

# Executive summary of report 'Organic and like-minded movements in Africa', development and status

Commissioned by IFOAM and written by Nicholas Parrott and Bo van Elzakker of Agro Eco, July 2003

1. This report was commissioned by IFOAM under the I-GO programme. Its purpose is to present a detailed overview of the current status of the organic movement in Africa and its potential for development. It has four main aims.
  - To provide an overview of the development and status of farming within Africa, with reference to the overall farming situation there.
  - To provide a statistical summary of organic production within Africa.
  - To provide profiles of the development of the organic sector.
  - To provide a summary of the situation within the three regions of Africa: North; West and the South East.
2. The report reviews the state of organic agriculture in 22 African countries, divided into three regions:
  - North Africa:** Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia
  - West Africa:** Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Togo
  - South and East Africa:** Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Together these countries represent around 40% of African nation states and 40% of the African landmass. These are the countries where organic agriculture are the most developed; they are not representative of the continent as a whole. We have provided brief additional data for other countries where it became available.
3. We identify five different mechanisms through which organic agriculture is currently being developed and promoted. These vary not so much in their style of farming (although the first and last are notably different from the others) but more in the types of actors involved and, equally importantly, the accessibility of information regarding the status, achievements, potential, and bottlenecks facing organic farming.
  - Commercially driven, certified and export-led organic agriculture that exist without any (significant) external funding. This is generally practised on large-scale farms, usually with an existing high level of engagement with export markets.
  - Export oriented organic agriculture, assisted through development funding. This is generally aimed at improving the cash incomes of impoverished small holders by giving them access to premium export markets.
  - Non-market oriented organic agriculture, assisted by donor agencies to meet a range of development objectives. These most frequently include poverty relief, anti desertification and other

measures designed to halt and reverse environmental degradation.

- Local organic agriculture projects, developed by farmer groups and indigenous development organisations as a means of addressing pressing social, economic and environmental problems.
- Research carried out within local, national and supra national institutes.

4. Our typology of these different approaches to organic agriculture forms the basis of discussions about the strengths, potentials, and bottlenecks facing each approach. We identify organisations explicitly promoting organic farming, together with movements with a close interest in using organic approaches. We try to explore the potential for further developing these synergies. These categories are in practice very fluid and here is considerable blurring between these boundaries. There are, however, distinct differences in the quality and availability of data regarding each type. While there is considerable data on certified organic farming (types 1 & 2), information regarding informal organic production is much more elusive. Our ability to specify the levels of activity in the last three sectors is constrained by this. We know that there is significant interest in organic farming in all these sectors, but information about the degree to which is developed or being employed is widely scattered and not easy to collate. In part this is because many development organisations regard organics as a tool rather than an end in itself and often do not differentiate between organic and sustainable approaches to agriculture. Equally local NGOs and farmers groups do not always have the communication capacity or motivation to share their experiences outside of their own environments. Hence our view of these types of organic farming is indicative of the types of activity that are occurring rather than an authoritative estimate of the extent to which they are being practised.
5. The survey shows that organic farming is significantly more developed in South and Eastern Africa than in the other two regions. This region accounts for >75% of Africa's certified organic land and has a large number of local NGOs and development agencies practising organic approaches. The balance between certified and non-certified approaches varies between countries. In some countries a large formal sector may be the consequence of a few large export oriented farms converting to organic production (as appears to be the case in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi). In other countries the formal sector has developed as a result of significant attempts to engage smallholders in export commodity production (e.g. Uganda and Tanzania). In most South and Eastern African countries there is a growing awareness of the close fit between organic farming and other development objectives. National and supra national networks are emerging that place organic farming centre stage in their aims to counter food insecurity, poverty and environmental degradation. In this respect the organic movement may be acquiring a critical mass. Nonetheless the development challenges in this region are huge. It is sobering to remember that in seven of the eleven profiled

countries 40% or more of the population are judged (by the FAO) to be malnourished. Faced with such a scale of deprivation it is difficult to judge how bright a ray of hope organic agriculture offers.

6. Organic farming in North Africa has quite a different complexion. Here production is mostly commercial, certified and (with the exception of SEKEM in Egypt) export orientated. The region accounts for 20% of Africa's certified land, most of which is found within Tunisia and Egypt. Organic farms are generally much larger than the average farm and production is highly orientated to nearby European markets. We found evidence of some state and/or research support in all four of these countries. In Egypt and Tunisia the level of this support appears significant. This is particularly so in Egypt where the organic movement has enjoyed a fruitful relationship with government and university research sectors and has contributed to mainstreaming organic methods of pest control in conventional cotton production.
7. Our analysis of the situation in West Africa is far more patchy. We found it difficult to develop a full picture of the situation there within the time frame of this project. In terms of certified production West Africa lags behind the other regions, containing just 5% of Africa's certified land. Outside of Ghana, Senegal and Cameroon the formal organic sector is virtually non-existent. While the region has often been thought of as having a potential for developing a formal certified sector, particularly in regard to tropical fruits, few sustainable organic trading links have been established. We found evidence of individual agroecological initiatives that explicitly promote ecological farming in Senegal and Ghana and know that Togo has a large IFOAM membership. However we found very little evidence of an emerging or "joined-up" informal organic movement on the scale that exists in many south and eastern African countries. Organic approaches have also been widely used within local and international programmes for promoting rural development, enhancing food security and combating desertification and salinity (notably in Mali Burkina Faso and Senegal). Despite this it has been difficult to build a coherent or complete picture of the status of the organic sector in West Africa. Several factors have contributed to this. Language is certainly one of them, but the apparent poor co-ordination within the organic movement in this region is more significant. We have probably under-reported the significance of the organic agriculture movement in West Africa and believe that it merits further more detailed investigation.
8. We have reviewed IFOAM's membership structure in Africa (section 2.6). Our impression is that it is largely composed of NGOs. Further there is much evidence of a high turnover of membership. Feedback during our research indicated that this may be due to financial reasons. In countries with an average GDP per capita of \$300 or less the cost of membership of IFOAM can represent the equivalent of four months salary for a training or extension officer. Also there is a difficulty to pay, since NGOs have difficulties in sending foreign currency.

9. Although not part of our report brief we identify a number of issues that emerge from the report which we recommend that IFOAM give consideration to and which we feel would contribute to the success and stability of IFOAM's Africa Service Centre:
- Several pan African networks are emerging that seek to promote different facets of organic farming (see section 2.8). IFOAM should be aware of these initiatives and seek to work with these organisations, using their strengths, contacts and existing capacity, rather than risk being seen as a potential threat to the positions that these networks have already created for themselves
  - The split between anglophone and francophone Africa is one that the IFOAM Africa Service centre needs to pay attention to if it is to avoid further marginalizing francophone countries from its development activities (assuming the centre is located in an anglophone country).
  - Cost appears to be a significant factor for non-renewals of NGO memberships. IFOAM may wish to give consideration to this issue in relation to lower income countries. It may also consider offsetting membership fees against the strategic importance of maintaining a member acting as contact point in each African country.
  - During this survey the view was expressed by one respondent that the IFOAM Africa Centre should avoid locating with an NGO<sup>1</sup>. This was based on the rationale that many NGOs might try to take advantage of this situation, using IFOAM's presence to further their own status and objectives, perhaps at the cost of the unity of a broader national or pan-African movement. His advice is well founded, given the competitive nature of the NGO sector in much of Africa. In choosing the location for an office IFOAM should pay careful attention to the networks that it wishes to build (and policies it wishes to pursue) as these possibilities will be strongly influenced by this choice.

---

<sup>1</sup> This comment was made by the chairman of an NGO.