



Agroecological Transition of Food Systems in Africa

Inclusive growth and sustainable job creation: Comparative advantage of the economy of agroecology

Jean-Michel Sourisseau, CIRAD

6 May 2025 | Natural History Museum | Brussels



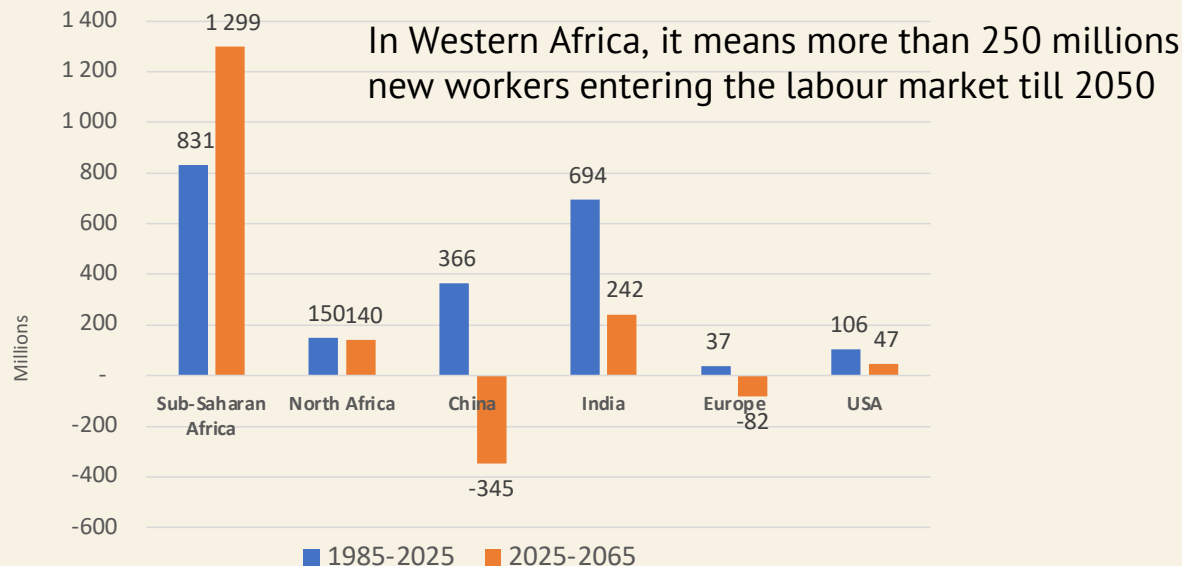
Funded by
the European Union



Sub-Saharan Africa : 3 massive trends questioning development strategies

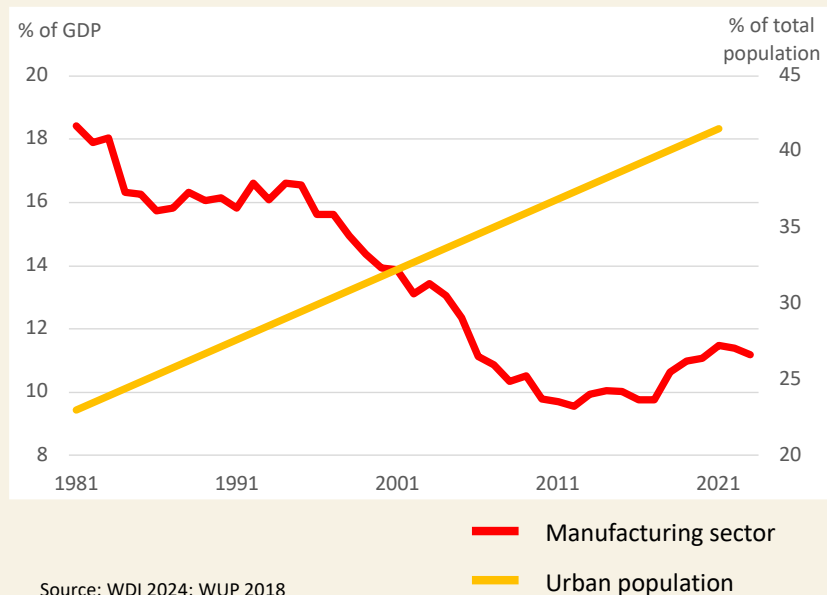
1. Uneven and uncompleted demographic transition

**Population increase by
regions and countries
(past and next 40 years)**



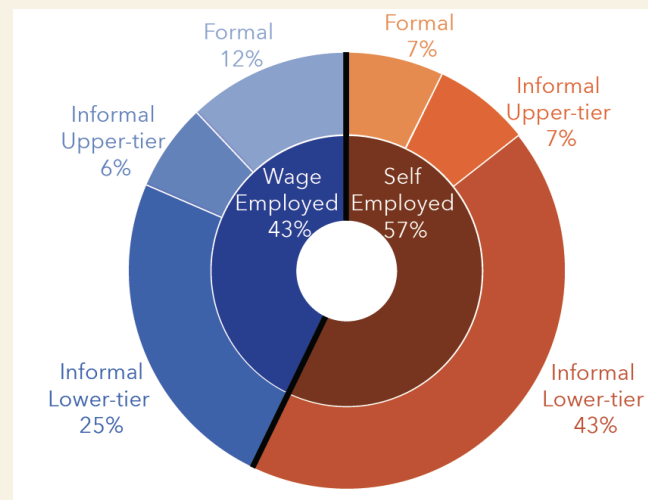
Sub-Saharan Africa : 3 massive trends questioning development strategies

2. Urbanization without industrialization



Source: WDI 2024; WUP 2018

Off farm jobs: informality is the norm

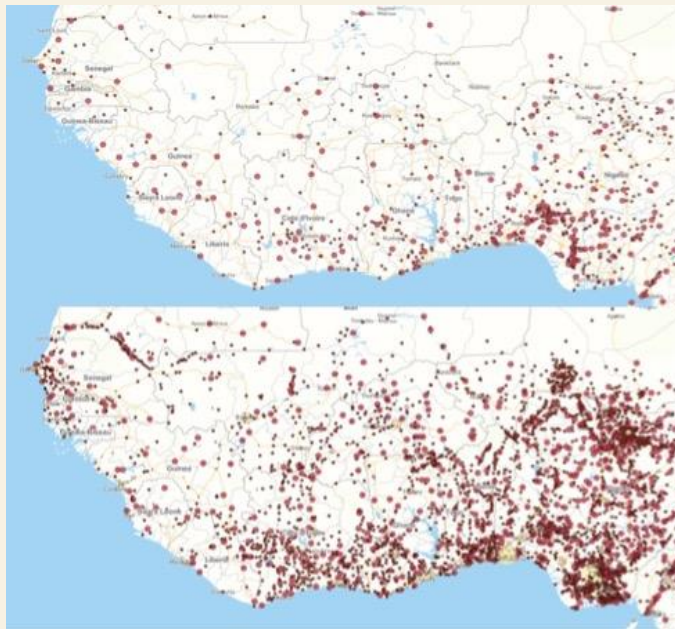


Source: Losch 2025 from IFM 2024



Sub-Saharan Africa : 3 massive trends questioning development strategies

3. Urbanization « from below », weak urban-rural linkages without high-performance infrastructures

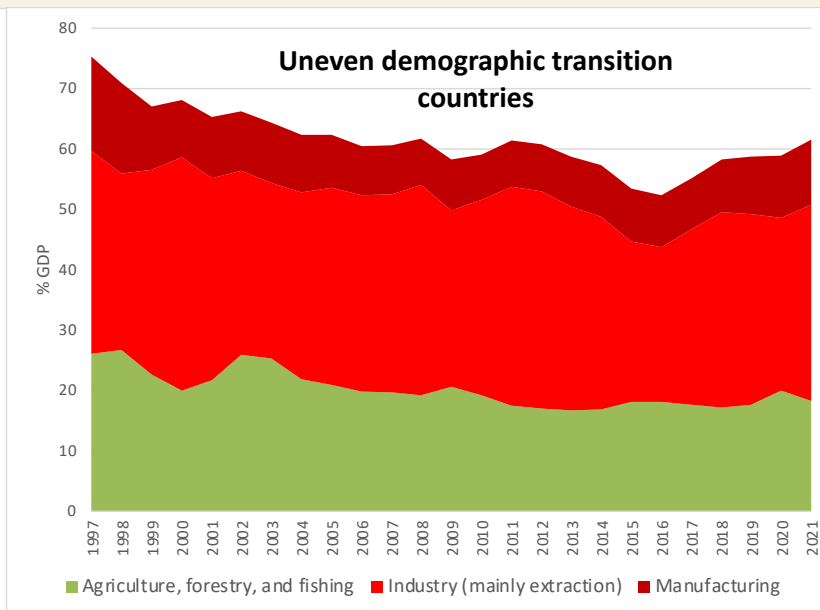
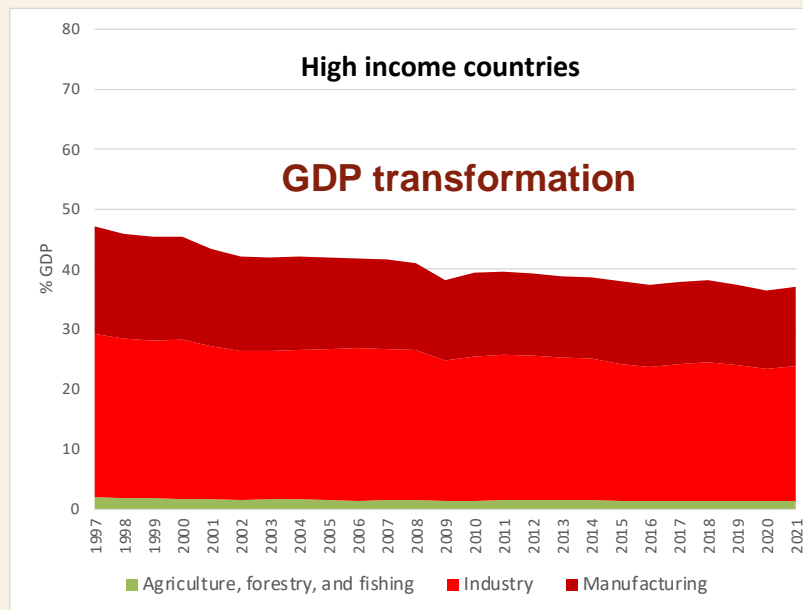


In half of African countries, 1/3 of the urban population still lives in the largest city.

But the majority (91%) of urban agglomerations have fewer than 100,000 inhabitants and are home to 1/3 of the urban population.

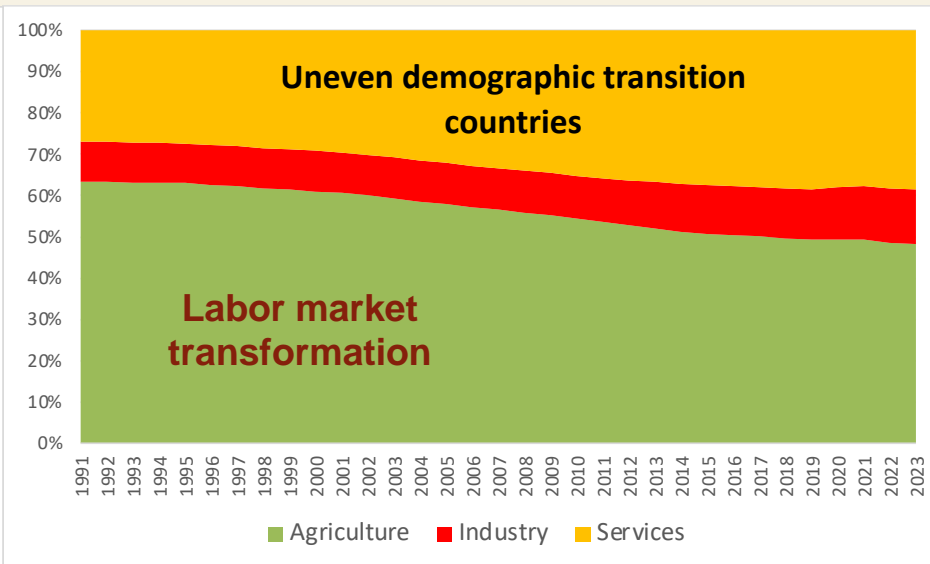
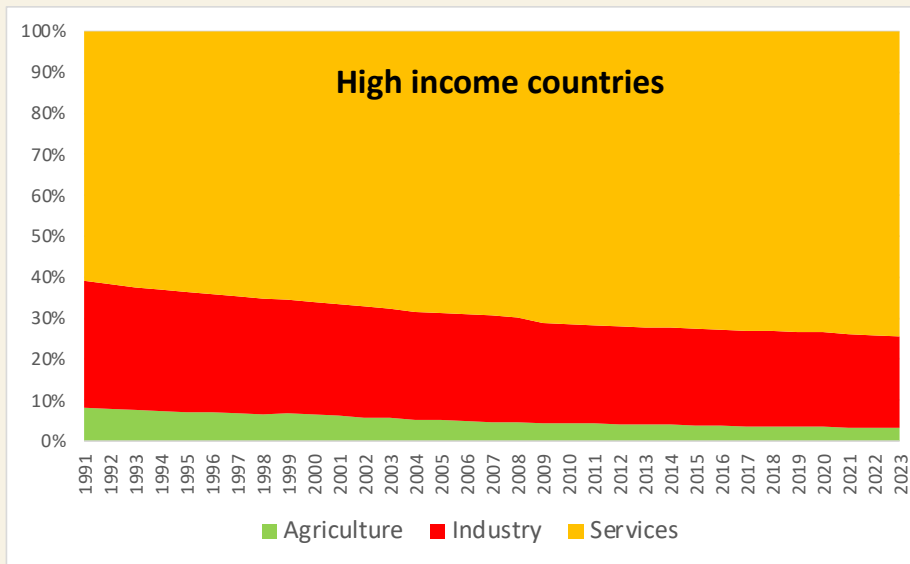
Question of the quality of infrastructure and economic environment to support diversification.

SSA pre-demographic dividend countries: the classical development path is more than uncertain



Source: WDI 2025

SSA pre-demographic dividend countries: the classical development path is more than uncertain

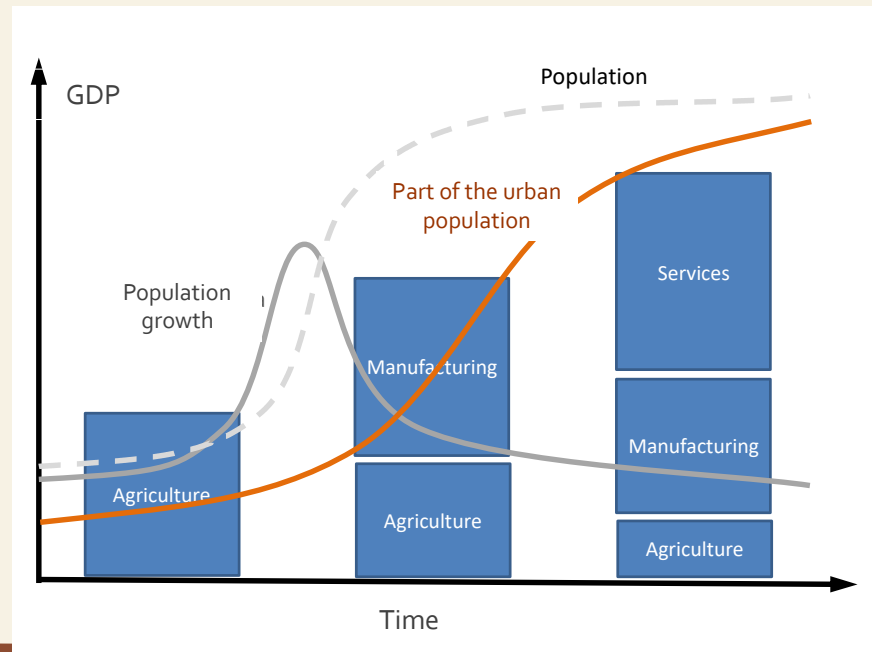


Source: WDI 2025

Sub-Saharan Africa pre-demographic dividend countries: the classical development path is more than uncertain

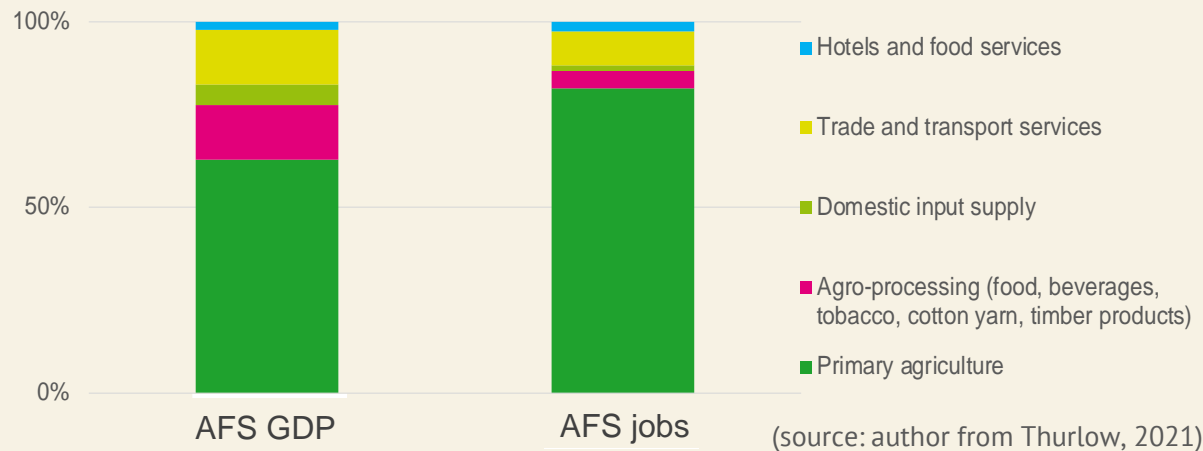
As a result, for tens millions of people around the world, the search for improved income opportunities appears as a choice between staying in low-productivity agriculture and unemployment or an also low-productivity non-agricultural job (Berdegue et al., 2025)

**For the 3 next decades almost,
agriculture will have to play a
massive role in decent jobs
creation and value-added
generation**



SSA pre-demographic dividend countries: the classical development path is more than uncertain

**A need to catch
agriculture within
the agrifood
systems**





Agroecological
Transition of
Food Systems
in Africa



Funded by
the European Union

Inclusive growth and sustainable job creation:
Comparative advantage of the economy of agroecology

Agroecology and AEFS : engines of alternative structural transformations?

1. *Agroecology and AE food systems are promoted for their environmental sustainability*
2. *But can they also address the challenges of*
 - *decent jobs creation?*
 - *inclusiveness?*
 - *rural-urban linkages?*

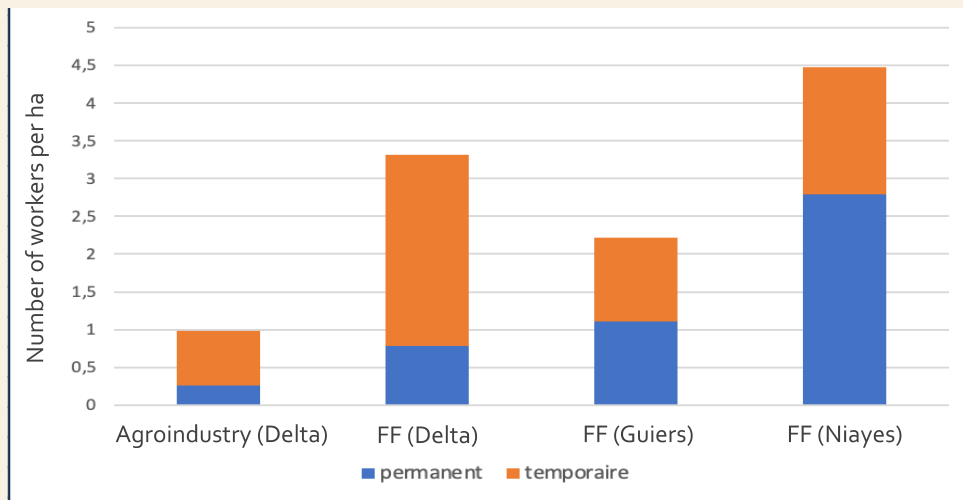
Questions to the panel (and to the room) rather than evidences



Inputs for the debate: Decent jobs creation in AEFS

**Family farming
rather than
agroindustry for
jobs creation?**

**FF are more
adapted to AE**



Source : Enda-Pronat, UGB, ISRA-Bame, 2017

Inputs for the debate: Decent jobs creation in AEFS

There are controversial debates in the literature on the impact of agroecology on job creation (Montt and Luu, 2020 ; Bezner Kerr et al., 2019 ; Laske and Michel, 2022)

There is only punctual consensus that some agroecology practices are more labor intensive (Altieri et Toledo 2011), more time consuming than others (e.g. manual weeding or manure) (Dugué et al. 2012)... and are more sustainable

Regarding decentness and quality of jobs, health and safety at work is an issue with the increasing use of pesticides

Inputs for the debate: Decent jobs creation in AEFS

*Adoption of
agroecological
practices and other
diversified production
systems.*

*Mostly positive for
employment (productivity,
quantity of employment,
and income and wages)*

*Mostly positive for inclusion
(Gender, youth, and poverty
reduction)*

*Reaches relatively few farmers,
with contested economic
impacts (though with positive
environmental effects)*

(Berdegue et al., 2025)

Inputs for the debate: Decent jobs creation in AEFS



→ Cocoa sourcing operation in Sierra Leone

Regenerative Organic cocoa and dynamic agroforestry from over 20.000 cocoa farmers

Examples of new jobs:

Pruning work gangs, non-cocoa seeds multiplication, nurseries for cocoa seedlings and other agroforestry crops, ICS management, data collection on ecosystem services, etc.

→ Sunvado: avocado processing factory and operation in Ethiopia

A sourcing model including sustainable avocado production through regenerative practices.

Examples of new jobs:

Nurseries (women), vermicompost and beekeeping.

Inputs for the debate: Decent jobs creation in AEFS

There are several promising agroecological practices tested by **SustInAfrica** project, that are producing Gross Margins that are significantly higher than others:

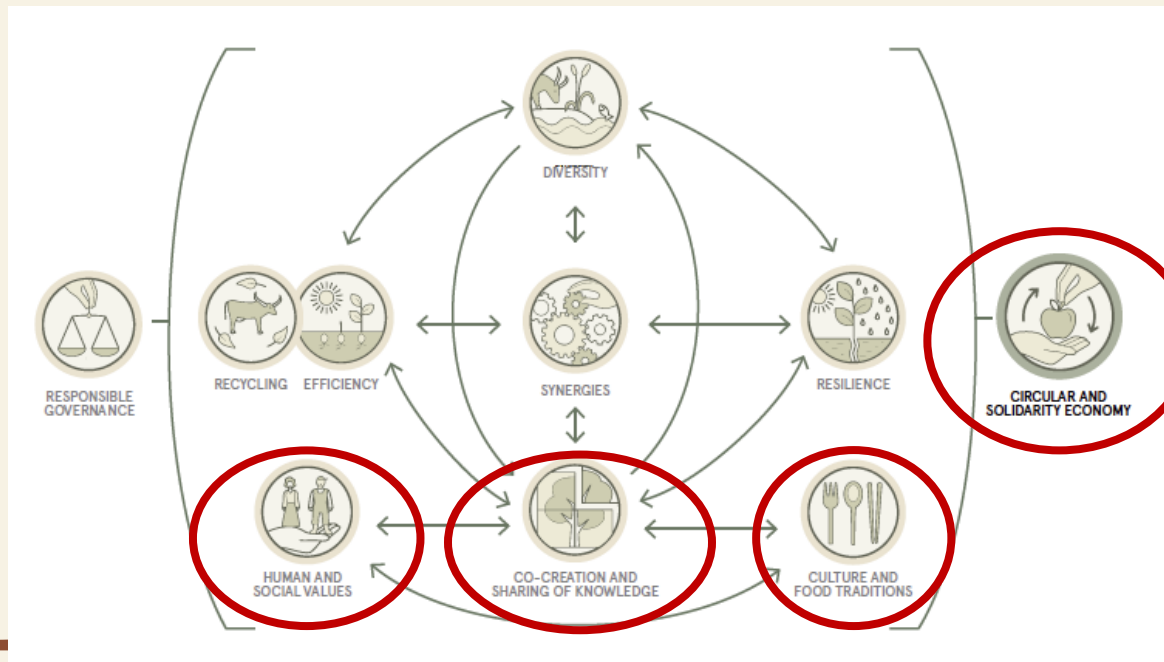
- **Faba Bean (*Vicia faba*)** as a green manure in olive orchards
- **No Till** in low rainfall conditions in rainfed olive orchards
- **Biodynamic cotton** production in Egypt



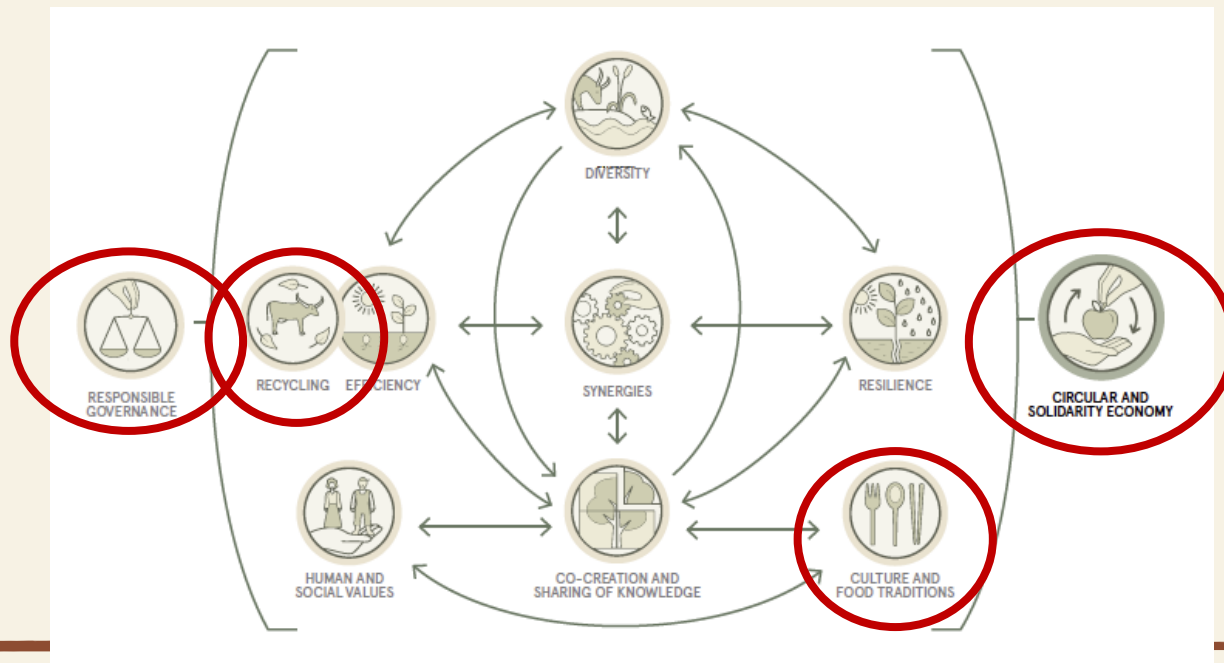
Other promising practises but requiring some agriculture campaigns to increase GM

- **Biochar in maize and cotton** production in Burkina Faso (from cotton crop residues or maize cobs).
- **Biochar or plastic mulch in pineapples.**

Inputs for the debate: Inclusiveness in AEFS



Inputs for the debate: Rural-urban linkages and territorial anchorage in AEFS





Agroecological
Transition of
Food Systems
in Africa



Funded by
the European Union

Inclusive growth and sustainable job creation:
Comparative advantage of the economy of agroecology

Inputs for the debate: financial tools perspectives → EU Agri-Food Challenge Funds

- €18M EU funding
- Match funding €35.5m (EIB, Equity, etc).
- 50 agro enterprises
- 5 years (2018-2022)
- 20,000 ha of land under CSA
- 10,000 jobs
- 100,000 smallholders



Inputs for the debate: financial tools perspectives → EU Agri-Food Challenge Funds

- EUR 26 million €
- Match Funding: EIB partner banks (€234,522) and non-EIB partner banks & Samawati Capital Partners (€28,353,226), total of €28,577,748. 5 years (2020-2025)
- 40 agri-enterprises supported ↑ 25% turnover
- 150,000 SHF better integrated into sustainable value chains
- 8,500 net equivalent jobs created
- 650,000 improved livelihoods
- 128,000 farmers contracted
- 190,000 farmers received training
- 42% increase in yields
- 33% increase in reported incomes among smallholder farmers





Agroecological
Transition of
Food Systems
in Africa



Funded by
the European Union

Inclusive growth and sustainable job creation:
Comparative advantage of the economy of agroecology

A need for a policy shift to allow this potential to materialize in structural changes

Agroecology and AE food systems are potential engines for decent jobs creation, inclusiveness, new rural-urban linkages... and for taking advantage of the young generation as an asset

In addition to their impact on natural resources management and sustainability, they can be part of a new transformational path, redefining agriculture and food economy roles in social and economic development

But massive innovative policies are required (including data and knowledge collection), when the “green revolution” model is still a priority





Agroecological
Transition of
Food Systems
in Africa



Funded by
the European Union

Inclusive growth and sustainable job creation:
Comparative advantage of the economy of agroecology

We may now listen to more illustrations, examples or counter-examples of the potential of AE and AE food systems described in this presentation

