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“Can agroecological farming feed the world?
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

The myth of agroecology – examples from Uganda

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Abstract

Not only in the Northern Hemisphere, but also in the South, there is a hype on agroecology, however, what’s behind this term, when we look into practice? Agroecological practices (AEP) mainly refer to crop rotation, inter- and mixed cropping, mulching, composting, biogas (compost and slurry), mechanical weed control, bio-pesticides, reduced tillage intensity, hedges and agroforestry, i.e., alley cropping, trenches, terracing, water and soil conservation, etc. – practices that are known for decades, however as single activities, while in case of organic farming as a systems approach.

In the mainly slopy Rwenzori region of Uganda, seven farms - two large coffee / tea farms (organic and mainstream) and five mixed so called agroecological oriented smallholder farms with banana, coffee, vegetables, root crops and goats / chicken, have been assessed via field walks, qualitative interviews, supported by a rich photo documentation. We classified AEP according to their relevance for soil erosion (soil fertility) control, climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity and farm output. Reasons are discussed under which conditions AE practices are established with high / low quantities and qualities, or not.

We conclude that the farming systems are diverse, but the implementation of AEP is more an exception than mainstream practice, and thus soil erosion and risk of landslides is high, biodiversity loss is on the rise and farms contribute to climate change. Where successfully implemented – as on one large and one smallholder farm, profound knowledge and long-term experiences, technical competences and, in the case of smallholders, group driven exchange and activities on practices, as well as well-developed access to markets for all farming systems, are crucial.

Keywords: Agroecology, farming systems, organic farming, smallholder farming