



AGROECOLOGY
FUND

AGROECOLOGY FUND LEARNING EXCHANGE

APRIL, 2025
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world's food systems and the ecosystems on which they depend are far too vulnerable, causing enormous risk for all. Industrial agriculture—built on chemical inputs, monocultures, and global commodity chains—has demonstrated its capacity to produce food at scale while simultaneously failing to improve human nourishment and ecological integrity.

Agroecology offers a different vision. Rooted in ecological science, traditional farming knowledge, and aspirations for fairness and inclusivity, its proponents build food systems that regenerate soil rather than depleting it, cultivate biodiversity rather than erasing it, conserve forests, fish stocks, and the landscape's integrity, and build community economic resilience rather than deepening dependence on corporations and external inputs. In the words of participants who were gathered in Bogor, Indonesia in April 2025 for the Agroecology Fund Learning Exchange, agroecology is not simply “organic farming”; rather, it is the organized, principled struggle of peasants to define and control their own food and agricultural systems.

For agroecology to be transformative, however, it must be economically viable. Farmers who practice agroecology must be able to sell their produce at fair prices, access affordable credit, build cooperatives and other entrepreneurship initiatives, and earn sustainable livelihoods. These innovative economic pathways are the infrastructure of “agroecology economies”.

The Agroecology Fund (AEF) convened the Asia Learning Exchange on Agroecology Economies in Bogor, Indonesia from April 21 to 27, 2025. Hosted by the Indonesian Peasants Union (SPI), the event brought together more than 118 participants from 25 countries spanning South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Western Asia, the Pacific, and Europe. AEF grantees, donors, advisors, government representatives, academics, and allied movements shared six days of structured learning, open dialogue, field immersion, and strategic reflection on the practical, political, cultural, and financial systems that make agroecology viable and scalable. The 2025 Asia exchange followed on the Africa Learning Exchange that was held in Zimbabwe in September 2024 and was the second of AEF's series of three regional learning exchanges.

The exchange and its structure

Day 1 grounded participants in Indonesia's agricultural and political context. The afternoon was devoted to regional group work that produced visual posters from seven subregional clusters.

Day 2 featured six simultaneous thematic sessions: Agroecology Entrepreneurship, Commercialization Networks, Territorial Markets, Participatory Guarantee Systems, Financial Mechanisms, and Cooperativism and the Solidarity Economy.

These were followed by a global trends plenary on corporate capture of food systems, biodiversity credit markets, and trade justice.

Day 3 addressed financing from two angles, convening a funder panel and a resource-seekers panel. This was followed by 13 participant-led Open Space discussions.

Day 4 focused on AEF's strategy and governance, with regional breakouts generating concrete proposals from five subregions.

Days 5 and 6 brought participants to SPI's National Training Center in Bogor and to the Food Sovereignty Area in Indramayu. The latter, developed on land reclaimed from a sugar company, is where farmers, using agroecological practices, have succeeded in halving production costs while maintaining yields.

Nine cross-cutting themes

Nine themes emerged consistently across all six days:

- **Agroecology as political struggle:** the insistence that agroecology is a movement of resistance against corporate food systems, not merely a set of farming practices; participants further insisted that agroecology requires political advocacy and policy engagement alongside technical support;
- **Land, territory, and the right to farm:** the foundational recognition that without secure land access all other agroecological gains remain fragile;
- **Women as pillars:** acknowledgement of the indispensable yet insufficiently recognized role of women across all dimensions of agroecological economies;
- **Youth, culture, and intergenerational knowledge:** culture as the entry point; this theme recognizes the urgency of making agroecological farming aspirational and dignified for the next generation;
- **Financing agroecology:** recognized here is the persistent gap between (often misplaced) institutional funding and the acute resource needs of grassroots organizations that are scaling agroecology in their territories; community-driven financial schemes have been found to be effective and replicable;
- **Cooperatives and the solidarity economy:** democratic cooperatives and similar forms of organization are fundamental to agroecology's economic architecture and are fragile without political consciousness and active vigilance;
- **Territorial markets and agroecology economies:** these connect producers and consumers through relationships of trust and cultural resonance that commodity markets cannot replicate; local food markets are spaces of political agency, fair pricing, and community sovereignty;
- **Seeds, biodiversity, and corporate enclosure:** seed sovereignty is the movement's most irreplaceable resource; it is under threat from UPOV 91 and the commodification of biodiversity; it is the symbolic and practical anchor of agroecological identity;
- **Solidarity across difference:** the exchange itself was a movement for building connections across an extraordinary diversity of players and regions; it incorporated deliberate methodological choices.

Key conclusions

The exchange confirmed that agroecology works economically, that democratic cooperative institutions are essential, and that the movement's diversity, including the fisheries sector, is its strength.

Convergences were seen on land rights, women's centrality, cooperative economics, and political solidarity, particularly with Palestine, through every regional context.

Recommendations

Five clusters of recommendations emerged for AEF's 2026–2031 strategic plan:

1. Fund closer to the ground: Direct funding to farmer organizations; simplify access for small and remote groups; support acquisition of appropriate equipment and tools as well as revenue-generating capacity;

2. Strengthen regional architecture: Establish a Central Asia regional fund; deepen Arab-country engagement; support country-level forums; mobilize local philanthropy; include grantees in AEF governance;

3. Invest in knowledge, evidence, and communication: Expand Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology (GEA) to more Asian grantees; invest in multilingual and multimedia outreach; build mobile decision-support tools; build a shared digital knowledge platform; use celebration and events as mobilization tools;

4. Center youth, women, and fisheries: Fund youth-led agroecology programs and scholarships; support women's formal leadership; expand fisheries sector inclusion;

5. Strengthen advocacy, policy engagement, and donor education: Educate donors toward trust-based funding; support policy advocacy; engage strategically with geopolitical risk; treat learning exchanges as long-term movement building initiatives.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADI	Agency of Development Initiatives (Kyrgyzstan)
AEF	Agroecology Fund
ANPFa	All Nepal Peasants' Federation
APCNF	Andhra Pradesh Community-Managed Natural Farming (India)
AOP	Assembly of the Poor (Thailand)
BUMMA	Badan Usaha Milik Masyarakat Adat (Community-Owned Indigenous Enterprise, Indonesia)
CAP	Consumers Association Penang (Malaysia)
CEA	Community enterprise approach
CREATE	Consumer Research Education Action Training and Empowerment Trust (Tamil Nadu, India)
CSO	Civil society organization
DISHA	District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees
FCRA	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (India)
FiBL	Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (Switzerland)
FKMM	Forum Kedaulatan Makanan Malaysia (Malaysian Food Sovereignty Forum)
FSA	Food Sovereignty Area
GEA	Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology
GGF	Global Greengrants Fund
GRAIN	Genetic Resources Action International
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IPB	Institut Pertanian Bogor (Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia)
IPES	International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
IUU	illegal, unreported, and unregulated (fishing)
KESAN	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (Myanmar)
KIARA	Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan (People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice, Indonesia)
KMP	Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines)

KPI	Koperasi Petani Indonesia (Indonesian Farmers' Cooperative Institution)
KWPA	Korean Women Peasants Association
LVC	La Via Campesina (International Peasants Movement)
MASIPAG	Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura (Philippines)
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India)
MOL	micro-organisms of local origin
MONLAR	Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (Sri Lanka)
NCDB	Northern Cooperative Development Bank (Sri Lanka)
NCNF	National Coalition for Natural Farming (India)
NFSF	National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers (India)
NGO	non-governmental organization
PGS	Participatory Guarantee System
PGPR	plant growth promoting rhizobacteria
Pusdiklat	Pusat Pendidikan dan Pelatihan (SPI National Training Center, Indonesia)
SAM	Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia)
SEARICE	Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (Philippines)
SHISUK	Shikha Shastha Unnayan Karzakram (Bangladesh)
SPI	Serikat Petani Indonesia (Indonesian Peasants Union)
SPFT	Southern Peasant Federation of Thailand
TFA	The Field Alliance (Thailand)
ToT	Training of Trainers
UAWC	Union of Agricultural Work Committees (Palestine)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDROP	UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UPOV	International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants
VOC	volatile organic compounds
WMW	World March of Women
WTO	World Trade Organization

01

INTRODUCTION: AGROECOLOGY ECONOMIES IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT



The world's food systems are at a crossroads. Industrial agriculture, built on chemical inputs, monocultures and global commodity chains, has demonstrated its capacity to produce food at scale while simultaneously generating ecological destruction, economic inequality, and nutritional impoverishment. In Asia, where the vast majority of the world's food producers live and work, this contradiction is experienced as a daily reality. Smallholder farmers, small-scale fishers, forest collectors and pastoralist communities grow food for entire nations but often cannot themselves afford to eat well. Communities that have managed biodiverse landscapes for generations watch those landscapes become converted to plantations, mines, and infrastructure. The young people who must carry forward agricultural knowledge are forced to migrate to cities in search of dignity and income. These are not isolated failures, they are systemic outcomes of a food system that is designed to prioritize industrial productivity over human nourishment and ecological integrity.

Agroecology offers a different vision. Rooted in the integration of ecological science with traditional knowledge and the political foundations of food sovereignty movements, agroecology is simultaneously

a set of food production practices and resource management principles, a body of scientific knowledge, and a political project. It is farming that regenerates rather than depletes soil and cultivates biodiversity rather than erasing it; it is the management of resources in such a way that forests and fish stocks are conserved and the landscape's integrity is preserved. It is practices that build community economic resilience rather than deepening dependence on corporations and external inputs.

In the words of participants who gathered in Bogor in April 2025, agroecology is not simply "organic farming"; rather, "it is the organized, principled struggle of smallholder food producers to define and control their own food and agricultural systems."

For agroecology to be transformative, however, it must be economically viable. Food producers who practice agroecology must be able to sell their produce at fair prices, access affordable credit, build cooperative enterprises, and earn livelihoods that sustain their communities. The enabling of these economic pathways—what AEF calls "agroecology economies"—is the central strategic challenge of the agroecology movement.



1.1

Asia's agroecological landscape

Asia is home to the world's largest concentration of smallholder food producers. Approximately 500 million farming families cultivate plots of less than two hectares (ha), collectively producing an estimated 80 percent of the food consumed in the region. Globally, fisheries comprise 2 million people in primary production, mostly in small-scale operations; of these, 77 percent are in Asia. In Central Asia, pastoralist systems are the foundation of food producers. Farmers, fishers and pastoralists, besides being the backbone of food systems that feed billions of people, are custodians of millennia of natural resource management knowledge and are stewards of landscapes that shelter extraordinary biodiversity. They are also among the world's most economically vulnerable, politically marginalized, and climate-exposed communities.

From the 1960s onward, the Green Revolution transformed Asian agriculture. It dramatically increased rice and wheat yields through high-yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. Its legacy, however, is deeply contested as it also displaced traditional knowledge and seed systems, created structural dependence on corporate inputs, degraded soils and waterways, and eroded the social fabric of rural communities.

The climate crisis has added a new and urgent dimension to this landscape. Across Asia, farmers are experiencing increasingly unpredictable monsoons, prolonged droughts, intensified flooding, and shifts in growing seasons. Climate change also affects the landscapes that are managed by pastoralist communities and the fish stocks in oceans and rivers. In Bangladesh, floodplain expansion driven by climate change has become a threat; through innovative community enterprise approaches, however, it has also become an opportunity for adaptation.

In Indonesia, the 2023 El Niño droughts significantly reduced rice production, and in Kyrgyzstan traditional land management systems of nomadic pastoralists are being destabilized by both climate shifts and economic pressures. As participants in the Open Space climate session carefully noted, agroecology is not a panacea for these challenges, however it is among the most promising systemic responses available, precisely because it builds resilience from the ground up rather than applying technological fixes from above.

Asia's agroecological movement is diverse. It encompasses mass farmer unions such as the SPI in Indonesia which has hundreds of thousands of members. It also includes small tribal communities in India who work with non-governmental organization (NGO) partners to reclaim land and revive Indigenous food systems, pastoralists in Kyrgyzstan's steppes and mountains, urban agroecology initiatives in Malaysian cities, farmer cooperatives in post-war northern Sri Lanka, NGO-led networks and platforms such as the National Coalition of Natural Farming in India, and Palestinian farmers who practice community supported agriculture under daily conflict and military occupation.



What unites them is a common commitment to food and land as rights, not commodities, and the conviction that the communities who produce the food must have the power to define how it is grown, valued, and shared.



1.2

The Asia Learning Exchange: Purpose and context

The Asia Learning Exchange followed the Africa Learning Exchange in Zimbabwe in September 2024. It was convened as the second in AEF's series of three regional exchanges. The shift from single global exchanges (such as those held in 2016 and 2020) to regional gatherings reflects the rapid growth of AEF's grantee network, which now encompasses more than 100 partners across Asia alone. It also recognizes that regional contexts require dedicated spaces for contextual learning and peer exchange.

Bogor was deliberately chosen as a venue for the exchange because Indonesia is the fourth-most populous country in the world and because agriculture is central to its economy and identity. It was also selected because the people and agricultural landscape are as diverse as its archipelago, ranging from the rice paddies of Java to the forests of Borneo and Papua. Indonesia is made up of five large islands and a vast maritime area and is the world's second-largest producer of fish. SPI, as host of the exchange, brought not only logistical capacity but a living demonstration of the themes under discussion. SPI is a peasant union that organizes hundreds of thousands of farmers and runs nearly 1,000 cooperatives.

They also operate a national agroecology training center and have reclaimed land from plantation companies through organized struggle. The choice of SPI as host was itself a statement about whose knowledge and experience should be at the center of the learning exchange. As Angela Cordeiro, AEF Co-Director, reflected in her account of the exchange, "Certainly it is very important for the Agroecology Fund to hold this event in Southeast Asia. In 2020 there were few partners in the region. Asia itself is very complex and diverse. Being here and being able to listen to, and interact with, partners gives us a better sense of how AEF can support." This report is a documentary record of that listening.

1.3

About this report

The report is organized to follow the structure of the exchange: contextual framing, a day-by-day narrative, field visit chapters, a cross-cutting thematic synthesis, recommendations, and a conclusion. It was prepared on the basis of detailed meeting notes from all the plenary sessions, thematic breakout rooms, Open Space discussions, field visits, and daily Learning Tree reflection exercises that were conducted through the four session days of the exchange. It draws additionally on the daily reports written by Angela Cordeiro. The Asia exchange, with its six days, two field visits, and extraordinary geographic and cultural diversity, has generated a correspondingly comprehensive treasure of insights.

02

AEF AND THE DIVERSITY OF ITS ASIAN PARTNERS



The Agroecology Fund (AEF) is a pooled philanthropic fund whose mission is to support the global movement to build fair and just food systems. It draws resources from 53 donor organizations and channels them directly to collaborators, regional networks, and grassroots organizations working across the food sovereignty and agroecology movement. AEF takes it as a key operating principle that at least 80 percent of funds must flow directly to grantees. Rather than issuing open calls, AEF operates through a trust-based closed nomination system in which its regionally embedded advisory board members, donors, and long-term partners identify and nominate grantees based on grant guidelines. This process is designed to share power and to ensure that funding decisions are guided by movement knowledge.

AEF's strategy extends beyond disbursement of grants. It invests in learning, action research, and evidence building among grantees, and encourages bilateral and multilateral funders to make long-term, principles-based agroecology-aligned investments.

2.1

AEF's presence and growth in Asia

By April 2025, AEF's Asia and Oceania grantees network had expanded to 75 collaborators involving hundreds of organizations across 28 countries. These countries include the major agricultural economies of South and Southeast Asia—India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia—as well as less-represented countries including Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, and Hawaii.

The diversity of this network reflects AEF's deliberate effort to support movements that are often invisible to mainstream philanthropic attention.

Among the Learning Exchange attendees, AEF Advisory Board members representing the Asian region included Cristino Panerio (Philippines), Sridhar Radhakrishnan (India), Lim Li Ching (Malaysia), and Milka Chepkorir (Kenya). Several donors with programs in Southeast Asia also participated, providing an unusual opportunity for direct, face-to-face dialogue between funders and the grassroots organizations they support.



2.2

The diversity of Asian partners

In South Asia, AEF's grantee network includes: mass peasant organizations such as La Via Campesina (LVC) and their member unions in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan; tribal communities in central and western India that are working to reclaim land and restore Indigenous food systems; women's collectives in Tamil Nadu that practice natural farming on collectively held land; fishworker federations in India that advocate for marine and freshwater rights; a farmer-built digital trading platform in India; and cooperative development banks in postwar Sri Lanka that finance agroecological transitions. In Southeast Asia, the diverse list of grantees spans from SPI's vast network of farmer cooperatives in Indonesia to grassroots environmental justice organizations in Malaysia that are building urban and peri-urban agroecology. Support is also extended to: Thai peasant movements that are running politically conscious territorial markets; school meal programs in Thailand and Vietnam; and Indigenous community organizations in Myanmar that are managing women-led community funds under conditions of armed conflict.

In East Asia, the Korean Women Peasants Association (KWPA) continues to work to improve seeds and soil health; it also works on advocacy that draws on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).

In Central and Western Asia, the Golden Hoof Collaborative in Kyrgyzstan revives the Indigenous Kyrgyz horse breed; the Rushinoi cooperative in Tajikistan conserves ancient apple and fruit tree varieties in a living Apple Park; and the Bilim Alliance in Georgia restores traditional knowledge after Soviet-era erasure. In the Pacific, Resilient Peers in Papua New Guinea advocates for Indigenous knowledge systems and community-based food resilience in the face of logging, mining, and climate disruption.

Palestine was a powerful and emotionally charged presence throughout. The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), an AEF grantee, sent representatives whose accounts of farming under military occupation included water restrictions, land confiscation, and the destruction of olive groves and agricultural infrastructure. Their accounts of these hardships moved many participants to tears.

The presence of Palestinian partners grounded the entire exchange in the understanding that agroecology is not only a technical or economic project, it is also a matter of survival, dignity, and resistance.

"Omar - listening to you and your situation in Palestine, and noticing the resilience you carry, has been the most inspiring part of my day. Makes us want to do even more to create change and strengthen the communities at the grassroots."

Participant reflection

Day 1 Learning Tree, Asia Learning Exchange



03

THE HOST, SERIKAT PETANI INDONESIA, AND THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT



3.1

Indonesia:

Food, land, and contradiction

Indonesia is an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands. It is home to approximately 285 million people and is one of the planet's most biodiverse ecosystems. Agriculture is central to Indonesia's economy and identity. The country is among the world's largest producers of rice, palm oil, rubber, coffee, and cocoa, and it has the world's second-most productive fishery. Even so, the relationship between Indonesia's food system actors and its small-scale farmers and fishworkers is marked by deep contradictions.

Rice is Indonesia's staple food and cultural touchstone. The rice paddies of Java, Bali, and West Java are among the most productive in the world and their terraced landscapes are inseparable from Indonesian cultural identity. The Indramayu district (regency) alone (which participants visited on Day 6) produces approximately 1.67 million metric tons (mt) of harvested rice annually, contributing roughly five percent of the national supply and 15 percent of West Java's demand. The farmers who produce this abundance, however, frequently remain economically precarious, dependent on chemical inputs they cannot always afford, and vulnerable to middlemen who capture the margin between farmgate and consumer prices; furthermore, as Indonesia's urban economy expands, they are also facing the gradual conversion of agricultural land to other uses.

The Indonesian government's food self-sufficiency imperative drives it toward intensification. At the opening plenary, Dr. Idha Widi Arsanti of the Ministry of Agriculture presented modernization plans that described mechanization, intensification, and the development of farmer economic institutions.

To the learning exchange participants, the plans she described used an often-heard Green Revolution narrative that has remained largely unchanged despite decades of mixed results.

In Focus: The Merah Putih Village Cooperative Program

Ms. Siti Aedah of Indonesia's Ministry of Cooperatives presented a report on the Merah Putih (Red and White) Village Cooperative program, which targets 80,000 village cooperatives. The program is authorized by Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2025 and is grounded in Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution. Each cooperative is designed as an integrated rural economic institution offering staple food outlets, a pharmacy, savings and loans, and cold storage services, with the aim of shortening supply chains and reducing middlemen. SPI's response has been measured, as its own nearly 1,000 cooperatives, built bottom-up over decades, are independent. Although sharing some common elements, the government's program and SPI's program represent two different models.

3.2

Serikat Petani Indonesia:

A movement built from the ground up

SPI was founded after the fall of Suharto's New Order regime. It picked up the pieces after the three decades of authoritarian rule that had suppressed peasant organization, eroded land rights, and opened Indonesian agriculture to agribusiness penetration.

SPI's founding vision was to reclaim, through organized peasant action, the Constitutional Article 33 mandate for a people-centered cooperative economy and land redistribution through the 1960 Agrarian Law. Today, SPI operates at national, provincial, district, and village levels across more than 20 provinces and has hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmer members. It is a member of La Via Campesina.

3.3

Two pillars:

The peasant union and the cooperative network

Because Indonesian law prevents peasant unions from engaging directly in business, SPI established cooperatives as separate legal entities under its organizational umbrella. Each SPI branch thus has a corresponding cooperative whose members belong to the SPI but which operates with its own governance, financial systems, and management structures. This dual architecture allows the SPI to maintain the integrity of its political and advocacy work while building the economic institutions its members need to survive and thrive. In 2012, the SPI declared its ambition, as its political strategy for food sovereignty, to establish 1,000 cooperatives. It is well on its way to achieving that goal.

The cooperative network collectively absorbs and markets the agroecological production of its member farmers; this includes, at the Bogor Training Center's cooperative, approximately 200 mt of organic vegetables per year. This provides the institutional structure through which the SPI's Food Sovereignty Areas (operated in collaboration with municipalities) manage their collective production and marketing.



"We need to practice agroecology and make it massive."

Henry Saragih
Chairman, Serikat Petani Indonesia

3.4

SPI and agroecology:

From resistance to practice

SPI's agroecology strategy has three mutually reinforcing components: education and training through a national network of Agroecology Training Centers (Pusdiklat); Food Sovereignty Areas (FSAs), which are territories reclaimed through agrarian reform where members practice agroecology collectively; and a cooperative network that facilitates agroecological production reaching markets at fair prices.



The Green Revolution, in SPI's analysis, was not simply a technical change, it was a social transformation that shifted power from peasants to corporations. Reversing it, they believe, requires an equally comprehensive transformation in the opposite direction.

3.5

Bogor as a learning capital

Bogor was a fitting host for the Asia Learning Exchange. Besides being the location of SPI's national training center, the city is home to a world-renowned botanical garden—a Dutch colonial legacy now dedicated to tropical plant research—and a leading agricultural university with which SPI has cultivated a relationship that is productive if not always comfortable. As Henry Saragih noted, universities sometimes resist working with peasant organizations that practice policy advocacy.

SPI's training center itself is not merely a teaching facility; it is also a research and innovation hub where farmer knowledge is tested and shared. This includes, for example, bio-input production from fermentation and local biomass, fodder from underutilized species, and seed conservation and breeding. Their research methodology, replicated in the learning exchange itself, is inclusive and participatory. The knowledge of farmers and their allies counts as they set their own research agenda.



04

MEETING METHODOLOGY



The design of the Asia Learning Exchange was the product of months of collaboration between AEF and SPI, coordinated across time zones and the Ramadan period. The facilitation team was led by Nova Syurahati from Tanah Air Lestari (TAL), whose mastery of a multilingual, multicultural environment drew admiration throughout the week. The methodology was built around the following distinct modes of engagement.

4.1

Structured knowledge and formal power

Plenary sessions created space for direct engagement with institutional actors that the agroecology movement seeks to influence; this included government ministries, UN agencies, and philanthropic funders. These sessions were designed to strike a balance between institutional and practitioner voices. Day 1's panel, for example, placed the Ministry of Cooperatives alongside IPB

University and SPI, Day 3's financing panels placed funders and resource-seekers in conversation with each other, and Day 4's AEF session was framed as a listening exercise.

4.2

Peer-to-peer co-creation

Day 1's regional group work generated trust within subregional clusters before embarking on cross-regional engagement. Each of Day 2's six simultaneous thematic sessions was opened by two "igniter" practitioners, exemplifying peer-to-peer learning. The fishbowl dynamic allowed all participants to engage directly, and graphic recorders produced real-time visual summaries that enabled cross-session learning in the World Café synthesis. Day 3's Open Space consisted of 13 self-organized discussion groups; this proved so generative that facilitators had difficulty ending it. As they described it, "The groups continued their exchanges and did not stop when the bell rang."



4.3

Grounding in field reality

The two field visits—to SPI's Training Center in Bogor and to the Food Sovereignty Area in Indramayu—connected discussions to lived reality. Angela Cordeiro noted a lesson for future exchanges, which was that field visits are methodologically stronger when placed in the middle of a program, as this allows field insights to illuminate subsequent discussions. While logistical constraints placed them at the end of the Bogor learning exchange, their emotional and intellectual impact was largely undiminished.

4.4

The Learning Tree

The Learning Tree was the cumulative artistic-physical representation of the exchange's collective journey. Each day, participants added differently shaped cards.

On Day 1, seeds captured their most inspiring insights;

on Day 2, trunks reflected what they felt were the things that supported agroecology economies; and

on Day 3, leaves named moments that participants felt had shifted their perspective.

On Day 4, cards shaped like fruits recorded one word each in a human chain that linked everyone across the meeting room. Collectively, these words became the emotional descriptors of the exchange; they included: struggle, solidarity, hope, sovereignty, justice, resistance, seeds, friendship, unity, movement, agroecology, and laban (fight).

4.5

Language and interpretation as political practice

Simultaneous interpretation in many languages was provided, including in Bahasa, Burmese, Hindi, Tamil, Sinhala, Korean, Thai, Russian, and English. This made it possible, for example, for Tamil women farmers and Korean women peasants to hold conversations, for Mr. Mirzosh of Tajikistan to share his philosophy of farmers' knowledge with the whole room, and for Palestinian voices to reach every participant. As Angela Cordeiro explicitly put it, "Linguistic inclusion cannot be seen as a luxurious accessory. It is a strategy. It is an assertive way of anti-colonial practice that recognizes other epistemologies and knowledge beyond that expressed in colonial hegemonic languages." The participant's reflection from Day 1 was not hyperbolic: "Without interpretation, there is no revolution."

4.6

Digital tools in service of inclusion

During plenary sessions, the facilitation team made thoughtful use of digital participation tools alongside the traditional microphone; this particularly included Slido, a platform that allows participants to submit questions and vote on priorities from their mobile phones. This small but consequential methodological choice meant that participants who may have been reluctant to speak in a large, multilingual room could still shape the direction of discussion. The result was visible in the quality and candor of the Q&A exchanges. This was particularly observable during the Day 3 financing panels and the Day 4 AEF strategy session, where some of the sharpest and most politically direct questions came through the Slido platform rather than from the floor.

05

THE PROGRAM



DAY 1

Roots and convergence

Building the foundation



Monday, April 21, 2025, began with a *mistica*, a cultural and spiritual expression grounded in ritual. In this case, it consisted of a traditional Javanese dance, song, and percussion by a local young women's artistic group, followed by an SPI music duo singing in Bahasa about peasants and agroecology. A short video of greetings from African partners connected the Asia exchange to the earlier African Exchange in Zimbabwe.

The formal opening remarks came from Henry Saragih, SPI's national co-coordinator, followed by Daniel Moss from AEF. The opening also carried a moment of collective mourning as news of Pope Francis' death reached the gathering during the afternoon's activities. A partner from the Philippines shared words of reflection.

Opening plenary: Understanding the Indonesian context

The exchange was hosted by Indonesia, the largest economy in Southeast Asia. The first plenary session grounded participants in the country's agricultural, political, and organizational context. Three speakers offered complementary and sometimes contrasting perspectives that framed the questions that were to be explored in the next six days.

Ms. Siti Aedah, Ministry of Cooperatives, Indonesia

Ms. Siti Aedah, Deputy Assistant for Human Resources, Capacity Building and Talents at Indonesia's Ministry of Cooperatives presented the government's Merah Putih Village Cooperative program. Within this program, 80,000 village cooperatives targeted supply chain shortening, middlemen reduction, and financial inclusion, while improving village welfare and employment generation, and curbing inflation. For participants from across Asia, the presentation offered a striking example of government-level recognition of the cooperative model as a tool for rural economic development;

however, discussions also revealed significant skepticism about whether a top-down program could deliver the community ownership that makes cooperatives genuinely transformative. SPI representatives indicated that their own network would remain independent. The assertion that economic viability is as important to farmers as ecological sustainability resonated through the entire week's discussions and was expressed convincingly by farmers in Indramayu on Day 6.

Professor Rilus A. Kinseng, IPB University

Professor Kinseng of the Faculty of Human Ecology at IPB University offered a sociological framework identifying three dominant forces that are reshaping Indonesian agriculture: mechanization, chemicalization, and homogenization. He placed these within three dimensions of social action: agency (farmers' rational economic choices), structure (policy and technology systems), and culture (value systems). Genuine agroecology transition, he told the gathering, requires attending to all three simultaneously. His key observation aligned with the exchange's thematic focus: "Farmers are rational. It is necessary to show evidence that agroecology offers economic benefits."



Mohammad Qomarun Najmi - SPI

Mr. Najmi, Head of the Agency for Research and Practices of Agroecology at SPI, presented SPI's strategy for restoring a model of farming that considers ecological, social, and cultural dimensions alongside economic ones. He described SPI's three-pillar strategy—training centers, Food Sovereignty Areas, and cooperatives—as simultaneous resistance against the Green Revolution.

Regional group work: The Collective Story Harvest

The remainder of Day 1 was devoted to the most participatory and creative activity of the exchange. It involved seven subregional groups, which were comprised of two Southeast Asia/East Asia groups, two South Asia groups, a Central/Western Asia/Eastern Europe group, an Oceania/global group, and a cross-regional group.

They created visual posters that answered three questions:

- 1) what stories from our region stand out;
- 2) what challenges keep appearing; and
- 3) what values, approaches, or strategies are unique to our region's agroecology journey.

The first Southeast Asia/East Asia group built their poster around three symbols: red flowers for women's leadership, coconut roots for deep knowledge, and hands for collaboration, thus foregrounding land rights, seed sovereignty, and the need for peasant-based political representation. The second Southeast Asia/East Asia group organized their analysis around the resistance of social movements to privatization, the economic movement against liberalization, and the political movement against deregulation, thus asserting the need first for agrarian reform and then for improved and expanded agroecology practices.



The South Asia groups brought a sharp gender lens. One group conceptualized gender as a flower with humans at the center and knowledge, collaboration, and struggle in the petals; the flower in bloom represented movements of solidarity and agrobiodiversity. The challenges named by participants reflected the specific political economies of South Asian agriculture; these included patriarchy, capitalism, feudalism, extractivism, and casteism. The Central/Western Asia group's unifying vision was, "Agroecology as a journey to the roots"; this encompassed food sovereignty, nomadic freedom, the garden of hope, and the biodiversity ark.

Their strategic insight was that, "We believe tradition is the best diplomat." The Oceania group described their journey by using the image of rivers flowing from mountains to coast, connecting communities; their unique challenges included geographic remoteness, invasive species, and restrictive seed laws.

As Day 1 progressed, a "Learning Tree" began to be constructed. Solidarity was the most frequently recurring theme, not as an abstract principle but as a lived experience. One seed on the Learning Tree read, "We face common issues, but we came with solidarity." The diversity of the gathering was repeatedly named as a source of inspiration. Another seed on the tree read, "Diverse people, diverse ecosystems, diverse food systems, one species, one planet—we are all on the same boat."

The political nature of agroecology was clearly asserted by several participants, including one who wrote, "Agroecology is NOT organic farming but the political struggle of peasants. The political dimension is being made to disappear on purpose." Women's leadership was explicitly named by participants who wrote, "Strength of the vision and voice of young women leaders here among us."



The beauty of collective action was embraced. One participant expressed this by writing, "The group exercise was fun—learning about each other's work and putting it in a creative way; we realized that all the participants in the room are on the same page."



An evening with Palestine

Later in the day, the agroecological market was inaugurated; there, participants displayed seeds, handicrafts, publications, and local products from across Asia. Following that, a large group stayed to hear a briefing from the UAWC representative on the current situation in Palestine. This briefing was not part of the official schedule, but it emerged organically from the presence of Palestinian partners and the urgency of what they were living through. They told of food baskets being the primary food source, of half of the available animal fodder going to human consumption, and of agricultural infrastructure systematically destroyed.

Their account left many in tears. The Palestine briefing was a reminder that the most fundamental aspects of agroecology—land, water, and physical security—can be denied by military force as easily as by policy failure.

Palestine was not a distant context; it was a reality that was vividly present in the room and it set a moral tone for all that followed.

"Getting to know the potential of our agroecology movements. We are everywhere. We love our struggles! We preserve and collectivize our land wisdom, and fight for a just and healthy food system."

Participant (Seed)
Day 1, Learning Tree



DAY 2

Economics in Practice



Six Thematic Sessions and a Global Lens

Tuesday, April 22, 2025, began with a *mistica* led by Mr. Mirzosh of Rushinoi, Tajikistan, who played his traditional guitar and sang in Tajik. When asked about the lyrics, he spoke of the relationship between farmers and nature: "Despite religion, political position, and backgrounds, what we need is to be good human beings. Learning and being in touch with nature is a key step." His words were translated by his young colleague Salmonsho, which exemplified a living manifestation of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Participants then reported on an early morning market visit to Bogor's traditional market; this was a highlight and grounded the discussions in territorial market realities. The *mistica* closed with a video of Humood Alkhudher performing a Palestine song in Arabic.

Six thematic sessions: Economies in action

The highlights of Day 2 were the six simultaneous thematic breakout sessions, each of which was opened by two igniter practitioners. Once the sessions concluded, a “fishbowl” discussion was held whereby a small group of participants engaged in discussion in an inner circle while the rest of the group (in an outer circle) listened, observed, and took notes; the latter could contribute to the discussion only if they entered the inner circle. Participants chose which of the six sessions to attend based on their interests, and the variation in group size was itself informative about the priorities and knowledge gaps in the Asian network; it ranged from the crowded Agroecology Entrepreneurship session that required additional chairs, to the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) session that was attended by fewer than ten people. The afternoon’s World Café dynamic allowed all participants to hear summaries of sessions they had not attended; these summaries were supported by graphic recorder illustrations that had been prepared by the facilitation team.

Session 1. Agroecology Entrepreneurship

The Agroecology Entrepreneurship session was the most well attended of the six, drawing approximately 35 participants. Its popularity validated the priority the AEF had given to this topic in the last review of its strategic plan. The first igniter was Sakiul Millat Morshed, Executive Director of Shikha Shastha Unnayan Karzakram (Education Health and Development Program, or SHISUK) in Bangladesh. This igniter presented SHISUK’s community enterprise approach (CEA); they described 30 years of collectively managing floodplain areas through integrated rice-fish farming, which provides more income than conventional paddy cultivation. According to this presenter, three principles sustain the model: community investment and ownership, sharing profits and failures, and learning-by-doing rather than classroom instruction. SHISUK now works with 20 women’s groups applying CEA to vegetable cultivation and beekeeping.



“Traditional knowledge is also social capital. They help communities grow together.”

Sakiul Millat Morshed
SHISUK, Bangladesh

Karan Singh of Farmiversity Jhadol in India, and Manas Arvind of India's Farmiversities Alliance shared their youth engagement program. Singh described choosing to become a "soil-dier" (a farmer-activist) despite family opposition, and then beginning to use art, drama, and music to attract tribal youth who had internalized the low status of farming. After one year, he said, 60 youth had chosen farming as a profession. Adivasi (Tribal) youth are among the most marginalized and disadvantaged communities in India, and the training gave them the dignity that they are denied by the caste-based system. Arvind described the Farmiversities Alliance's six support areas: networking, knowledge sharing, content creation, technology integration (including AI for local-language translation), entrepreneurship incubation, and grants for fieldwork. A key economic insight included the fact that wheat at INR 20/kg becomes flour at INR 60/kg and biscuits at INR 3,000/kg, and that youth must be taught to capture that value within their communities.

Session 2. Commercialization Networks

The Commercialization session explored two complementary approaches to connecting agroecological producers with consumers at scale; one of these was through institutional procurement systems and the other was through digital technology.

Nantawan Manprasong of Thailand's The Field Alliance (TFA) presented its pesticide-free school meal program, stating that Thailand's Ministry of Education had mandated pesticide-free school lunches since 2018. They went on to describe the school curriculum on agroecological methods that had been developed and implemented in over 300 schools and colleges across six countries. TFA's strategy has two mutually reinforcing actions:

- 1) school curriculum development that trains students to grow food using agroecological methods, which is then included in school kitchen gardens; and
- 2) the procurement of produce directly from local agroecological farmers to supplement school meals.

Plans to expand the program to Indonesia and the Philippines (2026-2028) were shared. Suresh Kanna Kesavan of Tamil Nadu's Consumer Research Education Action Training and Empowerment Trust (CREATE), raised the important definitional question of whether "pesticide-free" refers to certified organic zones or to simply avoiding pesticide use, this being a distinction that has significant implications for market recognition and farmer livelihoods.

Muhil Kannaiyan and Raja Vennila of Thalavady Farmers' Foundation, India, presented FarmFit—a multilingual smartphone app with already 8,000 downloads—which supports multiple languages including Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and English, and connects farmers directly to buyers.

Discussion raised digital inclusion barriers, with Nantawan Manprasong noting that mobile phone access remains limited in some rural Thai areas. Participants from Cambodia and Vietnam also questioned how to reach consumers beyond existing networks, and Indira Raimberdieva of the Golden Hoof Collaborative, Kyrgyzstan, noted that cooperatives could amplify digital tools through WhatsApp networks and social media.

Session 3. Territorial Markets

The Territorial Markets session was distinguished by the depth of political analysis that participants brought to what might elsewhere be treated as a purely technical discussion.

Anne Lapapan Supamanta of Assembly of the Poor (AOP), Thailand, opened with a foundational claim that, "Agroecology is not a kind of organic farming. It is the political actions of the peasantry against neoliberalism. We cannot do agroecology in the neoliberal regime." She described AOP's Bangkok Peasant Market, established in 2020 during COVID-19, as both an economic space and an advocacy platform; there, farmers set their own prices and women sellers build relationships with consumers through conversation.

As she put it, “Chatting in the marketplace is the most effective and cheapest way of campaign and advocacy.” AOP’s Cooperative Commune model (Kok Edoi Community) divides reclaimed village territory into family farms, collective farms, community forests, an agroecology school, and a roadside market.



“Peasant market for us is not the end but the means to achieve peasant emancipation.”

Anne Lapapan Supamanta
Assembly of the Poor, Thailand

Malaysian perspectives were added by Rety Anak Sendi of Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth, or SAM) and Venkata Subbarow Narayanan of Consumers Association Penang (CAP). Participants learned that, since 2021, SAM’s village-based organic program had grown from 20 members, mostly women, to now being spread across 10 villages, and that CAP’s 54-year-old urban agricultural education program was now producing homegrown vegetables across Penang.

Zainal Arifin Fuad of SPI named three critical policy gaps: how to ensure food access for all, how to shorten the value chain, and how to build producer-consumer trust without expensive certification. Kartini Samon of Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) raised the digital platform challenge of online marketplaces easily permitting imported products that undercut local producers, an issue that SPI is advocating for the government to regulate. Leonardo van den Berg, representing European perspectives, connected these Asian challenges to La Via Campesina’s advocacy for peasant territorial markets in Europe, where liberalization has similarly eroded farmer prices while increasing consumer costs.

Session 4. Participatory Guarantee Systems

The PGS session, though smaller in attendance than others, generated some of the day’s most technically rich and practically grounded discussion. Participants from India, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, the Philippines, and Indonesia shared their experiences at very different stages of PGS development.

Tanay Joshi of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements/ Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (IFOAM/FiBL), Switzerland, set the conceptual framework: PGS, as a trust-based, peer-reviewed quality assurance system for local markets, is far more affordable than third-party certification. Aida Jamangulova of the Agency of Development Initiatives (ADI), Kyrgyzstan, gave the cost argument its starkest form. As they explained, accredited organic certification in Kyrgyzstan costs up to USD 10,000, which is entirely out of reach for smallholders. Omar Abdalilah of UAWC, Palestine, noted that PGS works well at a small scale but faces challenges for larger-scale export markets. Cristino Panerio, an AEF Advisory Board member from the Philippines, emphasized the political dimension: PGS means farmers control the entire value chain, minimizing middlemen. Mohammad Qomarun Najmi of SPI raised Indonesia’s legal dimension, saying that a farmer who declares a product “organic” without certified verification risks criminal prosecution; he explained that this legal risk is a significant barrier to PGS adoption in Indonesia, where the government does not yet recognize PGS as a legitimate certification alternative.

Session 5. Financial Mechanisms

The Financial Mechanisms session explored how smallholder farmers can access the credit they need for agroecological transition in contexts where formal banking systems either exclude them entirely or impose interest rates that make loan repayment impossible, in some cases up to 40 percent annually. Two igniter presentations modelled different but complementary approaches.

Jiraporn Korwiangprai and Vasilina Chernysheva of the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Myanmar, presented their community fund model, whereby USD 10,000 was provided to communities and managed by women as rotating small loans of up to USD 1,000 per member. Of this, 90 percent of earnings was retained by the borrower and 10 percent was returned to the community fund for emergency needs and training. The entire system operates outside formal banking; this is an essential aspect, given Myanmar's current military control of financial institutions. Suthakaran Thamotheerampillai, of the Northern Cooperative Development Bank (NCDB) of Sri Lanka, presented a more institutionalized post-war model that involved cooperative lending at 6 to 8 percent—well below commercial rates of 10 percent or more—with agroecology farmers receiving approximately 75 percent preferential rates. Martua Sirait of the Samdhana Institute, Indonesia, contributed a third model, that of the Keling Kumang credit union; this was owned by an Indigenous tribe through a community-owned enterprise, the Badan Usaha Milik Masyarakat Adat (BUMMA), which links financial services to research, marketing, and community development support.

Session 6. Cooperativism and the Solidarity Economy

The Cooperativism session generated some of the most politically charged and philosophically substantive discussion of the exchange. Its igniter presentations came from two organizations that have developed cooperative models in very different but equally relevant contexts.

Maheshika Premachandra Sighara of the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), Sri Lanka, opened with the declaration that, "Cooperation is not just about selling and producing. It is about fighting." She structured her analysis around four political economy questions: who owns what (property relations); who does what (that is, what is the nature and status of labor relations); who gets what (income distribution); and what do they do with created wealth and surplus (accumulation and reinvestment).

These questions, she argued, expose the cooperative as a terrain of class struggle, a space where the principles of democratic ownership and equitable distribution either prevail or are subverted by capitalist logic.

Mahmud Zulfikar Rachman of SPI, Indonesia, traced SPI's cooperative model from the 1945 Constitution through the 1960 Agrarian Law. The 1965 military coup reversed land redistribution and provoked SPI's founding response: the creation of democratic cooperatives as constitutional and ideological resistance, operating on one-member-one-vote principles with external capital capped at total collective savings.

The wider discussion drew in cooperative experience from across Asia and beyond. İrem Bağcı Çalışkan of the World March of Women (WMW), Turkey, described how Turkish cooperatives have drifted from community solidarity toward entrepreneurial models as World Bank and EU funding introduced capitalist values alongside technical capacity. The 2023 earthquake in Turkey catalyzed a new generation of community cooperatives that were focused on rebuilding and food sovereignty. Susan Herawati of the Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan (People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice, Indonesia, or KIARA) argued that true cooperatives emerge from the real needs and initiatives of people, they are not imposed from outside. She illustrated this with the example of Lampung shrimp farmers who formed a cooperative after expelling a Thai company that had engaged in human trafficking on their farms.

Kathryn Manga of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines, or KMP), described a striking example of women-led collective action. As she told it, when powerful landowners attempted to harass residents to get off contested land, women planted banana trees because they regrow quickly even when destroyed. This action allowed them to sustain farming and to gradually occupy more land despite violence. During the pandemic, these women launched online markets for their produce, working collectively to expand their land use.

Sridhar Radhakrishnan of the AEF Advisory Board drew on the Kerala cooperative tradition to make a structural observation: most cooperatives in Kerala are male dominated, and male-led cooperatives are more prone to capitalist tendencies unless they are politically conscious. In India, meanwhile, women's self-help groups and collectives rarely evolve into formal cooperatives, a structural gap the movement has yet to adequately address.



"Cooperative is another business, but the system is democratic: one people, one vote."

Mahmud Zulfikar Rachman
Serikat Petani Indonesia

Global Trends Plenary: Structural threats to agroecology economies

The afternoon World Café allowed all participants to rotate through the summaries of the six thematic sessions, supported by the graphic recorders' visual outputs. This was followed by a plenary on global trends.

Azra Talat Sayeed of Roots for Equity, Pakistan, addressed corporate capture of food systems. Pakistan's dairy sector was highlighted here, situating it within the intersecting global crises of war, energy, and climate emergencies, debt restructuring, and land grabbing. The rise of renewable energy, she argued, creates new land dispossession as extraction of minerals for solar and battery production displaces rural communities in the name of green transition.

Nestlé's operations in Pakistan follow colonial dynamics, she went on; there, one can observe corporate supply chain control, suppression of farmer prices, displacement of local food cultures, and the use of marketing to create dependence on processed products in communities that had previously maintained diverse and nutritious food systems.

The power imbalance between corporations and smallholder farmers is so extreme that legal protections provided by the law are inadequate. "There is no other way but to resist," she told participants. "Much of the answers on how to do it have been shared in this very event."

Lim Li Ching, member of the Third World Network and of the AEF Advisory Board, dissected the concept of biodiversity credits, explaining that they are like carbon credits but for biodiversity and that they treat ecological complexity as a tradeable financial asset. Biodiversity cannot genuinely be replaced, she explained, and restoration takes decades. Offset markets ignore ecological complexity and Indigenous knowledge, she said, and local communities receive only a fraction of financial flows while corporations use credits to justify continued harm. As a civil society resistance resource, she directed participants to biodmarketwatch.info.



Dr. Angshuman Sarma of the Focus on the Global South, India, examined global trade systems through an agroecological lens. Dr. Sarma argued that tariffs—often dismissed as protectionism—can be powerful tools for food sovereignty when used strategically to protect domestic agroecological systems from subsidized industrial agricultural dumping.



At the close of Day 2, participants placed on the Learning Tree branch-shaped cards that reflected what supports agroecology economies. The branches identified community and solidarity, collective land tenure, cooperative and territorial markets, Indigenous knowledge, farmer-to-farmer learning, and the conviction that the current economic system will not sustain the earth, thus making agroecological alternatives not just desirable but necessary. Several cards captured the day's political economy analysis with striking brevity.

One participant wrote that food sovereignty is what frees communities from rice capitalism; another proposed a two-way movement strategy of resistance to the neoliberal corporate agenda on one side and the dissemination of viable agroecological alternatives on the other; and a third participant observed that distribution is not always about trading and that sharing surplus is itself a form of building solidarity.



DAY 3

Financing the transition

Funders, seekers and Open Space

Wednesday, April 23, 2025, opened with a South Asia *mistica*. This featured a beautiful dance by a young woman participant from Sri Lanka, video clips of protest songs from Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and Tamil women farmers singing in their own language. Before the financing panels began, La Via Campesina grantees performed a skit dramatizing the difficulty of securing funding without having their agenda captured by donors. The session ended with a collective dance and considerable excitement in the room. The day was enriched with two financing panels and an Open Space exercise in which people were encouraged to organize their own sessions.



Financing panel 1: The perspective of funders

The first financing panel was facilitated by Sridhar Radhakrishnan of the AEF Advisory Board. It brought together five speakers who represented different positions within Asia's funding ecosystem for agroecology.

The meeting was addressed by Martua Sirait and Alfred Kenneth S. Depala of the Samdhana Institute, a Southeast Asian philanthropy and grantmaking organization whose very name means "healing, uniting, and sharing". They described their model of "funding the un-fundable", issuing micro, small, and medium grants to Indigenous peoples and local communities across Southeast Asia. The program, they explained, draws on philanthropic and bilateral sources and, increasingly, on multilateral funding, including a dedicated program with Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry. They fund communities that are practicing shifting cultivation, youth doing urban farming and, in Papua, a deaf farming group that is growing corn agroecologically. Proposals are evaluated through food sovereignty assessments and gender and social inclusion tools.

Dr. Idha Widi Arsanti of Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture acknowledged real climate pressures including the 2023 El Niño drought and extreme rainfall in 2025, as well as accelerating land conversion. Dr. Arsanti then went on to present the government's response in the form of intensification, mechanization, and organic fertilization programs, as well as a plan to consolidate smallholders into competitive cooperative enterprises. The room, however, was not convinced. A Slido question raised the issue of whether the plan to develop large-scale enterprises on outer islands was simply agriculture industrialization; they further asked what protection existed for peasants who were caught in the middle. Dr. Arsanti answered that the government wanted small farmers to join cooperatives and become competitive, but this did not resolve the concern. Angela Cordeiro was direct in her synthesis to the advisory board; she noted that, "The Green Revolution narrative still shapes the plans of techno-bureaucracy without any make-up."



Muhammad Yayat Afianto of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Indonesia, offered the panel's most explicitly agroecology-aligned institutional perspective. He framed agroecology as a people-centered, nature-positive food system transformation that was aligned with Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. He acknowledged that all UNDP projects must link to national government frameworks and long-term government plans, which can create tension when government priorities diverge from agroecological principles. He claimed that the UNDP navigates this tension by demonstrating that agroecological approaches can deliver productivity, food security, and climate resilience outcomes.



Swati Renduchintala of the Andhra Pradesh Community-Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) program, India, described a state government-funded explicitly women-centered initiative that spanned three agro-ecological zones: dry and semi-arid areas, delta regions, and hilly coastal terrain. Women, as she put it, are the actual pillars of the land; they do the farming. The program's non-negotiable principle was that no chemical fertilizers or pesticides should be used, and that their use should be replaced by multi-cropping methods and biological inputs.

On funding strategy, she was sharp and direct. Restrictions under the government's Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) make foreign funding difficult for Indian civil society, so the role of NGOs must shift. As she put it, "The role of civil society, especially NGOs, should really focus on building models, building knowledge systems. Scaling is the job of government." What Andhra Pradesh demonstrates, she said, is that when a state commits, it can reach scales that philanthropy simply cannot match.

Daniel Moss joined the panel wearing the hat of the Agroecology Coalition rather than that of the AEF, of which he is a co-director. The Agroecology Coalition is a broader alliance working to increase both the volume and quality of global-level agroecology financing. He noted that trillions in subsidies continue to flow into harmful activities including industrial agriculture and that even much of what gets labelled as agroecology financing does not align with the 13 principles of agroecology. He told participants that the Coalition has built an assessment and tracking tool based on those principles, which lets donors honestly ask whether their investments qualify. The answer, he said, is sometimes no. GMOs, for example, are an explicit red flag regardless of how the investment is packaged.



Financing panel 2: The perspective of resource-seekers

The resource-seekers panel was moderated by Daniel Moss. It moved from the methodical to the harrowing to the inspiring, with accounts of five organizations whose funding experiences revealed a landscape that is simultaneously creative, uncertain, and deeply unequal.

Indira Raimberdieva of the Golden Hoof Collaborative, Kyrgyzstan, described building a three-stage organization around the revival of the Indigenous Kyrgyz horse. This involved a research program seeking non-commercial grants, an economic program that explored impact investment and cooperative structures, and a food security program seeking state funding. After four AEF grants, the Collaborative is now navigating toward longer-term financial sustainability, which is a complex terrain in a country where agroecology has almost no institutional presence.

Mariam Jorjadze of the Biological Farming Association Elkana (BILIM Alliance), Georgia, traced how Soviet occupation devastated agricultural knowledge and severed the generational transmission of traditional

farming practices. BILIM, founded in 2022, is rebuilding this through farmer-to-farmer seed sharing and the revival of varieties that disappeared during the Soviet period. Current funding conditions are extremely challenging, in that Russian occupation of Georgian territory and the political fallout from the Ukraine war have made Georgia's civil society largely inaccessible to international funders, while the government pushes to restore what it calls the "glorious" industrial agriculture of the Soviet era.

Gazala Akhil Paul and Krishna Srinivasan of the Samerth Charitable Trust, India, presented the session's most strategically instructive model. It used a government rural employment program known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as a vehicle for water infrastructure that enables agroecological farming. Samerth has helped tribal communities in Kutch and Chhattisgarh navigate the GIS mapping, online registration, and proposal writing that they are not able to do by themselves, with the result was that INR 2,360 million of government money flowed directly to 14,000 tribal farming families. As Gazala Akhil Paul put it: "No fund can compensate for the amount of money that the government can give. Scaling is the job of the government."



Elvira Rumkabu and Septer Manufandu of the Papua Democratic Institute delivered the panel's most harrowing testimony, which gave an account of the Indonesian government plans to convert two million ha of Indigenous Papuan land into sugarcane and rice monocultures, against the backdrop of active armed conflict. Their description of the experience was stark: "Being Papuan feels like there is a lot of food on the table – on our land – but we can only see it and cannot enjoy it. The food is distributed to the national level, not directly to the community."

Marzena Ann Marinjembi of The Resilient Peers, Papua New Guinea, offered a certain encouragement. Facing aluminum mining, logging, and climate disruption, the organization had accessed a grant from Global Greengrants Fund, and with that funding they had built a community resource center for farmers, youth, and

women that was designed around inclusive preservation of traditional knowledge for a community with low literacy rates.

Two further contributions rounded out the session. Azra Talat Sayeed of Roots for Equity, Pakistan, described how broadcasting the price of a single blanket after the 2022 floods had made donations come quickly, enabling blankets to be locally produced and distributed; three years later, they said, the contributions continued. Amitrajit Chakraborty of NFSF/DISHA, India (National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers/District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees), described a federation of 19 fishworker unions, each of which contributed annual fees and used an allied NGO to access donor funding while keeping the union's political independence intact.



Open Space: Participant-led discussions

The Open Space methodology was applied to form self-organized groups on topics proposed by participants.

İrem Bağcı and Susan Herawati of KIARA co-hosted the Feminist Economy and Women in Agroecology Economies group.

This group identified the multiple oppressions facing women as capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and racism, and characterized them as simultaneous rather than sequential burdens. Participants described what was called by one group member as a "second trauma" for women who were already being marginalized in their organizing work. Key takeaways here included the need to engage men in women's narratives and to build genuinely safe spaces within movement structures.

Angshuman Sarma and a colleague from Focus on the Global South hosted the Climate Change and Agroecology Economies group. It proposed a Hyper Local Nowcasting model that uses participatory farmer data to build resilient crop calendars for each specific ecology. Members of this group cautioned that agroecology would need such systemic solutions to build climate resilience.

Venkata Divya Veluguri and Nurfitri Amir Bin Muhammad co-hosted the Community Seed Banks and Seed Law group. Discussion centered on a variety of topics, including: infringements under the 1991 International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV 91) treaty on farmers' rights to save, exchange, and sell seeds; the saturation of markets with unsavable hybrid varieties; and the benefits of the farmer-led participatory plant breeding model used by



Dr. Gowri Sankara hosted the **Agroecological Transitions group**. This explored what agroecology is, why transition is needed, why Green Revolution farming systems are unsafe, and what factors affect transition. Key takeaways from this group were the need for traditional and Indigenous technical knowledge, better policies, and clearer explanation of agroecological principles.

Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura (Scientists Partnership for Development, or MASIPAG) in the Philippines. The group called for cross-country legal support against UPOV ratification.

Yara Dowani of Om Sleiman Farm, Palestine, hosted a session on Community Supported Agriculture and Agroecology in Palestine. This group addressed water restrictions, land confiscation, the destruction of agricultural infrastructure, and how agroecology has become both survival and resistance. The session closed with an emphatic collective statement, "We need ceasefire and to stop the genocide in Palestine now."

Amitrajit Chakraborty of NFSF hosted the Fisheries Economies and Rights group. This group connected organizations from India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea in their first structured cross-regional conversation. Shared challenges included: illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; water pollution from agricultural runoff; climate disruption of fish cycles; and lack of formal rights to water bodies. The key call of this session was for a global-level movement of fishworkers around the right to water and for much greater inclusion of fisheries organizations in agroecology spaces.

Avisha Jain of the National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF), India, hosted the Movement Building, Networking, and Coalitions group. It explored strategic communication, the gamification of food system education, and evidence creation. The conclusion was that movements require constant sustained effort, not quick wins.

Manas Arvind of the Farmversities Alliance, India, hosted the Reinventing Education for Regenerative Agriculture group. This group produced a portrait of a Super Teacher who was able to teach nutrition, agribusiness, medicinal plants, Indigenous languages, ethics, digital tools, the 13 principles of agroecology, art, poetry, and traditional sports; at the same time, they would be fair, non-judgmental, and gifted in communication. The Super Student, on the other hand, would be curious, empathetic, ethical, and possessed of scientific temper. Through this device of imagining an ideal, the exercise named what agricultural education currently fails to provide.



Dr. S. V. Bakiyalaksmi of CREATE, Tamil Nadu, hosted the **Healthy Foods** group on pigmented rice varieties, millets, and the nutritional and medicinal properties of traditional foods.

Saraswathi Gajalakshmi hosted the session on **Agroecology Practices for Home Garden Management**. It promoted village kitchen gardens that did not use pesticides or chemical manures, and its focus was on enhancing community food security and sovereignty through training, seed saving, and the formation of local committees.

Pramesh Pokharel of the All Nepal Peasants' Federation/La Via Campesina (ANPFa/LVC) hosted the Public Policies and Agroecology group. This group examined the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) and the UN Decade of Family Farming. Participants challenged government policies that push monoculture.

They cited Indonesia's "Nasi-sasi" all-rice policy as colonial in character and noted that Nepal has relatively good agroecology policies but poor implementation. The clearest conclusion was that most policies work against agroecological principles and that agroecology must be framed explicitly as a political project and resistance movement against neoliberal capitalism.

Athira S. Krishnan and Anju Babu of Thanal, India, hosted the Training in Agroecology and Traditional Knowledge session. Its sharpest takeaway was that agroecology needs not only technical credibility but cultural attractiveness; participants emphasized that there was a need for agroecology to appeal to aesthetics and identity in a way that could compete with the status associated with modern chemical agriculture.



At the close of Day 3, participants wrote on leaf-shaped cards a single idea or moment that had shifted their perspective during the day. The leaves captured an extraordinary range of learnings and emotional moments. These ranged from the political ("Agroecology is a political project" and "Indigenous rights to manage their land") to the personal ("No need to search for healthy food elsewhere, it is in our tradition"). The movement building session left its mark too. One leaf noted that only 3 to 5 percent of a population is needed for a non-violent movement to create social change. The relational cut through everything. Participants wrote that, "Peasants have common struggles, even if they are from different places. Farmers love to sing and dance."

Solidarity was on the leaves as it had been on the seeds. One participant wrote that the struggle of Palestinian farmers to protect their land is beyond imagination, that they are heroes who inspire. From the fisheries session came one of the day's most significant observations: "Agroecology in fisheries is just as important as agroecology on land." The ocean, it seemed, had found its voice in the Learning Tree.

"Funding is not just proposals. Solidarity in community support is also resource-building and sustaining."

Participant leaf
Day 3 Learning Tree



DAY 4

Strategy, regions, and harvest



Thursday, April 24, 2025, opened with a *mistica* led by participants from Oceania and the global collaboratives including LVC, GRAIN, and the IFOAM Seeds Platform. A woman participant from Papua New Guinea led the group into the hall in a line, moving as if paddling a canoe. Participants from West Papua then sang a karaoke duet about their land which they invited everyone to join.

After three days of analysis, financing debates, and Open Space exploration, Day 4 invited participants to look outward and forward. It asked: what does AEF do, how does it work, what have we learned this week, and where do we go from here.

AEF strategy session

The morning plenary brought together AEF's Co-Directors and Advisory Board members to present AEF's grantmaking process, governance structure, and strategic directions. Feedback was invited that would be channeled into the fund's five-year strategy. It was both an institutional briefing and a genuine listening exercise, with grantees and allies as the primary interlocutors.

Angela Cordeiro opened by walking through AEF's guiding principles: collaboration, inclusive participation, diverse practices, rights-based and trust-based approaches, efficient systems, and a commitment to multidimensional and intersectional agroecology while actively rejecting false solutions to food system challenges. AEF's grantmaking process is participatory through nomination, proposal review and recommendation, due diligence, and fund transfer.

It is currently in its 10th grant cycle with regional funds established in Africa, Mexico, and India. Learning initiatives include webinars, exchanges, thematic meetings, and the Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology initiative, with plans to launch an online catalogue of grassroots evidence in 2025.

AEF Advisory Board member Lim Li Ching noted that agroecology's share of total agricultural financing remains very small compared to the industrial sector and that AEF's focus on community-based rural organizations reflects a deliberate choice to support grassroots-level collaborators rather than larger intermediaries. Ashlesha Khadse of Thousand Currents described AEF's distinctive role as a dedicated, exclusive fund for agroecology whose advocacy toward donors is as important as its grantmaking. They noted that some donors are already "implementing trust-based approaches and actively supporting grassroots efforts to create change and take on leadership roles." Daniel Moss presented the resource picture of 53 donors pooling funds. Advisory Board member Sridhar Radhakrishnan summarized the external evaluation's key directions to strengthen regional funds; strengthen financial management and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems; build synergy between small and large donors; streamline project management as grantee numbers grow; and build trust between grantors and grantees through hybrid evaluation approaches.



The Q&A was notably frank. On the alignment between funding agencies and grassroots organizations, the panel emphasized donor education as the primary tool; donors, they felt, needed help in gaining a holistic understanding of the values and approaches of grassroots movements rather than expecting movements to adapt themselves to donor preferences. On geopolitics, Angela Cordeiro acknowledged that freedom of expression is being restricted in some contexts, and that European defence spending increases are already diverting civil society funding through cascading effects on bilateral agencies. Lim Li Ching added that grassroots communities remain extremely vulnerable to global economic flows. Sridhar Radhakrishnan said plainly that, "Globally, we must be prepared for the worst. Our current actions might be pushed back, but we need to be ready to return and continue the struggle." With regard to smaller organizations, Samdhana was acknowledged as a model intermediary that was able to reach communities that AEF could not directly access. Angela closed the session with a reminder about achieving change. "Everyone needs time. What matters is that we start and move consistently, while also exploring possibilities to accelerate the process."

Regional breakout sessions: What next?

Central Asia and Russia called for inter-country seed banks, a nomadic livestock breeding platform, a digital agroecology learning hub for youth and scientific exchange, regional market development for agroecology products, and seed sovereignty campaigns. Their takeaway was that agroecology development in the region is a complex, long-term process with unique challenges that range from biodiversity conservation to getting consumers to choose agroecological products.

Oceania and other global partners envisioned AEF as a "center of circles", that is, a hub for inter-regional and inter-partner connection, not a top-down funder. They called for multimedia collaboration to amplify local voices, greater allocation of funding to regional agroecology initiatives, and increased support for strengthening local fundraising capacity. Youth engagement was a cross-cutting priority.



Western Asia and Eastern Europe organized recommendations around three shifts: improved policy engagement to underpin grassroots movement growth; a focus on local solutions over one-size-fits-all approaches; and a shift in product emphasis from calories to nutrition. Takeaways included deepening gender perspectives in exchanges, reaching out to more Arab-country agroecology movements (which are currently underrepresented in AEF's network), and the BILIM Alliance's planned practical learning exchange in May 2025.

Southeast Asia and East Asia produced detailed proposals. These included: establishing village-level demonstration plots alongside land reform advocacy; promoting cooperatives as collective marketers; developing "mountain-to-river-to-sea" field exchanges across Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar; expanding farmer-to-farmer training in school curricula; holding an annual AEF Week of farm visits, workshops, and policy dialogues;

engaging in more popular media outreach in the form of comics, infographics, and videos; establishing a regional digital hub for curricula and tools; and deepening ties with FAO, UNDP, and ASEAN. Myanmar participants expressed interest in hosting a country-level agroecology forum.

South Asia called for a shared data and collaboration platform for grassroots organizations, better outreach to mass organizations to bridge echo chambers, mobilization of local donors to reduce dependence on international philanthropy, the establishing of political and pedagogical schools to educate grassroots communities in agroecology, and greater participation of small-scale fisheries organizations. Their takeaway was delivered in a variety of South Asian languages including Hindi, Tamil, Assamese, Telugu, Nepali, Chattisgarhi, Urdu, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Pashto, Rajasthani, Marwadi, Marathi, Mewadi, Bangla, Waki, Kannada, Konkani, and English. This linguistic diversity was recognized as one of the region's greatest and most essential shared strengths. The gesture underscored that linguistic diversity is not a challenge to be managed, but a heritage to be celebrated.



Learning Harvest: Aha! moments and funding lessons

The structured Learning Harvest that followed the session asked participants to name one funding-related lesson from the exchange that they could apply to help mobilize or influence funding in their own work. They were also asked to identify their most significant “Aha! moments”. The responses were collected on cards and shared in a brief plenary that captured the cumulative intellectual impact of four days of immersion.

On funding, the recurring lessons were practical and grounded; they included: the need to leverage nearby and underutilized sources before reaching for international philanthropy; the importance of publishing and communicating evidence widely; the value of building partnerships with organizations that share a vision; the imperative of looking to national governments and multilateral agencies as primary funders; and the need to use learning from thematic groups (cooperative banks, financial mechanisms, agroecological entrepreneurship) as models to adapt in local contexts. One strategy from the Philippines that stood out as replicable was that of lobbying governments to pass organic agriculture legislation, then working with civil society organizations (CSOs) to establish implementing rules and budgets that resulted in local government funding for farmer organization initiatives.

SHISUK's collective social entrepreneurship was named by multiple participants as “so inspiring and replicable in a local context”, and the Farmiversity model was celebrated as “borderless agroecology education to prepare youth for a promising career”. For several participants, the connection between climate and agroecology registered as a genuine new insight, and one particularly honest reflection captured a collective gap: “We are all working for the transition to agroecological agriculture, but we are all needing evidence-based results, data, and experiences to be exchanged. We think agroecological practices are more labor-intensive, but how much?”



We think they can decrease yield during transition, but how long? Most of us are discussing generally but we do not have evidence or data. My next action is to work toward having that data to share.”

AHA moments named by specific participants included: when Sakiul Millat Morshed of Bangladesh found himself the only man in a feminist action group and when he understood the potential of leveraging public funds; when Pramesh Pokharel of Nepal began to appreciate the possibilities of using AI as a tool for promoting agroecology; when Kahlil Apuzen-Ito from Philippines realized the benefit of building a directory of funding sources; when Aida Jamangulova of Kyrgyzstan gained an appreciation of the importance of timing (“We have to be prepared when the right time comes to change”) and of the potential of the CAHA model for connecting consumers and producers through community-based, philanthropy-funded structures; and when Saraswathi of India better understood how digital marketing and media could enhance the promotion of agroecology.



Closing Ceremony: The fruits

Day 4 closed not with a fixed panel but with participants being spread across the full ballroom itself. The facilitator invited each participant to distill their harvest from the entire week into a single word and then, standing in a human chain, to shout it out one by one. What followed was not a list but a surge: struggle, experience, collaboration, sharing, resilience, diversity, funding, aloha, agroecology, collective action, viva, friendship, solidarity, hope, seeds, creativity, laban, peasants fight, learning, inspired, sovereignty, movement, resistance, farmers, justice, equality, hope again, unity again. In Hawaiian: Mahalo keakua aloha keakua (Love and Thank God!);

In Bahasa: subur dan makmur (fertility and prosperity), ramah lingkungan (environmentally friendly), and bersama (togetherness). In Filipino: laban (fighting). In Hindi: jai kisan (hail the farmers). The same words kept returning—hope, solidarity, unity, friendship—not because participants had run out of words but because some things needed saying more than once.

As Angela Cordeiro later noted, by this point everyone was relaxed and collective dynamics had taken on a life well beyond what any facilitator could control. The session closed with a large collective braid that brought everyone together. This was a quiet, physical image of what four days of work had built. Angela wrote, with characteristic restraint, that, "The feeling is that we've harvested good fruits that, from its seeds, can generate new collaborative dynamics among the participants. Let's see."



06

FIELD VISITS: LEARNING IN THE FIELD



6.1

The SPI National Agroecology Training Center, Bogor

The four days of conference sessions in Bogor had been rich with panels, Open Space discussions, financing debates, and strategic planning; but it is one thing to talk about agroecology economies in a ballroom and another to walk through a farm where one can see it happening. Two field visits had been organized, one to SPI's National Training Center in Bogor on April 25th, and the other on the following day to the Food Sovereignty Area in Indramayu.

These visits gave participants the experienced evidence of the discussions and learnings that had occurred in the course of the sessions.

The SPI National Agroecology Training Center (Pusdiklat SPI, established in 2005) is a living demonstration of integrated agroecological farming. There one can see vegetable plots alongside rice paddies, a greenhouse sheltering seed collections, bio-input production facilities, and bamboo buildings that serve simultaneously as classrooms, dormitories, and meeting spaces. Participants were welcomed in a sturdy bamboo auditorium where they were served a sumptuous variety of fruits and boiled tubers. Before a word was spoken, pedagogy took the form of this abundance!



A panel presentation followed. This was led by Henry Saragih, the SPI Chairman; Zainal Arifin Fuad, who heads the Foreign Affairs of SPI; Mohammad Qomarun Najmi, Head of Agroecology Research; Pandi, Chairman of SPI Bogor Branch; and Kusnan, Head of the National Seed Center.

The Training Center is simultaneously a working cooperative farm that produces 200 metric tons of organic vegetables annually; a training school that runs programs from one week to four months in duration; and a political institution whose curriculum covers not only agroecological science but cooperative governance, trade politics, food sovereignty, and organizing theory. The strategic logic, in Henry Saragih's words, was, "We need to practice agroecology and make it massive." The Training of Trainers (ToT) model is the mechanism, with SPI training trainers in Bogor who carry knowledge outward into provinces, districts, and villages, while regional experience flows back to enrich the national curriculum and seed collection.



The practical science work ranges from making micro-organisms of local origin (MOL) and plant growth promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR) from locally available materials, to making botanical pesticides, compost, bokashi, bio-urine, and closed-loop livestock integration (Black Soldier Fly farming, goat rearing, biogas production), where animal waste becomes fertilizer and crop waste becomes feed.

Kusnan led the seed conservation tour, demonstrating processes for selection, crossing, storage, and preservation of traditional and Indigenous varieties. The cooperative and economic curriculum covers supply chain analysis, marketing, and trade politics. The political curriculum covers SPI history, LVC principles, and organizing theory; it reflects SPI's core conviction that a farmer who understands how to make compost but not why the system is structured against them is not yet equipped to sustain agroecological practice under pressure.



The delegates brought their own questions and connections. Karan Singh of Farmiversity Jhadol spoke of his goal of adapting SPI's cooperative model in Rajasthan. Delegates from Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, and Vietnam reflected on soil fertility and climate resilience education. Some collectives shared native seeds with SPI, such that exchange moved in both directions. Henry Saragih was candid about external partnerships; as he put it, "We hope the university can help us because they have the facilities. But sometimes they do not want to work with peasant organizations like ours because we do demonstrations and they don't like it. So we need to take the initiative and go after them."

SPI has eight additional regional training centers across Indonesia. Each adapts the national curriculum to its ecological and organizational context. This network is the physical infrastructure of SPI's massification strategy.

6.2

Harvest Day at the Food Sovereignty Area, Indramayu

The next day, the delegation travelled toward Indramayu's rice plains. They saw heavy golden heads bowing toward the land, and the end of the main harvest season was visible in every direction. Indramayu produces approximately 1.67 million mt of rice annually; this is roughly five percent of Indonesia's national supply, yet its farmers remain economically precarious, dependent on chemical inputs, and exploited by middlemen. More than 100 learning exchange participants arrived at Sukamulya village and were welcomed at a decorated bamboo bridge with a performance by traditional dancers. Women farmers sat on mats with their children, and the Indonesian and SPI anthems were sung. Try Utomo, Head of SPI Indramayu, set the tone, saying that, "The presence of peasants from all of Asia in Indramayu marks the first milestone in the small peasants' fight for triumph, and a form of solidarity."

The Food Sovereignty Area's (FSA) story begins with a struggle, not a planting. Since the 1970s, farmers here had labored on land that had been absorbed into state-owned sugarcane plantations. Over decades, SPI organized legal advocacy and direct action, until approximately 500 ha had been reclaimed and brought under the management of roughly 600 farming families. The promise of the 1960s Agrarian Law was being enacted one contested hectare at a time. From 1923 onward, agroecological practices were followed. This took the form of shifting to natural fertilizers, constructing owl houses for biological rodent control, and reviving the practices of making rhizome-based pesticides from ginger and turmeric that the Green Revolution had displaced.

After prayers of thanksgiving and a symbolic rice harvest where participants cut stalks alongside farmers in the field,

four practitioners shared with the gathering what the transition has accomplished. Zulfikar, Secretary of SPI Indramayu, spoke of their success in that, by the third year of the transition, natural farming yields had reached parity with chemical farming outcomes. According to him, that three-year window is precisely when economic cushioning through cooperatives matters most; without it, financially pressured farmers return to chemicals before the ecological benefits become visible.

Ito's data was more specific. He started with seven quintals (q) of urea per hectare, and harvested only four metric tons. Transitioning over three years to just 30 kg of urea—a 95 percent reduction—he now achieves seven mt/ha, with soil pH rising from 4-5 (strongly acidic) to 6-7 (optimal). Beny shared the cost comparison with the group: chemical farming costs 10 to 15 million rupiah per hectare, while his natural fertilizer system, drawing primarily on goat manure from his own animals, costs 5 to 6 million rupiah at equivalent yields of 8 mt—a 50 percent cost saving. Ela, the women's panel representative, described intercropping fruits and vegetables between rice plants, mangoes, oranges, and seasonal vegetables.



These simultaneously prevent weeds, maintain soil fertility, provide household nutrition, and generate supplementary income. This is food sovereignty made visible at the household scale.

For participants who had spent four days debating financial mechanisms, cooperative structures, and territorial markets in Bogor conference rooms, Sukamulya was the ground truth. The cooperative ends middlemen dependence, and the soil ecosystem is maintained year-round by postharvest diversification into chili, corn, mung beans, watermelon, and cucumber. As Angela Cordeiro noted: "I personally was very pleased to set foot in the FSA. I'd read the SPI reports and seen the photos and I really wanted to see it up close. A wish came true."

Lunch was served on bamboo plates. There was even a stall where participants could taste many delicacies made from the fruits and tubers harvested from local farmers' own fields. SPI gifted each participant a bamboo bag of rice from the Food Sovereignty Area; this was food grown without chemicals, on land that had been fought for and won, by farmers who had refused to wait for conditions to improve.

Eventually, the buses gathered to take the visitors home. Some left directly for the airport and others returned to the hotel for a final night. The journeys home would take participants back to Bangladesh and India, to Palestine and Kyrgyzstan, to Georgia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Korea, and Papua New Guinea. They would go back to their own farms, their own cooperatives, their own seed banks, their own struggles. They carried the gift bamboo bags of rice back with them, and they also carried Ito's yield figures and Beny's cost calculations. They carried the image of Ela intercropping vegetables between rice plants with the quiet confidence of someone who has always known what food sovereignty looks like. They carried the knowledge that the land beneath Sukamulya's ripening fields had been reclaimed not by policy but by organized people who refused to give it up. And they carried—each in their own way, each in their own language—the conviction that what had been built here could be built elsewhere, that what had been proven here needed to be proven elsewhere, and that the week in Bogor had given them not just ideas but companions for the road ahead.



07

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: WHAT THE EXCHANGE REVEALED



The deeper story of the Asia Learning Exchange is visible only when the proceedings of the whole week are held in view; it is seen in the set of themes that surfaced again and again across different sessions, days, countries, and organizational contexts. These themes are not conclusions, rather they are emergent patterns that are relevant for agroecology movements across the world, which are confirmed by their recurrence across the full diversity of the gathering.

Theme 1

Agroecology as political struggle, not technical fix

No single idea was stated more consistently during the exchange than this one: agroecology is not a farming technique but a political movement. It appeared in the opening plenary when Qomarun Najmi positioned SPI's work as political resistance.

It was captured in a Day 1 seed card that said, "Agroecology is NOT organic farming but the political struggle of peasants."

The political dimension is being made to disappear on purpose." Anne Lapapan's peasant market is a political platform. Maheshika Premachandra's cooperative "is not just about selling and producing—it is about fighting." It ran through the La Via Campesina skit dramatizing donor co-optation, and it was seen on the leaves of Day 3: "Agroecology is a political project."

The Open Space public policy session sharpened this further. Most government policies actively work against agroecological principles, even when they claim otherwise. Indonesia's "Nasi-sasi" all-rice mandate was identified as colonial in character, as monoculture dressed up as food security. Running through the entire discussion was the distinction between food security (enough food) and food sovereignty (farmers defining their own food systems).

Without implementation and organized communities that are capable of holding governments accountable, nothing is guaranteed by having good laws on paper, including UNDROP.



For funders, the implication is direct: supporting agroecology means supporting not just technical training but also political advocacy, policy engagement, land rights campaigns, and cooperative organizing.

“Agroecology is not a kind of organic farming. It is the political actions of the peasantry against neoliberalism. We cannot do agroecology in the neoliberal regime.”

– Anne Lapapan Supamanta, Assembly of the Poor, Thailand

Theme 2

Land, territory, and the right to farm

If agroecology is a political project, then land is its foundational condition. Without secure land access, every other agroecological gain is fragile and reversible. Land struggles were named by every regional group on Day 1. The Food Sovereignty Area in Indramayu exists because farmers organized for decades to reclaim 500 ha from a sugar company. Palestinian farmers described systematic destruction of agricultural land under military occupation.

The Papua Democratic Institute raised the alarm about two million ha of Indigenous Papuan land being converted to monoculture food estates under active armed conflict.

Soviet collectivization severed Georgian farmers from ancestral land knowledge. Protected area designations have evicted Indigenous communities from land they have managed for generations.

The land theme extends to water. The Open Space fisheries session connected organizations from India, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea in their first cross-regional dialogue. A compelling case was made that aquatic territories face identical structural threats: corporate intensive aquaculture, agricultural runoff, climate disruption of fish cycles, and absence of formal rights to water bodies. Food sovereignty and fisheries sovereignty are thus part of the same struggle, and agroecology's framework must expand to encompass aquatic food systems.

The implication for AEF and for the agroecology movement was also articulated by the African Learning Exchange: funding agroecology must mean funding the political advocacy and legal work that defends land and territorial rights, not only the agricultural and market development work that assumes that those rights are already secured. Supporting farmers to improve their soil is insufficient if those same farmers can lose that soil to a mining company, a plantation corporation, or a military operation in the following season.





Theme 3

Women as pillars – present everywhere, centered nowhere enough

Women were everywhere in the exchange and the gap between their indispensable presence and their insufficient structural recognition was one of the week's most recurring concerns. KESAN's Myanmar community fund is designed specifically for women. KMP's women planted banana trees on contested land as a sustained occupation. Ela's intercropping in Indramayu (vegetables between rice plants providing nutrition, soil health, and supplementary income) is what women's contribution to food system resilience looks like at the household scale. Swati Renduchintala stated it plainly: "Women are the actual pillars of the land. They do the farming."

The feminist economy Open Space group named the multiple oppressions facing women (capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, racism) as intersecting, rather than sequential, burdens that require safe spaces and men's active engagement within movement structures. Angela Cordeiro's candid observation about SPI's "male face"—despite a gender department and formal quotas—illustrates a gap between organizational policy and visible practice that is shared by most organizations in the network. A Day 3 leaf that named the aspiration of having a majority of women on a panel as "remarkable" is itself an indicator of how much work remains to be done.



Theme 4

Youth, culture, and intergenerational knowledge

The agroecology movement faces a generational challenge that was named with urgency in every regional context: young people are leaving farming. The reasons are consistent despite Asia's extraordinary diversity; farming is portrayed as low status work, financially unreliable, physically demanding, and culturally associated with poverty and backwardness. Karan Singh of Farmversity spoke of tribal youth who had internalized farming's low status so completely that children of farmers refused to farm. The approach that worked was using art, drama, music, and team-building to create an emotional connection before introducing technical content. Its success was reflected in the fact that within a year 60 young people had chosen farming as a profession. The insight running across all responses was that culture is the entry point, not agronomy. Mr. Mirzoshov of Tajikistan, playing his traditional guitar with young Salmonshev translating beside him with evident admiration, was the most spontaneous and vivid image of intergenerational transmission.

Manas Arvind of the Farmversities Alliance noted that one-tenth of the world's population does farming, but that youth cannot be pushed into it and instead must be attracted to it through appreciation of its value. The Open Space session on reinventing agricultural education mapped this challenge in systematic detail, asking what a transformed agricultural education system would look like for both teachers and students.

Digital tools and AI were raised as practical resources for this work, constituting replicable strategies. Pramesh Pokharel of Nepal identified his AHA moment as the realization of the potential of AI for creating local-language agroecology content. The Farmversities Alliance uses digital platforms alongside Indigenous identity and creative expression to make agricultural learning feel contemporary. This potential is largely untapped within the movement's current knowledge-sharing infrastructure and deserves deliberate investment. Investing in cultural and educational projects for this transmission is critical to agroecology funding; it determines whether the movement has a future beyond the current generation of practitioners.



Theme 5

Financing agroecology - the gap between principles and access

The gap between the financing that agroecology movements need and the financing they can actually access is not only a matter of insufficient donor interest, as noted by Daniel Moss. There is significant philanthropic activity in the field just as there exists structural misalignment between how funding flows and who is doing the work. The Papua Democratic Institute named it most sharply, saying that organizations doing excellent work for decades in difficult contexts remain entirely invisible to funders while newer, better-networked organizations receive resources.

Against this, the exchange documented proven alternatives; these included: KESAN's interest-free women's cluster fund operating entirely outside formal banking; NCDB lending to cooperatives at 6 to 8 percent in post-war Sri Lanka; and Samerth channeling INR 2,360 million of government money to 14,000 tribal farming families through a convergence model.

The strategic lesson was that no philanthropic fund can match what governments can deploy at scale. Civil society builds models and generates knowledge; scaling is the government's job. Angela Cordeiro added an internal dimension, saying that approximately 60 percent of AEF's funding through 2026 comes from three donors. "Monoculture is also evil in fundraising," she commented. Diversifying funding—including mobilizing local and national philanthropic sources in Asia—is as urgent as increasing its total volume.

One further learning that demands to be named surfaced in the Learning Harvest: the movement's evidence gap. Multiple participants reflected honestly that they lack hard data to answer basic questions such as: how much more labor-intensive is agroecological farming and how long does yield reduction last during transition. One anonymous card captured it well: "We are all working for the transition to agroecological agriculture, but we do not have evidence or data. My next action would be to work toward having that data to share." Professor Rilus Kinseng raised this at the opening plenary: farmers are rational and need evidence. The movement knows the practice. It urgently needs systematic documentation.

"No fund can compensate for the amount of money that the government can give. Scaling is the job of government."

Gazala Akhil Paul
Samerth Charitable Trust, India



Theme 6

Cooperatives and solidarity economy – democracy as an economic system

The cooperative emerged from the Asia Learning Exchange not simply as a business model for selling produce but as the primary institution of solidarity economy. It is an economic system built on democratic ownership, equitable distribution, and the return of surplus to the communities that generated it. Maheshika Premachandra Sighara of MONLAR, Sri Lanka, provided the political framework, stating that any cooperative can be evaluated by four questions: who owns the property, who does the labor, who gets the income, and what happens to the surplus. These questions expose whether a cooperative is genuinely practicing solidarity economy or whether it is reproducing capitalist logic under a different name. Anne Lapapan's Cooperative Commune at Kok Edoi divides reclaimed village territory into family farms, collective farms, community forests, an agroecology school, and a roadside market, all of which are autonomously managed. KESAN's community fund returns 10 percent of earnings to a collective pool for emergency relief and training. Both are solidarity economies in practice, and resources circulate within communities rather than being extracted from them.

The entire week's discussions were structured around the contrast between the government's top-down 80,000-cooperative program and SPI's bottom-up 1,000-cooperative political strategy—two visions of what cooperatives are for. The exchange also revealed fragility; for example, the drift of Turkish cooperatives toward entrepreneurial models as World Bank and EU funding arrived, and the tendency of male-dominated cooperatives toward capitalist drift unless they are sufficiently politically conscious.

Susan Herawati warned that cooperatives that are technically correct but politically unconscious eventually become what they were built to resist. The Bogor and Indramayu cooperatives were the concrete proof, emphasizing that cooperative economics and solidarity economy are not add-ons to agroecology but rather are its economic architecture.



Theme 7

Territorial markets and agroecology economies – building principled and profitable systems

The Asia Learning Exchange confirmed and deepened the insight that the Africa Learning Exchange had identified as being central to agroecology economies: that the reconstruction of territorial markets (local and regional food markets rooted in community relationships, fair pricing, and cultural identity) is both an economic necessity and a political project. Anne Lapapan's Bangkok peasant market represented the most politically conscious territorial market in the exchange; there, farmers set their own prices, women farmers build solidarity with consumers, and political protest is explained through the food being sold. CAP's 54 years of urban agricultural education in Penang represents institutional embeddedness. FarmFit's digital marketplace with 8,000 downloads represents technological innovation. Sahabat Alam Malaysia's village-based organic production and annual market exhibitions represent community groundedness. Together, they illustrate that territorial markets take many forms and require different strategies in different contexts, but that they share a common orientation toward connecting producers and consumers in relationships of trust, fairness, and cultural resonance that commodity markets cannot replicate.

The digital disruption challenge—online platforms permitting imports that undercut local producers—was raised urgently by Kartini Samon of GRAIN, who emphasized that it requires regulatory advocacy alongside market development. Indramayu's cooperative model (absorbing production, eliminating middlemen, distributing through democratic channels) represents the territorial market at its most integrated.

Theme 8

Seeds, biodiversity, and the struggle against corporate enclosure

Seeds were the most pervasive symbol of the Asia Learning Exchange, both literally and metaphorically. They are the movement's most irreplaceable resource. This was confirmed in a number of ways, including by: Kusnan's presentation on the seed center in Bogor; Mr. Mirzoshov's sharing on the Apple Park in Tajikistan; MASIPAG's farmer-led participatory plant breeding in the Philippines; and BILIM's seed multiplication model in Georgia. This was further confirmed by the fact that the Open Space seed systems session drew the largest number of participants.



The political dimensions of seed sovereignty were addressed with equal depth. Lim Li Ching's analysis of biodiversity credits extended the seed enclosure problem to the commodification of biodiversity itself as a financial asset. Corporations are thus able to use offset markets to offset ecological destruction, which neither restores what was lost nor genuinely protects what remains.

UPOV 91, discussed in the Open Space seed law session, threatens farmers' rights to save, exchange, and sell seeds across multiple Asian countries. The exchange recognized that movements need cross-border legal support as urgently as they need community seed banks and participatory plant breeding.



The exchange also recognized that, across Asia, the saturation of markets with hybrid seeds that cannot be saved and must be purchased annually is a practical barrier to seed sovereignty. Where farmers have lost the knowledge and practice of seed saving, reconnection to traditional and open-pollinated varieties requires active support for community seed banks, participatory plant breeding, and seed exchange networks.

"We connect sustainable seeds."

Participant
Day 1 Learning Tree - Seed



Theme 9

Solidarity across difference - the exchange as a movement building initiative

The ninth theme is different in character from the others. It is not a topic discussed across sessions, but rather is what the Asia Learning Exchange itself experienced. It is what made the conference something closer to a movement gathering. The solidarity that was built by cutting across diversity was the week's most important achievement, one that no agenda item could have planned for. It occurred between a Palestinian farmer under military occupation and a member of a Korean women's peasant association, between a Tajik musician-agronomist and Tamil women farmers, between tribal youths in Rajasthan who were becoming "soil-diers" and Indonesian cooperative farmers who were harvesting reclaimed land.



Participants who arrived as individuals representing specific organizations left as part of a network. They became more aware of each other's work, more connected to each other's struggles, and more convinced that what they are building locally is part of something larger. The movement felt like one, from the floodplains of Bangladesh to the steppes of Kyrgyzstan and from the rice paddies of Indramayu to the occupied farms of Palestine.

Participant seed
Day 1 Learning Tree, Asia Learning Exchange



08

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AGROECOLOGY FUND'S STRATEGY



The Asia Learning Exchange served as both a learning event for participants and a listening exercise for AEF. The recommendations that follow draw on the Day 4 strategy session, regional breakout discussions, the Learning Harvest, and the thematic content of all six days. These recommendations, along with those from the earlier continental exchanges, will surely inform AEF's 2027-2031 strategic plan.

8.1

Fund closer to the ground

The most consistently voiced priority across every subregional group and the Day 4 plenary was the importance of reducing the layers of intermediation that exist between philanthropic capital and grassroots practice.

Disburse more funds directly to farmers and grassroots organizations. NGOs and civil society intermediaries can act as gatekeepers to the communities they are meant to serve. Organizations such as the Samdhana Institute, which actively build relationships with community partners that are not directly reachable by AEF, play an essential facilitation role and should remain supported. But the overall balance should shift measurably toward direct funding of farmer organizations and community groups.

Simplify access for the smallest and most remote organizations. Documentation and administrative requirements designed for well-resourced organizations systematically exclude the most deeply rooted community groups. South Asian participants called for simplified data access for grassroots organizations and smaller grant opportunities alongside larger programmatic funding. AEF's nomination-based process is precisely designed to bridge this gap and should be further strengthened.

Fund hardware alongside software. Donors readily fund planning, training, and capacity building (the "software"); however, they consistently decline to fund the equipment, infrastructure, and processing facilities (the "hardware") that make the software investments productive. AEF should actively advocate within its donor network for hardware to be recognized as a legitimate and essential component of agroecology funding.

Support grantees to build revenue-generating capacity. The Learning Harvest identified an important organizational sustainability insight: certain pieces of agroecology work can be developed as cost centers and revenue-generating activities that reduce long-term dependence on grant funding; these include demonstration farms, training programs, seed banks, and organic produce cooperatives. AEF should support grantees in identifying and developing these possibilities alongside their grant-funded work.

8.2

Strengthen regional architecture

Asia is too vast and too diverse to be served by a single regional (continental) strategy. The exchange made evident a strong demand for subregional structures providing context-specific support and mobilizing local funding sources that international philanthropy cannot reach.

Establish a Central Asia regional fund. Participants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Turkey, and Palestine described funding landscapes constrained by geopolitical conflict, collapsed bilateral funding flows, and the near-total absence of local philanthropy. A dedicated Central Asia regional fund that is modelled on AEF's existing funds in Mexico, India, and Africa is their clearest and most urgent ask. A nomadic and pastoral agriculture dimension should be incorporated into its design, one that reflects the distinctive livelihoods of Central Asia's communities.

Deepen engagement with Arab-speaking countries in Asia. Arab-speaking countries including Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, and others remain significantly underrepresented in AEF's network. Reaching more Arabic-speaking organizations should be an explicit priority in the next strategic cycle.

Support country-level agroecology forums and an annual AEF Week. The Southeast and East Asia group proposed hosting an annual AEF Week of farm visits, workshops, and policy dialogues at the country level, with Myanmar expressing specific interest in hosting a country-level forum. Country-level gatherings strengthen the movement in the host country, which can then better support regional gatherings.

Mobilize local and national philanthropic sources. Building local philanthropic cultures and donor networks across Asia is as strategically urgent as is increasing the total volume of international philanthropy, both for AEF itself and for its grantees.

Include grantees more formally in AEF's governance. The Day 4 strategy session itself, in which grantees and allies provided substantive input into AEF's five-year strategy, demonstrated the value of participatory governance. AEF should develop more structured and regular mechanisms for grantee voices to be heard in fund governance, beyond the learning exchange cycle.

8.3

Invest in knowledge, evidence, and communication

One of the movement's most urgent strategic problems is the gap between the richness of agroecological practice in the field and the lack (and invisibility) of documented evidence available for communication to policymakers, funders, and farmers.

Expand the Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology (GEA) initiative. The evidence gap—the absence of hard data on transition timelines, labor intensity, and yield effects—was openly acknowledged in the Learning Harvest. Expanding GEA to more Asian grantees should be a priority alongside support for participatory research that jointly involves farmers, civil society, and agricultural universities.

Invest in publishing, multilingual communication, and popular media. The Learning Harvest generated a clear call: publish or perish. Practitioners should communicate their evidence and experience broadly through technical briefs, local-language handbooks, comics, infographics, videos, and social media, with the aim of reaching audiences beyond the English-language agroecology network. AI tools for translation and multilingual content creation should be deployed strategically for this purpose.

Build mobile decision-support tools for farmers. The Southeast Asia and East Asia group specifically proposed developing mobile tools for soil testing, crop planning, and pest alerts. These are practical digital resources that put evidence-based decision-making into farmers' hands in the field.

Build a shared regional digital knowledge platform. The knowledge generated within AEF's network is currently distributed across dozens of organizations in dozens of countries and is largely inaccessible to the practitioners who could most benefit from it. A shared platform for seed exchange data, agroecological practice documentation, policy information, and network contacts was proposed by both South Asian and Central Asian groups; it was felt that this would transform the network's collective intelligence into a shared resource.

Use celebration and events as tools of community mobilization. The Learning Harvest named this explicitly: making events joyful, culturally rich, and worth attending is itself a movement building strategy. The *mística* sessions, the harvest ceremony, and the collective braid were not incidental to the exchange's impact, but rather were central to it.

AEF should resource the cultural and celebratory dimensions of its gatherings as deliberately as it does the technical and analytical ones.

8.4

Center youth, women, and fisheries

Three constituencies are insufficiently centered in AEF's current strategy: youth and women in formal leadership roles, and small-scale fisheries organizations.

Fund youth-focused agroecology programs.

Youth engagement requires a specific focus in terms of culture, dignity, peer learning, and economic viability, as much as it does in technical training. AEF should provide scholarships for young farmers, support Indigenous youth education in agroecological practices, fund programs that reimagine farming as an aspirational career, and facilitate cross-regional youth exchanges that are analogous to those it organizes for organizational leaders.

Support women's formal leadership in cooperatives and networks. Women's leadership needs to be considered a matter of strategic importance as much as of equity. Organically grown women-led cooperatives are more rooted in a community's needs and more resistant to capitalist drift. AEF may consider making women's formal governance roles an explicit criterion in grantmaking assessment and should prioritize leadership development programs for women within its grantee network.

Expand fisheries inclusion in agroecology networks. Small-scale fisheries communities face the same structural threats as smallholder farmers and deserve the same organizational support, policy advocacy, and network inclusion. AEF should actively build partnerships with fishery organizations and ensure that learning exchanges and knowledge platforms create genuine space for aquatic food system perspectives.

The call for a global movement of fishworkers around the right to the ecosystem and fishing waters deserves AEF's active support.

8.5

Strengthen advocacy, policy engagement, and donor education

Educate donors toward trust-based, long-term, grassroots-aligned funding.

Donors tend toward politically safe and cost-conscious choices such as short-term projects, large well-documented organizations, and software over hardware. AEF's advocacy role within the philanthropic community is one of its most valuable functions and should be explicitly resourced as a core organizational activity, not a secondary one.

Support policy advocacy at local, national, and regional levels. Agroecology will not scale if policy does not actively support its values. Specific objectives such as digital platform regulation, organic agriculture legislation, school meal procurement, and territorial market governance would make the movement grow beyond its more immediate short-term goals. AEF should support grantees' policy advocacy work and should leverage grassroots voices on food policy to international and multilateral agencies such as FAO, UNDP, ASEAN, and the Agroecology Coalition.

Engage strategically with geopolitical risk.

Geopolitical pressures that result in greater military expenditures and further budget cuts to international aid programs are generating negative cascading effects on bilateral civil society funding, and AEF support cannot always be publicly acknowledged in some contexts. These risks need to be deliberately incorporated into AEF's strategic planning.

AEF's funding diversification, trust-based grantee relationships, and demonstrated nimbleness in responding to crises are strategic assets in a turbulent environment and should be maintained and developed as AEF grows.

Treat learning exchanges as long-term movement building initiatives. Learning exchanges reconnect grantees who have lost touch, introduce practitioners who have

not previously met, and create solidarity that travels back into a hundred organizing contexts; however, these network effects build on themselves only if follow-up mechanisms exist to sustain them. Peer exchanges, shared platforms, and regional forums are some of the mechanisms that can convert a week of solidarity into sustained movement collaboration. AEF should resource this follow-up infrastructure as deliberately as it resources the exchanges themselves.

8.6

Summary of key recommendations

No.	Cluster	Key Actions
1	Fund closer to the ground	Fund farmer organizations directly; simplify access for small and remote groups; fund hardware alongside software; support revenue-generating capacity
2	Strengthen regional architecture	Establish a Central Asia regional fund; deepen Arab-country engagement; support country-level forums; mobilize local philanthropy; include grantees in AEF governance
3	Invest in knowledge, evidence, and communication	Expand Grassroots Evidence for Agroecology (GEA) to more Asian grantees; invest in multilingual and multimedia outreach; build mobile decision-support tools; build a shared digital knowledge platform; use celebration and events as mobilization tools
4	Center youth, women, and fisheries	Fund youth agroecology programs and scholarships; support women's formal leadership; expand fisheries sector inclusion
5	Strengthen advocacy, policy engagement, and donor education	Educate donors toward trust-based funding; support policy advocacy; engage strategically with geopolitical risk; treat learning exchanges as long-term movement building initiatives

CONCLUSION

Learning exchanges are acts of political imagination. They rest on the belief that when people who are building the future in different parts of the world meet, listen to each other, and think together, something shifts in understanding, in solidarity, and in the sense of what is possible. The Asia Learning Exchange on Agroecology Economies was an act of that kind of imagination and the week in Bogor honored it.

What the exchange made clear is that the work of building agroecological economies on principled, profitable, and politically conscious foundations is not a project proposal for the future; rather, it is already underway in fields and cooperatives and seed banks and territorial markets across Asia and beyond. Farmers who have been told that their knowledge is obsolete are proving otherwise. Communities that have been excluded from decisions about their land are organizing to reclaim it. Young people who were meant to leave the countryside are choosing to stay and transform it. Women who do most of the farming are beginning to lead the movements that govern it. None of this is simple. None of it is finished. And all of it is real and happening. That is what we saw and heard at Bogor.

The exchange also made clear that the movement is stronger for its diversity than it would be without it. The differences and distances represented by participants at Bogor were huge by any conventional measure, be it geography, language, political circumstance, or ecological systems. Even so, the convergences that emerged across six days of honest conversation were deeper than the differences. The movement's political character, its democratic economic institutions, its insistence on women's leadership, and its relationship to seeds and knowledge and cultural identity went beyond their local particularities into shared foundations.

They constituted a common framework of diverse patterns for a world that desperately needs one.

AEF's role as funder, as convenor, and as learner is to keep building the conditions in which this movement can grow—resourced closer to the ground, connected across its regions, equipped with the evidence it needs to make its case, and understood by donors and policymakers in the fullness of its vision. The recommendations in this report are the movement's own suggestions for how that can better be done. They deserve to be taken seriously.

The seeds planted in Bogor will grow in ways that cannot be predicted—as is the nature of seeds and of movements. One can say with confidence that these seeds were planted in good soil that has been built through years of organized struggle and tended by people who understand that the work is long. The harvest will thus surely be worth it.



"Let's see how our knowledge tree grows."

Angela Cordeiro, AEF Co-Director

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