

SDC A&FS Network: Newsletter

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A&FS Newsletter

The newsletter of the SDC Agriculture & Food Systems Network provides you with the latest news submitted by the network members four times a year: projects, publications, events, network activities - everything to do with food systems. Feel free to subscribe by clicking the button on the right (network members are automatically subscribed).

Latest issue: March 2023



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Editorial

Dear Network Colleagues,

Since our last newsletter, the **Food System Learning Journey** (FSLJ) has substantially matured. We have held the FSLJ regional workshops in Bamako, Cairo, Harare and Tashkent and at the time of writing this are in the process of completing the one in Bangkok. We have garnered a rich array of fascinating insights. We hope you have been able to follow the first two global webinars attached to these workshops, and urge you to sign up for the next one coming up for **Asia on 5th April**. If you haven't already, check out our [FSLJ landing page](#). You will also find details about our final regional workshop which will take place mid-April in Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

Most importantly, however, we are pleased to announce that we will finally be holding our first post-Covid in person global face-to-face meeting from **26 – 28 September in Rome**. So pencil that in your diaries and await more details coming your way very soon.

But in the here and now, we are honoured to present some of the exciting initiatives been undertaken by our network members.

- First, we have Helen Pytherch reporting back from the **NICE Peer Learning Week** in Kenya which took a particular focus on urban food systems across different parts of the globe
- Next, Malte Reshöft writes about how the much-vaunted gap between academia and practice is being bridged in Niger as smallholder farmers and university researcher of Maradi University have come together to **co-create knowledge and practice in the field of soil fertility**.
- Then, returning to Eastern Africa, Séverine Erismann dives into the mechanics of peri-urban food systems in pursuit of how they can **sustainably provide healthy diets**.

In terms of news items, we have links to :

- an interesting paper authored by the Centre for Food Policy proposing 45 different actions to evolve our food systems towards environmental sustainability;
- the key results and recommendations of the Agroecology Dialogue Series which was recently presented in Bern by the FAO and Biovision;
- a new Biovision Policy Brief on organic agriculture and food self-sufficiency in Bhutan;
- PSA's (Plateforme Souveraineté alimentaire) first educational kit for food sovereignty advocacy;
- the Syngenta Foundation and University of Bern's efforts to strengthen seed systems in Ethiopia; and
- the Sustainable Coffee Project in the same country.

A big thank you to Sebastiano Caleffi, Tanja Carillo and Isabelle Lejeune for informing us of these resources.

Last but not least, we are pleased to introduce you to our new Academic Intern, Lara Sponagel, who recently took over from Rahel Streuli. Meet Lara under our [who-is-who](#) rubric.

We hope you enjoy the read!

Your A+FS focal points,



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Member Articles

NICE Peer Learning Week in Kenya: Urban food systems in action



After several online events, all six NICE cities finally got together for a face-to-face, peer-learning event in Kenya from 11-18 February. It focused on food system governance and facilitating multisectoral engagement from nutrition, health, and agriculture, as well as from civil society and local businesses. The participants learned from Kisumu, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Bambilor about their food city charters and about the anchoring of food system platforms through local legislation and by-laws.

[Go to the NICE Winter School website](#)



Helen Prytherch et al.

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Peer learning concept

The Nutrition in City Ecosystems (NICE) Project works on urban food systems with six “front-runner” secondary cities – two each in the involved countries of Bangladesh, Kenya, and Rwanda. Secondary cities are typically of a size where food system transformation is considered more feasible, as argued in [this NICE supported publication](#).

In each of these cities, it is the local government, municipality, or city corporation that is the main project partner. They have identified focal points from the city architecture that engage in the peer-learning process. The process is facilitated by the World Food System Centre (WFSC) and the AgroEcosystem group at ETH-Zürich, which has a pre-existing collaboration with the FAO Headquarters.

From virtual to face-to-face

After several online peer-learning events between all six NICE cities from all countries, a face-to-face peer-learning event was organised in Kenya from 11-17 February 2023.

The program was agreed between the city leadership, WFSC & AE-group at ETH, and FAO HQ, and made the link to the FAO Green Cities Initiative that works in Kenya in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. The opportunity was taken to involve the city of Bambilor from Senegal which is also part of the Green Cities Initiative. Jointly with officials from all these cities, national partners from the Ministries of Education, Health and Agriculture, FAO Kenyan representative, and participation of the Swiss Embassy in Nairobi, the peer-learning event involved visits to Busia and Nairobi.

The topics of focus included food system governance and facilitating multisectoral engagement from nutrition, health and agriculture, as well as from civil society and local businesses involved in food production, processing and sales. Here the NICE cities learnt in particular from Kisumu, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Bambilor about their food city charters, and anchoring of food system platforms through local legislation and by-laws.

Attention was given to the channeling of nutritious food to the public procurement system which Busia city has been successfully doing with its school feeding program, to the whole question of introducing agroecological transition, and to the interlinkages between demand and supply, and how this can be best achieved.

When working with secondary cities, the farming systems involve the food shed, while many consumers are based in the urban/peri-urban centers, and it was reflected how demand work needs to include consumers more broadly, through social activations, while also involving farmers, and more traditional multipliers like schools, health facilities (clinics), and community nutrition officers. The cities are also cognizant that many urban and peri-urban inhabitants are constrained in their consumer choices by a lack of resources, triggering the attention given to the public procurement system, and also examining other support modalities like small grants.

Poster gallery

The cities involved all presented the different ways they are working on urban food systems through a poster.

Outlook and next steps

Going forward, the NICE project will continue its peer learning concept through a mix of virtual and face-to-face meetings. It is also planned to continue the fruitful exchange with FAO at country level and with the Green City Initiative. As the NICE city focal points gain confidence, they will start to contribute to city networks at national and multilateral levels (like the Milan Pact). The two cities involved in Rwanda (Rusizi and Rubavu) are part of a national urban agriculture city network where experience sharing has already begun.

Ultimately, the peer learning is closely linked with the question of scales and the NICE project is starting to document its learnings in a synthetic manner for sharing with other cities that will be coming on board with the initial three countries, and ultimately beyond.

For more information on the NICE project see our website: <https://nice-nutrition.ch> and recently published protocol paper: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1081535>

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When Science and Practice meet



A small organization in Niger demonstrates how academic knowledge can be transferred from the university directly to smallholder farmers. Through a process of co-creation between academics and farmers, this knowledge is implemented and then reported back to academia; thus, creating a virtuous circle of knowledge-sharing and -creation which benefits both sides.



Malte Reshöft

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The story began with internationally renowned entomologist Dr. Ibrahim Baoua. When coming back to his home country, after having spent many years abroad, he decided to combine his university career with the endeavor to bring back the academic knowledge to the farmers, especially the smallholders in his region, the Sahel in Niger. Dr. Baoua works as a scientist at the University of Maradi, but at the same time he has funded an organization, named “Sahel Bio”, to facilitate the two-way exchange: knowledge from the university to the farmers on the ground, and also bringing their knowledge and experience back to academia, so that both can cross-fertilize each other.

Speaking of fertilization: that was one of the first entry points, because soil is becoming more and more infertile and land degradation is rampant in the Sahel – desertification, erosion, and overgrazing, to name a few of the challenges. Dr. Baoua and the very engaged team at Sahel Bio, mainly students and academics from Maradi University, came up with the idea to use effective microorganisms – EM (*Pseudomonas fluorescens*)– as one means to improve soil fertility (along with compost, green manure, and crop rotation). It’s not only

about bringing this technology and knowledge to the villages, but in the communities, small groups of “field scientists” are formed to experiment with the EM and other technologies and make them as easy to manage as possible for the very specific context.

This also applies to Dr. Baoua’s pet subject: entomology. The millet head miner moth (*Heliocheilus albipunctella*) is a serious threat to millet production in the region. One possibility to fight the moth is using a minute wasp (*Habrobracon hebetor*), which lays its egg into the caterpillar of the moth during the propagation cycle. Bringing this cutting-edge knowledge to the smallholder farmers is definitely one of the highlights of Sahel Bio’s work and sheds a light on how university knowledge, if implemented correctly, can directly serve the needs of the poor and vulnerable population.

The absence of quality seeds, especially for millet, beans, and peanuts, is a serious factor hampering yield increases. By having a well-organized, community-based and -driven seed improvement process, backed and supported by the scientists, Sahel Bio was able to significantly improve yields of this staple crop. For Sahel Bio, “high-quality” means that the seeds are responding to the needs of the community in the given environmental context: easy germination, propagation, and storage in the community. Additionally, the plants show good drought-, pest- and disease-resistance and, most importantly, have a short vegetation cycle to respond to the ever-shorter rain periods.

Sahel Bio is not only able to meet the needs of the smallholder for better seeds, but the group processes also foster and strengthen social cohesion and self-esteem in the communities – both important factors to improve resilience.

New partnerships for more sustainable food systems in Kenya and Uganda



Biovision funds three new innovative projects that ultimately aim to transform urban food consumption in Kenya and Uganda. These projects are implemented by grassroots partners who actively engage a variety of urban and peri-urban food system actors to strengthen both the demand for, and the availability of, healthy, safe and sustainably produced foods.

[Go to the Biovision website](#)



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Our partners Slow Food Kenya and Slow Food Uganda endeavor to bring food vendors closer to producers. Cooks from restaurants, food outlets, and street kitchens are encouraged to increasingly use local and traditional ingredients in their meal preparations, especially also fruits and vegetables grown locally by small-scale agroecological producers. Through this, the involved cooks commit themselves to the protection of agricultural biodiversity, while also promoting gastronomic knowledge and local culture.

To strengthen consumer awareness and empowerment, Biovision also supports consumer organizations, namely the Consumer Grassroots Association (CGA) in Kenya, and the Global Consumer Center (CONSENT) in Uganda. These two organizations are strong advocates for improved food safety regulations at national and local level. Their efforts are focussed on improving accountability and traceability mechanisms for consumers, as well as raising awareness among consumers of their rights and the channels they can use to act accordingly when necessary.

Furthermore, to ensure that not only affluent urbanites have access to affordable, healthy, safe, and sustainably produced food, Biovision's international partners in Kenya, The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, Feedback to the Future, and Diabetes Awareness Trust, will work towards linking vulnerable urban consumers, slum vendors (mama mboga), producers, and other stakeholders along the value chain to co-create and test new markets and business models for agroecological produce.

For more information, visit www.biovision.ch or contact s.erismann@biovision.ch

News

45 actions to orient food systems towards environmental sustainability



The Centre for Food Policy recently released a new Policy Brief to help guide and inform policy makers to transform current food systems. The policy brief addresses the challenge of making explicit and highly specific recommendations to increase the environmental sustainability of food systems (due to the number of variables at play and the complex ways in which they interact).

[Read the Policy Brief](#)

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Key results and recommendations from the Agroecology Dialogue Series



In 2022, FAO and Biovision Foundation organized the Agroecology Dialogue Series, an initiative in support of the Agroecology Coalition. The discussions from each dialogue have been summarized in three briefs. The briefs were officially launched during the FAO Deputy

Director-General's visit to Switzerland on 22 February.

[Read the Policy Briefs](#)

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Feebate policies to upscale organic agriculture and food self-sufficiency in Bhutan



The Biovision Foundation recently released a Policy Brief discussing how feebate policies could upscale organic agriculture and food self-sufficiency in Bhutan, specifically looking at rice production. The simulations show that a feebate (fee and rebate) policy, coupled with promotion and training in agroecological farming methods, could incentivize widespread adoption of agroecology.

[Read the Policy Brief](#)

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Release of the first educational kit for advocacy in food sovereignty



The PSA has released its first educational kit to improve advocacy in food sovereignty. This kit is designed for actors and trainers from all sectors of international cooperation to better choose their action strategies, lead and hold discussions, and implement advocacy strategies, by promoting and sharing experiences. (In French)

[Read more](#) [Watch the educational video](#)



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Strengthen Seed Systems of TEF in Ethiopia – Promotion of improved varieties among farmers



Since 2006, the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture has been supporting the Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research and the University of Bern to improve the productivity of Tef, one of the most important staple crops in Ethiopia, through developing and delivering improved varieties. The project has entered in a new phase, and intends to develop Seed Systems in order to facilitate access by small scale farmers to quality seeds of improved Tef varieties

[Read the article](#) [Go to the website](#)

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Sustainable Coffee: introducing traceability in the coffee supply chain in Ethiopia



Find out more about this interesting Sustainable Coffee project, implemented by Walter Matter in collaboration with different partners of the coffee value chain in Ethiopia. Coffee is among the most important export commodity of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's coffee is of high quality and produced extensively as garden or forest coffee by millions of small scale farmers. In order to comply with certification, however traceability systems need to be introduced in the value chain, which is highly challenging.

[Read the presentation](#) [Go to the website](#)

Walter Matter

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Events

1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference



Nairobi, Kenya, or online | 21-24 March

This hybrid conference, subtitled "Transforming Food Systems for Responsible Production, Consumption and Social Wellbeing", aims to invoke consciousness and motivate regional and continental communities to discuss how to curb the negative impacts of current, unsustainable food systems.

[Learn more](#) [Register here](#)

4th Global Conference of One Planet Network's Sustainable Food Systems Programme



Hanoi, Vietnam, or online | 24-27 April

"The transformation we need: Emerging from global crises by shaping sustainable, resilient, healthy, and inclusive food systems."

Contributing to the 2023 Stock-Taking Moment of the UN FSS follow-up process, this conference will look at how food systems need to be transformed to overcome these crises in order to minimize the risk of global collapse and achieve the SDGs.

[Learn more](#)

Who is who



Lara Sponagel

Academic Trainee, SDCs

What do you love, or what is special, about your work?

After studying for more than five years I'm really happy to finally gain some practical insights into how all the knowledge I've acquired over the years translates into action. This traineeship combines my diverse interests in food systems and global health and brings them into an international context. At the same time, the local and regional reference remains and provides an overview of the comprehensive interventions of SDC on different levels. Furthermore, I get to work with people with many different backgrounds and experiences which provides an inspiring, supportive and educative environment.

What is your favourite quote and why?

“I raise my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.” – Malala Yousafzai.

Malala summarizes a feeling I have felt many times when growing up or whilst studying. I had the luck to grow up in Switzerland, which comes with a lot of privilege. But for me, this privilege also comes with many responsibilities. That I am able to get an education and live so freely today is thanks to many, many women that came before me. Still, many women around the world do not get to live the same realities as I do. Therefore I think it is the most important thing, that if you have a voice and a platform for that voice, you also have a responsibility to use it. Or like Madeleine Albright put it: “It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.”

What is the most important lesson you have learned from your work?

That easy answers don't exist. Very often times, even for questions that appear to be rather simple, the realities are way more complex than we often think. This can be challenging. At the same time it is an opportunity to acknowledge the complexities of our international systems and us as humans. To sustainably navigate this, communication is crucial.