



## Conclusion

**Abstract** The final chapter concludes the book by summarizing our arguments and the urgency of agroecology transformations.

As the world's crises exacerbate inequity and fuel the erosion of the ecological basis of the world, the urgent need for transformative change is palpable. Agroecology responds to this call for change. Our formulation of agroecological transformation reflects not one grand theory of change but a recognition of a co-evolutionary and adaptive approach. It also underpins the importance of collective action, social movements and solidarity networks as a means of building and amplifying political power and community agency to advance agroecology transformations.

**Keywords** Agroecology • Crisis • Future

As we are bombarded with news of multiple intersecting food system-related crises—hunger, pandemic, climate change, biodiversity collapse and gross inequity—the edifice of the corporate industrial global food system is crumbling. Peasants, indigenous peoples, women, black and people of colour, among other groups and peoples, have long lived at the sharp end of the colonial-corporate stick. Now, as these crises exacerbate inequity and fuel the erosion of the ecological basis of the world, the urgent need for transformative change is palpable and calls for change grow louder.

Agroecology responds to many of these crises and offers multiple benefits (see Chap. 2): enhancing biodiversity, addressing climate change, contributing to good nutrition, strengthening social relations and—in its most radical and most needed form—directly challenging coloniality, inequity and oppressions. Social movements have been advancing agroecology as a paradigm for food systems that centres the voice, agency and priorities of these often-marginalized peoples. We have seen how—far from merely a tweaking of the existing system—political agroecology is rooted in the politics of food sovereignty. It simultaneously rejects the dominant food regime while offering an alternative vision and a pragmatic and viable set of principles as the basis for transformation.

The urgent need to advance this paradigm is why we chose the title for this book: *Agroecology Now!* We have sought to articulate what the processes of agroecology transformation look like at this historical juncture. Agroecology is an idea whose time has come. The need for transformation is laid bare, the idea has been foregrounded by social movements, local and territorial experiences in advancing the system are coalescing, and adjacent social movements from Black Lives Matter to climate justice and the World March of Women are gaining momentum.

At the same time, gross inequity has deepened, as has the vested power of the elite. While agroecology provides a promising alternative paradigm for food systems, there are tremendous barriers that prevent the transformation, which we have outlined in depth throughout the book. The disproportionate power wielded by the architects and beneficiaries of the dominant regime over food governance underlies most of the lock-ins and barriers to agroecology.

In Part I, we defined agroecology as a process of continuous transition based on core principles and a political commitment to both social justice and ecological regeneration. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, agroecology is not just a set of technical practices, but its transformative potential is grounded in its social, cultural and political dimensions. In fact, these dimensions are what distinguish agroecology from the many competing ‘solutions’ that are being proposed in the form of climate-smart agriculture, the Fourth Industrial Revolution and sustainable intensification. In contrast to agroecology, these centre corporate-led approaches for short-term and marginal gains in sustainability and leave in place the profit-centred logics and structural inequality that prevent the flourishing of nature and humanity.

At its root, agroecology is based on a shift in political and economic power from corporations, governments and elites to food producers and other citizens. It emphasizes production and distribution processes that are self-reliant and thus have limited commercial and speculative value for financial institutions and the shareholders of agri-food corporations. It enshrines the collective knowledge of food producers—especially women—and thus requires a fundamental change from dominant Western and patriarchal expert-driven knowledge and development systems. People's knowledge and agency are central to agroecology and is prioritized and brought into dialogue with scientific knowledge and other ways of knowing in a political agroecology approach.

Learning from the growing number of local experiences, case studies and critical analyses of agroecology in different parts of the world, we explored agroecology transformations as emergent, non-linear, context-specific and messy processes. We adopted the Multi-Level Perspective on Sustainability Transition to conceptualize agroecology not only as a niche but also as a proto- and counter-paradigm for food systems that is being advanced through political action at multiple scales. Our analysis explained how agroecology transformations occur at the various points of intersection and contestation between agroecology (as the 'niche' level) and the 'regime' in the six domains of transformation: (a) Access and Rights to Nature; (b) Knowledge and Culture; (c) Systems of Economic Exchange; (d) Networks; (e) Equity and (f) Discourse. In each of the chapters in Part II we unearthed the factors and dynamics that limit agroecology transformations and drew out examples and dynamics where agroecology transformations are enabled.

While many studies have drawn out some of the enabling factors or drivers in one or more of these domains, or emphasized the disabling ones, we looked across these studies to impute patterns that emerged across the experiences of agroecology transformations in different settings. This provided the basis to systematically and simultaneously articulate the enabling and disabling conditions within each of the six domains of transformation that emerged. While we identified six discrete domains in agroecology transformations, we emphasize that transformations will not be possible through a reductionist approach. It is essential that intentional processes of agroecological transformations not reduce action to singular domains—such as creating new markets (a common refrain)—but to consider and support transformations at the intersection of these multiple domains.

In Part III of the book, we drill down on the notion of governance interventions and what effects different approaches can have on agroecology transformations. We observed six effects in and across domains of transformation. This six-part framework provides nuance to the often-binary division between interventions that encourage conforming to the dominant regime and those that transform it. Our six effects of governance interventions are placed on a spectrum from those that directly suppress agroecology to those that dismantle the regime and strengthen agroecology.

We raised two complementary effects of governance interventions that undergird agroecology transformations. One is *nurturing* of agroecology—which includes interventions that support self-managed, grassroots networks and communities to develop agroecology on their own terms, rather than to conform to broader economic or political agendas that derive from the logics of the dominant regime (as is often the case with government policy and programmes). These often are the result of participatory and inclusive processes for policy-making and institutional choices, organizing citizens for widespread democratic coordination and beyond. The other promising governance effect is *releasing* agroecology from the disabling conditions of the dominant regime through contesting norms, structures and practices that disable agroecology while simultaneously anchoring it in the regime.

The outcomes or effects of any type of governance intervention (e.g. a policy, programme, project) are however not static or constant. For example, interventions that are intended to support agroecology may end up co-opting or containing it. To this end, in Part III, we argue that a participatory and continuously reflective approach is vital. We also articulate the territory as a critical yet underappreciated scale at which agroecology transformations can be supported.

Governments have in some cases played an important role in agroecology and especially have an important role in limiting the power of dominant regime actors. Yet, agroecology follows a bottom-up logic that is diametrically opposed to the systems of elite governance in place in many or most countries. Political agroecology is congruent with deeper forms of democracy which include civil society participation in decision-making, participatory democracy, and community self-organization in territories. Agroecology transformations thus fundamentally challenge governments and wider society to adopt forms of governance that counter current uniformity, centralization, blueprint planning, control and coercion.

Our formulation of agroecological transformation reflects not one grand theory of change but a recognition of a co-evolutionary and adaptive approach that involves multiple transformations. It also underpins the importance of collective action, social movements and solidarity networks as a means of building and amplifying political power and community agency to advance agroecology transformations. This is easier said than done. But, given the threats—from climate change and disempowering political dynamics to challenges to food security—it is arguably the most viable and socially just pathway to food systems fit for the challenges and opportunities of our tumultuous times.

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