



No. 3

GPFS – AT WORK: AGROECOLOGY AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Agroecological approaches and technologies rely mainly on renewable resources in locally organized agri-systems while minimizing the use of external inputs like agrochemicals and inorganic fertilizers that may have adverse effects on these systems. In Switzerland the concept of agroecology forms the basis for the Integrated Production (IP) system where as the African Union uses the term Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA).

This series is meant to give guidance and reflects the position of the GPFS.

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Agroecological approaches and technologies form the basis of many farming practices such as conservation agriculture, bio-intensive agriculture, permaculture, ecological farming and Organic Agriculture (OA).

Switzerland is among the leading countries for OA with 11% of its agricultural land under certified organic production and plays a key role in research, extension and training on OA internationally. Certified OA is linked to many national and international labels with its products targeting a niche market. At the same time and as a consequence of the lack of access to agricultural input markets, many poor farmers in developing countries can be considered by default as organic. Statistical data, however, is only available for certified OA: Worldwide 1.8 million farmers in 162 countries grow organically on more than 37 million hectares, less than 1% of global agricultural land (2011). Approximately 80 percent of farms that practice OA are located in developing countries. In terms of organic agriculture:

- **SDC supports activities that shed light to OA's potential for sustainable increase of production, particularly in smallholder systems in the tropics.** In a temperate climate and under good agricultural conditions productivity of OA is about 10% lower compared to conventional agriculture. This might however be different in a tropical climate and under sub-optimal agriculture conditions (e.g. water scarcity). Anyhow, besides sustainable production increases, food supply chains have to become more efficient and post-harvest losses and waste have to be reduced.
- **While OA certification is no major focus for SDC, some trade regulations (e.g. pesticide residue policy of the EU) have to be taken into consideration.** Certifying OA products includes a costly process and occupies a niche market for Europe and countries with an informed middle or upper income class. For Switzerland, Seco is involved in certification processes of standards internationally.

Importantly, SDC does not limit its support to OA but supports all cultivation systems that conserve the natural resources for coming generations, are economically viable and socially balanced. In this respect agroecological approaches and technologies play a key role.

- **SDC considers agroecology a powerful tool to address food and nutrition security and OA as an important motor for innovation in agroecology.** Agroecological approaches and technologies play an important role in enhancing the resilience and sustainability of farming and livelihood systems, while increasing productivity.
- **Agroecological approaches and technologies are less input intensive and therefore more accessible for resource-limited rural people and particularly women.** Conventional, high input agriculture as promoted by the Green Revolution in the 1970ies and 80ies with an emphasis on maximizing productivity and profitability and treating the farm produce as a commodity has often lead to vast environmental degradation and was only of limited availability and benefit to the poor and particularly women (e.g. mechanization, monoculture, use of synthetic inputs such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified organisms - GMOs).
- **SDC supports advisory services and training institutes for farmers and other stakeholders in the food value chain that focus on agroecological production.** Agroecological approaches and technologies are knowledge and often also labour intensive. Only with sufficiently informed and motivated rural population agroecology is a viable way for increasing agricultural production.