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

Agroecology approaches to enhance learning in a changing world: experiences from southern Africa

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Abstract

Climate change and a rapidly changing market context requires accelerated learning and adaptative capacity. This is key to local generation of suitable solutions to agricultural problems. Agroecology provides a foundational approach, one that emphasises understanding principles, harnessing biological processes, and enhancing local capacity. In Zimbabwe and Malawi agroecology approaches including participatory action research and living laboratories are part of an on-going learning process with rural communities, researchers and other stakeholders. Malawi aAgroecology living laboratory was established in 2013 and has supported farmer agency around soil health, crop diversification and sustainable intensification over the last decade. The Zimbabwe living labs are being established in “food territories” to support innovation and strategies for evaluating benefits of integrating various short and longer-term agroecology approaches implemented at farm-scale. Near term approaches include control of the pest Fall Armyworm using legume intercropping strategies, climate-adapted push pull and conservation agriculture systems with beneficial effects on natural enemies, such as ants, which suppressed this insect pest. Longer-term opportunities include payments for ecosystem services for key value chains and inclusive financing modalities are a novel and important approach. Generation of an expanded menu of agronomic innovations, continually generated and extended as options fit for contexts is underway. Scaling of on-farm experimentation is now possible and happening, where farmers generate innovations, along with researchers. This presentation will explore two decades of co-learning on farmer-centric Agroecology in maize based cropping systems in Southern Africa. New directions in terms of living laboratories being initiated in food territories of Zimbabwe, and action research renewed in Malawi will be explored.

Keywords: Agroecology, living laboratories, Malawi, Zimbabwe