

SPOTLIGHT ON AGROECOLOGY

ActionAid (AA) is an international women's rights organization that fights for a sustainable and gender-equal world. In more than 45 countries, ActionAid works side by side with people who stand up against injustice and believe in equal opportunities for all. Together with partners, ActionAid wants to increase its impact and contribute to the SDGs.

OUR APPROACH TO AGROECOLOGY

Smallholder farmers produce around 35% of the global food supply, yet their needs and challenges are routinely overlooked by governments and decision-makers. Harmful industrial agriculture remains the status quo, encouraging intensive planting of single crops, using antibiotics in animal rearing, and promoting synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides. Industrial agriculture accounts for 17% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is contributing to rising global temperatures, which is the cause for an increasing number of climate disasters such as droughts and storms.

The agricultural sector, particularly in low-income countries, is facing multiple challenges including climate change, soaring food, fuel and fertilizer prices, biodiversity loss, and lack of adequate investment in agricultural development. 1.3 billion people in the Global South are relying on agricultural land that is slowly degrading. **With world hunger levels on the rise, an urgent move away from harmful industrial agriculture and intensive farming practices is essential to avert catastrophic climate change and the growing food crisis.**

Agroecology is widely regarded as a pathway to food security, climate change adaptation and increased community resilience. Evidence shows that small, family farms that use agroecological techniques are vastly superior to industrial farms: they are highly efficient, sustainable, more resilient to climate change, and offer multiple social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits. However, despite being successfully practiced by millions of farmers across the world, agroecology is significantly underfunded and not supported in most national policies and budgets.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND AGRICULTURE

Women smallholder farmers play a critical role in the global food supply chain and farming is a greater source of livelihood for women than for men in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet compared to men, women smallholder farmers often face additional barriers, including lower wages; lack of access to



'If we tackle the gender inequalities endemic in agrifood systems and empower women, the world will take a leap forward in addressing the goals of ending poverty and creating a world free from hunger.'

Food and Agriculture Organisation, The status of women in agrifood systems - 2023.

Agroecology is a way of farming and managing crops, livestock, forests, fisheries that is viable, long-lasting, resilient to climate change, and offers various other environmental, social and cultural benefits such as addressing food and water scarcity, and poverty.



“In all my adult life I’ve never seen this type of flooding. Something is changing. We have lost everything. We understand the climate is changing.”

Angelina João is chair of the Women Entrepreneurs of Buzi town, Mozambique, and knows firsthand how the climate crisis is hitting women hardest, after losing her rice and corn crops to Cyclone Idai and then severe flooding.

Photo: Daniel Jukes/ActionAid

land, resources and markets; limited opportunities to influence agricultural policies, and greater unpaid care responsibilities.

Women, young people, and rural and marginalised communities, particularly in the Global South, are on the front line of the climate emergency, suffering the impacts first and worst.

ActionAid and our partners work with women smallholder farmers and their networks to support them to address these inequalities.

Around the world, despite receiving almost no support from governments, women smallholder farmers are choosing to practice agroecology to adapt to climate change. They are seeing positive impacts on their health, soil, income, and livelihoods.

That’s why **agroecology is a global priority for ActionAid**, and a core part of our strategy. For years we have **promoted community-led approaches** that strengthen resilience and recognise local experience and indigenous knowledge, shifting the power into the hands of women and their communities.



ActionAid’s principles for Just Transitions in Extractives and Agriculture, explain our vision to shape energy and food systems in a way that works for women, their communities and the climate. Together with our network of global partners, we are **promoting agroecology** as a viable alternative to industrial agriculture by:



Working with female farmers to build their resilience to climate change through technical training in agroecological techniques, providing tools, climate-resilient and indigenous seeds, and sharing information about sustainable practices.



Working with national and provincial governments to influence district and national policies, budgets and adaptation plans to shift funding to agroecology.



Ensuring **women farmers know their rights** and entitlements and are supported to lead change.



Influencing global decision-making bodies on sustainable food security and nutrition by working with other Civil Society Organisations and elevating the voices of smallholder farmers in global forums including the Food and Agriculture Organization communities of practice and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme to promote agroecology as a solution to hunger, climate change, women’s rights, and democratic governance.



Bringing together networks of women smallholder farmers to present their challenges and requests to challenge industrial corporate agriculture and false solutions (such as climate-smart agriculture) and redirect funding to agroecology.



“I harvest all year round because I use agroecology techniques. It is worth learning how to use them for food and nutritional security.”

Judite, Marracuene, Mozambique

Farmers participate in an agroecology knowledge exchange in Marracuene, Mozambique

Photo: ActionAid

MOZAMBIQUE

In Mozambique, we have been supporting women farmers and flood, drought and cyclone affected communities to learn climate resilient farming methods since 2008. **To date we have trained more than 20,000 farmers across the country on the production and use of natural fertilisers.** We also support with greenhouse construction, integrated pest management, irrigation systems, and erosion and deforestation preventive measures, and diversifying livelihood options.

In the south and northeast of the country we have been promoting agroecology initiatives to 80 farmers' associations consisting of over 8,000 farmers. We are supporting the collective learnings on how to design and implement sustainable production systems based on ecological concepts and principles. We organise farmer-to-farmer exchanges of knowledge, provide technical assistance, encourage the use of organic fertilisers and permanent soil cover to reduce dependence on external inputs, and support the preservation and local production of traditional and improved seeds.

CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, mangroves play a significant role in maintaining the balance of coastal ecosystems by absorbing carbon dioxide, protecting shorelines from floods and soil erosion, and as a nursery to sea life, but they are being lost at an alarming rate to coastal development, shrimp farming, mining, dredging and industrial agriculture.

ActionAid Cambodia and our partners are working with women, eight community fisheries, and the provincial fisheries administration in Kampot to restore the mangrove forests and protect marine resources. In Cambodia and Nepal, we analysed **the**

governments' national agricultural and climate policies, budgets, and programmes,

and held consultations in both countries to listen to smallholder farmers' direct experiences of agroecology and their requests for support. The results were presented to government bodies in the two countries, as well as to global decision-making bodies, including the UN's Committee on World Food Security, the Global Agricultural Food Security Program, Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Fund for International Development to urge these bodies responding to the recent food price inflation to support agroecological practices.

TANZANIA

In Tanzania, we have over 20 years' experience supporting sustainable livelihoods and climate change resilience. We promote food sovereignty through climate resilient sustainable agriculture, and train women and young people in agroecology at Farmer Field Schools, using demonstrations and model farms to support them to adopt new approaches, such as making organic fertiliser and mulching to improve crop yields. We also work with women farmers to advocate greater investment in agroecology at the local to national government levels and equal land rights for women. In response to our advocacy efforts, **the Tanzanian government integrated soil mapping into its 2020/2021 budget.** Knowing the soil content and profile in their local area allowed smallholder farmers to use agroecology principles effectively.

SENEGAL

In Senegal, we support women farmers to learn new skills to improve their harvests, including irrigation techniques, making organic compost and creating community seed banks with diverse seeds suited to the local conditions. Women smallholder farmers



Climate champion, Pak Pov, plants a mangrove sapling at Kampong Samaky Community Fisheries in Kampot province, Cambodia.

Photo: ActionAid

are also being supported to influence government policies at the national and regional level on increased investment in agroecology. This work informs and complements our women-led agroecology programmes in Nigeria and Liberia, and wider advocacy **promoting agroecology as the key to improve food security and resilient livelihoods with the Africa Union and Economic Community of West African States.**

PARTNERSHIP

We would love to team up to scale up this gender transformative approach to reach more women smallholder farmers. We would greatly value the opportunity to discuss this and explore whether there is a match for collaboration.

Thank you for your interest in supporting women smallholder farmers to improve food security, build resilience to climate shocks, and create sustainable livelihoods.



Fatou is a farmer living in Kedougou, Senegal.

“The biggest challenges for my community and my family are access to food self-sufficiency, the restoration of our degraded lands by water erosion, and creating methods of resilience to climate change. Today we can no longer rebuild our local seed capital because its seeds are starting to disappear, the cultivation of millet and rice that requires a lot of water have almost disappeared and yet these two grains are very important in our dietary habits.

“My main role is as the weather women for my community. I have been trained by ActionAid in several areas like new cultivation techniques, the production of compost, risk prevention and disaster, and the dissemination and use of meteorological information.

“We are adapting to protect our village by using stony cords and adopting other cultural techniques. As things improve, we see change: the stability and the balance of food, access to our local seeds and food habits, the restoration and the fertility of our cultivable soils. ActionAid supports us a lot. We hope they will continue to support us as there are many challenges.”

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