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Linking Agency to Food and Nutrition Security (FNS): the Role of Agroecology

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Abstract

Food agency concerns are sparsely considered in Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) policies and analyses to date. To achieve FNS especially in regions with deeply entrenched power inequalities in agri-food systems requires agency responsiveness, empowering vulnerable and marginalised groups, and strengthen stakeholder engagement. This paper aims to develop a framework for investigating the role of agency of households in building their food security. Importantly, the study considers farming households as an element of the production and food system they are embedded in. Thus, we look at food insecurity as one outcome of the food system, under the current dominance of the corporate food regime, which aim is not the achievement of rural food security, but the production of global welfare. Thereby, the novelty of the framework is its focus on framing how especially agroecological farming practices and market systems shape the agency of farming households. Our claim is that rural households gain food system agency and independence from the dominant corporate food regime expressed in gaining control over productive resources and production decisions by producing agroecologically and using agroecological market systems. The paper reviews and builds upon the newly published thorough description of agency by the HLPE and the large body of literature on agroecology and agroecological food systems. It brings the two bodies of literature together by suggesting a conceptual framework and identifies pathways in which agroecology increases agency and leads to food security among smallholder farmers. The framework highlights the centrality of and interplay between agroecology and agency in achieving food security, especially among rural farming households, in a political ecology context of the dominance of the corporate food regime. Understanding how FSN is linked to governance, equity, and power dynamics within the agri-food system at multiple scales is important for the operationalisation of agency in empirical research.

Keywords: Agroecology, food agency, food security, food system, framework