

# JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND DIVERSITY IN OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

## A POSITION FROM THE ITALIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

THIS PAPER HAS BEEN PREPARED BY GCAP ITALY FOR THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE EU DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS ORGANIZED BY THE ITALIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, FLORENCE 14/15 JULY 2014.

### Hunger is a result of injustice, not of scarcity!

According to FAO, 842 million people are still living in constant hunger and malnutrition is responsible for nearly half of all deaths in children under five. But hunger in our world today is a result of injustice, not of scarcity: talking about access to food implies considering the inequalities that make inaccessible the food and the resources needed to produce it. It's an issue of power rather than distribution. Discussing about power over food implies a reflection on production, transformation, distribution, consumption; issues related to food have crucial implications in territorial and environmental terms, as well as in cultural and social terms. As a whole, such a reflection urges a wider and more holistic view than one based on a purely economic and functional perspective. According to the Declaration of Nyeleni<sup>1</sup>, the above concerns can be expressed in terms of 'food sovereignty', defined as "...the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."

As highlighted by CONCORD<sup>2</sup>, food system need to enable everyone to eat a healthy, nutritious diet that is based in the right to food, shaped by planetary boundaries, resilient and defined by people. The basis for this just and sustainable food system already exists, in the local food systems – family- based, small scale, diversified- that already feed the majority of the world's people. However its potential is thwarted by the dominance of a corporate and industrial food model which receives disproportionate political attention and support.

### How to change things?

Addressing the current challenges of our current food system requires:

- to ensure democracy and coherence in policy making, with a bottom-up approach. Governments must in particular respect and strengthen the role of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that offers a promise to improve coordination and governance of the global food system.
- to opt for agro-ecological methods of production that maintain and increase biodiversity, regenerate ecosystems and opt out from production methods that ignore planetary boundaries.
- to prioritize local economies and trade that can support local producers to meet the growing and changing demand of city dwellers. International trade rules must allow policy space to support livelihoods and jobs where people live and ensure food is at all-time available locally.
- to focus investment policies on the provision of public goods (infrastructure, research and extension services, bank loans) which complement farmers' own investments rather than facilitating foreign private sector investment that legitimize land and water grabs and promote corporations' interests and products.

<sup>1</sup> Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni, 2007

<sup>2</sup>See CONCORD (2014) Justice, democracy and diversity in our food systems, Bruxelles, from which many of the following reflections are drawn.



- to ensure stable and fair prices by using policy tools which help to stabilize food markets and food producers to cope with unpredictable harvests. Governments should be able to take measures against import surges, prices spikes and for the management of buffer stock.
- to guarantee the access to productive resources through secure and equitable rights for family farmers, especially women, to land, water, seeds and livestock breeds, fisheries and forests.
- to enable and promote better responsible food consumption in terms of quality and quantity and healthy diets by improving policies on public procurement, regulating the marketing of foods, ensuring consumers have access to information and discouraging high meat and dairy consumption. A special focus is needed to meet the nutrient requirements of newborns, children and youth, whom potential sets the opportunity to change and improve the life conditions of future generations.
- to encourage actions to reduce the waste of food, in pre and post-harvest phases, and to reduce food loss and waste globally and nationally.
- to redirect agricultural research towards meeting the needs of family farmers, improving nutrition, developing innovative agro-ecological methods and restoring the environment in direct collaboration with food producers.
- better aid and development policies that are built on the human rights and support their realization, including the right to food and nutrition, with heightened attention to under-fives and mothers.

### Points of reflection for Italian and European institutions

Europe has a key role in setting the agenda towards more just and sustainable food systems. In this view, a clear stand has to be taken on all the issues mentioned above, and the following points should be prioritized:

- Hunger is a result of injustice, not of scarcity. The focus on equity, human rights, the inclusion of the more marginalized groups, the reduction of excessive vertical inequality should always be at the forefront of any policy initiative.
- All national and supranational institutions should make a clear commitment in favor of the full implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on Right to Food, and of the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure, promoted by the FAO
- Europe has an enormous responsibility towards the whole planet, when it comes to ensuring policy coherence among the various policy components intended to intervene inside and outside Europe's boundaries: the strict adherence to the principle of policy coherence should therefore be enforced at all times.
- The principles behind and the support to the *New Alliance for food security and nutrition* promoted by G8 should be deeply reconsidered: its vision of food security as market based (rather than firmly connected to human rights and to the 'right to food framework') is reason of deep concerns, as it could potentially undermine progress towards the eradication of hunger.
- In view of a growing debate about the role of private sector in development, we urge looking at the crucial impact it may have particularly on food systems. Private sector actors, while legitimately pursuing their ends, should be tightly hold to a publicly guaranteed regulatory framework.
- European and Italian institutions should reconsider the reasons behind their vote against the "Elaboration of an international legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights", adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The way TNC operate have dramatic implications on food systems.
- The debate around the adoption of principles for Responsible Agricultural Investments (RAI) should be completely refocused in order to avoid the risk that they are used to justify bad practices such as land grabbing, and the spread of agro-fuel at the expenses of local food productions. The key concerns should be that of building resilient and sustainable local and national food systems.