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promoting climate resilient futures”

Towards regenerative, inclusive food systems in Eastern Africa: A multi-level approach

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Abstract

A widespread paradigm of current food system development hinges on the short-term, linear exploitation of natural resources, aiming at high cash crop yields. This Green Revolution style of farming usually does not account for vulnerable groups and nature. This is also true for places in Eastern Africa where environmental and social degradation is being observed. Instead of trying to repair with similar means which have created the apparent impasse, we suggest a transformative approach to shift the direction of agri-food systems. Regenerative thinking and acting offers a comprehensive, long-term, place and landscape-based development approach. Its aim is to continuously foster and balance biophysical and social capitals, potential and opportunities. We conceptualise and test a development approach with an international team, spanning doers, thinkers and enablers from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and The Netherlands. Concrete action takes place on the ground. This is why we facilitate multi-stakeholder interactions in selected locations. Understanding the locations and their manifold stakeholder groups that depend on the environment is the crucial entry point. We develop workshops with such groups to verbalize and elaborate on their visions, needs and offers. In a stepwise procedure, the groups diverge and converge, coming to a joint understanding of actions that are desirable, feasible and benefiting local groups with different degrees of vulnerability, power holders and nature. While these local initiatives are developed from within, they are also seeking inspiration from outside and aim to generate positive spillover effects. Regional food system innovation platforms, equally set up as multi-stakeholder groups, play roles as brokers, inspirers and policy influencers. The platforms' ultimate aims are to improve the enabling environment for fair and just agri-food systems to flourish, and to initiate and support transformation. Monitoring, evaluation and learning are embedded at all levels since this individual and collaborative development process is a way of life that tries to remain valid under changing conditions, thus, requiring critical reflection and adaptation. We are looking forward to presenting our state of the art and discussing prospects, traps and new ideas with the audience.

Keywords: Food system transition, inclusivity, multi-stakeholder partnership, regenerative development, theory of change

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