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Scaling up Agroecology from Policies to Practices: Emerging Policies and Contradictions in the Global North

Kae Sekine[1)]*, Tadayoshi Masuda[2)] & Nina Takashino[3)]

1. Welcome Addresses

The 2023 ARAFE International Symposium at the 73rd Annual Meeting started with welcome addresses by Akitsu Motoki, President of ARAFE and Professor at Kyoto University, and Taniguchi Yoshimitsu, President of the Japanese Society of Organic Agriculture Science (JSOAS) and Professor at Akita Prefectural University. Akitsu welcomed the two interrelated fora on organic agriculture held during the 2023 Annual Meeting and encouraged the participants to reconsider our research that promotes industrial agriculture. Taniguchi referred to the philosophy of organic agriculture that pursues structural transformation of the entire agricultural and food system and therefore has the same spirit with agroecology. Throughout the symposium, Sekine served as chair and Masuda and Takashino as moderators.

2. Concept of the Symposium

At the Second International Symposium on Agroecology held in Rome in 2018, the United Nations (UN) initiated the Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative to transcend the global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, hunger, and social inequality. Echoing this initiative, the countries in the Global North recently launched their respective new agri-food policies aiming to transform their current food systems toward more sustainable systems. The European Green Deal, 2019 and Farm to Fork Strategy, 2020; the United States' Agriculture Innovation Agenda, 2020; and Japan's Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems (MIDORI), 2021 are examples of these efforts.

Although these greening policies are rapidly gaining visibility in agri-food debates, they are also highly questioned by scientists, farmers' organizations, civil society organizations because of their insufficiency, incoherency, lack of budget or support, and missing participatory approaches. The UN Food System Summit held in 2021 was a symbolic event for both countries that promoted their greening agri-food policies and the civil society organizations that boycotted and overtly criticized these initiatives.

Against this backdrop, the Association for Regional Agricultural and Forestry Economics (ARAFE) will organize two consecutive international symposia on "Scaling Up Agroecology from Policies to Practices" in 2023 and 2024. That of 2023 focuses on "Emerging Policies and Contradictions in the Global North." We have invited three speakers to analyze the greening of agri-food policies and their consequences and contradictions in the EU, the US, and Japan with interdisciplinary approaches.

[1)] Graduate School of Economics, Aichi Gakuin University
[2)] Faculty of Agriculture, Kindai University
[3)] College of Policy Science, Ritsumeikan University
* E-mail: kaesekin@dpc.agu.ac.jp

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3. Discussions: Comments and Replies

After three paper presentations—Penker (2024), Ichikawa (2024), and Ishii (2024)—Kohsaka Ryo from the University of Tokyo and Maharjan Keshav Lall from Hiroshima University commented on the papers.

(C1) Comments by Maharjan

My main comment is related to the point how agroecology can be upscaled or outscaled from the farmers' perspective. From this perspective, how can we minimize the contradictions in the emerging policies to upscale agroecology and meet the zero-carbon emission target by 2050?

First, what are the challenges at the farm-level practices to out-scale or mainstream agroecology to increase dedicated areas? Can the amount of food production in agroecological approaches meet the target of food security?

Second, how can we minimize the risk of co-optation of agroecology from the mainstream stakeholders who may not comply with several aspects of agroecology but try to equate agroecology to eco-farming? It is crucial to understand the difference between organic farming and agroecology. Whether or how far is the dilution of agroecology in the process of upscaling or mainstreaming acceptable?

Third, economic viability, livelihoods of producers, responsible production and consumption, the implications for global south deserve our attention.

From ARAFE's symposia held in 2021 and 2022, we had some particular discussions that farmers and rural communities should be informed so that they could make integrated decisions to produce safe and nutritious food, make decent livelihoods, conserve environment, biodiversity, and also reduce carbon emissions. Also, agricultural workers and immigrant laborers, who often come from the global south, need to be properly evaluated and rewarded at least for the minimum wages.

In addition, it is essential to grasp the relation between the farmers' practices and climate change when we support them to convert their practices to agroecology. In this process, farmers should not be overloaded but rather lifted out of the workload so that agroecology would be attractive for the farmers.

Fourth, who will gain the added value of agroecological products in the value chains? Is it the producers, the middlemen, or the consumers? Who takes advantage of PGSs (Participatory Guarantee Systems), organic labeling, digital tools, or marketing platform businesses?

In the ARAFE's previous symposia, we confirmed that mindset transformation based on sociological imagination for giving value to sustainable agriculture and foods was necessary.

Some of the findings from the recent studies show that agroecological setup dominated by small farmers who engage in circular economy in their local communities does exist in Japan. For example, in a site of GIAHS, Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, the concerted local efforts are needed to ensure farmers to be involved. The GIAHS's agroecological activities, including integrated local tourism management, local industry, branding, and labelling can possibly increase revenue generation for farmers.

As the farmers need to be motivated to practice agroecology, they must learn more about its climate change mitigation capabilities and improve biodiversity. A part of the income from the premium price of branded products can be used for local biodiversity conservation. Those products should be sold not only through the GIAHS sites but also directly to the consumers through digital platforms.

Fifth, how can the agroecological knowledges be passed on to the next generation? In the case of Japan, the aging population, lack of young successors, and depopulation of rural communities are challenging issues that can hinder the process of upscaling or outscaling agroecological initiatives.

(C2) Comments by Kohsaka

In the US, organic labelling is mandatory in farmers' markets and supermarket stores. The second presen-

ter, Nina F. Ichikawa, referred to significance of the school catering with organic foods which are gaining salience also in Japan.

When we look at the examples in Germany, these are links between organic agriculture and tourism supported by the federal government programme Bundesprogramm Ökologischer Landbau und andere Formen nachhaltiger Landwirtschaft (BÖLN). For example, next to a tourism office there are organic foods.

Animal welfare is another issue related to organics, certain labels such as Demeter has components in the criteria.

It is generally believed in Japan that organic foods are automatically domestically produced, yet certain ingredients such as soybeans of organic foods come from abroad, e.g. the US. It is legitimate in trading as long as these products have equal quality and meets standard, there is nothing wrong with it. Organic and local are both important factors, but are not interchangeable; more consumer education is necessary on this distinction.

Another issue is that new farmers cannot have good access to farmlands.

Listening to three informative presentations, I realized what are "loud controversy" (Marianne Penker) differ depending on the contexts. The first presenter, Marianne, has presented what is loud is food security versus ecology. But this is not so loud in Japan, unfortunately.

The second presenter, Nina, has mentioned technocentric versus alternative way. For example, I believe that the US and also Japan are a certainly technocentric in many ways, gene editing experience, and so on.

I identify that justice/social controversies don't almost exist in Japan unfortunately in the contexts of on-going organic or agro-environmental debates. So far in the discussion related to the MIDORI and others, this was not loudly discussed issue, except the children's canteens, *Kodomo Shokudo*, but it is not so loud. These are the issues.

As of October 2023, Japanese government is going to amend the current Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas in 2024. In this regard, the discussions over food crisis, food security and sovereignty have been quite loud. The discussions were, I would say, hijacked by the conservative narratives and therefore the discourses on ecology/green and justice/equity were somewhat sidelined, if not marginalized compared to food security issues despite the synergy and overlaps of the two themes.

There have been several pathways presented. In context of climate change and energy, Fujino (2007) presented two simplistic scenarios of a low carbon society in 2050. I believe that we need to think about where we are and where we are going. While the first presentation looked at the macro level and the second and third presentations have presented more the site level or the agroecology perspective.

(Q1) Question from the floor

Feuer, Hart N. from Kyoto University: Although there are obvious differences between places like the EU or Austria, Japan, and the US in terms of engagement with agroecology, are there also some commonalities among them?

(R1) Reply by Penker

To echo the second comment, the situations are quite different in terms of technology. European citizens are very skeptical regarding new technologies. Genetic editing is not allowed for food and feed production in the European Union. The Commission has proposed a new perspective on new genetic editing CRISPR-Cas. So, European regulations might be reconsidered in the future.

There is much hope for digitalization and precision farming regarding nutrient loss. At the same time, though, European strategies emphasize social issues to make sure that nobody is left behind. Vulnerable groups need not necessarily be supported via cheap food prices but by improving social policies. I believe that this is also something distinct.

And coming back to the first comment, I have the

feeling that in Europe, the issue is less about upscaling but more about mainstreaming. EU strategies encourage that conventional farmers take up lessons learned by organic farmers. Greening and cross compliance and eco-conditionality, strengthen agro-ecological practices of conventional farmers receiving direct payments in the European Union.

To reply to the question from the floor, we share the same planet. And we are confronted with the same planetary boundaries in terms of climate change and biodiversity loss. So, this is the biggest commonality. And I see other commonalities that all of us love food, although we have different culinary heritage with different histories. We must build up on these histories to make sure that we also keep the diversity of our culinary heritages.

This diversity, not only on the global level but also on the farm, local and regional level, guaranties the resilience of our food systems. We can work towards common global goals of climate change mitigation and fighting biodiversity loss while allowing for a big diversity to accommodate the different natural conditions and consumer needs in the different regions. I think this diversity also is a big advantage when it comes to experimenting with new approaches.

In Europe, there is more hope for social innovation, social-institutional, digital innovations, maybe less in genetic editing. However, we will see what the future will bring. I remain optimistic that we will find solutions because we have never known as much as we know today; we have never been as connected as today. We have a lot of resources that we can build on as a global community.

(R2) Reply by Ichikawa

To reply to the commentators, I believe an issue we touched on but did not fully address was this discrepancy between the idea of organic and agroecological products as an incidentally luxury product or the future of agriculture for everyone. We must address that head on. I sort of hinted at it with my slide of American food workers declaring “One Job Should be Enough,” but the question is really “can one job be enough to buy organic food?” Asking this makes the direct link between wages and food consumption and asks what type of food consumption and by extension, agricultural systems, we are incentivizing with our economic policies. To echo Marianne’s point, the point should not be to lower the prices of food, but to raise wages so that farmers can get the appropriate price for their food, and consumers are entitled to eat food free of harmful contaminants. It is possible, but we didn’t quite address that head on. So, that could be the topic of a future discussion.

And one other, lingering issue is the constant question posed by conventional agriculture advocates: “How to feed the 9 billion?” As noted by Claire Kremen, these population estimates are predicated on lack of women’s reproductive autonomy. 9 billion is not a definitive number. Again, we see linkages between reproductive freedom and how much food we must produce. Perhaps we need not to produce so much food but rather address the issue of hungry children and lack of reproductive autonomy which is creating a burden on our natural systems. These are ongoing issues.

Finally, regarding the mainstreaming of organic, how does that fit into our expectations of agroecology? I personally think this has great promise. For instance, the Aeon grocery store chain in Japan was one of the first to embrace organic as a store brand. And the price point is accessible, as well as the education potential is promising. So, let’s not discredit these kinds of mainstream approaches.

To reply to the question from the floor, I think a commonality we have seen across agroecological, organic, and other sustainable farmers is that they are largely resisting free trade agreements across all three regions. And we must recognize that and carefully parse that out as separate from nationalism. One reason President Donald Trump won in the United States in 2016 in rural areas was because he claimed to be against free trade agreements, and that did appeal to farmers. And so that is an open door for any progres-

sive politician, and I have been hearing a lot about Geographical Indications (GIs) since I've been in Japan, which is not a term we use in the United States. But it is a concept that is celebrated by farmers. And sometimes in the news media, that is called nationalism, but it's different. It is a food and agriculture understanding. This should be explored as a commonality among regions.

(R3) Reply by Ishii

To reply to the commentators, the problem is, in order to change towards agroecology, who can support farmers to change to agroecology or convert to organic production? In Japan, the consumers have already paid much more for their food, compared to the Europeans and the Americans. In term of the subsidy scheme, if the government employs additional environment requirement for the farmers, that would be the burden for the farmers and we would see further deserted arable pieces of land.

Also, we need to consider the local initiatives. In Japan, we have many local initiatives to change to agroecology or convert to organic farming.

In terms of consumption, now in the European countries and the United States, they are reducing eating meat. That is one of the social movements concerning diet, which can contribute to mitigate environment impacts. In Japan, our meat consumption is historically much lower. However, the beautiful appearance of products and sweetness which are equated with deliciousness are sought in Japan. It promotes farmers to put more nitrogen fertilizers and pesticide. Therefore, consumers must reconsider their behaviors. Instead of the appearance of the products, we need to think of the way towards the agroecology. That would be a veritable system redesign including consumer behaviors.

To reply to the question regarding commonality from the floor, first, the goals set by the governments in the European Union and Japan are almost the same; organic farmland reaches 25% of the total farmland and reducing the pesticide by 50%. That is a common top-down framework although the target years are different; by 2030 in the EU instead of by 2050 in Japan.

On the other hand, we can find commonality in the local initiatives among three regions presented in today's symposium including participatory approach and process. There would be the same kind of practices to improve organic farming practices and promote sustainable local consumption. Next year, the international symposium of ARAFE will focus on practices and experiences of agroecology that we must find commonality in.

(R4) Reply by Maharjan

To reply to the answers, when we are performing an agroecological system, who shares the burden? This is a big question, and this should be shared. The common understanding should be shared. It is not only the practitioners or the farmers. It may not be only the wealthy consumers who can afford, leaving the others behind. And it may not be just the taxpayers or just the subsidies. So, there should be an equal balance among this.

(R5) Reply by Kohsaka

When I listened to the discussions in the European context, there was a lot of discussion about obesity and income classes and so on. In the democratic countries, we cannot force people to do things. That's the same for all three countries and region. However, the way in which we are going to approach may differ.

For example, all three contexts, we talked about diet in schools, although the perceptions are quite different. As there is no dictator or control system, there needs to be some kind of a dialog for the consumption and how we are going to address it. For the production side, how do farmers adapt to the social and environmental changes? There needs to be further discussions. Maybe not in a quite centralized way, but in today's symposium can be also one step forward for these dialogs.

(R6) Reply by Sekine

To reply to the question from the floor, the commonality of all these three countries and regions is the fact that they have the agricultural sector which are heavily subsidized. In addition, these three region and countries are competing with each other to take initiative in the global rulemaking of greening policies and new trade regulations. For instance, in the UN Food Systems Summit of 2021, Japan tried to influence Asian countries, especially ASEAN countries, to follow Japan's MIDORI, Strategy for Sustainable Food Systems. Of course, behind the greening policies, there are always the competing power of nation states and also power of transnational corporations and their business interests.

4. Concluding Remarks

It's obvious that some parts of the Global North are making efforts to shift toward sustainable agri-food systems in their recent policies.

But these policies include contradictory/contested elements (e.g. genome editing, m-RNA pesticide) and tend to be still locked or pushed back in the mindset that favors conventional/industrial agriculture or "foods as commodity." This trend could be reinforced under the context of current wars in the world (Ukraine & Russia, Palestine & Israel, etc.). However, the electorates/consumers tend to remain relatively less informed.

What is challenging for us as social or interdisciplinary scientists is to emancipate/unlock these policies and related debates, not only in politics but also in academia. That will contribute to agroecological transition and ultimately redesign our society as a whole, not only agri-food systems. We hope that this symposium is a good step forward in our collective action. You are all welcome to the symposium of next year, in which we continue to discuss on scaling up agroecology.

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