

Can organic production be the driving force for development in Africa?

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Farming with no chemical inputs in Senegal. Credit: CIRAD

In Africa, the development of organic agriculture is facing specific challenges because of the need to achieve food security for a rapidly expanding population and the persistent low chemical input use for producing food for home consumption. We are familiar with the export of certified organic products to countries in the North, but know little about organic farming's potential for the continent's development. Yet the movement is booming. Ludovic Temple, an economist with CIRAD, has coordinated a collective summary documenting how organic production can constitute a technological pathway, providing a structure for the development of the food and agricultural sector in Africa.

For some years now, [organic farming](#) has become increasingly institutionalised in Africa with the emergence of continental networks, such as AfrONet (African Organic Network), created in 2014. It promotes organic and ecological farming on the continent by organising events, such as the

4th African conference on [organic agriculture](#) due to take place in Senegal with CIRAD's participation (see inset).

Uganda's success story

In Uganda, organic agriculture has gradually become institutionalised since the 1990s. This East African country now has 200 000 certified "organic" producers, a national movement has emerged (NOGAMU—National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda) and a specific policy is being drafted. "In this country, organic farming has been adopted by the agricultural sector, which is largely made up of family farming... in terms of the number of farmers involved in the movement, Uganda is the first African country and the second in the world after India," as Pauline Bendjebbar explains. She is a Ph.D. student in political sciences working with CIRAD. Her thesis is devoted to the institutionalisation of organic farming in Africa.

The young researcher's work has led to the deconstruction of two widely held assumptions:

- Organic agriculture in Africa is "organic by default." It is a fact that African agriculture is based on natural traditional techniques and has the lowest level of chemical input use in the world. However, several scientific articles highlight the serious problems and the pollution generated by chemical inputs on the continent, particularly in peri-urban zones. Furthermore, supporters of organic farming use more technical and structured methods than traditional methods.
- African organic agriculture produces for export to countries in the North. The export of products certified by a third party has indeed been one of the driving forces in the development of [organic production](#) in Africa. However, many organic farming initiatives have been launched with [food security](#) goals. The certification models are far more

varied than in northern countries, like the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), little known in Europe.

To develop organic farming in all its diversity, it must be certified whatever the contexts and the target markets. "In which case, the European example, where third party certification has superseded all the other systems, should not be followed," asserts Sylvaine Lemeilleur, a CIRAD economist. Elsewhere in the world, several certification systems coexist, which is often better. For example, in Brazil several certification models provide access to the same national organic farming standard.

"Maintaining a combination of guarantee systems is the best way to include the maximum number of producers in the 'organic' movement," says Sylvaine Lemeilleur, who is a PGS specialist. "Each certification method has advantages and disadvantages. Third party certification is expensive for producers, while PGS require farmers' time and involvement, especially to coordinate inspections. The former is better adapted to production for export, while the PGS are more suited to local and national markets. "When African countries have their own public policies for organic farming, they should strive to make them compatible and inclusive. For example, if grants for organic conversion are created, they should apply to all [certification](#) systems so that no farmers are excluded."

Provided by CIRAD

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