

# 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 Mozambique

Photo: ActionAid

### **SENEGAL**

In Senegal, women farmers are learning new skills to improve their harvests, including irrigation techniques, making organic compost and creating community seed banks with diverse seeds adapted to local conditions. Smallholder women farmers are also supported to influence government policy at national and regional levels to increase investment in agroecology. This work informs and complements our women-led agroecology programmes in Nigeria and Liberia, and our wider advocacy with the African Union and Economic Community of West African States to promote agroecology as key to improving food security and resilient livelihoods.

### **THE GAMBIA**

In The Gambia, agro-ecology is used as a means for job creation and food security. With support from ActionAid, women and youth from 30 communities in the Central River and North Bank regions have increased their capacity for climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture. Demonstration centres have been established, and participants have received trainings and financial support to purchase basic farming tools. Seed and grain banks were established and participants were trained in the management and administration of the banks. Activities included the construction of gabions, the production and distribution of energy-saving cook stoves, and support for the establishment of vegetable gardens, woodlots, poultry and small ruminant systems for ecosystem and environmental restoration.

### **NIGERIA**

In Nigeria, ActionAid works through the Strategic Partnership for Agroecology and Climate Justice in West Africa. The project aims to shape national policies and secure public investment in agriculture,

and to empower smallholder women farmers and young people by providing them with the necessary tools to adopt agroecological practices. It also focuses on facilitating access to early maturing seeds, seedlings, livestock and poultry, providing farmers with improved varieties tailored to their needs. The ultimate goal is to create a foundation for long-term food and nutrition security in the country.

### **ETHIOPIA**

ActionAid Ethiopia is implementing an agro-ecological programme in Guna and Ameya. It aims to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, especially women, and address the challenges they face in adapting to climate change. Farmers learn about sustainable soil and land management, backyard fruit and vegetable production, poultry and water management. These sustainable agricultural practices help strengthen food systems and provide socio-economic opportunities for women.

### **SOMALIA/SOMALILAND**

Climate-related droughts are a recurring problem for communities in Somalia. This is why ActionAid has supported the establishment of community-based disaster risk reduction and preparedness institutions. Here, smallholder farmers learn and share knowledge about natural resource management, water harvesting and best agricultural practices in seed selection, seasonality and low-cost irrigation. One example is the construction of soil bunds, small rock and soil structures that help reduce water run-off and erosion. Agro-ecological practices help community members to produce and sell food to support their families.





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

Photo: ActionAid

### **KENYA**

ActionAid International Kenya's Sustainable Agroecology Models of Production for ASAL of Kenya (SAMPAK) project is improving food and nutrition for women and other vulnerable groups in Isiolo County through agroecology and other climate-smart farming techniques such as soil and water conservation.

The project targets 7,800 agro-pastoralists and 15,900 pastoralists. Knowledge on developing sustainable business models will be transferred to local trainers to support local SMEs. And research is being conducted on agribusiness value chains and market conditions.

### **UGANDA**

In Uganda, ActionAid has opened five agroecology centres in the eastern and northern regions, where smallholder farmers, especially women and young people, are trained in sustainable, community-based natural resource management. They learn and share knowledge on innovative and scalable initiatives that conserve soil and ensure access to quality water for all. Community members are also supported to conserve crops, livestock and fish. And ActionAid is facilitating a pilot of renewable and clean energy solutions for farmer groups, such as using biomass to fuel cookstoves. In this way, farmers can generate income while promoting environmental conservation. ActionAid works with farmers to learn lessons from these initiatives and advocate for improved agricultural policies.

### **TANZANIA**

In Tanzania, ActionAid has more than 20 years' experience of supporting sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience. Farmer Field Schools have been set up to train women and young people in agro-ecological techniques. The schools use demonstrations and model farms to help them adopt new approaches, such as making organic manure and mulching to improve crop yields. And ActionAid works with women farmers to advocate at local to

national government level for greater investment in agroecology and equal land rights for women. In response, the government has included soil mapping in its 2020/2021 budget, an important way of understanding the soil in local areas, enabling smallholder farmers to grow crops more effectively.

### **MOZAMBIQUE**

In Mozambique, ActionAid has been supporting women farmers and communities affected by floods, droughts and cyclones to learn climate-smart farming techniques. Since 2008, more than 20,000 farmers across the country have been trained in the production and use of natural fertiliser. ActionAid also provides support for greenhouse construction, integrated pest management, irrigation systems, erosion and deforestation control, and livelihood diversification. In the south and north-east of the country, agro-ecological initiatives have been set up in 80 farmer associations, involving more than 8,000 farmers. Collective learning is used to design and implement sustainable production systems based on ecological concepts and principles. Farmers share knowledge, receive technical assistance, learn to use organic fertilisers and permanent soil cover to reduce dependence on external inputs, and conserve and produce traditional and improved seeds.

### **CAMBODIA**

In Cambodia, mangroves play a vital role in maintaining the balance of coastal ecosystems by absorbing carbon dioxide, protecting coastlines from flooding and soil erosion, and providing a nursery for marine life. But they are disappearing at an alarming rate due to coastal development, shrimp farming, mining, dredging and industrial agriculture. ActionAid and its partners are working with women, community fisheries and the Kampot Provincial Fisheries Administration to restore mangrove forests and protect marine resources. In both Cambodia and Nepal, national policies on agriculture and

climate change were analysed and smallholder farmers consulted on their needs. The findings were presented to government bodies in both countries, as well as to global policy-making bodies, including the UN Committee on World Food Security, the Global Agricultural Food Security Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Fund for International Development, to urge them to support agro-ecological practices in response to recent food price inflation.

### VIETNAM

In Vietnam, ActionAid is supporting 250 fish farmers in the Mekong Delta through capacity building and peer-to-peer learning. Farmers receive financial and technical support to use solar energy for their fish farms, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Bac Lieu Province. In addition, 250 fish farmers in mangrove forest areas will be supported to develop their skills in fish, shrimp and crab aquaculture. They will be provided with seedlings to plant in their aquaculture plots to conserve the forest.

### VANUATU

In Vanuatu, farmers are dealing with soil erosion and poor soil nutrition. In low-lying coastal areas, coconut and banana plantations are struggling to recover from successive cyclones. ActionAid is providing training and resources to women who

are leading agro-ecological solutions to protect forests and grasslands, and indirectly the marine environment, in Tanna and Erromango. 1,000 indigenous women are working together in hubs to pilot climate-smart agricultural practices and collectively engage policy-makers on their needs. They are learning to protect, restore and manage ecosystems, for example by preventing soil erosion, reducing the risk of flooding and increasing the amount of carbon in soils and vegetation.

### BRAZIL

Rural and peri-urban women in Brazil face social isolation and are often vulnerable to violence. In Pajeú, in the north-east of Brazil, ten women-only groups and the agroecology-based Network of Women Producers were set up to empower them. Supported by ActionAid through its grassroots partner, Casa da Mulher do Nordeste, the women systematically shared experiences, took over the management of agricultural processes normally carried out by men, and successfully fought for equal access and control over natural resources. The project helped them deal with chronic water shortages and empowered socially isolated women at risk of domestic violence. Women farmers adopted sustainable alternatives such as the use of water harvesting cisterns, flower beds, local seed varieties, improved poultry husbandry and better quality animal feed, soil preparation and fertiliser.



**“The biggest challenges for my community and my family are access to food self-sufficiency, restoring our land degraded by water erosion, and creating methods of resilience to climate change. Our local seeds are beginning to disappear and the cultivation of millet and rice, which require a lot of water, has almost disappeared and yet these two grains are very important in our diet.**

**My main role is as a weather woman for my community. I have been trained by ActionAid in new farming techniques, compost making, risk and disaster prevention, and the dissemination and use of meteorological information.**

**As things improve, we see changes: in the stability and balance of food, in access to local seeds, in the restoration and fertility of our soils. ActionAid has been very supportive. We hope they will continue to support us because there are many challenges.”**

**Fatou, Kedougou, Senegal**

**Photo: ActionAid**

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

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