

International Forum for Agroecology

Nyeléni Center, Sélingué, Mali
24-27 February 2015



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Other

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Foreword

We are pleased to present the report of the International Forum on Agroecology, held at the Nyéléni Center in Sélingué, Mali from 24th to the 27th of February, 2015. This represents the first joint vision of Agroecology from the shared viewpoints of all kinds of small-scale food producing peoples, seen from the perspectives of our social movements. This is the first common statement across constituencies, of the pillars and principles of Agroecology. We have endeavored to interpret, understand and share what Agroecology means from the diverse viewpoints of peasants, small-scale farmers, the landless, rural workers, indigenous peoples, hunter-gatherers, artisanal fisherfolk, pastoralists and nomadic peoples, urban communities, consumers and others.

As peoples who share the food system and the Mother Earth, and often the same territories, Agroecology is ours, built by our movements and organizations on our ancestral knowledge and on more recent decades of practical experience. This view of Agroecology is not just about agriculture, but takes into account the full diversity of food producing, gathering and consuming of our peoples.

Like Nyéléni in 2007, when the Food Sovereignty concept was expanded, deepened, and strengthened by the dialogue and collective construction among peoples' constituencies, and Porto Alegre in 2006, when the same happened with the concept of Agrarian Reform, the most important point about the Forum in Nyéléni in 2015 is that for the first time, Agroecology has gone through the same process ; it has been refined through the dialogue between the diverse knowledge of our peoples. In that spirit, we offer this report as but the first word in what will be an evolving dialogue carried out by our movements. Agroecology is an ongoing process, and our organizations are actively documenting, systematizing, analyzing and sharing our experiences, so our cumulative knowledge will continue to grow.

Finally, it is critical to note that Agroecology is currently under threat of appropriation and co-optation by institutional actors and the private sector, under names like "climate-smart agriculture," "sustainable intensification", industrial "organic," etc. These are false agroecologies, and we hope this report stands as an antidote to them, and as rallying point for our collective defense of Agroecology from co-optation.

In solidarity,

The International Steering Committee of the International Agroecology Forum Nyéléni 2015

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Declaration of Nyéléni 2015

Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology

Nyéléni, Mali

27 February 2015

We are delegates representing diverse organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people. Together, the diverse constituencies our organizations represent produce some 70% of the food consumed by humanity. They are the primary global investors in agriculture, as well as the primary providers of jobs and livelihoods in the world.

We gathered here at the Nyéléni Center in Sélingué, Mali from 24 to 27 of February 2015, to come to a common understanding of Agroecology as a key element in the construction of Food Sovereignty, and to develop joint strategies to promote Agroecology and defend it from co-optation. We are grateful to the people of Mali who have welcomed us in this beautiful land. They have taught us through their example, that the dialogue of our various forms of knowledge is based on respectful listening and on the collective construction of shared decisions. We stand in solidarity with our Malian sisters and brothers who struggle – sometimes sacrificing their lives – to defend their territories from the latest wave of land grabbing that affects so many of our countries. Agroecology means that we stand together in the circle of life, and this implies that we must also stand together in the circle of struggle against land grabbing and the criminalization of our movements.

BUILDING ON THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Our peoples, constituencies, organizations and communities have already come very far in defining Food Sovereignty as a banner of joint struggle for justice, and as the larger framework for Agroecology. Our ancestral production systems have been developed over millennia, and during the past 30 to 40 years this has come to be called Agroecology. Our Agroecology includes successful practices and production, involves farmer-to-farmer and territorial processes, training schools, and we have developed sophisticated theoretical, technical and political constructions.

In 2007 many of us gathered here at Nyéléni, at the Forum for Food Sovereignty, to strengthen our alliances and to expand and deepen our understanding of Food Sovereignty, through a collective construction between our diverse constituencies. Similarly, we gather here at the Agroecology Forum 2015 to enrich Agroecology through dialogue between diverse food producing peoples, as well as with consumers, urban communities, women, youth, and others. Today our movements, organized globally and regionally in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), have taken a new and historic step.

Our diverse forms of smallholder food production based on Agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas. As smallholders we defend our dignity when we choose to produce in an agroecological way.



OVERCOMING MULTIPLE CRISES

Agroecology is the answer to how to transform and repair our material reality in a food system and rural world that has been devastated by industrial food production and its so-called Green and Blue Revolutions. We see Agroecology as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life.

The corporate model over-produces food that poisons us, destroys soil fertility, is responsible for the deforestation of rural areas, the contamination of water and the acidification of oceans and killing of fisheries. Essential natural resources have been commodified, and rising production costs are driving us off the land. Farmers' seeds are being stolen and sold back to us at exorbitant prices, bred as varieties that depend on costly, contaminating agrochemicals. The industrial food system is a key driver of the multiple crises of climate, food, environmental, public health and others. Free trade and corporate investment agreements, Investor-State Dispute Settlement agreements, and false solutions such as carbon markets, and the growing financialization of land and food, etc., all further aggravate these crises. Agroecology within a Food Sovereignty framework offers us a collective path forward from these crises.

AGROECOLOGY AT A CROSSROADS

The industrial food system is beginning to exhaust its productive and profit potential because of its internal contradictions – such as soil degradation, herbicide-tolerant weeds, depleted fisheries, pest- and disease-ravaged monocultural plantations – and its increasingly obvious negative consequences of greenhouse gas emissions, and the health crisis of malnutrition, obesity, diabetes, colon disease and cancer caused by diets heavy in industrial and junk food.

Popular pressure has caused many multilateral institutions, governments, universities and research centers, some NGOs, corporations and others, to finally recognize "Agroecology". However, they have tried to redefine it as a narrow set of technologies, to offer some tools that appear to ease the sustainability crisis of industrial food production, while the existing structures of power remain unchallenged. This co-optation of Agroecology to fine-tune the industrial food system, while paying lip service to the environmental discourse, has various names, including "climate-smart agriculture", "sustainable-" or "ecological-intensification", industrial monoculture production of "organic" food, etc. For us, these are not Agroecology: we reject them, and we will fight to expose and block this insidious appropriation of Agroecology.

The real solutions to the crises of the climate, malnutrition, etc., will not come from conforming to the industrial model. We must transform it and build our own local food systems that create new rural-urban links, based on truly agroecological food production by peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, urban farmers, etc. We cannot allow Agroecology to be a tool of the industrial food production model: we see it as the essential alternative to that model, and as the means of transforming how we produce and consume food into something better for humanity and our Mother Earth.

OUR COMMON PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES OF AGROECOLOGY

Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It cannot be implemented the same way in all territories. Rather it is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of our territories, can and are practiced in many different ways, with each sector contributing their own colors of their local reality and culture, while always respecting Mother Earth and our common, shared values.

The production practices of Agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces our use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from industry. There is no use of agrottoxins, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies in Agroecology.

Territories are a fundamental pillar of Agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships to their lands. They are entitled to secure, develop, control, and reconstruct their customary social structures and to administer their lands and territories, including fishing grounds, both politically and socially. This implies the full recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, and constitutes the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.



Collective rights and access to the Commons are fundamental pillars of Agroecology. We share access to territories that are the home to many different peer groups, and we have sophisticated customary systems for regulating access and avoiding conflicts that we want to preserve and to strengthen.

The diverse knowledge and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to Agroecology. We develop our ways of knowing through dialogue among them (*diálogo de saberes*). Our learning processes are horizontal and peer-to-peer, based on popular education. They take place in our own training centers and territories (farmers teach farmers, fishers teach fishers, etc.), and are also intergenerational, with exchange of knowledge between youth and elders. Agroecology is developed through our own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding.

The core of our cosmovisions is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. We recognize that as humans we are but a part of nature and the cosmos. We share a spiritual connection with our lands and with the web of life. We love our lands and our peoples, and without that, we cannot defend our Agroecology, fight for our rights, or feed the world. We reject the commodification of all forms of life.

Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which Agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what make it possible to scale-up Agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.

The autonomy of Agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It means we minimize the use of purchased inputs that come from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers, and is based on the solidarity of shared risks and benefits.

Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.

Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward. Migration and globalization mean that women's work is increasing, yet women have far less access to resources than men. All too often, their work is neither recognized nor valued. For Agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration.

Youth, together with women, provide one of the two principal social bases for the evolution of Agroecology. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many of our societies. Youth bear the responsibility for carrying forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. They are the stewards of Agroecology for future generations. Agroecology must create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership.

STRATEGIES

We are building, defending and strengthening Agroecology together with others. Our evolving strategies include:

I. Promotion of agroecological production through policies that...

1. Are territorial and holistic in their approach to social, economic and natural resources issues.
2. Secure access to land and resources in order to encourage long-term investment by small-scale food producers.
3. Ensure an inclusive and accountable approach to the stewardship of resources, food production, public procurement policies, urban and rural infrastructure, and urban planning.
4. Promote truly democratized planning processes in conjunction with relevant local governments and authorities.
5. Promote appropriate health and sanitation regulations that do not discriminate against small-scale food producers and processors who practice Agroecology.
6. Promote policy to integrate the health and nutrition aspects of Agroecology and of traditional medicines.
7. Ensure pastoralists' access to and control over pastures, migration routes and sources of water as well as mobile services such as health, education and veterinary services that are based on and compatible with traditional practice.
8. Ensure customary rights to the Commons. Ensure seed policies that guarantee the collective rights of peasants to use, exchange, breed, select and sell their own seeds.
9. Attract and support young people to join agroecological food production through strengthening access to land and natural resources, ensuring fair income, knowledge exchange and transmission.
10. Support urban and peri-urban agroecological production.
11. Protect the rights of communities that practice wild capture, hunting and gathering in their traditional areas – and encourage the ecological and cultural restoration of territories to their former abundance.
12. Implement policies that ensure the rights of fishing communities.
13. Implement the Voluntary Guidelines on the Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests of the Committee on World Food Security and the Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Small-scale Fisheries of the FAO.
14. Develop and implement policies and programs that guarantee the right to a dignified life for rural workers, including true agrarian reform, and Agroecology training.

II. Knowledge sharing

1. Horizontal exchanges (peasant-to-peasant, fisher-to-fisher, pastoralist-to-pastoralist, consumer-and-producer, etc.) and intergenerational exchanges between generations and across different traditions, including new ideas. Women and youth must be prioritised.
2. Peoples' control of the research agenda, objectives and methodology.
3. Systemize experience to learn from and build on historical memory.

III. Recognition of the central role of women

1. Fight for equal women's rights in every sphere of Agroecology, including workers' and labour rights, access to the Commons, direct access to markets, and control of income

2. Programs and projects must fully include women at all stages, from the earliest formulation through planning and application, with decision-making roles.

IV. Build local economies

1. Promote local markets for local products.

2. Support the development of alternative financial infrastructure, institutions and mechanisms to support both producers and consumers.

3. Reshape food markets through new relationships of solidarity between producers and consumers.

4. Develop links with the experience of solidarity economy and participatory guarantee systems, when appropriate.

V. Further develop and disseminate our vision of Agroecology

1. Develop a communications plan for our vision of Agroecology

2. Promote the health care and nutritional aspects of Agroecology

3. Promote the territorial approach of Agroecology

4. Promote practices that allows youth to carry forward the permanent regeneration of our agroecological vision

5. Promote Agroecology as a key tool to reduce food waste and loss across the food system

VI. Build alliances

1. Consolidate and strengthen existing alliances such as with the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)

2. Expand our alliance to other social movements and public research organizations and institutions

VII. Protect biodiversity and genetic resources

1. Protect, respect and ensure the stewardship of biodiversity

2. Take back control of seeds and reproductive material and implement producers' rights to use, sell and exchange their own seeds and animal breeds

3. Ensure that fishing communities play the most central role in controlling marine and inland waterways



VIII. Cool the planet and adapt to climate change

1. Ensure international institutions and governments recognize Agroecology as defined in this document as a primary solution for tackling and adapting to climate change, and not “climate-smart agriculture” or other false versions of Agroecology
2. Identify, document and share good experiences of local initiatives on Agroecology that address climate change.

IX. Denounce and fight corporate and institutional capture of Agroecology

1. Fight corporate and institutional attempts to grab Agroecology as a means to promote GMOs and other false solutions and dangerous new technologies.
2. Expose the corporate vested interests behind technical fixes such as climate-smart agriculture, sustainable intensification and “fine-tuning” of industrial aquaculture.
3. Fight the commodification and financialization of the ecological benefits of Agroecology.

We have built Agroecology through many initiatives and struggles. We have the legitimacy to lead it into the future. Policy makers cannot move forward on Agroecology without us. They must respect and support our agroecological processes rather than continuing to support the forces that destroy us. We call on our fellow peoples to join us in the collective task of collectively constructing Agroecology as part of our popular struggles to build a better world, a world based on mutual respect, social justice, equity, solidarity and harmony with our Mother Earth.



1. Introduction

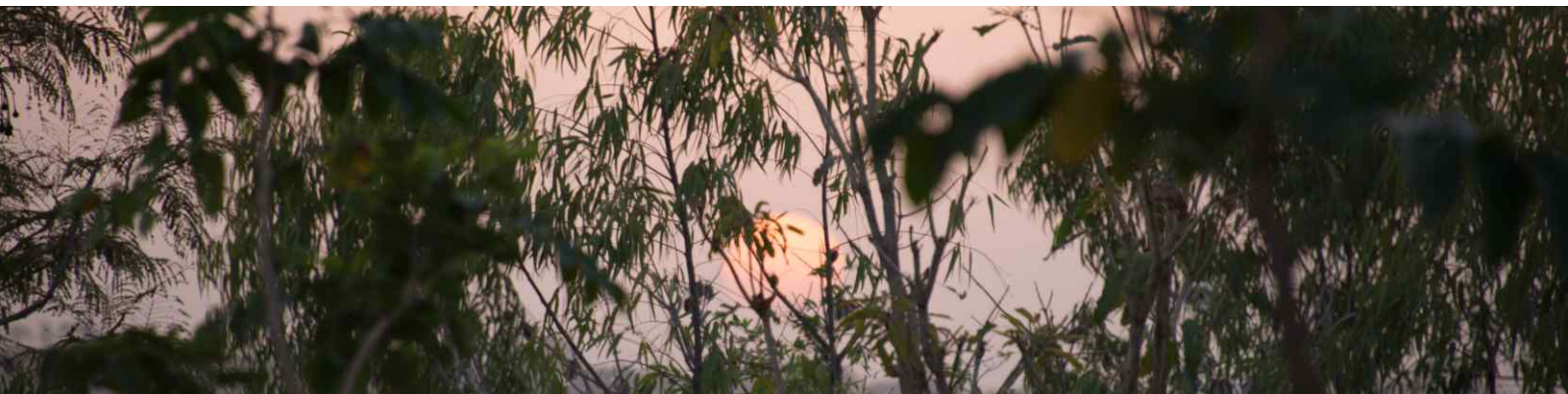
Our diverse forms of smallholder food production based on Agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas. As smallholders we defend our dignity when we choose to produce in an agroecological way. That is why Agroecology is our agenda, and a key element in the construction of Food Sovereignty.

To further this agenda, from February 24th to 27th, 2015, the International Forum on Agroecology, held in the Nyéléni Center in Sélingué, Mali, West Africa, brought together diverse sectors from around the world to share experiences, knowledge and strategies for the global agroecological movement. During four intense days of work, peasant farmers, fisher folk, herders, indigenous peoples, elders, urban communities, conscious consumers and representatives of civil society came to a common understanding of Agroecology. We agreed that Agroecology is a way of life, and is based on principles that can and are practiced in many different ways, while always respecting Mother Earth and our common, shared values.

We put agroecological food production into the context of ongoing global change: the privatization of the Commons by transnational capital, climate change largely fueled by the global agribusiness model, and the increasing recognition for the input by social movement actors in the debates that define better directions for social and economic development.

We see Agroecology as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life. Corporate agribusiness is a more obvious failure with each passing day. Despite never-ending public-to-private subsidies and colossal energy expenditure, the profit-led food system has been unable to make food accessible to hundreds of millions of people, many of whom live in rural areas. Land concentration, export agriculture, monoculture, giant feed lots, corporate fishing fleets, agrochemical inputs and seed privatization are all part of the same model that has devastated our planet's soil, sea, freshwater and forest resources, disenfranchised, small-scale food producers and consumers alike, and forced industrially produced food onto the plates of much of the world's population. The global climate disaster is bringing urgency to the issue of how to change humanity's corporate-dominated food systems.

Agroecological practices yield ample, diverse and nutritious foods, restore local economies and ecosystems, promote smallholder autonomy and resilience, preserve rural culture and knowledge, counteract the effects of global climate change and biodiversity loss, and can transform broader social relations. These attributes have led Agroecology to gain increasing recognition by policy makers and institutions. Many countries have begun to incorporate an agroecological perspective into their national policies and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has shown increasing interest in the agroecological framework. Even institutions intimately tied into the interests of transnational agribusiness have reacted, mostly by putting their weight behind potentially lucrative false “solutions” such as climate-smart agriculture (CSA), sustainable intensification, and others, which are presented as “triple-win” options for gaining food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation. In reality, these are false solutions that seek to incorporate certain agroecological practices into the dominant agribusiness model, while maintaining the structural dependencies that have led to the current global crises.





The International Forum on Agroecology, Nyéléni 2015, achieved a powerful synthesis of ideas and strategies from the participating representatives of the world's food producers. Delegates firmly rejected the attempts to co-opt Agroecology into any political framework compatible with the current domination of food systems by transnational corporations. Rather, the discussions about context, practice and strategy of the Agroecology movement produced clear principles that align Agroecology with Food Sovereignty, structural transformations of society, decolonization processes, conservation of diverse traditions of knowledge, culture and practice, women's emancipation and gender equality, construction of solidarity economies, and restoration of deep spiritual and material ties between society and living nature. The connection between Agroecology and the goal of creating a better world was made clear during the Forum.

At the same time, many of the practical issues related to how to advance Agroecology were debated during the forum. Agroecosystem transitions, access to markets and economic viability, producer networks, closer relationships between food producers and consumers, seed and agrobiodiversity, were all discussion themes during working group sessions. Particular care was taken to create a forum methodology that reflected the breadth of agroecological perspectives. Round table discussions, working groups and smaller break-out sessions created propitious situations for participants to share their diverse experiences. The process of framing the issues, small discussion groups, and participatory synthesis was repeated throughout the forum on diverse themes and in different languages, thanks to the tireless work of an extraordinary team of voluntary interpreters. This effort to create synthesis and conclusions has led to the creation of this report, in the hope of drawing out the lessons of local experiences and efforts to build Agroecology across the world.

Our Goals:

- **Share our knowledge, practices and experiences of agroecological food production**
- **Collectively deepen our understanding of Agroecology, its pillars and its context**
- **Build political, organizational and economic strategies for scaling up Agroecology**
- **Strengthen our capacity to work together across sectors, continents, generations and genders**

2. Methods and process: Building an International Forum on Agroecology

The first day of the Forum made the vast diversity of the delegates very clear. Delegates had arrived from all corners of the globe. It was a moment of self-discovery for the Forum. Throughout the Forum, delegates enjoyed meals that were fully sourced from local producers that used many local and traditional ingredients, and interpreters in wooden booths at the rear of the room rendered the speeches simultaneously into French, Bambara, English, and Spanish.

The Forum's host movement, the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOP-Mali) showed its enormous strength, as dozens of Malian men and women previously trained as Agroecology trainers in the Nyéléni center or other sites across the country made their way into the assembly.

The Forum was designed to ensure that each constituency and sector would have opportunities to express and organize their ideas and concerns in the form of strategic action planning as well as information-sharing sessions.

The Forum was organised with a limited budget. The responsible way in which the funds were managed and spent, combined with the considerable contributions by volunteers ensured the budget was respected.



Thematic working groups

The Forum agenda included thematic working group sessions that were divided into nine central themes and strategic issues related to Agroecology.

THEMES

- Agroecology grows from our diverse experiences and practices
- Our knowledge and the threat of co-optation
- A system that produces crises
- Agroecology sustains livelihoods
- Agroecology cultivates biodiversity and cools the planet
- Agroecology respects Mother Earth: territories, lands, soils, pastures and water
- Agroecology is economically viable
- Organization, articulation, knowledge-sharing and movement-building
- Building a common political agenda to defend our way of life

CAUCUSES

Women
Youth

SECTORS

Peasants and small scale farmers
Fisherfolk
Pastoralists and herders
Indigenous Peoples
The Landless
Workers
Urban communities
Conscious consumers

PARTICIPATION OF PUBLIC POLICY MAKERS

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the Malian Ministry of Agriculture participated in the Forum and made statements for the opening of the Forum. The FAO representative expressed their belief that Agroecology and Food Sovereignty are connected, and their interest in working with non-State actors.

Soil degradation is a grave threat, according to the representative of the Malian Ministry of Agriculture. The productions of forest resources, crops and livestock - and the income of millions of families - depend on protecting and rebuilding soils.



3. Opening speech: Time to mobilize, to create synergies

“Dear friends, you who have come from across Asia, from Central America, North and South America, Europe, all of Africa and from Mali. In the name of the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations of Mali, and on behalf the name of all the movements that support Agroecology at this forum, in the name of this Forum steering committee, I have the privilege to welcome you all to Mali.

I am honoured to open the International Forum for Agroecology in Mali; it is a highly important moment for us. Right now, everyone is talking about the goal of better agriculture, virtuous agriculture, and these words are in each and every political speech. But the reality is not coherent with these words.

When we talk about Agroecology, what are we really talking about? Who are we talking about? Small-scale producers, artisanal fisherfolk, nomadic herders, indigenous people, representatives of social movements and civil society whose aim is first and foremost to produce for their own consumption, and then to supply local markets. So we must thank them for providing food for us all.

All these categories of small-scale producers are represented at this Forum, so that they can raise their voices and be heard together. Nowadays, giant corporations have captured the idea, and are talking about Agroecology. But they are not the legitimate actors, and they have deformed our concepts and reduced them to technical tools.

Why? Everybody is wondering what the future will hold, and what will be left for us on earth. Humanity has gone too far... By putting the market economy before everything, humankind has become an endangered species.

As a result, we have to endure the disastrous effects of climate change—We stand helplessly by every day as we see drought, hurricanes, tornados.... This is why everyone is worried and wondering how we can respond to this global challenge. We, as social movements have to mobilize together, and build synergies. We will not let anyone devastate our planet anymore. The only way to save our Mother Earth is by moving forwards towards a production model that genuinely respects the environment. We refuse to submit to the World Bank and to the International Monetary Fund's policies, to the WTO, climate-smart agriculture and carbon trading.

In Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas, rural people are struggling to survive every single day. With the help of urban consumers we can create a worldwide movement to protect and preserve our planet and the future of generations to come.

Since time immemorial, when humans began to cultivate the land, producers have preserved and developed a wonderful diversity of plants and livestock. This heritage is priceless - and we must protect it from those who seek to destroy it. Producers are not creating this problem. The problem is that governments only listen to transnational corporations and the interest of capital investors who fund political parties. Yet we represent the majority, the broadest sector of the population. So we can mobilise and fight for fairer policies and justice that will provide the basis for the solutions.

Thank you for coming! God bless you all!”



**Ibrahima Coulibaly, President,
National Coordination of Peasant
Organizations (CNOP), Mali**

3. Caucuses at the Forum

Women

Women were the first food producers and they have a unique and vital role to play in fixing our broken food system! The presence of diverse women of all ages and cultures brought a sense of urgency and wisdom to the International Forum. Along with their Malian sisters from CNOP, female international delegates brought important elements into the debate at the Forum. During the first day, women delegates held a caucus meeting to clarify ideas and create a common set of principles for the Forum. Part of this effort included a critical perspective about the way that gender equality has been used within conventional development programs.

Women's access to the Commons was at the forefront of the debate in Nyéléni. Policy that normalizes individual private property relations is not the only way, or indeed the best way to transform gender relations or improve women's access to resources. Women expressed the need for State support for collective, agroecological initiatives, especially those stemming from grassroots organizations and social movements. Policy that supports women's seed saving, women's participation in community fishery and forestry management, productive credit for women's food production, commercialization and consumption networks, and women's agroecological training, is urgently needed.

Needs identified by the women's caucus

- More training of peasants on agroecological practices including the preparation of local products such as compost and natural pesticides.
- Facilitate access to markets for agroecologically produced products
- Mobilize financial resources and increased access to credit for agroecological producers.
- Create more spaces for farmers to exchange views and experiences
- Promote local knowledge and varieties and raise awareness of the value of Agroecology
- End discriminatory attitudes towards women's involvement and leadership

The women's caucus concluded that the Forum declaration must reflect joint responsibility towards future generations, and Agroecology as a viable alternative to the dominant system.



Youth

Young people are perhaps the essential key to the Agroecology movement. Before new ideas can change the world, it often takes fresh, young minds to successfully push them forward. If the current generation of youth is able to create a generational dynamic of change towards Agroecology, then agroecological farming can “scale-up” and slow down or stop global warming. Unfortunately, our youth are constantly being bombarded with elements of capitalist culture that erode self-esteem and internalize capitalist values such as greed, superficiality, and a desire for immediate gratification. The challenges of self-determination, identity, and cultural struggle were discussed by young people during a caucus meeting during day one of the Forum.

One major problem is youth migration from the countryside to seek job opportunities in the cities. The Green Revolution model seeks to use mechanization and chemicals to reduce the human labor associated with food production to a minimum. At the same time as industrial farming and fishing are destroying rural economies, peasant agriculture is often seen by young people as drudgery, and less interesting than work in cities. There is a widespread belief that food production is a job for the uneducated. Agroecology can change this, because the dialogue it creates between different ideas and ways of working can restore the dignity and recognition of ancestral knowledge. It can also provide interesting, healthy jobs that allow young people to continue learning through their work.

Needs identified by the youth caucus

It is important to create space for youth to self-determine their future and what they want for their lives. There is also a lack of trust by governments in youth's potential contribution, and a consequent limited mobilization of funds and other resources to address the needs of youth. In some countries, a macho culture prevents young women from taking a leadership role in Agroecology. Additionally, in some systems the land belongs to the clan (or the extended family) and the elders are in control. This leaves very little control over land for youth.

Training programs, helpful governmental policies, and rejuvenated pride in food production as a career, were three ideas generated by the youth caucus. Contacts and partnerships between old and young farmers can help to provide access to land for youth (who have abundant energies but often lack land, whereas the opposite tends to apply to aging farmers) and transfer of experience and knowledge.

The youth caucus called upon the the Agroecology Forum to: identify ways to increase active participation of youth in decision-making, and a clear articulation and definition of Agroecology as opposed to the dominant system. The caucus also pointed out a missed opportunity in the program for the exchange or sales of peasant products.



5. Sectors at the Forum

The Forum Steering Committee

We need to re-position food at the center of society. Agroecology is not just an alternative - it is our way of life. We have built it through thousands of years of learning, testing, breeding, planting. Now we have the answers for feeding the world, defending biodiversity, controlling seeds, taking care of our grandchildren. If we can come together in our great diversity, we can solve the global crisis. But we need better policy.

Our knowledge is at the heart of Agroecology. Our diverse experiences, across sectors and across the planet, make us - the world's people - the legitimate actors for creating agroecological strategies. We must defend our right to produce, to manage the Commons, to save seeds and biodiversity and to share knowledge. We will not let Agroecology be taken away from us.

“Seven years ago we came together around Food Sovereignty, which is about autonomy for our peoples. Now, we come together once more around Agroecology, a path we have been constructing with many organizations from the bottom up. Agroecology is the process we use to generate food from land and water; it is the way of life we have chosen.”

- María Noel Salgado Spinatelli
(MAELA, from Uruguay)

“We are the answers! We want the world to recognize we are the first researchers, producers and breeders. In our territories we are building our future, we are building a model that can last, that is not based on oil but on our knowledge and respect for nature, on our organizations, and on the way we live together. We have the answers and we want this to be the answer for the world. Agroecology and Food Sovereignty cannot be separated from one another, or both lose their meaning.”

Andrea Ferrante
(La Vía Campesina, from Italy)



“If you believe in Agroecology, then you must practice it.”

**Nelson Mudzingwa
(La Vía Campesina, Zimbabwe)**



“When we, Indigenous Peoples, speak about agroecology we are really speaking about our ancestors. For us agroecology happens when we can apply our traditional knowledge, celebrate our ceremonies, and respect our traditions. Not all indigenous peoples are peasants, some may be hunters, gatherers or fishers, but we all practice agroecology in a holistic manner. For us it is a circle, for which we need our native seeds, our songs, our water and lands. ”

**Nicole Maria Yanes
(International Indian Treaty Council, from Mexico)**

**Youth and women are the fundament of agroecology
as a radical way to construct a new society and productive system.**

**Blain Snipstal
(LVC youth caucus, from the US)**

Herders and pastoralists

Mobility shapes all aspects of pastoralists' lives: their culture, production system and needs. Pastoralists must have access and control of pastures, migration routes and sources of water that are spread throughout their territories and this requires mobility. Pastoralists require services such as health, education and veterinary services that conform to their cultures, and that are mobile.

Pastoralists are losing their essential common resources such as pastures. This is being taken away because of land grabs in various forms. Throughout the world the softest target for land grabbing are common resources.

The so-called green and white revolutions have destroyed their production system. Markets are now based on endless wants rather than limited needs. Situated mostly in the arid zones of the world, pastoralists are at the forefront of the impact of climate change and access to fodder and water is often very urgent. Without harmony with nature, pastoralism is not possible. The knowledge of pastoralists and their contribution to ecological balance is ignored or denied by decision-makers.

Pastoralism has always been based on integration of different types of livelihoods, for example integration with farming such as grazing of harvest fields in exchange for manure to ensure the fertility of farmers' fields. Pastoralists and farmers have had thousands of years of co-existence and inter-dependence, including conflict resolution systems, all of which have been eroded in the last 50 years. We can work together to bring back this integration.



Fisherfolk

National laws and regulatory frameworks do not protect fisherfolk and fishing communities. These laws are designed to commercialise and privatize resources in our oceans and water bodies - placing them out of reach of fishers. Added to this, the mining of the coastline and the seabed destroys the natural habitat of fish and other natural marine resources. It is the effect of this that leads to a reduction in fish stock and thus loss of livelihoods. This ocean grabbing and the grabbing of adjacent coastal land results in the loss of the sense of 'community' for fishers and the connection they have with the ocean and inland water bodies. Adopting an agroecological approach in fisheries means caring about the availability of fish for future generations, and respecting the rhythms of regeneration of marine resources. It means income, food and life for fishers and the community at large. The land is our mother, as is the sea. United we can defend them.

***“CNOP planted a tree, but the tree needs water in order to grow.”
- Peasants from Mali, on how CNOP supported peasant-to-peasant
learning and the need for continuation.***

**“Adopting an agroecological approach in fisheries means caring about the
availability of fish for future generations and respecting the rhythms of
regeneration of marine resources. Defend Mother Earth! Defend Mother Sea!”**

**Magline Peter
(World Forum of Fisher Peoples, from India)**

Peasants and small scale farmers

Conventional agriculture is being promoted, but we need to continue putting agroecological knowledge into practice: we did not invent it, but rather have inherited it from our parents and ancestors. Peasants want to practice Agroecology to improve yields, sustain local economies, provide nutritious and affordable food. We need to have tangible examples on the ground to convince the world that Agroecology works. For example, the small millet grains we produce are much more nutritious than the bigger ones that are promoted in the Green Revolution. It is important that we continue to practice and experiment, and collect more examples. It is difficult to fight a giant, but even by simply conserving the seed varieties we inherited from our fathers and mothers, we are doing just that. It is the soil's responsibility to feed the crop, but it is the farmer's responsibility to feed and nurture the soil. Then the soil will feed us all.

Indigenous Peoples

For Indigenous Peoples, Agroecology happens when we can apply our traditional knowledge, celebrate our ceremonies, respect our traditions, and speak of our ancestors. This cannot be separated: it is a whole. Not all Indigenous Peoples are peasants. Some are hunters and gatherers for example, but when we talk about Agroecology it means we approach this in a holistic manner. Agroecology is in the center of the circle; everything is tied together. We are facing similar problems to those of other sectors, for example our youth are leaving for the cities. As Indigenous Peoples we focus strongly on sovereignty, the ability to choose for ourselves. We must ensure that all food-related policies and programs affecting Indigenous Peoples, including the protection of Indigenous seeds and traditional practices, are carried out in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and with the full and effective participation and Free Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples.

In UNDRIP, we find article 31 of particular importance: the right of indigenous Peoples to develop, control and maintain cultural heritage, traditions, technologies and knowledge including genetic resources. Our task is to implement this at all levels on a daily basis. As did the youth, we also suggest using spaces like this Forum in the future as a place to trade and exchange knowledge, products and seeds.



Workers

Workers are the most direct victims of the chemical food model. For decades, workers' lives have borne the burden of agrochemical dependence in agriculture, suffering cancer, birth defects, sterility, nerve damage and other serious health impacts. It has now been finally demonstrated beyond any possible doubt that glyphosate causes cancer - but how many workers have had to die for this to become public knowledge? In Central America, tens of thousands of sugar cane workers have been killed by the same kind of kidney failure, all caused by agrochemicals. When will these people's families have justice? In the agribusiness model, the lives of workers and landless mean next to nothing.

Human health is linked to the dominant agricultural model. For this reason, Agroecology is nothing new to us - it is the form of production that we have always practiced on the small pieces of land upon which we have grown our own food.

Landless

The landless are producers who have been displaced by capitalism. Landless women face especially difficult challenges – they are often excluded from farm jobs due to conventional agriculture's macho bias. We have a right to produce healthy food using Agroecology. Access to land is a fundamental part of the struggle for agroecology. For the health of all landless workers, we struggle for access to land, Agroecology and human dignity.

Urban communities

Urban agriculture represents a powerful option for Agroecology, not only in terms of food produced, but also as an educational tool. Generally there is also an increased understanding of links between rural and urban areas, and how the food system should be dealt with inside “urban” governance. Local authorities and city-region policy makers have a huge role to play in supporting the development of local, agroecological food systems which can be reflected in laws and policies that promote participatory decision-making from production to consumption.

Many new national constitutions state that human rights must underpin public action, which is very relevant to the right to food. Therefore if governments fail to provide access to food it would be a violation of the constitution. This can also be used to push for access to land. A new urban policy is also being drafted in countries like Kenya that addresses issues of nutrition and social inclusion. An interesting new practice is that pastoralists bring their livestock to the cities, providing manure as organic fertilizer.

“In Kenya, the new constitution allows us to defend the right to land as a human right.”

Kuria Gathuru
(Habitat International Coalition, from Kenya)

Conscious consumers

Building alternative food systems, especially direct distribution and solidarity relationships where the risks and benefits of production are shared, is a priority in the agroecological approach. This includes the need to focus on Food Policy Councils that bring all the actors together at territorial level. Solidarity economies in their various forms provide the key to supporting agroecological economic change.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a model of solidarity between producers and consumers, of deepening linkages between producers and consumers, which can also redistribute wealth. Not only governments are responsible for redistributing wealth, families and communities can also initiate their own processes. About 1-1.5 million consumers worldwide participate in CSA, and in some cases jointly work on a budget with the farmers, to accommodate both their needs and those of the producers. Key words in community supported agriculture are: solidarity and a sense of shared risk and shared benefits.



“FAO is convinced that Agroecology has an important role to play in eradicating hunger in Africa and elsewhere.”

Sylvana Ntaryamira
(FAO)

6. Themes

Agroecology grows from our diverse experiences and practices

Our knowledge and the threat of co-optation

Our agroecological knowledge comes from what we have inherited from our ancestors. This knowledge allows peasants and farmers to produce healthy food in harmony with nature. However, this knowledge is also there for fisherfolk and pastoralists. In the same way that peasants create ways of living with and from Mother Earth, traditional fishing is part of living with Mother Sea. We have also seen how traditions of herding and grazing can work for thousands of years in harmony with the cycles of nature.

Peasants teach peasants, fisherfolk teach fisherfolk

We believe this knowledge is the basis of what we call 'Agroecology' today. We have dialogues among ourselves as grassroots sectors, but also share our peoples' knowledge and some elements of Western science. We have our practices when we fish, plant, harvest, eat. It is important, therefore, that we actively remember our knowledge, document, exchange, and share and teach it to others, and use it in our daily activities. There are many peasant-to-peasant exchange processes and cases of horizontal learning; many in our movement have training schools where peasants teach peasants, fisherfolk teach fisherfolk, pastoralists teach pastoralists. This is critical; we need to link these processes and make them visible.

When we create processes of dialogue, we often come up with new ideas, like Food Sovereignty, but it is important to remember that these ideas stem from our knowledge, our experience, and our heritage. Food sovereignty is a powerful political tool. From our lands, our sea, our pastures, Food Sovereignty has allowed us to move together towards a common objectives.

Conform or transform?

However, we are facing the threat of co-optation of our knowledge and of Agroecology. Many institutions are now adopting the concept of Agroecology, but some of these use it as a tool to legitimize, sustain and replicate the dominant model. The FAO held a forum on Agroecology in 2014. What we saw at that forum is that Agroecology is at a crossroads, it has been "discovered" by institutions and they have a very different idea of Agroecology. They see that the industrial food system is facing some challenges that may compromise the profitability of corporations in the future. There will not be enough fish; soils will be depleted. Their vision of Agroecology is as a set of production techniques that can conform to the industrial agriculture model without challenging the model per se. Just like climate-smart agriculture, Agroecology would be another nice-sounding concept that ultimately means more of the same.

However, to us, Agroecology will never be a tool to prolong the dominant model. For us Agroecology is not a tool for making the industrial food system more sustainable. It is a radical alternative to that model. We see Agroecology as a tool for transformation and radical change. We propose people's Agroecology for people's power.

When you have a new idea, first they ignore you, then they make fun of you, then they try to take what you've been promoting away from you, so that you are eventually out of the picture and dispossessed. Even Monsanto is using Agroecology to greenwashing itself its image the term. Peasants know how to keep the soil productive and now this knowledge is at risk of being co-opted. We lost sustainable development; let's not lose Agroecology. We are determined not to let this happen.

It's time to defend Agroecology from co-optation. For us to do that, it is crucial to achieve a common, agreed upon, unambiguous vision definition of Agroecology, and a clear strategic plan on how to defend it. We need to enumerate pillars and principles of our shared vision of the people's Agroecology, that is not an industrial, academic version of Agroecology, or Monsanto's or even FAO's Agroecology, but people's Agroecology based on our knowledge.

A system that produces crises

We are living in a time of continued economic crises, despite what the corporate media might suggest. The last acute crisis was in 2007-2008, when grain prices soared. As part of the same process, we also witnessed land grabbing. The crisis is not over. Most media will now say we are back on track, but we know that this is not the case.

The problem is inherent to the capitalist economic system. As the world's population grows, there is a fight for natural resources. This is getting more dramatic, and it manifests itself in landgrabbingland grabbing, water grabbing and seed grabbing. Companies are trying to make farmers dependent on always having to buy seeds. Another issue is financial speculation, a kind of gambling, making money from money, not really producing anything. Not everyone is getting poorer, a few people are getting richer and many people are getting poorer than before.

Investing in disaster

This situation is only possible because of the partnerships between international investment and local elites. We were asked to believe that “the market” would solve all our problems; we have seen especially with last economic crises that the neoliberal form of markets do not work - not only do they fail to reduce hunger, they actually are increase it. The situation is becoming increasingly complex: today, not all big investors are from the North, some are also from South. Moreover, they are investing both in the North and the South, so power is now shared in many different parts of the world. These investors are also taking over the entire value chain – processing, marketing, the entire system of production and consumption is controlled by the same actors.

Resource grabbing

Local businesses can't compete with multinational businesses. If national businesses are successful, they are usually bought out by international corporations. These same corporations are interested in countries in the South, as they represent attractive, emerging markets. Markets in the North are saturated; it is impossible for people to consume more than they currently do. Capturing African markets for their products is one of their objectives.

“In Mozambique we have good land and good soil but the issue is that there is an on-going conflict over those lands—driven by corporations that are trying to take over that land. Government megaprojects with foreign interests and monocultures are in direct conflict with peasants' access to land. Agroecology is a threat for these corporations, because to practice Agroecology you need land.”

**Munenganu José Basquete
(La Vía Campesina, from Mozambique)**



Multilateral organisations and Agroecology

The FAO has recognised the principle of civil society's autonomy and self-organisation. We are in a good position therefore to negotiate with them. The FAO organised a symposium on Agroecology last year, and we attended this event. It emphasized a scientific approach; they talked about the ecological problems of industrial agriculture, but not the social problems. Their view was that Agroecology has to be scientific, driven by academics and researchers, so this sends out a mixed message to us. However, different opportunities exist with the FAO. The FAO has said it wants to continue these dialogues at regional level. This is positive; but we want to negotiate, in order to organise field partnerships that take place directly in farmers' fields.

IFAD (the International Fund for Agriculture and Development) functions like a bank and it funds agricultural projects. It is not interested in questioning the dominant model, it is business as usual, and there is little space for political negotiation. The UN Environmental Program is drawing closer to the private sector. It is not very interesting as a partner. The CFS (Committee on World Food Security) is a committee of the UN, it exists within the FAO, but it is not the FAO itself. It functions with the strong participation of civil society and social movements, who have an equal say and funding available to work on policy, through the unique Civil Society Mechanism. Until recently, we were confronted by a great deal of difficulty in these talks; because national governments were scared that Agroecology was too political a concept, they preferred to talk about sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, civil society organisations are not united; there needs to be stronger alignment between them, as for some organisations, Agroecology is not a priority.

Increasing repression

The economic crisis also leads to many forms of repression - active repression. On one hand, we see violence - including in the northern part of Mali. There are many armed conflicts, often started intentionally and without the means of ending them. The question is, under these conditions, what space is there for Agroecology? Another form of repression is co-optation. This means that those of us who are fighting to transform the system are invited to come and sit around the table, dialogue, work in partnership, be nice, we are asked to cooperate and reduce some of our demands. These are some of the prominent features of our current system.

“In Mali, 85% of the population work the land. Peasants and small producers have collective rights, common ownership of the land through recognition of customary law. People can go and work in the fields. Women can pick fruit and nuts. However, World Bank-backed land titling programs have led to unprecedented land sales. The problem is that multinationals wanted to work on land that was being cultivated and send the peasants elsewhere. It is cheaper for these companies to work on land that is already being cultivated. This simple fact has led to a lot of repression, violence and death. Multinationals only do business. Defending Agroecology means defending land.”

Representative of the Malian Convergence against Land Grabbing

Agroecology sustains livelihoods

Some pillars of Agroecology that sustain livelihoods

Knowledge and learning together for transformation

- Horizontal exchanges (peasant-to-peasant, fisher-to-fisher, consumer-to-consumer and producer-to-consumer) to spark larger processes, mobilizations and the construction of knowledge
- Vertical exchange between generations, traditions and innovations
- Citizen's control over research agenda, objectives and methodology
- Research oriented towards participatory, transformative action
- Each one teach one
- Prioritizing young people and women in political and technical education programs
- Education based on community experience, the teaching of our ancestors
- Building theory based on what works on a small scale
- The knowledge that we build together is for our peoples' struggle, it is not for sale!

Autonomy

- ...from the dominant model of Development, includes that leads to price volatility and an export-led model
- ...from dependence on external farm inputs, including seeds, agricultural chemicals and even organic input substitution
- Is the inalienable community/people's right to control, access and manage the Commons
- Is the sustainability of the production system
- Is Community conservation of seeds.
- Is an agrosystems' approach (diversification of crops, seeds, animals, and cultures) and the use of techniques and technologies that respect the environment and minimize risks

Collective action, self-organization and solidarity

- Movements and popular organizations that put pressure on decision-makers
- Pride and identity as producers and consumers
- Care for the community, the young, the elderly
- No interest in copying Western lifestyles
- No interest in being consumerist
- Working as a collective identity
- Trusting in ourselves, and one another, working together



“We have to show that Agroecology is not the agriculture of the poor, and that it can enable people to live with dignity. We don't want to only focus on conventional economic indicators. We want to live well.”

**María Noel Salgado Spinatelli
(MAELA, from Uruguay)**

“Farmers were rewarded by society as food givers, but following privatization, agriculture became a business. At the same time, farmers have lost their social status. It is difficult for young male farmers to find wives, because few women are interested in marrying a farmer. Debt has become a major problem, and with it farmers are committing suicide. Since 2006 we have been using low-input Agroecology. Now, we no longer have to depend on purchased seeds and fertilizers.”

**Nandini Kardahalli Singarigowda
(La Vía Campesina, from India)**

Changing the urban-rural relationship

- Develop closer contact between producers and consumers
- Protect the right of individuals and communities to live in an agroecological way
- Ensure better forms of commercialization to eliminate intermediaries
- Create local certification and guarantee systems for agroecological foods
- Promote solidarity economy, farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture
- Strengthen a production model that is able to absorb the available local workforce and give workers (both salaried and independent) a quality of life that is not based on their monetary income
- Make inputs (like organic fertilizers) and sell processed goods
- Build Community Land Trusts
- Establish worker-owned co-operatives at many points along the value chain
- Use human rights' language to build sustainable local food systems

De-commodify society

- Land, water, forests, and seeds belong to Humanity
- Sustainable producers are stewards
- Access to resources can be more important than formal ownership
- Work can be satisfying beyond its monetary value, when we trust collective efforts
- Innovate to save on costs and increase ecological wealth, not just to make money
- Focus on our model: living well (buen vivir)

“In South Africa, fishing was not just the act of going to sea, but also food for our family, our neighbours, for everyday use, and cultural events, but it also had a spiritual value, connected to ceremonies, social occasions, it was part of our social and cultural life, it gave identity to our community. When we were denied fishing rights, we were disenfranchised from the right to our culture, our spiritual connection to the Commons of the sea. But we maintained a determined spirit to say we are fishers. It is in our blood.”

**Naseegh Jaffer
(World Forum of Fisher Peoples, from South Africa)**

Agroecology cultivates biodiversity and cools the planet

Agroecology depends on – and regenerates – the biodiversity that feeds us. Traditional farms, fisheries and herding systems maintain a vast diversity of animals and plants. Peasants and other small-scale producers have developed a wide range of biodiversity through their collective knowledge over the ages.

To continue to sustain this biodiversity, peasants, pastoralists, fisherfolk and Indigenous Peoples must regain control over this biodiversity and the knowledge that sustains it. This means having supportive legal frameworks, regulations and policies. But often, national public policies criminalizes traditional producers. Laws abound in our countries that outlaw collective landholding, seed exchanges, traditional common resource management, and other necessary tools for Agroecology.

Agricultural biodiversity has been drastically reduced by agribusiness. Seeds are being privatized by 'Monsanto Laws' in one country after another. These legal restrictions can take many forms : Patents, Plant Variety Protection (PVP), Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) and other Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). In Brazil, there is an effort to push through a Monsanto Law to privatize seeds - similar to those which have been passed in many Latin American countries. The peasants' movement is trying to stop that from happening. Terminator technology is subject to a moratorium at the moment. However, some Member States of UPOV may not respect this moratorium and it may not hold.

Small-scale food producers are resisting the onslaught of biodiversity-eroding industrial commodity production, livestock factories and large-scale commercial fisheries. Peasant producers are regenerating productive environments, for example, community management of mangroves; agroforestry, and mobile pastoralism. They are developing local innovations and new 'tools' to manage biodiversity for food and agriculture such as evolutionary and participatory plant breeding, Farmer Field Schools, local small-scale livestock diversification, and sustainable small-scale fishing gear.

The evidence is overwhelming for Agroecology as a key part of any solution to climate change. This can be seen in many of the reports published by the United Nations as well as independent organizations such as Grain and Oxfam. The biological diversity supported by agroecological food production is extremely important given that Earth is suffering an astounding loss of biodiversity during this century. The diverse uses of trees in Agroecology, the recycling of nutrients and heightened energy efficiency found in sustainably managed agroecosystems, as well as the local food systems created around agroecological production, all contribute to reducing global warming. Agroecological food producers are cooling the planet, but they need supportive policy.



Agroecological food production does not rely on fossil fuels. So it is the way to feed the planet and dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But we need to be clear about who can provide agroecological solutions. Only peasant agriculture, traditional fisheries, collective land use, and Food Sovereignty can break the logic that has created the climate crisis. False solutions come from industry, as multinationals propose new technologies as ways to continue to make profits, while destroying the planet. But the logic of capital is precisely where the the problem lies: small producers can feed the world and we can help stop climate change.

We want local food producers to be at the heart of a participatory, inclusive decision-making process. We must defend collective rights; change laws and discriminatory policies, and develop new legal frameworks that respect and protect Farmers' Rights to use, save, exchange and sell seeds and livestock breeds, putting the control of biodiversity and knowledge back in the hands of peasants. Policies need to value local knowledge, and give us the opportunity to share our knowledge. We need to be able to monitor and document agroecological experiences across the world in order to conclusively show that we care for biodiversity and cool the planet. We need to move beyond expensive, corporate labeling of organic or fair-trade products, and create our own systems of participatory guarantee systems and local certification. We will increase our efforts to provide training and awareness-building for producers and consumers. We need to strengthen collective approaches to sustaining biodiversity within and between sectors learning from each other. We will build alliances between producers, consumers, and other political actors. We will develop a common charter of values to help clarify our principles. We will continue to transform society with Agroecology!

***“Seeds are our life and livelihood—
the heritage of peasants at the service of Humanity.
Peasants have a duty to conserve seeds at several levels:
individual and family, the community, and the territorial level.”***

Gilberto Alfonso Schneider
(La Vía Campesina, from Brazil)

Agroecology respects Mother Earth: territories, lands, soils, pastures and water

Water bodies, land and territory are not a commodities! Our link with Mother Earth extends far beyond what the capitalist perspective can understand. We will struggle against land and water grabbing by private capital and corrupt governments. Territory is not only land, but also the profound cultural and spiritual connection between a people and a place. Our knowledge and our Agroecology are only possible when we have access to our territories. Defending water is urgent, since aquifers are under threat as never before. Droughts have caused increased political conflict over water resources and accerated privatization of water. It is time to reconsider the issue of the Commons and collective responsibility.

We need an integrated, territorial approach that embraces land, water and other resources as a whole. Agroecology implies long-term thinking, looking to the past and future alike. Agroecological producers are stewards of the land and water; our production methods conserve and improve soil, build pastures and forests, as well as maintaining our bond between peoples and living nature.

“The government of Thailand gives concessions for industry to build and push people off their land. The connection between the forest communities and the local ecology is being broken as the military government concentrates access to land. In response, there are efforts by farmers to integrate agroecological practices into their production in order to produce enough food on small amounts of land and to use water efficiently.”

Arat Sangubon
(La Vía Campesina, from Thailand)

Agroecology is economically viable

Despite the thousands of examples to the contrary, there is still a misconception that only industrial agriculture can be economically viable. This is not due to any real economic benefit of Green Revolution agriculture, but rather to the political, scientific, and propaganda consensus built around industrial agriculture. In order to counteract the dominant monoculture, we have to first change the way we think. This paradigm shift in people's minds is one of the most important steps toward changing society.

Agroecology is a life option that fulfills the needs of producer communities and provides food for society. Agroecology can feed the world - in fact, it always has. In most countries, the majority of food eaten is domestically produced by small-scale peasants with access to only a small part of farmland. Despite the dramatic advantages of industrial agribusiness - such as its access to capital, high quality farmland and public subsidies - the corporate model doesn't feed people nearly as efficiently or well as the agroecological model.

Many of the economic problems that food producers face are caused by the lack of direct links with consumers. The intermediaries that bring down prices for farmers also increase prices for consumers. By eliminating intermediaries, agroecological producers can receive a greater share of the price that consumers pay for food; indeed, producers can charge less and reach the large sector of the population that can't otherwise pay for pricey, alternative food. Producer associations and cooperatives can help collect, distribute and commercialize foods without losing all their value to intermediaries. Cooperatives help producers access needed infrastructure, new markets, and means for gaining autonomy and self-sufficiency. Adding value on the farm is a way to capture more of the full price of a product and enable the perpetual improvement of farm, pasture, forest or waterway.

Alliances with consumers through farmers' markets, local fairs and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) practice also strengthen the economic viability of Agroecology. In as much as producers and consumers are able to make decisions together, Food Sovereignty increases, and communities become healthier. Fresh, local food grown or caught in sustainable agroecosystems becomes the bedrock of better social relations.

Other problems faced by producers include the high costs of inputs and equipment, such as boats, equipment and infrastructure for fisherfolk, and seeds for farmers. Agroecology reduces these costs by saving seeds, valuing artisanal technologies, creating autonomy and sharing low-cost methods. Community seed-saving is a key tool for diversifying local rural economies and lengthening the growing season with local varieties.

The State has a role to play in making Agroecology viable. By providing schools, hospitals and other spaces with fresh, local food, the State can guarantee market access for small producers and nutritious food for the population. The State must make sure that agroecological food is accessible; we do not want Agroecology to fall into the trap of becoming a "market niche" like organics, which in capitalist countries are consumed by the wealthy and out of reach for most of society.

Finally, the creation of a common agenda for research and training can ensure the viability of Agroecology. The dominant extension model is vertical and one-way: researchers giving their advice to producers. We need to foment a model that is not only two-way (in which producers can guide researchers) but also horizontal—as in producers sharing their knowledge with other producers and researchers with other researchers. By changing the way we create and share knowledge, we can continue building the economic viability of Agroecology. We need to grow what we eat and eat what we grow!

“With the CSA model, lots of products that previously couldn't be sold are now being sold.”

Anoumou Komi Todzro
(CSA farmer in the Urgenci network, from Togo)

“In India, the shipping industry and 'big fishing' are wiping out fish populations. But we simply must fight back. We can't live without our sea. The sea is our Mother, the sea is our future.”

Magline Peter
(World Forum of Fisher Peoples, from India)

7. Strategies

Building a common political agenda to defend our way of life

Public policy has a dual nature: it is a threat and an opportunity. It is true that the vast majority of national and international policy serves to sustain the dominant agribusiness model. This includes land titling programs pushed by the World Bank which destroy collective land institutions, fishing regulations that favor large-scale entrepreneurs and monopolies, food safety legislation that cripples small and medium producers, health and environmental law that socializes the costs of industrial farm pollution, and other examples. While this kind of policy destroys food systems and makes Agroecology far more difficult, there is another role for the State that is worth visualizing. What kind of public policy could defend people's right to food, restore the Commons and promote Agroecology?

We need to defend access to land, water, oceans and forests for producers. Land use planning (zoning) is key local policy that can facilitate Agroecology, and the same goes for participatory research. With regard to local markets, there is a need for distinct hygiene rules for agribusiness and artisanal production that could favor local processing and local markets. Other kinds of policy that could promote local food systems include waste management policies, the creation of farmers' markets and artisan fairs, local Land Trusts, seed fairs, and funding for training local officials about Agroecology.

When good national policy is created, often it is not implemented. In the case of international policy, one important area of work is in the Voluntary Guidelines for Governance of Land, Water and Forests. We need to use these guidelines to push for better national policy. We need to legalize and promote peasant seed exchanges, especially in countries where they have been made illegal. Policy to promote research on native seeds and fish species is vitally important, as is policy to rescue and restore populations of medicinal plants.

The false solutions to climate change need to be denounced, such as climate-smart agriculture and sustainable intensification, through accessible publications and multimedia. Exposing and condemning transgenic crops and their devastating effects on rural communities is a potential point of unity.

Policy that connects the food system to public health is extremely important. Protecting farm workers from toxic agrochemicals is part of the same struggle to make Agroecology a viable alternative. By seeing the Agroecology struggle as the farm workers' struggle, it becomes clear that conventional agriculture is only profitable when farm workers' lives are undervalued. Education on healthy diets and nutrition can also increase the demand for agroecological foods. The integration of agriculture and health policy is highly beneficial for the Agroecology movement, and broadens the vision of public health to include ecosystems. We will push for policy that specifically strengthens youth and women in food systems. From cooperative development to job creation, training and access to markets, these parts of society need to be listened to and empowered.

“We cannot make Agroecology the global solution it has the potential to be, unless we can get out of colonized thinking and start creating solutions outside the framework of capitalism.”

*Saloua Kennou ep Sebei
(World March of Women, from Tunisia)*

“In Colombia, farmers cannot sell their coffee if they are not part of the powerful coffee grower's association. Colombian smallholders face growing extractivism, concentration of land, monoculture, use of toxic chemicals, and genetically modified crops. We see Agroecology as a way to confront the dominant model. Previously, farmers were not included on decision-making; over time we have created more autonomy to make our own decisions.”

**Javier Rivera
(MAELA, from Colombia)**

Organization, articulation, knowledge sharing and movement building

Now is the time for Agroecology. However, we know that conventional institutions, agribusiness interests, and dominant monoculture will all try to deny, destroy or distort the agroecological solution. In order to push for Agroecology, we must strengthen agroecological movements across the globe.

One of the strategies for building agroecological movements is to use existing networks to promote Agroecology. Many networks of scientists, consumers, producers, organizations, and movements already exist; we can harness these networks to disseminate our message on Agroecology. By doing so, we will include new constituencies and actors - such as labor unions and civil society group - who can help us refine the vision of Agroecology and build a massive, global movement for better food systems. We need to ensure that our definition and processes are inclusive. Everyone has a right to build Agroecology, not only in practice but also as a great idea that can be made even better.

We need to nurture real life, face-to-face exchanges as the basis for Agroecology. All strategies should begin with what works locally—in families, communities and organizations. Dozens of Agroecology schools are being built across the globe by La Via Campesina organizations and others. Some of these schools are local in scope, others are national and some, international. They use the peasant-to-peasant methodology for horizontal, peer-to-peer exchange and social learning. Agroecological training is not only technical, but must also engage with all of the political questions surrounding food, social movements and Mother Earth. These training programs are keys to 'scaling-up' agroecological processes.

We must create more agroecological schools and territorial processes of learning, and these training efforts must be better coordinated as networks. We need to build alliances prioritizing relationships with women's organizations and efforts to build Food Sovereignty and solidarity economies.

**“We know that society, not just peasants,
are involved. Under the banner of Food Sovereignty
we bring all sorts of groups together.
We can find the strength to transform
society in local movements.”**

Sonia Ingunza
(La Vía Campesina, from Basque Country)

**“We don't have to re-invent the wheel
every time we get together.
If I give you a seed and you plant it in your country,
we are building a global movement.”**

Nicole Maria Yanes
(International Indian Treaty Council, from Mexico)

**“Today Guatemalans are threatened by foreign mining companies
and the genetically modified crops pushed by agribusiness,
in a situation of modern-day looting and plundering. In response,
we have created this broad platform that is the agroecological
movement of Latin America based on our own cultural identity,
rooted in our agrarian culture.”**

Antonio Gonzalez (MAELA, from Guatemala)

Our common commitment: a final word

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are at the end of our work. We have talked about our lands, our seeds, and our collective rights. We want a local economy that gives everyone a chance. We want to live in a free world, with clean air and healthy food. Now we, all of us together, must mobilize as one person to face capital.

Our sectors represent at least 60% of the world population. If we are united, we will win. Our goal must be the establishment of a true democracy, which requires access rights for all sectors of the population. This makes us political actors. We are still far from this goal, but we will get there. Ours is a message of peace, a message of love. There is room for everyone in the world.”

-Ibrahima Coulibaly (La Vía Campesina and host organization CNOP-Mali)



The Forum was supported by:

FAO

Government of France

Action Aid

Why Hunger

Oxfam Solidarité Belgique

Fondation de France

Oxfam Novib

Oxfam USA

11.11.11 (Centre National de Coopération au Développement)

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