki, Swani Redouane
- Yahia Rhomari, Oriental Organic Cooperative
- Rachid Mentag, INRA researcher
- Brakez Mustapha; Dar Ait Malek, Ait Ourir -El Haouz
- Jihad El Malih, Facyla Tifelt Farm
- Migration and Development Representative

This panel made it possible to collect several testimonies of concrete initiatives that illustrate how agroecology contributes to strengthening the resilience of agricultural systems to climate and economic challenges in Morocco.

Speakers shared experiences from different regions, highlighting practices such as crop diversification, improved soil management through composting and agroforestry, local seed recovery and valorization, as well as water-saving techniques adapted to arid conditions.

These initiatives demonstrate an integrated approach that combines traditional knowledge and technical innovations to ensure the ecological, social and economic sustainability of farms. Several projects carried out by initiatives have demonstrated that it is possible to improve productivity while conserving natural resources.

The speakers also insisted on the rehabilitation of the peasant farmer by giving him dignity to his knowledge, to what he does, to value his ancestral know-how, and to recognize his strategic role in the agroecological transition and food sovereignty.

This approach to rehabilitating farmers through agroecology, supported by Migration and Development, has been working for several decades in southern Morocco, particularly in the Souss, High Atlas and Anti-Atlas regions, to support local development dynamics. Today, it places agroecology at the heart of its actions to rehabilitate areas weakened by the climate and social crises, particularly in the Taroudant region, through the establishment of agroecological

orchards, family gardens, associated crops and local varieties drought-resistant, in addition to technical support, especially for women and young farmers.

While there is a growing interest in agroecology in Morocco, some local initiatives are struggling to sustain themselves. This is the case of the Coopérative Biologique de l'Orientale, which, despite a promising start, experienced difficulties that led to a cessation of its activities. Several factors can explain the failure of this type of initiative, including difficulties in accessing the market; organic or agroecological products from small structures often have difficulty entering the marketing circuits. Among the major constraints that have led to the failure of certain agroecological experiments, such as that of the cooperative, is the lack of integration of consumers in the decision-making process, particularly with regard to the marketing of agroecological products.

Another example is Swani Redouan Farm, located in Shoul. This agroecological farm, managed without chemical inputs, perfectly illustrates the principles of agroecology with ecological water management, the practice of agroforestry, and the use of local seeds. Redouane Khellouki, a member of RIAM, also makes his farm a training place for farmers and researchers, thus contributing to the dissemination of agroecological knowledge.

These examples illustrate the concrete potential of agroecology in rural Morocco despite the constraints of access to markets, land and public support, thus underlining the importance of citizen initiatives and the transmission of knowledge to bring about sustainable and inclusive agriculture.

Panel 3: What public policies and strategy to promote agroecology in Morocco? Multi-stakeholder perspectives

Speakers:

- Public authorities: Ministry of Agriculture
- Research/development: ENA/INRA
- Representative of International Cooperation: European Union (EU)
- Representative of the Provincial Council of Sefrou
- Director of an agricultural training center
- Private Actor Representative

The panel brought together various actors (public authorities, researchers, civil society, international cooperation) around the promotion of agroecology in Morocco.

In its intervention, the Agricultural Development Agency (ADA) insists on the integration of agroecology into national policies, with a clear regulatory framework and appropriate financial support. It also plays a key role in the promotion of agroecology in Morocco as an organization responsible for the implementation of structuring projects within the framework of the national agricultural strategy (*Generation Green 2020-2030*). In this sense, ADA supports territorialized projects with an agroecological dimension, often in collaboration with international partners (GIZ, AFD, FAO, etc.). It finances and supports projects for the conversion to sustainable agricultural practices in vulnerable areas or areas of high ecological value (mountain areas, oases, rainfed areas).

Among these actors who support this agroecological transition, we find the Terre Verte program, funded by the European Union, which is an important lever for supporting the agroecological transition in Morocco, in particular within the framework of the Morocco-EU partnership for sustainable, resilient and inclusive agricultural development. The objective of this program is to support the implementation of the Generation Green 2020–2030 strategy through support for resilient, equitable and sustainable agriculture, integrating the principles of agroecology, the preservation of natural resources, and social justice.

The DIAF project (Agricultural and Forestry Technical Dialogue) is a Moroccan-German bilateral cooperation, initiated in 2019, aimed at strengthening the technical, institutional and

legal frameworks in the field of agriculture and forestry in Morocco. The objective of the project is to support agricultural and forestry reforms in Morocco, particularly within the framework of the *Generation Green 2020–2030* strategy and the *national forest strategy "Forests of Morocco 2020–2030"*, as well as to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of Moroccan ministries and public institutions (MAPMDREF, ADA, ONSSA, ANEF, etc.).

The National School of Agriculture (ENA) in Meknes plays a central role in applied research in agroecology in Morocco, through several structures, educational initiatives and concrete projects. In 2022, an Agroecology engineering course is launched. This specialization trains engineers capable of designing and managing the agroecological transition, by integrating innovation, sustainability and resilience into agricultural systems. This sector prepares students to understand soil-water-plant interactions in livestock farming, to evaluate and transform existing systems and to promote alternative models that respect the climate and biodiversity.

All these actors converge around the common objective of promoting a sustainable, inclusive and resilient agricultural model, according to the principles of agroecology. This focal point is structured around three main dimensions: the development and dissemination of agroecological practices, as well as the concrete implementation of an agroecological transition. These different actors intervene on different socio-spatial scales, but what they have in common is the promotion of agroecology in Morocco.

Except that these policies are often designed without any real consultation with farmers, especially smallholders. Thus, agroecology is sometimes reduced to a set of techniques, instead of being thought of as a transformation of food systems. In most cases, these policies are often without territorial anchoring, do not always take into account the ecological, social and cultural specificities of the territories.

A second point is that these programs supported by public investment often favor agricultural or productivist sectors (e.g., olive, citrus, carob, argan) to the detriment of agroecological food systems. Agroecology must be thought of, in its entire ecosystem. The main challenges remain coordination between actors, limited resources and resistance to change.

Conclusion

Moroccan agriculture is at a decisive juncture: water scarcity and climate change require a profound revision of existing models. Agroecology, based on farmers' knowledge and scientific innovation, offers a credible way to strengthen the resilience of farms and preserve natural resources. Feedback from agroecological initiatives is already showing concrete gains in terms of productivity and rural incomes. However, scaling up requires a clear public framework (regulation, targeted funding), effective coordination between governments, civil society and researchers, and increased support for training. Only an integrated strategy, nourished by multi-stakeholder dialogue and a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system, will make it possible to make agroecology the pillar of sustainable, efficient and equitable agriculture in Morocco.

This meeting brought together key actors of the agricultural sector, government representatives, agroecology experts, representatives, international organizations, farmers, and members of civil society, with the main objective of responding to the issues and challenges of an agroecological transition in the face of the effects of climate change in Morocco and North Africa (chronic drought, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation).

Agroecology is not limited to cultivation techniques; it encompasses a complete ecosystem including biodiversity, interactions between plants, soils, animals, humans and local knowledge. It aims to make farms more resilient to climate change, the sustainability of natural resources (water, soil) and the food autonomy of communities. This therefore requires a global vision and close coordination between different actors (farmers, researchers, institutions, consumers).

Recommendations

- **Strengthen the commitment of public authorities:** Public policies must clearly integrate agroecology as a central pillar of Morocco's sustainable development strategy.
- **Increase targeted financing:** Establish appropriate financing mechanisms to support farmers in their agroecological transition.
- **Awareness and training:** Integrate agroecology into school curricula and develop specialized training for new generations of farmers and decision-makers.

- **Developing short circuits:** Supporting local marketing channels to improve market access for agroecological products.
- **Strengthen grassroots initiatives:** Support pilot projects and demonstration farms, such as those of Redouane Khellouki, to disseminate good practices on a large scale.
- **Promote multi-stakeholder dialogue:** Encourage cooperation between farmers, researchers, NGOs, and public authorities to build inclusive agricultural policies adapted to local specificities.
- **Increase accessibility and inclusivity for farmers:** Establish specific initiatives to include marginalized groups, especially women and youth, in the agroecological transition.
- **Create market demand for agroecological products:** Establish ecological certifications and distinctive marks to stimulate demand for these products.
- **Financially support farmers:** Offer financial aid and incentives to make the agroecological transition more accessible and sustainable.
- **Strengthen collaboration among different stakeholders:** Create a unified national vision for agroecology, strengthening partnerships between the public, private and civil society sectors.