

AGROECOLOGY

A REAL ALTERNATIVE



Realization: September 2017

FIMARC WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS



AGROECOLOGY

A REAL ALTERNATIVE

SUMMARY

Introduction

Many examples

What is agroecology?

Agroecology and Human rights

Act to promote agroecology

Questions proposed to the movements

Annex: useful addresses

Realization: September 2017

FIMARC WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS



fimarc@skynet.be



www.fimarc.org

Bank name

BNP Paribas FORTIS

Account number: BE36250013278981, SWIFT code : GEBABEBB

Address

FIMARC, 15 Rue Maurice Jaumain, 5330 Assesse, Belgium



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many peasant organizations, questioning mode of industrial and chemical agriculture and promoting agroecology as response to the food needs of humanity and as the main alternative to produce and transform food into something better for humanity and mother earth.

In April 2016, the Executive Committee of the FIMARC hold a 3 days seminar in Belgium, on this topic. Delegates from all continents have developed a resolution giving a dynamic perspective to the concept of agroecology:

"The corporate model of Agriculture mostly produces food that poisons us, destroys soil fertility, and is responsible for the deforestation of rural areas, the contamination of water and the acidification of oceans and destruction of fisheries sector and creates pest- and disease-ravaged mono cultural plantations and increasingly negative consequences of greenhouse gas emissions, and the health crisis of malnutrition, obesity, diabetes, and cancer etc. This type of production system commodified the essential natural resources, and rising production costs are driving us from our own land.

Our traditional seed varieties are either destroyed or patented and millions of farmers are forced to depend on hybrid varieties which are costly, contaminated with agro chemicals and not adapted to the consumption habits of the local communities . It is a fact that 90 % of the world's 1.5 billion hectors of land is dominated by the industrial mono culture promoting only on 12 types of grains and 23 species of vegetables. These mono cultures are extremely vulnerable to pests, diseases and climate change. The increase of this model of agribusiness has no more the objective to feed the people, respecting the right to food for all, but only to develop the economic benefit. (...).

The FIMARC believe that agroecology is an alternative path to develop and a solution to feed the world today and in the future, without destroying nature. For the FIMARC, agroecology is probably a model to oppose the neoliberal capitalist system spread throughout the world." (Resolution of the Executive Committee of the FIMARC - April 2016).

This document contains five parts: many examples; what is agroecology?; the agroecology and human rights; act to promote agroecology; group questions, inviting to return to each party. The annex offers addresses for more information.



MANY EXAMPLES

Many examples, in all continents, demonstrate that agroecology is an effective concept. Through their work and their specific knowledge of soils and plants, farmers implement agroecology and this gives results.

In **Mali**, about 23 000 market gardeners and horticulturists are part of horticulturists of Kayes network (RHK), in the southwest of the country. Since 5 years, market gardeners and horticulturists convert their practices to agroecology, and are members of one hundred farmer's organizations. M. Mamadou Camara, Member of the board of the NKR, lists the principles of agroecology:

- No pesticides, no herbicides, no fertilizer
- Use of traditional seeds
- No genetically modified seeds
- Ecosystem friendly agriculture and traditional knowledge
- Use of natural herbicides at base of animal droppings or leaves of certain trees (the old well known know how)

- Strong involvement of women, including for the preparation of traditional treatments
- Importance of agro ecological training techniques, preparation of quality organic manure; association of livestock and vegetable production
- Promotion of organic consumption in the city of Kayes (30.000 inhabitants).

As in Mali, in all continents, many examples demonstrate that agroecology is effective.

Kenya - "Push-pull" or "repulsion-attraction" for the cultivation of the corn; farmers combine the corn culture with the elephant grass and desmodium. The desmodium, a forage plant scattered between the ranks of corn pushes away the codling moth, (predator of corn); elephant grass attracts it (herbaceous plant growing around the fields), where she lays her eggs, trapped by the goop from plants; the yield performance on 1/2 hectare, pass from 2 bags of 90 kg to 22 or 24 bags.

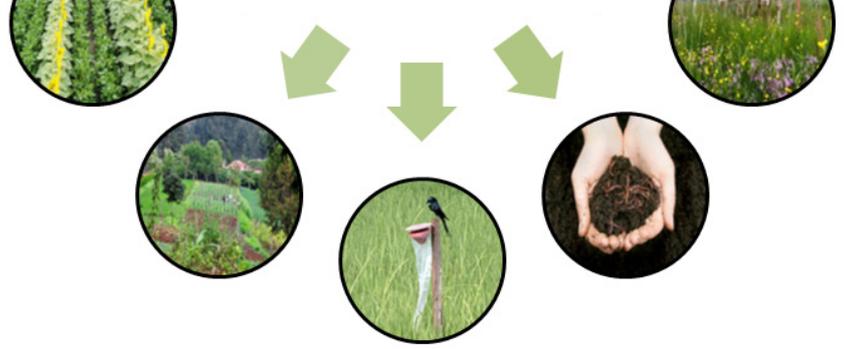
Mexico - corn cultivation: the MILPA system comes to sow together corn, beans, cucurbits (e.g. pumpkin), to combine crops and forage plants; neither pesticides nor chemical products.

France - association of the cultivation of rapeseed with other plants: sunflower, peas, camelina, buckwheat, vetch; by phenomena of competition, some plants are taking over and others enter in synergy; only rapeseed and vetch survive the winter; other plants die, leaving a clean ground: no need of weeding. Another advantage: the presence of auxiliary birds (blue titmouse) that protect rapeseed against pests, so no need of insecticide.

Philippines - the enhancement of peasant knowledge helped to recover 1 000 local, improved rice varieties with increased yields; farmers are involved in the selection of local seeds; no input, no external finance; back to the diversity of rice adapted to the environment (with the same process in India, farmers recovered some 40.000 local varieties of rice).

Each movement in his country or region can find effective achievements of agroecology. And thus can understand agro ecology.





WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY?

It is the main alternative to the industrial model which destroy the natural balance, the lives of farmers and communities. Agroecology is a way to transform the way of producing a quality food for humanity and Mother Earth (Pachamama).

Towards an alternative model of production

There is no "standard" agroecology definition. It is a system of crop production that varies from one region to another, according to local realities and practices of farmers and communities. A number of common points exist and allow to "fit well" a form of definition of agroecology.

Agroecology:

- Is a way of life, a set of practices
- Implements agricultural well known practices and techniques: polyculture, diversification and crop rotation, enhancement of local seeds and local breeds of livestock, use of natural enemies of pests, use of fertilizer and 'green' composts, respect for the soil organisms
- Is a key element to achieve food sovereignty
- Is based on family and peasant agriculture
- Integrates the management of water, reforestation, control erosion
- Allows dynamic management of biodiversity, improves the fertility of the soil, allows the retention of water;
- Is a way to fight against climate change
- In respect for Mother Earth, it allows the soil development and its life by recycling of nutrients (among others);
- Allows to design and manage sustainable agricultural systems
- Produces and develops local traditional knowledge
- Strengthens the visibility of rural areas
- Allows the promotion/liberation of women and enhancement of their work of agricultural food production
- Promotes social justice;

- Guarantees the peasant identity development;
- Has a social and political dimension
- Allows the people and communities to maintain their spiritual and material relationship with their land and environment;
- Puts life before profit.
- As a positive result, among others, the production of healthy and good quality food.

Agroecology is the “science” of the management of natural resources, by the accumulation of the knowledge of farmers on the functions of the cultivated areas and their environment (the ecosystem). It helps to design and manage sustainable agricultural systems.

Advantages of agroecology

Agroecology has assets that are struggling to be recognized. The promoters and defenders of industrial and chemical agriculture do not want to change...

It is increasingly recognized that industrial and chemical farming is destructive and deadly:

- Practices of agro-toxins, artificial hormones, use of GMO'S, chemical inputs, overproduction of food that poison people and nature
- Destruction of rural areas and the fertility of the soil, water

contamination, acidification of the oceans, conversion of natural resources into a commodity, including land

- The theft of seeds
- Monocultures often devastated by insects and disease; exhaustion of fish stocks
- Liberalization of the markets, control of the multinational agribusiness on the production, processing and marketing of agricultural products.

Agroecology is facing many obstacles, because it questions the agricultural industrial system of monoculture and mono-cropping. It faces economic, political and psychological barriers. What says M. Olivier de Schutter (former rapporteur on right to food for the UN Human Rights Council) in its report of 2014:

- Technological obstacles: we think production only by monoculture
- Socio-economic obstacles: major multinationals dominate the market, inputs and seeds to commercialization, through transformation and the distribution channels and sales
- Cultural obstacles: lifestyles in a hurry, especially in cities and industrialized countries, require food products processed and easy to consume
- Political obstacles: the politicians

are subject to the dictates of the multinational food enterprises, who opposed a veto to any project of transformation of the mode of agricultural production as a whole.

Is agroecology able to feed the world?

Industrial and chemical agricultural practices have not stemmed the increase in hunger in the world: 1 billion people are deprived of drinking water and suffer from chronic undernutrition, and other 3 billion suffer from bad nutrition (FAO estimation). A research conducted in 2006 on 286 recent projects of sustainable agriculture in 57 countries reported an increase in harvest up to an average of 79%.

In its report of March 2011 at the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in Geneva, M. Olivier de Schutter stressed that in front of the crisis of poverty,

we must increase revenues in rural areas where 75% of the poor are living. There is enough food produced in the world. Unsustainable farming methods accelerate climate change. He pointed out, in response to this situation, that the **Agroecology has 4 assets:**

- It is highly productive
- It is a response to rural poverty
- It is the best possible response to climate change: agriculture produces 33% of the greenhouse gases (GHG Emissions) of human origin, including 14% due to unsustainable agricultural practices, synthetic fertilizers made from fossil energy, monocultures
- For farmers and communities, it has real nutritional benefits: through the production of healthy and diversified food.

Agroecology is a farming technique that gives a satisfactory answer to questions about patterns of industrial production. It is an approach to move towards greater autonomy of the peasants, self-esteem, and recognition of their traditional know-how. It allows implementing, in practice, many conditions for the realization of food sovereignty, through farmer's agriculture.





AGROECOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states that rights are universal and indivisible. The practice of agro-ecology should allow the promotion of human rights everywhere and in all circumstances.

The UN Human Rights Council is developing a draft Declaration of the United Nations on the rights of the peasants. This project includes all rights adopted in 1948, by applying them to the peasant and rural world.

The FIMARC participates in the work on this project, via the members of the Working Group on human rights.

The practice of agroecology, adapted to local circumstances, allows promoting and defending **human rights**:

- It involves **the right of access to local resources (land, water, territories, natural resources, etc.)**; by its local involvement, it requires access to land for all, in particular for youth and women.

- Agroecology has a perspective of **right to live in the country**, and thus to allow the development of employment in rural areas, constituting a brake to the rural exodus.
- To be able to be practiced, agroecology implies that farmers have the **right to access and use of local production means, the right of use of local seeds and local livestock breeds**
- It implies that farmers have the **right to refer to the agricultural and traditional know-how and practices**, which means the **right to biodiversity and the protection of the environment**.
- Agroecology can produce sufficient, safe and diverse food for everyone in independence from chemicals, allowing everyone to have a healthy life, while being a positive response to rural poverty. Agroecology allows the realization of the **right to food**, in a safe, clean and healthy environment. It allows the implementation of means to achieve the **right to food sovereignty**.

- Agroecology includes the right to the recognition and enhancement of the expertise of elders, knowledge of farmers, thus developing their self-esteem. This implies the **right to freely develop their culture and knowledge, and the rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural and traditional knowledge**, including their techniques, their genetic resources, their seeds and their pharmacopoeia(merchandise).
- Agroecology implies the **right to remunerative prices for producers and breeders, access to local markets and proximity**; remunerative prices allow families to have better income, with consequences for the possibility of improving housing, schooling for children, time for work and citizenship, responsibilities at all levels of social life, for women as well as men.
- To be successful, agroecology has an objective to farmers, to build ties with the research sector, which must be independent of the agro-chemical multinationals and supported by the Government which must provide the funding; farmers have the **right to cooperate in research and access to scientific and technical knowledge**.
- Agroecology allows **the liberation and promotion of women, and their access to all human rights**: full development, promotion and empowerment, participation in decisions and professional and societal responsibilities, right to physical and moral integrity, property and decisions rights about their life.
- Agroecology is a way of life, in the respect of common values in relation to the language of nature and Mother Earth (Pachamama). For the people and communities, it allows the spiritual and material relationship with their territories, and therefore the **right to be recognized as a human being in all its dimensions**.



ACT TO PROMOTE AGROECOLOGY



To build, defend and strengthen agroecology, it is essential to carry out concerted actions, with a clear strategy and targeted objectives.

Each movement ought to take local actions, keeping in mind and in perspective the global dimension of the objectives. This is the priority, allowing the involvement of local actors.

Below are suggested courses of actions; each movement has to choose, adapt, add, based on local realities:

- **Create alliances**, between farmers organizations, with

other movements, with consumers, with the research organizations and institutes

- **Developing and disseminating agroecology** by communication, by the implementation of green practices allowing each and everyone to take it; hence the training programs, using local skills, for women and men: peasant leaders, everyone is actor of their future
- **Protect biodiversity and genetic resources**: control and use local seeds and local animal breeds, preserve the quality of natural resources, and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions; enhance the fight against climate change, promote ecological conversion in the sense of the text of the Holy Father "Laudato Si"



- **Importance of education/trainin** : for youth in schools, for women by the recognition of their rights; training for all and all, based on the sharing of knowledge of peasant farmers in all areas;
- **Support small farmers**, by a land reform accompanied and supported by the public authorities, by fighting against the land grabbing, against the control of the agro food multinational companies on seeds and genetic heritage, on inputs, markets of food products, prices, etc.
- **Intervene at all levels - local, regional, national and international - to all decision-makers** , political, economic, religious and others demanding their commitment and responsibility in the implementation of the actions for the promotion of agroecology.





QUESTIONS PROPOSED TO THE MOVEMENTS

These questions are proposed to initiate work and reflection on agroecology. Each movement can choose a particular group of questions, each group referring to one or the other part of this document. Each movement can add questions or topics not mentioned here.

1 MANY EXAMPLES

- Do you know about agroecology? What idea do you have on this topic?
- What are the examples of agroecology that exist among the members of your movement?
- What are the examples of agroecology that exist in your region or country?
- What research is being done by research centers in your country or region?
- How can farmers take part in researches, including those concerning agroecology?

2 WHAT IS AGROECOLOGY?

- What means do you have to know agroecology in your movement, in your region or country?
- What obstacles or brakes are you facing in your movement, region or country, to promote and implement the agroecology?
- What are the strengths you know in your movement, region or country, for the implementation of agroecology?

3 AGRO-ECOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- For you, what are the human rights that agroecology can promote or achieve?
- Texts of the United Nations exist on human rights as well as the draft declaration on the farmers rights: how does these texts help farmers to achieve the right to freely develop their culture and knowledge, the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural or traditional know-how?
- How agroecology does allow the realization of the women rights?

4 ACT TO PROMOTE AGROECOLOGY

- What are the priority actions to be realized to promote agroecology at your place?
- With whom (people, organizations, associations, etc.) can you do alliance for actions of promotion and implementation of agroecology?
- What aspects of agroecology do you think are of concern to decision-makers, whoever they are?

APPENDIX USEFUL ADDRESSES

References to find information on agroecology, skills for actions; each movement can get information in its country or region and find persons or organizations likely to help work on agroecology.

- FIMARC: EXCO declaration of April 2016 - VMR N° 111 (2013/3): www.fimarc.org
- Nyéléni forum: www.forum-agroecology-nyeleni-2015
- La Via Campesina: www.viacampesina.org
- FIAN international: www.fian.org
- M. de Schutter reports on food law: in 2011: "Agroecology and the right to food", 16th session of the UN Council on human rights (A/HRC/16/49); in 2014: "report: the right to food, factor of change" (A/HRC/25/57): www.ohchr.org.
- Laurent DELCOURT: CETRI (Centre tricontinental, Belgium): "Agroecology-challenges and prospects": www.cetri.be/Agroecologie-enjeux-et-defis
- Universal declaration of the human rights, United Nations; draft declaration on farmer's rights of the United Nations: www.ohchr.org.
- Produce more with less: guide for policy makers on the intensification of peasant agriculture (2011): www.fao.org
- Agroecology as a science, a movement and a practice (2009): www.agroeco.org
- Ecologically efficient agricultural systems for smallholders (2011): www.ruralforum.info
- Rural development network www.inter-reseaux.org.

AGROECOLOGY

A REAL ALTERNATIVE



PUBLISHED BY

Fédération internationale des Mouvements d'Adultes Ruraux Catholiques
Federación internacional de los Movimientos de Adultos Rurales Católicos
Federação Internacional dos Movimentos de Adultos Rurais Católicos
International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements

Editor responsible

George Fernandez, *Secretary General-FIMARC*