



Policy and Institutional Landscape for Ecological Organic Agriculture in Benin

**African Technology Policy Studies Network
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African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)



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About the Mainstreaming Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative

The Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I)¹ is a continental initiative that holds promise for increasing the productivity of Africa's smallholder farms, with consequent positive impacts on food security. Garnering support and legitimacy for programs and initiatives run in Africa from continental bodies such as the African Union Commission (AUC), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) as well as the relevant National governments could undoubtedly lead to ownership, high visibility, success, and sustainability of such programs and initiative. However, the process of engaging with these high-level bodies and governments is not straightforward. It requires strong champions who have established longstanding relationships both formal and informal with these bodies and governments to achieve the desired objectives. The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)² is one rare organization in Africa that has established working relationships and goodwill with these aforementioned bodies and governments for over 30 years. In most cases, ATPS provides human resource supports to these bodies in a win-win situation that has led to the development of trust and high integrity between ATPS and the continental bodies and governments. The EOA-I aims to transform and create sustainable food systems through promoting ecologically sound strategies and practices among diverse stakeholders in production, processing, marketing and policymaking, to safeguard the environment, improve livelihoods, alleviate poverty and guarantee food security. The overall goal of the initiative is to mainstream EOA into national agricultural production systems by 2025 in order to improve agricultural productivity, food security, access to markets and sustainable development in Africa.

¹ <https://biovisionafricatrust.org/ea-initiative/>

² <https://atpsnet.org/about-atps/>

About the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS)

The African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) is a trans-disciplinary network of researchers, policymakers, private sector actors and the civil society actors that promote the generation, dissemination, use and mastery of Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) for African development, environmental sustainability and global inclusion. ATPS has over 5000 network members and 3,000 stakeholders in over 51 countries in 5 continents with institutional partnerships worldwide. We implement our programs through members in national chapters established in 30 countries (27 in Africa and 3 Diaspora chapters in Australia, United States of America and the United Kingdom). In collaboration with like-minded institutions, ATPS provides platforms for regional and international research and knowledge sharing in order to build Africa's capabilities in STI policy research, policymaking and implementation for sustainable development.

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Key Messages

- The lack of policies and laws restricting the use of chemical inputs in agricultural production in Benin continues to predispose the country to plant, animal, soil and human health challenges and calls for actions to reverse this trend. The Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) development offers a good option for sustainable agricultural development in the country.
- The Beninese Organization for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture (OBEPAB) has been playing a critical role in the development of Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) in Benin by developing capacity in environment-friendly farming systems, building self-sufficient and sustainable organic supply chains, promoting action research in environmental health, food safety and farm family health, training extension agents, consumers, farmers, processors, researchers, students and decision-makers and facilitating access to information for various stakeholders on pesticides and its alternatives.
- Establishing local control and certification system for ecologically produced organic products is critical to earning stakeholders' confidence and subsequently the international market and visibility.
- There is need for increased public awareness and government participation in EOA development in the Republic of Benin to ensure full understanding of its benefits to environment and human health as well as its contribution to the national economy.

1. Introduction

Sustainable agriculture integrates the goals of environmental and human health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [ESCAP] (ESCAP, 2009). Looking forward, the continued global population growth and changing demographic patterns, coupled with income growth will put increased pressure on food supplies and already scarce natural resources (Fan, 2010). In the Benin Republic, the contribution of agriculture to the economy is not negligible as it employs 70% of the active population and 47% of the country's employment (Dayou et al., 2020). Agriculture contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) decreased from 33.1% in 1995 to 32.6% in 2005 and 25% in 2016 (World Bank, 2017). In order to improve the low productivity in agriculture, the agricultural modernization plan targeted changes in the cropping system in Benin such as the widespread use of machines and fertilizers and the large-scale exploitation of farmland among others (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries [MAEP], 2017). However, these practices have had severe negative impacts on the environment and the health of humans and other living things and it has become imperative for changes in the farming systems that are less destructive to the environment and humans while at the same time realizing increased productivity.

Organic farming has been touted to be the best option for enhancing agricultural sustainability and has been advocated by African leaders (Biovision Africa Trust, 2015). There have been various global and regional initiatives and strategies that have targeted to promote the agriculture sector aiming for increasing food production with little or limited destruction on the environment. These initiatives include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the Paris agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) among others.

The Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) is one of the initiatives in Africa that aim to transform and create sustainable food systems through promoting ecologically sound strategies and practices among diverse stakeholders in production, processing, marketing and policymaking in order to safeguard the environment, improve livelihoods, alleviate poverty and guarantee food security. With the overall goal of mainstreaming the EOA initiative into the national, regional and continental agricultural production systems by 2025, the Initiative intends to improve agricultural productivity, food security, access to markets and sustainable development in Africa.

Benin is seeking to become an emerging economy by 2025. To achieve this, it needs to manage the environment more efficiently in order to overcome the environmental challenges facing it, facilitate sustainable development, and reduce poverty in the country (Banque, 2010). This requires significant changes in policy as well as institutional frameworks in the agricultural sector as well as in other related sectors such as land, industry, trade, and environment among others.

2. Rationale for Ecological Organic Agriculture

Benin highly depends on the agriculture sector for its economic development. However, the sector earnings have been declining steadily over the years due to unsustainable agricultural practices. There has been increased deforestation caused by the demand for new land for farming, building needs and timber harvesting, and collection of non-tuber forest products as well as erosion caused by poor farming systems. These practices and technologies impact on the productivity of the natural resources and purchased inputs used by farmers (MAEP, 2016). Depending on the management and productivity of agriculture's use of resources and inputs this will affect the rate of depletion and degradation of soils and water; the flows of harmful emissions into soils, water, air and the atmosphere and the quantity and quality of plant and animal resources and landscape features. Agricultural production derives its existence from the use of land. Without productive land resources, no meaningful agricultural activity can take off. However, land use in Benin remains a huge challenge for the government (Ekpodessi and Nakamura, 2018).

Organic agriculture is a good option for ensuring food and nutrition security equal or better than most conventional systems and more likely to be sustainable in the longer term (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2008). A shift towards organic production systems has an enduring impact, as it builds up to levels of natural, human, social, financial and physical capital in farming communities. Evidence by a United Nations (UN) report reveals that smallholder farmers can double food production within 3-10 years, in critical regions when ecologically based improved methods of farming are applied³. Given that Benin has largely small-scale farmers, ecological organic production systems can ensure and sustain local food and nutrition security and sovereignty, ecosystem

³ <https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/CH/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10819&LangID=E>

services for rural welfare and biodiversity conservation (Biovision Africa Trust, 2015). It is acknowledged that small-scale farmers already produce 70% of the world's food and that following agroecological and organic principles and practices African small-scale farmers can produce adequate food to feed the continent sustainably, provided they have secure access to land, water, seeds/breeds and other natural resources (*Ibid*).

3. Methodology

This Policy Brief was developed from a study that was conducted in Benin where mixed approaches were used. First, a comprehensive desk study was conducted where literature on existing policies, strategies and institutional frameworks relevant to EOA in Benin were reviewed. Secondly, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with 15 identified EOA stakeholders at the national level targeting policymakers, researchers, non-governmental bodies, private sector, traders and individual actors among others. Finally, a Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) involving 8-12 people was conducted with selected stakeholders to triangulate data and information already obtained around EOA-related policies, strategies and institutional frameworks in the country.

4. Major Findings

4.1 National Policies, Strategies and Plans that support EOA development

The Republic of Benin highly depends on the agricultural sector in transforming its economy. It has therefore developed various policies and strategies to transform the sector. Those that specifically support the EOA subsector are highlighted below:

- a) **National Long-term Vision- “Benin Alafia 2025”**: This vision supports the agriculture sector by encouraging agricultural research and the development and dissemination of proven innovations. Agricultural development strategies are given priority in the realization of a strong and sustainable economy. The Vision is relevant to EOA since it advocates for environmental protection and the use of traditional knowledge to achieve sustainability in economic development.
- b) **Benin’s Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector [PSDSA] (2017-2025)**: This plan was adopted in 2017 and outlines the sector’s strategic objectives aimed at strengthening the growth of the

agricultural sector, food sovereignty and the food and nutritional security of the population, through efficient production and sustainable management of farms. The plan has a strong orientation on the adaptation to climate change and takes into account the sustainable management of the resources and the resilience of the populations. These include the promotion of climate-resilient agriculture and the development of value chains for maize, cashew and shea among other crops. Climate-resilient agriculture is part of EOA development.

- c) ***The National Plan for Agricultural Investments and Food and Nutritional Security [PNIASAN] (2017-2021)***: The Plan aims to increase the production and productivity of agricultural value chains; improve markets, trade and value chains; increase the resilience of livelihoods and systems; and strengthen the governance of the existing natural resources. Although this plan does not explicitly recognize organic farming, it promotes climate-smart agriculture as well as protection and conservation of the existing environment and natural resources, hence supporting EOA development.
- d) ***Benin's Strategy for Low Carbon Development and Climate Change Resilience (2016-2025)***: The development of this strategy is based on the assessment of both vulnerability and the greenhouse gas mitigation potential of the main sectors of the Benin economy including agriculture. The objectives of this strategy are to strengthen the resilience of local communities and economic production systems, reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthen community protection, particularly those most vulnerable to natural disasters. This strategy supports environmental protection and conservation in all production and economic undertakings thus expressing its support for ecologically sound agricultural practices.
- e) ***Benin's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions [INDCs] (2015-2030)***: Benin INDCs put forward action plans for both climate change mitigation and adaptation to align with the country's medium-term development agenda. Through the INDCs, Benin commits to implement adaptation action in three priority economic sectors: agriculture, water resources and forestry. Within these sectors, Benin aims to reduce the vulnerability of communities and ecosystems to climate change using appropriate measures, thus supporting eco-friendly agriculture development in the country.

- f) *Benin's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan [NBSAP] (2011-2020)*:** This strategy was adopted in 2010 by the Ministry of Environment to renew the commitment of the preceding NBSAP which was adopted in 2002. It promotes improved management of biodiversity and ecosystems to contribute to sustainable development in the country and to reduce poverty. In line with the previous strategy, it focusses on adopting a participatory approach to ensure that every citizen and sector of the economy contributes to promoting and protecting biodiversity across the country. The strategy aims to reduce pressures on biodiversity, restore ecosystems and use natural resources sustainably and fairly thus supporting ecological friendly agriculture.
- g) *Benin's National Adaptation Programme of Action [NAPA], 2008*:** The Plan has five key strategic areas of focus: agriculture and food security, energy, water, health and coastal development. With regard to agriculture and food security, this programme aims to establish early warning systems on climate risks to enhance food security in various agroecological areas perceived to be vulnerable to climate change. This will help stabilize and increase food production in those areas thereby, indirectly supporting EOA in the country.
- h) *National Programme for Adaptation to Climate Change (PANA) of 2008*:** The PANA aimed at identifying the urgent and immediate needs in terms of adaptation in order to reduce the vulnerability of fragile ecosystems and populations already subjected to poverty in the face of adverse and perverse effects of climate change and extreme weather phenomena. It works in line with other national development strategies to ensure that the Republic of Benin goes "green" by promoting policy measures aimed at integrating the environment into related plans, programs and projects, hence ensuring the sustainability of the key production sectors such as agriculture, and thus supporting ecologically-sound agriculture.

Despite the number of decrees promulgated and the efforts made by competent institutions in the country, the pollution resulting from the mismanagement of plant protection measures persist as evidenced in the presence of chemical substances in foods and food products. This has severely affected the efforts of promoting the EOA subsector in the country. Special attention should be paid in light of minimizing or removing the potential risks of certain chemical inputs used in agricultural production through awareness creation and advocacy in order to remain sustainable.

4.2 Institutional Framework for EOA development in Benin

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries (MAEP) is the main national governmental body regulating all agricultural activities in Benin. Through Decree No. 2016-681 (November 7, 2016) on the institutional framework of agricultural development, Benin has opted for the planning of agricultural development with the creation of seven (7) Poles of Agricultural Development (PAD) administered by Territorial Agencies of Agricultural Development (ATDA) whose role is to ensure the promotion of priority agricultural sectors by ensuring a better combination of the sector approach and the territorial approach as well as the application of instruments and related procedures. The Pole of Agricultural Development Plan (PADP) serves as a compass for ATDA interventions on their territory. It is developed under the technical coordination of the ATDA and serves as a basis for the development of the Sector Development Plans. This framework can also be used to anchor EOA in Benin within the established structures.

Organic certified agriculture in Benin started in 1996 under the leadership of the Beninese Organization for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture (OBEPAB). The initiative was centred on cotton and involved a range of transnational NGOs including PAN Trust/UK, Agro Eco, Solidaridad, and PAN Africa among others. The bilateral Sustainable Development Agreement (SDA) between the governments of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Benin was also key in the development of the organic cotton initiative. The not-for-profit Organisation OBEPAB was founded to contribute to the reduction of pesticide use in agriculture. Much of the annual ill-health and fatalities in rural areas in Benin are caused by pesticides. OBEPAB's objectives include promoting organic agriculture and developing capacity in environment-friendly farming systems; building self-sufficient and sustainable organic supply chains, which are profitable and socially just; promoting action research in environmental health, food safety and farm family health; training extension agents, consumers, farmers, processors, researchers, students and decision-makers on pesticide hazard issues; improving farmers confidence and capacity; and facilitating access to information for various stakeholders on pesticides and alternatives. OBEPAB's approach is to put people at the centre, via participatory approaches which value local knowledge and build the capacity of farmer groups for self-help.

Created by decree no. 92-182 of July 6, 1992, the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Benin (INRAB) falls under MAEP with headquarters in Cotonou, operates three regional centres in the Center, North, and South and

two commodity-based centres focusing on cotton and other fibre crops and other perennial plants. In recent years, it has undergone profound reforms leading to the issuance of decree No. 2019-202 of July 24, 2019, approving its status. The INRAB responds, with the various actors in the agricultural sector, on the national and international challenges of agriculture and development. INRAB's scientists conduct research on crops, livestock, postharvest technologies, socioeconomics, forestry, agricultural engineering, and natural resources. This, therefore, places Benin on a good slate for promoting EOA research and development of the subsector.

Benin's higher education sector plays an important role in national agricultural Research and Development (R&D). Seven units under the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) are actively engaged in agricultural R&D, the largest of which is the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. The Faculty of Agronomy of the University of Parakou is the only non-UAC higher education agency that conducts agricultural R&D. Some other non-governmental organizations also conduct agricultural R&D largely focusing on research related to socioeconomics, but also concerning agricultural issues. Agricultural research conducted by the private for-profit sector in Benin is negligible.

5. Conclusion

This Policy Brief has evaluated Benin's current agricultural policies, strategies, plans and institutional frameworks and how they impact on EOA subsector development in the country. It is evident the Government of Benin aims at increasing agricultural production through the expanding of cultivation areas and improving yields of most food and cash crops. This involved setting up and using techniques and equipment that sometimes did not respect the environment (Dayou et al., 2020). Various policy documents have been developed to revamp the economy through agriculture. Some of the provisions of these policies and strategy documents are not pro-organic or environmentally friendly. Thus, to achieve the goal of increasing agricultural production for food security without affecting the environment, strict provisions in policy and law must be made and enforced, this is despite having management plans and environmental assessments often included in projects. The Government support for agricultural R&D and of course in EOA has been low because most of the policymakers lack appreciation of its importance to sustainable agricultural productivity and economic development. Since some of the organic inputs may not be affordable to many farmers, the government should consider subsidizing organic inputs and make them available to farmers. Consultations need to be formally established where all actors can actively be involved to promote EOA

development and implementation. National organic markets should be created to allow free trade of organic products. Additionally, local production of organic inputs is crucial to ensure the production of zone-specific inputs that are affordable to the people. Moreover, a local control and certification system should be put in place for ecologically produced organic products. It is also paramount to promote entrepreneurship to add value to organic products in the country. For EOA to gain impetus and match the conventional farming system in Benin, the private sector among other actors should be fully engaged in all activities regarding EOA. NGOs have been actively involved in raising awareness of EOA practices and capacity building thus increasing its adoption. For the EOA initiative to gain full operationalization and implementation in Benin, EOA should be included in all agricultural policies and strategic plans. There is also need to popularize to the general public the benefits and importance of EOA over conventional farming.

6. Policy Recommendations

From the study, the following policy recommendations are proffered to ensure the growth and development of EOA in Benin.

Recommendation 1: Review the existing agriculture policies or enact a standalone National EOA policy:

Whereas there are strong agricultural policies in Benin, they do not strongly entrench provisions directly supporting EOA. The review of these policies or enactment of a stand-alone EOA policy will give a clear guideline for supporting the development of the subsector in the country. Participation in the policy and strategy processes should be inclusive and involve public-private partnerships to ensure sustainability. This will offer even the farmers a good opportunity to contribute to the process and ensure success in the implementation of the policies and subsequent programmes. A cross-sectoral coordination and support mechanism is very critical in bringing together key actors as it will form a strong basis for sustainability.

Recommendation 2: Awareness creation and advocacy in support of EOA policies and programs:

There is need to mount a concerted effort in sensitization to increase public awareness about EOA, its benefits in terms of health and income generation as well as in the sustainability of the environment in general. Advocacy campaigns that will build on the findings of this research should also be mounted across the EOA value chains in the country thereby leading to mainstreaming of EOA in

government policies, plans and strategies. All efforts should be inclusive and people-centred to ensure the acceptance and sustainability of EOA programmes in the country.

Recommendation 3: Capacity building across all levels of EOA value chain:

There is need to build the capacity of all actors along the EOA value chain to ensure effective and efficient delivery of goods and services in the subsector. All actors including producers, processors, middlemen, marketers, product certifiers, policymakers, researchers, civil society and the media need to understand what their roles are and how to play these roles for a sustainable EOA development in Benin. Most importantly, regular training should be designed for EOA producers, processors and consumers through the extension service delivery system to enable them to adopt good practices that will attract good profits for their products as well as maintain standards in the subsector.

Recommendation 4: Establish effective markets for EOA products as well as organic standards:

For effective marketing of organic products to happen at local and international levels, it will require the involvement of all stakeholders in Benin, especially through a public-private partnership to design the value chain that will be effective. It will also require the development of organic standards that can be easily implemented given the local circumstances and mirroring the regional and international standards. This will offer producers an opportunity to apply them in their specific contexts considering the climatic and agroecological conditions. Organic certification in the domestic market offers quality assurance to consumers by knowing that the products are produced in adherence to strict production procedures and standards of EOA.

Recommendation 5: Increase funding for EOA research through increased collaboration with development partners and the private sector:

There is need to increase support for research and development on EOA in Benin. This can be through increased funding by the government and/or development partners. The research findings should continuously be shared through conferences and workshops to increase the awareness, knowledge exchange and learning on EOA thereby boosting its adoption. It is also important to create functional and reliable national and regional networks for better interaction and networking among stakeholders in EOA. The government is urged to increase its allocation to agriculture in line with the AU's Maputo Declaration of 2003 that requests African countries to allocate 10% of their public expenditure to agriculture. This will boost further research, capacity

building, market access and overall development along the EOA value chain with the government's goodwill and hence help to realize a transformative change in the subsector.

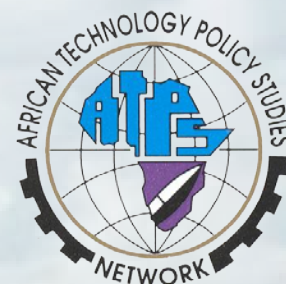
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