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Agro-ecology: A real alternative

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It highlights the rural world's life and activities of
the member movements belonging or not to the Federation

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Dear Readers,

Greetings from International secretariat

This edition of VMR onwards we will be focussing much on the practical and concrete alternatives based on decrease. In an earlier edition of VMR we discussed about the decrease in model of production .

The productivity gains of the industrial model of agricultural, livestock and fisheries production have fallen far short of meeting the food needs of everyone – hunger is rising inexorably – and have been accompanied by a number of serious environmental problems that undermine the long term viability of food production itself. Increasing corporate agribusiness involvement has diverted the goal from that of providing food for people as a basic human right to that of producing commodities for profit. Despite there being enough food produced globally to meet the needs of all, more than 1 billion poor people are hungry or malnourished.

FIMARC believe that agro-ecology is an alternative way forward and a solution to feed the world of today and in the future without destroying nature.

The key idea of agro-ecology is to go beyond alternative farming practices and to develop agro-ecosystems with minimal dependence on high agro-chemical and energy inputs. Agro-Ecology is both a science and a set of practices. As a science, agro-ecology consists of the 'application of ecological science to the study, design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems'. This implies the diversification of farms in order to promote beneficial biological interactions and synergies among the components of the agro-ecosystem so that these may allow for the regeneration of soil fertility, and maintain productivity and crop protection . The core principles of agro-ecology include recycling nutrients and energy on the farm, rather than introducing external inputs; enhancing soil organic matter and soil biological activity; diversifying plant species and genetic resources in agro-ecosystems over time and space; integrating crops and livestock and optimizing interactions and productivity of the total farming system, rather than the yields of individual species. Sustainability and resilience are achieved by enhancing diversity and complexity of farming systems via polycultures, rotations, agroforestry, use of native seeds and local breeds of livestock, encouraging natural enemies of pests, and using composts and green manure to enhance soil organic matter thus improving soil biological activity and water retention capacity

In April 2008, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) launched its report in Johannesburg, which was approved by 57 governments. The IAASTD was an inter-governmental process, co-sponsored by FAO, UNDP, UNEP, GEF, World Bank, with over 400 authors involved in drafting the report. The report reflects a growing consensus among scientists and many governments that the old paradigm of industrial energy-intensive and toxic agriculture is an outdated concept, while small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods provide the way forward.

Let us work together to promote and foster agro-ecological practices in our villages

Enjoy your reading

*George Dixon Fernandez
Secretary General*



Agro-ecology: A real alternative

In the current context of crisis, many initiatives are emerging, and among these, Agro-ecology is more and more increasingly popular. Although old, the term "agro-ecology" is now largely taken over, in the current context of questioning the agricultural model, not only within the peasant world but for all populations, agricultural or not, in the North as in the South of the planet. It appears as one of the only ways to ensure the right to food for all and in the long term. According to Pierre Rabhi, one of the defenders and promoters of this thesis, "peace and deployment of human cultures will only be achieved if men and women, in the North and South, have access to food self-sufficiency, to feed oneself, his family and his community are the foundation of any culture".

The history of agro-ecology began in 1928 with the first publication which used the term. The roots of agro-ecology as a science are based mainly on the disciplines of agronomy and ecology. The agro-ecology designed food systems based on the principles of life (cycles, rhythms, relations between the organisms, etc.) by placing human beings at the centre of the project. It uses and respects the natural cycles: natural soil fertility, water cycle. It protects the life of the soil and biodiversity: it combines different crops in the same field and uses natural fertilizers to fertilize the land.

But the agro-ecology is also beyond the practice, a movement that begins to grow in magnitude and more and more a scientific discipline, which will bring closer the scientific world, the producers and the consumers.

For several years, the FIMARC works on these issues. In the 1990s, we were talking about holistic development, a development for man and for all men to then further developed our thinking by addressing them by the angle of food sovereignty. In the logical outcome of all this, FIMARC suggested during the world meeting in Paraguay, focusing on the decrease, which was not satisfying for all, but which initiated certainly, wider reflection on agro-ecology, on other models of development which place human being at the centre of its concerns, just as the need to preserve natural resources.

FAO estimates that a billion people are deprived of drinking water and suffer from chronic under nutrition, and that three other billion suffer from malnutrition despite still abundant resources are there on the planet. To meet this challenge, modern agriculture was given the mission to solve the problem of global food need: it did not only fail but it worsened it: western, intensive and subsidized agriculture creates unsustainable competition for developing countries, causing misery, poverty and dependence. The vital needs of many populations are no more assured. The environmental consequences are no more to be demonstrated. The difficulties of access to drinking water and certain natural resources may give rise to new armed conflicts. The situation is more serious than unprecedented.

Only food self-sufficiency, food sovereignty of peoples can resolve the issue of hunger in the world. It is therefore essential to moving from a predatory and greedy system to a sober and interdependent system and to find an agricultural method that can help people achieve their autonomy.



THE MAIN DIMENSIONS OF THE AGRO-ECOLOGY: AN AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE, A SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE, A MOVEMENT... TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL PARADIGM!

Agro-ecology is a technique inspired by the laws of nature. It considers that the agricultural practice should not confine itself to a technique, but consider the whole of the environment in which it is embedded with a genuine ecology. It integrates the dimension of water management, reforestation, combating erosion, biodiversity, climate change, the economic and social system and the relationship of humans with their environment... It is based on the recreation of the humus as a regenerative force of land and the relocation of the production process, distribution - consumption as engine of a new social paradigm.

Agro-ecology as agricultural practice

In agro-ecology, it is mainly question of the respect of natural resources, planning of spaces and lands, maximum use of what the earth offers us in abundance and the use of knowledge of those who work it out. Therefore, the tillage is done respecting his structure, fertilizing it with green manure and compost, by fighting against the diseases and insects by the use of natural means. Without denying the progress, agro-ecology proposes also to select the best adapted varieties locally, to optimize the consumption of water in landscaping surfaces to fight against erosion, by planting hedges to

protect the land, by reforestation areas unused to produce sources of fuels and help the regeneration of soils and finally to make the best use of local and traditional knowledge for sustainable ecological and economic management

In this sense, agro-ecology represents a real alternative to existing production systems, which we have seen during the previous VMR, are destructive of natural balances and peasant life. Indeed, with emphasis on the sustainable balance of the soil-culture system, it allows a reduction of inputs in the long term, a better capacity of resistance of crops to the difficult conditions, be it in times of drought or to ensure diversified cultures.

According to a number of scientists, the soils, in many countries of the world, would be dead because of the use of pesticides and intensive crops. In agro-ecology, the use of manure and compost is recommended to retrieve soil, like the use of varieties of hardy plants that are often better suited than the hybrid plants which have been widely promoted in recent decades. These well associated with other plants or trees, vegetables, fruit and condiments, are perfectly profitable and their growth is even stronger than hybrids.

Questions for the groups and the movements :

- *Are there in your country, in your region, experiments in agro-ecological programs?*
- *What are its results? Positive or Negative ?
How to measure it?*



Agro-ecology as a scientific discipline

Agro-ecology is also an emerging scientific discipline. Its purpose is the study of agro-ecosystems (an agro-ecosystem or agro-system is an ecosystem changed by humans to exploit a portion of the organic matter it produces, usually for food.)

Miguel Altieri, Professor at the University of Berkeley gives a definition: "agro-ecology is the science of management of natural resources for the benefit of the poorest faced with an unfavorable environment. This science thus focuses on the accumulation of knowledge about the functions of ecosystems (cultivated). It leads the design, creation and adaptation in the participatory form of systems of complex productive culture and therefore attractive despite an unfavorable environment and a very low input use... »

But, even if some scientists are increasingly interested in this discipline, it remains nevertheless a wide gap to fill between the peasant and the scientific world. Indeed, without any recrimination to the researchers, it is clear that most researchers receive substantial resources for research in the field of conventional agriculture and that it is not easy for them to devote the necessary means and time to research on other agricultural models, which represent an alternative to the prevailing models. In addition, scientists are too often researchers in the laboratory, on experimental fields and do not always have this practice to go and meet the peasants, to listen, to understand the knowledge and know-how. This is without doubt one of the major challenges of agro-ecology: to reconcile the different worlds , who are from the land, the laboratory or research center, and the consumers, who would without doubt also things to say in this debate.

Questions for the groups and the movements :

- *Are there in your country, in your area laboratories or research centers?*
- *To what type of research do these centers dedicate themselves?*
- *Do you know if they conduct research in agro-ecology?*

Agro-ecology as movement

The "agro-ecology movement" is intimately linked to the agro-ecological field practice, since it is through the movement that the choice of such practices is justified. Proponents of this movement are defending themselves of only technical approach and advocate a holistic approach and recognition of knowledge and farmers know-how using the resources of nature.

The approach aims to associate the agricultural development in the protection of the environment, or even to its restoration where appropriate. It is also to develop a quantitative orientation towards a more qualitative agriculture, which implies a change of goals, means and contacts with other environmental associations, groups of consumers and the scientific world.

It is therefore a question beyond the agricultural vision and ecological agriculture to incorporate any reflection on the economic, social and political dimensions of agriculture more integrated into the society.

Among the best known of these movements advocating the agro-ecology, we should probably cite 'Earth and humanism', created in 1994 by Pierre Rabhi, farmer and thinker and which is designed to transmit the agro-ecology, here and elsewhere... This is what the presentation from the site tell us about :

Founded in 1994 by Pierre Rabhi, the association "Terre & Humanisme" draws its name from the attention paid to the link between human beings and mother earth. No ecology without solidarity... Agro-ecology is a global alternative, combining a farming practice and an ethic of life. Facing cruel findings of exhausted land, it offers natural solutions to regenerate in the respect of life, humans included. It integrates all social, health, economic and environmental aspects.

Make the agro-ecology and organic farming a global watchword would not a return back as some say. It is designed to meet the needs of survival while respecting life in all its forms. Simply put the achievements of the modernity in the service of a human project: recreate human size structures, upgrade microeconomics and crafts, reconsider the organization of the territory, educate children to values of cooperation and complementarity, awaken their sensitivity to the beauty and respect for life...

Agro-Ecological practice has the power to re - fertilize soil, combat desertification, preserve biodiversity, to optimize the use of water. It is an inexpensive and suitable alternative for the most deprived populations.



By reclamation of natural and local resources, it releases the peasants from the dependence of chemical inputs and transport which are the generators of so much pollution and responsible for a true choreography of the absurd, where anonymous food roam every day thousands of kilometers rather than be produced at the place of consumption. Finally, it allows producing a high-quality diet, guarantor of good health for the Earth and its children.

Responding in this way to the necessities of our survival while respecting life in all its forms is clearly the best choice we can do if we do not want to be exposed to unprecedented famine. This is what meets the agro-ecology as we understand it. [Extract from the manifesto for the Earth and humanity...]

We did not want this folder, to make a deep divide between the North and the South, between poor countries and rich countries. For FIMARC, agro-ecology, is without doubt a model to develop to counter the neo liberal capitalist system booming around the world. In some countries, where agriculture predominates, it comes to further develop agricultural practices, in others where it became minority, in terms of employment it will issue to focus on agro-ecology in its social and political aspects.

Whatever it is, it appears to us as an interesting practice beyond a farming practice an ethic of life that joined our project in FIMARC.



Pierre Rabhi speaking at the conference organized by Entraide et Fraternité in February 2013 at Louvain la Neuve (Belgium)

Agro-Ecology explained in 10 points by Pierre Rabhi

A genuine progress requires to pass from the concentration and technological sophistication to the participation of the greatest number; from the quantitative to the qualitative; from speculation to a real economy based on the effort of all; from food that travels constantly, to food consumed in the territory where it was produced; from intensive agriculture to an agro-ecology. Since 30 years Pierre Rabhi works on this issue, in the Ardèche region of France and in Africa...

From a scientific approach attentive to biological phenomena's, agro-ecology associated agricultural development with regeneration- protection of the natural environment.

- **Work of the soil which does not upset its structure**, its vital scheduling between surface and depth, between arable lands, sits by aerobic microorganisms and deep and often clay land, seat of anaerobic microorganisms - each microbial class has a specific role.
- **Organic fertilization** based on green manure and composting: aerobic fermentation of waste of plant and animal origin and some non-aggressive minerals, for the production of a stable humus, real food and medicine for the earth which improves the structure, absorption capacity, aeration and water retention. These techniques have the advantage of being fully accessible to the poorest farmers;
- **Phytosanitary treatments as natural as possible** and using products that degrade without damage to the natural environment, and substances that are traditionally used to combat pests and fungal diseases (neem, the caelcedra, cassia amara, the ashes of wood, animal fats...);
- **The choice of the varieties best suited** to the various territories with the development of local traditional species: controlled and can be reproduced locally (animal and plant) which are the guarantee of real autonomy;
- **Water: economy and optimum use.** Irrigation can be accessed when we understood the balance between land and water;
- **Use the more balanced energy, mechanical or animal** suit but with the concern to avoid any waste or build expensive. Poorly controlled mechanization has been at the origin of economic and ecological imbalances sometimes serious, but also dependencies (breakdowns, imported high-cost fuel energy). It is not to give up the progress but to adapt it to the realities on a case by case: human and animal metabolic energy is sometimes preferable to poorly controlled mechanization, factor of demobilization.
- **Anti-erosions surface works** (bunds, micro dams, filter, etc.) to maximize rain water harvest and combat the erosion of soils, floods and recharge groundwater which have sinks and sources...;
- **The construction of hedges** to protect the soil from wind and the construction of small systems in favor of the development of plant cultivation, the welfare of animals and to maintain useful auxiliary flora and fauna systems ;
- **The reforestation of the available and denuded surfaces** with diversity of species for fuels, Pharmacopoeia, art and crafts, food and feed, the regeneration of soils, etc...
- **The rehabilitation of traditional skills** in accordance with economic ecological management of the environment. This global mode of intervention as part of a reclamation of degraded territories or not. It requires training and follow-up, pedagogy adapted to the actors.



News from coordination



The MFC-Togo hold its annual session from 24 to May 26, 2013 in the Parish of Notre Dame of Fatima in Nlamtougou. The main theme, "the management of conflicts within the home" has been developed by the national chaplain Reverend Father Marc Lakassi. The types of conflicts, the causes, the solutions for these conflicts have been addressed. The reverend sister Anne Marie gave a briefing on the Billings method for the spacing of births. The participants worked in a relaxed atmosphere, satisfied with the meeting and sessions and more over in the friendship that has prevailed during this annual session. The session of 2014 will take place in the Parish of Solla, in the Diocese of Kara.

FIMARC participated in the Working group on United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

An open-ended intergovernmental working group, which has been mandated to negotiate and finalize a draft United Nations declaration on the rights

of peasants and other people working in rural areas, hold its first session in Geneva from 15-19 July. During the 5 days working group session, there was also panel discussions on issues ranging from food security, biodiversity conservation, the fight against climate change to the human rights situation in rural areas, examining in particular discrimination, poverty and hunger in these areas, as well as the need for a declaration on the rights of peasants.

FIMARC has been actively involved in this process from the beginning. Our human rights working group members Gabriel Falc'hun (Coordinator), Gérard Boinon, Marcelle Favre, Elisabeth Pariat and George Dixon Fernandez (Secretary General) had been participated in this first working group meeting to bring the voice of the rural people and farmers. FIMARC organized a preparatory meeting with CETIM and made very strong interventions which was appreciated by many governments. We were also part of the field visit organized by the chair of the working group

from Bolivia to find the life situation of the farmers in the field.

The Advisory Committee of the human rights council had noted that hunger, like poverty, is still predominantly a rural problem, and in the rural population it is those who produce food who suffer disproportionately.

"In a world in which more than enough is produced to feed the entire world population, more than 700 million people living in rural areas continue to suffer from hunger,"

Despite the existing human rights framework, peasants and other people working in rural areas are victims of multiple human rights violations that lead to their extreme vulnerability to hunger and poverty and to overcome this situation and further advance their rights, there is a need: (a) to better implement existing international norms, (b) to address the normative gaps under international human rights law, and (c) to elaborate a new legal instrument on the rights of farmers and other people working in rural areas.

The working group, which was established by the UN Human Rights Council in October 2012, has been also mandated to submit the finalized draft declaration on the rights of peasants to the Council. The draft declaration discussed in the working group was based on a draft prepared by the Advisory Committee, the Human Rights Council's think-tank comprising 18 experts. The draft declaration prepared by the Advisory Committee (A/HRC/WG. 15/1/2), and considered by the working group, contains 13 articles.

These are on: Definition of peasants (Art.1); rights of peasants (Art.2); right to life and to an adequate standard of living (Art.3); right to land and territory (Art.4); right to seeds and traditional agricultural knowledge and practice (Art.5); right to means of agricultural production (Art.6); right to information (Art.7); freedom to determine price and market for agricultural production (Art.8); right to the protection of agricultural values (Art.9); right to biological diversity (Art.10); right to preserve the environment (Art.11); freedom of association, opinion and expression (Art.12); and the right to have access to justice (Art.13).

The 5 day long working group meeting had discussed the various aspects and articles of the declaration and concluded with the report of the chair. The chair from Bolivia will further discuss with various stakeholders on the texts related to the declaration to submit the document in the next working group meeting in 2014. FIMARC will make necessary follow up in this regard

South Asian Regional Consultation of the Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on Food Security

NAFSO-Sri Lanka, in partnership with IMSE-India & Sri Lanka Nature Group hosted the South Asia sub-regional consultation of Civil Society Mechanism [CSM] of the Committee on Food Security [CFS], with financial assistance from CSM. This consultation was held from 22rd to 26th August 2013 at Golden Beach Hotel, Negombo, Sri Lanka.



The main objectives of the consultation was to bring together all the constituencies of the CSM of South Asia to share and evaluate the experiences on CSM and CFS work and also to understand the various CFS process and related issues from the South Asian sub region.

The consultation developed strategies and identified concrete follow-up actions of South Asian Civil Society and Social movements on existing debates at CFS e.g. Responsible Agriculture Investment, Implementation of newly adopted VG on Land Tenure, forestry and fisheries, discussion on bio-fuel, climate change and protracted crisis. Representatives of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were present in the consultation.

Secretary General of FIMARC participated in this meeting as resource person and due to unforeseen circumstances FIMARC Asia cant be present.

FIMARC CALL FOR ACTION - WORLD FOOD DAY 2013 -

"Healthy people depend on Healthy food systems - Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition"

This year world food day will be celebrated on 16th October with the main theme "Healthy people depend on Healthy food systems - Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition".

I urge all the members of FIMARC to organize a common action day on this theme and send us the news about their activities .

More details about this call for action will be received from the letter to the movements in September.



*The ecoquartier "E.V.A. Lanxmeer", at Culemborg (Netherlands).
The permaculture allows the inhabitants to live better and
to feed partly with products harvested from their fields.*



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