



Pastoral & Environmental  
Network in the Horn of Africa



## Brief Report

### Food We Want- Sustainable, Local, Fair Project Launch Event in the UK

29<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

IIED Meeting Place, London

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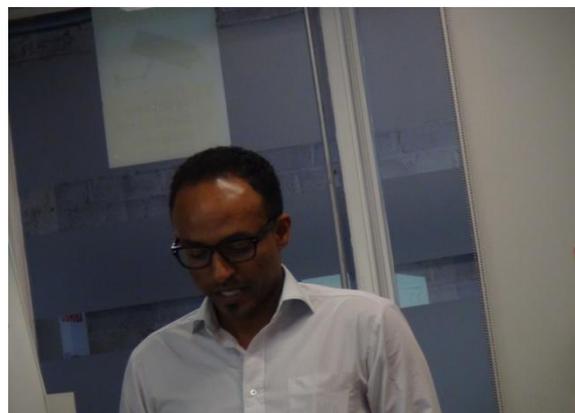


PENHA, in partnership with IIED, organised an event on **Food We Want – Sustainable, Local, Fair** project launch with a discussion on the challenges of food security in Africa. Panelists from various areas of the sector contributed their expertise by highlighting the integration of different food systems and their implications on reducing poverty and furthering development. The event was held on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, at IIED’s Head Office in central London.

## I. *Food Security in Africa: Critical Issues for Small Scale Producers*

Food security in developing countries in general, and Africa in particular, is being affected by the disempowerment of small scale producers, mainly farmers, and their exclusion from the development equation. Thus, the discussion, “*Food Security in Africa: Critical Issues for Small Scale Producers*,” was held by three distinguished and highly regarded panelists: Dr. Michel Pimbert (Principal Researcher, Natural Resources Group, IIED), Micheline Ravololonarisoa (International Consultant and former Chief, Africa section, UNIFEM) and Dr. William Lume (Director, Centre for Inter-African Relations/CEFIAR and lecturer at London South Bank University). The discussion was chaired by Dr. Essam Yassin Mohammed (Researcher, Sustainable Markets Group, IIED and PENHA Trustee).

Dr. Mohammed gave an overview on the key factors that are affecting the food security paradigm. He mentioned that the issue of food security has become very challenging and critical to where we live in our world today. He said millions of people are now affected by food insecurity and he raised some stimulating questions which were to be addressed by the panelists, including:



- Is food sufficiency sufficient enough?
- What does food security mean?
- Is food security about food production?
- Do people have access to food?

Finally, he raised some issues that are complicating a food insecure globe: food prices, the issue of climate change, the global food crisis, land grabbing, trade barriers, power imbalances, population growth, biodiversity, etc.

Dr. Michel Pimbert then gave a presentation entitled “*Towards an Indigenous African agricultural revolution?*”

He started his presentation by mentioning that he borrowed the title of his talk from Paul Richards, an anthropologist who speaks on the need for an *indigenous African revolution*. Dr. Pimbert stated that most of the important innovations for food and agriculture have their roots in rural communities and that African farmers’ innovations have remained unrecognised. Both men and women farmers have been creative and have sustained many landscapes and many food systems across Africa. There is the possibility of combining their knowledge of indigenous management systems with the modern science of ecology and

complex systems. He suggested that technology alone is not enough; policies and institutions are key for the spread and scaling up positive innovations that meet equity and sustainability goals.

Pimbert highlighted the fact that African farming families produce up to 80% of the food consumed in their countries and sold in markets, despite the fact farmers receive little or no policy platform.



Pimbert agrees with the view that family farming is capable of increasing its substantial contribution to the food security of African people and is capable of adapting to new challenges such as climate change. He indicated that there are several options on the table: sustainable intensification of GM, conservation, etc., but he personally favours “agroecology,” the synthesis of agronomy and ecology. The combination of family farming and agroecology can generate resilient, climate friendly, productive and sustainable models of food production. On the issue of an agricultural revolution,

Pimbert said that most successful innovations in Africa have had indigenous roots.

He also stressed that following the 2008 global food price hikes and riots, governments are proposing large scale investments in African agriculture. In this new context, the question is not only how much investment but also for *what* model of food and farming, - and *for whom*. African family farming combined with modern agroecological approaches provides a promising focus for this re-investment and the basis for a more sustainable and just food system.

Pimbert strongly emphasised merging agroecological science with local innovations. He said ‘business as usual in agricultural development is no longer an option and it is important to combine modern science with indigenous knowledge systems. Agroecology is a meeting of agronomy and ecology and seeks to improve agricultural systems by mimicking the structure and function of natural ecosystems and processes, and by creating beneficial interactions between different components in the agro-ecosystems.’

He said two decades ago agroecology was ignored by many mainstream organisations, but many research organisations like the FAO, UNCTAD, IFAD, etc., have recognised tremendous possibilities of agroecology as the technological paradigm that may help solve some of the pressing environmental, agronomic and economic problems that undermine food systems everywhere, especially Africa. Moreover, he revealed that there has been quite a lot of evidence showing that agroecological approaches do increase yields, income streams, and very importantly, environmental regeneration. Agroecological innovations also have the

advantage of reducing farmers' dependence on suppliers of external inputs (e.g. hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides..) thereby enhancing the potential for local democratic control over the means of production.

In the middle of his lecture, Pimbert expressed the need to scale up farmers' led agroecological innovations to more people and places.

Finally in his conclusion, Michel emphasised the following issues:

- Firstly, the need to redirect investment from capital intensive industrial agriculture to agroecological, biodiversity rich, and resilient models of production supported by participatory development under farmers' control. The framework of 'food sovereignty' offers a set of enabling conditions needed to redirect agricultural investments and policies towards agroecological models of production as well as resilient and equitable food systems in Africa.
  - The need for local empowerment and more direct democracy in the governance of food systems is required.
  - Investment should not poison the environment or bring high carbon footprints, or result in land and water grabs that displace pastoralists, farmers, and forest dwellers.
  - Addressing food insecurity in Africa also requires seeing it from a structural perspective. This is inherited from failed policies of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which ignored domestic food supplies and encouraged export crops and unfair market competition – a continuation of colonialism in Africa.
  - SAPs and liberalisation of agriculture tend to encourage the building of the export-led sector based on monocultures and globalisation of value chains. This has made transnational corporations extremely powerful as they benefit most from the dominant model of producing, distribution, and selling food. Another political economy is clearly needed for sustainable, fair, and climate friendly food systems.
- Secondly, the need to scale up agroecological approaches linked with the regeneration of local economies that enhance human dignity and cultural diversity. The following enabling factors corresponding to the pillars of food sovereignty paradigm were highlighted:

1. Strengthen local organisations formed by men and women food providers (pastoralists, farmers, food processors, etc.) to manage and govern diverse food systems in rural and urban contexts
2. Need for gender equitable rights of access, use and control over land, water, seeds, trees and their products, and knowledge
3. Promote models of production based on agroecology, ecoliteracy, and circular economy models that link food and energy production with water and waste management at different scales in rural and urban areas
4. Redistribute public goods (e.g. support for local food processing capacity and local infrastructure) to promote social inclusion and the right to food
5. Regoverning trade and markets to strengthen local food systems and economies whilst providing market outlets for food providers
6. Empowering citizens for more democratic decision-making, - so that they can claim and exercise their fundamental human right to participate in defining what kind food and agricultural policies they want.

The second speaker was Micheline Ravololonarisoa, who focused on women and food security. In her presentation, Ravololonarisoa said, "If we are talking about democratic governance, the issue of women's participation is not solely for women to deal with, but it is a political issue that should be a concern for everybody. The policy framework that ignores the role of women in agriculture is bound to fail. Full stop! That is the basic element."

Ravololonarisoa focused on three key issues:

1. What critical issues do women face still today with agriculture in Africa?
2. What needs to be done?
3. Some proposals how to move forward.

Ravololonarisoa stated that the majority of food producers in the agricultural sector in Africa are women. She said, "The face of agriculture around the globe in general, and in Africa in particular, is female. It is a female face, but it is an invisible face." She continued to support her argument by providing the following statistics:

- With an average of 32% of food contribution to GDP, 70% of this growth is done by women working in agriculture, and yet not much is being done locally or internationally to promote and strengthen this role of women.
- The large proportion of the agricultural production attributable to women makes them the principal agents of economic development. The majority of food

production is done by women, which makes them the principal agents for food security. So, they are both agents of production and the consumer, in their own right.

Ravololonarisoa said that the majority of women are in unpaid labour, but we need to look beyond the attribution of what women own and what they don't own and look at the barriers that inhibit women's ability to produce; this makes it difficult for them to escape the poverty trap and to provide food for the family. When women farmers have the



opportunity to control and earn income, it makes good economic sense. However, in real life what we see is that there is very little attention paid to this, and few resources devoted to the improvement of women's participation and performance in agriculture. The majority of the resources are used to help multinational corporations make profit on the backs of the producers.

On the issue of agricultural policy framework, Micheline said that a combination of smallholder farming and industrial agriculture is really important. Giving women access to simple agricultural resources would increase agricultural production. So, an increase of 20-30% in production by women would feed 115 million more of the hungry people in today's world. She impressed the participants by saying that "this is very telling because if women improve small-scale family farming practice and subsistence agricultural production where they use traditional tools, millions can be benefited from it. But declining agricultural productivity may be caused due to lack of access to adequate agricultural inputs, very poor marketing infrastructure and inadequate marketing experience. The prices offered to women are not adequate and it is not linked to sectors other than agriculture."

Furthermore, the speaker highlighted the following very serious challenges for food security and food sovereignty:

- High degree of women's dependence on middle men
- Women unable to control the production process
- Delimitation of women from economic assets and social capital.

This could be caused by the low level of literacy among smallholders and this makes women more vulnerable to a number of shocks such as economic, climatic, and agronomic shocks.

The recent phenomenon of forced eviction of smallholders from their land and the forced closure of their land has affected women greatly. It prevents women from accessing information, agreements and local policy making decisions. The process of eviction has lacked transparency, especially for women because of their social status.

Africa has a large number of instruments on women's rights, both at the regional and national levels. For example, the protocol on 'African Charter on Human and People's Rights' advocate for non-discriminatory practices on women's rights, yet we see in all spheres this discrimination continuing. According to Ravololonarisoa, to address women's productivity and economic empowerment this should be a priority for the policy framework. Any policy on



agricultural development must take on the problematic issue of women. Today, organisations like FAO, World Bank, the IFAD, are making the agenda of women a top priority, but they don't devote the resources. Only 10% of their resources go to empowering women, and it is less than 4% of the overseas development assistance which goes to improving women's agricultural performance.

Ravololonarisoa said that the following actions are required to highlight the issue of women in the context of food security in Africa:

- At the local level, it is important to raise the awareness and self-confidence of the women themselves.
- At the meso- and macro-levels, establishment of small-scale farmers need an instrument at the African level to do that. For example the African Union land policy guidelines specifically mention better and more productive land.
- To increase the investment and research and extension systems;
  - research based not just on how to enhance the indigenous knowledge of women to make it accessible to more small-scale producers, but also to preserve that knowledge.
- The question of commercially profitable products, that is, very often when you go to the production sector women produce, when the product becomes marketable, men become the owners of the product. Ravololonarisoa said, "It is really confiscating the power of women to be able to be agents of economic growth and to be confident in owning and marketing their own products."

On the issue of trade and public investment on women, Ravololonarisoa said, "There is a very urgent need to reduce and eliminate the trade distortion on subsidies and support the development of basic infrastructure and basic institutions in the agricultural market, and

also to increase public sector investment in research as high as possible in developing countries. Protecting women's rights (Pimbert mentioned this, as well) will need to look at trade and investment agreements which undermine women's capabilities, therefore undermining food sovereignty and the right to nutrition and affordable food.

Finally, in her concluding remarks and recommendations, Ravololonarisoa highlighted the following points:

- Adequate support mechanisms are needed for women's productivity and their roles; this requires coordination at local and international levels.
- Emphasis is needed on women's access to resources, property rights, including access to and the right to own land, and the equally proportioned leadership of many associations in order to promote the democratic policy framework that will enable citizens, particularly women, to participate in the growth of agriculture and the growth of economy.

During the panelists' speeches and the question and discussion session, a number of questions and comments were made by both the participants and the chairman. The panelists tried to address the questions accordingly from their own perspectives. One of the questions on the issue of smallholder women farmers' contributions in Africa was answered by Pimbert as follows: "I want to talk about the mindsets. It is striking that a lot of people in Africa, farmers, intellectuals, etc., say, "women are not farmers." If you have that mindset, you don't even start to think about women contribution. Such mind sets reflect the gender relations in those societies."

The third panellist was Dr. William Lume. He started his presentation by emphasising how individuals can be food secure. He was of the view that, "The most secure place for food is in one's own stomach and not in any one else's. If someone else decides what goes into the stomach then the situation cannot be food secure." Referring to The World Food Summit of 1996, Lume defined food security as "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life." Therefore, the paradigm of food security, either national or international, is a fallacy." He added that, "Food security is a complex issue beyond environment, economic or international trade if sustainable development is to be achieved. For instance it is dually intertwined with human health through either malnutrition or obesity".

Dr Lume's presentation included his personal history with food.

In those parts of the world where hunger is common, primary production is filled with many difficult and painful existential vagaries from which most people strive to escape. He narrated that then as a young student of Development Studies had dreamt of the promise of his own contributions towards a famine-free Sub-Saharan Africa, upon completion of a

top class education obtained in the UK. He went on to emphasise personal experiences and expectations of studying famine in Ethiopia. Hence, 'Food We Want.' For us, is still about the food we want". Nonetheless, many decades later we are still witnessing famine happen in the same region.



Lume now older and possibly wiser situated Sub-Saharan Africa's post-independence agricultural policies within a historical context. He explained that most of the political leaders and liberation heroes were educated in missionary schools, yet the same European missionaries practised a consumption behaviour inherited from the ancient Roman civilisation that celebrated an art for opulent consumption of fine cuisine. Hence when post-

independence government took over, this model was continued with. Even African intellectuals and experts in agriculture still focused their efforts on tradable commodities with short growing seasons geared for export. This approach did not take a long term view of food production as a potent political tool to emancipate the subdued small scale producers or their nutritional needs.

Lume then went on to compare the colonial period with the contemporary acquisition of agricultural land in Sub-Saharan Africa. Liberalisation of the international economy fuels the urge for trade to promote national food security that can easily be passed off as a means to inject foreign capital in Sub-Sahara African countries. Further, he went on to challenge the assumption that when the state gains access to foreign capital in order to accumulate revenue to balance its national budget does necessarily help the poor among its citizens to become food secure. He was of the view that we need not prostrate ourselves before the same global migration of international capital that historically flowed in full support by the colonising powers during their collaboration with Multi-National Corporations such as the British East African Company and other colonial state supported buccaneers.

Similarly, what we are witnessing in the 21st Century is that indigenous lands as a primary production resource are being acquired by the post independence state at the expense of local people, once again for export. Yet it is prudent to ask 'can international capital supported by a foreign national government serve the interest of indigenous small scale producers that can be protected by their own state?' It is simply a scenario of history repeating itself whereby we can clearly see private capital supported by emerging state powers that range among others from China, Qatar, South Korea and India making foray into Sub-Saharan Africa.

He rather firmly pushed for an alternative approach for improved infrastructure at the local level to promote intra-community and regional trade among small scale producers.

Finally, Lume recommended the following possible ideas:

Rather than place all faith in mechanical and chemical technology to build food security for the individual, research and interventions should instead emphasise the solid existing time tested local specific indigenous knowledge production techniques still in the possession of small scale producers.

Community associations with voluntary and free transparent participation should be targeted by private capital underpinned by government guarantees to produce for existing national, regional or international food markets.

The role of development workers should be better deployed to mobilise local communities, strengthen their capabilities in production techniques and timely awareness of available market opportunities, both national and global.

Nutritional security is the key for many small-scale producer households in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hence focus should be placed on identifying and responding to the varying needs among the elderly, sexes, infants and youth.

Discard the model based on aspirations for opulent food consumption derived from the Roman civilisation that excludes the poor, women and children from essential nutritional needs. As an alternative, practitioners of food security should consider the prospects of broadening the production and access to animal, and plant nutritional sources of food that may previously been considered weeds or pests.

- In order to realise food security, at the national level, rather than strive to undermine each other in the international market national governments should limit their roles to policy development and attracting capital to develop intra-regional infrastructural networks to facilitate movement of food between communities and nations in a specified region.
- There still remains serious problems with land tenure systems in Sub-Saharan Africa for example, in Sierra Leone it is not well organised; in Uganda land as a primary production resource is largely not taxed, which results in a degrading off-loading; whilst Eritrea and Ethiopia's governments have for many centuries placed exorbitant burdens on small scale producers.
- In order to limit the damage caused from the centuries-long inflicted on small scale producers by a hitherto top-down approach, principal focus should instead be firmly focussed on the individual and community as the starting point for any well meaning intervention on food security; i.e., nearer the individual's stomach.

- At the international level, UN, FAO, WB, WFP, philanthropists and international charity organisations should limit their activities to advocacy and provision of emergency relief.

After the presentation of the panelists, Ethel del Pozo-Vergnes, a researcher from IIED's Sustainable Markets Group, summed up the points raised during the panel. Then participants asked questions and made several comments on the issues raised by the panelists. The discussion was interactive and a number of debatable arguments were discussed.

## II. Food We Want – Sustainable, Local, Fair Project Launch

The next part of the programme comes under the broader context of sustainable agriculture and environmental protection: the *Food We Want- Sustainable, Local, Fair* project launch event is a project funded by the EU. In this session, two presentations were made: the first, entitled, “*Food We Want: A Global Action for Food Security*” by the National Project Coordinator, Bereket Tsegay, and the second, on the importance of the project to communities in both Europe and Africa, by Press Officer for the UK, Menbere S. Hailemariam.



Tsegay started his presentation by expressing his disappointment and sadness that, in this well-developed modern world, we still see people dying of hunger. He outlined the overall project objectives, work packages and activities, and summarised a brief annual report of the project. Based on his explanation the Food We Want project is a global action to support the critical role of Sustainable Agriculture to ensure food security and environmental protection. The global food system is very complex and it requires synergising the efforts of many stakeholders. Raising public awareness of development issues and promoting development education in the European

Union is the key agenda in the European Union. As he outlined in his presentation, the core objectives of the project are:

- To raise public awareness in Europe and developing countries (development and sustainable agriculture)
- To foster synergies between development actors, institutions and civil society for more equitable North–South relations

- To mobilise greater support for actions against poverty and empower civil societies to responsibly and sustainably care for development and food security

Additionally, he mentioned the specific objective of the project which intends to promote the great potential role of sustainable agriculture as a tool to fight hunger and poverty, maintaining a sustainable path for development and avoiding natural resource depletion, both in Europe and in developing countries.

The project lasts for three years (May 2011- April 2014) with a clear sustainability mechanism in place to ensure its long-term targets. The project has five key work packages:



- *Establishment of a Platform, Scientific Research and Dissemination;*
- *Communication Campaign, Web portal;*
- *School Education Campaign;*
- *Media Education, European Media Contest;*
- *Sustainable Agriculture Support Points and Public Events.*

For the first year of UK project activities, the project team has been:

- focusing on developing PR and Campaigning strategies for the UK target group,
- contacting potential project partners,
- preparing for the project launch,
- producing promotional materials, and actively participating in the project consortium to ensure the smooth execution of the project in both Europe and in Africa.

Tsegay handed the floor over to Press Officer for the UK, Menbere Hailemariam, to brief the participants on the communication and campaigning strategy of the project in the UK.

Hailemariam explained how the project intends to reach the project target group of the general public and with a main focus on youth. In her presentation, the project instruments to be used were given due attention with the expected outputs and outcomes.

Hailemariam briefly described the usage of media in influencing the consumer behaviour of citizens in both Europe and Africa, including the utilisation of social networks (Facebook, twitter, My Space, etc.), and Social web TV. She stated that the Web portal of the project

will continue to be a platform for exchanging ideas among the communities and professionals.

She elaborated on the strategy, listing:

- the proposed activities of the school education campaign;
- development and production of a pedagogical kit to improve the knowledge society through mobilisation and policy changes.
- Advocacy and lobbying,
- the inclusion of all stakeholders,
- carrying out workshops and meetings,
- participation in fairs and exhibitions which could also bring out policy changes.

The online and offline media workshops will open a space to have interactive ways of exchanging ideas on sustainable agriculture. The proposed media contest will plant a seed in the minds of future writers on the importance of sustainable agriculture and the environment.

Finally, Hailemariam brought the idea of how the project will reach the wider targeted communities. In her presentation, she focused on:

- networking with all stakeholders and the creation of viable partnerships and platform;
- research and analysis;
- disseminating information and communication;
- Capacity building of media students, local and regional authorities (including the sustainable agriculture info points in Africa);
- and advocacy and lobbying policy makers at all levels to change future actions on sustainable agriculture and food security.

In the public event, more than forty five participants from various civil society groups, EU delegation in the UK, media, university students, international NGOs, and local charities, participated in and contributed to the discussion. At the end of the project launch an exhibition on development education was visited by the event participants as well as IIED staff. A short video on the Food We Want project was shown and created a chance for exchanging ideas, followed by a networking session.

The overall event was moderated by Nicole Kenton, IIED's Co-editor, Participatory Learning and Action, Natural Resources Group and Publications Coordinator, Climate Change. The event was coordinated by a team of four people: Bereket Tsegay and Menbere S. Hailemariam from PENHA, and Nicole Kenton and Anthony Stonehouse from IIED.



**Food We Want- Sustainable, Local, Fair Project partners are:**



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