

## Farming Systems Comparison in the Tropics (SysCom) wins the 2021 SHIFT Prize for Transformative Agroecological Research for Development

The SHIFT Prize honours collaborative agroecological research projects that have made an exemplary contribution to transforming food systems. The SysCom project is carried out by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) with numerous partner organizations in Bolivia, India, and Kenya.



Research for the agroecological future: Edward Karanja from the partner organisation "icip" (International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology) in Kenya collects soil samples with a field worker. (Picture: Peter Lüthi)

Our agricultural and food systems face immense challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, degradation of natural resources, growing inequality and a series of human health and nutrition issues. Agroecology offers promising pathways towards sustainability, resilience and equity and allows for the production of sufficient healthy food for all in healthy environments.

Co-created evidence and innovations are of outstanding importance to convince diverse stakeholders of the systemic merits of agroecology and for bringing agroecology to scale. The [«Money Flows»](#) report (2020) by Biovision and IPES-Food showed that agroecological research is drastically underfunded and identified a lack of visibility and recognition for systemic transdisciplinary projects as a key barrier for changing this situation. Therefore, the foundations Biovision and Agropolis established a partnership to award the SHIFT Prize for Transformative Agroecological Research for

Development. The award ceremony will be held at the [Agroecology Europe Forum 2021](#) in Barcelona in mid-November.

An independent jury consisting of internationally renowned experts selected the project «Farming Systems Comparison in the Tropics» ([SysCom](#)) from 28 excellent applications, particularly due to its outstanding collaborative and systemic approach and holistic manner of addressing food system challenges. As the jury member Olivia Yambi, a senior expert on nutrition and sustainable development, puts it:

*«[SysCom] provides evidence for food systems transformation and contributes to the debate and potential policy changes to support agroecology, organic agriculture and diversity [...].»*

A core component of the SysCom project are the long-term experiments (LTEs) that compare different agricultural production systems in three tropical countries for already fifteen years, allowing for monitoring sustainable changes from different perspectives. The LTEs are complemented by participatory on-farm research on innovations adapted to local farmers' conditions. The SysCom coordinator an Head of Department for International Cooperation of FiBL, Beate Huber expressed that:

*«The award is an excellent motivation for our team, and it comes at the right moment: we have just completed an extensive midterm review with all partners where we concluded that we want to engage stronger in national and supra-national policy dialogues on the sustainable transition of the food systems. The SHIFT prize will help us gain awareness and link up with respective networks.»*

SysCom won by a narrow margin against two other finalists for the prize:

- **Malawi Farmer-led Agroecology Initiatives:** Led by the Soil, Food and Healthy Communities ([SFHC](#)) organization, the initiative focusses on farmer-to-farmer agroecological approaches to support rural Malawians in building sustainable, healthy, equitable and resilient communities. Working with over 10,000 farmers, SFHC has provided evidence on how agroecology improves household food security, nutrition and gender relations among others.
- **Towards Food Sustainability:** Reshaping the Coexistence of Different Food Systems in South America and Africa ([FoodSAF](#)): Carried out with numerous partner organizations in Bolivia, Brazil, Ghana, Kenya, Peru and Zambia this project is coordinated by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern. The project used a co-created concept of food sustainability to provide a transdisciplinary evidence base for innovation strategies and policy options. Different food systems have been assessed along five dimensions (food security, right to food, poverty and inequality, environmental performance, and socio-ecological resilience) and through 13 «transformative pilot actions» transformation is being co-created together with local actors.

Matthias Geck, programme manager at Biovision responsible for the SHIFT prize was very impressed by the quality and transformative potential of the different projects applying for the award:

*«SysCom creates crucial evidence on the effectiveness of agroecology and organic farming in addressing local food system challenges. In combination, the three finalists truly embody our vision of a paradigm change in the way agricultural research for development is conceptualized and implemented.»*

**For further information and interviews please contact:**

- Matthias Geck, Programme Manager Policy & Advocacy, Biovision, +41 (0)44 512 5858, [m.geck@biovision.ch](mailto:m.geck@biovision.ch)

- Beate Huber, Head of Department of International Cooperation, FiBL, +41 (0)62 865 0425, beate.huber@fibl.org

**Background material:**

- [Factsheets](#) on the three SHIFT Prize finalists
- [Terms and conditions](#) of the SHIFT Prize