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Agroecology Strengthens Social Reproduction: Implications for Food Security and Nutrition

CHUKWUMA UME, STEPHANIE DOMPTAIL, ERNST-AUGUST NUPPENAU

Justus-Liebig University Giessen, Inst. of Agric. Policy and Market Res., Germany

Abstract

Agroecology is increasingly discussed and promoted to achieve secure food and nutrition in various parts of the world. However, critics suggest that agroecology may not be able to address the sub-Saharan African nutrition and development challenges in the long term because it constitutes a barrier to modernisation, locking farmers in a non-productive traditional agriculture and poverty trap. This shows that the pathways through which agroecology leads to improved food and nutrition security (FNS) among rural populations are still unclear. In fact, social and power dimensions intrinsically linked to an agroecology-based - or in fact any - intensification strategy appear to be ignored in the discussion and research on agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa. We claim that transitioning to agroecology, even at the farm level also transforms farming households' social and political characteristics, thereby affecting their overall handling of food and nutrition. Using primary survey data from rural Nigeria, 2021, this paper uncovers which pathways of causalities exist between agroecology and FNS and quantitatively assesses the moderating effect of physical and social reproduction on the relationship between agroecology and FNS. We first assume that farming households are socio-ecological systems, nested in larger socio-ecological systems (landscape) at the territory level. Second, we anchor our analysis within feminist economics, more specifically making use of the concepts of physical, social reproduction, and agency in our analysis. We consider FNS as a productive goal of the household, linked to several other reproductive dimensions. The concept of reproduction, found in feminist economics, is a useful innovative lens to empirically address the dimension of agency for FNS among farming households. Given the strong constraints for the participation of smallholders in the formal production economy, investigating how else they achieve to maintain themselves with alternative systems is crucial for food security in rural areas in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, agency, agroecology, physical reproduction, smallholders, social reproduction, sub-Saharan