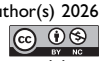
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Framing just agroecological transitions through participatory multistakeholder processes

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Abstract

Agroecology, as conceptualised in the thirteen HLPE principles, embeds justice dimensions in the place-based sustainable transition pathways it supports, yet operationalising just agroecological transitions is understudied and remains a design and implementation challenge. In this paper, we apply Schlosberg's four-dimensional justice framework post-hoc, distinguishing distributive, procedural, recognition, and capabilities justice, to six country-level Vision to Action participatory visioning processes conducted under the CGIAR Agroecology Initiative in India, Kenya, Peru, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. Although these processes had not been designed with explicit justice objectives, justice-relevant content emerged across them: competing visions revealed whose values are at stake in the transition; the composition and design of sessions determined whose knowledge shaped transition pathways; and intra-transition trade-offs revealed who bears the costs of change. The analysis revealed shared concerns around food security, fair returns, gender equity, and reduced external input dependence, which took locally specific forms. Capabilities concerns shaped transition pathways more than distributive and recognition claims; and a recurrent tension between visions of input autonomy and pathways of input substitution emerged. Government and private-sector actors were less represented than farmers but were generally assigned significant responsibility for enabling the transition. We argue that participatory multi-stakeholder visioning creates the conditions under which the justice content of agroecological transitions becomes visible, negotiable, and translatable into action planning. Establishing an explicit justice framing *ex ante* would allow deliberate choices on participant disaggregation while systematic mapping and engagement strategies for absent actors would allow future processes to embed justice-relevant content explicitly from the design stage.

Keywords

Just transition, agroecology, visioning, multi-stakeholder processes, participation

Introduction

The concept of just transition, initially developed in the context of energy and industrial decarbonisation, has focused on addressing questions of fairness in the distribution of costs and benefits and equal opportunities to participate in decision-making (McCauley and Heffron, 2018; Stark et al., 2023), and, more recently, recognition of diverse knowledge systems and values when transitioning towards more sustainable systems (Coolsaet, 2016), in accordance with Schlosberg (2007). Schlosberg (2007) provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating four dimensions of transition fairness: distributive (distribution of 'goods' in society), procedural (how people participate), recognition (rights of all to participate), and capabilities justice (opportunities of people to choose). Capabilities justice finds injustice not only in unequal distributions but in the structural conditions that prevent individuals and communities from translating available resources into effective agency and functioning. However, conceptual frameworks and empirical analyses for agricultural contexts have lagged behind, the just transition literature being focused on the mining and energy sectors (Blattner, 2020; Stark et al., 2023). Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022) broadened the just transition perspective by identifying principles and criteria for just food system transitions that address questions about who bears the costs (including non-human actants), who

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captures its benefits, who participates in, and whose values orient the transition. Multi-stakeholder processes are thus important analytical entry points for understanding whose narratives co-construct a certain transition pathway (Leach et al., 2010).

Within food-systems research, agroecology has emerged as a prominent pathway for just transitions. Wezel et al. (2009) characterise agroecology as simultaneously entailing a set of farming practices, a scientific discipline, and a social movement, distinguishing it from technology-centered approaches that rely primarily on external chemical and mechanical inputs, which often prioritise yield and profit over ecological and social considerations. As a social movement, agroecology tackles redistributive themes related to power in food systems (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). Ceddia et al. (2024) argue that the technical and political nature of agroecology, in particular its applications more oriented towards food sovereignty and autonomy, are crucial to transform food systems from profit accumulation to social justice and sustainability-oriented systems.

Agroecological transitions are multi-dimensional and locally negotiated, as they emerge 'from specific socioecological and cultural contexts in place-based territories' (Pimbert et al., 2021). A set of thirteen principles has been put forward as guidelines for agroecological transitions, spanning ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability, and providing an operational framework against which transition processes could be assessed (HLPE, 2019). A central aspect of this transition is the emphasis on justice, including participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, and the rule of law (PANTHER) (HLPE, 2019) which the HLPE identifies as principles that should guide individual and collective actions to address food system transformation (HLPE, 2019). Considering the 13 principles themselves, justice questions arise in the operationalisation of agroecology in terms of which specific principles and dimensions are prioritised, by whom, and at whose cost and to whose benefit. Specific tensions can arise within agroecological transition processes: e.g., between input reduction and labour demands, or in the distribution of labour burdens that can accompany the adoption of more knowledge-intensive practices; between crop diversification in favour of agrobiodiversity and short-term productivity gains; or when the focus is solely on the agroecosystem-focused principles (principles 1–6) and the food system-focused ones (7–13) are neglected. The attributes associated with agroecological transitions hence clearly align with Schlosberg's pluralistic conceptualisation of justice, which is defined as interconnected processes (Schlosberg, 2007; Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Schlosberg's principle of distributive justice focuses on the equitable allocation of environmental 'goods' (such as protection and benefits) and 'bads' (such as pollution and risks) (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). In the Agroecology principles, this is translated into addressing the maldistribution of economic benefits and resources as an aspect of the fairness principle. Schlosberg (2014) argues that maldistribution is often a symptom of a lack of recognition, or the social and cultural processes that shape actors' opportunities. The HLPE (2019) incorporates recognition through *land and natural resource governance* which emphasises the need to recognise and support smallholder farmers, and the *co-creation of knowledge* principle, which demands sharing, consideration, and inclusion of diverse knowledge and knowledge systems. Procedural justice refers to the inclusion of affected groups in the decision-making processes that shape their lives. The HLPE defines the *participation* principle as encouraging social organisation and supporting the deep involvement of marginalised and vulnerable groups in decentralised governance structures. This participation enables these groups to contribute directly to designing the food systems they desire. Finally, Schlosberg's capabilities principle focuses on the capacities necessary for individuals and groups to participate in processes. This concept is mirrored in HLPE's emphasis on agency as the capacity of individuals or communities to define their desired food systems, make strategic choices, and take actions supporting the transition towards their desired future. Thus, it can be argued that the thinkers behind agroecology as an aspirational transition pathway towards sustainable food-systems view the transition process as a matter of justice. Other approaches towards sustainability exist, however, following the choice of the Agroecology Initiative, this paper focuses on agroecology as oriented by the HLPE principles, which were consolidated from the existing literature through an iterative expert process. They were chosen by the Initiative because they explicitly go beyond farm-level practices to include issues of governance, equity and knowledge, all justice-relevant dimensions that we analyse.

Agroecology is not, however, a well-defined term. Lenné (2023) observes that the broadening of the concept and the proliferation of competing definitions have led to growing questions about what agroecology actually is, noting that hundreds of millions of farmers already deploy practices considered agroecological alongside conventional technologies. Given the lack of an agreed definition, what counts as an agroecological future is necessarily negotiated by the actors who will implement it, and the composition of that negotiation becomes a justice-relevant dynamic itself. Participatory multi-stakeholder processes enable such negotiations, even though operationalising a process that supports a just agroecology transition remains a significant challenge.

To address this challenge, the CGIAR Agroecology Initiative developed and implemented the Vision to Action (V2A) facilitation process (Triomphe et al., 2024). This methodology generates systemic theories of change that identify the specific mechanisms and the 'missing middle' necessary to drive transformation (Fuchs et al., 2025; Triomphe et al., 2024). The process culminates in concrete action plans, outlining responsibilities that translate broad pathways into specific commitments.

Schlosberg's principles of justice were not part of the design of V2A, but their essence is deeply embedded in the design and implementation of the V2A process. The approaches inspiring V2A are explicitly justice conscious: prioritising those at the margin and ensuring their equitable participation (Fuchs et al., 2020a); asking 'whose future is it?' and 'who has the power to decide about that future' (Shallowe et al., 2020: 32); questioning the postures, roles and legitimacy of the actors involved in an intervention (Blundo Canto et al., 2020). The entire process is driven by the goal of strengthening actors' agency, particularly for

the marginalised and vulnerable, empowering them to define their own futures and take transformative action (Fuchs et al., 2025; Triomphe et al., 2024).

This paper contributes to explicitly framing agroecological transition as just transitions, by applying Schlosberg's (2007) framework post-hoc to six country-level V2A participatory visioning processes conducted under the CGIAR Agroecology Initiative in India, Kenya, Peru, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. We argue that such multi-stakeholder, situated and negotiated processes reveal justice-relevant content: competing visions, questions about whose perspectives shape transition pathways, and intra-transition trade-offs. V2A processes do not deliver just transitions but foster multi-stakeholder conversations and planning that inclusively mobilise diverse stakeholders to contribute to just transitions. These conversations and their outcomes can illuminate elements of justice in designing agroecological transitions, which has implications for how agricultural research should engage in and navigate both the multi-stakeholder planning processes, and envisioned food system transition processes.

Methods

V2A is a participatory process through which diverse food system actors collectively articulate desired futures for agroecological transitions and negotiate, through back-casting, the pathways, actors, and actions needed to reach them (Triomphe et al., 2024). Participation serves as the cornerstone of this multi-actor approach; initial participants are identified through stakeholder mapping, and the selection is iteratively updated across steps to ensure representativeness and legitimacy. Central to V2A is a back-casting logic: actors collectively envision a desirable future 10–15 years ahead and then work retrospectively to identify the necessary steps to realise it. Within this framework, transition pathways are conceptualised as an interconnected network of behavioural changes required from diverse system actors.

A priority of the V2A methodology is not only to bring marginalised and vulnerable groups into the room but to utilise intentional facilitation strategies that create safe spaces where they feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, ideas, and interests. This horizontal knowledge-sharing is essential for the co-creation of transition pathways that are realistic, locally adapted, and locally owned. Furthermore, the inclusion of Asset-Based Community-Driven Development (ABCD) perspectives, methods and tools seeks to move beyond a deficiency mindset to foster self-belief and the cultivation of inner capacities (Fuchs et al., 2020a). By motivating stakeholders to identify and mobilise their own assets to improve their systems, the process directly resonates with Schlosberg's capability principle.

We draw on empirical data from six country-level V2A participatory visioning processes conducted between 2022 and 2023 under the CGIAR Agroecology Initiative in India, Kenya, Peru, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe, within each country agroecological living landscapes (ALLs), spaces bringing together farmers and food system actors towards a shared vision. Each process was documented in a country technical report, which constitutes the primary data source for this paper. Across the six V2A processes, participation ranged from a single multi-day workshop in India to multiple sessions in Senegal, involving farmers alongside civil society and NGOs, government officials, researchers, and private-sector, with women's participation ranging up to half of participants and several countries running gender-disaggregated sessions (Table 1).

The six countries represent the full set of country-level V2A processes conducted under the Agroecology Initiative. They span diverse agroecological, socio-economic, and institutional contexts, providing a basis for cross-case illustration of how such participatory multi-stakeholder processes contribute to designing action pathways towards more just transitions in agriculture. We analyse their outcomes under a justice lens in a purposive rather than comparative fashion. For each argument, we select the two or three countries with the most comprehensive documentation and clearest illustrations of the justice dimensions being examined. The approach prioritized analytical depth and contextual richness over exhaustive coverage.

The justice framework applied is Schlosberg's (2007) four-part conception of environmental justice, which distinguishes distributive justice (the allocation of benefits and burdens), procedural justice (fair and inclusive participation in decision-making), recognition justice (acknowledgement of diverse identities, knowledges, and perspectives), and capabilities justice (what individuals and communities need to fully function and flourish). This framework was applied post-hoc to the V2A country reports: the processes were not designed with justice objectives, and the country reports were not written with justice language. The application of the lens in this paper is interpretive and retrospective.

The analytical process involved identifying in each country report the sections, quotes and data where: (a) different actor groups articulated divergent future visions; (b) the design and composition of participatory sessions shaped whose knowledge was centred; and (c) transition objectives or identified pathways stood in tension with one another or with the broader policy environment. A fourth analytical section focuses on the transition pathways identified in these workshops, extracting and coding into themes and behaviour categories the exact words and phrases used by participants, preserving their language in relation to behavioural changes, including the actors involved and relevant enabling or motivating factors. Each behaviour was coded against the four dimensions of justice as defined by Schlosberg and Collins (2014). MAXQDA software was used in the coding process.

The post-hoc character of the just transition lens application is the main limitation of this analysis, as the reports do not address explicitly elements of justice, with justice language. However, the fact that the analysis revealed justice-relevant content, e.g., competing visions, issues of representation, and intra-transition trade-offs, across all six V2A processes analysed suggests that such participatory multi-stakeholder visioning allows such content to become visible, regardless of whether just transitions were the objective of the process. The implications of this for future research design are analysed in the discussion.

Results

Across the six V2A processes, several specific themes were recurrently mentioned as constituting part of a desired

Table 1. Number and type of participants engaged in the six vision to action processes.

Country	Number of workshops	Number of participants (as reported)	Type of participants (actor groups)
India	1 (spread across 3 days)	Day 1: 30 women; Day 2: mixed (number not reported); Day 3: 19	Farmers (Women CRPs; SHG members; women & men farmers); civil society/NGO; government officials; CGIAR researchers
Kenya	3 per ALL (Makueni, Kiambu): 1-day preparatory; 3-day visioning; 1-day transition-pathways	Preparatory (both ALLs): 8 (4 women). Nov 2022 — Makueni 39 (16 women); Kiambu 46 (25 women). June 2023 — Makueni 39 (18 women); Kiambu 29 (16 women)	Farmers & community-based organisations; civil society/NGO; government officials; research & education; private sector; youth representative; CGIAR researchers
Zimbabwe	4 (one per ALL: Murehwa Wards 4 & 27; Mbire Wards 2 & 3); community visioning + 2-day vision-to-action	Absolute numbers not reported; composition by ward. Gender: Murehwa W4 60% F/40% M; W27 58%/42%; Mbire W2 62%/38%; W3 27%/73%	Farmers; development partners; government officials; local business community
Tunisia	11 visioning focus groups across 6 farmer organisations, typically 2 per FO (one men's, one women's); complementary focus groups with research & civil-society actors; 1 stakeholder meeting	Per-focus-group numbers not reported. Approximately 500 stakeholders and beneficiaries mapped across the Initiative's activities	Farmers (incl. a women-only FO; olive growers, beekeepers, small-ruminant producers); civil society; research; CGIAR researchers
Peru	5 (two scales): 3 agroforestry-corridor workshops; 2 at cocoa cooperative scale	Corridor — W1: 25; W2: 34; W3: not reported. Cocoa — W1: 26 cocoa farmers (54% F/46% M); W2: 4 cooperative technical staff (1 F/3 M)	Farmers & producer organisations; civil society/NGO; government officials; private business; academia & research
Senegal	9 activities (2021–2023)	Scenario building 28; DyTAES caravan 65; territorialisation 30; action-plan update 20; Departmental Development Council 80; collective intelligence 28; 4 Local Development Councils 174; Territorialisation Day 86; workplan evaluation 32	Farmers (mixed & women's producer organisations); civil society/NGO; government officials; research & training institutions; processors

Note: Participation figures are not directly comparable across countries due to different process designs, from a single multi-day workshop (India) to nine activities over two years (Senegal). Where the source report did not provide a figure, this is stated as 'not reported'. Full participant detail is given in Supplementary Table S1.

transition: food security, reduced dependence on external inputs, fair returns, gender equity, and access to services and markets. These elements clearly connect to justice-related concepts and practices, such as equitable distribution, equitable access, recognition of certain actors, opportunities to engage in the transition. At the same time, the participatory visioning process revealed that these shared concerns take locally specific forms, visions and perspectives, which are illustrated in the following sections.

Whose perspectives shape transition pathways

The composition of workshops, the sequencing of group presentations, the decision to conduct gender-disaggregated or combined sessions, and the identification of absent actors, all shape whose knowledge is centred and whose perspectives are excluded from transition pathways, directly speaking to procedural justice. Who participates in V2A processes is not neutral: it determines the content of visions, the identification of barriers and opportunities, and the priorities embedded in transition pathways. Procedural choices carry distributive and recognition justice consequences. The examples from India, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Tunisia below show how deliberate procedural design can reveal justice-relevant content that mixed-group processes alone would obscure while also highlighting the structural limits of representation within participatory processes.

In the India V2A workshops, the initial day of the exercise was exclusively dedicated to the participation of women. The report notes that this choice emanated from the recognition that often development plans, schemes, and initiatives emerge from women collectives, underscoring their pivotal role in these processes. The decision to conduct separate discussions with women aimed to create an environment wherein women could articulate their perspectives with greater freedom. As a consequence, the women's sessions revealed content that did not appear in mixed-group discussions, including explicit attention to norms around girls' education, early marriage, and the redistribution of domestic labour. One women's group articulated this directly:

> we need to think and change the way we treat our girls in our homes, we need to ask our boys too to help in household chores, send her to school and work outside the village if she wants, we should not tell our girls to marry at young age…if we start to make these changes at an early stage, we will be able to see some changes in next generation. (Singh et al., 2024: 10)

Gendered norms were revealed as potential barriers to an agroecological transition that is just and inclusive.

In Zimbabwe, the V2A exercise used gender-disaggregated group discussions across all four wards of intervention, to minimise power imbalances and foster active participation. Gender composition varied markedly across wards, and the report acknowledged the need to incentivise women's participation for more inclusive planning and implementation processes. As in India, some content emerged only in the women's session and not in mixed-group discussions, where a key behaviour change identified was stopping gender-based violence, also by increasing women's participation in income-generation.

In addition to group composition, another procedural decision, the sequencing of group results presentations shaped whose perspectives were put forward. A government stakeholder reflected:

> It was a good thing that we presented most of the things the farmers have highlighted, and we are impressed. If we had presented first, it would have removed the importance of the farmers' views. (Sibanda et al., 2024: 31)

In Kenya, V2A was implemented in three main steps. During the first step, a multi-stakeholder 'community of place' was identified with previously identified Agroecological Living Landscape (ALL) Host Center team members. Following the Sustainability Planning approach (Fuchs et al., 2021), which was mainstreamed into V2A, workshop participants first identified 'mobilizing narratives' for the Kiambu and for the Makueni ALL respectively. In these, locally relevant threats and opportunities articulated with agroecology were mapped, and then a group of stakeholders identified who were likely to be interested in and responsive to that 'mobilizing narrative'. Representatives of these stakeholder groups, both men and women, were then invited for the first LL-level visioning workshops (Fuchs et al., 2023). During these visioning workshops, facilitators conducted a social asset mapping that explicitly distinguished between stakeholders present in the workshop and those absent, following the methods developed in Fuchs et al. (2020a). In Kiambu, beyond inventorying the 12 stakeholder groups present, the workshop mapped 18 additional actors who could play a key role in achieving each future change envisioned, with the analysis clearly showing that some future changes were within reach for participants while others required strategic partnering (Fuchs et al., 2023). This had direct consequences on action planning. The Kenya report also noted that while it is important to involve different relevant food system actors, it was not always easy to mobilise government officials, who, despite confirming their presence, did not always attend. This is a recognition-justice concern that limits the ability of the transition pathways produced in the workshop to address the policy and institutional dimensions of transition in a manner that is likely to contribute to concrete action, concentrating the focus on the farmers and civil society actors who are already engaging in this transition. During the initial 'community of place' identification workshops, LL host centre team members made several requests related to engagement practices on the ground. They requested, for instance, that men and women not be separated into groups during group work; and that no differentiation of stakeholders according to categories should be done. They argued that such subdivisions were not necessary to guarantee equal participation in Kenya and rather introduced an 'artificial' differentiation between people, which would hinder their relationship and movement building required to translate visions into action (for the sake of creating scientific categories). The Agroecology Initiative team decided to accept these requests and supported gender and stakeholder balanced groupwork instead.

The Tunisia V2A process also included gender-disaggregated visioning sessions: two focus groups were usually organised in each farmer organisation, one for men and one for women to capture differential perceptions of the future and present. In Sers, women-only sessions stressed concerns related to women's autonomy that did not emerge from mixed or male-only sessions. The report also acknowledges a structural limit of the representativeness of the farmer organisations for broader visioning, as in some cases they are comprised of members of the same extended family. The vision produced through this process does not represent farmers outside formal organisational structures whose interests and constraints may diverge significantly.

Except in Senegal, farmers constituted a large share of workshop participants. However, their representation among participants was proportionally higher than their share among the actors identified as responsible for implementing actions needed to achieve the ALL's aspirational agroecology vision (Figure 1). Farmers are among the groups most directly affected by an agroecological transition, are often particularly vulnerable to its implications, and are frequently marginalised in decision-making processes.

In contrast, government and private-sector actors were assigned substantial responsibility for implementing actions required to advance the desired transition, yet representatives of these groups were underrepresented in the workshops (except for Senegal and Peru). A similar pattern was observed for actors from the extension and education sectors in several countries. These mismatches between workshop participation and the distribution of responsibility for action suggest opportunities to strengthen the engagement of actor groups that are perceived as critical for driving and supporting the transition towards agroecology.

Competing visions of agroecological futures

The six V2A processes reveal competing visions across actor groups, making visible whose values and priorities shape what agroecological transition means in practice, reflecting recognition justice concerns.

This process allowed a plurality of visions, led by different actors, to emerge, even as a shared vision was negotiated to provide direction to the action plans. The examples from Senegal, India, and Peru below, illustrate how participatory visioning allows negotiation of divergent visions into a shared vision that stakeholders decide to agree with to have a common direction.

The V2A process in Senegal was organised around the Fatick department and the Dynamique pour une Transition AgroEcologique Locale (Local Dynamics for an Agroecological Transition – DYTAEL) coalition. Rather than constructing a single vision, the methodology explicitly oriented participants toward plural futures:

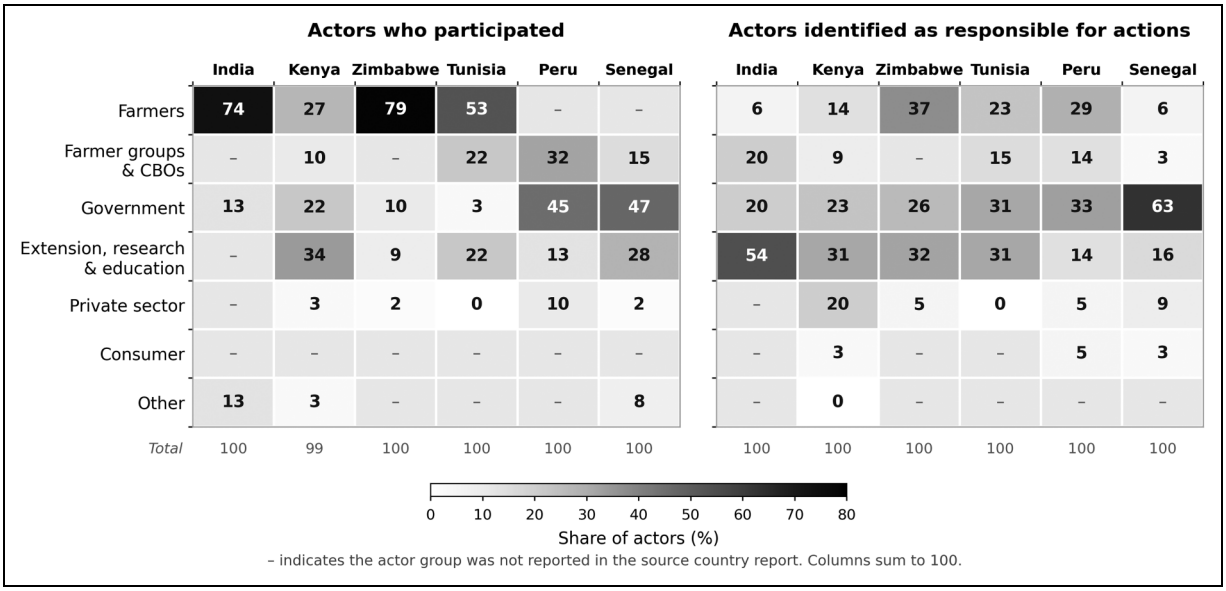


Figure 1. Participant composition and actors identified as responsible for implementing actions. Source: Based on report data and generated using Gemini and Claude AI.

> it was decided not to limit ourselves to constructing a single vision of what AE could be in the area, an approach often favoured by planning initiatives, but rather to promote work on the alternative futures of the area as a whole, and then to look at the conditions for developing agroecology. (Piraux, 2023: 5)

Six scenarios were co-constructed ranging from industrialisation supported by fossil energy and high-tech mechanisation to a future in which 'the local authorities have disappeared. The self-responsible population manages itself according to its own procedures, in which public investments are determined by divinatory processes (saltigué and pangol) during "Xoy" (traditional ritual ceremonies)' (Piraux, 2023: 14). The scenarios reveal the lack of a DYTAEL definition of what an agroecological farming system is, and in particular the role of mineral fertilisers, a controversial issue for several participating organisations, which led to future visions where agroecology takes different and even contrasting forms, reflecting the openness of the principles to the judgment of those implementing them.

In India, the V2A process was structured to produce disaggregated visions across actor groups, making visible divergent desirable futures that a single negotiated vision would have obscured. On the first day, dedicated exclusively to women participants, four groups articulated visions centred on gender equality, recognition of women's labour, and intergenerational change. One women's group expressed their vision directly:

> We wish to have a future where women are not low with respect to men, in our vision of 2033 men hear us, take advice from us regarding which crop to grow, where to sell. (Singh et al., 2024: 10)

On the second day, male groups produced different priorities: themes of infrastructure, economic development, and income opportunities dominate their visions, while the women groups highlighted issues of unequal household responsibilities and decision-making power, as well as unequal access to education and employment opportunities.

In Peru, the V2A process operated at two scales, the cocoa farmer and the cooperative scale, where competing visions emerged (Tristan Febres and Sanchez Choy, 2023). Four farmer groups produced visions centred on organic production, fair prices, food security, and diversification. Group 1 envisioned an agriculture that 'should have a good market, with fair prices so we can get a good organic product and have a healthy diet'; Group 3 called for 'organic agriculture with sustainable and healthy awareness with good environmental practices and well remunerated'; Group 4 articulated 'a more productive and diversified agriculture in income and resilient to climate change'.

The cooperative's institutional vision, on the other hand, reflects its action field, prioritising international competitiveness, focus on fine-flavoured cocoa as a single product, and exploration of value-added options in cocoa. Whilst farmer visions centred on household food security, fair recognition of their labour, and diversified systems, the cooperative vision centred on market positioning, specialisation, and value addition. The negotiation of the shared vision found a way to surpass the divergence between food-sovereign and market-competitive transition logics, by focusing on common elements of the visions through a Venn diagram approach. The resulting vision focused on: 'Cocoa farmers improve their quality of life and income by increasing cocoa productivity and diversifying their farms under an organic, environmentally sustainable, and economically profitable production scheme'.

Trade-offs and tensions within agroecological transitions

V2A processes reveal tensions within the agroecological transition itself: between competing goals, actor interests, and values. Some tensions concern ecological transition goals against short-term economic pressures facing smallholder households. The examples from Senegal, Peru, India, Kenya, and Zimbabwe below show how these trade-offs are central to understanding where justice questions emerge.

The central trade-off in the Senegal V2A process concerns the definition of agroecology itself and specifically the question of mineral fertiliser use, which is a controversial issue for several organisations. DYTAEL 'has based its strategy on respect for the FAO's main principles of agroecology' (Piraux, 2023: 9). DYTAEL is a coalition of interest, defined as one in which 'actors involved share common interests and set aside their differences on other issues to work together pragmatically to achieve that objective' (Piraux, 2023: 9). The use of mineral fertiliser question is left open for those who engage in agroecological farming to decide, preserving coalition coherence rather than definitional orthodoxy, especially given the absence of a universally accepted definition.

This mirrors the Peru case where a trade-off between cooperative competitiveness-oriented vision and farmer food-sovereignty-oriented vision emerged within the same process. The recognition-justice dimension of fair price illustrates this: the farmers articulated that not only the product is valued, but also the price must recognise the work that they carry out as small producers that are mainly organised at the family level. A single-product export-competitiveness logic does not necessarily deliver this recognition; the tension between what the cooperative requires institutionally and what farmers require for livelihood security and food sovereignty is a trade-off that the shared vision negotiated around rather than resolved.

In India, across the multi-stakeholder groups, two divergent positions on how to manage the shift away from chemical inputs emerged. Government stakeholders identified enabling conditions in incentives to reduce the use of chemical inputs, such as compensation for eventual yield losses, treating this as a risk to be compensated. Civil society organisations, by contrast, called for regulatory control and enforcement of rules of chemical input use. One vision focuses on fostering individual change through incentives, the other on regulating behaviour through constraining policy. The pathway toward reduced chemical inputs is contested as to what level its logic should be applied, either through government or individual behaviour.

In Kenya, in the Makueni workshop, participants explicitly included the reduction of inorganic fertiliser use within their desired future changes, formulating it as a goal for farmers, through on-farm circularity by recycling organic wastes. This aspiration sits in tension with the broader agrochemical environment in which Kenyan smallholders operate, including government distribution of certified conventional seeds and the lifting of the Genetically Modified Organisms ban. Further tensions were discussed and documented as part of the 'mobilising narrative' conversations (Fuchs et al., 2023).

In the Zimbabwe V2A process, in particular in the Mbire ward, the report identified social norms as an intra-transition potential justice barrier:

> social norms pose barriers to change by reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations, hindering efforts to increase women's leadership participation, and promoting resistance to deviation from established practices. (Sibanda et al., 2024: 17)

Moreover, human-wildlife conflict emerges as communities grow and encroach close to wildlife-protected areas. Coexistence with wildlife is part of the community's envisioned future, yet achieving it requires negotiating between conservation and livelihood objectives, as well as coordination across ZimParks, local leadership, traditional authorities, and the Rural District Council, which are subject to regulatory and financial constraints.

Another intra-transition trade-off in Peru concerns the relationship between participatory process and implementation timeline. Cocoa farmers were somewhat resistant to participatory process based on previous experiences where they did not experience tangible results for them. Prior extractive engagements had created mistrust in participatory processes. The report acknowledges that it is challenging to manage the expectations that are born at the beginning of the process with the time it takes to reach implementations linked to the V2A results. Similarly, stakeholders in Kenya expressed concerns about the slow speed of implementation of tangible actions and activities on the ground, while wondering about the purpose of extensive discussions if the results were not being translated into practical applications. A tension between depth of participatory deliberation that V2A requires and the immediate action demands of communities experiencing livelihood pressure is a justice-relevant trade-off. Communities already under pressure to secure their livelihoods bear a cost when participatory processes generate engagement without timely tangible change.

Justice dimensions reflected in transition actions towards the agroecological vision

We draw on the cases of Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Tunisia to assess the extent to which multiple dimensions of justice are reflected in the actions identified by stakeholders as necessary to advance their shared agroecological visions.

Distributive justice

In Kenya, system actors considered distributive justice through economic rebalancing and the explicit pursuit of economic circularity, which would render healthy food available and affordable to all, while benefitting smallholder farmers. Civil society organisations, academic institutions, and government agencies are expected to facilitate access to carbon credit schemes, helping to internalise the positive externalities generated for instance by farmers' tree-planting efforts. At the same time, a range of actors work to retain a greater share of value within local communities by strengthening branding, certification, and collective marketing mechanisms, including through participatory guarantee systems.

In Zimbabwe, distributive concerns emerge in securing greater shares of the produced value through certification standards and premium prices supported by government extension services and development partners, as well as through Community Wildlife Conservancies to share the benefits derived from biodiversity conservation.

In the Tunisian agroecological transition, distributive justice concerns adoption of agroecological and agroforestry practices that enhance household income, food security, and livelihood resilience, while communities strengthen local solidarity.

Across the three countries, distributive claims converge on value redistribution within existing market dynamics

rather than on redistribution of assets. Land, water, and other productive resources are absent from the actions identified, which reflects how principles requiring engagement with property regimes are less present in the pathways.

Recognition justice

In the Kenyan case, recognition justice requires all actors involved in the transition to value indigenous knowledge and acknowledge the diverse benefits of traditional and organically produced foods. It also entails recognising the important roles played by a wide range of stakeholders – from local farmers and private-sector actors to distant consumers – while remaining attentive to the needs, perspectives, and rights of marginalised groups. Specific multi-stakeholder co-learning events and participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) committees were set up by stakeholders in each LL to guarantee the full participation, inclusion, and opportunities to learn from each other in diverse forums and at regular intervals.

In Zimbabwe, recognition justice is apparent as authorities and communities are tasked to actively value and integrate indigenous knowledge into wildlife and natural resource management but also ensuring that women are recognised as equal leaders and decision-makers.

In the Tunisian case, recognition justice is reflected in communities' efforts to actively include youth and women in decision-making processes. More broadly, all actors are encouraged to recognise and support the pivotal role of farmer organisations in driving the transition. Researchers are expected to co-create knowledge with local actors, acknowledging farmers' expertise and lived experience, linked to farmers and government mutual trust building.

Recognition in the illustrated cases takes the form of knowledge systems recognition and marginalised groups recognition.

Procedural justice

Procedural justice focuses on inclusive and participatory governance. The Kenyan ALLs were structured together with, and around, existing, capable, and aligned farmer training centres in each ALL. Jointly with them, building on existing relationships and networks, and including new stakeholder groups responsive to the 'mobilising narrative', core stakeholders were engaged in the visioning and transition pathway processes. Decision-making and participatory MEL was henceforth placed in the hands of small MEL committees, which included ALL host centre staff. Farmers organised in groups that had already interacted with the host centres were complemented by other farmer groups that expressed interest in peer learning, innovation co-design, collective decision-making, and cooperation in processing and marketing. Civil society and community-based organisations played key roles in facilitating the transition process, while political leaders and local policymakers were involved in the V2A processes in the hope that they would limit undue interference and contribute to creating enabling regulatory conditions. These strengthened multi-stakeholder groups also started contributing to local policy formulation and budgeting processes, for instance through participating in local budget readings and other legislative public participation processes at the county level.

In Zimbabwe, procedural justice centres on inclusive governance arrangements where traditional leaders foster participation in local decision-making, while local government facilitate public – private partnerships for market engagement. Communities are further encouraged to establish locally anchored environmental committees to support collective rulemaking and oversight.

In Tunisia, procedural justice concerns emerge as communities and farmer organisations are expected to move beyond individualistic approaches and strengthen networking, collective action, and cooperation. Participants further emphasised the need for dedicated facilitators to ensure continuity, coordination, and sustained engagement throughout the transition process.

The governance authority in the illustrated cases lies in different levels: formalised committees with defined membership; traditional leadership and new environmental committees; farmer organisations. These have different consequences on the scale and durability of the pathways, more or less integrated within stable or temporary structures.

Capabilities justice

Capabilities justice was advanced through a broad system of support for farmer empowerment. Diverse actors contributed to strengthening farmers' capacities in sustainable agriculture, e.g., in the production of organic inputs, food processing and storage, agroforestry, water management, renewable energy. These technical trainings were often part of broader innovation co-design processes, especially for agroecological on-farm innovations and business models. Through the V2A process, participants also improved their understanding of the diverse mandates of different public actors, helping them make strategic requests for support and collaboration, while holding them accountable for delivering on their mandates.

In Zimbabwe, capability-enhancing actions include government extension services, researchers, and development partners strengthening communities' capacities in agroecological production, small-scale mechanisation, livelihood diversification, entrepreneurship, marketing, water management, and gender-transformative approaches. These efforts are complemented by public – private partnerships that improve farmers' access to inputs and technologies required for agroecological production. Notably, participants viewed the jointly developed vision itself as an important collective asset, providing a shared sense of direction and commitment for advancing the agroecological transition.

In Tunisia, farmers and community members, supported by extension services, are expected to develop and share technical capacities related to agroecology, compost and biochar production and application, seed production, intercropping, land restoration, biodiversity conservation, agroforestry, medicinal plants, fodder production, machinery use, and nutrition. Researchers are expected to generate more holistic and context-specific knowledge while strengthening their capacities to facilitate co-creation processes. Producer organisations are expected to cooperate in mobilising resources and improving access to finance, while government actors are called upon to invest in and maintain essential irrigation infrastructure.

Capabilities claims are the most detailed in all three cases, and they are distributed across farmers, researchers, producer

organisations, and government, reflecting the agroecology transition as an expansion of what people can do rather than a full reconfiguration.

Discussion

Agroecology, as conceptualised in the thirteen principles defined by the HLPE, embeds justice in the transition pathways it envisions to support, and Schlosberg's four dimensions map quite easily onto these principles. The V2A process at the basis of this paper, aimed at fostering participation in building future visions based on agroecology, is considered to be one way to operationalise just transitions: its design embeds participation, the recognition of diverse knowledge sources, and the strengthening of capabilities. The six case studies analysed in this paper demonstrate how justice-relevant content is inherent to V2A and more broadly to agroecological transitions, even when not explicitly defined in just transition terminology. Competing visions reveal whose values are at stake in the transition; the composition and design of sessions determine whose knowledge shapes pathways; and intra-transition trade-offs reveal who bears the costs of change. We argue that this visibility is inherent to participatory multi-stakeholder visioning as it creates the conditions under which the justice content of agroecological transitions can be observed, negotiated, and translated into action planning.

V2A was designed to produce a shared vision, but before that, it produces several visions. It is in this plurality that justice-related content becomes visible. When visioning was done separately by gender in India, Zimbabwe and Tunisia, where gender specific dynamics emerged, or by value-chain position such as in Peru, where sovereignty versus commercialisation-focused visions were revealed, the futures described by different groups were not the same. They differed in what they understood the transition to be for. As a consequence, they had to negotiate to identify a common vision and transition pathway that accommodated different perspectives. Mangnus et al. (2019) argue that bringing multiple visions into view, instead of focusing on one shared narrative early, reveals competing values and interests before these are smoothed under a shared negotiated vision. The V2A evidence from Senegal, where the DYTAEL coalition could not agree on whether mineral fertilisers belong within an agroecological farming system, illustrates how such definitional tension at the landscape level emerged through the vision-building activities.

For recognition-justice content to be visible, spaces for allowing the emergence of multiple perspectives and visions should be built into the design of just transitions visioning processes. Indeed, the HLPE participation principle distinguishes between bringing marginalised groups into the room and giving them a real part in the decisions taken there (HLPE, 2019). At the same time, while prioritising marginalised and vulnerable groups addresses historical disenfranchisement and ensures recognition, a strategic balance is necessary. If key transition actors are underrepresented, their sense of ownership and willingness to contribute to systemic change, when called upon, may diminish. Farmers constituted the largest share of workshop participants across the six processes, yet their share among the actors assigned responsibility for implementing the envisioned actions was proportionally smaller; on the contrary, government and private-sector actors were underrepresented in the room yet assigned substantial responsibility for action. The actors expected to enable the transition took a smaller part in negotiating it, while those most affected by its outcomes articulated visions whose realisation depends also on others. This asymmetry concentrates the operationalisation of transition pathways on the farmers and civil-society actors already engaged in the transition. Effective transitions must harmonise the empowerment of vulnerable communities with the strategic engagement of influential stakeholders to ensure the collective commitment and action required for a just food system transition. The data we analyse from V2A processes are among the few where this distinction shows up empirically, across several country processes, rather than as a general design recommendation.

These patterns are also linked to the different salience of the thirteen agroecology principles. The principles that appear consistently across groups, such as input reduction, soil health, economic diversification and participation, are those that individual households can act on. Those that appear least, such as synergy, land and natural resource governance, and biodiversity, require collective governance, coordination across farm boundaries, and engagement with authority and property regimes. Participants of the six V2A case studies seem to imagine the transition mainly as an expansion of what people can do, and only secondarily as a redistribution of what people obtain. Our data cannot tell us whether this reflects a real ordering of priorities, or whether it reflects the limits of what participants think a landscape-level process can actually deliver. In either case, the practical implication is that if the principles most important for collective governance are regularly underrepresented in the spaces where transition pathways are negotiated, those pathways may underserve the justice dimensions that depend on collective governance to be realised.

This also raises the question of how agroecological transitions relate to government policy that is not aligned to the HLPE principles. Participants in Makueni, Kenya, identified reduced inorganic fertiliser use as a desired change while operating within a policy environment of distributing certified conventional seed, and the lifting of the ban on Genetically Modified Organisms. Although participants framed these as opportunities, in other contexts such policies could be seen as obstacles to be contested, which raises its own justice question: challenges to democratically established policy are not self-evidently just, and it is smallholders rather than the actors mounting the challenge who bear the risk of forgoing incentives their peers receive. On the other side, this tension highlights the conditions under which the transition must operate, directing attention to where agroecological practices can be made viable within, rather than against, the prevailing policy environment. The V2A processes analysed here name government actors as enablers to be engaged rather than contested, and several action plans place stakeholders inside county budgeting and public participation processes. We cannot conclude from our data whether this reflects pragmatism, the composition of the workshops, or the limits of what a landscape-level process can contest. However, they show how multiple decision-making levels must be embedded and analysed in participatory visioning to achieve justice in agroecological transitions.

Another tension that emerges recurrently across the six V2A case studies concerns communities wanting autonomy from purchased/external inputs and committing to on-farm circularity, recycling organic waste back into the farm, or moving fully away from chemical inputs, and taking up composting from local by-products. Gonzalez de Molina (2026) argues that autonomy in agroecology has a real ecological meaning, closing nutrient cycles at farm or territory level and cutting reliance on inputs from outside the system, not just an economic or political one. Measured against that definition, the pathways designed to reach these visions often fall short. Other pathways replace one external input with another or propose input shops and resource centres run by community groups and government departments, which means autonomy is delivered through a new supply chain. In contexts with severely degraded soils and limited access to organic matter, a common situation across many African ALLs, farmers adopt pragmatic strategies that combine modest external inputs (whether organic or low-chemical) with on-farm circularity. These adaptations reflect rational responses to local biophysical constraints and represent a form of practical autonomy. These actions reflect independence from corporate-controlled input systems and a commitment to ecological principles, even if not achieving complete nutrient cycle closure at the farm level. Therefore, the tension is not between agroecology and conventional agriculture but within the agroecological transition itself, between circularity aspirations and the biophysical constraints that make full input autonomy unrealistic without institutional and agronomic support (Falconnier et al., 2023). Much of the pathway content coded across our cases similarly centres on the agroecosystem-focused principles (1–6) and on the first two of Gliessman's transition levels (Gliessman, 2016). This matches a known pattern in the wider agroecology literature. Gliessman's transition-levels framework separates input efficiency, input substitution, and full system redesign. Work applying this framework has found that most real-world transitions get stuck at the substitution stage, and that programmes and funders sometimes treat substitution as the end point rather than a step toward redesign (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al., 2018). What we see across these cases studies is one version of that same gap between an autonomy-oriented vision and a substitution-oriented pathway, present in different national policy settings.

Nonetheless, across the V2A case studies we also found evidence of more transformative, capability-enhancing content. These map onto Schlosberg's dimensions (Schlosberg, 2007; Schlosberg and Collins, 2014) and onto the HLPE (2019) principles. But the institutional form that each concern takes is locally specific, and participatory landscape processes make this visible in a way that the principles alone cannot. Fair returns are identified in Kenya as farmers aggregate into marketing groups to gain bargaining power. In Tunisia it shows up as a push toward cooperative organisation, away from individual farming. In Zimbabwe it shows up as certification that opens market access. A programme built around any one of these forms would likely not transfer well to the others, even though the underlying justice concern is the same. Participatory guarantee systems, collective branding and certification, access to carbon-credit schemes, community wildlife conservancies, and the recognition and integration of indigenous knowledge into resource governance, are commitments that can be argued as capability-enhancing, as well as distributive and recognition claims about who captures value, whose knowledge is taken into account, and what collective capacities can be embedded in the transition pathway. What counts as a fair distribution, and how it should be delivered, depends heavily on context and on who is asked (Coulson and Milbourne, 2021).

The envisioned transitions do not remain stuck at Gliessman's lower levels: they also reveal aspirations toward food-system redesign that takes locally specific forms. They reflect Tribaldos and Kortetmäki's (2022) framing of just food-system transitions, which asks who bears the costs, who captures the benefits, and whose values shape the transition. First, this supports the value of landscape-level participatory design as a diagnostic tool. A national survey would record the aspiration to reduce chemical inputs and the intervention to promote bio-inputs as if they were fully consistent. Only a process that follows a vision through to concrete actions and named actors reveals the tension between them. Second, it shows where research effort may matter most. The tension depends on the conditions under which circular practices become economically viable, which is, among other, a question of fertility management, seed systems, and the terms on which inputs and knowledge are supplied.

This also connects to a bigger question about how justice is defined in transition governance more broadly and how its achievement can be assessed. Nayak (2026) argues that justice works better when it is built into a transition from the start, across its different phases, rather than assessed only retrospectively. This is a limitation of this paper's own approach, since Schlosberg's framework was applied to these six processes after they had already happened. However, the learnings we present are concrete examples of what that retrospective view can still catch.

Conclusion

The six V2A case studies analysed here demonstrate that participatory multi-stakeholder visioning can reveal justice-relevant content about competing visions, questions of whose perspectives count, intra-transition trade-offs, and the expansion of what people can do, that speak to the distributive, recognition, procedural, and capabilities dimensions of just transitions, even when it is not explicitly designed to do so.

Across diverse agroecological, socio-economic, and institutional contexts, common concerns recurred, including fair returns, gender equity, and reduced external input dependence, but each took locally specific forms that only multi-stakeholder participatory processes could reveal. Fair prices that secure a healthy diet were a concern in Peru, as well as fair returns through marketing-group aggregation in Kenya, cooperative organisation in Tunisia, and certification that opens market access in Zimbabwe. Gender equity was most visible in India, where women-only sessions revealed visions centred on the recognition of women's labour and on decision-making power that a single negotiated vision would have obscured. The aspiration to reduced external input dependence revealed an internal tension of the transition, in which full input autonomy is unrealistic without institutional and agronomic support depending on the context, and

where, combining modest external inputs with on-farm circularity is a rational and partially autonomous strategy rather than a departure from agroecology. The V2A case studies revealed similar concerns with different institutional forms across landscapes, which calls for strong contextualisation and adaptation of the agroecology principles.

Three implications for the design of future participatory processes towards just agroecological transitions research follow from our analysis. First, an explicit justice framing built into process design would allow eliciting justice-relevant content at the onset, and to address the justice dimensions systematically. Such an approach would allow articulating a transition as comprehensively agroecological only when at least one principle under each of the dimensions in which they can be grouped, is achieved: ecological production (principles 1–5), economic circularity (principles 6–7, 10–11), and social justice (principles 8–9, 12–13) (Fuchs et al., 2020b). This does not imply that all thirteen principles are to be achieved for an agroecological transition, but that such a transition, to be just, should engage the three dimensions. Such a framing would ensure that recognition and distributive dimensions, which our coding found least present, are not sidelined in favour of the production-focused principles that participants reflect and act on most readily.

Second, the role of disaggregated sessions deserves more attention in multi-stakeholder processes towards just transitions. Such disaggregated spaces within the more aggregated process allow certain justice content to become actually visible. Procedural design must be however locally negotiated, but it has consequences on which justice content a process can reveal.

Third, the mapping of absent actors, especially those who are identified as responsible for enabling at least partially the pathway towards the agroecological transition, has consequences for the achievability of action plans, for the distribution of responsibility across actors, and for identifying whose support must be secured before a pathway can be successfully implemented.

Justice-relevant content was not explicitly sought in the six processes we analysed, yet it emerged across all of them; a deliberate justice framing, applied from the outset rather than retrospectively, would allow future processes envisioning agroecological transition pathways to elicit that content, distribute it across the four justice dimensions, and carry it into the actions and actors that determine whether a transition is not only agroecological but also explicitly just.

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Ethical considerations

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Consent to participate

Participants in the workshops were read the informed consent aloud and/or read it at the moment of signing attendance sheets and were asked to accept or reject their participation.

Consent for publication

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Additional unpublished reports used in this paper for Tunisia and Senegal are available upon request.

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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