

Confirmed: Rwanda to host 5th AOC in December

By Constantine Akitanda

The African Organic Network (AfrONet), an umbrella association of the organic agriculture sub-sector in Africa, will in collaboration with National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs), the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) and African Union Commission (AUC) host the 5th African Organic Conference (AOC) in Kigali, Rwanda from December 5-8, 2022.

Normally the AOC is held after every three years, with the previous editions in Kampala, Uganda (2009), Lusaka, Zambia (2012), Lagos, Nigeria (October 2015) and Sally, Senegal (November 2018). Hitherto, the next conference was set for Marrakesh, Morocco in November 2021 under hosting of the Fédération Interprofessionnelle Marocaine de la Filière Biologique (FIMABio), but had to be postponed due

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**THE 5TH AFRICAN
ORGANIC
CONFERENCE**
KIGALI, RWANDA

DECEMBER 5 - 8. 2022

Going chemical-free in farming is unavoidable to save the planet despite corporate hesitancy

By Astrud Lea Beringer

We are under constant pressure today to optimize – our bodies, the way we work and how we produce food. Uniformity is the rule, instead of diversity. But this industrial way of intensive food production is killing our living planet and locking people up in poverty. It's time for a radical and sustainable agricultural turn-round.

So what is the problem with being fully sustainable in our farming? It is the lack of political consensus on what sustainable farming really means. This ambiguity creates room for green-washing of intensive farming while suppressing and co-opting alternative approaches such as agroecology.

Low productivity is a common argument used against agroecology - but growing evidence in research proves its potential to increase yields without any chemical inputs.

Unsustainable

The truth is that the radical agroecological pathway is a threat to the core business of agrochemical corporations – a fear that

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New initiative underway for formation of an African organic food basket

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

The East Africa Ecological Organic Agriculture Steering Committee recently met in Dar es Salaam to push for the mainstreaming of organic agriculture to boost the regional food basket.

According to Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) regional



Dr. David Amudavi, CEO, BvAT

chairperson Hakim Baliraine, the meeting followed a 2011 declaration by Africa Union (AU) heads of state to prioritise agriculture across the continent.

The steering committee meeting, which also saw the launch of the Ecological Organic Agriculture-Initiative (EOA-I), drew

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Nigeria to delve deeper into organic agriculture - minister

By Collins Nnabuife, Abuja

Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr Mohammad Abubakar, has said the increasing consumer demand for organic products locally is an indication of the high growth potential within the sector.

According to the minister, most of the organic products on sale in the Nigerian market are imported.

Dr Abubakar disclosed this in Abuja during a recent national dialogue on Organic Agriculture Policy for Nigeria organized by the ministry in collaboration with the Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative of Nigeria.

Represented by the director of the Federal Department of Land Resources, Shehu Bello, he said his ministry is looking to end the challenge of Nigerian produce being rejected in the international market by introducing organic options.

He said through this measure, the problem can soon be a thing of the past.

According to Dr Abubakar, the ministry is focused on adopting organic agriculture for the sustainability of soil nutrients and fertility, especially in areas where the agricultural landfall within the Savannah and Sahel Zones are characterized by inherent low soil fertility.

Said the minister: 'Our ultimate goal in this area is to increase agricultural productivity, earn more foreign exchange, alleviate poverty and improve job creation in the rural economy.'

'For Nigeria the agricultural sector is one of the key drivers of the economy, and a vibrant agricultural sector. There is an increasing demand for food and raw materials for agribusiness

industries. This forms the ministry's resolve to develop a National Organic Agriculture Policy for Nigeria.

'The policy is all-encompassing and cuts across all segments of organic agricultural business and practices including production, marketing, processing, exports and imports, quality control, raw materials, training, research and innovation, government and institutional interventions.'

The director of the ministry's Farm Inputs Support Services Department, Eng. Tunde Bello, said through full implementation of the National Fertilizer Quality Control (NFQC) Act 2019 and its regulations the ministry will begin to sanitize the industry and rid it of adulterators after issuing permits and certificates of registration to fertilizer manufacturers, blenders, distributors, exporters and importers.

Bello said the Ministry has commenced registration of fertilizer merchants for both organic and inorganic farming and urged all players in the organic fertilizer field to comply and obtain proper permits for their enterprises to avoid prosecution.

He said the increasing calls from stakeholders for the development of an appropriate policy to guide and regulate organic agriculture operations in Nigeria will receive the necessary attention.

According to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Boss Mustapha, Nigeria's agricultural sector has witnessed a remarkable policy change aimed at increasing agricultural production and ensuring food and nutritional security for the citizens.

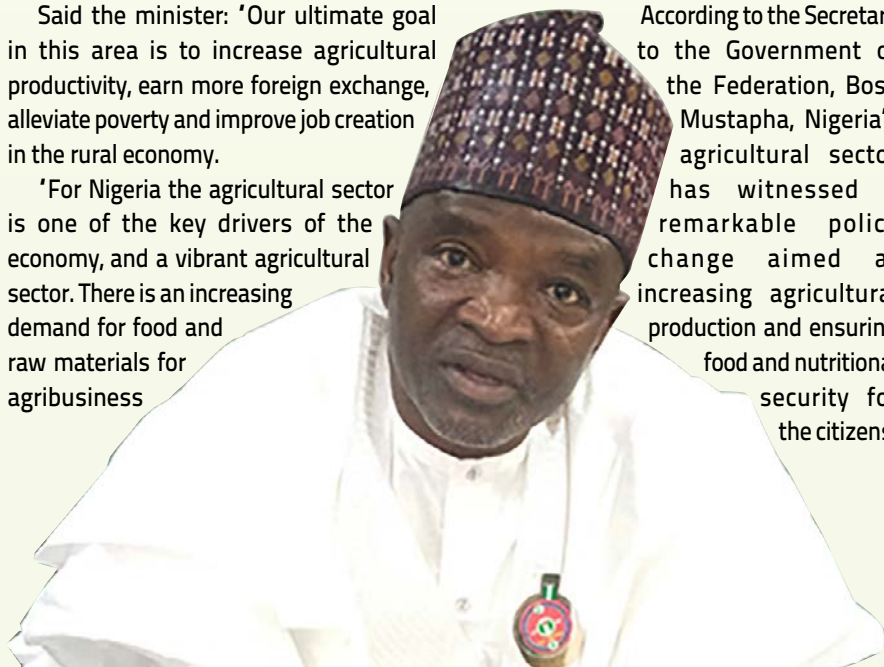
TIPS ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE:

According to IFOAM (2002), organic agriculture practices are based on the following principles: Principle of health: The role of organic agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In view of this, it should avoid the use of fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects.

Principle of ecology: Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustaining them. Organic management must be adapted to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale. The reduction of inputs by reuse, recycle and the efficient management of materials and energy will contribute to improve environmental quality and will conserve resources.

Principle of fairness: This principle emphasizes that those involved in organic agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties – farmers, workers, processors, distributors, traders and consumers. It also insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life according with their physiology, natural behaviour and well-being. Natural and environmental resources that are used for production and consumption should be managed in a socially and ecologically fair way and should be held in trust for future generations. Fairness requires systems of production, distribution and trade that are open and equitable and account for real environmental and social costs.

Principle of care: This principle states that precaution and responsibility are the key concerns in management, development and technology choices in organic agriculture. Science is necessary to ensure that organic agriculture is healthy, safe and ecologically sound. However, it must consider valid solutions from practical experiences, accumulated traditional and indigenous knowledge and prevent significant risks by adopting appropriate technologies and rejecting unpredictable ones, such as genetic engineering.



Dr. Mohammad Mahmoud Abubakar, Minister of Agriculture

Editorial Note

How organic practices can enhance sustainability in agriculture

In a real sense, organic agriculture promotes socio-ecological sustainability with practices such as crop rotation, natural pest management, diversified crop and livestock production, and addition of compost and animal manures in place of synthetic inputs.

Sustainable agricultural practices are intended to protect the environment, expand the Earth's natural resource base, and maintain and improve soil fertility. Based on a multi-pronged goal, sustainable agriculture seeks to increase profitable farm income and promote environmental stewardship.

Normally, sustainability focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

In the context of agriculture, sustainability refers to the successful management of agricultural resources to satisfy human needs while at the same time maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environment and conserving natural resources for future generations.

Sustainability in organic farming must therefore be seen in a holistic sense, which includes ecological, economic and social aspects.

Organic agriculture is an integrated production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity (FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, 2007).

It emphasizes the use of natural inputs (i.e. mineral and products derived from plants) and the renunciation of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Organic agriculture follows the principles and logic of a living organism in which all elements (soil, plant, farm animals, insects, the farmer and local conditions) are closely linked to each other.

This is accomplished by using, where possible, agronomic, biological and mechanical methods, following the principles of these interactions, using natural ecosystem as a model.

As it is being taught all over the world, organic agriculture shares many techniques used by other sustainable agricultural approaches like intercropping, crop rotation, mulching, integration of crops and livestock).

However, the use of natural inputs (non-synthetic), improvement of soil structure and fertility and use of a crop rotation plan represent the basic rules that make organic agriculture a unique agricultural management system.

In accordance with the Guidelines of Organically Food Produce of the Codex Alimentarius (2007), an organic production system is designed to enhance biological diversity within the whole system, increase soil biological activity, maintaining long-term soil fertility and recycle wastes of plant and animal origin in order to return nutrients to the soil, thus minimizing the use of non-renewable resources.

It also relies on the renewable resources in locally organized agricultural systems and promoting the healthy use of soil, water and air as well as minimizes all forms of pollution that may result from agricultural practices.

Further to that, it promotes the careful processing methods of agricultural products in order to maintain the organic integrity and vital qualities of the product at all stages. We live in an era of large-scale disruptions and fast-paced technological advances that are transforming many aspects of our lives, but changes taking place in one area are particularly very crucial for the future of our agriculture.

Where is it going and how will it define our future on this planet?

Write to the editor,
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to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The AfrONet supreme organ made a resolution at the 4th AOC in Senegal that should Morocco fail to host the 5th AOC, its place would be taken by the first runner-up of the 2018 elections. In December 2021 the resolution was honored and the Rwanda Organic Agriculture Movement (ROAM) was nominated to host the 5th AOC in December 2022.

The 5th AOC is anticipated to bring together over 300 organic stakeholders across Africa and Europe to share experiences, successes, challenges and ideas that will contribute towards strengthening the organic sector in Africa.

It is an avenue to create more linkages among different organic actors (producers, consumers, traders, policy makers, donors and scholars) and those engaged in different levels of organic value chains.

Organic agriculture is practiced worldwide and Africa inclusive, and ranges from subsistence, small scale to large scale.

Although organic agriculture in Africa is mainly practiced for export, a small portion is consumed locally among the population who are informed and knowledgeable about its benefits.

According to IFOAM – Organics International, Africa has a big opportunity to benefit more from the production and export of organic products to Europe and other parts of the world.

A Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) survey of February 2021 shows that there is still continuous growth of organic agriculture in Africa and other parts of the world.

There has been an increase in land occupied by organic agriculture from 1,854,646 hectares in 2018 to 2,030,830 hectares in 2019, the survey shows.



Moses Aisu, AfrONet's CEO, first from left is with MOGA team members shortly after he had discussed the development of the Ecological Organic Agriculture in the country

AfrONet seeks to rope in Malawi in Organic Agriculture initiative

By Constantine Akitanda, Lilongwe

The African Organic Network (AfrONet) recently ventured into Lilongwe, Malawi to promote Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) through the Malawi Organic Agriculture Growers Association (MOGA).

AfrONet Chief Executive Officer Moses Aisu told MOGA Board and Secretariat officials in a meeting that the purpose of the visit was to get Malawi stakeholders more involved in scaling up the country's own EOA profile.

This was in line with the continental Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT) as agreed by African Union heads of state.

The initiative's vision is for a resilient and vibrant Ecological Organic Agriculture system for enhanced and sustainable food and nutritional security across Africa.

AfrONet's goal to ensure that all National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs) are

active and have ample capacity to run networks within their countries for the scaling up of ecologically and organically sound strategies and practices towards this end.

Such strategies include institutional capacity development, scientific innovations, market participation, public policies, programs, outreach and communication, efficient coordination, networking and partnerships.

The overall goal is to mainstream ecological organic agriculture into national agricultural production systems, plans and policies, according to Mr Aisu.

Malawi Organic Growers Association (MOGA) board member Dr Stanley Chidaya noted that despite the market for organically grown crops in the world growing steadily every day, Malawi has not done enough to take advantage of the situation.

MOGA, formed in 2000, encourages farmers to grow crops without using synthetic fertilizers because most European countries prefer organically grown crops compared to those grown using synthetic fertilizers.

Currently, MOGA has markets in Germany, other European countries and China for Malawian farmers to sell their rice, coffee, macadamia, tea, legumes and other horticultural products.

Dr Chidaya further noted that the world market for organic crops has grown to \$100 billion at present 'because more people are interested in consuming crops without health risks.'

'Currently we are working with 37,000 farmers in Malawi who have adopted this system. Most of them are in the Central Region followed by the North and the South. These farmers are growing crops such as garlic, ginger, cereals, maize, soya, legumes, coffee, tea and vegetables,' he said, adding:

'Three years from now we will have at least a minimum of 120,000 farmers and this will be a very good progress. Our neighbors Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya are doing a wonderful work of registering more OA farmers each year, and also in the southern cluster Zambia and Zimbabwe are recording more farmers than ,say, five years ago compared to Malawi'.

Commenting on EOA-I, Dr Chidaya said there was a misconception among many Malawian farmers that without using synthetic fertilizer, the country's agricultural sector will not develop.

'This is a very malevolent ideology and people should stop thinking in that perspective,' he remarked. 'There are various proven technologies which are already documented and user friendly. If one needs to reproduce organic fertilizers, the materials can be found at household level with minimal costs. Why can't we stand together?'

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:

UN Report: 34% of agricultural land is degraded, water overdrawn

By Dana Nuccitelli

The land and water resources farmers rely on are today stressed to “a breaking point” even as almost 10 percent of the eight billion people on earth are already undernourished with three billion lacking healthy diets. And by 2050 there will be two billion more mouths to feed, warns a new report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

For now, farmers have been able to boost agricultural productivity by irrigating more land and applying heavier doses of fertilizer and pesticides. But the report says these practices are not sustainable: They have eroded and degraded soil while polluting and depleting water supplies and shrinking the world’s forests.

The FAO report discusses some important climate change impacts, such as changing distribution of rainfall, the suitability of land for certain crops, the spread of insects and other pests, and shorter growing seasons in regions affected by more intense droughts.

Hunger

While not the sole source of obstacles facing global agriculture, the report makes it clear that climate change is further stressing agricultural systems and amplifying global food production challenges.

The report also offers hope that the problems are solvable: Water degradation can be reversed by turning to smart planning and coordination of sustainable farming practices and by deploying new innovative technologies.

More sustainable agriculture can also help fight climate change: For instance, the report notes that wiser use of soils can help sequester some of the greenhouse gasses currently emitted by agricultural activities.

Drastic changes in climate will require regions to adjust the crops they grow. For example, the report predicts that much cereal production will probably have to move north, to Canada and northern Eurasia. Brazil and northern Africa may have a harder time growing coffee, but it may get easier in eastern Africa.

A changing climate ‘may bring opportunities for multiple rainfed cropping, particularly in the tropics and

subtropics.” And for areas ‘where the climate becomes marginal for current staple and niche crops, there are alternative annual and perennial tree crops, livestock, and soil and water management options available.”

The report recommends seed and germoplasm exchanges globally and among regions, and investments to develop crops that can withstand changes in temperature, salinity, wind, and evaporation. The changes will not be easy, the report says, but they may be necessary to avoid widespread hunger and other catastrophes.

Aquifers

Over the past 20 years, the global population has risen by more than 25 percent from just over six billion to nearly eight billion people. The amount of land used to grow crops has increased by just four percent over that time, as farmers have been able to meet the growing demand for food by dramatically increasing the productivity per acre of agricultural land.

Climate change exacerbates farmers’ challenges by making weather more extreme and less reliable.

They’ve done so, for example, by increasing use of diesel-fuelled machinery, fertilizer, and pesticides. But these practices have come at a price.

‘Human-induced degradation affects 34 percent - 1,660 million hectares - of agricultural land,’ the FAO report says. ‘The treatment of soils with inorganic fertilizers to increase or sustain yields has had significant adverse effects on soil health, and has contributed to freshwater pollution induced by run-off and drainage.’

This degradation is especially extensive on irrigated farmland. Irrigation has been critical for meeting

food demand because it produces two to three times as much food per acre as does rain-fed farmland. But irrigation also increases runoff of fertilizers and pesticides that can contaminate soil and groundwater.

The FAO report notes that globally, agriculture accounts for 72 percent of all surface and groundwater withdrawals, mainly for irrigation, which is depleting groundwater aquifers in many regions. Global groundwater withdrawals for irrigated agriculture increased by about 20 percent over the past decade alone.

Similarly, the quality of 13 percent of global soil, including 34 percent of agricultural land, has been degraded. This degradation has been caused by factors such as excessive fertilizer use, livestock overgrazing causing soil compaction and erosion, deforestation, and decreasing water availability.

Deforestation trends offer one relatively bright spot in the FAO report. The global forested area has declined by about one percent or 47 million hectares over the past decade, but that is a significant improvement from the nearly two percent decline or 78 million hectares in the 1990s.

And in the November 2021 international climate negotiations in Glasgow, 141 countries covering 91 percent of global forested area agreed to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030. It remains to be seen, of course, how many reach those commitments.

Climate change exacerbates farmers’ challenges by making weather more extreme and less reliable. Extreme heat can stress crops and farm workers while increasing evaporation of water from soil and transpiration from plants, thus amplifying agricultural water demands.

Here too, it’s not all bad news: agricultural productivity is expected to increase in regions that are currently relatively cold, but decrease in places that are hotter and drier, especially as climate change exacerbates droughts.

Agri-food

As with others, farmers will need to adapt to the changing climate, and making those adaptations be expensive. For example, as the primary or sole producer

The treatment of soils with inorganic fertilizers to increase or sustain yields has had significant adverse effects on soil health, and has contributed to freshwater pollution induced by run-off and drainage

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Focus on IIABA:

A visitor's perspectives on OA policy formulation progress in Tanzania and Uganda

Ms Mathilde Gourion, agricultural Policies Trainee from the French agricultural research and cooperation organization CIRAD, recently held an interview with our Staff Writer Constantine Akitanda as she completed a study on agricultural policy in Tanzania and Uganda, Excerpts:

Question: After your recent visit to Tanzania how do you see that country's progress towards establishing a fully-fledged national organic agriculture policy?

Yes, my trip was in line with current efforts in Tanzania to mainstream organic agriculture in its National Agriculture Policy (NAP) and develop a separate organic agriculture strategy under this policy.

The NAP has been under revision since 2019. Organic stakeholders have already provided comments and are waiting to see if these were included or not. The revised NAP is currently at the Ministry of Agriculture which was requested by the Cabinet Secretariat to provide more arguments for the need for policy to be revised at all. A consultant is working on an evaluation report to be attached to the revised NAP.

The organic stakeholders have managed to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Agriculture to develop an OA strategy which will be a key part of the NAP. The formulation of the OA strategy started in July 2021. This process could be supported by the Institutional

Innovation for Organic Agriculture in Africa (IIABA) project.

Q: Under the IIABA project, the policy component is a strategic component; could, you tell us the weight of this component after this field study?

A: I was only working on the policy component as a major topic in my field of study. It may thus be difficult to assess its 'weight' for the organic sector in general as my answer may be biased.

That being said, the respondents (23 in mainland Tanzania) were asked to identify the main challenges faced by the organic sector. The most cited challenges were related to production (30% of the total number of cited challenges) followed by the

institutional framework (26%).

In relation to the institutional framework, the respondents mentioned the following challenges:

- Lack of support to OA from the government (11 times)
- Lack of knowledge on OA from extension officers (9 times)
- Lack of policy support (9 times)
- Government support to chemical farming (8 times), and:
- The NAP is not operationalized through a programme (6 times)

Therefore, the policy component appears to be one of the key components for organic agriculture in Tanzania.

Q: What lessons did you draw about organic agriculture policies for African countries?

A: First, it appeared that there is growing interest in the organic sector both in Uganda and Tanzania. It shows in the policy framework; adoption of the NOAP in Uganda, inclusion of policy statements for OA in the NAP in Tanzania. These processes take time but there is progress.

I would probably say that the biggest lesson learnt is to take into account the specificities of each legal and policy framework. For example, in Uganda most stakeholders would say that the NOAP (National Organic Agriculture Policy) needs to be operationalized through proper legislation.

That did not seem to be the case in Tanzania where the operationalization of the NAP was more dependent

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Ms. Mathilde Gourion



Olive fruits

An overview of organic agriculture sector in Tunisia

Tunisia is a small country by North African standards, sandwiched between the much larger countries of Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. The northernmost country in Africa, Tunisia is bounded on the north and east by the Mediterranean Sea.

It covers an area of 163,610 km², measuring 1200 km from north to south and an average of 280 km from east to west. Northern Tunisia has a Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. Toward the south the climate becomes progressively hotter and drier.

Agricultural sector

Even though Tunisia is on its way to becoming a modern service economy, the agricultural sector is still of vital importance, contributing 12.6% of GDP and employing almost one quarter of the country's labour force. Agricultural produce represents about 6% of the country's export earnings. The main cereal crops are wheat and barley.

Tunisian farmers grow olives, dates and

fresh fruits for both export and domestic consumption. Meat (chicken, sheep and cattle) and vegetables (tomatoes and potatoes) represent important comestible goods as well. The main agricultural export is olive oil (FAO, 14.07.2006). The European Union is the country's principal trading partner (ITC, 10.09.2006).

Organic farming

Organic agriculture is relatively new in Tunisia. However, in the last ten years the organic land area, number of farmers, and crop diversification increased rapidly. With 155,323 hectares under organic management, representing 1.59% of total agricultural area, Tunisia has now one of the most developed organic sectors in Africa (IFOAM & FiBL 2006).

This favorable trend is largely due to an active government policy in the promotion of organic agriculture (IFOAM 2003). Since there is no strong domestic demand market for organic products as yet, most of the production is directed to the export market. Some farmers are producers and exporters

at the same time.

Key organic products

About three quarters of organic land in Tunisia is dedicated to growing olives, most of which are processed into oil. Organic olive farmers receive a price premium ranging from 10 to 20% relative to non-organic products (Twarog 2006).

Other crops include dates, jojoba, almonds, fruits and vegetables, honey and aromatic plants (IFOAM 2003). In recent years, organic livestock husbandry in Tunisia has expanded significantly.

The network

Organic agriculture in Tunisia started in the 1980s with private initiatives. However, the breakthrough came in the mid-90s when the Tunisian government established a national strategy for the development of the organic sector. This program included the establishment of a national commission for organic agriculture (CTAB) and the provision of financial support.

Over the first five years after conversion, organic farmers are eligible for financial help covering up to 30 per cent of investment costs for equipment and 70% of certification costs (GTZ, 2003).

Four certification bodies licensed by the Ministry of Agriculture are operating in Tunisia: ECOCERT, IMC, LACON and BCS. They comply with IFOAM standards, EU regulations and Tunisian legislation.

The benefits of baobab powder as a 100% natural organic super-food

By Constantine Akitanda

Baobab is an exceptional super-fruit of Africa's 'Tree of Life'. It is the only fruit in the world that dries naturally on the branch.

When baked in the sun for at least six months, baobab's prickly green, furry coating transforms into a smooth, brown, coconut-like shell. Inside its hard casing the pulp is naturally dehydrated.

It can be simply harvested and sieved to produce a 100 per cent natural and organic super-food powder that is exceptionally nutrient-rich, providing a wide range of health benefits.

Baobab powder is a rich source of vitamin C which contributes to normal energy release, immune function, healthy and glowing skin.

It is also almost 50 per cent fibre (two-thirds soluble and one-third insoluble, making it a powerful prebiotic) and contains more antioxidants than any other whole fruit.

As it is a natural source of these nutrients, baobab is more bioavailable than

manufactured vitamin supplements, meaning our bodies can absorb the nutrients more easily, ensuring a greater uptake.

Amazingly, baobab has a natural shelf-life of three years so there are no additives or preservatives that need to be added; just 100 per cent pure baobab fruit pulp powder.

The human body cannot make or store its own vitamin C (unlike other animals), so we need to make sure we get a good supply from the foods we eat every day.

A single serving of Baobab Powder (10g or 2-3 teaspoons) provides 33 per cent of your daily vitamin C requirement (NRV).

One of the key benefits of vitamin C is that it helps to keep our immune system strong, supporting our body's defence against viruses, infections,

diseases and other illnesses.

Vitamin C contributes to normal energy release – this slow and steady release sustains us for a longer period of time and prevents us from feeling tired all of a sudden.

Apart from helping to reduce fatigue, it also supports a normal energy-yielding metabolism which is 'needed for all functions and activities of the body, including physical activity and exercise' (EFSA, 2012).

Baobab Powder contains 34 per cent soluble fibre which helps to slow down the release of sugars into the bloodstream, reducing energy spikes. Soluble fibre can also help to control blood glucose levels, improve blood cholesterol and reduce visceral fat.

According to the World Health Organisation, by 2017 over 30 per cent of the world's population was deficient in iron, making it the most common nutritional disorder.

Many people turn to various iron supplements to increase their intake (we like to use Moringa Powder as a natural alternative). A lesser known fact is

that vitamin C is needed to help the body absorb iron, so pairing iron with vitamin C actually increases absorption.

Our bodies require two types of iron: heme iron (found in fish, poultry and red meat) and non-heme iron (present in plant foods, eggs, milk and meat). Compared to the former, non-heme iron is not easily absorbed by the body. One of the ways in which absorption of both types of iron can be increased is by combining

the consumption of iron with vitamin C.

As baobab is a rich natural source of vitamin C, it is easily accessible to the body and is better absorbed than artificial supplements.

Sprinkle some baobab onto your iron-rich foods for a lemony zing or shake it into your water when taking your iron supplements.

explain how baobab might just be the secret to having the world's healthiest gut. Studies of the Hadza Tribe in Tanzania, who are among the planet's last remaining hunter gatherers, found they have 40 per cent more diverse gut microbiomes than the average Westerner.

'According to scientists, the Hadza have the most diverse gut bacteria of anyone anywhere in the world' (Independent, 2017). One of their key staples? That's right, you guessed it – the baobab fruit.

The benefits of including prebiotics in your diet don't stop there; a study by the University of Colorado Boulder suggested that prebiotics can improve sleep after a stressful event, suggesting that adding baobab into your diet can also help support a good night's sleep.

The Journal of Nutrition also recommends that baobab has the highest antioxidant content of any fruit. Baobab powder has twice the antioxidants gram per gram of goji berries and more than blueberries and pomegranates combined.

It is generally advised that pregnant women should consume 85mg of vitamin C per day as it helps the body produce collagen. Collagen is a structural protein that is needed for your baby's normal growth during pregnancy. It plays a vital role in structuring a baby's body and supporting their developing organs.

Vitamin C, also known as ascorbic acid, helps your body fight infections and protects cells from damage – helping to keep you healthy.

Another key role that vitamin C plays during pregnancy is its ability to increase the absorption of iron – a vitamin that most pregnant women are deficient in. Iron is needed to help our bodies produce red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body and to the baby.

If that wasn't enough to convince you of baobab's super-powers, it is also a good source of fibre. Nutritional therapist Eve Kalinik explains how this helps to 'support bowel movements and a great addition for new mums to help fight fatigue that comes with having a newborn.'

Baobab is considered to be one of the highest alkaline foods available as it has a PRAL rating of -52. Eating highly alkaline foods helps to balance our body's pH levels.

The Journal of Environmental Health (2012) found that alkaline foods can also help defend our bodies from chronic diseases and ailments such as hypertension, arthritis and deficiency in vitamin D.

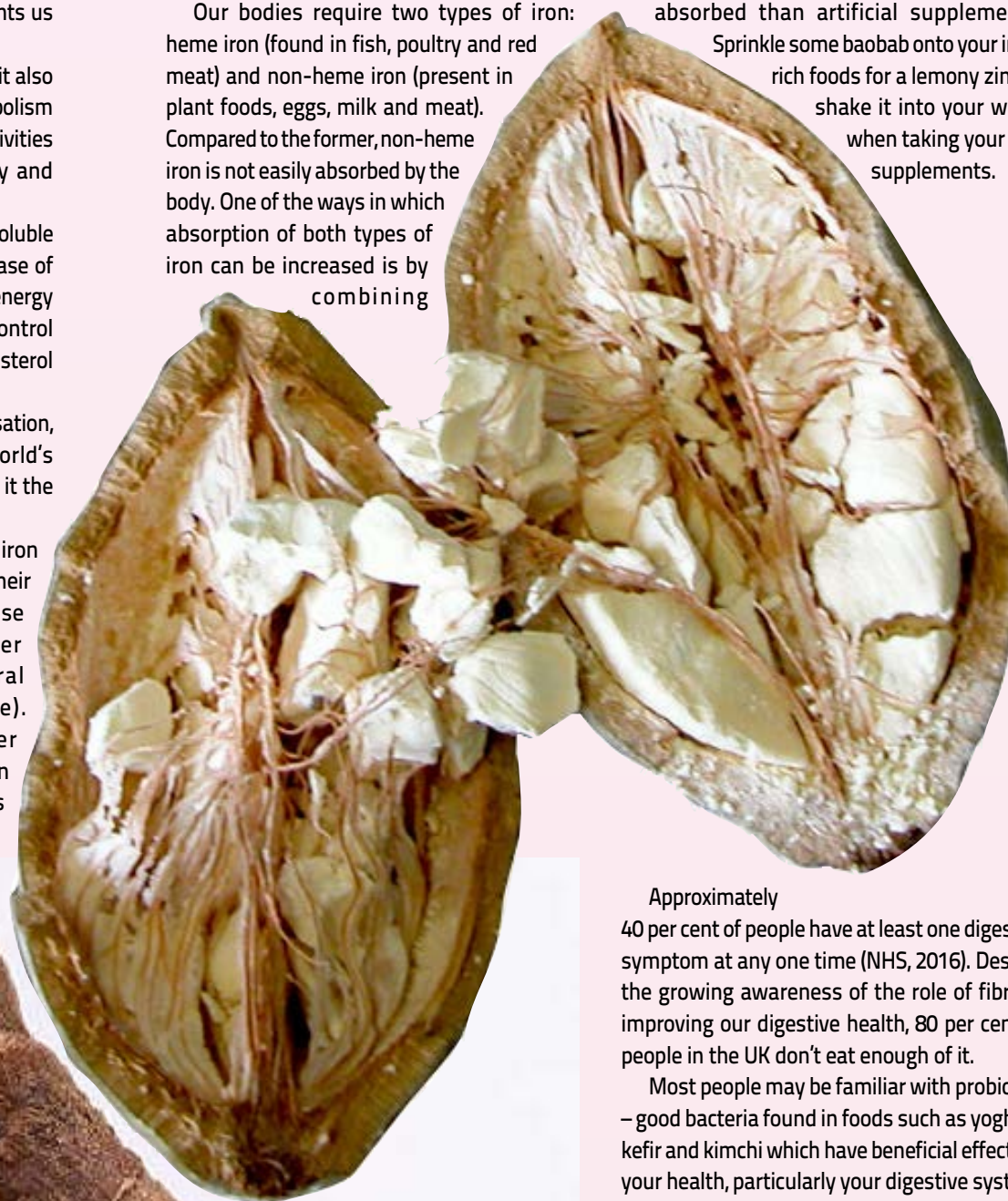
Approximately 40 per cent of people have at least one digestive symptom at any one time (NHS, 2016). Despite the growing awareness of the role of fibre in improving our digestive health, 80 per cent of people in the UK don't eat enough of it.

Most people may be familiar with probiotics – good bacteria found in foods such as yoghurt, kefir and kimchi which have beneficial effects to your health, particularly your digestive system. However, very few are familiar with prebiotics which play an equally important role in gut health.

Prebiotics are indigestible dietary fibre, also known as soluble fibre, made up of non-living organic matter.

The soluble fibers of baobab fruit pulp are prebiotics: non-digestible food components that beneficially affect the host by selectively stimulating the growth and activity of beneficial micro-flora, according to the Journal of Food Research 2016.

It is these prebiotic qualities that could



Bao bab fruit

Going chemical-free in farming is unavoidable

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became obvious at the corporate-backed UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in September 2021. Sooner or later, intensive agriculture will be brought to its knees because its dirty past will finally catch up with it.

Instead of arguing about what kind of farming practices can pass as 'sustainable', we should start by explaining what practices are unsustainable and why they place further harm on people and the living planet.

Ending hunger and stopping the climate breakdown is not about increasing productivity but redistributing profits, regulating corporate power, and realizing human rights

Simply put, practices such as fertilizers, pesticides, and hybrid seeds, heavy machinery based on burning of fossil-fuels, large-scale mono-cropping and highly concentrated livestock keeping are unsustainable as they rely on external or toxic chemical inputs.

Plenty of studies show that these industrial farming methods have been major drivers of increasing biodiversity loss and poisoning of the natural world since their introduction in the 1960s.

Yet, it is genetic diversity that makes food systems resilient to threats such as pests, pathogens, extreme weather, and the climate breakdown. Can we really afford to continue destroying the immune system of our living planet, unknowingly, if we can still restore it?

Chemicals

Every year, the world loses about 24 billion tones of fertile soil. The extensive use of mineral fertilizers is a major cause of this shocking depletion of soils. The production of one tons of ammonia (nitrogen fertilizer) needs one ton of natural gas, which is a significant amount of fossil fuels.

The application of nitrogen fertilizers also produces nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions, a 310-times more climate-damaging greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Over four million tons of chemical pesticides are applied in industrial farming every year to get rid of weeds and pests on crops. But its collateral damage to the natural world and wildlife such as insect mortality seems to have little importance.

Essential pollinators such as bees lose their sense of navigation and bumblebees their sense of smell. Herbicides also eliminate not only the targeted weeds but all nearby plants. Some pesticides that have been banned in the European Union (EU) for decades are still

applied in other parts of the world.

Green-washing

To this day efforts to discard this destructive industrial food production model are moving only at a snail's pace. Strong political influence from corporations, investors, and people who are benefiting from the sale of chemical inputs is preventing real change from happening.

A look at the solutions that were put on the table at the UNFSS and UN Climate Conference (COP26) in 2021 confirms resistance to abandoning the idea of turning these crises into capital.

Whether they are called climate smart agriculture, nature-positive production, digital agriculture, regenerative farming or carbon farming, in the end they are all just one and the same; 'greener' versions of intensive farming.

Repacked as nature-based solutions (NbS), they still aim above all for productivity increases without forgoing the profitable chemical inputs.

Productivity

The United States outcry against the EU's Farm-to-Fork (F2F) sustainability strategy at the G-20 Agricultural Ministerial Meeting in September 2021 reveals the fear of agrochemical corporations to lose profits.

In their logic, the EU strategy could lead to massive productivity losses, thus more global hunger. At the UNFSS, the US also used this argument to gather supporters for its 'Sustainable Productivity Growth for Food Security' coalition that should attack the EU's sustainability ambitions.

Such powerful alliances create distraction and prolong urgently needed decision-making processes.

In fact, the F2F strategy makes a momentous move against intensive agriculture with its objectives to halve the use of pesticides by 50 percent and reduce excess fertilization by at least 20 percent by 2030 while increasing organic farming by 25 percent. It is no wonder that the US study that was used to weaken the F2F policy process did not include a shift to chemical-free production systems.

Power-shift

Agroecology is often drowned in the pot of market forces as its fundamental differences in application and effect are not officially acknowledged. There is no lack of good reports,

practices, or studies but only of political will to commit to radical change.

This is because agroecology is not only a transition to ecological growing practices but a shift in power from big agrochemical corporations to small-scale communities who make up 70 percent of the global hungry. Thus, it redesigns agricultural systems by 'reshuffling the wealth produced and regaining of control' for small-scale communities.

Agroecology improves crop resilience to climate shocks and maximizes biodiversity through the practices of diversification - e.g., crop rotation, intercropping and mixed farming. It replaces chemical inputs by integrated methods to deal with pests and weeds and recycles waste for long-term soil fertility.

It realizes the human right to food and nutrition of small-scale communities by breaking them free from their stringent dependencies on pricy chemical inputs - meaning the logics and structures of industrial agriculture that often keep them in a poverty spiral.

What's more, agroecological farms sustain productivity over time because they keep their life support systems healthy and still perform well under environmental stress.

Whereas industrial farms' productivity becomes at times more unstable, as a 2012 study shows: Yields of intensive farms either failed to improve, stagnated, or even collapsed in 24 to 39 percent of staple crops' areas worldwide from 1961 to 2008.

Hope

The UNFSS and COP26 in 2021 were only more 'blah, blah, blah' of the same old and failed stories of a sustainable intensive agriculture.

But the evidence is clear: a defective system cannot be constantly rebooted until it destroys itself and everyone around it.

Ending hunger and stopping the climate breakdown is not about productivity but redistributing profits, regulating corporate power, and realizing human rights.

This productivity dilemma can be overcome if agroecology is advanced as a new food system.

Fingers crossed 2022 bring new hope for civil society movements around the world and will make their voices for radical actions louder.

The Author: Astrud Lea Beringer is a political writer and advocacy expert in food sovereignty, peasants' rights, and environmental justice.

New initiative underway for formation of an African organic food basket

Continues from Pg 1

smallholder farmers and civil society leaders from Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and Ethiopia.

The key aim was to promote sustainable organic food production and trade within the East Africa Community and beyond, said Baliraine who is also Uganda national chairperson for ESAFF.

ESAFF seeks to ensure that its member states fully understand the concept of organic agriculture and strengthen the policy advocacy capacities of unions, associations and intermediary organizations that

We need to promote research, communication and extension (training), publishing and build capacity of farmers in the grassroots to produce enough organically raised agriculture.

represent the interests of smallholder farmers.

It supports civil society organizations like the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM) to coordinate and promote the development of organic farming among farmers, distributors and consumers through networking and information distribution.

ESAFF is tasked with making sure farmers produce organic products that are regulated by individual government bureaus and build an advocacy movement that engages vigorously in agricultural policy-making processes across Africa.

Without stronger civil society participation and particularly the engagement of smallholder farmers, Africa is not likely to achieve its vision of sustainable and equitable agriculture,

said Baliraine.

He continued: 'We need to promote research, communication and extension (training), publishing and build capacity of farmers in the grassroots to produce enough organically raised agriculture.'

'This must entail holding national and regional dialogue and policy campaigns to promote ecological agriculture for farmers to grow uncontaminated foodstuffs, because ecological agriculture protects the ecology, biodiversity and supports the growth of climatically resilient crops.'

'As in Uganda, the ecological organic agriculture core of the Kulika Community Development Programme is aimed at training of farmers in sustainable organic agriculture which focuses on experiential learning, practical work, on-farm experimentation and demonstrations to improve the skills of farmers in the following areas and grow crops which are climatically resilient to any weather situation.'

On his part, Kenya-based BioVision Africa Trust chief executive officer Dr David Amudavi noted that for African farmers to excel in raising organic agriculture growth, they must accept research findings suggested by organizations like ICIPE (the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology), KALRO (Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Organization) and FIBL based in Switzerland.

All these organizations carry out research and training in sustainable management of insects (arthropods) for improving comprehensive health and agricultural productivity in the tropics.

Said Amudavi: 'Their findings require little or no use of heavy chemicals which are not good for people's health. Evidence shows that a lot of diseases like cancer are currently on the rise in human populations as a result of modern foodstuffs traced to chemicals

used to support their growth.'

'We should revert back to the systems used by our ancestors to grow food that increased and maintained soil fertility and health, increased food supply, maintained soil microorganisms and supported great and diverse range of crops and livestock to thrive naturally.'

'We must raise farmers' awareness to implement research findings through radio programs and printing success stories like what Mkulima Mbunifu is publishing in Tanzania. Farmers should be facilitated through organized training to get skills along the value chain and organize themselves as participatory groups, while their products are identified and given certificates as real organic food that fetches good prices.

'The list should also include creating a platform with a big database supported by various organizations as a One Stop Centre for our farmers to be educated on soil management and market options, among others. Individual governments could also be lobbied to allocate 10 per cent of their budgets for organic farming.'

Rwanda Organic Agriculture Movement (ROAM) Chief Executive Officer Lise Dusabe said it is time every government focused on building the capacity of value chain actors and sharing information to help farmers grow safe and secure organic food in the continent.

'The University of Rwanda, with funds from the UNDP, has conducted research on the status of wetlands which have been wasted by chemicals as a result of farmers' activities releasing toxics to the soil. Something must be done to stop this because in essence ecological organic agriculture requires no chemicals,' Ms Dusabe said. 'We have had cases where bees are disappearing, which mean that pollination will not be there. But since we started using heavy chemicals to produce food, have we achieved food security?' she posed the question.

According to Ms Debase, Rwanda producing organic seeds of pyrethrum and exporting to Ghana is a clear testimony that organic farming can be very lucrative for farmers if it is fully supported by governments.

CALL FOR ACTION

THE SECOND NATIONAL ECOLOGICAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE (NEOAC) 2021

On accelerating ecological organic agriculture uptake for sustainable food systems, We, the 378 participants, including farmers, agriculture experts and researchers, policymakers, civil society organizations and practitioners, agriculture (including organic) businesses and entrepreneurs, development partners and Media from the Mainland and the Islands attending the 2nd National Ecological Organic Agriculture conference in Dodoma, Tanzania from the 21st to 22nd October, 2021, express our sincere gratitude to the Deputy Minister - Ministry of Agriculture for officiating the conference.

Having discussed and exchanged information on Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) from seeds and agriculture inputs; EOA farming practices and performance; markets for organic produce; and on knowledge creation, sharing and dissemination, we noted progress on accelerating ecological organic agriculture uptake for sustainable food systems by the government and the EOA stakeholders including National Agriculture Policy 2013 reviews, EOA strategy development, research and practices, training and dissemination, financing, certification, access to markets (local and international), as well as increasing and changing in consumption pattern.

Recognizing that smallholder farmers constitute a major part of producers in the agriculture sector in Tanzania and that their contribution to household, national and global food security is huge Further, recognizing that 2019 2028 has been declared by the United Nations (as the Decade of Family Farming and that it offers unique oport unities for accelerating ecological organic agriculture uptake for sustainable food systems, and therefore food security, through the use of innovative and environmentally friendly techniques and practices that are resilient to climate change and respectful of natural ecosystems and humans' health

Iterate those investments in the Ecological Organic Agriculture are in line with the African Union Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA I), the African Union Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (the African Union Agenda 2063 and the agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals

Appreciating the strategy of African Union Commission in the scale up of EOA I from the pilot eight African Countries including Tanzania The National Agriculture Policy of 2013 and current draft review has included policy statements that will unleash contribution of the ecological organic agriculture to sustainable agroecosystems, climate change resilience, food and nutrition security, improved livelihoods and increased household incomes.

In the same view through the Five Year Development Plan (FYDP 21/22 25 26), the government aims at improving agriculture backed by increased support through an enabling production, marketing and export environment backed by enhanced awareness of standards, increased access to capital, acquisition of new knowledge on production, storage, processing, packaging, logistics, quality assurance and marketing. The private sector which is behind all this success can increase its share of the local and foreign markets in agricultural products.

Thereby, acknowledging the significant potential of the EOA for the domestic and the export market, help to create employment and income, contributing towards sustainable economic growth and positive trade balance.

And finally, call for a new arrangement for ecological organic farming in national sectoral policies to prioritize support for EOA seeds and other agriculture inputs, farming practices and performance as well as markets for organic produce and ensuring knowledge creation, sharing and dissemination

SPECIFICALLY DECLARE AND CALL FOR GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE SECTORS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, PRACTITIONERS, RESEARCH AND ACADEMICIANS TO IMPLEMENT AND REPORT PROGRESS ON THE COMING NATIONAL ECOLOGICAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE, 2023:

- Establish a Unit to oversee and support Ecological Organic Agriculture Ministry of Agriculture
- Further, to set a budget in the coming financial year 2022 2023 and the following financial years for the purpose of advancing Ecological Organic Agriculture in the country Ministry of Agriculture
- Further, in collaboration with EOA Stakeholders to finalize the drafting of the National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy 2022 2027 (and coordinate its implementation Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Development Partners and Private Sector
- Review the Seeds Act 2003 so as to take into consideration the recognition and support of Farmer Managed Seed System Ministry of Agriculture
- Further, in collaboration with EOA Stakeholders and farmers to support the preservation, improvement, multiplication and promotion of indigenous/local seeds and availability of organic seeds, notably through community seed banks and seed fairs Ministry of Agriculture, Private Sector, NPGRC, NGO and Farmers
- Further in collaboration with EOA Stakeholders to conduct continuous training on ecological organic agriculture to agronomists, extension officers and smallholder farmers and capacitate the Bihawana Farmer Training Center to become a center of excellence for EOA under the Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Development Partners, NGOs and Private Sector
- Incorporate Ecological Organic Agriculture research in the national agricultural research agenda Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (Ministry of Agriculture
- Enhance EOA research and dissemination of research findings including on key topics such as seeds, soil fertility, plant health and specific EOA technologies in a language that is clear and friendly to smallholder farmers Ministry of Agriculture, TARI, SUA, UDSM, COSTECH, NPGRC, SAT, ECHO, PELUM, TOAM, AFSA and Development Partners
- Strengthen linkages of EOA farmers with markets, raise awareness across consumers, traders and producers about the East African Organic Products Standard (strengthen organic certification system and make it accessible and affordable to many farmers to be able to reach local and international markets Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Industries and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East Africa Cooperation, TOAM, Private Sector, Development Partners
- Promote the consumption of organic agriculture products Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Private Sector, Development Partners, Media and Farmers
- Fundraise for the purpose of promoting ecological organic agriculture technologies through relevant platforms Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Private Sector, Development Partners, Media and Farmers
- Further, the government to include ecological organic agriculture in the district agricultural development plans PO RALG and
- TOAM to organize and lead the Ecological Organic Agriculture Forum TOAM.

THE FUTURE OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN TANZANIA



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Les de Paix



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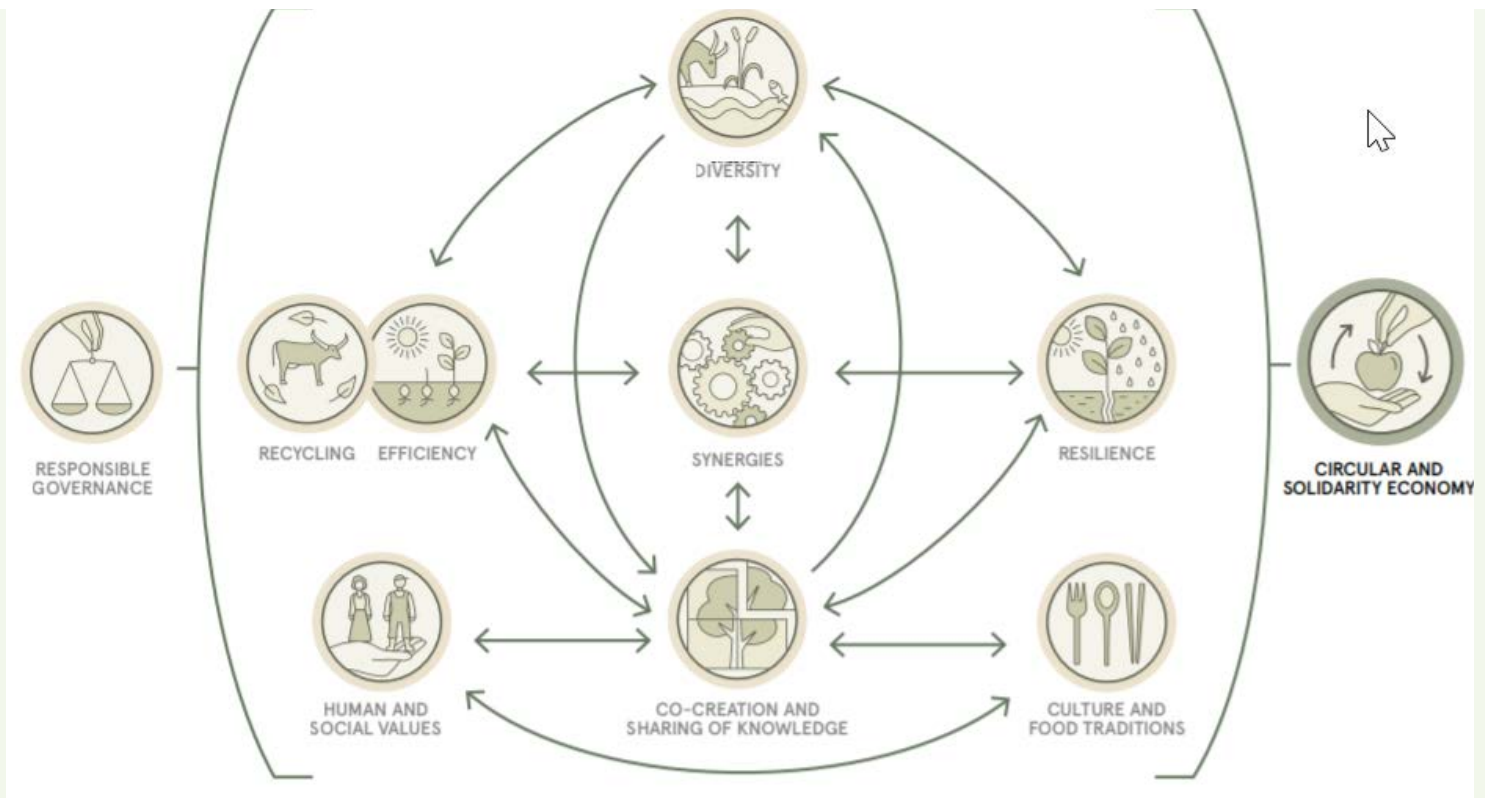
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AfrONet
African Organic Network



The difference between agroecology and organic agriculture

By Mgeta Daudi

Agroecology may not suggest the notion of sustainability as we perceive it within the organic fraternity. Agroecology is broader in the sense that it can be likened to 'Christianity'. If someone introduces himself/herself as a Christian, that is a general concept because within Christianity there are multiple denominations/sects such as Anglicans, Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, Methodists, Jehovah Witnesses, Adventists and so on and so forth.

In the same vein, Agroecology encompasses several production approaches which promote different levels of sustainability. Some of the most widely cited approaches are Permaculture, Zero/minimum tillage, Biointensive agriculture, Climate Smart Agriculture, Biodynamic agriculture, Conservation agriculture and Organic agriculture. Out of these, Organic Agriculture stands out as the purest and strictest system of agriculture production, embracing all aspects of sustainability including environmental health, consumer health, biodiversity growth, and equity of production forces from the farm to the market.

While other agricultural production

approaches may allow minimum use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, additives such as growth hormones, and GMOs just to comply with the international Minimum Residue Levels (MRLs), organic agriculture principles strictly prohibit the application of these toxic inputs. To ascertain its integrity for domestic and international consumers (markets), organic agriculture puts in place an elaborate system of traceability and certification in line with defined standards for organic products. It is made distinct from other production approaches by its four unique principles: Health, Ecology, Care and Fairness.

Sustainability of agricultural production systems refers to the capacity of the natural system to maintain its productivity in spite of economic and natural, external or internal limitations.

Agroecology emerges as a new field of scientific knowledge with different theoretical, epistemological, methodological and practical implications which outline a trans-disciplinary approach to address social, political, ecological and ethical issues for solving rural problems. Agroecology is a broad, umbrella term for growing

food using methods that will also nurture society, the environment, and the economy. It is an alternative to mainstream, industrial agriculture practices stemming from the Green Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s which are depleting our natural resources through monocultures and the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers, among other practices, while leaving people with unequal access to food and nutrition around the world.

FAO mentions five principles of agroecology which are later expounded in 10 agroecological elements. The broad agroecological principles are:

- Recycling biomass and balancing nutrient flow and availability;
 - Securing favorable soil conditions for plant growth through enhanced organic matter;
 - Minimizing losses of solar radiation, water and nutrients by way of microclimate management, water harvesting and soil cover;
 - Enhancing biological and genetic diversification on cropland; and
 - Enhancing beneficial biological interactions and minimizing the use of pesticides.
- The 10 elements of Agroecology as identified by FAO (2014) are shown in this graph:

Agroecology is a

- science
- set of practices and
- social movement

Each of these three dimensions has an elaborate explanation which is readily available in relevant literature from online sources.

UN Report: 34% of agricultural land is degraded, water overdrawn

Continues from Pg 5

of many of the country's fruits, vegetables, and nuts, California effectively acts as America's garden. But climate change is exacerbating droughts and water shortages in the state, and farmers are struggling to adapt.

About 80 percent of all almonds in the world are grown in California, generating \$6 billion in annual revenue, but almonds are a very water-intensive crop. As a result, some farmers have been forced to tear up their lucrative almond orchards. It's a stark reminder that "adaptation" can sound easy on paper, but in practice can sometimes be painful and costly.

Adaptation will nevertheless be necessary in the face of an anticipated 50 percent increase in food demand by 2050, including a doubling in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, extensive land and water quality degradation, and a changing climate. The FAO report recommends four action areas to continue to meet rising global food demand.

- First, adopting inclusive land and water governance through improved land-use

planning to guide land and water allocation and promote sustainable resources management.

- Second, implementing integrated solutions at scale, for example by helping farmers use available resources more efficiently while minimizing the associated adverse environmental impacts and also building resilience to climate change.
- Third, embracing innovative technologies and management like remote sensing services; opening access to data and information on crops, natural resources and climatic conditions; and improving rainwater capture and increasing soil moisture retention.
- Fourth, investing in long-term sustainable land, soil, and water management; in restoring degraded ecosystems; and in data and information management for farmers.

Fortunately, sustainable agricultural practices can also do double duty as climate solutions. The FAO reports that 31 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from

agri-food systems.

Sustainability

Sustainable farming practices like regenerative agriculture can require less diesel-fueled machinery and less reliance on soil- and water-polluting pesticides while increasing the carbon stored in farmed soils.

Solving these multiple problems will require planning and coordination, the FAO writes in the report, and "data collection needs to improve."

Again, a bright side: the technology to improve data collection already exists, and advances in agricultural research have also put other solutions within reach.

What is needed now is for policymakers and planners to coordinate work with farmers to adopt more sustainable practices and adapt more quickly to the changing climate. So, while the food system is currently at a "breaking point," these more sustainable solutions are all within reach.

The Author: Dana Nuccitelli is a research coordinator for the nonprofit Citizens' Climate Lobby and an environmental scientist,

A visitor's perspectives on OA policy formulation progress in Tanzania and Uganda

Continues from Pg 6

on the development of a strategy and implementation programme.

A second lesson is that organic efforts are undermined by opposing efforts to support chemical farming.

The projects supporting chemical farming can fall under poverty reduction programs financed by international organizations. These programs, in Tanzania, benefited from far more resources than projects in favor of organic farming.

A third lesson is that there is a need for more coordination in terms of institutional related activities. There is already coordinated action by organic stakeholders in Tanzania as shown by the OA strategy formulation process. Yet, additional coordination could be beneficial to building better relationships

with institutional stakeholders such as regular visits, sharing updates on the NAP revision, etc.

Q: Do you see the organic agriculture policy formulation process as a sign of a better tomorrow for OA in Africa? What is your advice to African governments on how to change the continent's agriculture sector in favour of OA?

A: Organic agriculture policies are just the tip of the iceberg; what Africa requires is the development of a strong and well-organized organic sector that is able to sell organic products in national, regional and international markets. Policies are key elements to achieve this through giving organic stakeholders enough space and voice to push the agenda forward, especially in

countries where organic by default is already practiced.

Without such policies, initiatives or projects run by organic agriculture stakeholders cannot achieve their full potential.

My main message is that there is more to organic agriculture than a low-production, outdated way of farming. Organic agriculture needs resources and research to be conducted to reach its full potential in terms of productivity.

Organic farming can be more productive than traditional farming and can also protect the environment in the long run.

Chemical farming is a short/medium term solution with dramatic side effects on the environment.

Q: If you are asked to define Africa based on the two countries you visited (Tanzania and Uganda), what would you say?

A: I cannot... even after living on this continent for five years – in Cameroon, Ghana, Zambia, South Africa and Morocco. Africa has so many cultures, languages, places, practices, etc. I would not be able to define it.



Moses Aisu, AfrONet's CEO and the Coordinator of Malawi Organic Agriculture Growers (MOGA) Simeon Mezani

About MOGA's involvement in promoting organic farming in Malawi

By Constantine Akitanda, recently in Lilongwe, Malawi

Since Malawi achieved her independence in 1964, agriculture has remained the mainstay of the nation's economy, accounting for 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating over 80 percent of national export earnings, according to official 2015 figures.

The 2013 Malawi Labour Force Survey report indicates that agriculture employs 64.1 percent of the country's workforce. Agriculture also contributes significantly to national and household food security and nutrition. The Government of Malawi recognizes the importance of agriculture in driving economic growth and its contribution to economic

and human development of the country, as highlighted in the MGDS II. To this end, the government for the past decade has continually allocated more than 10 percent of the annual national budget to agriculture.

This is also in line with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) compact that Malawi signed in April 2010. CAADP stipulates that countries should allocate at least 10 percent of their annual national budgets to the agriculture sector in order to foster agricultural GDP growth of more than 6 percent per annum.

Despite Malawi consistently surpassing the targeted agricultural sector budget allocation threshold, average agricultural GDP growth has remained stuck at about 4 percent per year since 1968, partly due to the lack of a coherent policy to guide the sector.

Furthermore, growth in

Continues on Pg 15

About MOGA's involvement in promoting organic farming in Malawi

Continues from Pg 14

Malawi's agriculture has been volatile over the years, suggesting structural weaknesses and a lack of resilience in the sector. The food crises induced by erratic rainfall in 1992, 1994, 2002, 2004 and 2015 demonstrated the particular vulnerability of the sector to weather-related shocks.

Agriculture in Malawi is comprised of the smallholder and the estate subsectors, with more than 70 percent of agricultural GDP coming from smallholders. These farmers mostly grow food crops such as maize, rice, cassava, sweet

smallholder farmers," affirms Mr Mezani.

He says the agriculture sector contribution currently stands at \$7.9 billion per annum. The country produces a lot of maize, soya beans, rice, sweet potatoes, cassava, cocoa, groundnuts, banana and coffee.

Malawi does not have to import a single kilogram of sugar from outside the country. Its domestic production is more than enough for local needs with ample surplus for export, which Malawian agricultural authorities consider one of the sector's biggest achievements and attributable to clever strategies for running the sugar sector.

In terms of organic agriculture, from 2000 to date MOGA has put in place a series of mechanisms that have helped the organic subsector develop to the point of placing Malawi second only to Zambia in organic agriculture output among Southern African countries.

MOGA believes that to have 37,000 registered organic farmers is no small feat given the association's minimal resources. Organic standards are registered at the Malawi board of standards and the biggest challenge now is extension services and the marketing component which needs to be structured properly.

AfrONet's assessment

There are approximately 3.1 million smallholder farmer households in Malawi sharing 6.5 million hectares of land, with 69 per cent of Malawi's total land area (9.4 million hectares) available for agriculture under customary tenure systems.

Organic agriculture boasts a total of 37,000 farmers in all districts of Malawi with the exception of one. MOGA has enabled more groups within communities to get involved in organic agricultural production

and linked up to trade.

Currently MOGA only offers extension support to farmers who are financially capable because the association does not have the financial muscle to cater for all in need of its services.

Despite the fact that Malawi does not yet have an official policy for organic agriculture, MOGA works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and it is expected that this close relationship will eventually pave the way towards obtaining the said policy.

Dr Stanley Chidaya, a MOGA board member and leading proponent in organic agriculture in the country, notes that with a guiding policy it will become easier to push the organic agenda in Malawi in terms of facilitating proper government support and attracting more investment all round.

The government presently supports both conventional agriculture and organic agriculture and MOGA feels a stronger preference for organic agriculture is possible if a policy dialogue is initiated now.

According to Dr Chidaya, Malawi hosted the meeting where African ministers of agriculture made the decision to formally embrace Organic Agriculture to be later endorsed by the African Union heads of states summit, resulting in what is today known as the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I).

'We did a lot of work to ensure the ministers understood the benefits of OA to the environment, people and the earth at large, yet Malawi was not part of the implementation phase,' he said, adding: 'But anyway, let's keep focusing ahead, the sector needs us and we really need to grow it wider.'

Despite the fact that Malawi does not yet have an official policy for organic agriculture, MOGA works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and it is expected that this close relationship will eventually pave the way

and Irish potatoes, and legumes for subsistence purposes.

The Malawi Organic Growers Association (MOGA), which was formed in 2000 as an umbrella organization uniting organic farmers and like-minded people in Malawi, is believed to be one the oldest umbrella organizations in Southern African cluster.

The association's current Organic Agriculture Coordinator Mr Simeon Mezani, who took over from founding Executive Director Dr Stanley Chidaya, says MOGA has done a lot in promoting this subsector.

'Malawi is not so big, population wise it is estimated to have 18 million people where 53 percent are women and 47 percent are men, and 80 per cent of all Malawian are

Organic Agriculture experts push for healthy, sustainable practices

■ More political will is also required, they say

The recent 6th West African Conference on Organic Agriculture in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso lent fresh support to expert opinions that organic agriculture provides food that is healthy and free of poison to both humans and their environment.

The hybrid four-day event with the theme 'Feeding the World Without Poisoning' (FWWP) and monitored by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) had participants from across the world proffering solutions to healthy sustainable agriculture practices.

The Burkina Faso Minister of Agriculture, Salifou Ouedraogo, used his opening speech to urge African policy makers to find solutions that are trustworthy that promote eco-friendliness.

'We need good ecological farming systems that promote environmental friendliness and the health of the people,' said Ouedraogo who was represented by the ministry's secretary general Kinda Yaaya.

He said governments must show willingness to support best farming practices that are also sustainable for the good of all.

'Stakeholders must continue to work together, share ideas that will promote agro-ecology, organic

farming and agro-forestry. Given the degradation we experience in our continent, all hands must be on deck to save our environment,' Ouedraogo added.

The Head of the Agriculture Division in the ECOWAS Commission, Ernest Aubee, said the commission was working to increase stakeholder engagements and boost political commitments for the elimination of hunger in the region.

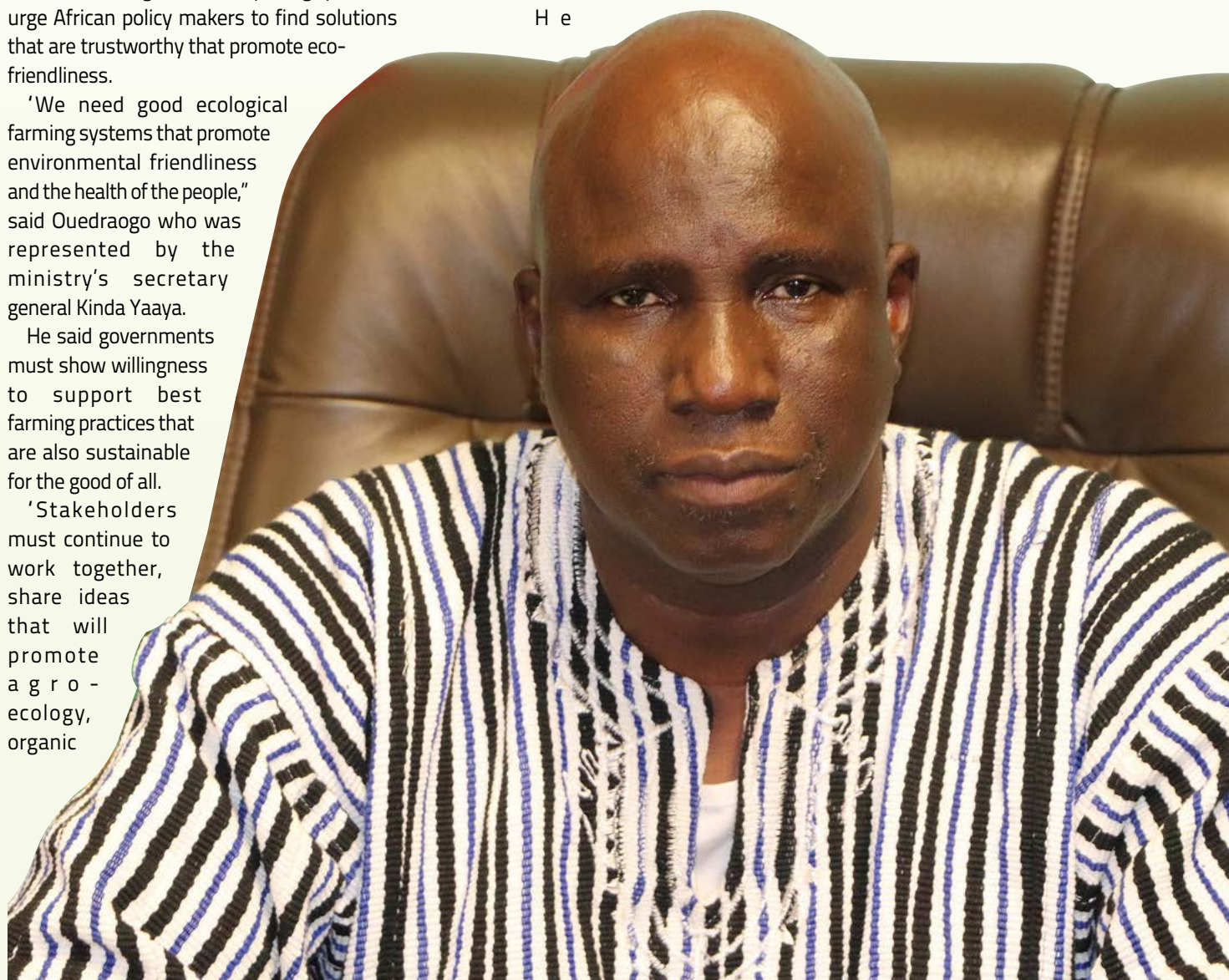
'We are pursuing these goals through advocacy and awareness campaigns and establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships', Mr Aubee said.

H e

called for more human and financial support from member states for organic agriculture, saying 'that's where the future lies.'

'We must come back to nature if we want to have a healthy people and environment. We should all work together for a common ECOWAS Economic Integration for the benefit of the people of the region', he said.

Economic Integration is a process in which two or more states in a broadly defined geographic area reduce a range of trade barriers to advance or promote a set of economic goals.



Burkina Faso Minister of Agriculture, Salifou Ouedraogo