

## Background information on the concept of Agroecology concept for BAG project organizations

---

This section wants to give an overview of the different efforts of “defining” agroecology developed by different kind of actors in different contexts:

- Social movements with the *Nyeleni Declaration* (2015),
- FAO with the *10 elements* (2018),
- the HLPE (large scientific community based on consultations processes) in their report on *Agroecology and other innovative approaches* (2019),
- and CIDSE in their communicative tool (2018).

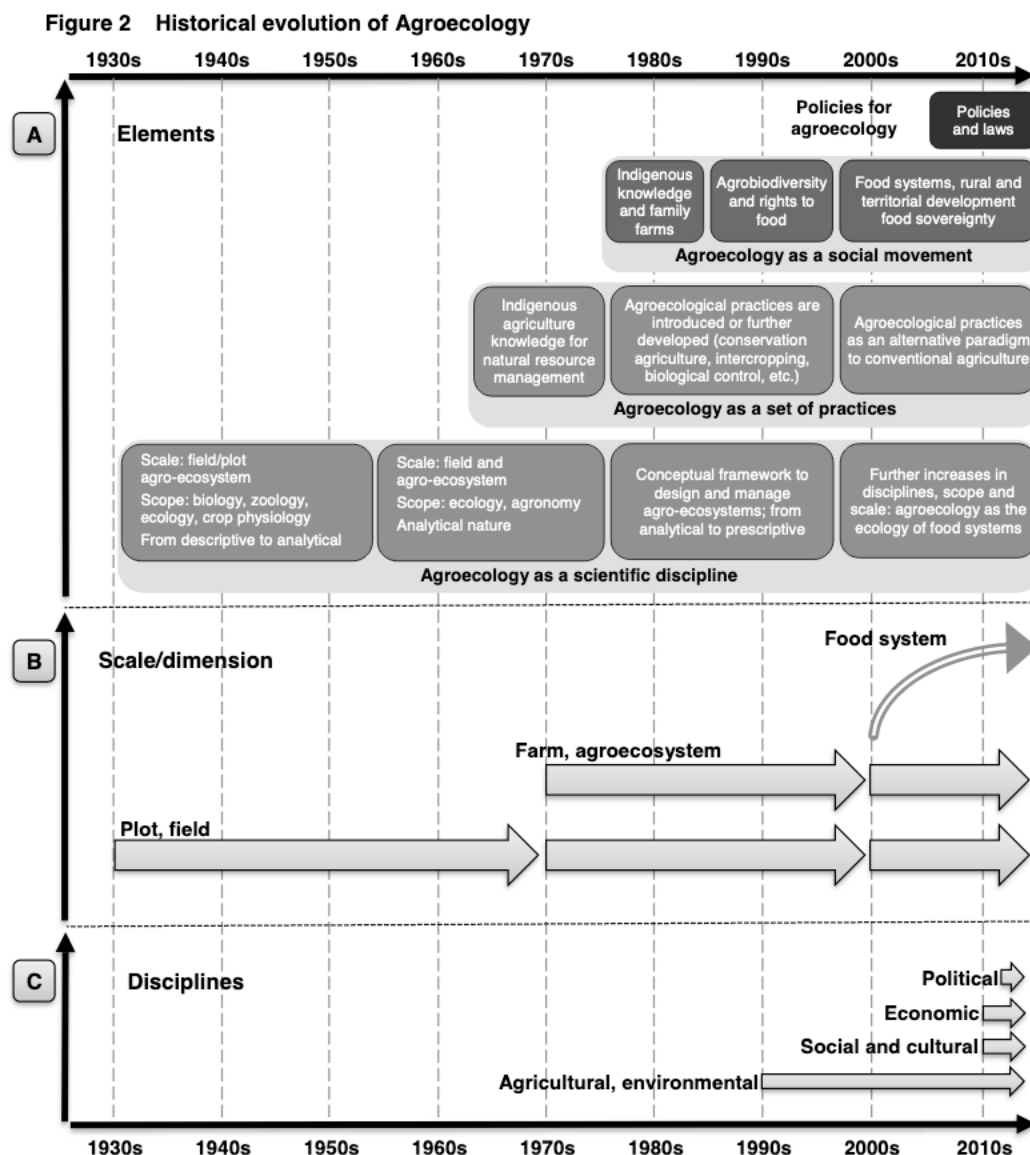
It provides partner organizations of the BAG project with a better understanding of the central concept of our common project: Agroecology.

*This draft will be taken as a basis for drafting the Part I of the Agroecology guidebook, but will be shortened and improved for that purpose.*

BAG organizations are constituted by small-scale food producers’ organizations and allies (NGO, academia) supporting the movement for agroecology and food sovereignty in Europe. The Nyeleni Declaration is the natural reference for our work on Agroecology, a unique work developed by social movements in its diversity, legitimated by its inclusivity.

## Agroecology: an evolving concept

Existing as practices for millennia, the concept of agroecology is a product of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its social and political /governance dimensions are only recently considered.



The HLPE report<sup>1</sup> gives a good resumé -referring to several sources- of the evolution of the concept (no bold in the original text):

*« Agroecology is a dynamic concept that has gained prominence in scientific, agricultural and political discourse in recent years (IAASTD, 2009; IPES-Food, 2016). During its historical evolution, agroecology has expanded beyond the field, farm and agroecosystem scales to encompass,*

<sup>1</sup> HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

*over the last decade, the whole food system. Agroecological approaches explicitly aim at **transforming** food and agriculture systems, addressing the root causes of problems and providing **holistic** and long-term solutions (FAO, 2018a) that consider the **complexity** of farming systems within their social, economic and ecological contexts (Petersen and Arbenz, 2018).*

*Agroecological approaches are increasingly considered as possible alternatives to the industrial model of agricultural improvement, representing concrete transition pathways towards SFSs that enhance FSN (De Schutter, 2010; HLPE, 2016, 2017a,b). »*

## The Nyeleni Declaration 2015

### Context

The international forum of Nyéléni convened in 2015 by social movements in the framework of the work of the IPC ([International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty](#)) and “representing diverse organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people. Together, the diverse constituencies our organizations represent produce some 70% of the food consumed by humanity<sup>2</sup>”. (...).

The originality of this process is in the fact that it was the first time ever that the different constituencies (food producers, indigenous, consumers, etc.) shared views and agreed on a common understanding of agroecology, establishing a common set of principles (11 pillars – see below). During the forum in Nyéléni (Mali), they express and shared what agroecology is for their context, their reality, their specificities. Evidences coming from their differences and the common principles that they share beyond the differences of their context made visible the pillars of agroecology linking local practices around the world across diverse constituencies and realities.

The Declaration of Nyéléni, thanks to this unique gathering of peoples, has the strength and capacity to go beyond a simple “economic / social / environmental” aspects of sustainability. It highlights people agency (through social movements) in the transformation of the food systems and the immaterial links showing the “care” that food producers experience with Mother Nature as an essential driving force for agroecology. These 2 aspects cannot be found in any other tentative of definition.

*extract*

---

*« We have built Agroecology through many initiatives and struggles. We have the legitimacy to lead it into the future. Policy makers cannot move forward on Agroecology without us. They must respect and support our agroecological processes rather than continuing to support the forces that destroy us. We call on our fellow peoples to join us in the collective task of*

---

<sup>2</sup> Nyeleni Declaration 2015

*collectively constructing Agroecology as part of our popular struggles to build a better world, a world based on mutual respect, social justice, equity, solidarity and harmony with our Mother Earth. »*

---

The 11 pillars are:

## OUR COMMON PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES OF AGROECOLOGY

1. Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature, that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It cannot be implemented the same way in all territories. Rather it is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of our territories, can and are practiced in many different ways, with each sector contributing their own colors of their local reality and culture, while always respecting Mother Earth and our common, shared values.
2. The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces our use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from industry. There is no use of agrotoxics, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies in agroecology.
3. Territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships to their lands. They are entitled to secure, develop, control, and reconstruct their customary social structures and to administer their lands and territories, including fishing grounds, both politically and socially. This implies the full recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, and constitutes the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.
4. Collective rights and access to the commons are fundamental pillar of agroecology. We share access to territories that are the home to many different peer groups, and we have sophisticated customary systems for regulating access and avoiding conflicts that we want to preserve and to strengthen.
5. The diverse knowledges and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to agroecology. We develop our ways of knowing through dialogue among them (diálogo de saberes). Our learning processes are horizontal and peer-to-peer, based on popular education. They take place in our own training centers and territories (farmers teach farmers, fishers teach fishers, etc.), and are also intergenerational, with exchange of knowledge between youth and elders. Agroecology is developed through our own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding.
6. The core of our cosmovisions is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. We recognize that as humans we are but a part of nature and the cosmos. We share a spiritual connection with our lands and with the web of

life. We love our lands and our peoples, and without that, we cannot defend our agroecology, fight for our rights, or feed the world. We reject the commodification of all forms of life.

7. Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what make it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.
8. The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It means we minimize the use of purchased inputs that come from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers, and is based on the solidarity of shared risks and benefits.
9. Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.
10. Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward. Migration and globalization mean that women's work is increasing, yet women have far less access to resources than men. All too often, their work is neither recognized nor valued. For agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration.
11. Youth, together with women, provide one of the two principle social bases for the evolution of agroecology. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many of our societies. Youth bear the responsibility to carry forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. They are the stewards of agroecology for future generations. Agroecology must create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership.

Full text available here : [EN DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR AGROECOLOGY 2015](#)<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The International Forum on Agroecology was organized at the Nyeleni Center in Mali, from 24 to 27 February 2015 by the following organisations: Coördination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP Mali) as chair; La Via Campesina (LVC), Movimiento Agroecológico de América Latina y el Caribe (MAELA), Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP), More and Better (MaB)

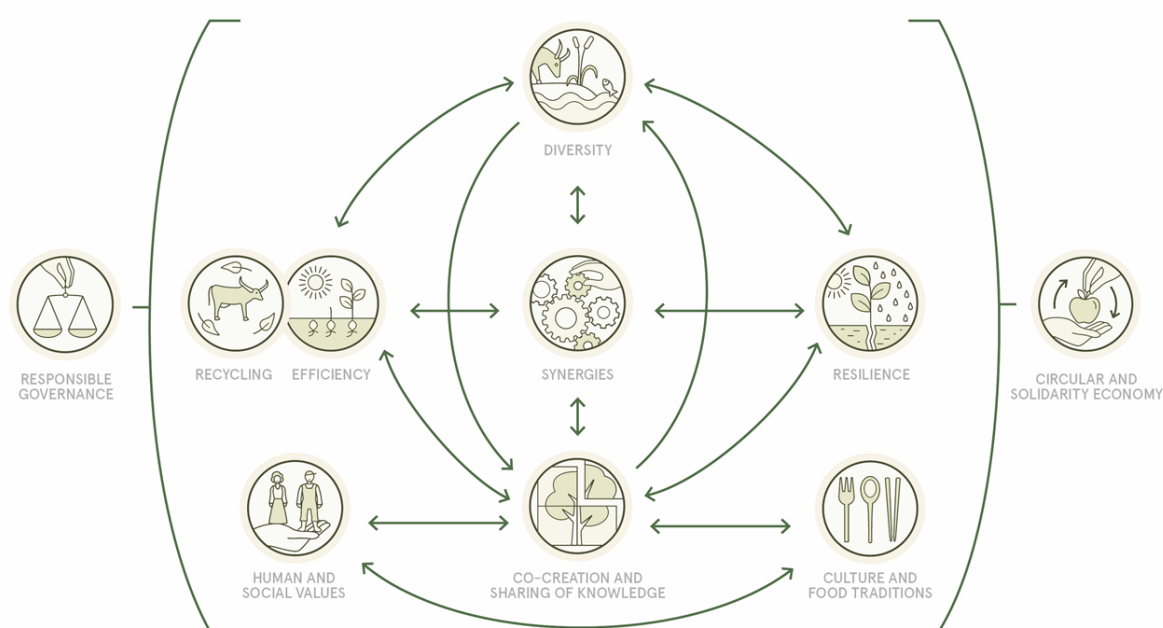
## FAO 10 elements (2018)

### Context

« Between 2014 and 2018, FAO has facilitated a global consultation on Agroecology through the organization of 9 international and **regional seminars** on Agroecology. This large consultative process started with a first **international seminar** organized in Rome in September 2014 highlighting the relevance of Agroecology for food security and nutrition. It led to the organization of 7 **regional meetings** aiming at defining the different understanding of the concept and needs, with the active participation of all stakeholders, including CSOs and Family Farmers' Organizations. A 2<sup>nd</sup> International Seminar was organized in Rome in April 2018 concluding the consultative process and focusing on **Scaling up Agroecology** to Achieve the SDGs. It aimed at moving from dialogue to actions.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the **FAO Committee on Agriculture** (COAG, October 2018) welcomed the Scaling up Agroecology Initiative. It requested FAO to develop an action plan with partners, taking into account country needs and capacities. This decision was endorsed by the 160<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Council, in December 2018. COAG 26 (2018) request to FAO: *to assist countries and regions to engage more effectively in the transition processes towards sustainable agriculture and food systems.* (C 2019/21 Rev.1 , Para. 15 a) »

« FAO (2018c) identified ten elements of agroecology to guide the transition towards sustainable agriculture and food systems. These consolidated FAO ten elements are based upon seminal **scientific literature** on agroecology (in particular: Altieri, 1995; Gliessman, 2007) and upon the extensive and **inclusive multi-stakeholder 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 (September 2014). » (HLPE 2019)



## Difference between FAO definition of Agroecology and Nyeleni Declaration

*This section is based on a workshop held by Schola Campesina in July 2019 with young people from food producers organizations from all over the world on “Agroecology and global governance”(Italy).*

In general, FAO 10 elements are more technical, and Nyeleni Declaration is more focused on culture, social, rights and governance. The logic of action is definitely different: FAO is suggesting agroecology to overcome environmental challenges where civil society organizations are pointing out the power relation in food systems, people’s rights (not only the rights to resources -water, land, seeds,...-), community emancipation, importance of the territories, importance of the relationship with Nature, inequalities and justice. Nyeleni Declaration is draft by the ones who produce and live their territory, as well as this spiritual relashion with the soil, the seeds, the natural life around them).

The starting point of FAO is the production aspect and Agroecology is considered as a way of practice / a way of producing food. The 10 elements have been designed as a reference document, relying on evidences through a scientific approach. It’s worth to note here that 5 on 10 FAO elements (elements 1,3,4,5,6) are addressing the production side, at farm level; which is highlighted only in pillar 2 “Ecological principles” of the Nyeleni Declaration.

### Notes on specific points:

The governance element (FAO) is considering “**multistakeholder** dialogue” which is pointed out and denounced by social movement as unfair (equaling the voice of companies with organization representing the populations, the right-holders). Social movements present the necessity to work together amongst food producers, in relation with allies in academic and activist sectors, highlighting the value of farmer to farmer (campesino a campesino) methods of knowledge sharing, of community and organization. This is in contraction with the FAO style of building multistakeholer partnerships without giving more importance to the food producers (who are the right holders).

In the same line, FAO 10 elements don’t recognize the central role of **organizations** and **territories** to live and implement agroecology (pillars 1 and 3).

The link with Mother Nature and the **feelings / care** aspects of farming is absent from FAO elements. The spiritual / cosmovision perspective is not addressed at all in this kind of document (Pillar 1 : language of Nature / Way of life) and 6 : cosmovision)

FAO 10 elements	Comments from a « Nyéléni » point of view
1. Diversity	The “diversity” element (as well as “synergies”, “efficiency”, “recycling” and “resilience”) focuses on the technical aspect of production.
2. Co-creation and sharing of knowledge	This element highlights the necessity to consider all kind of knowledge, including the often underestimated traditional and indigenous knowledge. Nyéléni Declaration goes further considering food producers as the main actor in knowledge creation and sharing



	<p>(transmission amongst peers and between generations).</p> <p>The FAO element includes the term innovation, to avoid addressing “transformation” or “system change” aspects. It’s interesting and useful (in order to advance agroecology agenda) that Agroecology is considered as an innovation. By FAO.</p>
3. Synergies	
4. Efficiency	<p>Again, it shows the technical approach to agroecology. It refers to “ecosystem services” which approach considers nature as holding economic value, to be measured by metrics, where Nyéléni Declaration express the intrinsic link between Human beings and Nature.</p>
5. Recycling	
6. Resilience	
7. Human & social values	<p>Women and youth are mentioned here. As very often they are mentioned because of the necessity too address these groups in all documents. Nyéléni Declaration highlight the importance of women as the major actors of agroecology today and the necessity to conduct feminism struggles to advance agroecology. “Agroecology without feminism cannot be” is well acknowledged convergence with 10 even if well focused on women rights. And 11: Youth, AE helps with youth employment.</p>
8. Culture & food traditions	<p>This element is important. FAO recognizes local knowledge (pillar 5) and our culture (pillar 9).</p>
9. Responsible governance:	<p>See above on the problematic « multistakeholder » partnership and dialogue: companies (through private sector participation) are considered as equal as communities. Address procurement, land tenure which is very important but do not state who is responsible for it.</p>
10. Circular and solidarity economy:	<p>Do not address the causes on inequalities in markets / trade, nor the “control” of the markets. Nyeleni highlights the importance of the local markets and its autonomy toward global market (Pillar 8). FAO is avoiding any political statement.</p>



## HLPE report 2019

The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security (HLPE) is a panel of experts that produces scientific report -after large consultation processes- to base the discussion of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). In its annual meeting the CFS adopts the HLPE report which is then considered as an international reference. In 2019, the HLPE published a report on Agroecology “Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition”.

« HLPE 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 SFS4s set out in the introduction –improve resource efficiency, strengthen resilience and secure social equity/responsibility (see Table1).

Each agroecological principle was allocated to the operational principle to which it most clearly contributes. However, given the interlinkages among these three categories, this classification is not fully discrete. For example, principles 3, 5 and 6 contribute not only to resilience but also to resource efficiency. Principles are also related to the FAO ten elements. »

---

<sup>4</sup> Sustainable food systems

**Table 1 Consolidated set of 13 agroecological principles**

Principle	FAO's ten elements	Scale application*
<b><i>Improve resource efficiency</i></b>		
<b>1. Recycling.</b> Preferentially use local renewable resources and close as far as possible resource cycles of nutrients and biomass.	Recycling	FI, FA
<b>2. Input reduction.</b> Reduce or eliminate dependency on purchased inputs and increase self-sufficiency	Efficiency	FA, FO
<b><i>Strengthen resilience</i></b>		
<b>3. Soil health.</b> Secure and enhance soil health and functioning for improved plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biological activity.		FI
<b>4. Animal health.</b> Ensure animal health and welfare.		FI, FA
<b>5. Biodiversity.</b> 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
<b>6. Synergy.</b> Enhance positive ecological interaction, synergy, integration and complementarity among the elements of agroecosystems (animals, crops, trees, soil and water).	Synergy	FI, FA
<b>7. Economic diversification.</b> Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that small-scale farmers have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers.	Part of diversity	FA, FO
<b><i>Secure social equity/responsibility</i></b>		
<b>8. Co-creation of knowledge.</b> 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
<b>9. Social values and diets.</b> 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
<b>10. Fairness.</b> Support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment and fair treatment of intellectual property rights.		FA, FO
<b>11. Connectivity.</b> Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by re-embedding food systems into local economies.	Circular and solidarity economy	FA
<b>12. Land and natural resource governance.</b> 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
<b>13. Participation.</b> 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 from Nicholls *et al.*, 2016; CIDSE, 2018; FAO, 2018c.

## CIDSE 2018

« CIDSE is an international alliance of Catholic development agencies working together for global justice. »

They are active on Agroecology and dedicate efforts to advocate for a shift in policies toward agroecology. For this advocacy work they developed a **communication tool** on Agroecology (see below). This tool wants to highlight the work done by social movements (Nyeleni Declaration) and make it more effective and visible, while enhancing influence on global policies.

