



A Stakeholders Brief on AMCEN@40

**From Ground Realities to Global Policy:
Positioning Agroecology at the center
of AMCEN's 40-Year Vision**

IN BRIEF

At its 40th milestone, AMCEN stands at a political and ecological inflection point. Climate volatility, land degradation, and rural inequality continue to deepen across the continent, yet existing responses remain fragmented. This brief argues that agroecology is not simply a farming system, but a political strategy to rebalance power over land, restore ecological functions, and democratize rural development. The brief makes a compelling case that agroecology enhances resilience, reduces input dependency, and strengthens household food security. Still, its implementation across Africa remains scattered, often confined to donor-led pilot projects without legal or institutional scaffolding. AMCEN's 20th Ordinary Session offers a historic moment to embed agroecology not at the periphery but at the heart of Africa's food and climate policies.

The brief outlines five policy fronts for moving agroecology from innovation to institution. First, it calls for a Pan-African Agroecology Knowledge Platform to anchor technical, social, and financial evidence across member states. Second, it urges that agroecology be explicitly integrated into national climate plans, biodiversity strategies, and agricultural budgets. Third, the brief proposes a Regional Agroecology Transition Facility to ensure women-led cooperatives and smallholder groups gain direct access to concessional finance. Fourth, it introduces the idea of Agroecology-Energy Hubs; community-run systems that convert agro-waste into clean fuel while restoring soils and livelihoods. Lastly, it insists on gender accountability in all agroecological programs, aligning with Agenda 2063.

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FIDEP Foundation



Introduction

At forty, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN@40) stands at a moment of reflection and redefinition. The 20th Ordinary Session arrives as African countries grapple with climate volatility, ecological degradation, and deepening rural inequality. Agroecology offers a framework to respond not just to these crises, but to the systemic failures that underlie them. It is not simply a farming method; it is a governance paradigm, grounded in climate science, social equity, and ecological integrity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) identifies agroecological systems as among the most effective adaptation measures in low-resource settings. They strengthen food security, build soil carbon and improve biodiversity, all while enhancing the decision-making power of local actors. The African Union, in its 2024 Continental Report on Resilient Food Systems, underscores that agroecology offers “a strategic pathway to climate-resilient rural economies.” Yet the transition remains fragmented, underfunded, and politically undervalued. AMCEN@40 provides a critical opportunity to move from fragmented practice to continental strategy.

1. Good Practices Alone Are Not Enough. We Need a Critical Mass and a Policy Shift.

Across Africa, agroecological practices have demonstrated remarkable resilience and productivity under climate stress. From farmer-managed natural regeneration in Niger to traditional rotational cropping systems in Ethiopia and decentralized composting initiatives in Ghana’s urban peripheries, these models consistently deliver outcomes that align with the objectives of climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and rural economic stability. Recent assessments by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2024) and the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2019) confirm that agroecological systems can enhance soil organic matter by up to 30%, increase yields under rainfed conditions by 20–50%, and strengthen household-level food security.

Yet, these gains remain largely siloed. Many community-led initiatives operate without institutional backing, regulatory alignment, or access to sustainable finance. They are visible at the grassroots level but structurally invisible in national policy frameworks. The absence of formal recognition impedes their ability to scale, and without institutional channels for policy integration, their transformative potential remains unrealized.

Documentation alone will not change this trajectory. What is needed is a deliberate shift in governance and political economy that transitions agroecology from a patchwork of “best practices” into a recognized strategic pillar of agricultural and climate policy. This requires anchoring agroecological systems within formal planning instruments and budgeting processes.

A high-leverage intervention would be the establishment of a Continental Agroecology Knowledge and Policy Platform, hosted by an AU-affiliated institution with a mandate to convene ministries of agriculture, environment, finance, and gender. AMCEN and the African Union Commission may be urged to lead this effort, working with NEPAD and regional economic communities to ensure alignment with the Malabo Declaration, the African Climate Change Strategy, and CAADP targets.

This platform must do more than aggregate technical data. It could further create a unified repository of agroecological knowledge that includes institutional innovations, land tenure models, gender-responsive metrics, and evidence of economic viability. Peer-reviewed meta-analyses (Gliessman et al., 2023; Tiftonell et al., 2022) point to a 25–70% reduction in input costs under agroecological transitions; numbers that are politically relevant in budget-constrained ministries. When integrated into macroeconomic planning, these systems could reduce fiscal dependency on subsidized fertilizers and generate savings for public investment in rural infrastructure.

Development partner and financial institutions may be urged to also recalibrate their approach. Current investment portfolios heavily favor industrial input-based systems, despite their marginal returns in degraded landscapes. Redirecting even a fraction of these flows (just 10%) towards agroecological innovation, extension services, and participatory research would catalyze a systemic shift. Institutions such as the African Development Bank, IFAD, and the Green Climate Fund could integrate agroecology indicators in their climate financing frameworks and disbursement criteria.

Policy coherence is another critical frontier. Ministries of agriculture, land, and environment often work in parallel, resulting in fragmented implementation and diluted impact. Agroecology requires a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism that compels harmonization of policy instruments. National agroecology task forces, with representation from civil society, farmer organizations, and local governments, could serve as implementation bodies under existing food system governance frameworks.

This is not a call for idealism. It is a call for institutional realism grounded in evidence. The IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (2022) identifies agroecology as a key strategy for both mitigation and adaptation, with co-benefits for equity and health. Yet, without structured pathways for institutionalization, these benefits will remain localized and vulnerable to policy discontinuity.

Governments that seek to transition towards climate-resilient, socially inclusive food systems must treat agroecology not as an add-on, but as a foundational component of national

development. This means embedding agroecology in public procurement rules, climate-smart land restoration programs, and school feeding schemes.

Policy credibility on climate and food systems will increasingly be measured not by the volume of pilot projects, but by the depth of institutional reforms and the clarity of public accountability frameworks. Agroecology is ready for scale. The question is whether governance is ready to make the right shift it.

2. Scaling Up Agroecology Requires Legal Recognition, Financing and Institutional Support.

Agroecology cannot remain confined to demonstration plots or development pilot projects. To unlock its full value, states must embed agroecological principles into public policy and regulatory frameworks. This includes land tenure protections for women and Indigenous communities, public procurement systems for local agroecological produce, and reformed agricultural extension services that prioritize co-creation over top-down knowledge transfer.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and agricultural investment plans offer critical entry points. Yet analysis from Biovision Foundation and IPES-Food (2023) shows that only 6 of 55 African countries reference agroecology in their NDCs. AMCEN may possibly advocate for the inclusion of agroecology indicators across all environment-related policy instruments. In providing financial support, the African Development Bank and Green Climate Fund on their part may be urged to establish a Regional Agroecology Transition Facility, with flexible access windows for cooperatives, youth groups, and women's associations.

3. The Energy–Agroecology Nexus: From Soil Fertility to Fuel Sovereignty.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) underscores that climate resilience and poverty reduction are inseparable, particularly in regions where land degradation, food insecurity, and energy poverty converge. Nowhere is this more evident than in rural Africa, where over 70% of agricultural production remains rain-fed and over 80% of households still depend on woodfuel for cooking (IEA, 2023). The failure to integrate clean energy innovation into agroecological systems represents a missed opportunity of significant scale. Agroecology is often framed narrowly as a food security measure, but its waste-to-energy potential remains largely untapped. Transforming crop residues, shea husks, cocoa pod husks, and livestock waste into clean energy through biochar, briquettes and pellet fuel can simultaneously restore soil fertility and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while also reducing demand for forest biomass. This dual benefit demands policy integration across ministries, not sectoral silos.

Policy efforts may possibly not stop at technical promotion of cleaner cookstoves. They must support decentralized models of energy-soil systems governance. Integrated Agroecology-Energy Transition Hubs which are designed and managed through rural cooperatives can serve as incubators for energy sovereignty, especially for women farmers who are disproportionately

burdened by fuelwood collection, respiratory illness, and energy poverty. Peer-reviewed evidence from Kenya and Burkina Faso shows that community-scale biochar initiatives increase maize yields by 30–45%, reduce deforestation pressures, and generate income from surplus biochar sales (Lehmann et al., 2021; Fungo et al., 2023). Investment in such hubs must be supported by public finance institutions, with the African Development Bank and Global Environment Facility targeting rural value chains where energy transitions meet land restoration. Policy guidance from AMCEN could promote these hubs as infrastructure for both resilience and redistribution.

Governance frameworks must ensure that benefits flow back into communities through participatory ownership and clear accountability mechanisms. Subsidies for decentralized biochar production and agro-waste conversion technologies must prioritize women-led cooperatives, not just private sector actors. Ministries of Energy, Agriculture, and Environment need to align incentives, integrating biochar into national soil health strategies, and recognizing clean biomass fuel as part of national energy access targets. The World Bank (2023) estimates that scaling biochar and agro-waste fuel across West Africa could reduce emissions by 100 million tons CO₂e by 2030. But without institutional coordination, these figures will remain theoretical. Governments must act now to embed these innovations into national adaptation plans and just energy transition frameworks. The choice is not between food and energy. It is between fragmented solutions and integrated systems that work for people and the planet.

Conclusion

Agroecology presents one of the most credible pathways for Africa to respond to climate vulnerability, restore degraded lands, and democratize food systems. It's clear that agroecological approaches improve resilience, reduce emissions, and enhance food sovereignty when embedded in inclusive governance structures. Yet, agroecology is not merely a technical method for sustainable farming. It is a political proposition of rebalancing power in how land is managed, who controls resources, and whose knowledge counts in policy design. This is why AMCEN must no longer treat agroecology as an optional innovation but must elevate it as central to Africa's environmental and socio-economic future.

As AMCEN looks ahead, its relevance will not be measured by declarations but by its ability to institutionalize agroecology as a continental strategy. This requires regulatory shifts at the national level, cross-sectoral coordination, and access to capital that prioritizes grassroots movements. It also requires breaking the silos between agriculture, energy, and climate.

Policy Recommendations for Institutional Uptake and Action

1. A Continental Knowledge System for Agroecological Transitions

We propose that AMCEN initiate the creation of a Pan-African Agroecology Knowledge Platform to serve as a coordinated, science-policy interface for documenting and supporting regenerative agricultural practices across the continent. Anchored in the IPBES Nature Futures Framework

(2023), this platform would consolidate farmer-led innovations, evaluate policy impacts, and facilitate inter-country learning grounded in ecological justice and sovereignty. It offers a mechanism to elevate local agroecological practice into the domain of continental policymaking, ensuring that state and non-state actors alike benefit from shared knowledge, harmonized metrics, and technical collaboration. The urgency of biodiversity loss, land degradation, and climate vulnerability demands a collective repository of African-grown solutions. This proposition aligns with AMCEN's mandate to foster environmental cooperation and positions the region as a thought leader in ecological governance.

2. Institutional Integration of Agroecology in National Development Commitments

We urge member states to embed agroecology into their NDCs, NBSAPs and medium-term agricultural investment frameworks. Agroecology remains one of the few pathways that simultaneously deliver climate resilience, biodiversity restoration, and inclusive rural development as substantiated by the IPCC Special Report on Climate and Land (2019) and the FAO's Scaling up Agroecology Initiative. Its absence from national climate and development plans reflects a missed opportunity for both ecological and fiscal optimization. Governments should adopt agroecology as a policy pillar, set measurable targets for its expansion, and allocate budget lines accordingly, opening pathways to international climate finance. Strategic alignment at the national level will catalyze institutional support and enhance Africa's negotiating power in global forums on food, climate, and biodiversity.

3. A Regional Agroecology Transition Facility for Smallholder Equity

We propose the establishment of a dedicated Regional Agroecology Transition Facility under the joint coordination of the African Development Bank and the Green Climate Fund. This instrument would mobilize concessional finance, direct grants, and risk guarantees for smallholder cooperatives, particularly those led by women and youth. Current financing architecture overwhelmingly favors capital-intensive agribusiness, leaving grassroots producers under-resourced despite their centrality to Africa's food system and ecological stewardship. This facility would re-balance investment flows and enable scale without displacement, prioritizing equity, land tenure security, and ecological integrity. Politically, it would demonstrate Africa's commitment to just transitions and contribute to inclusive economic recovery in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

4. Integrated Agroecology-Energy Hubs for Climate and Rural Transformation

We call for the piloting of integrated agroecology-energy transition hubs in key agricultural corridors, particularly in regions where bio-waste from farming remains underutilized. These hubs would convert agro-waste into energy for clean cooking and rural electrification, while supporting soil regeneration and climate-smart production systems. Endorsed by the IEA (2022), such models directly address Africa's clean cooking crisis, which continues to affect over 900 million people, disproportionately harming women and children. A cooperative governance structure involving local producers, traditional authorities, and ministries of energy and

agriculture would ensure inclusivity and sustainability. This integrated approach reinforces circular economy principles and strengthens the region's climate leadership on energy-food nexus policies.

5. A Binding Commitment to Gender Justice in Agroecological Policy Frameworks

We recommend that all agroecological programs and policies across the continent integrate binding gender equity provisions that guarantee women's access to land, productive resources, and leadership roles. Despite rhetorical commitments, systemic exclusion persists in both policy design and implementation, limiting the transformative potential of agroecology. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and Maputo Protocol provide a normative framework, but national enforcement remains inconsistent. We propose the adoption of gender-disaggregated monitoring tools, institutional mandates for women's representation, and budgetary targets for female-led initiatives. Prioritizing gender justice is not only a moral imperative but an economic necessity one that will multiply the returns of agroecological investments and deepen the social contract between governments and their citizens.

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