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BUILDING NEW AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS: STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES

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“Global markets, in which food has been reduced to yet another commodity for speculation, have demonstrated that they are incapable of solving urgent situations of hunger: far from it, they actually worsen them.”

This statement may seem self-evident, but it is worth reminding ourselves that we live in a context of global crisis that can be defined as perverse. Globalization, which emerged some decades ago, has exponentially exploded in the last 15 years. It has paved the way towards a world where there are officially 795 million hungry people,¹ and, what is more, many more are not even accounted for, yet they are suffering from malnutrition-related problems on a scale never seen before. Against the backdrop of an energy-dependent society—with petroleum as our system’s cornerstone—we have surpassed peak oil² and seem to have forgotten that planet Earth’s resources are finite.

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Photo

Women in a local food market (Essakane, Burkina Faso, 2011). Photo by Florence Kroff/FIAN International.

1 FAO, IFAD and WFP. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World - Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress*. Rome: FAO, 2015. Available at: www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf.

2 Fernández Durán, Ramón, and Luis Gonzalez Reyes. *En la Espiral de la Energía*. Libros en Acción. 2014.

3 Max-Neef, Manfred A, Antonio Elizalde and Martin Hapenhayn. *Desarrollo a escala humana: conceptos, aplicaciones y algunas reflexiones*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 1994. Available in Spanish at: www.max-neef.cl/descargas/Max_Neef-Desarrollo_a_escala_humana.pdf.

4 For more information, please see: Rundall, Patti. “The Business of Malnutrition: The Perfect Public Relations Cover for Big Food”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 23-28. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/node/31.

This outlook does not bode well for the planet over the coming years, and indeed, the final outcome will largely depend upon peoples’ movements and their capacity of response and coordination. The predominant development paradigm from the last century has led to a society that is not only hungry, but also devoid of humanity. Citizens have been turned into objects and are now considered merely another commodity with which to trade and increasingly generate profit from. They are not seen as people with needs and rights,³ but rather viewed as possible market niches and targets for different types of commodities. Similarly, common goods—water, land and seeds—have today been reduced to resources that can be extracted, whilst human beings are simply considered a human resource who are at the service of the market. In that respect, when we talk about food, it is essential that we build a narrative based on real needs linked to peoples’ rights, and also consider the repercussions that this perverse system has both on human beings and on our planet.

TERRITORIAL MARKETS: A TOOL FOR RESISTANCE

Today, in order to transform food systems within global institutions, we are fighting to make it clear that people are, first and foremost, human rights holders. The current discourse around ‘multi-stakeholderism’ has placed people’s claims and agribusiness companies’ needs for profit on an equal footing, thus making this rights battle all the more urgent. Within a human rights-based framework, such a perspective is inadmissible, and yet we see how this discourse spreads like a stain, seeping into different areas. It is imperative that the challenge of feeding the world is addressed by all actors together, but first there is the need to identify the real root causes of hunger and malnutrition, rather than simply mitigate the symptoms. Because of a reductionist vision, those that are mostly causing the problem are now asked to design the solution—and actually benefit from it.⁴

In this context, peasants, fisherfolk and pastoralists need to be rendered visible, as they produce 70% of the world’s food. Demands need to be made to preserve their production models, which have practically nothing in common with the model imposed by the globalized market. Small-scale producers cannot enter that market, nor do they want to, as doing so would trigger their demise. Global markets, in which food has been reduced to yet another commodity for speculation, have demonstrated that they are incapable of solving urgent situations of hunger:

- 5 The term 'territorial' was used by the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) at the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome during the negotiations of the Working Group (WG) on Connecting Smallholders to Markets. An analytical guide that covers the development of this term as well as case studies that can help organizations in policy advocacy is available at: www.csm4cfs.org/connecting-smallholders-markets-analytical-guide. The WG's process and documents are available at: www.csm4cfs.org/working-groups/connecting-smallholders-to-markets.
- 6 In the case of Mexico, for instance, over the last two decades there has been an increase in people who are overweight and suffer from diseases such as diabetes, which coincides with "the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This allows huge imports of ultra-processed foods with a high content of sugar, fat and salt, and low in fiber. During the same period the Mexican Government has encouraged the creation of, and investment in, large food corporations, thus, multiplying their influence and sales." Cedeño, Marcos Arana and Xaviera Cabada. "Nutrition Policies Taken Hostage by Multinationals and Conflicts of Interest The Obesity and Diabetes Epidemic in Mexico." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 70–71. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/node/46.
- 7 "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems". "Nyéléni Declaration". Mali: Nyéléni, 2007. Available at: nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290.
- 8 CSM Working Group on Nutrition documents are available at: www.csm4cfs.org/working-groups/nutrition.
- 9 For more information, please see: Schieck Valente, Flavio Luiz. "The Corporate Capture of Food and Nutrition Governance: A Threat to Human Rights and Peoples' Sovereignty." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2015): 15–21. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/node/25.
- 10 For more information, please see: Campeau, Christine. "Agroecology: An Alternative Way to Ensure Food Security." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2013): 28–29. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/alternatives-and-resistance-policies-generate-hunger.
- 11 For more information, please see: Cedeño, Marcos Arana. "Responses to Climate Change Challenges on Food Production: Strengthening Resilience or Increasing Dependence." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 46–49. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=46.

far from it, they actually worsen them. Meanwhile, so-called 'territorial' markets are also the most invisible, despite being the ones that can truly provide healthy and nutritional food to people.⁵ By now—in 2017—a clear link between the spread of diseases from an unhealthy diet and a country's level of economic globalization has been established.⁶

Consumers' 'free choice' is one of the most cited dictums in the discourse that goes hand in hand with the globalized model, in such a way as to suggest that this global system allows consumers to have a wider choice in their daily purchases. It is important to highlight that, in this context, things are not what they seem, as the global model does not equate citizens with consumers. Most existing legislation on consumers' rights recognize that consumers are those who have exchanged money for a product, which means that those people who use other channels to access food, such as bartering, soup kitchens, or food aid do not enjoy any rights. This aspect is key; as it reduces the human right to adequate food and nutrition to a mere quantitative transaction of goods to fill stomachs, without taking into account the quality or nutritional value of food. The definition of food security reinforces this notion, as it relegates food to mere quantitative indicators. For these reasons, food sovereignty is the principle that guides civil society organizations' claims.⁷

NUTRITION: A POLITICAL BATTLE IN A TERM

Following the declaration in 2016 of a so-called Decade of Action on Nutrition, one could easily imagine that there is a new window of opportunity within the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) and at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Theoretically, over the next ten years nutrition will be put forth as a key issue to be addressed by states, hand in hand with civil society. Thus far, one cannot claim to be very optimistic about the decade. As mentioned above, multi-stakeholderism is the approach taken, and initial documents and meetings place additional weight on false solutions provided by agribusiness. In the view of civil society, the main problem lies in the fact that nutrition is addressed with neither a holistic nor a human rights-based approach.⁸ Instead, quantitative indicators are used, thus ignoring the entire context of how food is produced: production models, water, land, biodiversity, energy, cultural context, women's rights, etc. By sidelining all of these aspects, false solutions to hunger and malnutrition are discussed, such as nutritional supplements and fortified foods.

We, civil society organizations, will not tire of repeating that all of this is unnecessary, in a world where 150% of the required food is produced, and where food is a political, not a technical problem, which needs to be addressed from a human rights-based approach: the right to food and nutrition cannot be separated from everything else.⁹

Even though we have managed to introduce agroecology into different FAO documents,¹⁰ in order to have real inclusion, the term would have to be placed on an equal footing with so-called 'climate smart agriculture', which is promoted by the private sector.¹¹ But we know that these two terms cannot simply coexist, because in order for agribusiness to survive, peasant farming would have to die. Half-hearted commitments by states are useless right now, as are the attempts to try and please all 'stakeholders'. The priority should lie in the needs and rights of human beings, not of business.

A NEW CONTEXT: THE URBAN PLANET

We should not forget that these developments take place in an era when more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. The development model driven by global entities prioritizes the development of cities, as these units replicate the system itself. Therefore, we should recognize that cities are fully dependent on the territory as a whole, especially in terms of food. Indeed, cities expand and encroach on what was once agricultural land, and as they do so, they engulf a workforce who are either from that country or other more disadvantaged countries.¹²

This urbanization leads to abject poverty and hunger in the peripheries of cities, where the majority of migrants live: hunger is no longer just a problem of countries in the Global South, but rather of cities that themselves reflect the North-South divide. Take for instance the life expectancy of Bronx (New York, USA), which is lower than that of Bangladesh.¹³ In cities like Glasgow (Scotland), the life expectancy of a person living in an affluent neighborhood is 30 years longer than that of a person living in an underprivileged neighborhood.¹⁴

Against this backdrop, we are witnessing the emergence of different initiatives that see food in cities from a more sustainable perspective, such as for example the Milan Pact, signed in October 2015. In order to be really transformational, these initiatives must be holistic and reconsider the city in its entirety, as well as the very social model that is promoted by most large urban centers. In this day and age, individualism has taken ownership of urban dwellers. To build a new system, we would have to recover our collective and communal vision, because our ego, in all of its insignificance, blinds us from the immensity of the issues at hand that go far beyond ourselves. To this end, more inclusive food governance models are being sought,¹⁵ such as food councils, where a crosscutting approach is taken in order to build new alternatives. However, there are no magic solutions: each context needs to find formulas based on participation and social inclusion.

WOMEN AS PILLARS OF FOOD SYSTEMS

In these new alternatives, we cannot but highlight the role played by women: for centuries women have sustained food production and human life. Women are the pillars of food systems, both as peasants—guardians of seeds and knowledge—and as carers, the latter as a result of patriarchy and gender labor division.¹⁶ Historically, women have fed the world yet they are also the most silenced victims. The hetero-patriarchal system, which only values large-scale activities that are considered productive and carried out in the public sphere, scorns and dismisses all other activities, yet these are the ones that really sustain the system. If women's historical labor were to be valued, capitalism and its calculating nature would be shattered. This is precisely why reconsidering and rebuilding the food system, nutrition and markets, would have to first of all guarantee women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights.¹⁷

Those of us who debate at forums such as the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS), often come up against a brick wall when we make such claims. Some states do not consider women's issues to be a priority; in some cases, women are not even viewed as subjects with their own rights. Indeed, we can say that women became a priority for agribusiness, as soon as they were identified as a significant consumer niche market. From supplements for breast milk, to nutrition

12 For more information, please see: Forster, Thomas and Emily Mattheisen. "Territorial Food Systems: Protecting the Rural and Localizing Human Rights Accountability". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 38–42. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/territorial-food-systems.

13 Petras, James F. "New-York fait éclater le mythe de la société pot-industrielle." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 1992. Available in French at: www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1992/04/PETRAS/44315.

14 VSF Justicia Alimentaria Global. *Viaje al centro de la alimentación que nos enferma*. Barcelona: VSF Justicia Alimentaria Global, 2016. Available in Spanish at: vsf.org.es/sites/default/files/campaign/informe_dameveneno.pdf.

15 One example worth highlighting is the Detroit Food Policy Council, in Michigan, USA, which designates six seats out of 21 for grassroots community residents. For more information, please see: Yakini, Malik. "From the Bottom Up: Building the Detroit Food Policy Council". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 43–44. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/territorial-food-systems.

16 For more information, please see article "From a Market Approach to the Centrality of Life: An Urgent Change for Women" in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

17 For more information, please see: Córdova Montes, Denisse, and Flávio L. S. Valente. "Interdependent and Indivisible: the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition and Women's sexual and Reproductive Rights". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014): 32–34. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf#page=32.

- 18 An interesting example is the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, which was born during the African Social Forum in Dakar in 2014. The convergence aims to construct a strong and united movement to defend the right to land, water and seeds. For more information, please see: Koné, Massa and Chantal Jacovetti. "The Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles in West Africa: Building a Strong and United People". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 52-54. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/global-convergence-land-and-water-struggles-west-africa.
- 19 Fred Wesonga is the Principal of Sheikh Technical Veterinary School and Reference Centre (ISTVS). Haileselassie Ghebremariam is the Head of Department for the degree program in Dryland Economics and Agro Ecosystems Management (DEAM) at ISTVS. ISTVS is a regional institution located in Sheikh, in the highlands of the Sahil region (Somaliland). Its aim is to support the provision of technical and professional personnel and to facilitate Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional networking to strengthen resilience and upgrade pastoral and agro-pastoral communities' livelihoods thereby releasing the full potential of the Horn of Africa's arid and semi-arid lands. Special thanks to Lucy Wood, Paola De Meo (Terra Nuova) and Nora McKeon (International University College Turin, Rome 3 University and Terra Nuova) for their support in reviewing this insight box.
- 20 Wesonga, Fred, Haileselassie Ghebremariam and Abdirahman Bare Dubad. *Milk marketing in Somaliland: A case study for the Hargeisa and Wajaale urban-rural milk supply chain*. ISTVS/IGAD. March 2016. Available at: drive.google.com/file/d/0B8k9Dj78FdL9ZGxrNURxVFRxVmc/view. For more information, please see: Food Security Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU). *Market Data Update October 2015–November 20, 2015*; and District Participatory Planning and Budgeting Process. *District Development Framework Hargeisa*, 2010. Available at: www.scribd.com/document/168354053/Documents-DDFs-DDF-Hargeisa.
- 21 Ministry of National Planning & Coordination. *Somaliland in Figures 2004*. Hargeisa: 2004. Available at: www.somalilandlaw.com/Somaliland_in_figures_2004.pdf.
- 22 Mosele, Luciano and Abdi Osman H.A. *Sustainable Peri-Urban Milk Value Chain Development in Somaliland 2013-2016*. International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (icipe). Available at: bit.ly/2IXUwEX.
- 23 Wesonga, *supra* note 20.
- 24 *Ibid.*

programs for girls or women at childbearing age, multinationals unroll their wide range of offers of products that add to the causes of malnutrition and objectification of women as mere incubators or walking uteruses. Real and transformational alternatives cannot be built if women are not considered as subjects with full rights and if we do not work towards their autonomy and real equity. Just as ecological or environmental economy is introduced as a new alternative, a feminist economy is key for the construction of another fairer world.

HUMAN RIGHTS FROM THE BOTTOM-UP

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to bolster unity and coordination among those civil society networks who advocate food sovereignty and agroecology as key tools in the struggle to preserve peasant agriculture and food systems that can really feed and 'cool' the planet. From past experience, social movements have realized that, irrespective of what sector they prioritize, they need to organize in a jointly manner, in order to denounce the unfair world that we live in and build other worlds.¹⁸ As discussed at the beginning of this article, this crisis will barely be solved with the 'technological optimism' that has caused it. Instead, a deconstruction and reconstruction of the food system in its entirety is required, along with the consequent reformulation of the social model. As we embark on that path, it is crucial that human rights be the basis of a narrative that still needs to be constructed: a narrative that is centered on the needs of peoples and of the planet, not the ambitions of businesses whose only objective is their own enrichment.

INSIGHT 4.1 The Milk Cooperative Movement in Somaliland: Pastoralists Reclaiming Food Sovereignty *Fred Wesonga and Haileselassie Ghebremariam*¹⁹

In Somaliland, situated in the arid Horn of Africa, livestock is the economic backbone and the main source of livelihood for the country's population of four million.²⁰ The livestock population is estimated at 10 million goats, 5 million sheep, 5 million camels and 2.5 million cattle.²¹ With up to 60% of the population relying on milk and milk products for household food security and income, the milk sector plays a key role in the food system. Women are primarily responsible for retail marketing (hawking and vending in shops/markets), while men assist with collection and transportation. Milk is consumed on average twice a day and provides approximately 60% of the total daily caloric intake amongst rural and urban populations.²²

COOPERATIVES ORGANIZE TO ENSURE GENUINE FOOD SECURITY

A milk marketing survey conducted in Somaliland in 2016 indicates that, although the marketing system is largely informal, the cooperative movement is gaining momentum.²³ The survey also concurs that locally produced fresh milk is preferred to imported milk.²⁴ Despite campaigns by various regionally-based international corporations promoting the consumption of packaged, pasteurized milk from the formal sector, raw milk remains popular. It is cheaper, has higher fat content, is widely accessible and comes in variable quantities to suit every consumer's purchasing power. Moreover, food is fundamental to identity: People prefer local food from their own culture if the quality is good and if it suits their daily rhythms.

Somaliland currently has five milk cooperatives that are registered with the government.²⁵ Membership is growing, with women increasingly filling prominent management roles. They benefit from legal registration, communication on animal health, linkages between milk chain actors and international organizations, and security in the markets. Additionally, these cooperatives support traditional pastoralist arrangements with all the above, as well as with the provision of milk cans, hygiene and sanitation.

In this context, the growing cooperative movement provides a platform for a traditional arrangement of women pastoralists to sensitize communities on the benefits of consuming raw milk and how it can lead to economic gains at the household level. Known as *hagbed*, this system builds on shared culture, values, and trust. Producers organize themselves in groups of 10–15 members with the objective of minimizing operational costs. Each member contributes towards the daily requirements of their customers. The milk is sold on behalf of one member, who retains the money. The following day they contribute milk to another producer and so on, until all members have had the opportunity to sell. Furthermore, in times of fluctuation in supply, traders can source milk from other cooperatives. The system guarantees consumers a regular supply of milk, while providing producers equal access to customers and safeguarding their incomes. This creates strong social and economic bonds among members, who together can safeguard their trade and face up to the many food safety challenges, including the highly perishable nature of milk, handling practices and cooling facilities.²⁶

This ‘informal’ marketing system promotes genuine food security, and should therefore be supported by appropriate policies and regulations that assure milk quality as well as investment in infrastructure and facilities to improve marketing and processing. This can be achieved through lobbying for policies and services that recognize and favor this ‘invisible’ trade.

LOOKING AHEAD: HOW TO SUSTAIN THE MILK PRODUCTION’S CONTRIBUTION TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Cooperative movements should be sustained, given the role they play in promoting food sovereignty for the people. They provide a mechanism by which people can participate politically, thereby influencing the government to formulate policies that are vital for the development of milk production and trade. Furthermore, cooperatives are instrumental in shielding the country from the dominance of transnational corporations (TNCs), which often operate systems that are detrimental to the development of the local economy. The milk marketing chain is efficient and sustainable, despite the popular belief that only TNCs are able to provide a dependable system in the dairy sector.

The country is now opening up to private sector investment, leading to the inevitable influx of TNCs. Local trade will thus be threatened, thereby contributing to food insecurity, and marginalizing women who are the backbone of the supply chain. To safeguard the existing methods of milk production, and its positive impacts on people’s wellbeing and rights, the national government and local authorities are called upon to implement the following measures:

- Uphold cooperative movements, as they can support the government in formulating policies that protect citizens’ rights to produce, trade and consume locally produced products;

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

- Strengthen the role of cooperatives, as they enable traders' access to credit and encourage a culture of savings to cushion against losses in adverse trading periods; and,
- Establish private insurance schemes to provide capital to milk traders who lose their investments due to spoilage or drought, in order to enable them to continue trading.

These claims are in line with the policy recommendations on small-scale producers and markets adopted by the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) at its 43rd plenary session in October 2016. Thanks to strong social movement and civil society advocacy, the CFS recognized that domestic markets embedded in territorial food systems are far more beneficial for food security, smallholder livelihoods, and rural economies than formal value chains. We call on states to recognize, support and defend small-scale producers through appropriate policies and investments.²⁷ Indeed, more than 80% of smallholders operate in territorial markets worldwide—and they channel around 70% of the food consumed in the world.²⁸

27 Civil Society Mechanism. "Connecting Smallholders to Markets: an analytical guide". 2016. Available at: www.csm4cfs.org/connecting-smallholders-markets-analytical-guide/.

28 Goita, Mamadou, Nora McKeon and Nadjirou Sall. "Peoples' Markets or Corporate Supply Systems? Negotiating in the Committee on World Food Security." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 41. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/territorial-food-systems.