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## An Agroecological Turn? Assessment of Kenya’s Policy and Legal Framework

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### Abstract

Agroecology is emerging as one of the approaches to sustainably transform agricultural systems. Fanned by global crises such as climate change and Covid-19, agroecology is however more than just a set of principles and practices. It aims to create a people-led movement that is supported by rather than led by science and policy. This paper analyses Kenya’s policies and laws to determine whether an agroecological turn is happening.

Given the cross-cutting nature of agroecology, Kenya’s policies and legislations are fragmented across different sectors but with little synergy. A sectoral approach still dominates, with many policies focused on attaining rapid economic growth. Even though the agricultural policies and strategies do not use the terms agroecology per se, they offer a good foundation for the promotion of and implementation of agroecological principles and practices (particularly levels 1 and 2 of Gliessman’s five levels). The environment, forestry and wildlife related policies and legislations address conservation of biodiversity and genetic resources and broader environmental stewardship. However, most are focused on protected areas rather than agricultural landscapes even though most of Kenya’s biodiversity are found in the agricultural landscapes. The trade policies provide little support to niche products such as organic products, even though export-led agriculture can stimulate adoption and upscaling of ecological agriculture to meet the often-higher international market standards. Some counties are showing leadership by developing agroecology and biodiversity policies even without similar policies or guidance from the national government. Overall, the policies provide a good framework for the promotion and enhancement of agroecology. However, poor implementation, little participation and influence of farmers, and poorly designed incentive structures remain.

Making the transition from conventional to agroecological agriculture and food system requires a portfolio of incentives, but also the empowerment and participation of small-scale farmers in decision-making. These are still largely lacking in Kenya. The agroecological turn is thus yet to fully take root in Kenya, but elements of such a turn are evident. More research on the barriers and opportunities for the establishment and up-scaling of agroecology in Kenya and other sub-Saharan African countries is necessary.

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