

# Is Organic Agriculture a viable option for the Global South?

Debate is ongoing whether organic/agroecological approaches would be a realistic and innovative pathway for eliminating poverty and hunger and promoting responsible and inclusive healthier consumption and production in the Global South. However, the latest findings from comparative research in Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, Bolivia, and India covering 12 years' research from 4 on-station trials and assessments on around 2000 smallholder-farms and on-farm research demonstrate that „**Organic can work in the Global South**“.

Organic agriculture can equal other production systems regarding profitability and productivity, and provides more benefits that essentially address most SDGs (goals 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13, and 15). Empirical findings showed that:

- **Productivity** of organic agriculture can achieve similar yields; yield gaps depend on crop, site, and farmer know-how
- **Profitability** of organic agriculture is very context-specific and varies between crops
- **Sustainability** of organic agriculture is better, e.g., in Ghana, organic cocoa production performs better with regards to species diversity, land degradation, greenhouse gases, energy use, waste reduction & disposal



Yet, good performance of organic agriculture systems depends on active, locally adapted, organic management that respects the principles of organic farming. Good practice management includes preventive pest and disease management like crop rotations, mixed cropping systems, and soil fertility management. The substitution of conventional inputs by organic inputs is not enough to achieve good production and economic results. The complexity of a system determines its performance, such as monoculture vs. agroforestry, mixed- or intercropping. Within the same line is the finding that a pure focus on cash crops does not favour the adoption of good management among farmers. Knowledge is important for successful sustainable farm management.

## Capacity building & scaling up is key

The forum participants conclude that limited capacities, lack of appropriate inputs, and market access are major agronomic and institutional challenges that should be addressed to exploit the potential of organic agriculture in smallholder contexts fully:

- Research and capacity building need to be strengthened at the farm, extension, and research level to close knowledge gaps, e.g., on pests and diseases, nutrient dynamics, soil fertility, management of different crops (planting density, appropriate timing, post-harvest management), and appropriate mechanization to reduce labor demand.
- Governance at the supply chain and cooperative level is essential to organize farmers better, provide technical support, train supply chain actors, enhance access to information and inputs, and catalyze successful linkage to markets.
- Market interventions should be sensitive to the fact that crops for export might replace crops important for food security (e.g., macadamia nuts replace corn) with negative consequences for the food security of small producers.
- Multi-objective sustainability assessment tools encompassing all dimensions of sustainability already exist and should be used in determining returns to investments.
- Policy interventions in terms of plans, programs and investments supporting truly sustainable food systems as organic agriculture do not need prolonged debate. Instead, they need significant support over a long enough period.

**More information on the FiBL projects:** [systems-comparison.fibl.org](https://systems-comparison.fibl.org) and [www.proecoafrica.net](http://www.proecoafrica.net)

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