

Agroecology in Ghana, the sesame sector as an opportunity

Ghana's vision for agriculture is based on the use of hybrid seeds and the application of chemical fertilisers. In order to make agriculture sustainable, the National Coordinator for the Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association advocates for the implementation of agroecology in the sesame value chain.

Grain de Sel (GDS): Can you present the main challenges of agriculture in Ghana? What about the sesame sector?

Amoah Clifford (AC): In Ghana, the main challenges for agriculture are the low capacity of smallholders, the lack of agriculture infrastructure and the low access to market opportunities. Many farmers produce their commodities but lose a lot of income for the commodities sometimes end up rotting in the fields. Besides, the methods of production are not sustainable because of the country over reliance on chemical fertilisers due to low soil fertility. This leads to increased cost of production or land degradation.

THE ONLY WAY
WE CAN MAKE AGRICULTURE
SUSTAINABLE IS TO PROMOTE
AGROECOLOGY

As for the sesame sector, it is still at a very young stage with very limited information about production. It lacks support from government and also sesame cleaning plants. Sesame grows well in the Northern part of Ghana and some parts of Oti Region and Bono East. In 2013, the international development organisation SNV engaged some farmers to cultivate sesame as a cash crop. It yielded some good results and was scaled up to other parts of Northern Ghana. It became important to have a Sesame farmer association that would focus on sesame production and lead the development of its value chain to a stronger supply chain. That led to the birth of the Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association in 2015.

The Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association has been promoting the application of agroecology in sesame culti-

vation. We identified viable crops to rotate with sesame such as soghum, millet and Guinean corn. The farmers were also trained in conservation agriculture methods where crops residues add organic matter and improve the soil conditions. Farmers were encouraged to plant sesame and groundnut on the same field as well as cowpea and other leguminous crops.

GDS: What is Ghana's government agricultural policy regarding agroecology?

AC: The Government of Ghana (GoG) currently does not have a policy on agroecology. Its understanding of modernisation of agriculture is based on the use of hybrid seeds, the application of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and weedicides. In the 2019 budget statement, the GoG projected to spend 400 million Ghana cedis on 300,000mt of inorganic fertilizers and 200,000mt of organic fertilizers under this subsidy programme! It should be noted that gaps in the implementation of the programme lead to the smuggling of the fertilizers to other countries such as Burkina Faso and Togo (p 17).

Despite the general support to the intensification of the Ghanaian agriculture, some Agricultural Department levels and stakeholders still support interventions or field implementations on agroecology.

GDS: What have been the main impacts of the National fertilizer subsidy programme on your activities?

AC: The GoG has been making some efforts by promoting organic fertilizers under its subsidy programme. At the same time, the GoG and its agent's campaigns are geared towards encouraging farmers to use chemical fertilizers with the view of increasing crop yields and to improve farmers' incomes. Those fertilizers are highly subsidized and sold at very low prices to farmers. Thus, adoption of agroecology practices is slow as more people tend to use fertilizers even if farmers recognize the benefits of agroecology to their health and environment.

GDS: What is the Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association's role regarding agroecology?

AC: First we needed to generate evidence of the practical part of agroecology. The Association engaged with farmers in a bid to discourage use of chemical fertilizers. Alternative solutions are provided as climate smart farming practices such as planting short duration crops. We also sensitize them on the benefits of agroecology for the reduction of production cost. We also realised that there is a need to do advocacy. Our advocacy is rooted at the regional and district levels. We brought various departments to a common platform to discuss on the practical part of agroecology and its integration into their medium-term development plan. We meet annually and undertake farmer exchange and learning visits on the field. This has led to the setting up of agroecology demonstration field.

We think the only way we can make agriculture sustainable for the rural farmers is to promote agroecology! Thus, the Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association has been pushing the GoG to see sesame as an opportunity to include in its current agricultural policy. ■

Clifford Amoah Adagera



Clifford Amoah Adagera is the National Coordinator for the Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association.

The Ghana National Sesame Business Farmers Association is a farming systems-centred apex body. It operates a sesame agribusiness-focused strategy, and works as an advocacy-oriented structure.