

Agroecology Best Practices and Benefits as Well as Its Implementation Obstacles

Pemba, Mongu, Rufunsa and Chongwe Districts



POLICY BRIEF

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Acronyms

8NDP 8th National Development Plan

FGD Focus Group Discussions

FOA Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

KATC Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre

KII Key Informant Interviews

NAP National Agriculture Policy

1 Introduction

This policy brief addresses the impact of climate change on rural households in Zambia, focusing on the vulnerability of those dependent on rain-fed agriculture. The purpose of the project is to promote agro-ecology and food justice, through raising awareness and enhancing the capacities of farming communities in Lusaka's Rufunsa and Chongwe districts, Pemba in Southern province and Mongu in Western province of Zambia to advocate for policies and a legislative environment that support agro-ecological food production practices in fostering climate change resilience. The inadequacy of current agricultural practices and policies exacerbates the challenges faced by farmers, leading to limited food availability and diversity.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FOA) has identified agroecology as integral to responding to the challenge of climate change. According to its Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, agroecology offers a unique approach to meeting the increasing food needs of communities. This approach prioritizes local cultures, responsible governance, sustainable agricultural practices, and importantly, resilience to the extreme weather events which climate change can bring about.

However, the Zambian agricultural policy and legislative regime does not adequately support the practice of agroecology. The national government has yet to establish a specific policy which supports agroecology. While the National Agricultural Policy 2012-2030 does recognise the need to increase agricultural output to meet increasing food requirements, as well as the devastating effect of climate change, it does not give adequate attention to facilitating agroecology. It mentions the need to update the legislative environment, but it does so with undue emphasis being placed on promoting private sector investment and does not highlight the need to update laws to reflect support for agroecology.

1.1 Objectives

The study aimed to assess Zambian policies supporting agroecology, identify agroecology practices known by small-scale farmers, understand the benefits of agroecology, explore challenges faced by farmers and policymakers, and gather recommendations for widespread adoption.

2 Methodology

The survey employed an explanatory research design which utilized qualitative methods including Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII). Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were applied to select relevant stakeholders and small-scale farmers across Pemba, Mongu, Chongwe, and Rufunsa districts. The survey had a total sample size of 66.

3 Key findings

3.1 Policy Analysis

The study scrutinized existing Zambian policies related to agroecology, with a focus on the National Agriculture Policy (NAP), Vision 2030, and the 8th National Development Plan (8NDP). Despite these policies being identified as supportive of agroecology by key stakeholders, a thorough analysis revealed that none of them explicitly recognized agroecology. Instead, there was an inclination towards sustainable agriculture, specifically conservation farming. This means the current agriculture legislation does not recognize and support agroecology as evidenced from the current agriculture policy and other related policies.

3.2 Farmers' Practices

Data from all the four districts, Pemba, Mongu, Chongwe, and Rufunsa revealed that the majority of small-scale farmers were not practicing agroecology while conventional farming methods was largely practiced, with some incorporation of elements of conservation farming. Notably, Chongwe had farmers engaged in agroecology due to their exposure to agroecology training with KATC though on a limited scale. The prevalent agriculture practices in all the target areas included minimum tillage, crop rotation, crop diversification, intercropping, residue retention, pot holing, ripping and manure application.

3.3 Benefits and Challenges

Despite the limited adoption of agroecology, farmers practicing sustainable methods reported various benefits. These included increased yields, improved food security, enhanced water retention, sustainable pest control, and improved drought resistance. However, challenges were consistent across districts, encompassing the lack of farming implements, low awareness of agroecology, difficulties in weed control, and insufficient public investment in agriculture.

4 Conclusion

The study concludes that Zambia lacks explicit policies supporting or promoting agroecology. While there are endeavours to endorse sustainable agriculture, the absence of tailored policies hinders the full potential of agroecology. It was also concluded that the majority of the farmers in are largely practicing conventional farming with a small proportion of the farmers mixing conventional and conservation farming. Addressing challenges such as the lack of farming implements and providing training on sustainable practices during the transition to agroecology are pivotal for the successful promotion of agroecology in Zambia.

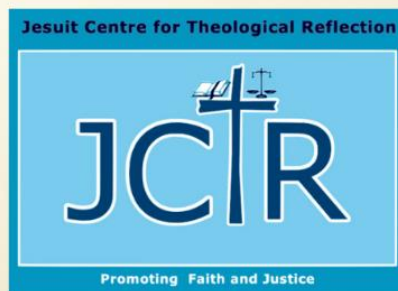
5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendation were made;

1. There is increased need for enhanced awareness of agroecology and its benefits among all stakeholders.
2. There is a need for increased dialogue and engagement with government and policy makers on the inclusion of agroecology in the NAP to ensure that agroecological practices are promoted and practiced.
3. Increased budget allocation towards sustainable agriculture which will allow the ministry to conduct trainings and sensitization.
4. There is a need to revise the National Agriculture Policy and other policies such as 8NDP and Vision 2030 to include provisions that promotion and support Agroecology.
5. Projects promoting the practice of agroecology should provide farmers with such farming implements as rippers.
6. Training of farmers in sustainable weed management and control as they transition to agroecology and sustainable farming.

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