
Reclaiming Energy and Food Sovereignty Through Agroecology

In the global push to decarbonize the economy, energy has become the new frontier for transformation. But the discourse around 'energy transition' is technocratic and reductionist—focused on grids, markets, and kilowatt-hours—rather than being rooted in justice, people, and people's living space. At the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), we believe that energy, like food, is a matter of sovereignty. It is not simply about the infrastructure of supply and demand. It is about power. Power in the literal sense—who generates it, who controls it, who benefits from it—but also power in the political sense: who decides, who is included, and whose knowledge and needs shape the system.

We have long advanced agroecology as the path to reclaiming food sovereignty on the continent. But increasingly, we are coming to see that food sovereignty cannot be achieved in isolation from energy sovereignty. Energy is not just a support service for agriculture—it is a lifeline. Without access to affordable, reliable, and community-controlled energy, farmers cannot irrigate crops, store food, mill grain, or dry produce. Women walk long distances for firewood instead of participating in community life. Youth are driven away from rural areas due to lack of opportunity. Agroecology cannot thrive in the dark.

Agroecology, as we define and promote it, is not merely a technical toolbox for sustainable farming. It is a transformative political project rooted in the principles of autonomy, equity, biodiversity, cultural integrity, and ecological harmony. Agroecology challenges corporate control of food systems and asserts the rights of communities to define their own food and farming systems. It is a paradigm shift from extraction to regeneration, from exploitation to cooperation.

This vision must be extended to the energy systems that underpin food production and rural livelihoods. Too often, the dominant models of energy access in Africa replicate the very extractive dynamics that agroecology seeks to dismantle. Large-scale hydropower dams flood farmland and displace people. Fossil fuel projects pollute water, degrade ecosystems, destroys community's livelihoods and enrich elites. So-called "green" energy projects, such as foreign-owned solar farms or lithium and nickel mines for battery production, displace communities and concentrate benefits in the hands of the powerful.

What would a truly agroecological energy sovereignty look like?

First, it would be people-centered. Rather than prioritizing export-oriented energy projects or mega-infrastructure that bypasses rural communities, it would focus on decentralized, small-scale, and community-managed solutions. Just as agroecology favors local food systems over global supply chains, energy sovereignty favors local grids over transnational pipelines.

Second, it would be democratic. Decisions about energy should not be made in corporate boardrooms or donor capitals, but in community assemblies, farmers' unions, and cooperatives. Energy infrastructure should be collectively owned and governed, ensuring that the benefits flow to those who need them most.

Third, it would be regenerative. Instead of polluting and depleting nature, agroecological energy systems would harmonize with nature. Solar, wind, biogas, and micro-hydro technologies can be deployed in ways that restore landscapes, reduce emissions, and build resilience.

Across Africa, this vision is already being brought to life. In Uganda, farmer cooperatives are powering grain mills with solar mini-grids. In Kenya, women's groups use solar dryers to preserve fruits and vegetables for longer shelf life. In Ethiopia, communities are piloting micro-hydro systems to electrify rural schools and health centers. In Ghana, youth-run initiatives are converting agricultural waste into biogas for cooking. These initiatives are more than technological experiments, they are political acts of reclamation. They embody the spirit of agroecology: rooted in the place communities live, led by communities, and oriented toward justice.

But the barriers remain daunting. Financing continues to favor large-scale infrastructure over community-based systems. Policies are designed for corporate investors, not local innovators. Civil society actors working on food and energy often operate in isolation, missing the opportunity for integrated and collaborative action.

To overcome these barriers, AFSA is building a pan-African campaign for energy sovereignty, linked to our broader agroecology movement. We are calling on governments to integrate food and energy planning. We are urging donors to redirect financing from corporate-led extractive projects toward community-led models. We are engaging policymakers to adopt regulatory frameworks that support collective ownership and participatory governance. We are mobilizing farmers, women, and youth to share knowledge, build solidarity, and multiply transformative practices.

Our vision is not simply technical; it is civilizational. We are not just seeking better energy gadgets, but a better way of life. One that honors the rhythms of nature, values the wisdom of elders, uplifts the agency of communities, and restores the balance between humans and the Earth.

In traditional African cosmologies, energy was not separate from life. It flowed through the soil, the sun, the wind, and the people. Fire was shared. Water was sacred. Light was communal. The fossil-fuel era broke this balance, severing energy from ethics, and turning it into a commodity to be bought and sold.

The so-called "green transition" is repeating this error because it fails to question the underlying logic of extractivism. A solar farm that displaces farmers is not green. A lithium mine that poisons rivers is not sustainable. A wind turbine built on stolen indigenous land is not just. If we want to build a just transition, we must start with justice.

Agroecology teaches us that transformation begins from the ground up, with seeds, with soil, with relationships. Energy sovereignty must follow the same path. It must be rooted in community wisdom, co-created through participatory processes, and scaled through solidarity, not speculation.

Let us imagine a continent where every village has the power to light its homes, power its schools, and run its grain mills, not through dependency, but through dignity. Let us build alliances between food sovereignty and energy democracy movements. Let us break what divides us and embrace the holistic vision that our ancestors practiced and our children deserve.

This is not a dream, it is already happening. The seeds have been planted. Now is the time to water them, to nourish them with policy, funding, and solidarity. From soil to solar, from farm to flame, from seed to system, the struggle for sovereignty is one. Let us reclaim it together.

