

## Organic agriculture: The perfect solution for resource-poor farmers

By Constantine Akitanda

**T**he importance of agriculture should not be undermined since it is a primary activity of more than 60 per cent of the total population in Africa.

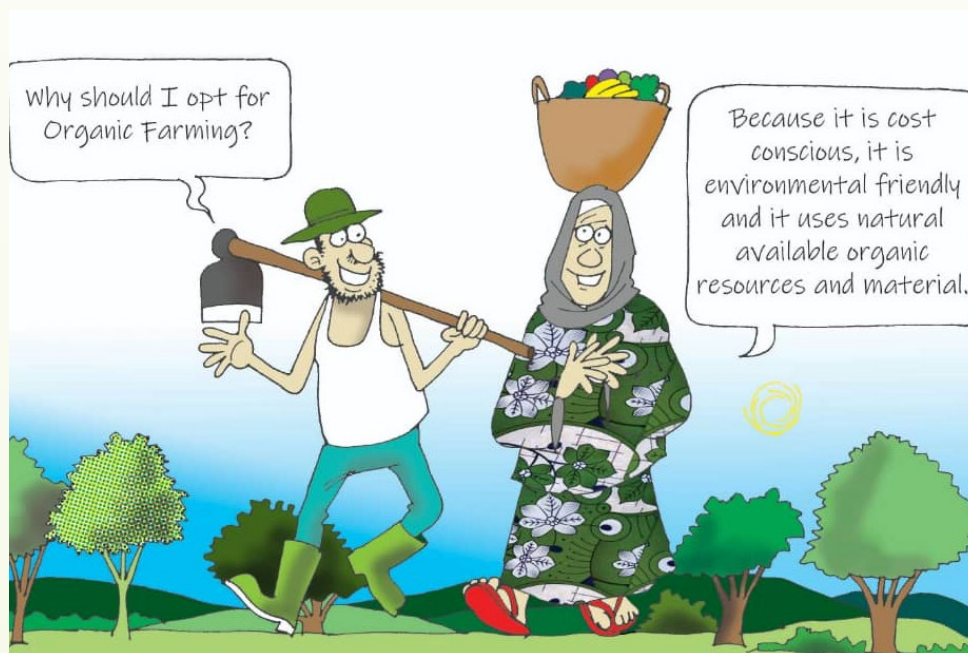
Agriculture is the backbone of the continental economy and accounts for more than 30 per cent of the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in many sub-Saharan African countries today.

Moreover, agricultural products are the main export products for most African countries

while vast majority of farmers in Africa are smallholders, working on small family farms.

More than 90 per cent of farmers in sub-Saharan countries farm less than five hectares; in Uganda for example, over 95 per cent of

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## Tunisia wins bid to host organic world congress in 2024

By AfrONet Staff & International News

Agency

Tunisia has been elected to host the 2024 Organic World Congress, an event organized every three years by IFOAM Organic International.

Tunisia's bid to host the event brings Africa to the forefront of global efforts to promote organic agriculture, said UNObio Tunisia, a professional union grouping farmers, processors and distributors of natural or

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By Constantine Akitanda

After receiving applications from all over the world, the IFOAM General Assembly on 13 September 2021 selected 10 new members to join the World Board for the 2021-2024 term.

Karen Mapusua is the President of the new World Board while Chaitresh Ganguly (Bablu) and Julia Lernoud are the Vice Presidents.

The General Assembly also selected Tunisia to be the host of the next Organic World Congress in 2024. Congratulations to Tunisia and we applaud all those who submitted their hosting bids.

The IFOAM - Organics International World Board is democratically elected by our membership. This team is responsible for overseeing and supporting our work

## AfrONet board member wins place on IFOAM 2021-2024 board

growing the global organic marketplace, communicating the benefits of organic products, training organic leaders and facilitating capacity-building for organic farmers.

The previous World Board was led by Peggy Miars as President and Vice Presidents Jennifer Chang and Karen Mapusua. The 10-member team oversaw and supported the



Ms. Fortunate Nyakanda

promotion of the organic movement as a whole on a global scale.

Originally their term was meant to be from 2017 to 2020. However, with the postponement of the General Assembly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they agreed to continue for an extra year in their roles.

African Organic Network (AfrONet) board member from the southern cluster,

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# ECOWAS food expert proposes ecological organic agriculture as solution to global hunger, malnutrition

## Nigeria

**H**alf of the world's population is underfed with about 3.4 billion people suffering hunger, malnutrition and obesity, according to the head of the Agriculture Division in the ECOWAS Commission, Ernest Aubeé.

Speaking in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja recently, Aubeé identified agro ecology as one way of ensuring food security and sustainability of people's health and the environment.

He described agro ecology as the application of the science of ecology to agricultural systems in order to develop an ecological structure that does not need external inputs.

The practice of agro ecology allows for necessary interaction among species for the system to work better, says Aubeé who is in charge of food and nutrition security programs at the ECOWAS Commission.

He attributed the increasing rates of global hunger and malnutrition to inadequate food security, noting further that 'about 33-40 percent of food produced in agro-industrial chains is still wasted in production, transport or thrown away.'

'Poor agricultural productivity, poor management of agro-ecological resources for agricultural production, over-reliance on non-renewable resources for

agricultural production... all of these lead to shortage of food,' he said.

Other limitations he cited include poor funding of the agricultural sector, inadequate knowledge of agro ecological management, poor institutional capacity, poor coordination, networking and linkages between farmers and research institutions, and climate change effects.

Aubeé called for better policies and implementation of strategies to promote the development of Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) in the West African region.

'These policies must be backed by the right investments, regulatory framework, institutional arrangements and capacity

development. To get our political leaders to accept EOA, we must always provide empirical evidence of its benefits over conventional agriculture because seeing is believing,' he stated.

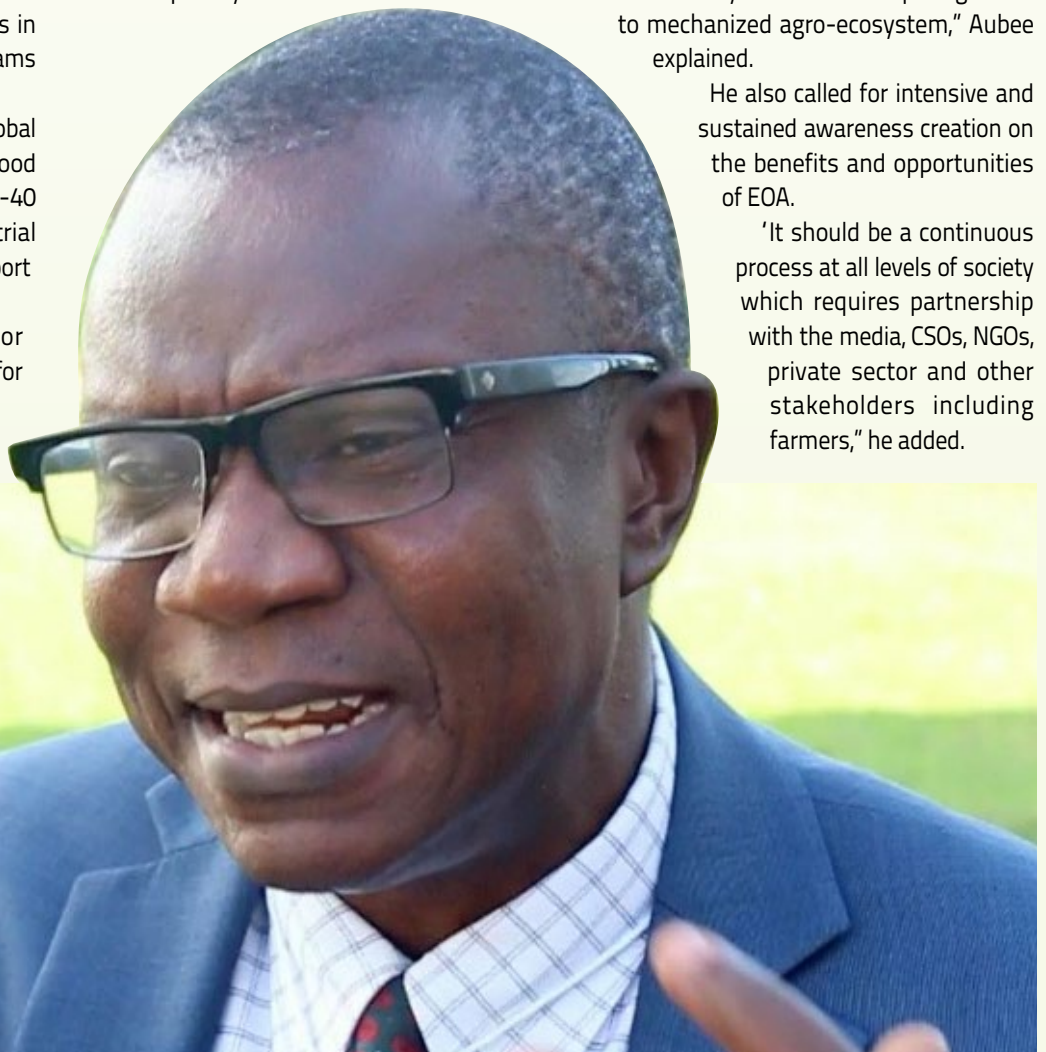
Noting that research on EOA is currently still lacking, he called for the inclusion of EOA in the curricula of tertiary educational institutions.

He further stated that EOA can mitigate climate change as it is a system that has high productivity, efficiency and biodiversity with high recycling rates.

'It uses low external inputs, resilient and efficient in use of local resources and has a high level of synergy and integration. It has its roots in ecology, applying the understanding of natural ecosystems and comparing these to mechanized agro-ecosystem,' Aubeé explained.

He also called for intensive and sustained awareness creation on the benefits and opportunities of EOA.

'It should be a continuous process at all levels of society which requires partnership with the media, CSOs, NGOs, private sector and other stakeholders including farmers,' he added.



ECOWAS Commissioner Ernest R. Aubeé

## Editorial Note

# Of organic agriculture and its great potential to mitigate climate change

**T**he organic industry is growing faster across the world today than five or ten years ago. Organic farming yields vital benefits such as helping to preserve the organic composition of soils; maintain and improve soil structure, fertility and biodiversity; and reduce soil erosion.

Many people also tend to underestimate the role it plays in mitigating climate change and the greenhouse effect, and promote global warming through its ability to sequester carbons in the soil.

Management practices used in organic agriculture like minimum tillage, returning crop residues to the soil, using cover crops and rotations, and the greater integration of nitrogen-fixing legumes increase the return of carbon to the soil, thereby raising productivity and favoring carbon storage.

A number of studies reveal that soil organic carbon contents under organic farming are considerably higher. The more organic carbon is retained in the soil, the more the mitigation potential of agriculture against climate change.

However, more research is needed in this field. There is a lack of data on soil organic carbon for developing countries, no farm system comparison data from Africa and Latin America, and only limited data on soil organic carbon stocks, all of which are crucial for determining carbon sequestration rates in farming practices.

We call on the Network of Organic Agriculture Researchers in Africa (NOARA), in collaboration with African universities of agriculture, to collaborate in undertaking in-depth soil organic carbon studies and compile related data in African countries.

These studies if done properly will help channel more climate change funding towards organic agriculture. Let's never forget that climate change is real and inescapable, and require prompt mitigation actions across the board. Organic agriculture is one such action that can be very effective and rewarding in the long run.

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## Organic agriculture: The perfect solution for resource-poor farmers

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the farmers have less than three hectares of cultivated land.

At the same time, most farmers have very limited resources to expand and invest in their farming engagements.

These points were highlighted during a virtual meeting to commemorate the life of the late Jordan Gama, former African Organic Network (AfrONet) President and Chief Executive Officer of the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM), which was organized by his former colleagues across the continent.

In his keynote speech, Musa Muwanga - one of the late Gama's closest associates - underscored that organic agriculture is a perfect solution for resource-poor farmers as it utilizes mostly traditional farming knowledge and minimizes external inputs.

Organic agriculture provides easier access to export markets for smallholders when compared to conventional agriculture in line with compliance to pesticide residue requirements, Muwanga said.

He noted that commercially-oriented organic farming in Africa started in the late 1990s although there were initiatives to promote formal organic farming as early as the 1970s and 80s.

Organic farming has developed rapidly in Africa largely driven by the unfolding market opportunities, he said, adding that donor programs have assisted to a large extent in mobilizing smallholders and strengthening market linkages.

Self-initiatives such as the formation of National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs) and the African Organic Network (AfrONet) have been very instrumental in building a formal

presence of organic agriculture in Africa.

But despite all these efforts and initiatives, Africa still remains at the bottom of organic agriculture development globally.

Out of the 71.5 million hectares of the world's organic-certified land, Africa has only 2 million Ha (2.79%).

Only 0.2 per cent of the total agricultural land in Africa is certified organic compared to 8.6 per cent in Oceania, 3.1 per cent in Europe and 1.5 per cent globally.

Whereas Africa has 28 per cent of the 2.8 million organic producers worldwide, this only represents less than 3 per cent of the certified organic land.

And whereas the global market sales for organic products reached \$105.5 billion in 2018, Africa only represented less than \$1 billion.

As a rapidly growing global market for organic products, Africa has been signaled as the next prime source for such products as governments continue to set up national policies and standards to promote organic agriculture.

Problems include limited focus and emphasis of selected and strategic value chains without compromising the principles of organic farming as production needs to be focused and targeted.

Also dwindling donor funding, low financing from within, and low commitment to national policies.

Musa urged the organic agriculture fraternity to organize more smallholders into value chain-focused enterprises, saying this would help the sector grow faster.

Africa has also been advised to invest in selected value chains, standards scale-up and organic certification programmes while focusing on more organic product development and promotion.

# AfrONet remembers its first president with deep fondness

**T**he African Organic Network (AfrONet) recently held a memorial public lecture in memory of its late president Jordan Gama who passed away a year ago in Dar es Salaam.

The virtual meeting was organized by close working colleagues of Mr Gama who was also Chief Executive Officer of the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM).

Among the speakers was Mr Gama's successor as AfrONet president, Josephine Atangana, who delivered a moving tribute to her former boss covering the many years they worked together with Jordan as the first AfrONet president and Josephine as vice-president.

'It is a loss difficult to bear not only for the organic agriculture development community in Tanzania and Africa, but the world at large. In Jordan we lost a true expert, leader and friend, a humble and very kind man,' remarked Josephine.

She said Mr Gama was an avid supporter of smallholder farmers' rights and always dreamed that one day they would graduate to medium-sized farmers with a highly-valued contribution to food security and sovereignty.

'He was very kind to everyone, but very strict when it comes to work, a team builder who oversaw a very strong network of organic agriculture development in Tanzania and Africa.'

'Paul Valey once said:

'A great man is one who leaves

others at a loss after he is gone'. I know we are all still suffering from the loss of this great man, but we can still celebrate his wonderful life," added Josephine.

Jordan Gama passed away at 9 am on August 19, 2020 at Hindu Mandal Hospital in Dar es Salaam Tanzania.

He fell sick during an

official trip to Njombe and Ruvuma regions in the southern highlands of Tanzania in mid-July 2020 and was rushed to the Ruvuma Referral Hospital in Songea municipality, later to be transferred to Hindu Mandal Hospital in Dar es Salaam on August 7.

The AfrONet governing board endorsed Josephine Atangana from Cameroon to succeed Mr Gama as the continental network's leader.



Late Jordan Gama

# Developing OA as a sustainable agri-food system in Africa

By Constantine Akitanda

**T**he World Food Day is celebrated annually to mark the anniversary of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations which came into being in 1945.

Commemorated every year on October 16, World Food Day is significant due to global efforts to tackle hunger. In 2019 the theme of the day was 'Zero Hunger' with the aim of making sustainable and healthy diets affordable and available to all.

According to FAO, more than 3 billion people - almost 40 per cent of the world's population - cannot afford healthy diets today.

Eating a healthy diet is not about strict limitations, staying unrealistically thin, or depriving yourself of the foods you love. Rather it's about feeling great, having more energy, improving your health, and boosting your mood.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a healthy diet helps to protect against malnutrition in all its forms and avoid non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer.

Eating a variety of foods and consuming less salt, sugars and saturated and industrially-produced trans-fats, are also very essential for healthy diet.

## What agri food systems do we need to look at for a healthy diet?

An agri-food system is a complex term that may sound slightly unrealistic, but do you know our lives depend on such systems?

Every time we eat, we partake in the system. The food we choose and the way we produce, prepare, cook and store it makes us an integral and active part of the way in which an agri-food system works.

A sustainable agri-food system is one in which a variety of sufficient, nutritious and safe foods is available at affordable prices for everyone, and nobody is hungry or suffers from any form of malnutrition.

The shelves are stocked at the local market or food store, but less food is wasted and the food supply chain is more resilient to shocks such as extreme weather, price spikes or pandemics, all the while limiting - rather than worsening - environmental degradation or climate



*Cassava is the most important tropical root crop and it's known to be the highest producer of carbohydrates among staple crops.*

change.

Sustainable agri-food systems deliver food security and nutrition for all without compromising the economic, social and environmental bases, for generations to come. They lead to better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life for all.

According to FAO, agri-food systems employ one billion people worldwide, more than any other economic sector.

Moreover, the way we produce, consume and, sadly, waste food exacts a heavy toll on our planet, putting unnecessary pressure on natural resources, the environment and climate.

**Sustainable agri-food systems deliver food security and nutrition for all without compromising the economic, social and environmental bases, for generations to come.**

Food production too often degrades or destroys natural habitats and contributes to species extinction. Such inefficiency is costing us trillions of dollars, but, most importantly, today's agri-food systems are exposing profound inequalities and injustices in our global society.

Three billion people cannot afford healthy diets, while overweight and obesity continue to increase worldwide.

To address the issue of providing healthy diets to Africans, the African Organic Network (AfrONet) - a continental organic agriculture umbrella organization - is implementing a project known as Institutional Innovations for Organic Agriculture in Africa (IIABA).

The IIABA project is financed by the French Development Agency (AFD) and coordinated by African -based international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) including AfrONet which has its headquarters in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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*Togo was the largest West African exporter of organic agricultural products to Europe in 2018*

# How eating organic foods can boost immunity, cure Covid symptoms

By Ebere Agozie

**T**he consumption of organic and natural foods, vegetables and spices has been proven as effective in boosting immunity from coronavirus and other infectious diseases and possibly curing some of the symptoms.

This is according to Dr Olugbenga AdeOluwa, national coordinator of the Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative in Nigeria. He told EOA's stakeholder's forum in Abuja that although several researches have been done to find effective ways of stemming the Covid-19 pandemic, organic foods are still a preferred option.

'Eating right' was and will always be one of the most effective precautionary measures against disease

infections known to mankind, Dr AdeOluwa said, adding: 'Eating right starts with eating chemical-free foods obtained through organic farming which does not permit the use of organisms or substances that are foreign to nature like Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), chemical fertilizers, pesticides or food additives.'

'Rather, it gives farms and animals life conditions that correspond to their ecological roles and allow them to display natural behaviors.'

AdeOluwa urged Nigerian farmers to embrace organic farming to enable them access all the associated benefits.

He said one of the strengths of organic farming is the production of healthy produce and products, which should be encouraged.

'In organic farming, the use of inputs that are hazardous to human health are avoided. Inputs are rather used with due regard to their implications on the health of consumers and the environment.'

'Some of these benefits include improved health and nutrition. Organic farming causes little damage to the environment, is less costly for society, and reduces nutrient losses as well as erosion'.

According to Dr AdeOluwa, research has shown the potential of organic spices to improve the body immune system. 'Several studies have shown that persons with strong immune systems are more likely to avoid being infected by Covid19. Even if they get infected, they have higher chances of surviving the attack, hence the need to explore ways to build the body immune system,' he said.

He said organic spices are known to contain and maintain phytonutrients which are plant compounds exhibiting the capacity to alter biochemical reactions and consequently influence human health after ingestion.

'Crops, including spices grown using organic standards, contain better combinations of nutrients and phytonutrients than the ones grown in conventional systems,' he added.

Coronavirus was first discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019 without a definite cause.

The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January, 2020 and the World Health Organization (WHO) announced Covid-19 as the scientific name for the disease on 11 February.

WHO also declared the outbreak a pandemic on 11 March, 2020 due to the speed at which case numbers were rising daily in 213 countries of the world. All African countries had also been affected by the pandemic by 12 June, 2020.

Covid-19 is a virus that causes severe upper and lower respiratory tract infections. Its various symptoms include fever, tiredness, itching in the throat, dry throat, and dry cough. Some infected patients may experience pains and aches, nasal congestion, sore throat, runny nose or diarrhea.

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Madam Fortunate Nyakanda, was also voted in as a new IFOAM International Board member for 2021-2024.

When interviewed by AfrONet Newsletter, Fortunate said: 'Our continent has experienced so much land degradation, ecosystem breakdown and the impacts of these problems have been made worse by climate change. Therefore, we need to work harder.'

'The ecosystems that the continent used to enjoy are becoming scarce; Water tables are going down, rivers are drying, pest and disease pressure is increasing, and food supplies from Mother Nature are being depleted.' 'As a continent we need to regenerate, restore and sustain our land and ecosystems through organic agriculture and this has to start from the communities going upwards.'

'I see strengthened National Organic Movements

## AfrONet board member wins

(NOAMs) as a path that will develop a vehicle to make this happen, NOAMs with strengthened systems and structures can help communities to develop organic agriculture through production, research, marketing and consumption.'

'Increasing food and nutritional security, increasing organic products, and increasing market share in the formal and informal sector starting from local levels up to the national and international, should be the priorities.'

'If we position ourselves properly, NOAMs will be able to stand up and influence policy at national, regional and continental level,' said Fortunate.

Josephine Atangana, the AfrONet President, also congratulated Fortunate for her election to the IFOAM Organics International Board representing the African

continent.

'Amidst stiff competition, you won the race and we know that the Almighty God has a reason for putting you in that position representing the plight of organic agriculture actors in Africa where livelihoods depend on agriculture by over 70 per cent' said Atangana.

She added that the entire AfrONet Board, Secretariat and organic agriculture community in Africa are eagerly willing to support Fortunate during her tenure as IFOAM Board member.

'We hope that together we shall succeed in our endeavors to support the growth of NOAMs, AfrONet and Organic Agriculture in Africa,' Atangana concluded. During the 2021 General Assembly that was held digitally, the outgoing IFOAM World Board 2017-2021 was appreciated for its work.

# RIAM develops framework for short circuit markets

By RIAM staff

**A**s one of the partners involved in the Institutional Innovations for Organic Agriculture in Africa (IABA), the Network of Agroecological Initiatives in Morocco (RIAM) is pursuing two main objectives in six of Morocco's regions.

It is implementing and developing Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) groups and has developed a framework for short circuit markets that will become a document of reference to ensure such markets are implemented across Morocco in a clear, coherent and sustainable way.

The document was approved by RIAM's Council of Strategic Orientation (COS) on July 10 after a participatory process involving short circuit markets initiated by RIAM.

What is a short circuit market ?

A short circuit market is a mode of commercialization of agricultural products that takes place either by direct sale from a producer-transformer to a consumer (farm sales, producers' market, etc) or by indirect sale but limited to a maximum of one intermediary between the producer and consumer.

The short circuit enables the recreation of a relational proximity between producers and consumers and geographical proximity which has a positive influence on local development and alimentary territorialization.

Short circuits are linked to the need for local, seasonal nutrition, the aim being to make the producer-transformer the first beneficiary of the sale of her/his products and always put the consumer in the forefront to ensure market transparency.

Why is this framework important ?

The process of PGS already creates a clear, transparent and solidarity-based platform to ensure that fresh and seasonal products are cultivated in a manner respectful of the environment and well-being of the consumers and without the use of pesticides.

Now that production is framed by this process, it is time for commercialization to be framed in the same way. Since short circuit markets are supported by RIAM, the process will be controlled by producers and consumers themselves and coordinated by RIAM.

The establishment of this framework may prove to be crucial in advancing IABA's goals to develop short circuit markets in Morocco. It is a tool that will benefit producers and consumers and create a clear and transparent process to implement a stronger short circuit markets strategy.

## Developing OA as a sustainable agri-food system in Africa

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Launched on February 28 for a duration of three and a half years, the aim of the IABA project is to support the development of organic agriculture across the continent.

Changes are already being seen in the scale of organic agriculture in Uganda, Morocco and Tanzania, to name but three African countries.

The project is coordinated by AfrONet and project partners include the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), France's National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE), the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM), National Organic Agriculture Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU), Moroccan Interprofessional Federation of the Organic Sector (FIMABIO) and Réseau des Initiatives Agroécologiques au Maroc (RIAM).

CIRAD and INRAE are working closely to facilitate the emergence of institutional

innovations for the organic sector through the IABA project and thereafter deploy AfrONet to domesticate all those innovations to members continent-wide. In the meantime, various activities are in place in these three countries of Morocco, Uganda, and Tanzania.

The premise is that in order to encourage organic agriculture, it is not enough to increase organic agricultural production. Rather, it is necessary to also develop the appropriate institutions in terms of markets, certification programmes overseeing the 'organic' quality of products, and public policies.

So from 2020 to 2023, CIRAD, INRAE, TOAM, NOGAMU, and RIAM under the supervision of AfrONet will strive to identify institutional innovations in these three areas and promote them at the national and continental levels.

Organic farming is widely considered to be a far more sustainable alternative than normal farming when it comes to food production.

The non-use of pesticides and wider

variety of plants enhances biodiversity and results in better soil quality and reduced pollution from fertilizer or pesticide run-offs.

Organic foods often have more beneficial nutrients, such as antioxidants, than their conventionally-grown counterparts and people with allergies to foods, chemicals, or preservatives may find their symptoms lessen or go away when they eat only organic foods.

Therefore African governments need to both overhaul old policies and adopt new ones that foster the sustainable production of affordable nutritious foods and promote farmer participation.

The African Union decision on Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiatives (EOA) provides a new path for African countries to put more focus on organic agriculture now than, say, 20 years ago.

The UN Secretary-General convened the very first Food Systems Summit in September 2021 to forge consensus on bold new actions to transform the way the world produces and consumes food, with the aim of getting back on track towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals where organic agriculture features directly or indirectly in seven of them.



*Francisco Garrido-Garza, a Mexican researcher in an interview with Constantine Akitanda of AfrONet.*

# Making global agri-food systems more sustainable and eco-friendly: The challenges and opportunities

## A Mexican researcher discusses his in-depth involvement in the IABA project

**Question:** Tell us briefly about yourself, the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE), and your engagement in building innovative markets for IABA implementing partners?

**Answer:** My name is Francisco Garrido-Garza. I am originally from Torreon, Mexico but I am currently residing in France where I am doing a PhD course in management specializing in sustainability transitions by market creations and innovations. I come from a dual academic background in life and social sciences, and I have developed an interdisciplinary career path to studying agri-food systems from multiple perspectives. I have research and fieldwork backgrounds in short food supply chains, agricultural systems, agrobiodiversity, functional ecology and sustainable food networks. My interests are broad and diverse, but generally pertain to exploring challenges and opportunities for making agri-food systems more sustainable and eco-friendly.

INRAE is sponsoring my ongoing doctoral studies and supervises my research and

fieldwork carried out in the three countries within the IABA project. INRAE is an important research institute in France in the fields of agriculture, food safety and environment. The institute's objective is to carry out scientific research dedicated to life, humans, and the Earth, uncovering solutions to most pressing concerns related to sustainable agricultural and food provisioning systems.

The IABA project is the practical part of my PhD course wherein I am conducting research on organic market innovations in each of the project partner countries. This is contributing to the project's Work Package 2 (Innovative Markets) through my collaboration with each project partner (FIMABIO, RIAM, TOAM and NOGAMU) in collective and participatory approaches to the better understanding of markets for organic and (agro-) ecological products in every country, plus the study and exploration of co-creation processes involving challenges, opportunities and action plans oriented to innovative visions.

**Q:** You therefore seem to be very fundamental in IABA projects especially in building innovative markets. How are you faring in the consumer roundtable meetings in the project implementing countries, since we know most of the project planning is done through these discussions?

**A:** The purpose of my interventions in the producer-consumer roundtables is to assist the project partners in organizing and facilitating them through activities where participant stakeholders can collectively discuss challenges and opportunities for organic markets. The roundtables serve as spaces for dialogue on investments in and growth of markets for organic products in every project implementing country, and take place at city/district level.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions in the first six months of 2021, travel to Morocco was impossible and hence the roundtables had to be conducted via video conference. RIAM

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*PGs group in Arusha*

# Of PGSs and the Tanzanian experience

The rapid growth of the organic sector globally has resulted in an increasing interest in alternative ways of guaranteeing the organic quality of food. The mainstream approach to certification is commonly known as third party certification (TPC). To understand more about certification processes, our Staff Writer Constantine Akitanda interviewed PHILLIPPE NINNIN, a researcher from CIRAD in France, who gives more details on certification and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs). Excerpts:

**Question:** You recently visited Tanzania under the Institutional Innovations for Organic Agriculture in Africa (IIABA) project representing CIRAD. Please explain who you are and what exactly was the purpose of your visit in relation to organic agriculture?

**Answer:** I am a French agro-economist specialized in the development of agro ecology and sustainable food systems in tropical countries. After working on organic coffee and cocoa production in Latin America, I entered the IIABA project to analyze Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as a possible alternative to third party certification for organic products. As I will be doing a PhD course on the subject, I came to Tanzania to conduct interviews with PGS-certified organic producers and main stakeholders of the sector. The objective of my visit was to gather knowledge about the functioning of PGS in Tanzania, its impacts on the livelihood of producers, as well as its strengths and vulnerabilities.

**Q:** According to IFOAM International, PGS is defined as a locally focused quality assurance system used to certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and a foundation of trust, social networking and

knowledge exchange. What's on the ground in line with your recent study of the Tanzanian situation?

**A :**



*Philippe Ninnin*

Participatory governance is indeed one of the key features of PGS. In Tanzania PGS producers are directly involved in the inspection of their peers. If they comply with the East African Organic Product Standards (EAOPS), they obtain a certificate allowing them to sell their products under the Kilimohai mark. During the internal inspections, producers from the same local group share experiences and ideas on their respective practices. This helps them to identify and apply locally adaptable agricultural practices. It also allows them to cooperate in new activities such as collective farming and organic marketing. To that extent, PGS is far more than a certification system; it is a springboard to improve organic production, social linkages, income and empowerment within farmers' communities.

**Q:** It looks like PGS is a very sensitive aspect in organic agriculture in its totality. What shall IIABA do to make it more easily affordable to the producers?

**A:** PGS certified products are first and foremost dedicated to domestic markets, which makes PGS an opportunity to develop access to affordable healthy and safe food in Tanzania. However, one of the main obstacles for PGS development

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# Of PGSs and the Tanzanian experience

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seems to be the difficult linkage between producers and customers. To that extent, there is work to be done in connecting the numerous local groups into a national scale network. The establishment of reliable supply chains allows the offering of stable product volumes, diversity and quality which is critical for the opening of new market outlets.

**Q: The existence of standards and labels generates an economic advantage for user as long as the value of the resource is maintained. In relation to your current study in Tanzania, is labeling of organic products an essential component?**

A: It depends on the scale of the market. If you sell your whole production to your village, your neighbors don't need a Kilimohai logo to know your produce is organic. Trust is passed on by direct contact. However, if you live in Arusha and you want to buy organic

cashew nuts from Masasi, then the label serves as a guarantee for the quality of the products. The label indicates that the farm of origin was inspected by both producers and an external auditor employed by TOAM. Without it, some opportunistic merchants may sell industrial products as organic, which could destroy the trust of customers in the system. Therefore, labeling of organic products is indeed an essential component for the development of organic supply chains.

**Q: Since consumers must always rely on quality signs like labels which indicate the origin, methods of production and or processing of the products they buy, do you guarantee smallholders farmers that IABA will bring more innovations for PGSs which create more trust to buyers?**

A: The IABA project is not, to my knowledge, aiming to change the guarantee system itself. Nonetheless, to improve the quality of

the PGS and its adaptation to production and market conditions, it could be considered to have a better integration of producer and consumers within the various decision mechanisms; content of the organic standards, appointment of TOAM staff and so on. We could, for example, imagine inviting producers' and buyers' representatives to the TOAM general assembly.

**Q: What was your best experience while studying the PGSs in Tanzania?**

A: As an agronomist, I am always very happy to visit organic farms. Some of the producers I visited in Tanzania have developed very smart systems on their farms. From the micro-climates created by stones in Zanzibar to gravitation-irrigated agroforestry plots in Morogoro, I learned new ways to optimize sometimes scarce resources. I am grateful for the time producers gave me, and look forward to be walking in the Tanzanian countryside again.

## Tunisia wins bid to host organic world congress in 2024

*Continues from Pg 1*

organically-processed agriculture products.

Tunisia collected a total of 60 votes, or 32 per cent of all electronic votes cast by IFOAM affiliates, beating four other counties including Denmark.

The country is ranked first in the world in terms of area dedicated to organic agriculture and organic olive growing, and is also top of the list of exporters of organic products, according to the Ministry of Agriculture.

The latter also points to an increase of 14 per cent in the area devoted to organic farming during the period 2001 to 2018, 26 per cent in stakeholders, 22 per cent in the quantities exported, and 31 per cent in the value of organic exports.

### Organic World Congress (OWC)

Every three years the Organic World Congress is held in conjunction with a general assembly bringing together thousands of organic farmers, producers, researchers, advocates and policy experts from around the



*The outgoing World Board 2017-2021*

world.

The OWC is an opportunity for organic agriculture like-minded stakeholders working towards sustainable agriculture, value chains and consumption to trade knowledge, information on new innovations, and experience.

The congress is seen as a leading event for the global organic sector.

Josephine Atangana, president of the African Organic Network (AfrONet) which is an umbrella organization representing organic agriculture actors in Africa working through

National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs), congratulated Tunisia for winning a very competitive bid to host the next OWC in 2024.

She said AfrONet together with NOAMs and other organic actors in Africa are grateful for all the efforts Tunisia put in to have the OWC held in Africa for the very first time.

'We look forward to collaborate and support your team towards hosting the OWC in 2024 and ensure it is a success and generates a higher participation from Africa and our networks across the globe,' Ms Atangana said.



*A group photo of the participants who attended a roundtable meeting in Zanzibar. Photo by AfrONet*

**By Constantine Akitanda, Zanzibar**

**O**rganic farming and food represent one of the major changes in the food industry today compared to, say, two decades ago. Reasons include growing concerns among consumers over safe food and the health benefits associated to organic food.

A roundtable meeting on marketing of organic produce was recently held in Zanzibar under the Institutional Innovations of Organic Agriculture in Africa (IIBA) project under the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM).

Over 20 participants attended the meeting where the Ministry of Agriculture re-affirmed Zanzibar's commitment to push the organic agriculture agenda forward. According to ministry representative Mohammed Yusuf: 'President Hussein Mwinyi has vowed to look into organic agriculture very closely to enable smooth operationalization of the subsector including marketing of organic produce.'

All government authorities responsible for agriculture, trade and marketing of agriculture produce have now been urged to work collaboratively to enable smallholder farmers access organic product markets.

There was consensus among participants of the need for more openness and sharing of markets and marketing information worldwide, alongside the promotion of organic

## Zanzibar joins the organic agriculture bandwagon

agriculture products through mass media and online platforms to create more public awareness.

'We want to have a consumer base of locals first, before considering export market,' Yusuf said.

Climate-smart agriculture abides by up to 95 per cent to organic agriculture practices but so far there are no specific organic markets established in Zanzibar, commented Msadala Ali Mbarouk, one of the participants.

He added that organic produce with the East African Organic Mark commonly known as Kilimohai mark is attracting a lot of customers, an indication that the mark has gained widespread respected.

'What is important is to ensure organic farmers become certified under Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) for their products to penetrate easily into the market place,' he said.

During the meeting AfrONet newsletter was informed of the formation of the Zanzibar Organic Initiative (ZOI), a platform for organic stakeholders which is working in close collaboration with the Revolutionary

Government.

The meeting was also informed that the Ministry of Agriculture has officially started a department of organic agriculture in a bid to speed up growth of the sub-sector.

Alice Mushi of the Milele Foundation said markets for organic products are rising rapidly in number due to huge number of tourists visiting the Isles, the only challenge now being to motivate Zanzibaris themselves on the importance of consuming safe organic food.

Group discussions came out with various issues and challenges like lack of knowledge on organic agriculture, low productivity of organic produce, and lack of developed market systems.

It was recommended that a plan of action be established which should involve developing collection centres, linking farmers to financial institutions, awareness creation on the importance of organic agriculture, and proper coordination of the sector.

Representatives from CIRAD and INRAE also were present to guide the meeting as it was part of a bigger study on organic product marketing.

# Making global agri-food systems more sustainable and eco-friendly: The challenges and opportunities

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organized two (in Rabat and Casablanca) and FIMABIO one (in Casablanca). Similarly, the unexpected rise of COVID-19 cases in Uganda last June interrupted plans to hold roundtables there with NOGAMU. The Ugandan government implemented pandemic

## The TPC model, in contrast, involves getting producers, manufacturers and businesses to comply with global standards

control measures that did not allow for such group activities and meetings. However in Tanzania it was possible to travel and organize the roundtables which were successfully completed in mid-August.

**Q: The aim of the IIABA project is to scale up organic agriculture across the African continent in the context of innovative markets. To what extent is this objective workable?**

A: From my own perspective, and according to the people I have interviewed about innovative markets, there are indeed efforts underway for the scaling up of organic agriculture across Africa, along with some progress. The views expressed indicate both optimism and pessimism, ranging from acknowledgement of particular project achievements and collective actions being taken (e.g. initiatives to empower producers, install foreign businesses and improve export numbers) to reflections on barriers to such efforts such as lack of awareness and scarce infrastructure.

**Q: From your study of the situations in Morocco and Tanzania, what do you see as hindrances for consumers to access organic food, if any?**

A: From what I recall, the hindrances come mostly from the producers rather than consumers. For example, at the roundtable held by FIMABIO the participants highlighted the lack of and need for more awareness raising regarding the negative impacts of consuming conventional products (e.g. how non-organic products affect consumers' health, the environment and economy, and how organic products are beneficial in this context). In Tanzania participants expressed similar concerns. Overall, in both countries (if I am not mistaken) there are no consumer organizations but efforts are being made to increase direct producer-consumer contacts and organic product legitimacy. Perhaps one of the French interns studying the Moroccan organic markets can provide a more accurate answer

**Q: The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is a low-cost quality assurance mechanism that guarantees the quality of organic agricultural products and has the potential to regain consumers' trust. Would you say that it is now time for Africa to have a unified certification process in order to streamline organic products marketing?**

A: I am confident that a unified but decentralized certification system would ease the production and marketing processes, even reduce costs and deficiencies. That is, domestic regulations should comply with global standards whereas certification shall be managed by qualified private entities but not by government departments. Governments should not control the processes but they can regulate them to ensure they are followed accordingly. Therefore, a Pan-African commission should be created similar to the European Union (EU) Organic Label (Certification) body. I recognize both third party certification (TPC) and PGS as effective and transparent mechanisms but they differ

in geographical coverage, verification, governance, accessibility and affordability. The level that PGSs commonly operate goes from local to national, but mostly regional. PGS involves verifying agri-food systems to safeguard local consumption of products from individual or organized small-scale producers within specific localities, regions or even countries. Compared to third party certification (TPC), PGS is demonstrated to be more affordable and accessible to small-scale farmers for developing local markets for organic products. The TPC model, in contrast, involves getting producers, manufacturers and businesses to comply with global standards. The certifiers are intermediaries, whether government agencies or private companies, who inspect processes to ensure they comply with international norms. TPC is definitely essential and compulsory when aiming for exports principally to Western markets such as North America and the EU.

I think in order for Africa to have a unified certification process, it will have to undergo a similar trajectory followed by the EU when creating the EU Organic Label (Certification) body. For sure it is a long and complex process because the number of countries in Africa is more than the double those in Europe (54 countries in total). Also take into account the large geographic sizes of most African countries, scarce infrastructure, low and medium economic freedom (based on Fraser Institute studies), and the existence of autocratic and semi-autocratic governments implementing protectionist policies. From my point of view, these are the major challenges for Africa to conceive a pan-African organic certification body. The key step is to secure the agreement of all or most states to conform to regulations aligned to global organic standards. I think the PGS has been effective in easing certification processes although at levels no greater than national. It also represents an alternative to small-scale producers in terms of access and affordability. But when aiming to import and export organic products across Africa and beyond, TPC is still the only way.

# 'Africa still lagging behind in global organic farming drive'

**N**ot a single African country is included among the world's largest areas of organic land, according to Dr. Olugbenga AdeOluwa, country coordinator of the Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative in Nigeria.

AdeOluwa was delivering an online presentation on the 'Principles of Organic Agriculture practices' organised by the Journalists Go Organic Movement, a Pan-African initiative that brings journalists together with organic agriculture and environment experts.

He said low level of technical know-how among stakeholders and policy makers has been a major limitation to the development of the organic agriculture sector in Africa.

'The global organic sector was valued at \$130 billion by 2019, spanning 72.3 million hectares managed by over 3.1 million producers, and yet Africa is still found wanting,' he noted.

AdeOluwa, who is an associate professor in the Department of Soil Resources Management at the University of Ibadan, said organic agriculture contributes a lot to the health of the world.

'The Principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness, and Care are the roots from which organic agriculture grows and develops,' he stated, adding:

'Ensuring the health of both the living and non-living components of the ecosystem is a must in organic agriculture. This is what you don't get from conventional agriculture, where 'you rob Peter to pay Paul' like through the indiscriminate use of harmful agrochemicals without concern for their negative impact on the entire value chain'.

According to him, 'organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which enhances agro-ecosystems utilizing both traditional and scientific knowledge.

'It contributes to agro-ecosystem balance or sustenance, and protects native entities including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity.

of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account the fact that regional conditions require locally adapted systems."

'This is accomplished by using, wherever possible, agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods, as opposed to using synthetic materials to fulfill any specific function within the system'.

According to AdeOluwa, organic production methods play a dual societal role: on one hand providing for a specific market responding to a consumer demand for organic products, and on the other hand delivering public goods contributing to the protection of the environment and animal welfare, and promoting rural development.

He said that journalists need a proper understanding of organic agriculture principles in order to properly address issues surrounding the sector.

'Journalists have great roles to play in taking Nigeria to a higher level and exploring the opportunities for mankind within the organic agriculture system. A major question is how far can journalists go in proper advocacy for organic

agriculture when they don't have good understanding of the sector?"

'So it is vital that journalists as the society's watchdogs, and indeed all stakeholders, should be trained and retrained in organic agriculture practices. This is one way to increase consumer awareness of the benefits of organic agriculture. Health considerations, especially, is increasing the demand for organic produce and products."

Mrs Ebere Agozie, a journalist with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) and founder of Journalists Go Organic, said the project was born out of the desire to help curb strange illnesses ravaging the world today.

'This project is to build the capacity of journalists across the African continent not

only in the promotion of, and sustenance of, organic agriculture, but in getting them to become organic farmers," she said, adding:

'The idea is to work with journalists who are the watchdogs of society to announce the benefits of organic agriculture in every nook and cranny of the country. Since we are what we eat, we can no longer leave the business of our health and that of our environment to farmers alone."

'Nigeria must be number one in the drive for organic agriculture in Africa; therefore we must sit up and work as a team,' Ms Agozie asserted.



'It emphasises the use Dr. Olugbenga AdeOluwa