

Session Three
Design Strategies: Incorporating Agroecological Principles

Group Consultation

Question 1: How do the principles and design approaches fit within USAID projects? Does this align with FFP programs and strategic objectives? How does what we are currently doing coincide or differ from these principles and design strategies?

- These principles align with FFP. But it's difficult to do because of the environments we operate in: local government, land tenure, etc.
- There is a gap between what is and what ought to be. FFP is leaning farther forward than other parts of USAID.
 - Market opportunity/commodity emphasis tends to still dominate discussion. Framing hunger as a production issue is not grounded in reality. Hunger is rooted in poverty, not absolute production levels.
 - FFP is thinking further into the future by considering these principles, but we must close the gap in messaging.
 - If there was an initial risk and vulnerability assessment, agroecology could show its value.
 - Is the secondary status of agroecology because of weak evidence or the prevailing paradigm?
 - If markets internalize some of the negative aspects of conventional agriculture, value of agroecology could be more readily apparent.
- The importance of context and site-specific considerations prevent these principles from being easily incorporated. We need to talk about what parts of context matter—both social and ecological processes must be considered.
 - One overlooked aspect of today's discussion is gender. Gender in agriculture is key. If these practices increase the labor burden on women, then they are not sustainable.
- Why doesn't the toolkit get delivered in its entirety by the time it gets to the beneficiary?
 - In donor-driven projects, there are limitations for educational opportunities.
 - National policy changes are crucial in longer-term success
 - Land tenure shift in Niger affected forest management

- The inherent long-term timescale of agroecology makes it difficult to incorporate into 5-year programs
 - The donor will want more immediate results
 - Rebuilding nature is not an overnight thing. But it is a critical part of a longer-term solution. This fact will not be appreciated if we only operate in an “emergency management” mode.
 - With new direction in FFP, projects will hopefully run longer than the current cycle
- The economic driver of ecological-based systems. If the ecosystems allow for more stable, reliable production because of agroecology, then these systems should be more attractive for buyers.
 - Small-holder farmers are also in America; these principles are critical here too.
- Ag development historically has leaned towards commercial agriculture development. Do these principles address market linkages?
 - The products of agroecological systems can create markets for their products. We don’t need to strain to reach the current market of agribusiness products.
 - There are markets being created for sustainable cocoa and palm oil. We should try to work with private industries to green the supply chain. They know their customer base a lot better than we do, and the demand for commodities is only going up.

Question 2: How can these principles and design strategies help smallholder farmers adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses? How does what we are currently doing to build resilience of smallholder farmers to these shocks and stresses compliment or differ from what has been presented?

- Water conservation and composting programs will protect farmers against shocks. There is also a natural alignment with improved nutrition. If crop diversity is adopted, then diet will improve.
- Soil health is pivotal in creating resilient ecosystems. It could help with pests and plant diseases and help the farmer transition away from pesticide dependency. Could provide an immediate return to farmers with an early crop.
- How to complement short-term market-based considerations vs. long-term resource management
 - Redefine wealth to include natural resources. Behavioral change must be a key part of programs.

- Farmer decisions may harm the ecosystem, but we must understand farmer decisions from their perspective. Farmers are rational actors, but what are going into their decision making? What do they perceive as the biggest risks? Hunger is often more pressing than environmental concerns.
- How to draw on different sources of knowledge—indigenous, academic—and how useful each source is depending on the context.
 - The threat of losing indigenous knowledge during violence, drought. If most of locals have died, local traditions lost. This loss of knowledge affects future resiliency.