



Agroecological Transition and
International Cooperation in West Africa:

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

A position paper by
AZIONE TERRAE: Coalition for the Agroecological Transition



DECEMBER 2025

AZIONE TERRÆ: Coalition for Agroecological Transition is composed by:



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PREFACE

This document is the result of a reflection process by Azione TerrAE, a coalition of Italian and European organizations that brings together international cooperation NGOs (ACRA, COSPE, CISV, Deafal, LVIA, Mani Tese, and Terra Nuova), with decades of experience in West Africa, along with a network of Italian civil society (Rete Semi Rurali) and a European network that includes important universities and research centers (Agroecology Europe), active in research and advocacy for the agroecological transition.

The second edition of the document, developed five years after the first version, is an opportunity for a multi-level discussion on the evolution of the context, tools, and opportunities to accelerate agroecological transition processes supported by international cooperation systems.

It is a contribution to rethink international cooperation in one of the most critical areas of the planet, which we want to share with all the people, associations, and institutions engaged in these issues.

It is a renewed call for urgent and coordinated action, appropriate to the severity and complexity of the ongoing crisis, which we address to international cooperation agencies and all the actors operating in the region.

It is an invitation to mobilize and optimize everyone's resources in support of immediate and effective responses, from a systemic and long-term perspective.



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1. A CRITICAL SCENARIO

West Africa, particularly in its Sahelian region, has long been the stage of a severe crisis, where the intersection of the major global challenges of our time – climate change, economic, social, and demographic imbalances, and human rights violations – creates a vicious cycle of unemployment and income scarcity, food insecurity, and both international and internal migrations. While the recognition of women's roles and rights still struggles to take hold, the poverty of prospects for youth – now the majority of the population – continues to worsen. At the same time, the weakening of social cohesion fuels conflicts, facilitating the entry of armed groups into areas with limited state control.

In recent years, these dynamics have rapidly accelerated, reaching, in some countries, the breaking point of the institutional framework. It is a scenario that intersects with an evolving Africa, marked by contradictory processes of deglobalization and the gradual weakening of multilateral institutions and regional integration, alongside new pathways of geopolitical engagement¹ and cooperation². Meanwhile, the West, in a crisis of credibility, seeks to adjust its strategies – with the G7's Africa Development Plan³, the Mattei Plan for Africa, and the EU's Global Gateway investment plan – while witnessing the progressive rise of Russia, China, and Turkey's influence.

In this context, **international cooperation still has significant financial resources but lacks a coherent strategy to meet these challenges**. It is influenced by different, sometimes conflicting, geopolitical priorities, the militarization of responses to conflicts, and a transactional and geopolitical logic⁴ that narrows the focus to reducing inequalities⁵. As a result, it produces incoherent and ineffective responses. One example is the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: €5 billion spent since 2015 to curb irregular migration by addressing humanitarian crises, which has become a target of criticism from civil society and the European Court of Auditors for inefficiency in resource allocation and for funding entities responsible for human rights violations.

Meanwhile, an epochal change is taking place before everyone's eyes, driven by **internal migration flows that, in just a few decades, will reverse the ratio between urban and rural populations**. The majority still live in rural areas but have increasingly limited resources and opportunities to produce food and generate income. On one hand, there is a widespread expropriation of common land for agro-energy use. On the other hand, the growth of the urban middle class is driving an increase in demand for processed and industrial food products from abroad, which accelerates the departure from traditional diets, local products, and markets. The resulting rise in food prices favors the



consumption of low-cost but nutrient-poor calories, such as refined grains and imported processed foods, contributing to the spread of "**dual malnutrition**": vitamin deficiencies and stunted child growth coexist with obesity and chronic diseases linked to imbalanced diets. The loss of food biodiversity and local knowledge exacerbates insecurity, creating a vicious circle between environmental crises, dietary impoverishment, and socioeconomic vulnerability.

At the same time, **development driven by demographic dynamics and the acceleration of socio-economic changes in cities presents an opportunity for better interconnections between rural and urban systems**, in order to develop innovative policies and tools capable of responding to the challenges of equitable and sustainable development, which is the horizon set by the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The path to follow is the one that African farmers' organizations have long reminded us of: "**Africa can feed itself.**" With its supply chains, it can produce, process, and market up to 80% of the food needed, derived from regional products such as cereals, oilseeds, roots and tubers, legumes, oil, and sugar⁶.

By abandoning any remnants and temptation of neo-colonialism, international cooperation has a duty to take this path that Africa points out and leads. Starting with the recognition that, in both urban and rural areas, **the relationship of African populations with their land is the key to a systemic response** capable of addressing the different fronts of crisis, in order to support lasting development paths and alternatives to forced migration, starting with internal migration. For this change in direction, it is necessary to **free all local resources**, often stifled by our way of doing cooperation, and **break with practices that promote the disconnection of urban markets from the rural system, increasing dependence on imports**, with negative effects on nutrition, youth employment opportunities, poverty reduction, the socio-economic divide, access to rights, and – as the ultimate consequence – the growth and spread of conflicts throughout the region.



2. AGROECOLOGY'S ANSWERS

Agroecology is an integrated approach that applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the management and design of agro-food systems, **in order to initiate transitions towards sustainable and equitable models.** From an **environmental perspective**, it supports pathways focused on the development of biodiversity and the functional interactions between plants, animals, and people, minimizing the need for external inputs.⁷

Agroecology promotes cooperation between producers, civil society, research, and institutions to implement direct actions supported by appropriate public policies, using participatory tools aimed at co-creating knowledge between the farming world and the scientific community. It is an approach in constant evolution, influenced by both internal and external factors, and requires continuous experimentation to find the most effective solutions, benefiting from the contribution of all actors in the food system. Agroecology aims to produce a complex set of goods and services that improve environmental quality, the health of people, plants, and animals, while simultaneously diversifying income opportunities.

In recent years, Agroecology has gained increasing international recognition, with scientifically proven positive effects, including socio-economic benefits⁸. In 2019, **it was included by the FAO as a key strategy within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.** Viewed as an integrated approach, rather than a set of separate practices, it is considered more effective in creating resilient territorial food systems compared to more sectoral models based on the market (such as climate-smart agriculture, nature-based solutions, and other options focused on carbon stocks in soil like Net Zero), which do not incorporate the socio-political dimension necessary for transforming food systems.⁹

In West Africa, Agroecology is supported by major regional and international networks, such as ROPPA (*Réseaux des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*¹⁰), 3AO (Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa)¹¹, a coordination platform between farmers' organizations, research institutes, universities, international NGOs, and social movements, created in 2018 in Dakar. This is complemented by national platforms such as DYTAEs in Senegal, Raya Karkara in Niger, and national branches of regional organizations.

With its systemic approach and ability to mobilize multiple actors, Agroecology is in a position to promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient food and natural resource management economies in



West Africa and the Sahel, based on the full utilization and development of all local resources. It can therefore make a **significant contribution to overcoming the region's crisis by implementing strategies suited to the specific local conditions**: prioritizing family and smallholder enterprises, enhancing the role of women and youth, strengthening associative forms that ensure the participation and representation of all actors, and fostering dialogue with institutions, starting with local ones. **The goal is to promote coherent and effective public policies on priority issues** such as:

- a) The distribution and access to primary resources;
- b) The ecosystemic and territorial approach;
- c) The protection of biodiversity, traditional seed heritage, and intellectual property of the same;
- d) The recognition of farmers' knowledge;
- e) The commercial protection of local products and the promotion of proximity markets;
- f) The enhancement of agriculture, including in urban and peri-urban areas;
- g) The development of research and investments necessary to support the ongoing transition.

Azione TerrAE was founded five years ago through the initiative of a group of civil society organizations that chose to join forces to strengthen and make their contribution to this process more impactful. The Coalition pursues a dual goal: to unite their forces and promote collaboration with international cooperation agencies and all actors involved in the agroecological transition. The aim is to optimize the available resources to support immediate responses to the crisis of agro-food systems in West Africa, from a systemic and long-term perspective.

The founding organizations have signed a **Memorandum of Understanding**, committing to pursue common goals within the framework of shared strategic horizons, as well as a **Regulation** that defines the governance system and the management methods for programs, projects, and advocacy initiatives¹². In its first five years of activity, the Coalition has turned the commitments made by its members into action, implementing programs, tools for analyzing the agroecological transition, and advocacy activities. Notable achievements include:

- **Mapping of local agroecological transition processes** and their key actors, conceived as an original learning exercise from real-world practices;¹³



- **Analysis of the coherence of international cooperation interventions**, applying innovative methodologies such as the Agroecology Assessment Framework (Agroecology Coalition) and OASIS (Agroecology Europe);
- **Training of agroecological facilitators** in West Africa and Italy, with courses organized in collaboration with CISAO (Interdepartmental Center for Research and Technical-Scientific Cooperation with Africa at the University of Turin) and CIHEAM (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies) and webinars to facilitate widespread participation in West Africa;
- **International cooperation and Global Citizenship Education projects** implemented in various formats: **co-financed projects or entrusted by AICS** (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) to Coalition organizations; **consortium programs** in Senegal, Niger, Guinea, and Burkina Faso supported by AICS, the EU, and banking foundations; decentralized cooperation initiatives and university cooperation projects.

Tavoli di lavoro della Coalizione sono oggi attivi in Senegal, Burkina Faso e Niger, e in fase di avvio in altri Paesi dell’Africa Occidentale. In Italia sono stati realizzati percorsi di advocacy e promosso il dialogo con il sistema della cooperazione italiana, con FAO e IFAD, Fondazioni, Università, Amministrazioni locali.

3. STRATEGIC THEMES AND LINES OF ACTION

3.1 Land

For the people of West Africa, land is life, a connection to their roots, food and means of production, a source of essential services, and a condition for resilience. But today, it is an **increasingly scarce resource**: on one hand, due to climate change and the spread of unsustainable production practices, and on the other, due to the combined effect of the fragmentation of enterprises caused by population growth and their concentration, linked to the growing phenomenon of land grabbing for energy purposes and other speculative uses. The intertwining of



these factors exacerbates the living conditions of the most vulnerable social groups, increasing inequality in access and insecurity in land rights, while fueling migration flows towards urban areas.

Agroecology addresses these as critical factors within a single socio-environmental system, developing the following **lines of action** in an integrated manner:

- a) **The recovery and sustainable management of natural resources, including soils, forests, and water, as well as agro-silvo-pastoral systems**, for the development of integrated and multifunctional local economies in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, collection of wild plants, fishing, and the provision of ecosystem services;
- b) **The development of inclusive and responsible land and water governance tools**, with particular emphasis on community-based management approaches¹⁴;
- c) **Monitoring the critical issues created by land grabbing phenomena**;
- d) **Capacity building to manage and resolve disputes over natural resources**, including along interstate transhumance routes, supporting policies, laws, and land commissions for inclusion and peace.

3.2 Seeds

Developing decentralized and participatory models of research and dissemination, including genetic improvement, is essential to support the resilience of agro-food systems in the context of unpredictable climate variability at the local scale. It is therefore necessary to promote a paradigm shift in the agricultural research and dissemination system, accompanied by the evolution of policies to support it. **The theme of agrobiodiversity must become central in rural development projects**, as has been established by international agreements, starting with the FAO Treaty on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).¹⁵

In particular, **the issues of sustainable use of agrobiodiversity (Art. 6) and farmers' rights (Art. 9) should be viewed as guiding principles for agricultural development and cooperation policies.** In this regard, greater exchange between Europe and West African countries would be both desirable and necessary.

The practical implementation of these principles requires the consistent development of the following lines of action:



- a) **Ensure the full implementation of the ITPGRFA Treaty** in the countries where international cooperation initiatives are being carried out;
- b) **Participate in the dialogue between institutions and civil society to promote local¹⁶ and diversified seed systems** through low-cost, appropriate, accessible, and inclusive solutions;
- c) **Promote community-based seed management** (through the development of Community Seed Banks¹⁷);
- d) **Support research and enhancement processes of agrobiodiversity** based on the interrelation between diversity, diet, and nutrition, starting with Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS)¹⁸;
- e) **Promote exchange moments on regional and international policies related to the management of agrobiodiversity;**
- f) **Develop adequate training programs for all involved actors** to support the consistent implementation of these lines of action in policies, programs, and projects.

3.3 Markets

To take advantage of the opportunities offered by a varied and diversified production of goods, family businesses, cooperatives and farmers' organizations need access to markets and terms of exchange that they can govern rather than be subject to. **Territorial markets¹⁹, linked to local, regional and national agricultural systems, play a fundamental role in this regard.** Not only because they reduce the vulnerability caused by global market volatility and ensure added value remains in the hands of rural economic actors, but also because they foster the exchange of information and knowledge about products and food, the development of social relations, and the involvement of women.

From an agroecological perspective, whether they are **rural markets**, which may cross the borders of different states, or **urban markets** that act as a bridge between countryside and city, it is **territorial markets that must be the reference point, developing the following lines of action:**



- a) Qualitative and quantitative research on the production of family businesses and farmers' associations**, building existing tools such as the participatory research methodology on family businesses promoted by ROPPA²⁰;
- b) Analysis and strengthening of the potential to access national and international markets for selected agroecological products** with high added value for local economies;
- c) Development of direct relationships between producers and consumers**, through a range of initiatives capable of reaching different targets and meeting different needs;
- d) Agreements between producer networks and institutions** within the framework of social protection policies, for the provision of meals to schools, care homes, prisons and hospitals;
- e) Support to municipalities to upgrade market infrastructure and services.**

3.4 Services

The agroecological transition requires innovative services to support producers, aimed at reducing reliance on external inputs and creating new professional opportunities for young people. To achieve this, **adequate research and training tailored to new needs are required**, including strengthening the tertiary function of agriculture through educational and recreational services open to private operators and farmers' organizations. It is also necessary to develop innovative and context-sensitive certification systems capable of recognizing and documenting the added value of agroecological systems.

Italy, with its vocation for agrobiodiversity and the promotion of quality products, can make a significant contribution to the development of the following lines of action:

- a) Participatory research activities to develop innovative services** for agroecology, based on the analysis and monitoring of local agroecosystems;
- b) Support for the creation of agroecological services** in the areas of information, insurance, credit, mechanization, processing, and the production of eco-compatible inputs for fertilization and plant and animal protection;



- c) **Feasibility studies and promotion of tertiary services** such as educational activities and agritourism;
- d) **Development of collection, storage, processing and transformation supply chains;**
- e) **Support for producer consortia** to develop integrated supply chains, purchase inputs and equipment, enhance and market products, and improve quality standards, traceability procedures and certification.

The thematic areas described so far cannot be separated from the food communities that generate and sustain transformative agroecological transition pathways.

These communities inherently include women, men, and young people, as well as vulnerable individuals or those belonging to marginalized social groups, such as migrants and people with disabilities. The involvement of this diversity of actors is a fundamental prerequisite for an approach that fosters social cohesion within a framework of inclusivity, equity, and justice. In this context, recognizing and enhancing the role of women and young people strengthens society as a whole and supports more sustainable and resilient transformative pathways.

3.5 Women

In West Africa, **women play a central role in food production, environmental stewardship, and rural economies.** Despite this, they remain largely excluded from decision-making processes — spaces that are essential for bringing forward their practices, perspectives, and needs — in a context where their rights are not always recognized and are frequently violated.

As agricultural producers, women constitute the majority, yet they are also the group most denied access to land. Women play a strategic role in food sovereignty and family nutrition, but this economy of life goes unrecognized in public policies, which still struggle to free themselves from patriarchal models and gender inequalities. For this reason, **recognizing women's contribution to the agroecological transition must go hand in hand with the full recognition of their rights.**



Agroecology is once again able to provide an integrated response to these challenges — one that holds together the complementary pathways of social, economic and political empowerment — through the following **lines of action**:

- a) Promotion of collective bodies and public spaces for women**, capable both of bringing forward new agroecological visions and practices and keeping their rights in the spotlight;
- b) Development of income-generating activities and economic enterprises among women's groups**, encompassing literacy, support for production, preservation, processing, marketing, business management and savings activities;
- c) Support for advocacy initiatives** to reform public policies on rights and representation for women and girls;
- d) Development of women's representation** in farmers' organizations, institutions and land commissions;
- e) Removal of barriers that prevent access to resources**, particularly land.

3.6 Young People

Recognizing the expectations, rights and role of young women and men is the first step toward countering their emigration from rural areas, driven by a lack of employment opportunities and limited access to productive resources. As ROPPA²¹ indicates, it is first necessary to understand their aspirations in order to support, train, accompany, and consolidate their projects, and to guarantee them decent work and income. To facilitate generational renewal, it is also crucial to promote processes of concertation within families, communities, civil society organizations and public administrations, **while at the same time encouraging the creation of jobs and income-generating activities based on a comprehensive development of skills and competencies.**

Agroecology can make a decisive contribution to these processes through the following **lines of action**:

- a) Skills development** through training and technical support in agroecology and business management, and agroecological support services (see Chapter 3.4);



- b) Job creation** in agro-silvo-pastoral projects and agroecological support services, ensuring decent working conditions;
- c) Access to natural and technological resources and dedicated financing channels;**
- d) Development of concertation among youth groups and support for advocacy actions** toward local administrations.

4. PROGRAMMES, ACTORS AND FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

The signatory organizations of this document, together with numerous farmers' movements and activists from around the world, **have long called for the conversion of the unsustainable development model that is also responsible for a severe systemic crisis in West Africa.** This crisis risks worsening without a decisive and substantial change of course, one capable of initiating an ecological and social transition in which every actor can contribute, and where the role of the "public space" between state and market, presided over by civil society, is fully recognized.

The signatory organizations are therefore committed to supporting this process through their daily work and projects, strengthening coordination among interventions, and making available their resources and knowledge, built on **long-standing and fruitful collaboration with the broader "Italian system" of international cooperation.**

4.1 *The evolution of the "Italian system" of cooperation: opportunities, limits and contradictions*

The context of the Italian cooperation system is evolving rapidly. Two developments stand out in particular:

- The **"Piano Mattei"**, which aims to renew relations with Africa through new foreign policy initiatives not limited to the Mediterranean area, supported by a growing awareness of the strategic importance of the continent.
- **Italy's accession to the Agroecology Coalition, and AICS's commitment to ensuring programme coherence with the 13 Agroecology Principles of the HLPE²²**, reflect a growing



recognition of the role of agroecology and open the way for its greater consideration in policy and resource allocation.

In light of these developments, the funding currently available and the initiatives underway²³ do not yet appear to respond to the urgency and scale of change required to ensure food security and support the agroecological transition²⁴. Measures taken at both bilateral and multilateral levels in the areas of nutrition, agriculture, and agro-industry also point to a strategy that is still evolving and contains contradictory elements.

The orientation set out in the MAECI²⁵ Three-Year Programming and Policy Document 2024–2026 (DTPI), and even more so in the Mattei Plan, prioritizes private sector engagement and investment, for which robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms are essential to ensure respect for human rights, local governance, and the participation of local actors, particularly farmers' organizations.

The framing of the Mattei Plan appears to focus predominantly on large infrastructure investments and public-private partnerships, with the risk of marginalizing local economies, territorial value chains and systems of common natural resource management, which are a vital part of Africa's socioeconomic fabric. In the future development of the Mattei Plan, it will therefore be essential to adopt an approach that recognizes and values community-based land and resource management, promotes local and inclusive value chains, and supports African territorial markets as key actors in achieving genuinely fair and sustainable cooperation.

The Three-Year Policy Document (DTPI) 2024–2026 reaffirms Italian cooperation's strong focus on Africa, both through the funding of promoted projects and other locally managed interventions, and by directing resources toward enterprises operating in Africa²⁶. This includes **coordination with the European Union** through initiatives such as the **Global Gateway** - subject to significant criticism from Concord and other civil society networks²⁷ - as well as collaboration with multilateral organizations and **United Nations** agencies.

Although in 2022 AICS signed the Commitment Declaration joining the *UN Coalition for the Transformation of Food Systems through Agroecology* (Agroecology Coalition) and actively participates in it²⁸, the **DTPI contains no explicit reference to agroecology**. This is an inexplicable omission in a policy document that identifies agriculture and food security – ensured through "Sustainable Food Systems" - as a priority of Italian cooperation, encompassing both social dimensions (decent incomes for smallholder producers and other sector actors, and access to healthy, nutritious and sufficient food) and environmental dimensions (protection of biodiversity and natural resources).



A structured dialogue between institutions and civil society is, in our view, essential to overcome these contradictions and the limitations of an excessively transactional approach to international cooperation, and to consolidate the commitments already made by the MAECI within the framework of the *Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*²⁹.

These commitments must be adapted to the evolving context, by supporting pathways that strengthen local governance and ensure transparent resource management, within a framework of a pluralistic and effective cooperation system, aligned with the goals of the 2030 Agenda and oriented towards development models that guarantee farmers' access to land and local resources, recognizing that food is not merely a commodity.

Within this frame of reference, with a sense of urgency and with a view to making the most of the entire Italian system, **we propose a dialogue to structure integrated regional programmes.** These could be structured as multi-country programmes or as national programmes embedded within an inclusive regional strategy, encompassing both the priority countries for AICS (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Guinea and Senegal) and other West African countries such as The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and, in a second phase, Benin and Togo. Such **multi-year programme, ideally of four years' duration with the possibility of renewal and expansion,** represent, in our view, a key instrument for fostering aggregation among the various actors committed to supporting the agroecological transition: peasant movements, research institutes, NGOs, civil society networks, diaspora communities, businesses, local authorities, foundations and international cooperation agencies.

4.2 Accelerate the agroecological transition by developing priority lines of action

At the same time, we consider it essential to build on and further develop existing lines of work on key aspects of the agroecological transition, which are already fostering increasing interaction and collaboration among a wide range of actors within the Italian system and their African partners.

Integration of environmental issues

To ensure the effective and comprehensive integration of environmental dimensions into agroecological transition programmes—such as environmental protection, multifunctionality, and carbon sequestration—collaboration with specialized agencies should be strengthened and further developed, starting with the Ministry of the Environment and other actors involved in the energy transition.



Research and innovation

The focus on **research and innovation** should be better integrated, not only at the national level with the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) system, but also with multilateral cooperation actors (FAO, IFAD) and intergovernmental organizations such as CIHEAM and ABC (Alliance Bioversity International–CIAT). This should be achieved through the integration of Italian and European resources into regional programmes, alongside stronger linkages with action research and transformative learning for agroecology.

Genetic resources

There is a need to relaunch and strengthen collaboration with international institutions and organizations promoting the implementation of the FAO Treaty (**International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture – ITPGRFA**), by more effectively and broadly engaging West African partners, in order to support the conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Rural–urban interconnection

Rural–urban linkages, framed within sustainable food systems, require specific attention to the integration of holistic approaches into urban food policies. Engaging a wide range of actors—local authorities, producers, processors, traders, communication actors, and consumers—is essential to improve sourcing from local food systems, enhance distribution efficiency, and promote informed consumption that also recognizes the **cultural and social value of food**, while reducing losses and waste.

Within this framework, the **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)** represents a key instrument for the implementation of sustainable, integrated, and inclusive urban food policies. As the largest global network of cities committed to transforming food systems, the Pact facilitates the exchange of good practices, provides methodological guidance, and promotes policies that recognize **food as a fundamental human right**.

Many cities in West Africa—including Dakar, Ziguinchor, Niamey, Agadez, Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Abidjan, and Bissau—have joined the MUFPP, initiating inclusive processes and more sustainable governance pathways, also with the support of Azione TerrAE organizations. In these contexts, the commitment to sustainable urban policies creates a favourable environment for advancing the **agroecological transition**, strengthening rural–urban linkages, valorizing local knowledge and practices, and addressing key challenges such as poverty, health, spatial planning, waste management, and product quality.



4.3 Proposed Programmes for the Agroecological Transition

- **Development of new programmes** to support the agroecological transition within the Italian cooperation system, in partnership with CSOs and multilateral and intergovernmental actors, through country-level and regional programmes;
- **Design of an inter-ministerial programme** (AICS and the Ministry of the Environment) in areas of high vulnerability and environmental relevance, aimed at supporting pastoral systems and enhancing both marine (in the Gulf of Guinea) and inland fisheries, within the framework of Italy's commitment to combating desertification and its bilateral environmental cooperation;
- **Structuring of an Italian initiative on agroecology** within European cooperation, in particular under the agriculture pillar of the Africa–Europe Alliance, in line with the EU Comprehensive Strategy for Africa;
- **At the European level, activation of delegated cooperation and multilateral instruments**, with particular reference to the new programming frameworks under the EU Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, sustainable finance, the External Investment Plan in Africa, and the Circular Economy Action Plan, where food is identified as a priority sector;
- **Support to cooperation pathways for innovation**, with a focus on **training, action research, and academic cooperation in West Africa**, with the involvement of MAECI, MUR, CIHEAM, FAO, and Azione TerrAE, to be further strengthened through targeted agroecology training initiatives for farmers, technicians, and development practitioners. These innovation pathways contribute to building synergies with other European actors and initiatives on cross-cutting themes, leveraging available funding instruments such as the Horizon Europe framework programme for research and innovation.



5. CONCLUSION

The deep crisis affecting West Africa calls for **systemic responses**, grounded in a renewed pact among institutions, civil society, farming communities, research actors, and international cooperation. Agroecology, with its integrated, territorial, and multi-actor approach, represents a concrete and effective pathway—already advanced by African networks and movements—for building sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems.

Through this document, Azione TerrAE calls on the Italian system and international partners to assume clear political responsibility: to support the agroecological transition as a structural choice, recognizing the right of African populations to autonomous, sustainable food systems rooted in their own resources. It is time to move beyond transactional, fragmented approaches or those driven by external priorities, and instead invest in public policies, research, local governance, and territorial markets capable of generating development, social cohesion, and justice.

Only through coordinated, plural, and long-term commitment will it be possible to support development pathways that respond to the complexity of the crisis and build concrete prospects for present and future generations.



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4. Programmes, actors and financial instruments

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NOTES

¹ Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have formalized their withdrawal from ECOWAS to create the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), with the aim of strengthening their political, economic, and military autonomy.

² A reduction in the involvement of France, the United Kingdom, and the USA, with an increased projection of China, Russia, Italy, and the European Union, alongside the uncertainties arising from the confrontation with Russia. (https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_8c530629-en/full-report.html)

³ <https://www.g7italy.it/wp-content/uploads/2024-PGII-Joint-Action-Proposal.pdf>

⁴ <https://concordeurope.org/2024/05/24/you-cannot-reach-the-poorest-if-you-dont-know-who-they-are-new-research-finds-global-gateway-projects-currently-lacking-ambition-regarding-inequality-reduction-in-partner-c/>

⁵ <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/how-the-eus-global-gateway-shifted-from-development-to-geostrategic-interest-211706>

⁶ Several West African countries are among the world's leading producers of agricultural products (AUC/OECD, 2019). Although West Africa is one of the main exporters of primary food products to non-African countries, the region imports a large share of processed products from these countries (AUC/OECD, 2023). "Africa's Development Dynamics 2023: Investing in Sustainable Development," OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3269532b-en>.

⁷ Within this vision, health, grounded in the One Health approach (the health of the soil, plants, animals, and humans), plays a central role.

⁸ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13593-024-00945-9#citeas>

⁹ IPES-Food, 2022. Smoke and Mirrors: Examining competing framings of food system sustainability: agroecology, regenerative agriculture, and nature-based solutions (https://ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/SmokeAndMirrors.pdf)

¹⁰ ROPPA was founded in 2000 in Cotonou. It is a network of farmers' organizations and producers and currently coordinates the initiative of 15 national platforms in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cape Verde, and Nigeria. (<https://roppa-afrique.org/>).

¹¹ The 3AO platform was created during a meeting organized in August 2018 by ROPPA and IPES-Food (a network of international experts on sustainable food systems), which was attended by 31 national, regional, and international organizations. During this meeting, the objectives were defined and the action plan for the emerging alliance was prepared. (https://ipes-food.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/3AObrochure_EN.pdf).

¹² <https://azioneterrae.com/en/what-we-do/>

¹³ <https://azioneterrae.com/en/online-the-results-of-the-mapping-of-good-agroecological-transition-practices/>



¹⁴ The voluntary guidelines for the responsible governance of land tenure are a valuable tool for supporting policymakers in the development of strategies, policies, and activities to implement the right to food and promote equity.

¹⁵ International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (<https://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/overview/text-treaty/en>)

¹⁶ Local seed varieties represent, in the Sahel as elsewhere, the legacy of long-standing farmer selection efforts and the result of a co-evolution between plant species and agroecosystems. Highly adapted to pedoclimatic contexts, they are an essential resource for **genetic biodiversity**, crucial in conditions of increasing climate variability. For example, in some villages in Mali or Burkina Faso, up to 25 different varieties of sorghum are grown. These seeds meet the nutritional needs of communities, support local traditions, and represent an invaluable cultural and biological heritage.

¹⁷ Community Seed Banks (CSB), which have emerged in various parts of the world since the 1980s, take on different forms and functions but share the goal of combating the loss of agrobiodiversity and facilitating access to local seeds that are unavailable in the market. Often based on participatory models, they play a significant role in Europe as well, for the conservation and sustainable use of phytogenetic resources, especially where access to germplasm banks is limited. CSBs can be centralized or decentralized, store seeds or cultivate collections, and are managed by communities organized in informal networks or legal entities. They belong to the informal seed system and do not fall within the public or commercial sectors. Communities define shared rules for accessing seeds, knowledge, and information, shaping a specific culture and identity.

¹⁸ <https://alliancebioiversityciat.org/publications-data/fighting-poverty-hunger-and-malnutrition-neglected-and-underutilized-species>

¹⁹ The “Connecting Smallholders to Markets” recommendations, approved by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2016, recognize that so-called “territorial” markets—although largely overlooked by most existing analyses and statistics—are an essential component of food security in countries of the Global South, particularly in West Africa (e http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ENG ConnectingSmallholdersToMarkets_web.pdf)

²⁰ The Family Farm Observatory (FFO), promoted by ROPPA, collects and systematizes information on their structure and functioning, providing National Platforms with a database to support advocacy and policy monitoring. At the same time, it enables family farms to analyze their own accounts, understand sources of income and costs, and better guide the design of their activities.

²¹ “Stratégie régionale d’insertion/installation des jeunes dans le secteur agro-sylvo-pastoral et halieutique 2019-2023”, in <https://it.scribd.com/document/880263423/Roppa-Strategie-Emploi-Jeunes-3bdef>

²² High Level Panel of Expert on Food Security and Nutrition – FAO.

²³ https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Three-year-Programming_Policy-Planning-Documents_PPPD_2024-2026.pdf

²⁴ “Money’s floods: what is holding back investments in agroecological research for Africa?”, IPES_FOOD, April 2020

²⁵ Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation



²⁶ <https://www.simest.it/en/simest-offer/soft-loans/facilitated-financing-for-internationalization/strengthening-african-markets/>

²⁷ For a critical analysis of the Global Gateway, see: CONCORD Europe, *Understanding the EU's Global Gateway: Why Civil Society Must Pay Attention* (September 2025) <https://concordeurope.org/2025/09/16/understanding-the-eus-global-gateway-why-civil-society-must-pay-attention/>; and *A gateway to equality? Insights from El Salvador and Lesotho on tackling inequalities in the European Union's Global Gateway programmes* (May 2024) <https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-gateway-to-equality-insights-from-el-salvador-and-lesotho-on-tackling-inequalities-in-the-european-unions-global-gateway-programmes/>

²⁸ <https://www.aics.gov.it/fields-of-action/sviluppo-rurale-e-sicurezza-alimentare/agroecologia/?lang=en>

²⁹ <https://www.effectivecooperation.org/book-page/2030-pact-effective-development-co-operation>

