

# ILEIA and COMPAS publications on agroecology digitalised

Agroecology was on the margins of international attention in 1984 when the Information Centre for Low-External-Input Agriculture (ILEIA) was created in The Netherlands at ETC Foundation. ILEIA sought to collect and share practical experiences that offered viable alternatives to Green Revolution agriculture – alternatives appropriate and feasible for small-scale farmers. The centre facilitated learning about creative and sustainable local innovations that could complement and enrich knowledge from formal agricultural science to create systems of low-external-input and sustainable agriculture (LEISA).

In the *ILEIA Newsletter* – after 2000 called LEISA Magazine and after 2009 *Farming Matters* – experiences were shared by farmers with their indigenous knowledge based on generations of experience, own experimentation, and observation; by agricultural advisors who developed locally appropriate technology together with farmers; and by scientists who worked with these farmers and agricultural advisors in Participatory Technology Development (PTD).

*“What we are aiming at with low external input agriculture is the highest possible level of sustainable food production. This means that recycling of nutrients is essential for maintaining soil fertility and that a high diversity in agricultural production is necessary to optimise the ecosystem and to minimise risks.”*

From ILEIA Newsletter 1, December 1984

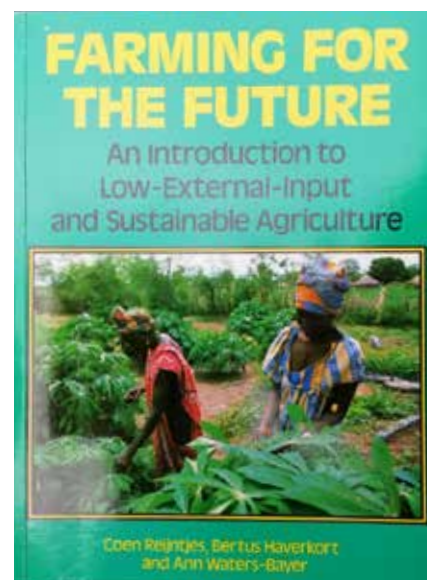
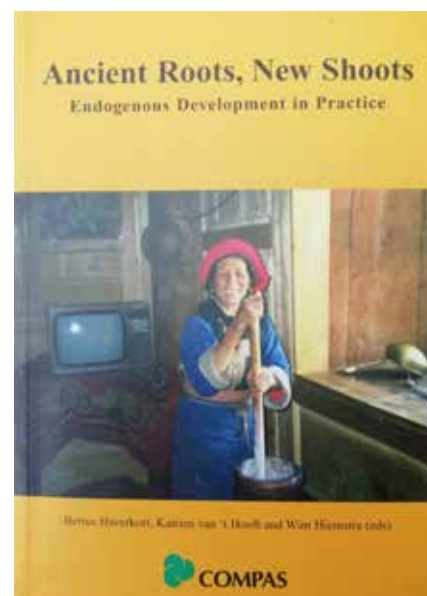
Over the decades, ILEIA built up a comprehensive body of practical knowledge on sustainable agriculture and PTD. Its focus broadened from farming practices to include also the socio-political side of agroecology. It documented innovative ways of social organisation, creating alternative markets and struggles for food sovereignty, and broadened its scope from farming to food systems. Recognising

the need for better linkages among farmers, scientists and activists working towards the same aim, ILEIA also engaged in networking, training and advocacy activities. The magazine and several books published by ILEIA disseminated inspiring stories that strengthened family farming rooted in agroecology.

Today, agroecology has become mainstream – at least in the rhetoric of institutions of agricultural research, development and education. It is striking how many articles on agroecology refer to ILEIA’s book *Farming for the Future: introduction to low-external-input and sustainable agriculture* (which was translated into seven languages) – as academics, researchers and development practitioners now recognise the merits of the LEISA approach through PTD and its contribution to agroecology.

One initiative that grew out of ILEIA was ProInnova ([www.proinnova.net](http://www.proinnova.net)), the international network to promote local innovation in agroecology. Another was Compas: Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development. This became an international network that developed ways of supporting endogenous development based on local peoples’ own values for their material, social and spiritual wellbeing. This network, closely collaborating with ILEIA, created partnerships of civil society organisations and universities focusing on the links between agriculture, health and use of natural resources.

The large body of practical knowledge on sustainable agriculture and endogenous development built up by ILEIA and Compas is now available online. When the *ILEIA Newsletter* started in 1984 and the *Compas Newsletter for Endogenous Development* in 1996, the issues were printed and sent by post to subscribers around the world. Two former members of the ILEIA team – Coen Reijntjes and Wietsma Bruinsma – have completed the enormous task of digitalising all the ILEIA and Compas magazine issues and books. These



include the four books in the ‘ILEIA Readings in Sustainable Agriculture’ published by Intermediate Technology Publications in the UK – e.g. *Joining Farmers’ Experiments and Farmers’ Research in Practice* – and the six books in the ‘Compas Series on Worldviews and Sciences’ – e.g. *Endogenous Development and Bio-cultural Diversity*.

*The digital collection is hosted by Echo Development Community ([www.echocommunity.org](http://www.echocommunity.org)). Most of the publications have also been included in the online library of Wageningen University and Research ([www.wur.nl/en/library.htm](http://www.wur.nl/en/library.htm)) for free downloading and can be found in WorldCat ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)). Simply search for ‘ILEIA’ or ‘Compas’.*