

## The Agroecological Assessment Process in the CCRP East and African Community of Practice

The CCRP generates knowledge based on principles of agroecology (AE) to support farmers to have improved nutrition and income in a sustainable way. This is achieved through knowledge co-creation using farmer research networks which include extension, research and farmers, and through collaborating between different types of institutions and people in communities of practice. In the ESAf COP, although projects were dealing with different aspects of agroecological intensification (AEI), their understanding of what agroecology really meant differed. We held a workshop in Arusha in July 2019 that focused on improving the understanding of AE and what it means for research in projects in the region. Various AE frameworks were introduced e.g. HLPE 2019, CIDSE 2018; FAO 2019; Biovision etc. Projects mapped their AE work using the FAO 10 elements.

Projects were introduced to the draft FAO TAPE tool for assessing the status of the 10 elements. It uses a few indicators for each element, assigning simple score of 0 to 4 for each. Seeing this tool was inspiring, with projects teams realizing that AE assessment did not have to be very complex or time consuming. We also realized that assessment could be done at farm, landscape or community landscape. Teams thus started a process of deciding if and how they could follow up. Projects were invited to a monthly AE e-learning group to work out how to do this and through this the thinking evolved as follows.

- ✓ Projects identified potential objectives for assessments inspired by TAPE including baseline assessment, monitoring, awareness raising and training.
- ✓ In order to do the assessments, projects needed to adapt the indicators and the scores to their contexts. For example, what was considered highly diverse in a semi-arid environment would differ from that in a humid area.
- ✓ The potential levels of assessment evolved to include farm (which was what the TAPE had envisaged), landscape (spatial area including farmed closely interacting with nonfarmed land) and community (including groups of people and cultures with common objectives or ways of food production).
- ✓ Projects also needed to know how the practical assessment in the field could be conducted.

The figure below summarizes the progressing of the process within CCRP. How this assessment fits in the bigger picture with FAO and others needs to be worked out. Currently, FAO has interfaced with CCRP at the Leadership Team meeting and in one of the online working group meeting. Discussions emerging from these interfaces may help frame how the local processes feed into the bigger global discourses.

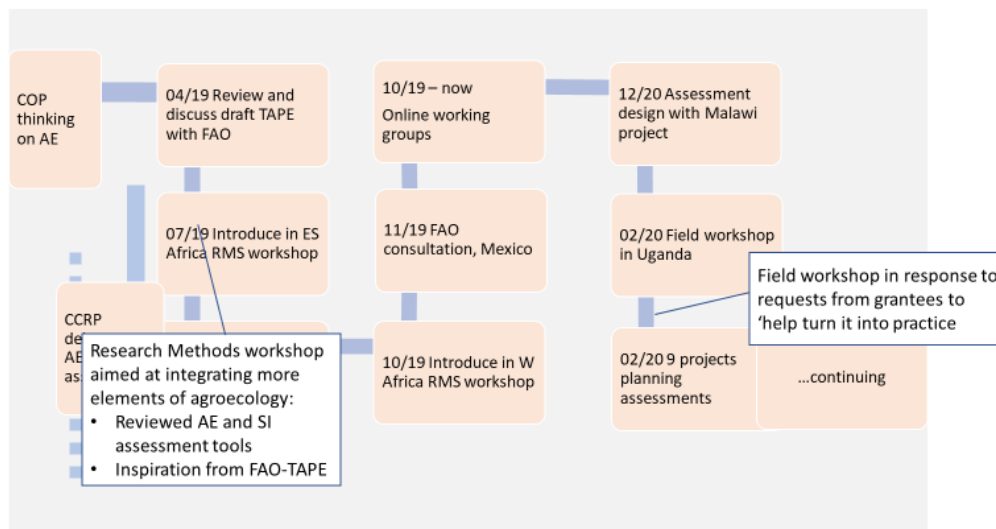


Figure 1. How the process of AE assessment has evolved

## Pilot testing of the TAPE in Soroti, Uganda

A workshop in Soroti convened 32 people from 10 projects hosted by the Cereals FRN to help projects advance with their plans and practice testing the tool by directly interacting with local farmers and stakeholders. For starters, projects reviewed their own objectives for conducting AE assessment, developed the conceptual framework for their assessment and the process they would follow. Projects shared these for peer review.

For practical field work, an overview of the Soroti context was presented by Grace (Cereals FRN PI) to inform planning. Projects were then grouped to design and implement a protocol for piloting components of the assessment with Soroti farmers at farm, community and landscape levels. A key part of this planning included making the indicators and scores relevant to the Soroti context, something projects wanted to do in a participatory way. They also needed to develop protocols for interfacing with farmers and their stakeholders in the field. They piloted the assessment in three groups each focusing on one of these levels:

- ✓ Farm - with a few farmers.
- ✓ Community - with one focus group representing a community.
- ✓ Landscape - with a field focus group on top of a hill with farmers and other stakeholders taking into consideration farmed and non-farmed land and interactions between these.

## Lessons

Groups reflected on the piloting exercise and came up with the following lessons.

1. Objectives matter. Assessment is a means (not end) and needs to be part of a larger process. Objectives projects gave for conducting the assessment included:
  - Characterising the agroecological state of farms and landscapes
  - Creating awareness of the many dimensions of agroecology
  - Training farmers or others in agroecology
  - Envisioning alternative farm futures and planning actions to promote transformation
  - Measuring change
  - Identifying additional dimensions of agroecology is important in specific contexts
  - The design of the assessment will depend on the exact objectives, so we can not expect everyone to use the same method and tools.
2. FAO assessment guide is currently general and high level: needs to be localized and operationalized for use with communities. Piloting enables restructuring of AE tool to be relevant to local context.
  - Some of the guiding questions were not clear and others were repetitive (however, they verified the earlier information). On some occasions additional guiding questions were needed.
  - Different elements/components are more/less easy to assess (related to understanding, visualizing). However, some elements may have more than one meaning at community level: culture and food traditions
  - What is low/high (and +/-ve) in a particular context? The scoring system of each indicator was adapted by setting the extremes by asking: what would be least desirable and what would be most desirable in order to assess the current situation. For 'Diversity' in Soroti, the scale for croplands was:
    - ✓ One kind - Not diverse;
    - ✓ 2-3 kinds - less diverse
    - ✓ 3-5 kinds - moderately diverse
    - ✓ 5 kinds - highly diverse

GIS or google maps could give a spectrum of the landscape and then enable judgement of what is considered to be good on one extreme and poor on the other.

3. Community participation in defining scores looks doable
4. Having a field-based assessment which includes a diversity of stakeholders (e.g. FGD or transect walk) enables observation of landscape elements that farmers may not give, leading to probing why. For example, naturally growing herbs, local vegetables, orange and mango trees were everywhere, but were not mentioned. When this was raised, farmers showed that the lack of market value was a major reason why these components were overlooked.
5. Effective community participation is essential but challenging.
  - ✓ Group size; community composition; other stakeholders
  - ✓ Strong facilitation
  - ✓ Existing researcher-community relationships
6. Rapid vs. more detailed assessment. 'Expert' assessments & community assessment
7. Need good planning, clear questions, protocol, translation. Takes time!
8. Researcher participant: 'Piloting was an eye opener' - in understanding the assessment process and community knowledge
9. Tools seem a practical and accessible way for projects to engage in furthering their work on AEI. Opportunity for opening up conversations on AE transformation

### One month after Soroti

Five projects Finger Millet Kenya, Tanzania Hub, Drylands FRN, FRN NGO and Sorghum Uganda reported their progress since the Soroti workshop. Key issues discussed were

- a) Whether assessment was of current status or historical trends and how this could be used to envision the future
- b) The fact that elements interact and cannot really be assessed separately
- c) The widely differing objectives that projects have for conducting the assessment
- d) Adapting the tool to context