

Alliance Sufosec

Alliance for Sustainable Food Systems  
and Empowered Communities



## Farmers' application of promising agroecological practices:

**Key learnings by and for practitioners on the critical success factors  
in the early stages of the agroecological transition**



**Synthesis of Phase 2 of the Agroecological Learning Journey**

**by the Sufosec Alliance members and partners**

August 2023

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Why this learning document?

With the aim to foster the transformation processes towards sustainable food systems based on agroecological principles, the decision-making processes of farmers are a central element. Understanding farmers' objectives on why they apply agroecological practices in their agricultural systems and identifying the critical factors influencing their choices are crucial steps towards scaling-up agroecology. Especially during the early stages of the agroecological transition, their choices play a key role towards the long-term application of agroecological principles and practices. Therefore, we will look at the following two key questions in this document:

- How to shape the first, critical steps towards the agroecological transition?
- What are farmers' objectives and the critical success factors to apply agroecological practices during the early phases of the agroecological transition?

To reflect on these key questions, over 180 participants came together in October 2022 in online workshops in three different languages as part of the second phase of the joint learning journey of the Agroecology Learning Group of the [Sufosec Alliance](#). This document is the result of this co-learning process and represents the second output of the learning journey.

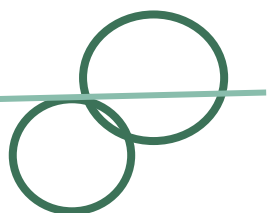
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This learning document aims to capture the insights gained during the workshops on the important factors to be considered towards the adoption of agroecological practices. It focuses on the critical success factors during the early stages of the agroecological transition, which enable smallholder farmers to apply agroecological practices in the long-term.

## 1.2. Who is this document for?

This learning document targets practitioners in the field of agriculture and agroecology, from Sufosec member organisations and partners, but also practitioners, extensionists, field animators from other organisations working in the agricultural sector / international cooperation. This document is for you, if you aim to:

- Set out on new agricultural pathways based on agroecological principles
- Compare your current activities with the recommendations of this document
- Have a starting point to understand and design practical steps and pre-conditions needed during the early stages of an agroecological transition
- Have more informed discussions with other (local) agroecological experts



### 1.3. How did the co-creation process work?

Building on the spirit of joint participatory learning and co-creation of knowledge kicked off in phase 1 of the agroecological learning journey of the Sufosec Alliance, interested staff of the Coordination Offices, direct partners' staff working with farmers on agroecology, and the wider public were invited to join the second phase in 2022. The co-creation process followed the same methodology of the first part of the learning journey and consisted of 5 interrelated steps: (i) Participatory workshops with Sufosec staff and partners; (ii) Compilation of draft document by the learning journey core team; (iii) Consulting process with Sufosec Alliance members; (iv) Final editing by the core team; and (v) Sharing of final product with partners and networks.

The online workshops took place in October 2022 and were integrated into the "[Agroecology Days](#)", a series of events organised by [Agroecology Works](#), a Swiss network of organisations that raises awareness and understanding of agroecology and promotes synergies between the different actors. In total, 3 sessions were carried out - one in each language (EN, FR and SP) - comprising 370 registrants from 62 countries and 184 attendees (EN: 81, FR: 62, SP: 41). Each edition included two case studies from Alliance members or partner organisations, followed by interactive group work, in which the participants reflected on the drivers of change towards a successful agroecological transition.

Based on the inputs gathered in the workshops, the core team prepared this synthesis report, which will be widely shared to multiply learnings.

## 2. The early stages of the agroecological transition

### 2.1. Why focus on the early stages?

When aiming to foster the adoption of agroecological practices in the long-term, one needs to look at critical factors facilitators can support during the early stages of the agroecological transition. If looking at the well-known analytical framework by Gliessman<sup>1</sup>, which includes 5 levels of food systems change (Figure 1), levels 1 to 3 describe the steps farmers can take to convert from conventional farming models to agroecological systems, rooted in basic agroecological principles:

- **Level 1** consists of improving the efficiency of industrial and conventional practices to reduce the use and consumption of expensive, scarce or environmentally damaging agricultural inputs (e.g. reducing synthetic fertilisers per hectare or reducing water consumption).
- **Level 2** aims to replace conventional inputs with local ones, as well as to improve existing practices and introduce new ones based on agroecology (e.g. green manures, cover crops, biological pest management, etc.).
- **Level 3** focuses on the redesign, implementation and management of agroecosystems based on ecological processes, for example, through the introduction of agroforestry, crop-livestock integration or crop rotation.

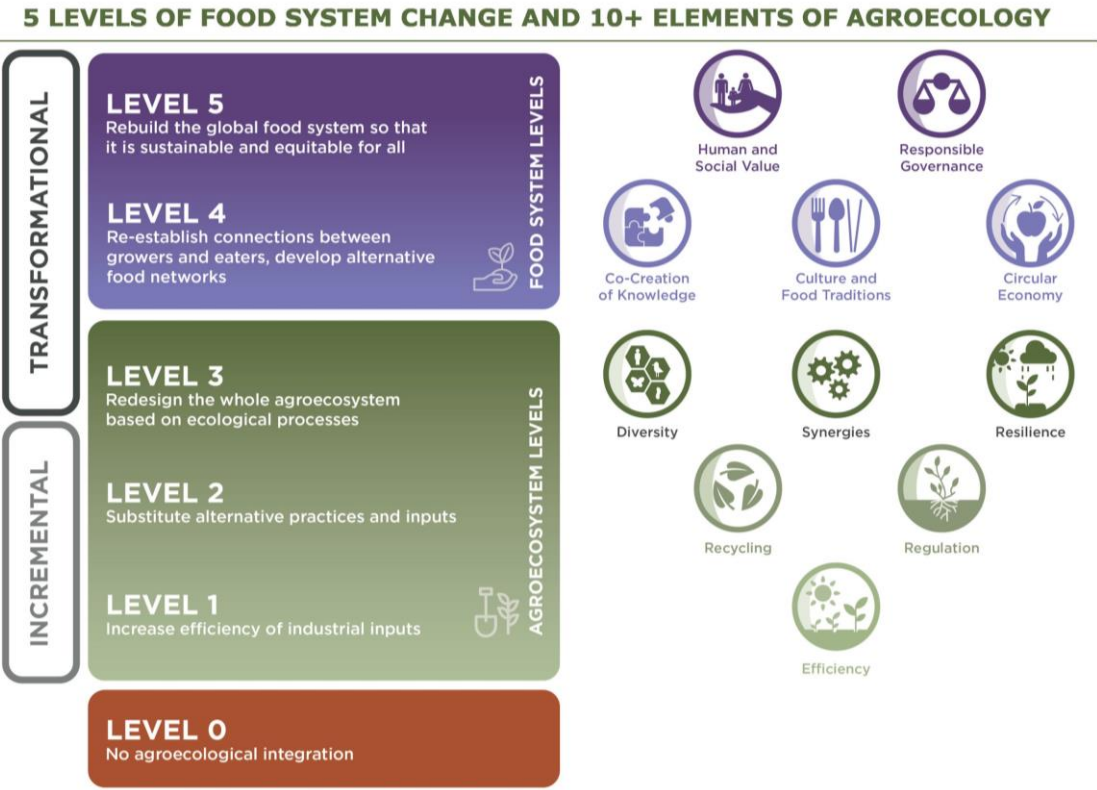
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<sup>1</sup>Gliessman, S. R. 2015b. *Agroecology: The ecology of sustainable food systems*, 3rd ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press/Taylor and Francis Group.

Levels 4 and 5 go beyond the farm and focus on the broader food system and the societies in which they are embedded. They include the cultural, societal and economic aspects and contexts in which the systems are embedded. Level 5, particularly, moves towards building a new, fully transformed global food system.

Especially during the early adoption of agroecological practices in the incremental stages of agroecological transition (levels 1 to 3), success by farmers is key for long-term adoption of agroecological farming. This learning document focuses on the early phases of the transition, as field facilitators can take crucial steps towards the overall agroecological transformation. This can be achieved by: (i) Considering the critical success factors for farmers; (ii) Facilitating hands-on agroecological practices at farm level; and (iii) Creating spaces to exchange on concrete farming choices by small-scale farmers. Levels 4 and 5 need to involve other complex processes and actors, and will be the focus of the third phase of Sufosec’s agroecological learning journey in 2023.

As a final note, it needs to be emphasised that Gliessman’s framework is only a model. It illustrates the need for a multi-level approach that can evolve linearly or non-linearly over time at different levels. Factors at level 4 and 5, e.g. an enabling environment for the agroecological transition, can be equally important for farmers at the outset of their transition as factors situated at the agroecosystem level.



**Figure 1** - The 5 levels of food system change according to the Gliessman framework and the 10 Elements of Agroecology as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)<sup>2</sup>. This learning document focuses on levels 1-3. Source: [Agroecology Info Pool](#).

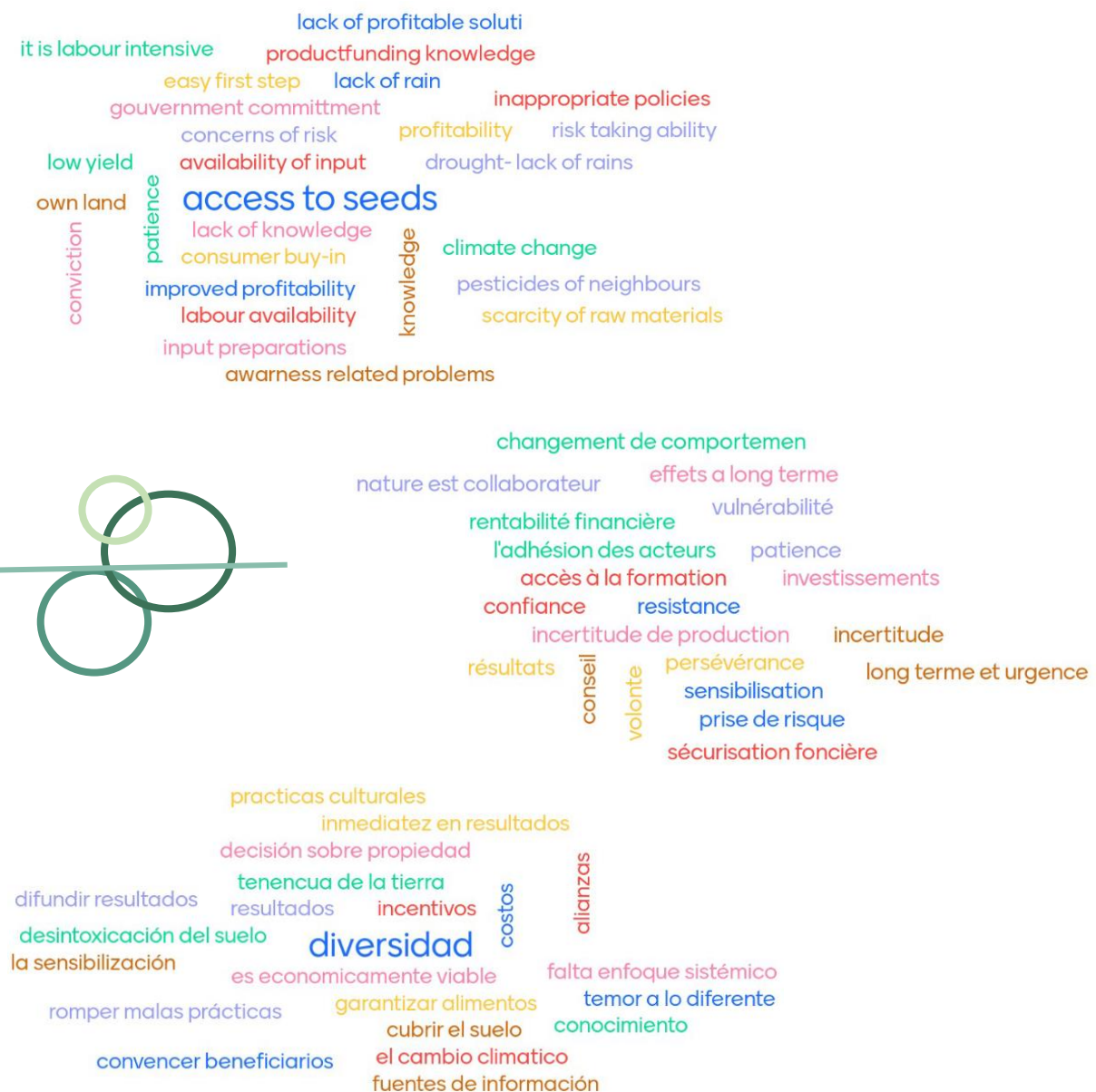
<sup>2</sup> Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (2018): The 10 Elements of Agroecology - Guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems. Available [here](#).

## Collective intelligence exercise:

### 2.2. Challenges in the early stages of the agroecological transition

The adoption of agroecological practices during the early phase of the agroecological transition poses many challenges to farmers. During the participatory workshops in October 2022, the participants were invited to brainstorm on the most urgent ones (Figure 4). Commonly listed challenges included:

- Access to seeds
- Land tenure and property rights
- Diversity (of farmers, plants, methods, etc.) intrinsic to the agroecological transition
- Sensibilisation, (lack of) knowledge, capacity building, and behaviour change
- Costs and investments (including time and labour intensity)



**Figure 2** - Participant inputs on the major challenges for farmers to apply agroecological practices in the early stages of the agroecological transition (English, French and Spanish workshops).

### 3. Critical success factors and practical steps towards the adoption of agroecological practices during the early stages of the agroecological transition

#### 3.1. Critical factors impacting farmer's choices

Before looking at concrete practical measures in the next sections, we need to understand the factors that affect farmers' decisions during the early stages of the agroecological transition. The choice of the types of farming practices depends largely on the specific context the farmer is embedded in. It is shaped by multiple factors along 5 layers, from individual to superior layer (Figure 5), which are interrelated and can influence each other. They can be grouped into two main types:

- **Layers 1 - 3** can be easily influenced by practitioners and farmers. These are factors at the individual, household and community layers. Examples comprise the mind-set of farmers; the natural, physical and financial assets on their farms; social cohesion aspects; community farmer groups; among others.
- **Layers 4 - 5** are not so easily influenced by individual farmers and/or communities, but rather by organised communities, social movements, and advocacy organisations. These factors include framework conditions (such as policies, availability of extension services, cultural and social norms, etc.) and superior changes (e.g. disasters, climate change, market shocks, volatile prices, among others).

At each layer, a variety of different factors can drive farmers' choices to adopt new farming and potentially agroecological practices. For example, at the **individual layer**, which is affected by personal beliefs, mind-sets and attitudes, a farmer with a risk-taking personality will be more likely to experiment with new alternative practices. At **layers 4 – 5**, which include economic, politico-institutional, sociocultural and ecological factors, changing market prices of chemical inputs may for instance prompt farmers to seek alternative farming practices to avoid the purchase of expensive inputs. When looking at Gliessman's model, all these factors can play a role in the choices of farmers during the early phase of the agroecological transition, as they influence the room to manoeuvre in which a farmer can act in.



# Critical factors impacting farmer's choices

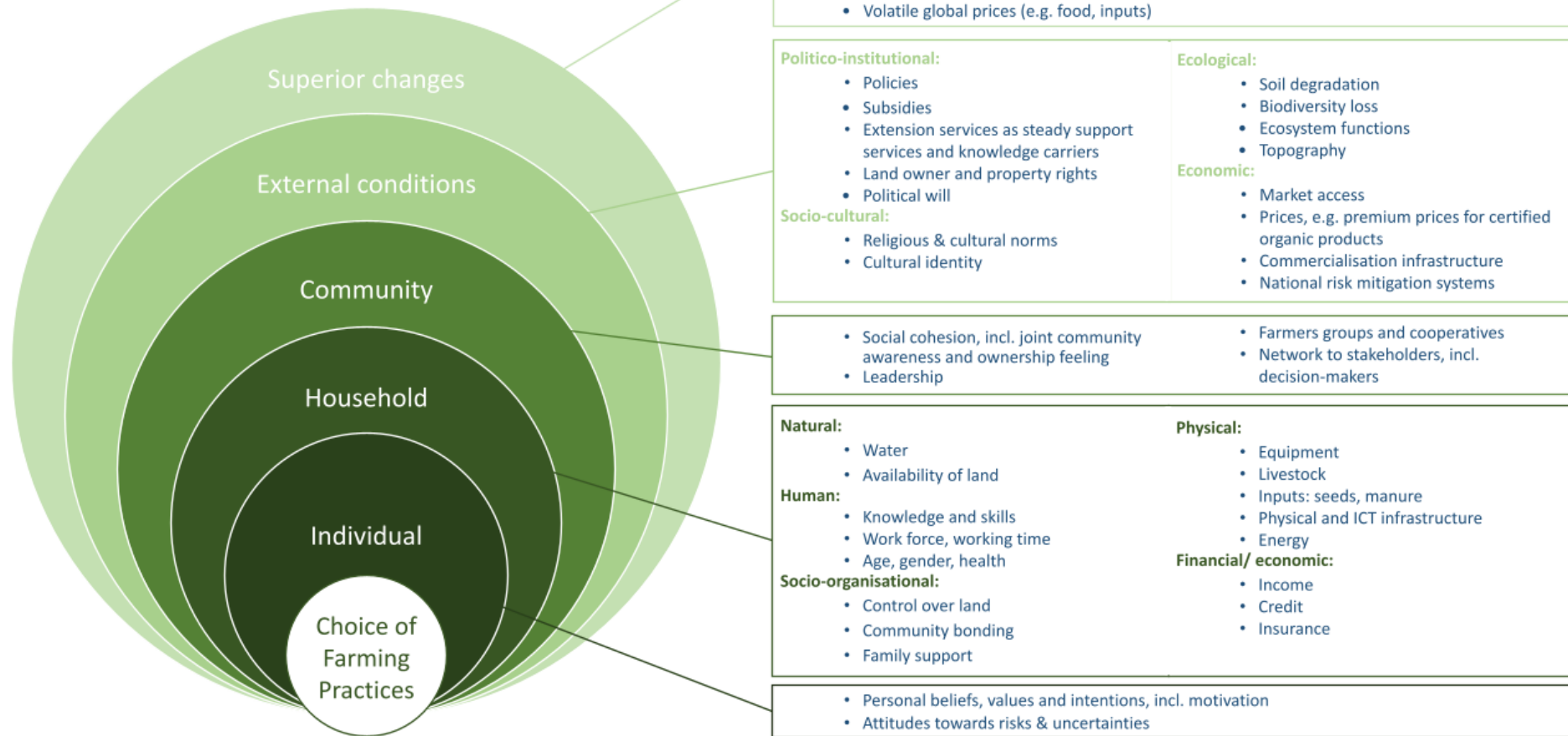


Figure 3 - Factors at different layers can become drivers of change for a successful agroecological transition. Source: Sandra Fürst, Skat Foundation.



### 3.2. Steps towards identifying successful drivers of change

To understand the **context of farmers' choices**, the most critical and influential factors need to be identified, evaluated and adjusted based on agroecological principles, so they can ultimately become drivers of change for a successful agroecological transition. To understand which factors are the most successful to trigger change, the concrete bottlenecks need to be identified by analysing the specific context the farmers are acting in and by understanding why the farmers decide or not to use agroecological practices. Thereby, all layers and different social groups of farmers need to be considered when designing potential interventions. Figure 3 above can support the mapping of the factors.

As an agroecological practitioner, the following steps in the table below might be useful for you to understand, compare and (re)design your new or current activities and to identify the factors and interventions that can potentially become drivers of change. As a practitioner, you can act as a facilitator of this process. The content and implementation should, however, be driven by representative groups and stakeholders in a participatory approach, so to include a full spectrum of perspectives and knowledge to enable them to become actors of change. The steps below can help you to identify knowledge gaps, together with your partners and stakeholders. As a preparation of this process, information and knowledge can be generated by reviewing available evidence-based material and by involving perspectives of different social groups and stakeholders through appreciative interviews. If you are planning to use the following steps, you may need to adapt them to your specific needs and to use them complementary to other available analytical approaches:

	Questions	Method
 <p><b>1. Understand the full picture</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the current situation like? Which factors are in place?</li> <li>• Which historic factors are still influential?</li> <li>• Which potential future factors play a role?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the context-specific factors, e.g. along the figure above</li> <li>• If useful, include a timeline to visualise historic and potential future factors</li> </ul>
 <p><b>2. Point out hindering and success factors for the agroecological transition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of all identified factors, which ones are most hindering?</li> <li>• Which ones support a successful transition?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your map, highlight or circle the most prevailing hindering and success factors with different colours to make them visible</li> </ul>
 <p><b>3. Identify and allocate groups of farmers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which farmers face similar hindering or success factors?</li> <li>• Which resources do they have available?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make short profiles of a typical farmer of a group (incl. needs and resources)</li> <li>• Draw a table to compare the resources that different groups of farmers have</li> </ul>
 <p><b>4. Evaluate bottlenecks for different groups of farmers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the major bottleneck of the groups of farmers?</li> <li>• Do the groups have different bottlenecks or do they all have the same?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend the table and include the bottlenecks</li> </ul>



5.

**Generate a list of potential practical options, incl. technical and organisational options for different groups of farmers**

Questions	Method
-----------	--------

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which technical and organisational options are available to the different groups of farmers?</li> <li>• Which practical measures would potentially be useful to integrate?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the list of practical measures in the section below</li> <li>• Make an overview of available options and include their advantages and disadvantages</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



6.

**Compare the options against agroecological principles and combine them in a holistic way**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which technical and organisational options are in line with agroecological and sustainability principles? Are the options socially accepted, economically viable, ecological sustainable and institutionally feasible?</li> <li>• Which ones can the farmers sustain with their available resources?</li> <li>• Which are the most appropriate for farmers? Do they support the options?</li> <li>• Which ones need the lowest or no external support?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a table to compare the options against the principles</li> <li>• Compare it with the table of resources available to the farmers</li> <li>• Circle the combination of options that are the most feasible and appropriate for the groups of farmers</li> </ul> |
|--|---|



7.

**Get feedback from others**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who else should be consulted?</li> <li>• Which feedback do other groups of farmers have?</li> <li>• Which service and organisational support is needed? By whom?</li> <li>• What needs to be adjusted?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise discussion groups with the groups of farmers and stakeholders to validate options</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



8.

**Test options, get feedback and adjust them continuously in an iterative way**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the options work for some farmers? How do they work differently for others?</li> <li>• Which feedback can be integrated?</li> <li>• What needs to be adjusted?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test simplified options in the field at small scale</li> <li>• Collect quick feedback based on interviews</li> </ul> |
|---|---|



9.

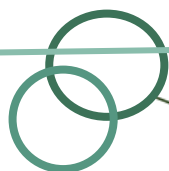
**Start from the top**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which aforementioned steps should be repeated to better adapt the options to the given context?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a retrospective of all steps</li> </ul> |
|---|--|



### 3.3. Practical measures to maximise early successes

This section presents concrete practical measures at each of the 5 layers, identified by the workshop participants as the crucial measures to foster a quick and successful adoption of agroecological practices during the early stages of the transition. This list of measures is not exhaustive as it is a collection of inputs from the collective intelligence exercises. Each table below represents one layer. Within each table, each row represents one of the measures to be considered.



#### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Personal beliefs, values and intentions, incl. motivation
- Attitudes towards risks & uncertainties

Factor	Practical measures
Personal beliefs, mind-sets, values and intentions, incl. motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Highlight the importance of commitment and engagement</b> for a successful agroecological transition. This includes discussing mind-sets, opinions, attitudes, values, fears, etc. Champions, local entities, teachers and other (potential) leaders can play a key role in this, as they can act as role models.</li> </ul>
Attitudes towards risks and uncertainties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Offer learning spaces</b> to provide on-site practical examples for farmers with risk-averse attitudes or uncertainties, e.g. through farmer field schools, action research on common fields or demo plots of project nurseries or other learning models.</li> <li>● <b>Enable farmers to share their experiences</b> and encourage each other. Connect farmers who are open to change with pioneers (early adopters) to enable access to experience and evidence at the field level. Encourage them to document progress and results, validate and replicate.</li> <li>● <b>Mobilise and organise farmers with common issues and interests in groups</b>, to foster attitude and behaviour change, revival of (lost) traditional knowledge and values of solidarity, collaboration and joint labour, risk management, and saving and loan systems to cover basic needs and emergencies.</li> <li>● <b>Strengthen the knowledge of farmers</b> on their local systems (including assets and constraints), agroecological practices and the bigger food system picture to reduce uncertainties and facilitate informed choices.</li> <li>● <b>Create a solidarity fund at the community level</b> that can be used in case of failure/loss of yield. Such a provision can motivate risk taking and reduce the fear of failure.</li> </ul>

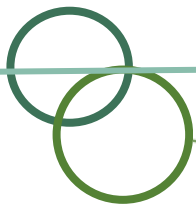
## HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

<p><b>Natural:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Availability of land</li> </ul> <p><b>Human:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Work force, working time</li> <li>• Age, gender, health</li> </ul> <p><b>Socio-organisational:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control over land</li> <li>• Community bonding</li> <li>• Family support</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment</li> <li>• Livestock</li> <li>• Inputs: seeds, manure</li> <li>• Physical and ICT infrastructure</li> <li>• Energy</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial/ economic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income</li> <li>• Credit</li> <li>• Insurance</li> </ul>
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Factor	Practical measures
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enable access to and control over water and land</b>, incl. land tenure and usage rights.</li> </ul>
Physical/ technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enable access to knowledge and promote practices on improving soil fertility</b> (compost, manure, crop rotation, intercropping, cover crops, etc.)</li> <li>• <b>Promote locally adapted, less time-intensive practices that generate immediate effects and provide concrete evidence of benefits.</b> Depending on the context, the positive effects of agroecological practices can be very quick (e.g. organic compost, mulching, home-made pesticides, use of locally adapted quality seeds, vegetable gardens, etc.)</li> </ul>
Financial/ economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Diversify food production</b> and crops, and conserve and produce locally adapted seeds.</li> <li>• <b>Identify strategies to reduce losses</b> caused by debt service, land lease, sale of produce when prices are at the lowest.</li> <li>• <b>Reduce the dependency on external factors</b>, e.g. reduce purchase of external inputs, work with local material.</li> <li>• <b>Apply new technologies and practices that progressively reduce costs.</b></li> </ul>
Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promote a good understanding of agroecological principles and practices</b> and how they can be adapted to the local context, looking at the transition process as a whole: from inputs to cultivation, harvest and post-harvest. Involving the whole family in the</li> </ul>

Factor	Practical measures
	<p>transition can be helpful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Encourage the transition through different learning approaches</b>, e.g. study tours, demo plots, farmer field schools, participatory research, digital media and online resources. They allow producers to meet committed peers, whose example may convince and fuel the reflection at the household level.</li> <li>● <b>Involve youth in agroecological education and activities</b>, e.g. by supporting schools in curriculum development or setting up agroecological school gardens, nutrition programmes etc. or promote ICT initiatives and exchange on agroecology.</li> </ul>
<b>Socio-organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Understand and evaluate how the household is organised</b> to identify which practices are suitable. Be aware that households have different needs as well as different resource availabilities.</li> <li>● <b>Integrate agroecological practices</b> that are socially and culturally accepted by the farmers.</li> </ul>





## COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Social cohesion, incl. joint community awareness and ownership feeling
- Leadership
- Farmers groups and cooperatives
- Network to stakeholders, incl. decision-makers

Factor	Practical measures
<b>Social cohesion, incl. joint community awareness and ownership feeling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Create and show agroecological successes</b> in the community, e.g. in farmer field schools, by organising farmer to farmer visits, visits to demo farms, etc. <b>Discuss and spread these successes!</b></li> <li>● <b>Build social cohesion</b> among farmers through mobilisation and organisation of farmers into groups/networks, by fostering exchanges, conscious reconnection of (lost) beneficial values like solidarity, collective work and partnerships. This also includes supporting community champions that could facilitate social cohesion.</li> <li>● <b>Foster community participation and a feeling of ownership.</b> Establishing interest groups by age, themes or expectations can help to build trust and create a safe space for expressing expectations and joint learning/development.</li> <li>● <b>Sensitise the community</b> on agroecological practices and the transition steps, as well as on the effects of climate change. It is essential to strengthen the conviction and key insights on a different way of production based on system changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Support effective leadership</b> at the community level.</li> <li>● <b>Foster a joint territorial vision</b> of the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Farmers groups and cooperatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Showcase tangible innovations</b> to learn from, implementing demonstration plots and promoting farmer-to-farmer and community education.</li> <li>● <b>Mobilise farmers to get organised and form groups and networks</b>, accompany and empower them so they are ultimately capable of demanding their rights and services.</li> <li>● <b>Support farmers groups and cooperatives to document</b> progress and results, validate and replicate.</li> </ul>
<b>Network to stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Build synergies with the different actors/institutions involved in the agrifood system</b> to enable scaling-up and increase the outreach (e.g. public/private extension, decision makers, market actors, etc.).</li> <li>● <b>Connect farmers groups and networks</b> to stakeholders who can provide various services as well as to decision makers so farmers can demand for rights and services.</li> </ul>

## EXTERNAL CONDITIONS

### Politico-institutional:

- Policies
- Subsidies
- Extension services as steady support services and knowledge carriers
- Land owner and property rights
- Political will

### Socio-cultural:

- Religious & cultural norms
- Cultural identity

### Ecological:

- Soil degradation
- Biodiversity loss
- Ecosystem functions
- Topography

### Economic:

- Market access
- Prices, e.g. premium prices for certified organic products
- Commercialisation infrastructure
- National risk mitigation systems

Factor	Practical measures
<b>Politico-institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Provide access to training and technical, advisory and material/ input support.</b> This includes building the capacities of sound extension staff (also at the government level).</li> <li>● <b>Tackle the land ownership and security issues.</b> It is essential to secure farmers' land tenure.</li> <li>● <b>Integrate agroecology into the official curriculum of national farming training</b> and support agroecological pioneers. For instance, at district level, programmes can support agroecological farming pioneers and make sure that the knowledge gained is shared.</li> <li>● <b>Promote advocacy campaigns.</b> This could comprise advocacy for national policy change, campaigns to restrict the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), among others. Advocacy is needed at all levels to influence decision-makers and communities to advance the transformation of the agrifood system based on agroecological principles.</li> <li>● <b>Facilitate a multi-stakeholder approach</b> involving the various actors in the system (multi-level public, private, academic, CSOs and all actors in the value chain) and build synergies with the different institutions involved, to enable scale-up and increase the outreach (e.g. public/private extension).</li> <li>● <b>Foster financial support from various sources,</b> including e.g. taxes, subsidies and formal support for agroecological practices and enabling access to agri-inputs (e.g. seeds, bio-inputs, etc.) from the government, NGOs, donors, environmental organisations, etc. to address higher costs at the beginning of the transition.</li> <li>● <b>Push legislative and economic changes</b> for the creation of an enabling framework (including regulations on the adoption of</li> </ul>

Factor	Practical measures
	<p>agroecological practices, organic inputs, among others). Try to establish a national agroecological transition policy or a food policy based on agroecological principles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Raise awareness through media communication</b> (e.g. radio, podcasts, etc.) to transmit the knowledge and make it accessible to the wider public.</li> <li>● <b>Support authorities in their efforts to level agroecological policies and plans.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Ecological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Generate positive changes in practices</b> that are undoubtedly beneficial for the territory from an ecosystemic point of view.</li> </ul>
<b>Socio-cultural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Promote multi-ethnic exchanges</b> on diverse experiences within the agroecological transition.</li> <li>● <b>Tackle gender imbalances</b> and foster women's involvement in the transition to influence gender roles on a societal level.</li> <li>● <b>Engage village elders</b> to take responsibility at the politico-institutional level.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Organise farmers to establish Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)<sup>3</sup></b> to facilitate market access. Have a joint commercialisation strategy in place and curb claims on fake organic produce.</li> <li>● <b>Strengthen alliances between producers and consumers</b>, so that consumers value the healthy products, surplus work and risks taken by producers.</li> <li>● <b>Develop markets through agroecological fairs.</b> Offering vouchers or other incentives for the consumption of local agroecological products can be helpful, especially in large urban centres.</li> <li>● <b>Establish contract farming between farmers' markets located in urban areas and local producers.</b> Additionally, pursue agreements with local restaurants.</li> <li>● <b>Promote local public procurement.</b> School feeding, for example, poses an opportunity for systemic leverage.</li> <li>● <b>Develop market linkages and a strategy for commercialisation.</b> It is essential to match production and demand, taking into consideration the different types of consumers.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> "Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange." (Official Definition 2008, IFOAM: [Participatory Guarantee Systems | IFOAM](#))





## SUPERIOR CHANGES

### Long-term changes:

- Climate Change
- Market structure
- Political conflicts

### Seasonal changes:

- Dry and wet seasons
- Volatile global prices (e.g. food, inputs)

### Shocks:

- Disasters
- Extreme weather events
- Market shocks
- Political crises

Factor	Practical measures
Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Build capacities</b>, including training on climate change adaptation, anticipation of shocks, prevention &amp; mitigation strategies. This could include new technologies, successful case studies, and exposure and exchange visits.</li></ul>
Seasonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Incentivise practices adapted to seasonal changes</b>. This could be achieved by providing subsidies for agroecological practices and the production of local agri-inputs (e.g. seeds, bio-inputs, etc.), to counterbalance the support for synthetic products.</li><li>• <b>Include compensation mechanisms</b> for farmers and the community, in case of losses during the early stages of the transition.</li></ul>
Shocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Promote more resilient crises responses</b> by national and international policy advocacy.</li></ul>

## 4. Key take-aways

The group discussions and co-creation process highlighted important lessons learned on how to shape the early stages of the agroecological transition. The following were identified as key action points to increase the chances of a long-term adoption of agroecological practices by smallholder farmers during the initial phases of the transition:

### 1. Carry out a solid participatory analysis on farmers' context and aspirations

Farmers have different values, aspirations and farm goals, and are embedded in different contexts. It is essential to obtain a clear understanding on the specific conditions, the farmers' goals, their constraints and the opportunities. A gender lens is indispensable in such a contextual analysis as women and men farmers face different constraints and have different aspirations.

### 2. Contextualise interventions, including practical knowledge and quick wins

Contextualise interventions by jointly identifying quick wins (monetary or non-monetary benefits) and focusing on practical knowledge to keep farmers interested in the agroecological transition. Create and showcase immediate evidence that agroecology works (e.g. through demonstration plots or other learning models), focusing on agroecological principles and context-specific practices.

### 3. Ensure equitable access and control over productive resources

Land tenure issues hinder long-term investments in land and agroecological production practices. We need to minimise the risks of land being taken away from community initiatives once it has been revitalised to a fertile and productive state. For that, it is important that particularly women groups have their own titles for communal land where they can cultivate vegetables for the market. This requires gender sensitisation training of women and men at the early stage of the transition. For sustainable change, policy advocacy on the rights over natural resources is required.

### 4. Combine different extension approaches

For the effective adoption of agroecological practices, it is necessary to combine multiple extension approaches that build on farmers' traditional knowledge and strengthen their self-identity. These may include demonstration plots, farmer field schools, farmer-led research, champion farmers, face-to-face approaches, information and communications technology (ICT) extension, among others. For more information, access the [Inventory of selected learning models and tools for Agroecology](#) published by the Sufosec Alliance under phase 1 of the agroecological learning journey.

### 5. Sensitise farmers on gender issues and introduce labour-saving technologies

Women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agroecology growth. Agroecology is a labour-intensive practice that heavily relies on the involvement of female farmers. Investing in labour-saving technologies that can be managed by the community and local service providers is essential, particularly to reduce the women's work burden. This requires local operation and maintenance capacities to be in place, as well as affordable spare parts, which should be independent from external support in the long term.

### 6. Involve youth in innovative interventions

Youth are an important source of innovation but often lack future perspectives in rural areas. Involve younger generations in the agroecological transition process through small local enterprises or digital ICT initiatives, for instance.

7.

### Strengthen social cohesion and infrastructure at the community level

Without social cohesion and a well-functioning social infrastructure at the community level, the agroecological transition will not be successful. It is important to strengthen the relationships within and between farmer groups and cooperatives, setting up farmer-to-farmer exchanges and networks. Establishing a strong sense of solidarity among the community is key, as it fosters farmers to support each other, especially during difficult times. Agroecology as a social movement can motivate hundreds of farmers and other actors to join and strive for a common goal.

8.

### Strengthen linkages with other actors in the food system

For a successful agroecological transition, it is essential to link farmer groups with other actors in the food system such as consumers, local authorities and decision makers. Policy framework and markets are intrinsically linked (consumption drives production choice) and are important drivers of change already at the early stage of the transition. It is important to address different actors with different strategies for the agroecological transition and to work on both the production and demand sides (by promoting the image of healthy local agroecological food, for example). A multidimensional framework like agroecology requires a pluralistic, multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach from the beginning: push, pull, policy!

9.

### Shift the role of NGOs to a facilitation approach

NGOs need to shift to a facilitator role that fosters stakeholder interaction, learning, and empowerment, building human and social capital at different levels. Coming in with technical solutions is not enough - it is necessary to develop and strengthen the linkages between farmers, consumers, local authorities and markets. For that, long-term engagement is necessary.

## 5. Forecast and contact

The last phase of Sufosec's agroecological learning journey in October 2023 will look at supporting elements and mechanisms (i.e. enabling environment) that need to be in place to enable a sustainable implementation of agroecological practices at scale. We are looking forward to discussing these important elements with you in the upcoming phase.

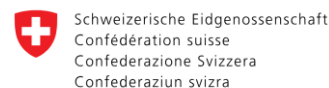
If you would like to join the next phases or receive more information, please contact Sandra Fürst, [sandra.fuerst@skat.ch](mailto:sandra.fuerst@skat.ch) or Rena Salzmänn, [rena.salzmänn@skat-foundation.ch](mailto:rena.salzmänn@skat-foundation.ch).

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## 6. Annex

### 6.1. Links to slides of collaborative workshops

The following online slides provide the basis for the creation of this practical guide comprising the critical success factors for the adoption of agroecological practices during the early stages of the agroecological transition. The slides include the group reflections on the drivers of change towards a successful agroecological transition:

- [Workshop 1 in English](#)
- [Workshop 2 in French](#)
- [Workshop 3 in Spanish](#)



### 6.2. Acknowledgments

**A huge thank you to all participants, for having contributed to the workshops and this guide!**

We kindly thank all participants for your valuable contributions during the exchange process. Many of you have taken up an active role to shape and facilitate the process. Thanks also to the presenters from the partner organisations, the members of the Learning Group, and those who have contributed to this learning document.

