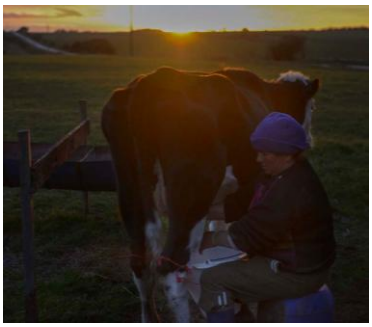
Bridging feminist agroecology and justice frameworks: theoretical foundations for gender-transformative food system transitions



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RSO79324: Research practice report

Rural Sociology Group

MSc Resilient Farming and Food systems

October 2025

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Abstract

Agricultural policies in Europe continue to overlook the experiences and contributions of women farmers, reinforcing inequalities in access to land, resources, and decision-making. To support a more gender-transformative approach in agricultural policy, this study develops a theoretical foundation to develop a decision support tool that aims to guide fairer and more inclusive policy design. Through a systematic literature review, it examines how justice is conceptualized and operationalized in food system transformation frameworks and explores their alignment with feminist agroecology principles. The analysis finds convergence around three core justice dimensions (distributive, procedural and recognitional), while highlighting the value of including Cosmopolitan, Ecology and non-human and Capacity dimensions for a broader and more inclusive approach. Linking these justice dimensions with feminist agroecology principles helps translate abstract notions of justice into actionable pathways for transformation, while revealing gaps in current frameworks. The insights contribute to advancing more just agricultural transitions.

1. Introduction

This report was developed within the framework of the SWIFT project (Supporting Women-led Innovations in Farming and Rural Territories), which aims to advance gender equality in European agriculture by providing practical tools and strategies to support women farmers and promote more inclusive policy design. The project recognizes that agricultural policies in Europe overlook and undervalue the experiences, needs, and contributions of women farmers, reinforcing inequalities in land access, resources, decision-making and opportunities for participation (Diamanti et al., 2024).

As a point of departure, this report considers that making the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) more gender-transformative -actively promoting gender equality and challenging existing power imbalances- is crucial for a fairer and more sustainable future. However, more practical guidance on how to translate these goals into action across different contexts in the EU is needed. The narrative just food systems is present in food policy and governance spaces, but what constitutes a just food system transition remains broadly defined and contested.

In this regard, broader discussions around just transitions and food justice offer valuable framing for this work, as they emphasise that sustainability transformations must address not only environmental but also the social aspects of change. The existing inequalities in society call for an intersectional analysis, and the different dimensions that it encompasses.

Building on this background, this report develops a theoretical foundation for the development of a Decision Support Tool, a user-friendly online resource that will guide policymakers and practitioners through pathways to tackle key challenges facing women in agriculture. Through a literature analysis, the report examines (1) **how justice is conceptualized and operationalized in the context of food system transformation**, and (2) **where is there alignment between justice dimensions and the principles of feminist agroecology.**

By bringing these two perspectives into dialogue, the report seeks to bridge theory and practice, showing how a feminist agroecology perspective can operationalize multidimensional understandings of justice, helping bridge philosophy and praxis, and offering insights to guide transformative policy design and implementation within the CAP and beyond.

2. Directionality and our theory of change: Feminist Agroecology

This chapter introduces our theoretical orientation: feminist agroecology as a transformative pathway that provides directionality to just food system transitions. While there is a growing attention to just transformations and dimensions of justice, (see literature review below), there is not as much clarity on what these transformations should look like in practice. Feminist agroecology addresses this gap by offering a grounded vision of transformation that centres care, reciprocity and social reproduction as foundations of justice.

In this report, we use feminist agroecology as a theoretical lens to connect and operationalise the dimensions of justice. Specifically, we draw on ten feminist agroecology principles (Table 1) identified through a systematic literature review and informed by a social reproduction framework (Vroegop, 2025). These principles represent the direction of change we envision towards a more just and sustainable food system.

In the results section of this report, we review existing frameworks on just food transformations and analyse how justice is conceptualized and operationalized across them. During the discussion, we bring the justice dimensions into dialogue with the feminist agroecology principles to identify areas of convergence, tension and opportunities for integration. This allows us to identify critical points of entry to inform the decision support tool.

Feminist agroecology principles

Table 1. Principles to inform a feminist approach to agroecology (Vroegop, 2025)

Feminist agroecology principles	*What feminist agroecology problematizes*	*What feminist agroecology proposes*
Revaluation	Monetary and non-monetary revaluation of women and other marginalized people's roles, particularly the reproductive and productive work in agroecology.	Recognition that reproductive and caregiving work performed by women are essential to both social and reproduction and agroecological sustainability.
Redistribution	Redistribution of tasks and benefits, of productive and reproductive labour across households, communities and society.	De-privatising and collectivising care-oriented food work as a way to overcoming the feminisation of food provisioning and domestic work.
Resources	Access, ownership and control of land (productive resources). Access to social rights (health services, childcare, elderly care). Access to markets, knowledge, seeds, credits.	The state can provide services to credit, extensions, training, information on new technology, field trials, input supply, storage and marketing, tailored to women farmers.
Diverse knowledge systems	Diverse knowledge systems, particularly by LGBTQ+ people, black	Their knowledge is overlooked, undervalued and mythologised.

	women, migrant women, indigenous women, non-binary and other marginalized people. Connection with the environment, coexisting with nature. A call for knowledges dialogue.	Limited access to education or knowledge-sharing platforms, and ongoing dominance of western knowledge system.
Autonomy	Capacity to act and decision-making in private sphere of household and in public sphere. Multidimensional: relational, bodily, material. Financial Physical and sexual violence (domestic and at work) restricts women's bodily safety and autonomy.	Recognising and promoting spaces of autonomy, practices and support networks within community, self-reliance and solidarity culture, promotes autonomy and empowerment for decision making.
Participation and representation	Addressing the structural barriers that exclude women, LGBTQ+ people, BIPOC from agroecological institutional decision-making processes and leadership positions. Persisting gender norms, sexism and sexual violence, creating spaces where women feel unsafe to use their voice. Lack of representation leads to their knowledge, preferences and priorities given less voice and weight than men's.	Full equal participation and representation of women and other marginalised people in decision making processes within agroecology. Inclusive governance structures and social processes that grants women and marginalized people the opportunity to voice their needs, priorities, perspectives and knowledges and consider these voices with equal weight.
Collective action	Problem with top-down approach that mainstream and institutionalise agroecology, invisibles efforts, agency and struggles from below of peasant leadership and protagonism.	Support and strengthen autonomous organisations of women and other marginalized people. Spaces to share experiences, needs and interests. Horizontal relationships, dialogue, collective reflection.
Solidarity	Women's empowerment not as an individual achievement through market-based interventions, but as an outcome of a complex relational process through collective action.	Social relations based on solidarity at different levels and spheres in agroecology. Solidarity economy, prioritises attending needs of the community over profit.
Interconnectedness and interdependency	Economic system based on exploitation of the regenerative forces that sustain nature. Individualistic, utilitarian, commodified view on land.	Fem agroecology proposes interconnectedness and interdependency between wellbeing and sustainability of humans and more than humans. Based on reciprocity and mutual care. Empowering women on agriculture not through elements that harm the environment. Ending violence not only to women but to all forms of life.
Intersectionality	Gender issues intersect with many other forms of inequity. Intersecting power relations exacerbate inequalities and shape the embodied experience of women, indigenous, racialised people, non-binary people, LGBTQ+, peasants, landless, other marginalised people. All these axes mediate in a mutually reinforcing	Fem agroecology calls for intersectional feminist agroecology that acts upon the structural, material and cultural factors that shape asymmetrical relations of power and privilege. Interventions should be tailored to context-specific needs and intersectional realities

way, shaping access to resources, valuation of their work, experiences, level of autonomy.

3. Methods

3.1 Literature review

A systematic literature review was carried out to explore diverse frameworks of just food system transformation. The literature search was done on Scope on the 18th June 2025 with the search terms “food systems" AND framework AND justice OR fair OR democrac* OR equit*. The search was reduced to articles published between 2015 and 2025, subject area social sciences and included English, Spanish and Portuguese as languages.

The search resulted in 136 papers, whose titles and abstracts were downloaded and imported into Zotero to be reviewed. The exclusion criteria led to discarding the articles that did not refer to the food system transformation, did not present an explicit framework on justice, or were overly focused on urban contexts. As a result, 16 articles conformed to the search and inclusion criteria. These articles were reviewed, putting on an excel file the full reference, definitions of justice, the goal of the paper, justice dimensions or elements they were identifying, relevant figures and notes (reflections or comments on the article). From these articles, preference was given to studies relevant to the topic that offered perspectives or elements considered valuable for the decision support tool discussion. Articles that were repetitive or added little new insights were also excluded. Ultimately, six articles were selected based on their clear frameworks and their potential to inform the development of the SWIFT decision support tool.

3.2 Validating the results

To validate the results of the literature review in relation to the ambition of a decision support tool, two meetings were held with members of the SWIFT team, notably those based at WUR. During the first meeting, the six frameworks were initially presented to the SWIFT team that afterwards brainstormed about which frameworks and elements would be the most useful and which figures were helpful for the creation of a decision support tool (Figure 2). The second meeting with the SWIFT team was to further discuss the alignment between the justice dimensions identified in the different frameworks and the feminist agroecology principles.

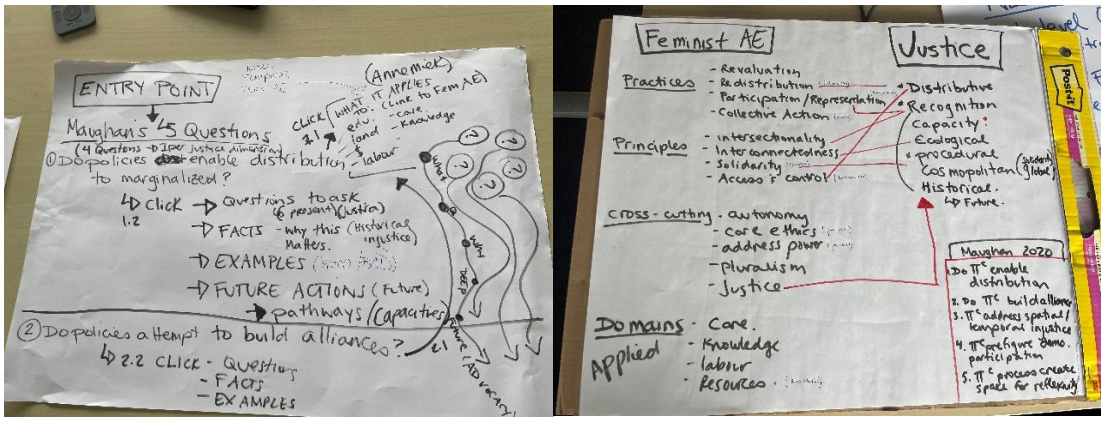

Figure 1. Brainstorming on justice frameworks and decision support tool with SWIFT team

3.3 Efforts to align justice dimensions with Fem AE

The ten principles of feminist agroecology (Vroegop, 2025) from the thesis "Toward a Feminist Agroecology: Achieving Socially Just and Sustainable Food Futures" were synthesised and organised in an Excel table to facilitate their comparison and analysis. This table served as an analytical tool to map the principles against the different dimensions of justice and to identify conceptual overlaps and distinctions. The comparative table (Figure 2), which included the basic definitions of the feminist principles of agroecology and the dimensions of justice, was then presented to the research team during a group meeting. The team held a discussion aimed at validating the intersections and alignments between both sets of concepts, which subsequently would inform the development of critical questions to be incorporated into the decision support tool and guide the following stages of its development.

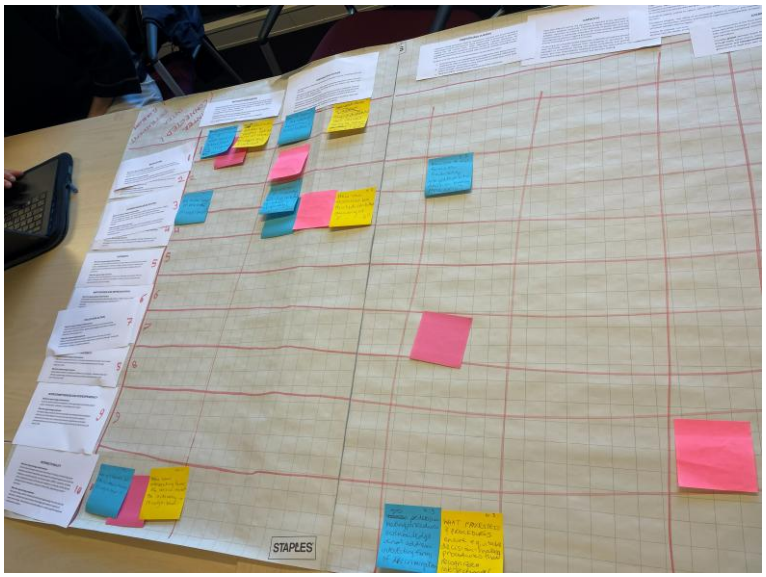

Figure 2. Comparative table with feminist agroecology principles and justice dimensions alignment

4. Results of the literature review

To explore how justice has been conceptualized and operationalized within food system transformation literature, this section reviews six frameworks that explicitly address questions of justice in transformation contexts. They reflect an effort across literature to move beyond general references to fairness or inclusion, and to articulate concrete principles and criteria for what a just transformation entails. The six frameworks reviewed are proposed by **Maughan et al. (2020), Whitfield et al. (2021), Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022), Kaljonen et al. (2024), De Bruin et al. (2024), and Conti et al. (2025).** In the following sections each framework is described, outlining its analytical focus, theoretical grounding and contribution to understanding justice in the food system, and subsequently compared and critically analysed. Particular attention is paid to the different dimensions of justice each framework engages with, so to provide foundation for this review, the general definitions of the key dimensions of justice these frameworks engage with are presented next.

The concept of justice in food system transformation is multidimensional, encompassing several interrelated yet distinct dimensions. There is a basic three-dimension understanding of justice (Fraser, 2009): **Distributional justice** concerns the fair distribution of benefits and burdens resulting from transitions. **Recognitional justice** refers to acknowledging different socio-cultural values, identities and positions in society, and the vulnerabilities that arise from their intersection, as well as recognizing the existing power-related disparities that shape how policies may impact different groups. **Procedural justice** focuses on ensuring equal opportunities to participate in decision making processes for all of those who are affected by it, through a process that must be transparent, inclusive and open to diverse voices and opinions.

Beyond these core dimensions, several frameworks incorporate emerging perspectives that expand the justice debate. **Cosmopolitan justice** extends the concern across temporal and spatial boundaries, emphasizing fairness to future generations (intergenerational) and to people in other regions of the world (intragenerational). **Ecological and non-human justice** questions anthropocentric approaches by recognizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems and non-human beings. Finally, **capacity** focuses on the ability of individuals and communities to adapt to the changes needed for a transformation of the food system.

4.1 Frameworks description

1. Maughan et al. (2020): reading for social justice

Maughan et al. (2020) developed a framework for "**reading for social justice**", to analyse food governance policy discourse in the UK after Brexit. This framework is

based on the concepts of distributive and procedural justice, the dimensions they identified as themes through a literature review. These two dimensions are concerned with how the benefits and burdens of the food system transition are distributed, for whom and by whom. The framework developed consists of 5 questions to spark critical analysis of policy and policy processes.

The first question, “Do the policies enable the distribution to (and participation of) the most marginalized?”, addresses explicitly the distributional issues of policy by focusing on the inclusion of the structurally disadvantaged and the importance of clearly targeting policies (asking them “for whom?”).

The second question, “Do the policies attempt to build alliances across boundaries?”, according to what the authors explain it in the article, this question refers to the lack of representation of the most vulnerable in society and their interests in policies. These tend to reflect the interests and perspectives of more privileged groups, and the authors argue that policy should bridge these differences. This concern is aligned with procedural justice’s, based on recognitional justice, so first is needed to acknowledge who those vulnerable groups are to then be able to integrate them into the decision-making process.

The third question, “Do the policies address spatial and temporal injustices?”, This question could be categorized as distributive justice, as it reflects on the distribution of the burdens of the transition, bringing attention to the consequences of the policy on other territories (beyond national boundaries) and generations, for the future but also acknowledging historical injustices. Other authors have categorized this as a different justice dimension, calling it cosmopolitan, intergenerational, universal, restorative or even recognitional justice (Conti et al., 2025; Kaljonen et al., 2024; Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022).

Question number four, “Does the policy process prefigure democratic participation?” is also addressing the procedural aspect of policy, highlighting the importance of people’s involvement and participation in democratic processes.

The last question, “Does the policy process create space for reflexive learning?” calls for reflexivity on one’s own relative power in society and the importance of one self’s critique as a personal learning process. The authors state that reflexivity is critical to enable the consideration of the principles entailed in the previous questions.

Figure 1. A Framework to Support a Process of "Reading for Social Justice" in Order to Evaluate Both the Content of Policies and the Processes through which Policies are Discussed, Formulated, and Decided Upon

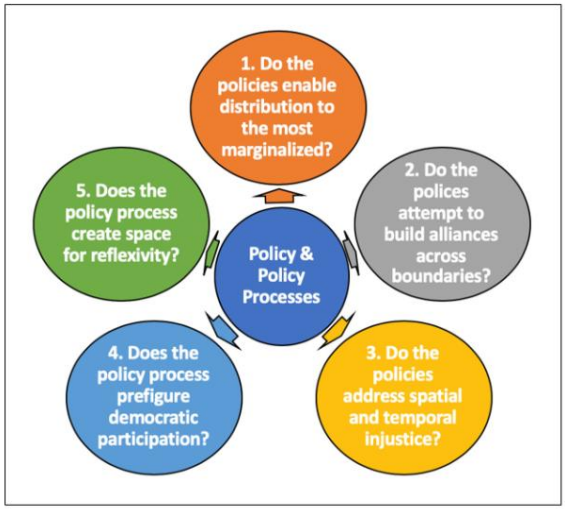

Figure 3. Maughan et al. (2020) 5-question framework to support reading for social justice.

2. Whitfield et al. (2021): justice in food system transformations research

The goal of this paper was to develop a framework to critically examine the justice implications of the food system transformation, highlighting the multiple forms of injustice that can arise and the potential role of research to contribute to these. This framework looks at the food system through a temporal justice lens: historical, representational and distributional justice. Through the **Historical** Justice dimension, they propose to look at how structural injustices have enforced inequalities in the past and continue to be replicated in the present. **Representational** justice turns the attention to the present and how represented every voice is in the governance process of the food system transformation. The authors point out the need to include "non-humans within the food system" for a less anthropocentric perspective, although the concept is not discussed further than that in the article, as it is in Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) and Kaljonen et al. (2024). Finally, **distributional** justice refers to how the outcomes (benefits and risks) of the transformation could be distributed, imagining alternative futures, in terms of access and security of food, land, waste, income, energy, employment, etc.

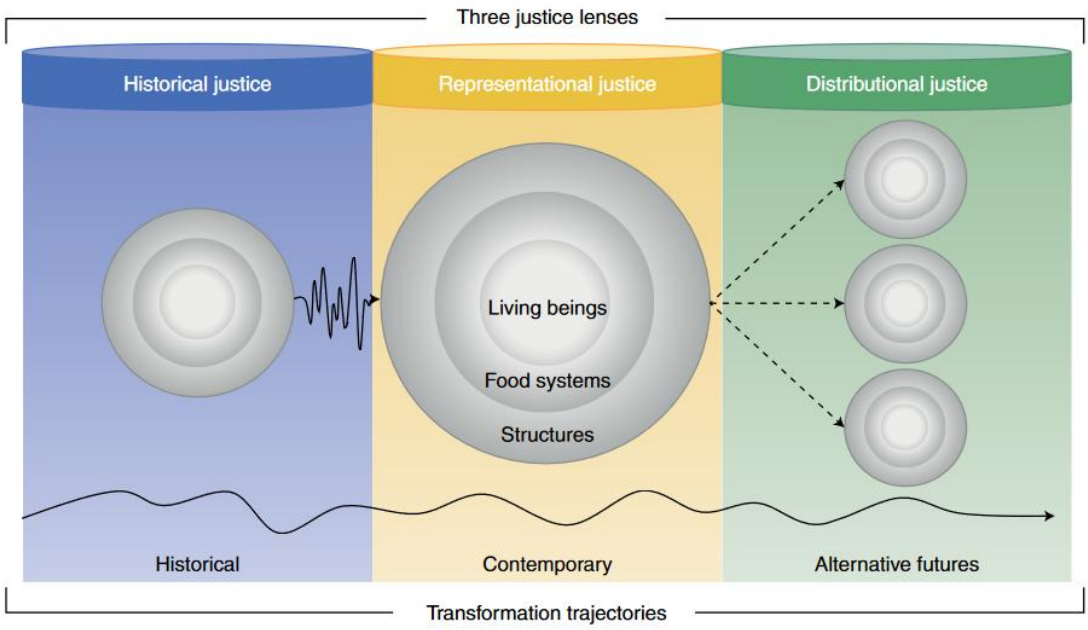

Figure 4. Whitfield et al. 2021 conceptual framework showing the three justice lenses on the three time dimensions.

3.Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022: Evaluating just transitions in food systems

This article proposes a framework of principles and criteria to evaluate and guide just transitions in food systems, ensuring that climate mitigation efforts are socially inclusive and equitable. The framework draws from philosophy research and social justice theory to establish A-level principles. B-level principles are more practical aspects of just transitions across different sectors, and the last level consists of 27 criteria to help assess whether certain situations or actions are fair or not, in just transition contexts. A particularity of this framework is that it has the effectiveness of the decarbonization actions as a precondition to apply the framework to evaluate the policy or transition pathways, a concept that would be relevant when seeking transformative pathways in feminist agroecology.

For the A-level principles they used two justice related perspectives, one perspective based on the three-dimension conceptualization of environmental justice (distributive, recognition and procedural justice), and the second perspective is based on the "justice to whom?" question, and calls for incorporating a global, intergenerational and non-human dimensions of justice. Additionally, they incorporated 'capacities' as another dimension, understanding that the capability of people to adapt to changes should be equal for everyone. Therefore, the level A dimensions of justice in this framework are **distributive, cosmopolitan, ecology and non-human beings, procedural, recognition and capacities**.

Distributive justice refers to how the benefits and burdens of the transition are distributed among the different actors, in the food system specifically this is mainly

about food, nutrition security, livelihoods and the environment, therefore they differentiate the following principles: right to vital goods (the right to food and a resilient food supply chain), labour justice (fair payment and working conditions), just food chain structures (farmer resilience and agreeable food chain relations) and livelihood opportunities (viability of farming, access to suitable farmland, support for opportunities of livelihoods in rural areas).

These authors set **cosmopolitan** justice as a distinct justice dimension under the principle of "all humans matter", to explicitly ensure that the transition impacts are just beyond spatial and temporal borders. They include global fairness and intergenerational justice as principles. Global fairness is evaluated as activities not causing food insecurity elsewhere in the world, respecting participatory control over and access to productive resources elsewhere in the world, and that activities do not undermine fair livelihood opportunities for spatially distant actors. On the other hand, intergenerational justice is understood as meeting the needs of the present without undermining the opportunities of future generations to achieve well-being.

The third justice dimension the authors identify is **Ecology and non-human beings**. The framework is centred in the transition of the food system to a low-carbon production, and actions that can be beneficial for this goal, are not necessarily positive for other environmental impacts of the food system. Therefore they propose ecological integrity as a principle based on ecological justice, defining it based on Parrish et al. (2003) as "the ability of an ecological system to support and maintain species composition, diversity, and functional organization comparable to those of natural habitats within a region", and they evaluate it according to criterion on ecosystem health, biodiversity protection, soil, water and air quality and natural resource use within planetary boundaries. The second principle included in this dimension is justice for non-human animals, through the understanding that in general just-transition literature fails to include animals as beings with needs, dignity and agency, and only depict them as an instrumental resource. The criteria they consider is whether the inherent value of animals is respected and they are treated respectfully.

Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) understand **procedural** justice as "equal opportunities of all people to participate in decision-making that may concern them" and highlight the importance of how these processes are carried out, specially that they provide the proper space for all voices to participate and be heard. Furthermore, the authors claim that epistemic injustice is often related to procedural injustices, so they highlight the principle of access to relevant information as part of this justice dimension, to be able to make well-informed decisions.

Recognitional justice, the third fundamental dimension of justice refers to the acknowledgement that the opportunities to participate in society as equals is deprived by gender, ethnic, cultural or racial differences (Fraser, 2009, as cited in Tribaldos and Kortetmäki, 2021). The way food is produced, prepared and consumed is deeply connected to cultural values, therefore the authors in this framework highlight the principles of "respectful pluralism and esteem recognition", meaning that all kinds of knowledge will be respected and given voice, the different ways of producing, preparing and consuming food is respected, recognized and esteemed, and "non-discrimination", as the transition policies can have different consequences for different groups of people and the intersection of inequalities. This definition incorporates ethical principles like respect, plurality, non-discrimination and epistemic justice, interrelating with the concept of procedural justice they present.

Lastly, **capacity** refers to people's capabilities to adapt to the changes the transition demands. Building these capacities is key for a just transition, especially for those who are already facing inequalities.

4.Kaljonen et al. (2024): Policy mixes for just transitions

Kaljonen et al. (2024) developed a framework to evaluate policy mixes for just transitions. They integrate the multidimensional understanding of justice, the multi-level perspective to sustainability transitions from Geels (2002; 2011) and Kanger et al.'s (2020) six policy intervention points. Like Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022), they also emphasize the relevance of capacity building for a just transition. They applied it analysing the food system transition in Finland and concluded that the relative importance of the justice dimensions differs depending on the intervention point.

They build on the idea that policy mixes should be designed to simultaneously encourage the emergence and acceleration of niche innovations, while destabilizing the regime by phasing out unsustainable practices. Kaljonen et al. (2024) base their framework on six intervention points which reflect this combination of consequences intended to push change in a specific direction (Fig. 5). On one hand, policies are meant to encourage innovation and trigger new ways of doing things; on the other hand, they aim to discourage harmful or unsustainable practices. However, changes can have negative consequences that need to be mitigated. Kaljonen et al. (2024) argue that policy efforts tend to focus on mitigation of distributive impact, paying less attention to active and emancipatory measures.

In regard to the justice dimensions, they use the same six as Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022), they build on their framework, among others (Atteridge & Strambo, 2020; European Environment Agency, 2024; Kivimaa et al., 2023 as cited

by Kaljonen et al., 2024), but they incorporate the concept of reactive, active and emancipatory measures (Koretsky et al., 2022), understanding as reactive those that aim to "mitigate the direct repercussions of destabilization by transition periods", active is associated with "the discontinuation of undesirable systems with actions such as technology or product phase-outs, but also the anticipation of future transformations through retraining strategies or territorial reorientation" and emancipatory measures are those that "challenge structural forms of power, oppression and neglected interests, empowering alternative development pathways" (Kaljonen et al., 2024). The framework aims to help move from reactive to more active and emancipatory measures.

They also point out that although they separate the issues into different dimensions, these dimensions are highly interconnected, and each issue should be assessed in relation to its specific context and evaluated in terms of its intersectional impact.

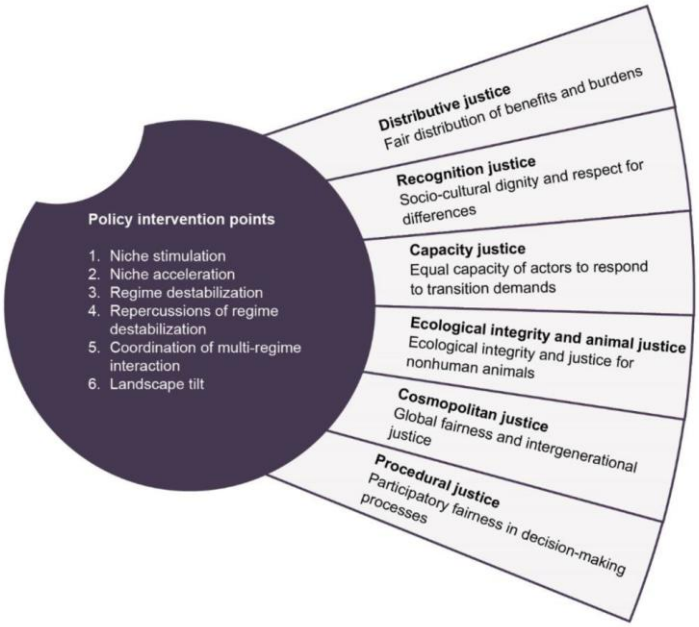

Figure 5. "Holistic framework for evaluating policy mixes for just transition", Kaljonen et al., 2024.

For **distributive** justice they use the same definition as Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) but highlight that usually this aspect tends to lead to restorative policy measures instead of emancipatory, that would be for example "distribution of profits along value chains making sure that innovations do not strengthen current injustices in power distribution". It calls for an intersectional perspective to assess the cumulation or intersection of vulnerabilities in society.

Recognitional justice is also framed similarly to the previous framework analysed, both build on Fraser (2009) concept of recognizing the different values, identities and positions in society, but Kaljonen et al (2024) highlight that the recognition of

different socio-cultural and power disparities will provoke different policy impacts, sometimes even challenging those values, so it is important to incorporate and balance the different views in the policy design, to avoid polarization and "support different socio-cultural groups in responding to transition demands in their own terms".

These authors consider that **capacity** justice, although related to recognitional and distributive, "**warrants a separate principle due to its distinct and proactive character as part of just transition**". It refers to the material and immaterial capacities to respond to transition demands, it is based on recognitional justice as it acknowledges how inequalities and their intersections can lead to less capacities to adapt to the changes that transitions entail. Emancipatory measures of capacity building would be to "support individuals' or communities' capacities to partake in collective action and decision-making".

Ecological integrity and justice for animals is also granted its separated dimension in this framework, as in Triblados and Kortetmäki's (2022), as they understand that climate transitions often entail broad impacts on the ecosystem and biodiversity that need to be considered. They also include **cosmopolitan** justice as global fairness and intergenerational justice to ensure across borders justice and future generation's well-being.

Lastly, **procedural** justice, similarly defined as the other frameworks and based on Schlosberg (2007), is about transparency and impartiality in decision-making processes and equality in opportunities to participate in them. The authors highlight the importance of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), the availability of reliable information and the capacity to utilize it, as a key aspect of procedural justice.

5. De Bruin et al. (2024): Conceptualizing justice in food system transitions

This article starts from the understanding that there is a lack of clarity in the conceptualizations and principles of justice that the researchers are using on the food system transition context. They made an initial framework based on political philosophy literature and then a literature review of food system transition literature. Later they identified the conceptualizations of justice that emerge from the literature related to food system initiatives and the principles of justice they use, to understand how researchers play a role shaping the just transitions of the food system.

They draw on political philosophy to define the concepts of recognition, distributive and procedural justice (Fig. 6). **Recognitional** justice, as the previous frameworks reviewed, is concerned about who is the subject of justice. Similarly to the concept of "Ecology and non-human" (Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022; Kaljonen et al., 2024), they propose the inclusion of nonhumans as subjects of justice; not only animals,

but also plants and ecosystems. They point out that the temporal and spatial dimensions are also part of the discussion of who is a subject of justice, including humans and nonhumans who live here and now, but also those who live in different parts of the world, referred to as cosmopolitan or intragenerational justice. When justice concerns future generations is called intergenerational justice (Stumpf et al., 2015; Miller 2017; Kaljonen et al. 2021), while acknowledging historical injustices and how they continue to shape inequalities, is usually referred to as restorative justice (Whitfield et al, 2021; (Heffron & McCauley, 2018); Kaljonen et al. 2021). In this framework, all these different forms of justice identified fall into the category of recognitional dimension.

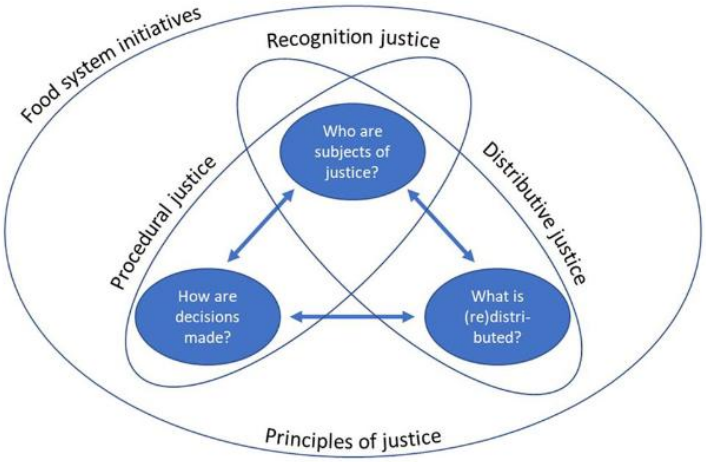

Figure 6. Framework figure used by De Bruin et al. (2024) to analyse justice conceptualizations

The definition of **distributive** justice that de Bruin et al (2024) make from their literature review is that it is "what is (re)distributed between those who are considered to have an obligation towards subjects of justice". As "what is distributed" they identified food accessibility and affordability, viable livelihoods in terms of resource ownership, good working conditions, health and wellbeing in terms of environmental impact, availability of natural resources to produce food, among other things.

The third justice dimension reviewed by de Bruin et al (2024) is **Procedural** justice. It is about who is or should be included in the decision-making process and the distribution of power amongst the different stakeholders. It focuses on inclusion, participation and fairness in the processes, addressing who has the power, whose voices are heard and how decisions are made. In food systems, injustices arise when power is concentrated in a few actors, marginalized groups are excluded or certain knowledges are delegitimized (Biermann et al. 2012; Tschersich and Kok, 2022, referenced by de Bruin et al., 2024).

De Bruin et al. (2024) affirm that recognitional justice is part of both distributive and procedural justice, as "those experiencing distributive injustices tend to have little influence in decision-making processes". Their analysis showed that the three justice perspectives are closely connected through three subjects of justice and that multiple principles of justice are relevant when examining the impacts of food system initiatives. They also observed that most conceptualizations were adapted to the context and scale of the analysis. They highlight the researcher's role as shaper of the conceptualization of justice dimensions, and the importance of being clear and reflective about the values, ideals and priorities behind the research.

6. Conti et al. (2025): an interrogative approach to advance just food system transformations

The framework of this article is based on a review of 120 publications that identified core food system elements for transformation. Among them are four of the frameworks reviewed previously on this literature review; Whitfield et al 2021, Tribaldos & Tortetmaki 2022, Kaljonen et al 2024 and De Bruin et al 2024. They present a matrix that brings together justice and transformation of the food system concerns, through critical questions that allow food system actors to reflect and assess policy, with the aim to implement a more just, inclusive and power-aware food system transformation. The resulting matrix shows the interconnectedness between the food system elements and justice elements. The objective of the matrix is for "diverse stakeholders (policy makers, development practitioners, civil society actors) to more openly reveal past and present issues of injustice in food systems and consequently help set out more informed and openly negotiated priorities and strategies for enacting transformations".

On one axis of the matrix, they present the justice dimensions in the food system that arise from the literature review they carried out: **distributive, procedural, recognitional and universal justice**. On their theoretical framework they define **Distributive** justice as the fair distribution of benefits and harms "among all members of a society". **Procedural** justice "concerns the meaningful involvement of diverse actors in decision-making processes and whether all people can participate in decisions that affect them". **Recognitional** justice "addresses whether the rights and perspectives of different agents, ideas, and cultures are acknowledged as valid and equally valuable, regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or other characteristics". Lastly, the article does not explicitly define **universal** justice, but they mention that "other authors consider issues of cosmopolitan, intergenerational and restorative justice as part of distributive, rather than labelling them as universal justice", so we assume that they are including those dimensions as universal justice.

On the other axis of the matrix, they place the food system elements to be tackled for transformation to be achieved: technology options, infrastructure, research and development priorities, attitudes and cultures, policies and institutions and political economy. On each intersection of the matrix they present 3 questions, a retrospective one, a present-day one, and a forward-looking one. The retrospective questions challenge "business as usual", present-day ones can be used to assess the food system justice and be a baseline for monitoring and evaluating, and the forward-looking questions can be used to design future pathways and reveal possible trade-offs.

4.2 Comparison and critical analysis

This section firstly compares the six frameworks reviewed that conceptualize justice within food systems transformations, highlighting convergences and divergences on how justice in understood and operationalized (Table 2). We will address their different focus and the implications of their different analytical choices. Following this, we will analyse certain elements identified in the reviewed frameworks that appear to be relevant for consideration in the decision support tool development.

4.2.1 Alignment, tensions and gaps in justice conceptualizations

Echoing de Bruin et al.'s (2024) findings, we observed a range of conceptualizations of justice across the frameworks; there is a general alignment around the core dimensions of Distributive, Procedural and Recognitional justice, yet their interpretation and scope vary. Other frameworks explicitly define new dimensions like Ecology and non-human, Capacity and Cosmopolitan/Universal, whereas others take some of these elements into account but consider them embedded in the broader core dimensions.

Table 2. Theoretical frameworks reviewed and the justice dimensions they identify.

Authors, year	Title	Justice dimensions
Maughan et al., 2020	A five-point framework for reading for social justice: A case study of food and farming policy discourse in the context of Brexit Britain.	Distributive Justice Procedural Justice
Whitfield et al., 2021	A framework for examining justice in food system transformations research.	Historical justice Representational justice Distributional justice
Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022	Just transition principles and criteria for food systems and beyond	Distributive justice Procedural justice Recognition justice Cosmopolitan justice Ecology and non-human beings Capacities
Kaljonen et al., 2024	Policy mixes for just transitions: A holistic evaluation framework	Distributive justice Procedural justice Recognition justice Cosmopolitan justice Ecological integrity and animal justice Capacity justice
De Bruin et al., 2024	Easier said than defined? Conceptualising justice in food system transitions	Recognition justice Distributive justice Procedural justice.
Conti et al., 2025	A quest for questions: The JUSTRA as a matrix for navigating just food system transformations in an era of uncertainty.	Distributional justice Procedural justice Recognitional justice Universal justice

Recognitional justice is most often presented as the base of all the other justice dimensions, as it informs what would be a fair distribution of benefits and burdens, how capacities might be different among different groups of society and what voices have historically been silenced and need to be brought forward for procedural justice to happen. Recognition is also important to acknowledge the injustices along the food system in different parts of the world and throughout time, as well as the consequences on the ecosystems and its non-human inhabitants.

In some cases, some dimensions are implicitly embedded within others. For instance, Maughan et al. (2020) centre their framework on five guiding questions grounded in Distributive and Procedural justice. Although they only explicitly mention these two dimensions, Recognitional aspects are embedded in the first three questions, which require identifying marginalized or less-heard groups. Additionally, the third question aligns with Cosmopolitan or Universal dimensions

of justice as understood by Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022), Kaljonen et al. (2024) and Conti et al. (2025), as it refers to intergenerational and global concerns. De Bruin et al. (2024), on the other hand, explicitly refer to non-humans and ecosystems, as well as to the concept of Cosmopolitan justice, yet deliberately adopt a broad conceptualization of Recognitional justice that functions as an umbrella term for these dimensions. Similarly, Conti et al. (2025), in their comprehensive literature review, included four of the five frameworks discussed in this report, but do not consider these additional dimensions separately either. Instead, they use the term *Universal justice* to encompass Cosmopolitan, Intergenerational and Restorative justice. This decision is not theoretically explained, and Universal justice itself is not defined. Using narrow conceptualizations of justice risks overlooking certain aspects of the components of the food system transformation. It could be limiting the transformative potential of the processes or reinforcing existing injustices.

The dimensions Whitfield et al. (2021) identify in their framework differ from the other frameworks as they are based on a temporal scope. However, there is a lot of overlap of concepts. How they conceptualize Historical justice coincides with Recognitional in the sense that they both talk about acknowledging historical injustices and how those shape today's inequalities. However, Historical can be focused mainly on the acknowledgement and reparation of past injustice, whereas Recognitional justice, the way Fraser (2009) defines it, addresses identities, values and cultural differences, and has a more present and forward-looking vision, that seeks to recognize power imbalances and among other things, how this can impact decision-making processes. Whitfield et al. (2021) use the concept of Representational justice, which is very close to Procedural justice, but not the same. Representational justice is concerned with which voices are being represented or not in decision-making processes, whereas Procedural justice focuses not only on the representational aspect but also on how those processes happen, whether they are fair, transparent and inclusive.

Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) and Kaljonen et al. (2024) frameworks share the same understanding of the justice dimensions, considering the same six ones (table 2), highlighting the importance of differentiating, besides the three core dimensions, three more dimensions of justice: Ecology and non-humans, Cosmopolitan justice and Capacity. Some of these may likewise be found in other frameworks analysed, although not explicitly articulated as separated dimensions but embedded in others, as we mentioned previously with Ecology and non-humans and Cosmopolitan justice. The case of Capacity justice, introduced by Tribaldos & Kortetmäki (2022) and Kaljonen et al. (2024), is different since it represents a new dimension of justice in relation to the other frameworks under consideration. The capacity to participate in the transition or to adapt to the changes needed for it, was briefly mentioned only as a distributive matter by de Bruin et al. (2024).

4.2.2 Relevant elements from justice frameworks for the decision support tool

The reviewed frameworks differ not only in their conceptualization of justice but also in their purposes. Some are designed primarily for research and reflexive inquiry (Whitfield et al., 2021), others for policy discourse analysis (Maughan et al. 2020), and others for assessing policy content or transformation processes (Tribaldos & Kortetmaki, 2022; Kalnonen et al., 2024; Conti et al., 2025). Whitfield et al.'s (2021) work is focused on food system transformation research and the researcher and activist's role to contribute to already existing injustices, and what influence their positionality can have on the food system transformation. This idea coincides with Maughan et al. (2020)'s fifth question on reflexivity about one's own positionality and power within society. This concept could be useful for the SWIFT decision support tool, to **incorporate the reflection of researchers, activists or policy makers' positionality,** to make explicit who we are and how our nuances can we be shaping what we are doing. De Bruin et al. (2024) showed us the relevance of understanding the researcher's positionality and the values behind their conceptualization of justice, which will shape who they recognize as subjects of justice, what should be distributed and how, as well as how decisions are made and with whom. All of this is shaped by the principles of justice that the researchers hold.

Kaljonen et al. (2024) incorporated other new concepts to analyse the transition: the multilevel perspective and the six intervention points, as well as the distinction of reactive and emancipatory measures, so the framework seems more comprehensive. **Seeking emancipatory measures** for policy that target the structural causes of inequalities would be an important element to consider for the decision support tool. Moreover, Kaljonen et al. (2024) observed that not all justice dimensions had the same relative relevance for the different intervention points, meaning that at different stages of the transition some justice aspects may become more relevant than others. For instance, distributive and procedural justice may become more relevant during phases of resource allocation or participatory decision-making, whereas recognitional justice is key in earlier stages where dominant norms and power relations are being questioned. However, prioritising one justice dimension over others can lead to partial approaches that address certain inequalities while leaving others behind. For example, focusing on distributive efforts like access to resources, without considering recognitional or procedural aspects might reproduce existing power imbalances by reproducing whose voices shape decisions or whose knowledge is being valued. Similarly, neglecting ecological or cosmopolitan justice could result in short-term solutions that fail to account for long term sustainability or interdependencies across time and space. This highlights the need for an **integrated approach of the multiple justice dimensions.**

In this sense, bringing the justice dimensions into dialogue with the ten principles of feminist agroecology becomes particularly relevant. This analysis will allow us to assess which justice dimensions are most closely associated with each principle, and therefore how these dimensions might manifest across different policy intervention points. Nevertheless, this exercise also carries certain risks. While it might help us identify areas of convergence, there is a danger of overlooking justice dimensions that may not appear directly connected to the feminist framework. The absence of a clear link does not necessarily imply irrelevance, rather it may point to blind spots or aspects that require further conceptual attention. In this sense the analysis should not only highlight alignments but also reveal potential gaps, allowing us to reflection on which justice concerns might risk being neglected in the process of operationalization.

On another note, Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022) highlight for future research the need to **have a minimum standard of justice** against which to assess the different criteria, especially when there are trade-offs, and to prioritize certain principles like "right to vital goods" and "ecological integrity". This idea can be related to what is included in the last EAT-Lancet report (Rockström et al., 2025) about the need for policy to address inequalities in the distribution of benefits and burdens of the food system, to ensure that the human rights related to the food system are being met. This could also be an interesting and useful element to incorporate into the SWIFT decision support tool.

As we have seen in this section, the justice dimensions are deeply interrelated and often overlap. Nonetheless, to ensure that the analysis remains comprehensive and does not risk leaving out relevant elements, it is important to adapt a broad conceptualization of justice. For this reason, and to capture the full spectrum of concerns across different aspects of transformation, this report adopts the justice dimensions proposed by Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022) and Kaljonen et al. (2024) as the analytical framework against which the feminist agroecology principles will be assessed.

5. Discussion

Alignment feminist agroecology principles with justice dimensions

This section explores the intersections between the feminist agroecological principles and the dimensions of justice identified in the literature. The aim is to examine how both frameworks converge in their pursuit of equity, inclusivity, and transformation within food systems, and how feminist perspectives can enrich existing justice frameworks by expanding their scope to include issues such as reproductive labour, diversity of knowledges or care. Drawing inspiration from the

Conti et al. (2025) framework, the principles of feminist agroecology and the elements of justice were brought together in a matrix to identify points or alignment, overlap and possible gaps (Table 3). What follows is an analysis of these relations.

Table 3. Alignment matrix: Feminist agroecology principles vs. justice dimensions

Feminist agroecology principles	Justice dimensions					
	Distributive	Recognitional	Procedural	Capacity	Cosmopolitan	Ecology and non-human
Revaluation		X	X			
Redistribution	X					
Resources	X		X	X		
Diverse knowledge systems		X	X			X
Autonomy	X	X	X	X		
Participation and representation		X	X	X		
Collective action			X			
Solidarity	X				X	
Interconnectedness and interdependency	X	X			X	X
Intersectionality		X				

There are a number of principles and elements that show strong alignment. For example, the **Revaluation** principle coincides with Recognitional justice; they both call for acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities in the food system. Revaluation emphasizes the need to recognize and value the reproductive and caregiving work performed by women and other marginalized groups, forms of labour that are essential for both social reproduction and agroecological sustainability, but have historically been undervalued or rendered invisible. In this sense, Revaluation can be understood as a crosscutting principle, informing other dimensions of justice. An example of this can be how the revaluation principle can be connected with Procedural justice, when we think that decision-making processes should not only be inclusive but should also revaluate what voices, practices and types of labour are considered during those processes. It is not enough to have everyone participating but it is also necessary to revaluate what has historically been excluded or subordinated in those spaces.

The **Redistribution** principle is very close to the concept of Distributive justice. Redistribution of labour is one of the concerns of Distributive justice, even though specifically reproductive labour was not mentioned in the literature reviewed on food systems. Both concepts address how benefits, resources and responsibilities are allocated within society, but from complementary angles. While distributive justice focuses on the fair distribution of material and immaterial resources among groups, redistribution expands this perspective by including the division of productive and reproductive labour, highlighting the need to de-privatise and

collectivise care work. Together they seek not only for equitable outcomes but also transforming the underlying structures of labour and care that sustain the food system.

Access to resources, as a feminist agroecological principle, is closely connected to Distributive justice, as both address how benefits, burdens and opportunities are shared across society. Resources can include not only land, farming means, credit, or technology, but also social rights, viable livelihoods, access to markets, food and knowledge. In the context of food system transformation, Distributive justice is concerned about the fair distribution of benefits and burdens of the transition, where an emancipatory vision would seek to "avoid innovations or changes to strengthen current injustices in power distributions" (Kaljonen et al. 2024). Ensuring Distributive justice therefore requires addressing structural inequalities in access, ownership and control of productive and social resources, through state interventions such as credit, training and market access programs that seek to remedy gendered and socioeconomic inequalities. Moreover, as knowledge and information are also resources, this principle connects with Procedural justice, since access to relevant information is essential for fair participation in decision making (Tribaldos y Kortetmäki, 2022). Finally, access to resources can be a determinant of how well actors are equipped to face and adapt to changes, linking this principle to the Capacity dimension of justice.

The feminist principle of **Diverse knowledge systems** is closely related to Recognitional justice, as both are concerned with the respect and inclusion of different visions, knowledges and cultural values (Triblados & Kortetmäki, 2022). This feminist principle calls for acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all marginalized groups whose knowledges have been overlooked and undervalued. Recognitional justice thus demands not only that these perspectives are acknowledged, but that they actively inform decision-making and knowledge production processes, linking this dimension to Procedural justice as well. Furthermore, this principle emphasizes the coexistence and connection between humans and the environment, aligning it with Ecology and non-humans dimension of justice.

The **Autonomy** principle is multidimensional and touches upon various justice dimensions. It is directly connected to Procedural justice, as it is about empowering decision-making both in private and public spheres. It can also be linked to Distributive justice through the aspect of collectivization of resources, seeking the self-reliance of communities. Furthermore, it also refers to Recognitional justice, as it claims that spaces of autonomy should be recognized, as should be physical and sexual violence in order to achieve safety and autonomy. Lastly, it can be

related to Capacity dimension of justice, given that less reliance on external actors can lead to greater resilience or adaptive capacities.

The feminist principle of **Participation and representation** is directly aligned with Procedural justice as they both address fairness and inclusion in decision-making processes. Procedural justice is concerned about who is included, how decisions are made, and whose voices are being heard and valued, meanwhile the feminist principle points out the need to work on the structural barriers that exclude women, LGBTQ+ people, BIPOC and other marginalised groups from the decision making spaces. This feminist principle is related as well with Recognitional justice, since those marginalized groups that are intended to be included need to be first recognized, their perspectives and knowledges need to be firstly acknowledged as valid to then be considered during the decision-making processes. Finally, Capacity justice is related to this principle as well, as Kaljonen et al. (2024) defined that emancipatory capacity building would entail supporting the required capacities to participate in collective action and decision-making.

Collective action principle raises the importance of maintaining autonomous organizations with horizontal relationships, to ensure openness and inclusion. Moreover, collectives and organizations of women and marginalized groups should be included in decision making spaces without being forced to change their nature or be institutionalized, essential aspects to ensure Procedural justice.

The **Solidarity** principle of feminist agroecology proposes an alternative way of understanding social and economical relations, grounded in collective well-being rather than profit oriented. While not strictly a justice issue, it can be connected to Distributive justice, as it challenges the dominant logics of distribution based on market value and instead promotes fair share of resources and responsibilities according to community needs. It also resonates with Cosmopolitan dimension of justice, as solidarity seeks to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, making the connections between communities and territories visible.

The principle of **Interconnectedness and interdependency** challenges the individualistic and utilitarian view on resources of the dominant economic system, which relies on the exploitation of nature regenerative forces. Feminist agroecology proposes instead a vision of wellbeing and sustainability grounded in reciprocity, mutual care and the recognition of interdependence between humans and more than humans. This principle aligns closely with the Ecology and non-human dimension of justice, as it calls for ending violence not only against women but against all forms of life, acknowledging that ecological degradation and social oppression are deeply related. It also connects with Recognitional justice, since it requires expanding who is recognized as a subject of justice, including ecosystems and non-human, and with Cosmopolitan justice, as it makes visible the relational

connections beyond spatial and temporary boundaries. Taken together with the Solidarity principle, it reveals a gap in the existing justice frameworks, as they do not account for the ontological and relational dimensions of transformation, the shift that feminist agroecology proposes, from domination and extraction to coexistence, reciprocity and care, as fundamental for justice in the food system.

Finally, the principle of **intersectionality** is closely aligned with Recognitional justice, as they are both concerned with acknowledging and addressing the multiple intersecting axes of oppression that shape people's experiences. Intersectionality highlights how gender, race, class, sexuality and other social positions mutually reinforce inequalities, influencing access to resources, recognition and participation in decision-making processes. It calls for policies and interventions to be tailored to context-specific realities, ensuring that the transformation efforts do not reproduce existing hierarchies of privilege. By exposing these overlapping structures of power, this principle provides a lens through which Recognitional justice can be better operationalized, and therefore all other dimensions of justice can be better understood and applied. In this sense, intersectionality, as well as Recognitional justice, functions as a crosscutting element, informing Distributive, Procedural and Capacity-related concerns, grounding the pursuit of justice in the diversity and complexity of real social relations.

During this analysis we could see clear examples of how bringing the justice dimensions into dialogue with the feminist agroecology principles can help translate abstract concepts into practice, grounding them in real issues that need to be addressed and setting concrete pathways for change. The exercise makes visible and helps to politicize the justice elements, ensuring a focus on those who have been and continue to be marginalized by dominant food systems. It also reinforces the feminist agroecology principles by grounding them in broader trends and theories of justice, which are, at least rhetorically, emerging as central in debates and policy around the future of food systems. Recognitional justice is clearly a transversal dimension, a primary element to be achieved to move forward successfully with the other dimensions. We also observed that Capacity emerges as an important justice dimension for feminist agroecology, since many of the elements that are proposed as desirable aim to achieve a greater resilience for women and other marginalized groups, which would translate into a better adaptive capacity to the changes demanded by the transformation of the food system.

6. Conclusion

The review and analysis of justice frameworks revealed both convergence and diversity in how justice is conceptualized and operationalized within the food system transformation literature. Most frameworks build on the basic three dimensions of justice, Distributive, Recognitional and Procedural, yet we found value on considering Cosmopolitan, Ecology and non-human and Capacity dimensions, in order to maintain a broad and inclusive understanding of justice for a more comprehensive analysis of the transformation process.

Bringing the justice dimensions into dialogue with the feminist agroecology principles proved to be a valuable exercise through which feminist agroecology can operationalize the multidimensional understanding of justice in food system transformation processes, bringing theoretical concepts of justice to a more grounded, practical level. This is critical to find ways to advance more just agricultural policy. It also allowed us to recognize a gap in the justice theories by not considering the ontological and relational side of the transformation.

The decision support tool can build on the pathways indicated by the intersection of the feminist principles and the justice dimensions. Additionally, it can also benefit from some key elements identified during the literature review: (1) using the multidimensional understanding of justice to avoid the risk of overlooking important elements in the transition, (2) the relevance of seeking emancipatory measures to target the roots of inequality, (3) the possibility of having human rights as a baseline for justice, and (4) to include the reflection and acknowledgement of positionality of the policymaker/researcher/activist or any user of the tool.

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