

It is a common experience for me to get a particular question when I link gender equity and feminism with agroecology. Whether it is from reviewers during scientific peer review, or in policy circles, I am often asked, ‘what does this have to do with agroecology?’ The answer, in my view, is *everything* – without addressing gender and other social inequities, and developing new forms of organization that address injustice, agroecology is simply an environmentally-friendly way of farming.

In the United Nations High Level Panel of Experts report which I co-authored last year on agroecology and other innovations to address food security and nutrition, we highlighted how attention to power dynamics is one of the fundamental ways to differentiate agroecology from other sustainable agriculture approaches. This is not just about gender inequity, but the many and often layered social inequities inherent in the food system. The term intersectionality, coined by feminist scholar Crenshaw, refers to the overlapping and interactive ways that race, sexuality, class, gender, and other categories of difference act as multiple sources of power and forms of oppression at individual, social and institutional levels.

The framework of agroecology goes beyond a set of practices and approaches to ensuring ecological benefits from agriculture, to one that is trying to build a just, fair food system. Agroecology is not just about growing food, it is also about addressing power. While terms such as *transformative agroecology* draw attention to political and economic factors which shape the food system, there is still limited attention given to power dynamics within households and communities which use agroecological approaches. If agroecology is leading to increased workloads for women at the expense of their health and well-being, or is failing to think about farmworkers and their families, then it is not addressing social justice.

A *feminist agroecology* is thus one which looks at how to integrate attention to inequities into agroecological approaches, and strives to place considerations of social justice at the centre of efforts to shift values and processes. What are the implications of specific practices for people’s time, work and leisure? How are decisions and tasks shared regarding what to plant, how to manage the farm, how to care for members of the family and what to do with the harvest? Are the benefits from agroecological production shared within and between families and communities? Are people being exploited?

In our work in Malawi, in collaboration with a farmer-led non-profit, Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC), we have examined how agroecology can work to repair social rifts that are created in the current broken food system, including gender dynamics. Such efforts are neither without struggle nor straightforward, but they can provide real, meaningful change as farming families use agroecological methods to not only repair the soil, but also to repair and address the inequities embedded in families and communities.

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References:

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Towards a feminist reparative agroecology