

WHAT ROLE DO TERRITORIAL SOCIAL COALITIONS PLAY IN ENHANCING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC POLICIES THAT PROMOTE AGROECOLOGY PRINCIPLES? CONCRETE EXPERIENCES FROM LATIN AMERICA

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Agroecology is an ambitious approach that fosters fairer, more resilient, sustainable, and healthier food systems. It encourages long-term social, institutional, and productive transformations aimed at reconfiguring food production and consumption, safeguarding agroecosystems, and promoting inclusive governance of food systems. National public policies are crucial in facilitating agroecological transitions. However, the success of these policies largely hinges on their ability to integrate with local processes and collaborate with actors operating in the territories they seek to impact.

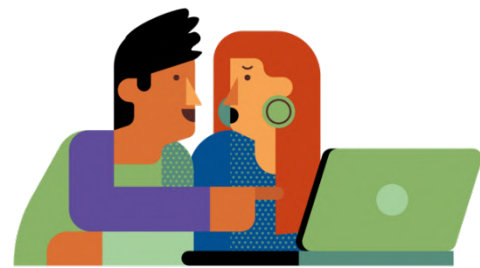
KEY MESSAGES:

- Institutional arrangements involving a diverse range of actors at multiple levels strengthen the design and implementation of national public policies.
- Payment for environmental services schemes can be more effective and sustainable by channeling resources into territorial funds managed by local actors.
- Municipal agroecology models can enhance local governments' ability to influence national public programs, promoting their alignment with local demands and priorities.
- Social control systems that involve various civil society stakeholders enhance compliance with laws and strengthen public programs that target family farmers.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Multilateral organizations and Latin American states are not allocating sufficient resources to projects that explicitly promote agroecology. According to Moeller et. al. (2020), only 10.6% of the Green Climate Fund's portfolio is invested in projects supporting agroecological transformation. Furthermore, only two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean explicitly mention agroecology in their Nationally Determined Contributions, which outline national governments' mitigation and adaptation commitments to climate change (FAO, 2020).

Resources from programs and public policies that finance projects explicitly promoting agroecology are scarce. To scale the adoption of agroecological principles in Latin America, it is essential to leverage other available public resources, such as investments in infrastructure for family farming, public procurement markets, technical assistance services, and payments for environmental services, among others.



The scoping study “**Lessons from Latin America on Agroecology and Territorial Development to transition towards Inclusive and Resilient Food Systems**”, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and coordinated by Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development, **has documented 10 experiences from eight countries¹ in the region that have fostered agroecology transition pathways over a period of 10 to 30 years.** These case studies provide valuable insights into how agroecological transitions are triggered, consolidated, and scaled. In this policy brief, we highlight strategies that demonstrate how various national public policies can be more effective in promoting agroecological transitions.

Research Approach:

The study adopts a territorial development approach that situates agroecological transitions within historical, sociocultural, political, and geographical contexts. This territorial perspective sheds light on how national public policies intertwine with local processes and stakeholders. The study documents established experiences of agroecological transition through the lens of territorial social coalitions composed of grassroots organizations, NGOs, consumers, academia, and public entities. The collaboration among members of these coalitions goes beyond the scope of a specific project or public policy; instead, they coordinate efforts around shared objectives, interests, and values, guided by a common vision for the future of food systems.

¹ Mexico, Guatemala (2), El Salvador, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil (2) and Chile.

The following section presents experiences that have developed social and institutional innovations capable of enhancing and sustaining public policies that target family farmers.

INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL INNOVATIONS THAT PROMOTE AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

Borborema, Brazil: Institutional arrangements involving actors at multiple levels strengthen the design and implementation of national public policies.

The Federal Government of Brazil has established mechanisms that allow for the participation of various civil society entities in the design and execution of public policies. The Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA) in Brazil is a network comprising hundreds of civil society organizations across nine states, responsible for executing programs such as "One Million Cisterns," "One Land, Two Waters," and "Seeds of the Semi-Arid." ASA has partnered with the Polo de Borborema, which is a network that connects **13 agricultural unions and 150 community organizations** in the territory, as well as the NGO ASPTA, to implement these three programs.



Results of the Institutional Arrangements:

- ✓ **Incorporation of local innovations:** Participatory experimentation efforts have provided empirical and scientific evidence regarding the advantages of local water storage systems and heirloom seeds to combat recurrent droughts. This evidence has supported the integration of local innovations into the aforementioned public programs.
- ✓ **Establishment of rotating funds:** Organizations and farmer groups have created various types of rotating funds, enabling rapid access to resources such as manure, water storage cisterns, seeds, livestock, machinery, and fencing materials. These rotating funds have expanded the reach of public programs providing cisterns and seeds while facilitating access to other inputs that foster diversified farming systems.
- ✓ **Development of a multilevel seed bank network:** Seed banks have been established at family, association, union, and regional (mother banks) levels, forming a network for the exchange of genetic material and management strategies. These banks are self-managed, each establishing its rules for seed access and return. This network has enhanced the sustainability of the seed banks created by the federal program "Seeds of the Semi-Arid."
- ✓ **Collaboration with the Food Acquisition Program (PAA):** The Polo of

Borborema has created Ecoborborema as the certifying entity for the organic production of its members, while CoopBorborema facilitates local farming families in selling their products and seeds to the PAA, receiving an additional payment of up to 30% for certified organic or agroecological products.



“Many of ASA's programs emerged from civil society, and we participated directly in designing and negotiating with the public authorities. The relationship with federal governments has always been very important.” (Luciano Silveira, Coordinator of ASPTA, Semi-Arid Region of Paraíba)

Southern Mountain range and coast of Mexico: Payment for Environmental Services schemes can be more effective and sustainable by transferring resources to local agents.

One of the pilot experiences of the Payment for Environmental Services Program (PSA) of the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) was implemented with the Community Biodiversity System (SICOBI) in the Copalita-Zimatán-Huatulco hydrological complex in the state of Oaxaca. In 2009, CONAFOR and SICOBI, with the support of the Autonomous Group for Environmental Research (GAIA), collaborated to define local mechanisms for payments for environmental services aimed at optimizing the provision of environmental and hydrological services. By creating a concurrent territorial fund, SICOBI received payments from the PSA Program to invest in projects prioritized by each community, such as the production and sale of specialty coffee, agritourism, or honey production.



Results of the Concurrent Territorial Fund:

- ✓ **Territorial expansion of the PSA Program:** The territorial fund allowed a portion of the resources received from the PSA to be allocated to communities in areas that did not receive these incentives but where key productive activities were conducted to regenerate and protect conservation areas.
- ✓ **Income Diversification:** The resources from the territorial fund created the necessary conditions for the development of the Copalita Route and the Territorial Products company, generating supplementary income for families participating in SICOBI.

- ✓ **Sustainability of the PSA Program:** Through alliances between SICOBI, GAIA, and private companies, both the Copalita Route and Territorial Products generate revenues that help sustain the ongoing management of the agroecosystem within the Copalita-Zimatán-Huatulco hydrological complex.



"By 2024, income has increased; the Route generates ten times more than in 2016, and we can say that this is a stable economic activity... this allowed for new accounts, and it is no longer the project paying, but rather the sale of coffee or the Route." (Marco Antonio González Ortiz, General Coordinator of GAIA)

San Nicolás, Chile: Local government agroecology models can influence national public programs, fostering their alignment with local demands and priorities.

The Local Development Program (PRODESAL) of the Agricultural Development Institute (INDAP) is implemented through municipalities, which receive resource transfers from INDAP via a collaboration agreement. The Department of Rural Development (DDR) in San Nicolás has successfully influenced PRODESAL to enable mechanisms that allow farming families to access the infrastructure and technical assistance necessary to adopt the agroecological model developed by the San Nicolás Peasant Coordinating Committee and the DDR. This model is designed to be developed over four years, on plots of 0.5 hectares, combining the production of vegetables, fruits, crops, poultry, and small livestock.



Results of the agroecology model in San Nicolás:

- ✓ **Channeling public resources:** The multidisciplinary team at the DDR has facilitated the formalization of 27 peasant committees that are part of a Coordinating Committee. With legal status, these committees and their affiliated families can apply to national public programs like PRODESAL. The DDR and the Coordinating Committee successfully leverage an average of approximately 1 million U.S. dollars per year. The DDR employs staff exclusively dedicated to assisting peasant committees and affiliated families in applying for various public programs.

- ✓ **Progressive implementation of the agroecology model:** Implementation begins with setting up a greenhouse and an open-air garden for self-consumption. In the second phase, the area of production is increased, while in the third phase, surpluses are generated and sold in local markets. The final phase focuses on increasing surpluses, processing food, and boosting sales.
- ✓ **Monitoring agroecology model application:** Using a monitoring instrument, municipal technicians conduct continuous evaluations of compliance with indicators reflecting progress in the implementation of the agroecological model in San Nicolás.
- ✓ **Formalization of the agroecology model:** In 2018, the municipality declared itself agroecological through a municipal decree that promotes environmental protection, conservation, agroecology, and environmental health in San Nicolás. This decree strengthens the municipality's capacity to engage with national public entities, enabling them to adjust their programs to the established agroecology model.



“The strategy they employed [in San Nicolás] to ensure the success [of the agroecology model] was to start adapting public subsidies and funds and directing them towards agroecology.” (Interview with a former member of the GEF Technical Team)

Totonicapán, Guatemala: Social audits ensure compliance with school feeding laws.

The school feeding law in Guatemala was enacted to guarantee that all students in the public education system receive adequate nutrition during their school day. This law stipulates that allocated funds must be used to purchase nutritious, high-quality food, preferably from local suppliers. The network of family farmers in Totonicapán, which is part of the Association of Community Forestry of Guatemala (Utz Che’), has actively participated in the implementation of the school feeding law and social audits, employing innovative strategies to ensure their members engage in decision-making and oversight of school feeding programs.



Results of the social audit model:

- ✓ **Training on legal framework and social audits:** Utz Che’ convened the network of family farmers in Totonicapán, along with parent organizations, school feeding committees, and other stakeholders, to provide training on the legal framework regulating the rights of indigenous and peasant communities to oversee the management of public resources.
- ✓ **Social Monitoring:** Utz Che’ implemented social audit mechanisms that enabled the network of family farmers to monitor compliance with the law, ensuring that products were delivered correctly and that funds allocated for school feeding were utilized appropriately.
- ✓ **Collaboration networks:** Utz Che’ has also encouraged the formation of collaboration networks between communities and grassroots organizations, facilitating the exchange of practices and strategies in social auditing and project management. These networks empower communities to support each other in the monitoring process and strengthen their political advocacy to ensure their rights are respected and laws are upheld.



“We cannot view the territory only as a forest. That’s where the process of supporting community economy emerges.” (Utz Che’ Team)

Recommendations for public policies that promote agroecology principles in Latin America:

- ✓ Establish mechanisms that facilitate the participation of local and territorial stakeholders in the design, implementation, and monitoring of public programs.
- ✓ Design pathways for change that initially address and resolve critical issues in each territory, followed by complementary actions that strengthen agroecological transitions.
- ✓ Incorporate technological and social innovations into public policies that have proven effective in local contexts.
- ✓ Create mechanisms to engage civil society organizations and networks in decision-making and oversight of school feeding programs.

- ✓ Channel resources from public programs to territorial agents to develop inclusive business models (such as tourism and gastronomy services, rotating funds, etc.), ensuring the continuity of public programs after their completion.

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