

Organic Farming in Africa

HERVÉ BOUAGNIMBECK¹

The use of biodiversity, ecosystem services and the greater integration of people centered ecological practices and systems are now widely recognized as a sustainable and appropriate option to optimize the productivity and climate resilience of farming systems.

- The International Assessment on Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report noted that expensive, “quick fix” technologies – including GM crops – fail to address the complex challenges that small-scale and subsistence farmers face, and often exacerbate already bad conditions. Instead, the IAASTD outlined the needs for ecological approaches, the use of appropriate and low-cost technologies and a focus on capacity building for small holding farmers including women (IAASTD 2008).
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has called on governments and international agencies to urgently boost ecological farming techniques to increase food production and save the climate.²
- The UNEP called for organic agriculture to be supported as one of five recommendations for transforming the global economy under its “Global Green New Deal”.³

This is particularly important for Africa, as solutions proposed for increasing food security are sometimes based on the industrialization of African agriculture and the intensification of costly external and ultimately unsustainable inputs.

Sustainable production systems offer Africa huge opportunities in terms of improving food and nutrition security, increasing local access to food, bringing degraded land back into production, building the resilience of farms to climate change, especially to water stress, and protecting biodiversity and ecosystem services through their sustainable use. In addition to its affordability, organic agriculture in particular is recognized for its contribution to alleviating poverty and offers farmers the additional benefit of access to higher value markets both at home and abroad (Badgley et al. 2006; EPOPA 2008; FAO 2007; IAASTD 2008; Ifejika Speranza 2010; Lyons and Burch, 2007; UNCTAD-UNEP, 2008).

There are many highly convincing examples throughout the continent of the enormous development and progress organic agriculture can bring – especially to resource poor farmers and their families. For example:

¹ Hervé Bouagnimbeck, Africa Office, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5, 53113 Bonn, Germany, www.ifoam.org

² UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food : “Agroecology outperforms large-scale industrial farming for global food security,” says UN food expert. Press release June 22, 2010, Brussels. Available on www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/press_releases/20100622_press_release_agroecology_en.pdf

³ Global Green New Deal: In response to the financial and economic crisis, UNEP has called for a “Global Green New Deal” for reviving the global economy and boosting employment, while simultaneously accelerating the fight against climate change, environmental degradation and poverty. More information is available at www.unep.org/greeneconomy/GlobalGreenNewDeal/tabid/1371/language/en-US/Default.aspx

- The push-pull method of maize growing developed by the International Research Institute (www.icipe.org) in Kenya, together with local farmers, led to yield increases of up to 200 percent while reducing dependency on chemical pesticides and GMOs. The benefits of this methodology are scientifically well evidenced and it is positioned for a significant rollout in Africa.¹
- The SEKEM group in Egypt, with over 30 years of experience in biodynamic, ecological farming, has not only transformed their 70 hectares of desert into a productive paradise, but also enabled the country to reduce synthetic pesticide use by 95 percent through their extension activities.²
- In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, organic management practices have produced many positive results: higher yields, decrease in the use of costly synthetic fertilizers, a greater diversity of crops, improved farm resilience, higher ground water tables, better nutrition and new income opportunities (Edwards et al. 2010).
- Through the Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA) more than 60,000 farmers from Uganda and Tanzania gained access to higher value organic markets in the industrialized world and could provide their families with a richer and more varied diet. Furthermore, organic agricultural practices learned through the projects were transferred to the production of subsistence crops, improving productivity and local food security (EPOPA 2008).

Two of these projects were honored with considerable international acclaim in 2010 by the jury of the One World Award, which recognizes the year's most innovative projects and courageous ideas for a sustainable world.³ Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren, Rachel Agola and the Swiss Biovision Foundation in Kenya (practitioners of the push-pull method) were named the 2010 laureates. Helmy Abouleish, Director of the SEKEM Group in Egypt, was named one of the five finalists. This is a clear sign that commitment for sustainable and just world makes a difference and brings hope in Africa.

The extent of organic agriculture in Africa

The lack of an official organic agriculture data collection in many African countries makes it difficult to obtain reliable information on the extent of certified organic production. With the exception of Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt where the government collates the data, data related to organic agriculture in Africa is collected by private sector organizations, such as national organic umbrella organizations and certification bodies (For specifics, please see annex). Nevertheless, the availability and quality of information is improving in most countries and organic agriculture continued to grow across the continent.

In global terms, Africa accounts for 2.8 percent of total certified organic land. Table 38, (page 234) shows the figures for individual African countries. According to these figures, 38 African countries are engaged in certified organic agriculture (data end 2009).

Currently (data end 2009), more than 1 million hectares of land is certified organic, constituting an increase of approximately 170'000 hectares compared with the previous survey

¹ International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology: Push-Pull: A novel conservation agriculture technology for ending hunger and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. More information at www.push-pull.net/works.shtml

² More information is available at the website of the Egyptian Biodynamic Association (EBDA) at <http://www.sekem.com/english/cultural/EBDA.aspx?PageID=1>

³ More information is available at www.one-world-award.com.

(data end 2008). This land is managed by at least 500'000 farms. The agricultural land is mainly used for permanent crops, principally cash crops like coffee and olives.

The leading country in terms of organically managed agricultural land is Uganda with 227'000 hectares.

However, when organically managed land is measured as a percentage of each country's agricultural area, Sao Tome and Prince rank highest with 6.5 percent.

Uganda (187'893 farms) has the largest number of organic farms, followed by Ethiopia (more than 100'000 farms) and Tanzania (85'366 farms).

Of the total increase in organic agricultural land, there were increases and decreases in individual countries. Substantial increases were recorded in countries like Sierra Leone (+71'512 hectares) and Ethiopia (+22'783 hectares). The biggest decrease was recorded in Madagascar (-5'845 hectares). These changes all occurred against the backdrop of new projects being initiated and others coming to an end.

Organic wild collection areas and bee pastures

In addition to the one million hectares of certified organic agricultural land, 16.4 million hectares of land are organic beekeeping, forest and wild collection areas (Table 45). The largest beekeeping areas are in Cameroon (6 million hectares). The largest wild collection areas are in Namibia (3.0 million hectares) and Morocco (618'000 hectares). Medicinal plants like devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) play the most important role in wild collection.

Markets

Farmers in Africa produce a diversity of organic crops. These range from cash crops like coffee, cocoa, tea, cotton and olives to processed fruits and vegetable oil, including everything in between, e.g., fresh fruits and vegetables or honey.

Export

The majority of certified organic produce from Africa is destined for export markets, with the large majority being exported to the European Union, which is Africa's largest market for agricultural produce. The total value for the export of organic produce from Uganda has been estimated at 36.87 million US dollars¹ in 2009. In most cases, due to the dominance of smallholders in Africa, the typical supply chain is made up by a private enterprise organizing many smallholders as out growers to secure the sufficient quantities for export, or farmers are working together on one project supplying and packaging for exporting trading companies.

In Tanzania, for example, the total value for the nine most exported organic product categories was estimated at almost 10 million euros in 2009 (Kledal & Kwai 2010). The exports are mostly destined for the European Union and the USA. In terms of tons, heavier nut products like cocoa, cashews and coffee are on the top. In economic terms, cocoa, cashews, vanilla and tea are the most important export products. They represent 55 percent of the total organic export value.

¹ 1 US Dollar = 0.71895 Euros; average exchange rate 2009. Source: www.oanda.com

The domestic market

Although the African market for organic products is still small, domestic organic markets are growing in Africa. Local organic markets are usually located near capital cities. The majority of the consumers are foreigners and upper-middle class citizens with values similar to European organic consumers. The products marketed include organic fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products, meat, wine, herbs, and personal care products. In Tunisia and in Egypt, specialized shops and a number of supermarket chains (Metro and Carrefour) have organic sections. Similarly, organic shops in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda and Ghana are also picking up organic products and therefore playing a growing role in the domestic organic market. In Zambia, organic farmers sell their produce in local farmers' markets or to urban supermarkets. There is no doubt that, with increasing awareness, the potential of local or domestic African markets for organic products will increase. However, few African countries have articulated a concrete promotion strategy for domestic markets. (For an important exception, see Tunisia country report (page 111).

State support

Despite the benefits of organic agriculture, it receives little support from African governments and is generally not integrated into agriculture policies. However, in some countries like Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Tunisia, there is a growing recognition of policy makers that organic agriculture has a significant role to play in addressing the pressing problems of food security and climate change in Africa. In these countries, organic policy is in the process of being developed, and the national organic movements are strongly involved in the process. There is no doubt that once finalized, these policy frameworks will help realize the multi-functional benefits of organic agriculture in these countries. Having an organic policy in place offers access to financial resources, educational and training programs, and increased market opportunities for organic farmers.

In other countries like Ghana, given the multiple benefits of organic agriculture and the growth of the organic sector in the country, a desk for organic agriculture has been established in the Ministry of Agriculture. The desk works as a contact point for organic agriculture to liaise between the government and the organic industry. Its aim is to increase awareness of organic agriculture and build the capacity of officers of the Ministry of Agriculture at the district and regional levels, so that they can better serve the interests of organic farmers and support the further development of the organic sector in the country.

Given the affordability and multi-benefits of organic agriculture, it is important to enable national policy frameworks on organic agriculture in other African countries in order to grow the capacity for the African governments to develop sustainable, resilient and productive farming.

Standards and legislation

With the exception of Tunisia, which has Third Country Status with the European Union, all other African countries are reliant for export on foreign standards. To date, the largest part of certified organic production has been certified according to the EU regulation for organic products. Some producers are, in addition, certified to the U.S. National Organic Program (NOP) or the Japan Agriculture Standards (JAS) and numerous private-sector organic standards, such as those from Naturland.

For the domestic market, African countries are reliant upon national standards. The countries with organic standards are Egypt, Senegal, Tunisia, and the East African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi). The ways of ensuring that organic standards are met include both third-party certification and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). In some countries like Burkina Faso, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, national standards are in the process of being developed.

Research, extension and training

Dedicated organic research on organic agriculture is still very minimal in Africa. However, there are some outstanding examples of innovative organic research within research institutes, universities and private sector led projects such as:

- The International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), Kenya;
- The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya;
- The University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria;
- The Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Tanzania;
- The African Organic Center of Excellence, Uganda Martyrs University; and
- The Technical Centre of Organic Agriculture in Sousse, Tunisia.

The lack of dedicated research initiatives in Africa constitutes a barrier to developing the potential of the African organic sector, as it makes it difficult to find appropriate solutions to the problems and questions of African organic farmers, processors and marketers.

Outlook

Organic agriculture has a significant role to play in addressing the pressing problems of food security and climate change in Africa. It is therefore very important that national and regional policies in Africa do not overlook the valuable tool-kit provided by organic agriculture.

In addition to expanding international market access, there is a need to develop local and regional markets for organic produce in Africa. Key elements to achieving long-term sustainability of organic production systems in Africa include: increased consumer awareness, cooperation among stakeholders and producers in the supply chain, increased investments in research on organic agriculture, and the development of conformity assessment mechanisms for local marketing that are accessible for smallholders, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). There is no doubt that the recently launched IFOAM OSEA II Project

African Organic Agriculture Manual

Organic agriculture provides effective tools to manage resources efficiently and has the potential to improve incomes and livelihoods through access to domestic and international markets. With the aim of harnessing the potential of organic agriculture to break Africa's cycle of hunger and poverty, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) is currently developing training materials in collaboration with IFOAM and African National Organic Agriculture Movements to enhance the adoption of organic farming practices by African smallholder farmers.

The materials will include a manual for trainers, booklets for farmers, videos, posters and radio programs and will be comprehensive, easy to understand and extensively illustrated. The materials will be made available in 2011 to training organizations throughout Africa. There will be field programmes to refine and disseminate the materials.

The project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture.

(Regional Cooperation for Organic Standards and Certification Capacity in East Africa), funded by Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), will help to address these issues and thus facilitate trade in organic products in East Africa. Also, once finalized, the African Organic Agriculture Manual will help to increase awareness of organic agriculture and build the capacity of African trainers, extension workers and small-scale farmers to understand and implement organic farming principles and practices.

More importantly, given the affordability and multiple benefits of organic agriculture, there is a need to implement national policy frameworks on organic agriculture in African countries that can increase the capacity for the governments to develop sustainable, resilient and productive farming.

The second African Organic Conference to be held in Lusaka, Zambia, from May 15-19, 2012 will provide a key platform for discussion and sharing experiences. Moreover, this conference will provide a significant opportunity to mobilize support for organic agriculture and take the necessary actions to bring the Organic Agenda to new heights in Africa.

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Background: The Organic Alternative for Africa

Despite the multi-functional benefits of organic agriculture in Africa, it receives little support from African governments and is generally not integrated into agriculture, climate change adaptation and poverty reduction policies. Instead, industrial and GMO agriculture are promoted over affordable and sustainable practices.

IFOAM's **Organic Alternative for Africa** is a continental strategy to increase awareness of the multiple benefits of organic agriculture and facilitate the integration of organic agricul-

ture solutions and opportunities at the core of African policies and agricultural development. This initiative builds on IFOAM networks, activities and experiences in Africa and its development and implementation are subject to the support of partners and donors.

IFOAM wishes to engage with organizations and groups that are interested to work with IFOAM and the African organic movement in the framework of **the Organic Alternative for Africa** to design appropriate strategic approaches or develop specific projects that meet the objectives of the initiative. Key components of the initiative include:

- Providing African national and regional policy makers, media and funding agencies with evidence-based information on the multi-functional benefits of organic agriculture and their contributions to the challenges and needs in Africa.
- Increasing awareness of the opportunities presented by organic production and trade for contributing to the realization of the Right to Food and poverty alleviation.
- Assisting governments, intergovernmental organizations and funding agencies interested in exploring organic agriculture for integration into agriculture, food security, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, and poverty alleviation policies.
- Building national capacities for implementing practices and systems for building secure, resilient, profitable and sustainable farming systems.

Contact

- Hervé Bouagnimbeck, IFOAM Head Office, Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5, 53113 Bonn, Germany, E-mail h.bouagnimbeck@ifoam.org, Tel. +49 228 926 50-10, Fax +49 228 926 50-99, Internet www.ifoam.org/africa

Related tables

- Table 40: Organic agricultural land: The top ten countries per region 2009
- Table 42: Share of organic agricultural land: The top ten countries per region 2009
- Table 43: Growth of the organic agricultural land by region 1999-2009
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- Table 47: Land use and key crop groups in organic agriculture worldwide in the regions 2009