

SWISSAID Policy on
AGROECOLOGY

1. Key Messages

- Agroecology has an environmental, a socio-cultural, an economic and a political dimension. In its work on agroecology SWISSAID particularly puts the role and the rights of **peasant women**¹ in its focus of attention.
- Agroecology maintains and enhances the diversity of species. SWISSAID supports **peasant seed systems** that preserve agrobiodiversity and are thus a core element of resilient agroecological farming systems. Especially peasant women play an important role in saving and promoting seeds.
- A diversified agroecological production contributes to resilient and more productive and **sustainable food and livelihood systems** of peasant families. SWISSAID supports peasants, especially rural women, in the production and first level processing of agroecological produce as well as in strengthening and accessing local markets.
- SWISSAID supports peasants and their organizations in developing and using their knowledge and resources to enhance their adaptive capacities. Agroecology helps peasants **to adapt to climate change** and to be less vulnerable.
- Agroecology is knowledge intensive. It values traditional **knowledge**, especially the knowledge of rural women, and blends it with scientific knowledge. SWISSAID supports the knowledge exchange between peasants, scientists, extension workers, partners, external actors and SWISSAID staff for mutual learning and to upscale agroecology horizontally and vertically.

2. Introduction

This policy document aims at creating a common understanding among SWISSAID staff members in one of SWISSAID's thematic priority areas: agroecology. The policy document sets boundaries and provides guidance for all SWISSAID activities related to agroecology. The aim of the document is to enhance SWISSAID's quality of work in the area of agroecology as well as the external perception of SWISSAID as a leading actor in the promotion and implementation of agroecology.

This document replaces the former SWISSAID Ecological Farming Policy. The overhaul became necessary due to the changing context, recent scientific knowledge, SWISSAID's own experiences on the ground and international conceptual frameworks stressing that agroecology can contribute to address current global challenges. The elaboration of this document involved staff in Switzerland as well as in the SWISSAID country programmes.

3. Context

The world is currently facing diverse and mutually reinforcing human-made crises such as continuous hunger and inequalities, the loss of biodiversity and climate change, just to name the most important ones.

Although enough food is currently being produced to feed the world population, over 800 million people worldwide are still going hungry². The ones most affected by hunger and poverty are peasant families in developing countries which are, paradoxically, the groups that produce most of the world's food. Three out of four starving people live in rural areas, 75 % are women and children. High prices and poor availability of food, both locally and

1 SWISSAID deliberately adopts the term "peasant" to sympathize with the socio-political connotation behind this term. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) defines a peasant as "...any person who engages or who seeks to engage, alone, or in association with others or as a community, in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market, and who relies significantly, though not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labour and other non-monetized ways of organizing labour, and who has a special dependency on and attachment to the land." SWISSAID uses "peasant" as a synonym to "smallholder farmer" or "small-scale food producer", depending on the context and local language of use. With the term "peasant" we address women and men.

2 <https://worldhunger.org/world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics>

seasonally fluctuating, also prevent poor populations from gaining access to food. In addition to the already hungry population, the UN anticipates demographic growth from today's 7.3 billion to 9.7 billion people by 2050, while inequality is likely to increase and the gap between rich and poor to widen.

Nature regulates several processes that are the basis of our economies and well-being, such as clean water, protection from environmental hazards, the pollination of crops and the regulation of the climate. Through breeding, reproduction and exchange, peasants around the world have created an incredible diversity of plant genetic resources in thousands of years of work. However, natural resources and agrobiodiversity are declining globally at rates unprecedented, with up to 1 million species threatened with extinction, more than never before in human history.³ According to the FAO 75% of the world's varieties have been lost in the past 100 years. The intensive cultivation of agricultural land with agrochemicals and the overexploitation of the oceans occur at the expense of biodiversity. The loss of biodiversity poses a serious and urgent threat to human beings as it secures our food supply in the long term and makes it possible for plants, and thus for agriculture, to adapt to changing environmental conditions. This is particularly important in view of climate change.

The seed market has also undergone extreme concentration in recent years. Restrictive seed and plant variety protection laws impede the free circulation of peasant saved seeds and threaten food sovereignty and security of the people. The economic interests of big seed enterprises violate peasants' rights and the important role of women in ensuring food sovereignty.

The implementation of the international agreed climate targets continues to be inadequate. Agriculture has a very special role to play here. About one quarter of global emissions of greenhouse gases can be attributed to agriculture and associated to changes in land use.⁴ Deforestation, the reduction in natural forest cover and replacement by industrial plantations, the use of chemical fertilizers and machinery, the intensive animal husbandry, etc., all contribute to climate change at a large extent. Climate-damaging emissions from agriculture have even doubled between 1961 and 2016 because of the intensification of the sector.⁵

At the same time, agriculture, and especially peasant families, are also massively but unequally affected by the consequences of climate change: Changes in the water regime with new, unpredictable precipitation patterns, extreme events such as cyclones, heavy rainfall and droughts, and increasing and changing pests. These changes make it difficult to plan agricultural activities and lead to significant harvest losses. Due to gender roles and unequal access to and control over resources, such changes make peasant women more vulnerable.

The present conventional agricultural and food system is one of the most important drivers of poverty and inequality (e.g. between south and north, peasants and large-scale farmers, women and men), and of the current global environmental challenges. Many scientists are pushing a paradigm-shift in agriculture – namely to move away from industrialized, monoculture and exportoriented agriculture towards more sustainable, local food systems that reduce the dependency of peasants on the industry and global markets and hence reduce their vulnerability.⁶ The recent IPCC special report⁷ and the IPBES⁸ have both highlighted the urgency to radically transform our societies and agriculture.

Such a paradigm shift, a profound transformation of our food system, is also needed if we want to meet the targets set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda 2030 calls for a farming system that is sustainable and diverse. Agroecology, an approach which has in some parts of the world been practiced by peasants for decades, is transformational and contributes to the achievement of a variety of SDGs, namely: 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 13, 15, to some extent also to 5 (target 5.4 care work) if the interventions are gender sensitive.

3 <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

4 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/srcl>

5 IPCC 2019

6 <https://www.globalagriculture.org>

7 https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf

8 IPBES global assessment on biodiversity (<https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>)



Also the report submitted by the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)⁹ to FAO highlights the high potential of agroecology to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In 2018 FAO launched the Scaling up Agroecology Initiative¹⁰, a vision to bring agroecology to scale and transform food and agricultural systems to achieve the SDGs.

SWISSAID's key underlying reference document for this policy is its strategy, currently the strategy 2019-2024. Within this strategy, agroecology fits into the strategic area "small-scale farming" and aims at contributing mainly to the first outcome of the work of the development cooperation department: The living conditions of SWISSAID beneficiaries improved noticeably by the end of the strategy period. By creating evidence in the area of agroecology, interventions also aim at contributing to the second outcome: The capacities of civil society organisations to exercise political influence using specific evidence in SWISSAID's strategic areas have been built up and are making an impact. The strategy also emphasizes that the equal participation of women and men is one of the fundamental premises for sustainable development with dignity.

In addition, the development political work of SWISSAID aims at contributing to a paradigm shift in agriculture to tackle the world hunger problem and increase resilience to climate change.

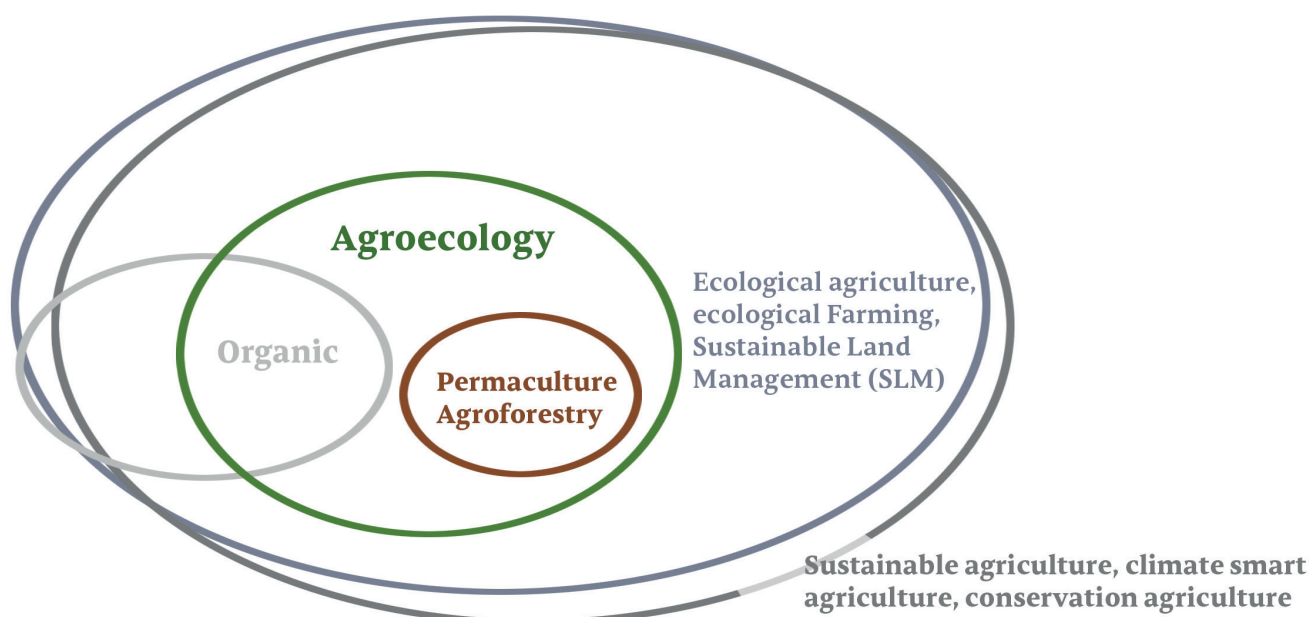
4. Definition

There are several agricultural concepts affiliated with agroecology: Sustainable agriculture, climate resilient agriculture, conservation agriculture, ecologic organic agriculture, biodynamic agriculture, permaculture, agroforestry, just to name a few of them. Also, the concept of food sovereignty, a more political concept, goes well together with agroecology. It demands the right for communities and states to define their own agricultural and food policies, seeks to strengthen sustainable farm production and local markets as well as fair producer prices.

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/3/I9049EN/I9049en.pdf>

The following graph situates agroecology in the jungle of the main alternative concepts:



Agroecology is commonly regarded as¹¹:

- **An interdisciplinary scientific research approach** involving the holistic study of agroecosystems and food systems.
- **A set of principles and practices** that enhances the resilience and sustainability of food and farming systems while preserving social integrity.
- **A socio-political movement**, which focuses on the practical application of agroecology, seeks new ways of considering agriculture, processing, distribution and consumption of food, and its relationships with society and nature.

Besides similar concepts shown in the graph above, there are an increasing number of definitions for agroecology provided in recent years that have different nuances depending on the authors, institutions or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that provide them. What they have in common is the goal to develop sustainable food systems.

Among the different definitions of agroecology SWISSAID will adhere to the following definition, mentioned in the FAO document “10 elements of agroecology – guiding the transition to sustainable food and agricultural systems”¹²:

Definition:

“Agroecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.”

¹¹ <https://www.cidse.org/2018/04/03/the-principles-of-agroecology/>

¹² <http://www.fao.org/agroecology/knowledge/10-elements/en/>

In 2018 FAO developed ten elements of agroecology to guide the transition towards sustainable agriculture and food systems: 1) Diversity; 2) Co-creation and sharing of knowledge; 3) Synergies; 4) Efficiency; 5) Recycling; 6) Resilience; 7) Human and social values; 8) Culture and food traditions; 9) Responsible governance; 10) Circular and solidarity economy. This consolidated framework of ten elements is based upon scientific literature on agroecology (in particular: Altieri, 1995; Gliessman, 2007), earlier work of civil society networks¹³ and upon the extensive and inclusive multistakeholder dialogues, gathering states and intergovernmental organizations, CSOs and private actors, held at global, regional and national levels since the first FAO International Symposium on Agroecology in September 2014.

Building on all these efforts, the HLPE¹⁴ elaborated a consolidated list of 13 principles, combining and reformulating principles from the three principal sources (Nicholls et al., 2016; CIDSE, 2018; FAO, 2018d) to produce a minimum, non-repetitive but comprehensive set of agroecological principles. These are organized around the three operational principles for sustainable food systems: 1) to improve resource efficiency; 2) to strengthen resilience and 3) to secure social equity/responsibility. For SWISSAID, these 13 principles and elements – plus an additional 14th on gender – are key in putting the agroecology policy into practice. (See table on page 6.)

To summarize: SWISSAID understands agroecology as a holistic, systemic and dynamic farming approach that evolves and adapts based on the changing agroecological and social context. It builds on ecological cycles and processes and their application, while strengthening agricultural production. It strengthens synergies between plants, animals and livestock, microorganisms and soils. It works towards maintaining local seeds and livestock, improving soil fertility, water retention and recycling nutrients and energy on the farm rather than relying on external inputs. Agroecology puts the peasants, their knowledge and the knowledge exchanges among them in the centre. Peasant women play a significant role in the promotion of agroecology, with their specific knowledge, the role they assume in agricultural production and by ensuring household food security.

Table 1. Principles and elements of agroecology¹⁵

Principle	FAO's ten elements	Scale application*
Improve resource efficiency		
1. Recycling. Preferentially use local renewable resources and close as far as possible resource cycles of nutrients and biomass.	Recycling	FI, FA
2. Input reduction. Reduce or eliminate dependency on purchased inputs and increase self-sufficiency by using mainly local and natural resources.	Efficiency	FA, FO, FI
Strengthen resilience		
3. Soil health. Secure and enhance soil health and functioning for improved plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biological activity and preventing soil erosion.		FI, FA
4. Animal health. Ensure animal health and welfare.		FI, FA
5. Biodiversity. Maintain and enhance diversity of species, functional diversity and genetic resources and thereby maintain overall agroecosystem biodiversity in time and space at field, farm and landscape scales.	Part of diversity	FI, FA, FO
6. Synergy. Enhance positive ecological interaction, synergy, integration and complementarity among the elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil and water).	Synergy	FI, FA, FO

¹³ (e.g. Nyéléni, 2015; CIDSE, 2018)

¹⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

7. Economic diversification. Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that peasants have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers.	Part of diversity	FA, FO, FI
Secure social equity/responsibility		
8. Co-creation of knowledge. Enhance co-creation and horizontal sharing of knowledge, including local and scientific innovation, especially through farmer-to-farmer exchange.	Co-creation and sharing of knowledge	FA, FO, FI
9. Social values and diets. Build food systems based on the culture, identity, tradition, social and gender equity of local communities that provide healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets.	Parts of human and social values and culture and food traditions	FA, FO
10. Fairness. Support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment for women and men and fair treatment of intellectual property rights.		FA, FO
11. Connectivity. Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by reembedding food systems into local economies.	Circular and solidarity economy	FA
12. Land and natural resource governance. Strengthen institutional arrangements to improve, including the recognition and support of family farmers, smallholders and peasant food producers as sustainable managers of natural and genetic resources.	Responsible governance	FA, FO
13. Participation. Encourage social organization and greater participation in decision-making by food producers and consumers to support decentralized governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems.		FO

* Scale application: FI = field; FA = farm, agroecosystem; FO = food system
Source: derived from Nicholls et al., 2016; CIDSE, 2018; FAO, 2018c.

As for SWISSAID Gender / women's empowerment is a priority topic, too, for SWISSAID, the following 14th principle should be added to principles and elements by HLPE.

14. Gender equity. Agroecology must ensure that women improve their economic autonomy, have equal access to and control over the productive resources, have equal access to the market and enjoy a healthy environment free of violence.

5. SWISSAID priorities in the area of agroecology

As said, SWISSAID adheres to the agroecological principles and elements compiled in the table above. They provide a good guiding framework for a context specific and flexible design and implementation of activities in the field of agroecology. In some of these principles SWISSAID would like to focus its attention and go a step further, mainly to better achieve SWISSAID's overall outcomes and hence the impacts at target group level, but also to enhance the institutional profile in these particular areas. The **five** sub-themes below describe SWISSAID's conceptual understanding as well as the strategies and approaches SWISSAID will use to achieve its goals.

5.1. Gender and peasant women

Since gender and the focus on peasant women are a SWISSAID priority topic, it is obvious that SWISSAID focuses its work in agroecology on gender / peasant women, too.

Agroecology can create better opportunities for women at multiple levels¹⁶. First, it creates meaningful work by integrating diverse work tasks and specific forms of knowledge, providing a diversified role for women in the household economy while challenging patriarchal structures inside the family unit. Second, as peasant-to-peasant sharing and learning are at the heart of agroecology, the pursuit of agroecological methods requires the spaces and opportunities for such exchanges and builds social cohesion. This includes women-only spaces which are of high importance for achieving gender equality, building solidarity, autonomy and strengthening women's creative and collective work towards self-determination. Third, agroecology fosters better economic opportunities for women. Characterized by low start-up and production costs, simple and effective production techniques and yields that are stable over time, agroecology is less risky and more affordable and accessible for women. Fourth, agroecology supports the health of both agriculture workers and consumers by eliminating harmful synthetic chemicals, which have a disproportionate negative impact on women's health. Furthermore, diversified crops, fruits and livestock enrich diets and improve household selfsufficiency, alleviating women's care work burden. Finally, agroecology supports biodiversity and traditional knowledge, affirming the crucial role of women as traditional keepers of seeds and indigenous knowledge. Last but not least, in its political dimension, agroecology seeks to achieve a more just system, therefore its implementation can deconstruct and render all forms of injustice more visible, including the inequalities that women face and suffer.

It is not enough to simply include women in the implementation of actions: If the process is to be truly inclusive, women need to be there from the outset, designing it. Peasant women and men assume different roles in farming, also in agroecological farming. It goes without saying that the particular role peasant women play needs to be taken into account while planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating agroecological interventions.

To enable women farmers to exercise their economic rights and improve their economic autonomy, it is above all necessary that they have equal access to and control over the productive resources, like land, water, seeds, knowledge, credit, etc.

Focus 1: Agroecology has an environmental, a socio-cultural, an economic and a political dimension. In its work on agroecology, SWISSAID particularly puts the role and the rights of **peasant women** in its focus of attention.

5.2. Agrobiodiversity / Seeds¹⁷

Agrobiodiversity, the genetic resources for food and agriculture, covering all the diversity of seed varieties, other planting materials and animal breeds is a crucial element of agroecology and sustainable food production. Only if we succeed in preserving and further developing the diversity created by peasants over thousands of years, will we be able to continue farming successfully in the future. SWISSAID therefore pays particular attention to this task by supporting peasant seed systems (PSSs).

PSSs aim to promote the seed autonomy of peasants by strengthening their control over the seeds. Therefore, what stands at the heart of these seed systems, is the planting, conserving, improving and promoting of the huge diversity of open pollinated, genetically heterogeneous varieties and seeds through the peasant families themselves. Each variety is a source of extensive knowledge and diverse practices of the peasants and their networks. Especially peasant women play an important role in saving and promoting seeds. Relevant for health and nutrition, peasants' seeds contribute substantially to feed people and to strengthen the food sovereignty.

¹⁶ https://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/rtn-watch11-2019_eng-42-50.pdf

¹⁷ Seeds entails other planting material

The broad genetic range is the reason why peasants' seeds adapt easily to changing environmental and climatic conditions, developing new characteristics over the time. Cultivated and stored under agroecological conditions, peasants' seeds are an important part of a diverse, ecological farming system. Promoting peasants' seeds contributes also to people's livelihood in a positive manner. The organization through seed saver networks and community seed banks, the specialization or professionalization in seed selection and production, the value addition through participative guarantee schemes are important factors that determine the economic benefits of peasant seed systems.

Native seeds are part of the cultural identity of peasants and indigenous people and understood as a common good. Therefore, access to seeds is crucial for peasants and should neither be diminished by intellectual property rights, in particular by patents, nor should mechanisms for seed registration and certification jeopardize peasants' freedom to operate. Peasants should have the right, under the peasants' privilege, to breed, produce, store, reseed, exchange, lend and sell all types of seeds. As a common good under continuous adaptation, peasants' seed should not be integrated into official state mechanisms of certification and registration that request seeds to be uniform and stable. SWISSAID promotes, however, alternatives supported by peasants to record the characteristics and qualities of peasants' seeds and to make them public, for example through seed inventories, and to guarantee the quality of peasants' seeds, for example with PGS systems.

Due to the lack of support and recognition of PSS, e.g. with appropriate policies, the sustainability of these systems is still a challenge and has to be improved over the next years to stop the loss of the agrobiodiversity and give future to agroecological farming systems. Important instruments to succeed with this difficult task are among others the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and the UN Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (UNDROP).

Focus 2: Agroecology maintains and enhances the diversity of species. SWISSAID supports **peasant seed systems** that preserve agrobiodiversity and are thus a core element of resilient agroecological farming systems. Especially peasant women play an important role in saving and promoting seeds.

5.3. Economic diversification and income

Product Diversity:

Agroecological systems are highly diverse. Agroecological diversification therefore not only strengthens the ecological resilience, but also the socio-economic resilience. The products deriving from an agroecological farming systems or/and a crop-livestock system are manifold: staple food crops; intercrops for spatial diversity; legumes used to enhance soil fertility, vegetables from the kitchen gardens; high value cash crops as additional income source; livestock to produces manure, milk, meat; fruit trees and non-timber products, etc. Having a diversity of crops enables the families to sell different products throughout the year and not only in certain months and thus means for the families to have a stable source of income. Crop and animal diversity at the farm level help reducing the risks and vulnerability. An integrated diverse farming system can better withstand or recover from difficult conditions or unexpected change, be it of environmental, economic or political nature. Harmful possible shocks are floods, droughts, rapid price changes, political instability or conflicts that might lead to crop failure or a meagre income. Producers who follow an agroecological approach reduce their vulnerability, in case a single crop, livestock specie or another commodity fails or fetches a bad price.

Reduction of input costs and loss of income:

By relying on one's own seeds, on locally available materials to produce organic fertilizer and pesticides, on systemic improvements, on nutrient recycling etc., the production costs (except for labour) can be reduced compared to a farming system where external inputs need to be purchased. Post-harvest measures, e.g. better conservation / storage of seeds and products, can furthermore reduce the loss of income.

Value addition:

Simple value addition measures at farm level or the level of a farmer group or cooperative can quickly lead to higher income. Possible examples are: selling of well stored products at the time when the prices are higher; undertaking first processing steps, e.g. grinding of grain or drying of tea leaves or fruits; labelling of agroecologically / organically produced products, e.g. through Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).

Value addition activities need to be designed carefully, taking into account the resources and the capacities of the peasants and farmer groups, market demand as well as required hygiene standards. SWISSAID focuses its attention on the lower stages in the value chain. For interventions higher up in the value chain, SWISSAID collaborates with specialized partners in this field.

Access to markets:

Agroecology seeks to connect producers and consumers through a circular and solidarity economy that prioritizes local markets and supports local economic development. Local markets are more stable and less prone to crisis. Strengthening short food circuits can increase the income of the peasants, while maintaining a fair price for consumers. Shorter food chains are also more resource-efficient and reduce food waste. Social and institutional innovations play a key role in linking producers and consumers, e.g. local producer markets, direct sale by peasants / farmer groups to consumers. SWISSAID helps peasants and their associations to access consumers / markets with products that are demanded by them, unprocessed or processed. SWISSAID gives particular attention to women producer groups and their access to markets.

Focus 3: A diversified agroecological production contributes to resilient and more productive and **sustainable food and livelihood** systems of peasant families. SWISSAID supports peasants, especially rural women, in the production and first level processing of agroecological produce as well as in strengthening and accessing local markets.

5.4. Adaptation to climate change

Industrial agriculture exacerbates climate change through the emission of particularly detrimental Greenhouse Gases (GHG) and through important natural resource depletion. Its business model strips farming communities of their control over productive inputs, thereby reducing genetic variety, depleting soils and in many cases polluting land and water. Direct and indirect costs of the system leave farmers with little financial resources. These factors combined make rural communities highly vulnerable¹⁸ to climatic shocks. A transformation of the current agriculture and food system towards a more sustainable system is imperative.

Agroecological practices allow for an agricultural production that reverses environmental degradation and strengthens the resilience of the ecosystem and rural communities in the face of climatic shocks. It is also the right approach to maintain production and productivity in the mid- and long term, under declining rain patterns, increased mean temperatures and extreme weather events. However, climate change considerations have to be carefully integrated into programming and design in order a) to be able to consider the implications of climate change (also in the long term) and raise awareness of / enhance disaster preparedness and risk reduction in SWISSAID's projects; b) to engage in the most suitable adaptive practices according to the respective context and c) to strengthen the rural communities' transformative capacities in order to become ever more sustainable. To match SWISSAID's engagement on agroecology to diversify genetic resources, to enhance the fertility of soils, to support heterogeneous farming systems, to strengthen knowledge and commit to self-determined, resourceful communities, SWISSAID therefore also engages in measures to strengthen

¹⁸ "Vulnerability" is the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected (IPCC, 2012). It is a dynamic concept, varying across temporal and spatial scales and depends on economic, social, geographic, demographic, cultural, institutional, governance and environmental factors.

- the analytic capacity of communities to understand and factor in changes in climatic patterns, to be able to access forecasting of extreme events and associated risks as well as in order to understand and participate in basic monitoring activity.
- the adaptive capacity¹⁹ of communities to plan for and face changing climate patterns and extreme events through - among others - knowledge on disaster risk reduction and training on adaptive agroecological practices, knowledge and the resources to engage in water management and irrigation as well as crop storage. The measures will further strengthen knowledge for market access in times of crisis as well as access to financial and technical resources provided by private and public stakeholders.
- the transformative capacity in the communities by increased knowledge sharing on climate change adaptation solutions and by fostering innovations and farmer-led research.

Not all these fields of engagement have been explored and are ready to be implemented. SWISSAID is therefore engaging in a transition period where concepts and some implementation work will be tested before decisions on the elements to settle with for the coming years will be taken.

Focus 4: SWISSAID supports peasants and their organizations in developing and using their knowledge and resources to enhance their adaptive capacities. Agroecology helps peasants **to adapt to climate change** and to be less vulnerable.

5.5. Co-creation of knowledge, knowledge transfer and advocacy

This fifth sub-theme is to be understood as a crosscutting sub-theme relevant for the implementation of the three other sub-themes. This fifth sub-theme is required to upscale agroecology horizontally as well as vertically as well as to improve programme quality on the ground and remain innovative.

Agroecology depends on context-specific knowledge. It does not offer ready-made prescriptions. Agroecological practices are tailored to fit the local environmental, socio-economic, cultural and political context. Co-creation and sharing of knowledge play a central role in the process of developing and implementing agroecological innovations. Agroecology blends traditional and indigenous knowledge, producers' and scientific knowledge. Education, formal and non-formal, plays a fundamental role in sharing agroecological innovations. Experiences show that top-down models of technology transfer have had limited success.

Farmer-led research and extension:

Horizontal knowledge exchange models, like the “campesino a campesino” movement in Latin America, have played a pivotal role in connecting hundreds and thousands of producers for sharing agroecological knowledge. SWISSAID has been supporting farmer-to-farmer exchanges in different forms, e.g. by facilitating farmer field schools, by working through and with pioneering farmer promoters as champions in their field and multipliers of knowledge.

Farmer-led research is regarded to be very important as it allows greater appropriation, adoption and adaptation of the knowledge generated by farmers and to find local solutions for local problems. Farmer-led research can generate good practices that can be shared and is thus an instrument for horizontal upscaling. Furthermore, farmer-led research, especially when coupled with the collaboration with a renowned research institute, can generate important evidence for advocacy.

¹⁹ “Adaptive capacity”, the capacity of a system to adapt in order to be less vulnerable.

Knowledge sharing platforms, networks and advocacy:

In order to learn from each other and to upscale agroecology, the establishment of knowledge ex-change mechanisms at different levels is crucial, at field level, at partner level but also within SWISSAID. In different country programmes SWISSAID has been supporting the strengthening of learning alliances and “competence centres” or national platforms that aim at contributing to the transformation of the current food systems towards more sustainable agriculture and food systems. The SWISSAID-established Communities of Practice (CoPs) at international, regional and national level foster knowledge exchange and the co-creation of new knowledge. SWISSAID shall also collaborate with external, national, regional, continental, international networks to gain and share knowledge and to upscale agroecology.

Focus 5: Agroecology is knowledge intensive. It values traditional **knowledge**, especially the knowledge of rural women, and blends it with scientific knowledge. SWISSAID supports the knowledge exchange between peasants, scientists, extension workers, partners, external actors and SWISSAID staff, for mutual learning and for upscaling agroecology horizontally and vertically.

6. Implementation of policy

The implementation of the policy on agroecology occurs in the frame of the implementation of the country programmes and its projects. Based on the policy, the Coordination Offices might want to develop their own implementation plans or integrate activities towards the implementation of the policy in the currently existing management and planning system of SWISSAID.

As long as this policy is valid it is expected that all country programmes respect the following minimal standards:

- Within the current programme cycle, all country programmes work on the five sub-themes prioritized by SWISSAID (see above) and align the interventions with the 14 principles and elements outlined in the table 1 of this policy. Objectives to be achieved within the five focus-themes will be defined in corresponding projects.
- Programmes and projects are subject to a solid analysis (livelihood, farming system, market analysis, climate change related long-term risk assessment, etc.); the results of this analysis are to be considered for programme / project design.
- At least one project in every country of operation entails at least one outcome and corresponding indicator(s) in the area of climate change adaptation.
- At least one project in every country of operation entails a component that creates evidence in agroecology for advocacy purposes at country level and / or Swiss / international level and provides of an advocacy component.
- SWISSAID will not financially support activities that violate elements of this policy:
 - Purchase of chemical fertilizers
 - Purchase and use of synthetic pesticides. Highly hazardous pesticides (HHP), such as Glyphosate, Endosulfan and Paraquat are to be avoided at any time. See PAN List of HHPs: http://www.pan-germany.org/download/PAN_HHP_List_150602_F.pdf
 - Purchase and use of genetically modified seeds and animals
 - Purchase of imported hybrid seed (except for vegetable seeds)
 - Investments in monocultures
 - Investments in agro-fuel plants

In case a country programme has difficulties in adhering to these minimal standards, it is requested to explain the issue and seek an individual solution together with SWISSAID Switzerland.

The adherence of the country programmes to the SWISSAID agroecology minimal standards is in the responsibility of the Country Representative and the Programme Manager and will be assessed in the frame of project and programme evaluations, at the stage of project approval and during programme visits. The Head of the SWISSAID Cooperation Department and the Thematic Advisor will check the adherence of the policy on a random basis.

If necessary and required by Coordination Offices, the Thematic Advisors in Switzerland will provide further conceptual guidance and support, e.g. by developing or sharing additional supportive documents, tools, or by participating in the development of new projects.

Furthermore, the SWISSAID CoP on agroecology will focus its exchanges mainly in the above out-lined focus-themes to continuously enhance the competence and capacity of key staff.