ACRA

FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

THEMATIC STRATEGIC POSITIONING PAPER

FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Summary

**In this kit, the masculine form (and the extensive masculine form) is used to indicate people of all genders*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the great international food crisis of 2007-2008, Olivier De Schutter (ex United Nations Special Rapporteur for the right to food), took notice that in the world, **there is food for everyone but it is either not available or not accessible.**

> *"We know where hunger and malnutrition come from. Their source is found within the deeply unequal distribution of income, in the absence of social protection system for agricultural workers, in the ethnic discriminations [...], in the unequal access to resources, in an unfair system determined by international trade [...], in the speculation on markets by means of futures contracts on agricultural products".*

An authoritative, clear and unambiguous analysis, far from the common vulgate that sees in technological transfers the mean to solve the problem of poverty. It is now clear that hunger is not the result of the inability of the Earth to produce enough food for its citizens, but is determined by the balances and inequalities that make up the food system.

Dealing with the food paradigm (of how is produced and consumed the food that the world provides) means confronting a wide range of issues. Real conflicts arise from it (linked with skin color), hunger and malnutrition, but also **conflicts** of a more conceptual nature, centred on how to address the challenges posed by the "food question":

- **Control of resources and food:** who controls genetic resources, seeds, large stocks of cereals at the global level;
- **Production and transformation**, **value chain**, distribution **channels**, food waste at various levels (the instruments of conservation, of storage,... are absent) including the uninterrupted decline of means in agriculture;
- **Agricultural biodiversity : valuation of local species** adaptable to the specific context, integration of diversity throughout the value chain;
- **Nutritional quality, food security and safety**: access and safety of the food consumed, value added/ quality of products;
- Environmental management of rural and urban areas: access **to land vs.** water grabbing for agriculture and **migration phenomena**, megacities;
- Role and objectives of **innovation** adoption and **technology used in agriculture**;
- **Gradual transformation of the social role of the farmer**, able of feeding and nourishing himself, into a labour supplier for the large land concentration;
- **Use of food resources:** why they are produced and what they are used for (biofuel, financialization of food, sudden changes in population's diet).

Since 2014, when the FAO began to collect the data relative to FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale), **food insecurity around the world**

1. Second meeting of the Contact Group to support the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) 22 May 2009, Rome. https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/docs/CFS_reform_note22May09.pdf

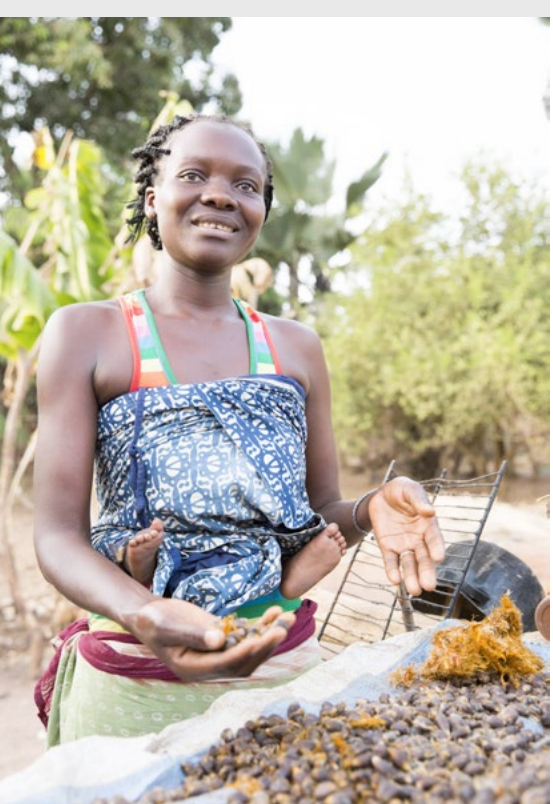
has been gradually increasing. But in 2020, with the Covid-19 pandemic, food insecurity increased in one year, as much as in the previous five years combined (up to 30,4%), further delaying the achievement of **the goal of ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG 2) and ending global poverty (SDG 1)**.

It is estimated that due to the disruption of the agri-food supply chain and the consequent lack of available and accessible nutritious food, the gradual erosion of capital in agriculture, other effects of the pandemic and relative restrictive prevention measures, almost one in three person worldwide did not have access to adequate food in 2020 (FAO progress report, 2021)

Therefore, **ACRA's strategy for Food Security and Safety**, in line with the **2030 Agenda** of United Nations, means to contribute to the achievement of the following **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**:

SDG 1: "End poverty in all its forms everywhere"

Goal 1.4 (Ensure that all have access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services) and 1.5 (Build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters);



SDG 2: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"

Goal 2.1 (End hunger and ensure access by all people, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round), 2.2 (End all forms of malnutrition, especially in children under 5 years of age, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons), 2.3 (Double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets etc.), 2.4 (Ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality), 2.5 (Maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge), 2.a (Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries), 2.c (Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility);

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SDG 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"

Goal 11.b (Substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement holistic disaster risk management at all levels);

SDG 12: "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"

Goal 12.3 (Halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses), 12.a (Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production);

SDG 13: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts"

Goal 13.1 (Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries);

SDG 15: "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss"

Goal 15.3 (Combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods), 15.5 (Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity), 15.6 (Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources), 15.8 (Introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems), 15.9 (Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts).

Furthermore, **SDG 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"** is an integrant part and is cross-cutting to all ACRA interventions.

2. OUR APPROACH

Food is a human right: have access to a "food that is sufficiently nutritious and safe to meet basic nutritional needs", is written in the article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights , in which governments "recognize the right of each individual to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food [...] and the continuous improvement of living conditions". In this sense, every government has an obligation to make food accessible, available and guaranteed for its citizens. Furthermore, this right is included in the article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, in which it is stated that "every individual has the right to an adequate standard of living to insure the health and the well-being of himself and of his family, particularly in relation to food [...]".

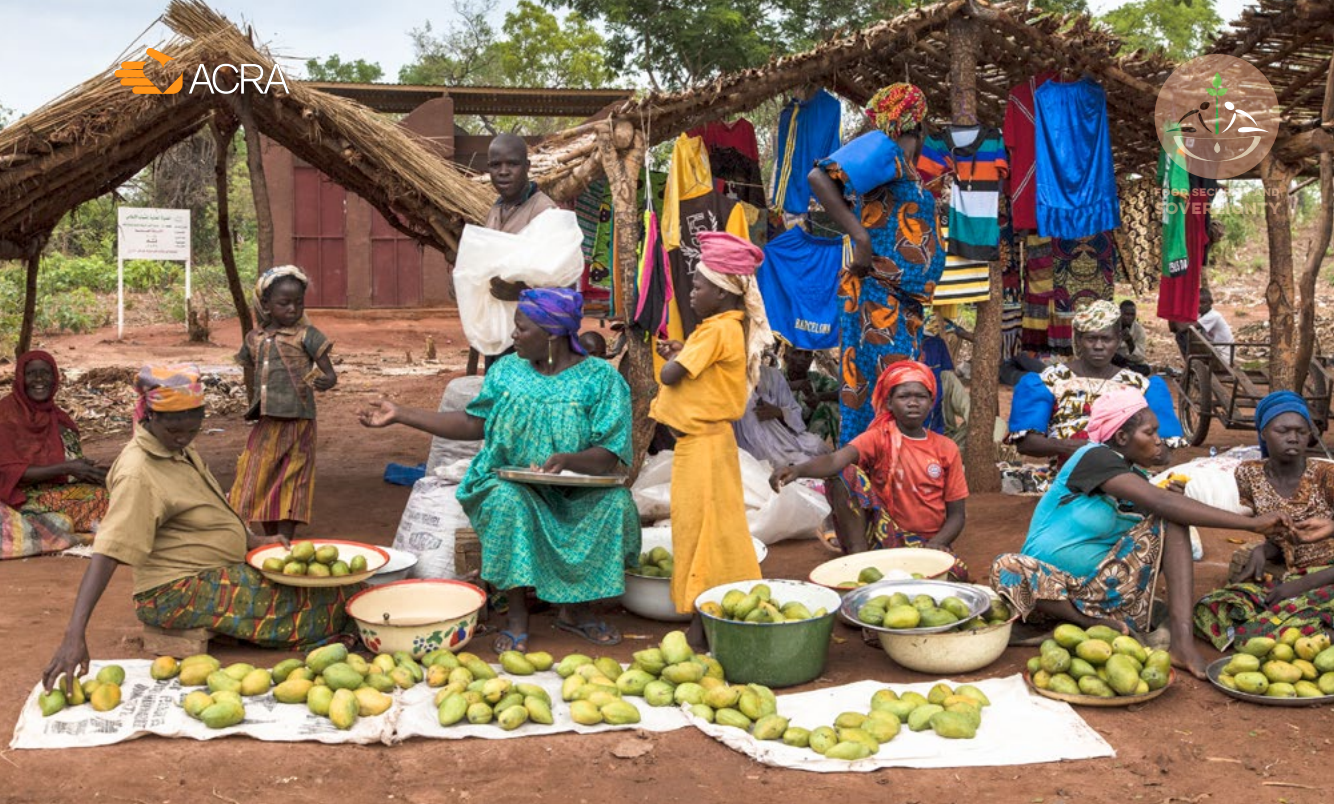
The **right to food** cannot ignore **food sovereignty**: by putting the producer (farmers, breeders, fishermen, pastoralists, pastoralists/breeders, and nomads), the food distribution and consumption, at the center of the agricultural system and food policies. These are defined by the actors themselves, who direct them towards ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate models. To do this, we put an emphasis on the **resources** to produce food, on their **quality** and integrity, on ensuring **availability** and the **accessibility** for those who produce it.

The **intervention** strategy favoured by ACRA is the one **proposed by** the **agro ecological model**. It is about applying the ecological concepts and principals to the design and management of food systems so that food production respects the environment, health and the rights of the farmers and consumers (Gliessman et al. 2007, Barberi 2019). The fields of action of agroecology aim to relocate agricultural systems and food and to promote the circulation of natural capital in the production system, reduce dependence to external inputs: self-production of seeds, management of soil fertility through good agro economic practices, self-production of amendments, fertilizers, biostimulants and biopesticides.

It is therefore, essential to co-design

2. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights

3. https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/italian



agro ecological systems, starting from the circularity and efficiency of the resources available in a field, a farm, a community, in order to offer viable solutions that contribute to creating systems capable of adapting to continuous change and responding to urgent climate and nutrition challenges. To do so, one possible strategy for innovation in agricultural systems consist of promoting their diversification, starting from the recovery of cultivated biodiversity and innovating/adapting traditional agronomic techniques and knowledge.

Starting from the diversification of agricultural systems, agro ecology can respond to the challenge of ensuring food security and better nutrition for all. Agro ecological techniques, taking advantage of natural cycles and synergies, promote a set of diversified agronomic practices that restore or improve soil fertility, contributing at the same time to an increase in yields (Altieri, 2009). The diversification of agronomic practices and therefore of the environment in which crops are grown, is closely linked to the diversification of local genetic resources (animal and plant).

Indeed, the choice of the latter must take into account the resilience of biotic and abiotic factors (Gimenez et al., 2018).

Agro ecology is therefore based on a set of flexible and dynamic practices, determined and developed by local actors themselves, in contrast to industrial approaches based on the universal implementation of the same technologies, hyper specialization and intensification (both at the company and at the regional levels) and homogenisation of landscapes. It is applied differently according to local realities, traditions, spirituality, social spheres, while sharing a common set of values, centred on respect for people and nature.

Therefore, the transition of agricultural systems towards an agro ecological model will differ depending on the starting conditions. In the case of most actors we work with, the starting point for the agro ecological transition is small scale subsistence or family farming or ranching with modest commercial activities. This pathway requires the adaptation and improvement of ecological principles already present within the company, as well as the adoption of new practices, but does not require major structural changes (Altieri, 2009).

In a more limited number of cases, the challenge is to abandon industrial modes of production that have been

fully or partially adopted (for instance, export-oriented crop production) or to replace in local food systems species that have been favoured and/or imposed by some development programs. In these cases, the transition will need gradual restauration/regeneration of natural resources (for instance, soil, water, starting genetic material), re-diversification of the agro-ecosystem and development of synergies between its various components (Côte et al., 2019). For the transition to be effective, farmers themselves must be the promoters of change and be involved as soon as the design and planning phases, using a participatory approach. This approach puts the farmer's knowledge and practices back at the centre, by promoting the circulation of knowledge and by recognizing the value of empirical knowledge, of mutual learning and of restoring, if necessary, the skills and social value expropriated by the transition to an industrial agricultural system. The **transmission of knowledge** takes place through **a participatory and intergenerational dialogue** between farmers on issues ranging from the economic viability of small-scale family farming, to agro ecological innovations adapted to a given sociocultural context (technical, mechanical and biological innovations in pest and weed management, use of certain species as fertilizers).

In this perspective, it is essential to **promote biodiversity in agricultural systems**, as well as in seeds systems, by supporting both informal seeds systems and the emergence of formal systems at the local level. The objective of these systems is not to conserve but to improve and support the circulation and use of genetic material, by **favoring indigenous species and local varieties**. ISupport for these practices, which promote cultivated agro biodiversity, aims to stabilize productivity over time, while allowing for a gradual reduction in the use of external inputs, based mainly on synthetic chemical products.

Aware that the genetic resources that have arrived until today, are the result of the work and knowledge of farmers, we are working to promote the implementation of the **International treaty on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (ITPGRFA)**[4] in the countries where we operate.

In the current context, the Treaty recognizes the contribution of farmers and seeks to facilitate access to genetic resources, which is constantly subject to legal limitations related to intellectual propriety rights and propriety itself. Indeed, since 1992, with the **Convention on Biological Diversity**[5], genetic material ceases to be a heritage of humanity and becomes a heritage of States. As a result, the exchange of genetic material is linked to the signing of bureaucratic bilateral agreements that often hinder or slow down the process of transferring biological diversity to farmers.

The Treaty, which came into effect in 2004, instead promotes a "multilateral" type of exchange system in which the exchange of all crops listed in Appendix I of the Treaty can be facilitated through a "Material Transfer Agreement (MTA)". In addition, signatory states have the obligation, for all crops (and not only those included

4. https://www.fao.org/3/I0510IT/i0510it.pdf

5. https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-fr.pdf

in Appendix I) to ensure cataloguing and ex situ conservation, as well as the sustainable use of genetic resources.

Given that many species considered as staple food in the States where we work are not included in Appendix I, we aim to promote institutional awareness among representatives of the governing body, for the expansion of the Treaty and the full implementation of Articles 6 and 9 on farmers' rights.

Since 2004, Italy has also become one of the signatory states of the FAO Treaty on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, of which it is one of the main funders. The law XX of 2004 recognizes the importance of this international instrument and delegates to the regions, the role of implementing some of these measures. However, almost twenty years after its coming into effect, the Treaty remains an instrument that is still almost unknown to civil society and the various actors in Italian research. The relevant entry points for this ACRA action are, Article 7 which calls for the creation of development cooperation policies on the objectives of the Treaty and Article 9, on Farmers' Rights, which is expressed through Benefit Sharing (BS) measures.

Having **access to the seeds** stored in germplasm banks (a crucial point of the Treaty) is essential for farmers. Indeed, diversity is the key to activate genetic improvement processes and to build the seeds of the future. Through the Treaty, ACRA can legitimately act as a facilitator of transfer agreements between germplasm banks, farmers and research to develop participatory

projects on genetic improvement, community seeds banks, seeds exchange fairs and more generally decentralize and diversify seed and agricultural systems (Art.6) – rejecting the single "improved seeds" strategy.

Finally, the agro ecological model envisions heterogeneous agricultural systems that require in parallel **research** model different from the conventional one, achieved through the involvement of various actors present in a territory (farmers, associations, technicians, researchers, consumers and administrators) according to a **participatory and decentralized** approach, specific to the context and adaptable (Wezel et al, 2016).

To ensure a truly participatory approach, it is essential to integrate various disciplines (humanities and hard sciences) to link ecological processes with socioeconomic ones in all stages: from design to implementation (Mafpumo, 2014). In particular, anthropology, as a cross-cutting discipline, plays a key role in facilitating the understanding of real needs and issues, promoting the research for possible strategies and solutions with other stakeholders.

The **agro-ecological** transition is currently supported by the **European Commission**, who, in January 2021, published a list of agricultural practices that could be integrated into the eco-schemes that the member states should implement. In the transition process from traditional agriculture to agroecology, three levels are identified : efficiency, substitution and reorganization of productive systems.

In terms of efficiency, it is important to improve industrial and conventional practices and reduce waste and environmentally harmful actions, such as the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (Gliessman, 2016). On the other hand, the substitution part, concerns the transition from the use of commercial synthetic materials to organic or biological materials. Finally, the third level concerns the reorganization of the agroecosystem, practices and techniques, according to a holistic vision of diversification of ecological processes and minimal use of external materials. This process of ecological transition can be understood as a continuous

6. Gliessman in his 2016 publication actually indicates 5 levels: increasing the efficiency of practices, substituting practices, reorganizing the agro system, re-establishing direct connections, forming a new global system. (Gliessman, 2016)

transformation, where farmers contribute gradually according to their knowledge and skills and where the synergies between conservation agriculture and organic agriculture are enhanced, instead of being put in opposition (Agroecology Europe, 2021).

Finally, a paradigm shift is necessary regarding **the role played by the forests,** forestry and agricultural practices. **Agriculture is one of the causes of deforestation,** but forests and trees are essential to food security and fighting climate changes:

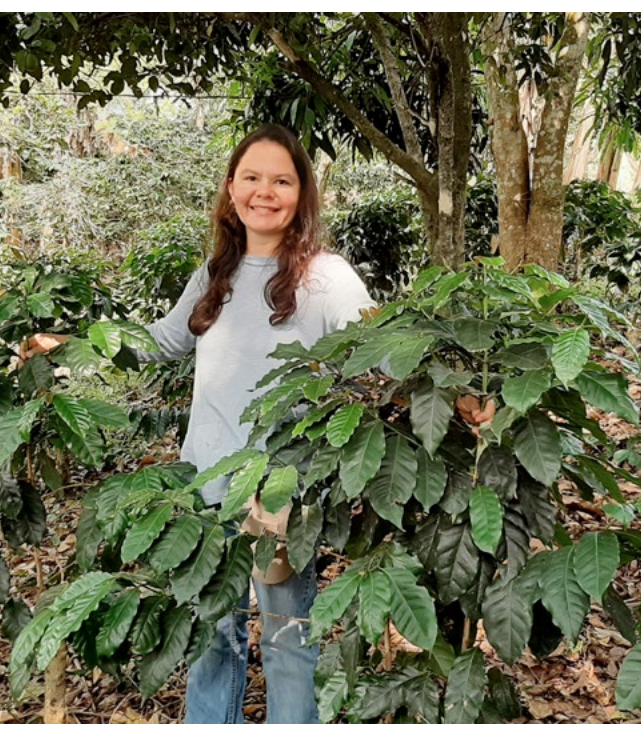
- They fulfil several functions, including ensuring soil fertility, storing carbon, regulating water (both quantity and quality) and helping to prevent erosion.
- They provide diverse and micronutrients-rich food for the populations that depend on it and constitute a significate source of income for the most vulnerable populations.
- They also provide the energy needed to cook food for one third of the world's population.
- They are essential to the proper functioning of ecosystems and agricultural systems.

In this sense, ACRA promotes **AGROFORESTRY** which strengthens resilience to climate changes and is an example of an agricultural model to ensure food security for the future. Forestry systems are complex and therefore it is necessary to rediscover and recognize the value of local indigenous species. Monoculture and the introduction of non-native species, on the contrary, disrupt the balance, lead to losses in biodiversity and reduce the capacity to adapt.

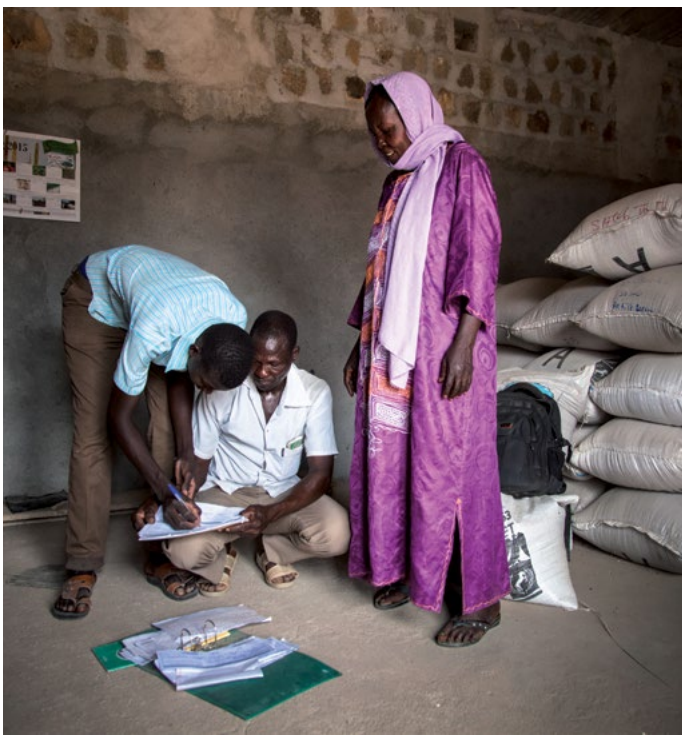
3. OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We work by supporting that (quality) food is an individual and community right rejecting the simple logic of need and its recognition;

We contribute to **ensuring a participatory and gender-sensitive, access to and management of productive resources**: Land (access and fertility), Water (green water management), Genetic resources (access and research), Knowledge, focusing on the theme of food poverty within the global poverty paradigm;



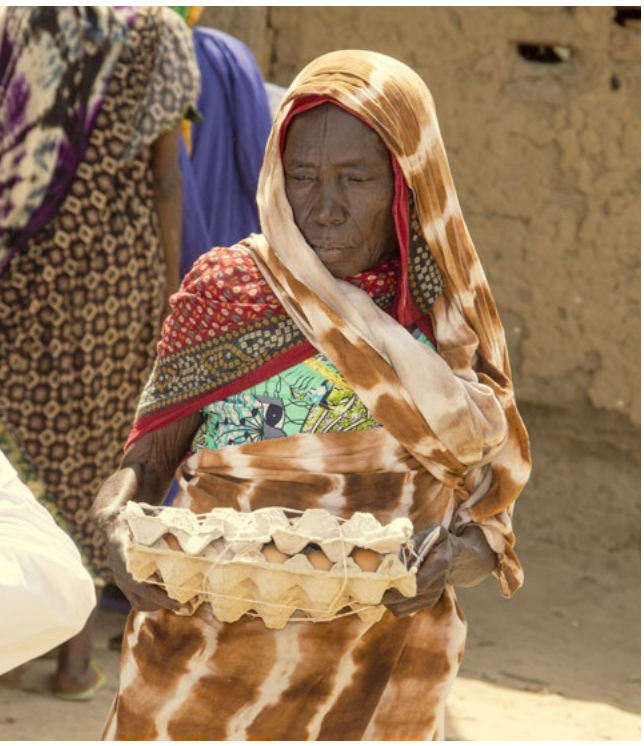
We consider **technical capacity building** as a strategic sustainability factor for our interventions, by working on technical training, formal and vocational education, training of leaders (agricultural unions), organisational and institutional strengthening of Grassroots Organisations;



We work, both in the Souths and the Norths, to promote **agro-ecological production models and support local food systems, participatory agricultural research and innovation** to improve production and trade chains;

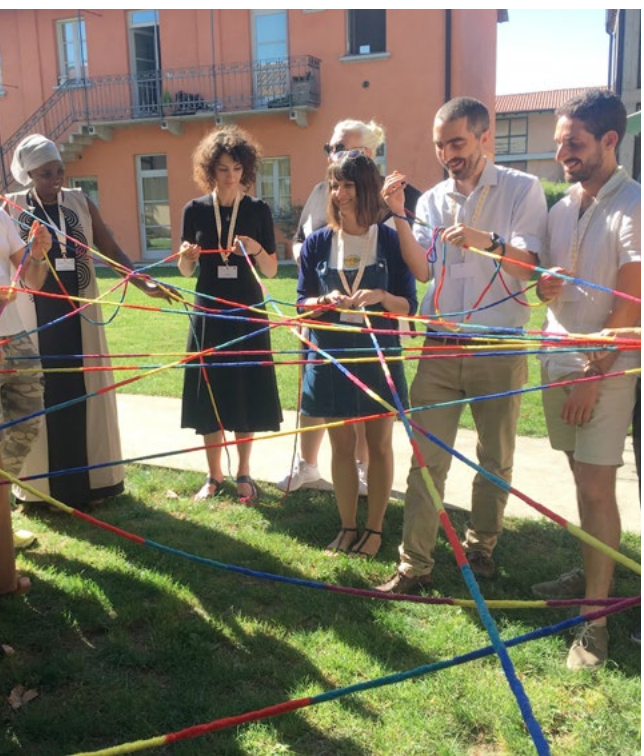
We favour **market access** by focusing on the local a**nd regional dimension of trade**, as well as fair market policies, the **dignity of labor** and the establishment of appropriate social protection regimes as a lever for public action;

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



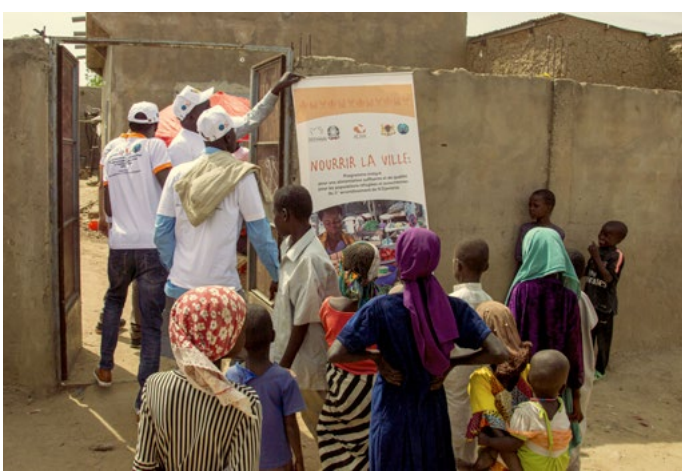
We work to **support the processes of transformation and valuation of local and sustainable agri-food products;**

We support practices that also use **food as an instrument to facilitate intercultural dialogue**, by integrating it into education and awareness initiatives aimed at welcoming and social inclusion;

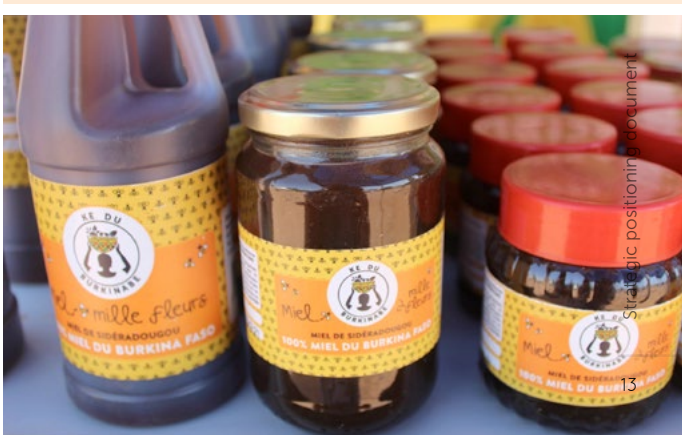


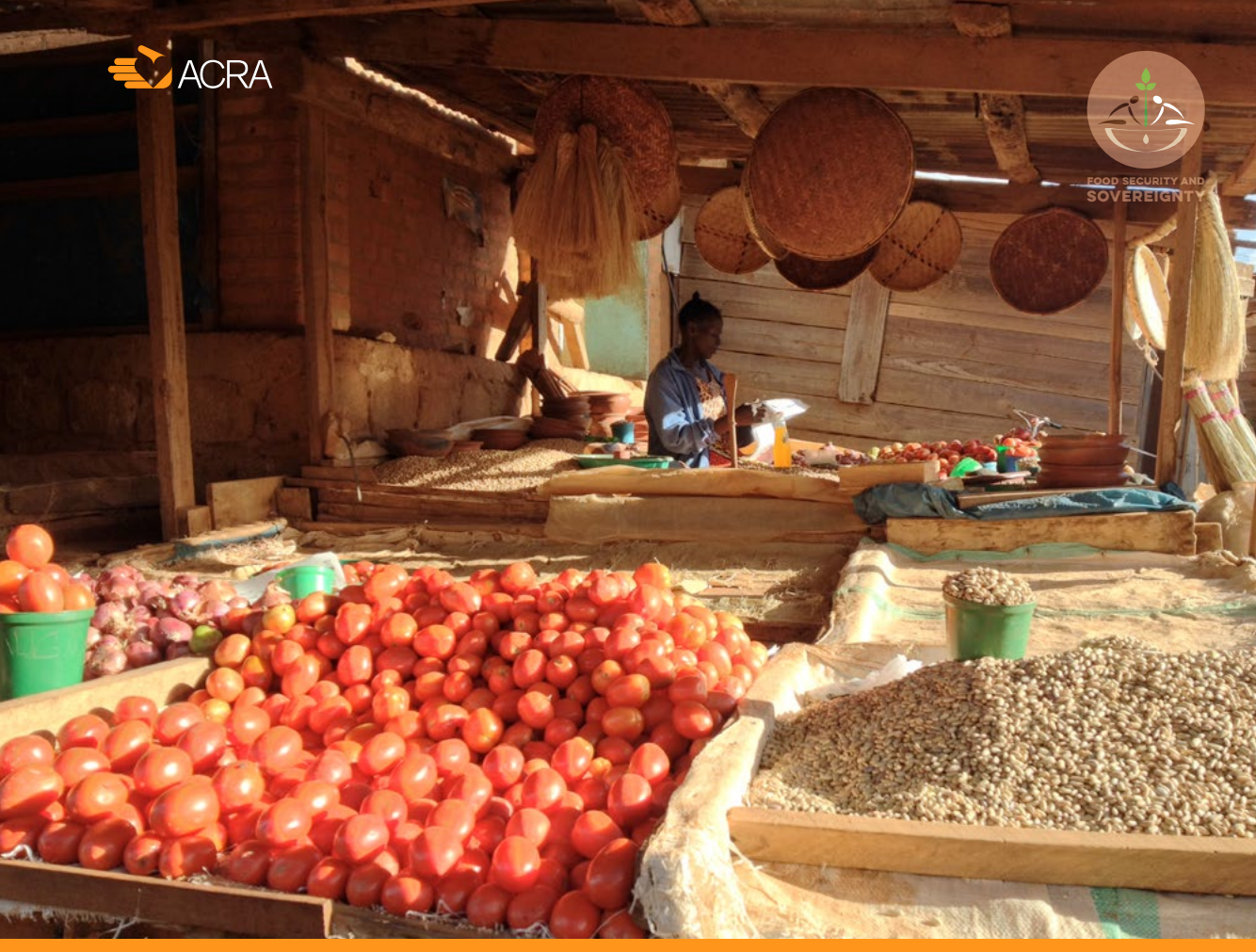
We also support and promote **advocacy actions at the local, European and supranational levels** by accompanying activists and civil society in their participation in consultative and decision-making processes;

We promote actions, campaigns and processes to inform and educate citizens about food production systems and the impact of individual consumption choices, in order to promote more sustainable and fair choices;



We adopt a **gender approach** to promote equal rights and the equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities between women and men, through a p**articipatory and integrated approach** in all our interventions, based on the *Human Rights Based Approach.*





4. INTERSECTORIAL PERSPECTIVES

In accordance with the **ACRA 2020-2025 strategic document**, ACRA also promotes:

Human Rights Based Approach

Gender equality, equal opportunities and community empowerment

Governance – Participation in local development, active and conscious participation of civil society actors and citizens, change in behaviours

Climate change adaptation – Integrated approach to the sustainable use of natural resources

Decentralization and democratization of agricultural and food systems research

Models for the application of new technologies in agri-food production

Development of social entrepreneurship

Multi-stakeholder partnership

5. MAIN STAKEHOLDERS

ACRA adopts a **multi-stakeholder** approach, involving and concluding partnership agreements with other Italian and international NGOs, universities, research centers, municipal administrations, civil society organizations (CSOs) in the countries of intervention, producers and their cooperatives/associations, etc.

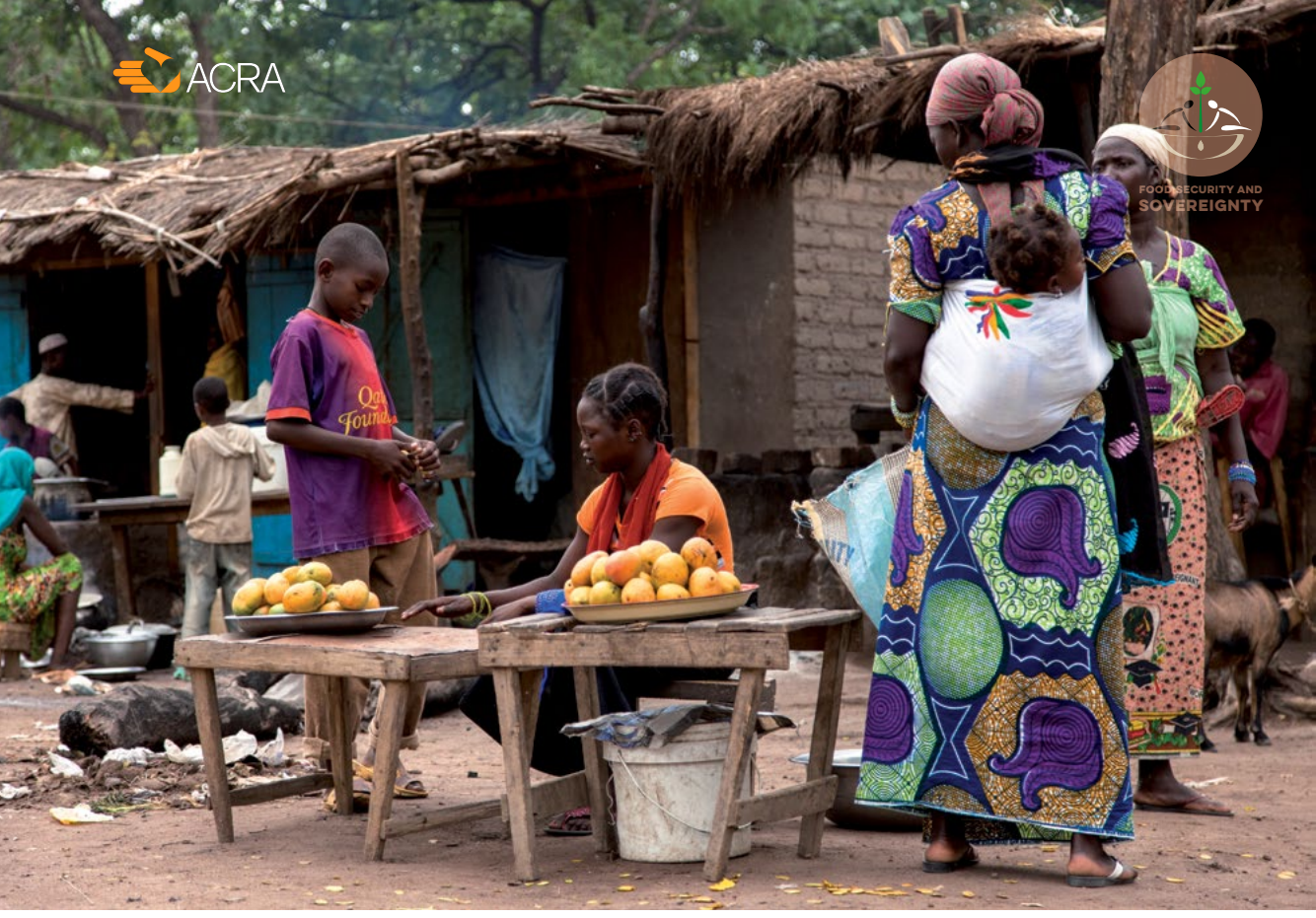
ACRA is one of the founding members of **Azione TerrAE**[7] ***Coalizione per la transizione agroecologica***, a coalition of Italians and Europeans organizations created to support the agro-ecological transition in West Africa in response to the serious crisis experienced in the region. The Coalition was born from the meeting between diverse experiences and competences: seven international cooperation NGOs (ACRA, COSPE, CISV, LVIA, Mani Tese, Deafal, TerraNuova), with decades of work in West Africa, an Italian civil society network (Rete Semi Rurali) and a European network that includes several major universities and research centers (Agroecology Europe) active in the fields of research and advocacy for agro-ecological transition.

In addition, ACRA contributed to the founding of **AIDA**[8] (Associazione Italiana Di Agroecologia).

ACRA has a **strategic partnership** agreement with **Rete Semi Rurali**[9], an Italian association that promotes the dynamic and collective management of agricultural diversity. The agreement establishes a collaborative research relationship in order to develop design and research in the areas of agro-ecology, nutrition, agricultural and food policies and agricultural extension.

ACRA has supported the **MUFPP** (***Milan Urban Food Policy Pact***[10]) since its beginning in 2015, by supporting the MUFPP Secretary and the cities with which it works and partners, helping them to adopt sustainable urban food policies and implement dedicated governmental bodies and by promoting the participation of civil society in food policy-related processes. In addition, ACRA has promoted the regionalization process of the MUFPP in Africa, participating in the organization of regional forums, starting with the first regional forum in Dakar in 2016. Among the cities of the network with which ACRA has collaborated directly are: **Milan, Turin, Dakar, N'Djamena, Niamey, Ouagadougou, Tegucigalpa, Maputo, and San Salvador.**

7. https://azioneterrae.wordpress.com/
8. https://www.agroecologia.eu/
9. https://rsr.bio/
10. https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/



ACRA has been collaborating for years with **URGENCI**[11], an international network of networks for agro-ecology and solidarity alliances between producers and consumers.

ACRA is also a partner of various technical and scientific actors who collaborate in active projects. The relevant actors at the international level include:

- **ICLEI** ***Local Governments for Sustainability***[12] - lead partner for the AfriFood project (MULHOR)
- **CIRAD** ***Organisme français de recherche agronomique et de coopération internationale pour le développement durable des régions tropicales et méditerranéennes***[13] - already a project partner of ACRA and with whom we collaborated on the organization of the MUFPP Regional Forum in Africa
- **ICRISAT**[14] *The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics*
- **Università degli Studi di Sassari**[15] **- Dipartimento di Agraria e Nucleo di Ricerca sulla Desertificazione** lead partner for the Ewa-Belt project (BURHOR)
- **Università degli Studi di Milano - Facoltà di Agraria**[16] - partner of several projects in Italy
- **ESTà Economia e Sostenibilità**[17] - already a project partner of ACRA and with whom we developed the Position Paper Green Deal on Food in African Cities (see Appendix 3).

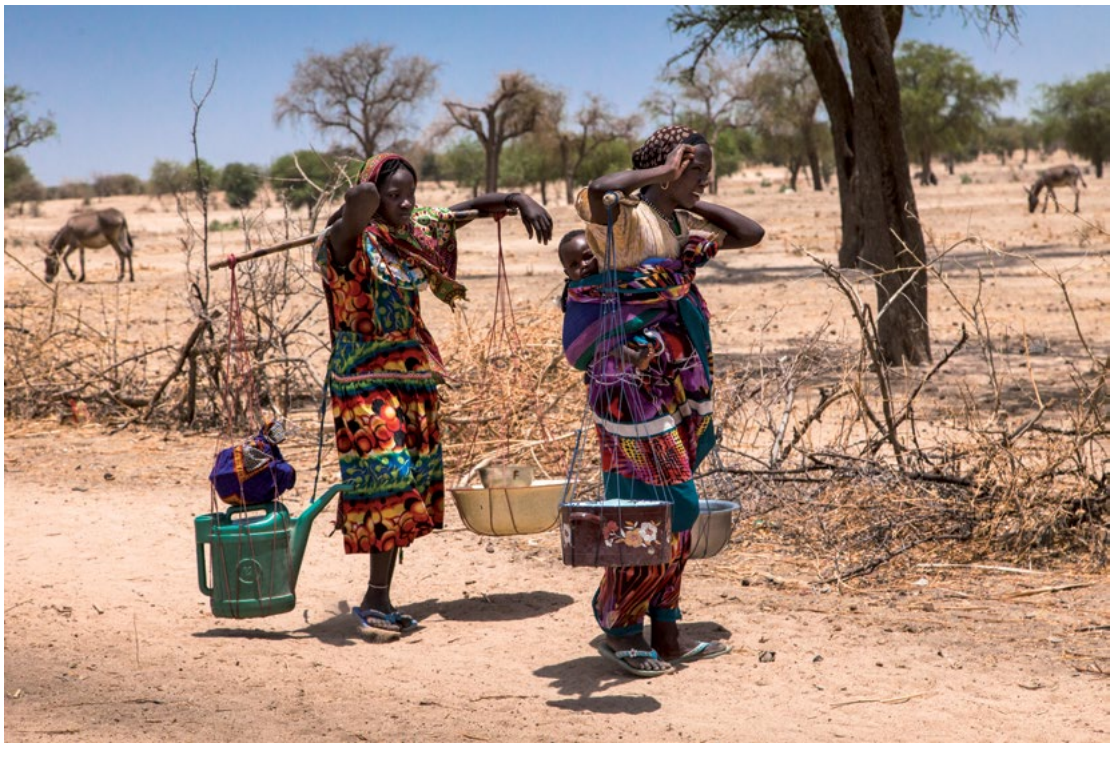
In addition to established relationships and agreements, the dynamics of the context mean that ACRA is constantly developing or redefining new partnerships.

11. https://urgenci.net/about-us/
12. https://iclei.org/
13. https://www.cirad.fr/
14. https://www.icrisat.org/
15. https://www.uniss.it/
16. https://www.unimi.it/it/corsi/facolta-e-scuole/scienze-agrarie-e-alimentari
17. https://assesta.it/

6. IN-DEPTH APPENDICES

The appendices to this strategic positioning paper are an integral part of it and consist of a document summarizing the sectorial impact measurement indicators, **sectorial papers that address and deepen sub-themes, and summary sheets of good practices**.

- Appendix 1: SSA reference indicators
- Appendix 2: Position Paper on Agroecology Azione TerrAE
- Appendix 3: Position Paper Green Deal on Food in African Cities
- Appendix 4: ACRA good practices sheets
- Appendix 5: Guidelines for the valuation of indigenous species
- Appendix 6: Guidelines for environmental planning
- Appendix 7: Guidelines for hydrogeological risk analysis and mitigation
- Appendix 8: Guidelines for empowerment and gender equality in agriculture
- Appendix 9: Guidelines on Nutrition 1 000 Days Approach
- Appendix 10: Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
- Appendix 11: International Treaty on Plant Genetic Risks for Food and Agriculture
- Appendix 12: ACRA projects sheets



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