

Finanziato da



The Challenge Project

Mapping of Best Practices for Agroecological Transition

FINAL REPORT:

THE SELECTION PROCESS AND ITS RESULTS

October 15, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	p. 3
2. Criteria, Methods and Evaluation Tools.....	p. 3
3. Results of the Call.....	p 4
4. Results of the Selection.....	p. 6

Attachments:

- a) Format for submission of good practices
- b) Grid for evaluation and selection of good practices
- c) Summary table of practices received
- d) Summary table of results
- e) Evaluation return form



1. Introduction

The activity of mapping Best Practices in Agroecological Transition was launched by the CHALLENGE project to promote an integrated and transformative approach among key actors within the agri-food system across various sectors and supply chains, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

The initiative behind this activity and the overall design of the CHALLENGE project was inspired by Azione TerrAE, the Coalition for Agroecological Transition, which has long been committed to training and spreading the themes of agroecology. This involves collaboration with the research community, farmers' organisations, civil society, and institutions. In March 2021, member organisations signed a Position Paper titled "Agroecological Transition and International Cooperation in West Africa," outlining the Coalition's goals and orientations, along with a call for urgent action in one of the world's most critical areas.

The Position Paper by Azione TerrAE aligns with the FAO's vision of agroecology, defining it as "an integrated approach that applies ecological and social principles to the management and design of agricultural and food systems, setting pathways for transitioning to sustainable and resilient models."

The objectives of the mapping, as well as the participation details for the call, were presented in a webinar held on April 9, 2024. The invitation to participate was open to all stakeholders in the agri-food sector, both in Italy and abroad, including private companies, cooperatives, civil society organisations, and public entities of various sizes and characteristics. During the webinar, the standard format for describing one's "best practice" (see attachment) was introduced.

The deadline for submitting best practices was initially set for May 31, and later extended to June 15, 2024.

2. Criteria, Methods and Evaluation Tools

The responsibility of selecting the best practices to be included in the Mapping was entrusted by Azione TerrAE to an Evaluation Committee (EC), composed of experts with relevant and complementary skills and experiences aligned with the objectives of the call. The Committee members were:

- **Giorgio Menchini**, acting as coordinator. Spokesperson of Azione TerrAE, former President of COSPE NGO (2015-2023), and an expert in community-based environmental resource management, with 40 years of experience in international cooperation NGOs across Africa, Latin America, and the Mediterranean.

- **Caterina Batello.** Vice President of the Italian Association of Agroecology (AIDA), a member of the Agroecology Europe Council, and former Team Leader for FAO's Agroecology and Ecosystem Management unit, with a pivotal role in the approval of the 10 Elements of Agroecology. She is an agricultural development expert with experience in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- **Cristiana Peano.** Professor at the Department of Agricultural, Forestry, and Food Sciences of the University of Turin and President of CISAIO, a second-level centre at the same university focused on research, training, and capacity building in Africa. She has 20 years of experience in the transition of agrarian systems in Europe, Africa, and Latin America.
- **Carlotta Ebbreo,** collaborator of the NGO DEAFAL, bridging academia and the third sector in local development, education, and training for agroecology. She has been active for 10 years in Italy, Europe, and Latin America as a facilitator and social researcher in agroecological transition processes.
- **Riccardo Bocci.** agronomist, Technical Director and former coordinator of the Rete Semi Rurali since 2007, and collaborator with the Ministry of Agriculture for the drafting of National Guidelines for the Conservation of Agricultural Biodiversity (2010-2012). He managed European projects such as Farm Seed Opportunities, SOLIBAM, and DIVERSIFOOD (2007-2018).

The Evaluation Committee (EC) was formally established on May 15, 2024, and at that time, it defined its own criteria and working methods.

Considering that the Agroecological Best Practices Mapping, supported by Azione TerrAE and launched by the CHALLENGE Project, aims to promote the dissemination and exchange of experiences among various actors developing processes aligned with the integrated and transformative vision of Agroecology, the EC decided to **focus the evaluation on agroecological transition processes rather than individual, separate practices or projects.** To better reflect this approach, the Mapping was renamed **“Mapping of Agroecological Transition Best Practices.”**

To support this approach, 6 specific evaluation areas were defined:

- 1. Systemic Scope:** integration of ecological and social principles
- 2. Transformative Scope:** transition towards fair, sustainable, and resilient models
- 3. Participatory Scope:** involvement of local actors throughout all stages of design and implementation, with particular emphasis on smallholder and family farms, women, and youth.
- 4. Co-creation and Knowledge Exchange:** in analysing agri-food systems and identifying tailored solutions.



5. Sustainability: sustainability of the processes from environmental, economic, social, and political perspectives.

Funded by

6. **Replicability:** with particular attention to the potential for horizontal scaling of these experiences.

These areas, along with the specific criteria for each, form the foundation of the evaluation grid developed during the meeting, which is attached to this report.

Given the interactive and inclusive nature of the Mapping, the Committee decided to make use of the option to request additional information from participants who submitted their applications before May 30, 2024, the date on which a notice specifying the evaluation areas and criteria mentioned above was published on the Challenge website.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest, the Committee also decided that its members would refrain from evaluating proposals submitted by organisations or institutions with which they are affiliated or to which they are linked, or that are involved in projects in which they have had or currently hold any role.

3. Results of the Call

The call received 28 proposals for agroecological transition best practices: 8 were submitted by the initial deadline of May 31, 16 arrived by the extended deadline of June 15, and 4 more were submitted the following day.

The variety and diversity of these proposals immediately stand out, underscoring that the topic of agroecological transition is not limited to specific, isolated experiences of interest only to experts and specialized agencies; rather, it involves a broad network of individuals and social relationships surrounding food, both in Italy and around the world, each with its own histories, agendas, and perspectives.

The ability to gather and represent this diversity is both a strength and a challenge for those tasked with selecting experiences capable of highlighting the richness it represents. This is especially true given that the material does not naturally lend itself to the rigid standardization of formats and language.

This aspect should be considered in future editions when rethinking the structure of the application forms for participants and the methods of describing agroecological transition practices, which currently appear more tailored in form and language to international development cooperation calls.

The Summary Table attached to this report shows that 10 out of the 28 submitted practices were carried out in Italy - Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino, Emilia Romagna, Campania, Sardinia, Basilicata - e 18 were implemented abroad across 15 Countries:

Chad, Morocco, Kenya, Peru, eSwatini, Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, Greece, Portugal, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin, Guinea Bissau and Niger.

These experiences were initiated exclusively by civil society in its various forms. Specifically, 10 projects implemented in Italy were presented by family farms, cooperatives, social promotion associations, other third-sector entities, and an informal group. Of the international experiences, 18 were submitted by 9 Italian international cooperation NGOs, 1 foreign NGO, 1 cooperative, and 2 local African networks. Among the strategic themes described in the Azione TerrAE Position Paper and referenced by the call, "Land" was identified as the primary focus (10 indications), followed by "Seeds" (6) and "Services" (5), with "Markets" (3), "Women" (3), and "Youth" (1) also highlighted. As for the sectors, training, governance and natural resource management, and associative and institutional development were among the main areas in most practices.

Based on this overview, during the meeting on June 18, 2024, the Evaluation Committee (EC) established the schedule for the selection process:

- June 20 to July 9: preliminary evaluation of the received practices by two EC members, with one responsible for an initial analysis and recommendation based on the evaluation grid established in the prior meeting, and the other reviewing and adding insights. This process aimed to achieve two goals: ensuring double-checking for the preliminary assessment of each practice and allowing the two evaluators to work independently, exchanging comments and assessments primarily via email to minimize the need for remote meetings.
- July 10: In-person session to finalize the selection process, starting with the presentation of preliminary assessments for discussion and final decisions by the entire EC.

The 24 practices submitted by the deadline (June 15) were assigned within the EC according to the above criteria. The 4 practices submitted after the deadline on the morning of June 16 were provisionally accepted, with evaluation postponed until after the July 10 session.

3. Results of the Selection

In light of the proposals received, the plenary meeting held on July 10 in Florence allowed the Evaluation Committee to first share some methodological reflections on



the application of the criteria outlined in Chapter 2 of this report, with particular attention to the following critical aspects identified in several practices:

- Predominant focus on sustainable agricultural production techniques and soil management: these practices followed a conventional approach, lacking adequate integration of social aspects or connections with broader transformative processes within the agri-food system towards equity and rights
- Under emphasis on the roles and characteristics of the social actors involved: these were often portrayed more as recipients or beneficiaries of projects rather than active participants in the change process, staying within the limits of a conventional approach.
- Insufficient or absent analysis of local needs and resources: in some cases, there was a lack of co-creation and knowledge exchange in identifying solutions tailored to the specific contexts.

The Committee unanimously agreed that these elements are key to an evaluation that aligns with Azione TerrAE's vision. They should be applied consistently and rigorously to signal the distinctive nature of an "agroecological transition practice" versus a mere "agroecological practice". This distinction is intended not only for communication purposes, to convey Azione TerrAE's vision but also for educational purposes. In this sense, the evaluation was emphasized as a tool for reflection and dialogue on the challenges of agroecological transition, aiming to improve our capacity to adapt it to real processes in a continuous learning journey that involves everyone. From this perspective, it was emphasized that all the practices presented represent both a value and a resource, in their strengths as well as in their weaknesses.

The Committee then made decisions regarding how to communicate the evaluation results:

- For each practice, an assessment form will be prepared, containing evaluations for each area and an overall assessment (see attached Evaluation Feedback Form). These forms will be available to each proposing entity upon request, providing a concrete foundation for the development of the dialogue described above
- The selection results will be presented in the Final Report of the Evaluation Committee, accompanied by a Summary Table that will include all relevant information and a concise evaluation for each practice (see respective attachments).

- The Final Report and Summary Table will be submitted to the CHALLENGE project leaders and the Azione TerrAE Coordination for publication and dissemination.

Following a positive response from the CHALLENGE project staff, it was decided to select six top practices, with separate categories for those implemented in Italy and those implemented internationally. The preliminary assessment results, detailed in the previous chapter, were presented and discussed. To complete the evaluation of some practices and standardize all accompanying documentation, additional time and effort were required, which the Committee members completed remotely in the following weeks. It was not possible to evaluate the 4 proposals submitted late and provisionally accepted. Therefore, 24 practices completed the evaluation and selection process, with 16 recommended for inclusion in the best practices mapping. For the remaining eight, as well as the late submissions, the EC suggests considering these for the 2025 selection round to fill in missing information and address issues highlighted in the evaluation forms through dialogue and the development of a common language and framework.

For the selection of the top practices, the following were chosen:

In Italy:

- **Agroecologia in Montagna** (Trentino)
- **Mesa Noa** (Sardinia)
- **La filiera degli 11 grani** (Lombardy)

Internationally:

- **Women peasants as protagonists** (eSwatini)
- **Reviving Traditional Knowledge of Cassia Nigricans** (Burkina Faso)
- **Circulating in the Amazon** (Perù) and **Organic Fonio Production** (Senegal). It is suggested to maintain both.

In concluding its rigorous and passionate work and presenting its findings, the Evaluation Committee thanks Azione TerrAE for the trust placed in them.

It recommends creating adequate spaces for dialogue, comparison, and communication to share not only the results but also the lessons learned from this experience. Such sharing can inspire and contribute to the development of evaluation models tailored to the unique characteristics of agroecological transition pathways, moving away from standard models where necessary. The Committee also highlighted two key challenges that emerged during the process, requiring

Finanziato da



innovative responses in methods, tools, and language: the need to shift focus from project-centred to process-centred approaches, and the diversity and variety of the participants and contexts involved.

In closing, special thanks go to Sara Baglioni from the Azione TerrAE Secretariat, who participated in all group activities, providing invaluable and timely support.

October 18, 2024

Giorgio Menchini, Caterina Batello, Cristiana Peano, Carlotta Ebbreo, Riccardo Bocci