

## **DISCUSSION POINTS ON SDG 2 AT THE UN High-level Political Forum, NEW YORK**

**(long version)**

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- **I am pleased to be here, and happy that you have agreed to hear the viewpoints of the movements that represent the people most implicated in the sustainable development debate: that is the rural poor, small farmers and peasants. These are viewpoints that are all too often left out of these discussions, so again, thank you.**
- In the SDGs debate, we need to keep asking ourselves a critical question to guide our discussions today, and hopefully find a lasting solution: The question is: **Who is continually being asked to adjust to who? And what? And Why?** Because, while a superficial look would lead us to believe that governments and corporations are going to adopt more sustainable practices, in fact most of the SDG goals involve a "business as usual" approach to solutions, based on economic growth. That leaves the poor and Southern countries to adjust to the on-going imperatives of the wealthy.
- As a women, a smallholder farmer, a peasant and General Coordinator of La Via Campesina -- the international peasant movement representing over 200 million people, including peasants, family farmers, indigenous peoples, the landless, farm workers, herders, fisherfolk, forest dwellers, rural women and youth -- the SDGs, in this case SDG 2, presents an impressive (but it seems, only in theory) move to eradicate poverty, end hunger, achieve food security, promote nutrition and sustainable agriculture and ensure that no one is left behind.
- However, what worries me, and the constituency I come from, is that **privatization in its various forms, "fiscal discipline" -- which means budget cuts on social spending for health, education, food programs to reduce hunger, etc) --, trade liberalisation through free trade agreements, development driven by growth,** are being put forth as the **magic wand** to eradicate poverty. We see this everywhere in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and even Europe.
- For us in La Via Campesina, we have noticed that these are the very same policies (**the same magic wand**) that caused poverty in the first place. Now it seems they have changed in appearance and name, as the new foundations and conditions to achieve SDGs goal. The ways to achieve "sustainable development goals" are in fact "business as usual." The same old wine in new bottles. What a contradiction!!!

- The crucial alternatives we have put forward, such as **food sovereignty, agroecology, and popular and integral agrarian reforms** to end hunger and promote sustainable agriculture, are not even mentioned or used. Only such real transformations – aimed at the root causes, which are all tied to rampant inequality and injustice - can give us any hope at all to end hunger and poverty, and to put the Earth back on the path of true sustainability.
- We take the fact that our alternatives have been ignored, as a repudiation of people's movements and ideas.
- Ladies and gentlemen, our political messages and alternatives are real solutions, solution that come from the very people the SDGs supposedly aim to help, and therefore they must be considered.

### **What do we need to do to achieve plausible SDG 2 results in the next 15 years?**

- We need urgent and deep structural transformations, including true agrarian reform, and defending, protecting and keeping territories (land, oceans, forests, etc) under the control of the majority of the world's population (peasants, fisherfolk and other peoples). We must engage to develop a different kind of society, through a radical transformation towards a fair and decent food system for all, based on principles of food sovereignty, which must necessarily include a rejection and reversal of runaway trade liberalization.
- We must have policies that protect critical functional biodiversity, like farmer-saved seeds, as these ensure adequate and appropriate nutrition in the face of a changing climate. Food diversity based on crop diversity, grown by the small-scale farmer, who is the first consumer, is a better and more effective alternative to fight malnutrition. Thus, governments and countries should have stronger policies to support agricultural biodiversity in the hands of peasants and small scale farmers, and not only focus on key international trade commodity crops – thus neglecting many farmer saved indigenous crops.
- We need to embrace agroecology, most of which is based on traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, to promote sustainable agriculture. FAO has thankfully opened debates on this. Agroecology can make critical contributions towards resolving the climate crisis. The Green Revolution and conventional agriculture have not been sustainable, and have only served to increase the inequality that is the root cause of most of the problems we face.
- The modern industrial food system, controlled by multinational corporations, based on large-scale industrial monocultures, and the long-distance shipping of food around the world, contributes between 40 and 60% of all greenhouse gas emissions. The way things are going now, in our home countries we will someday export everything we grow to Northern countries, while importing everything we need from them. This is absurd. Every country has the natural

resources and labour needed to produce everything it needs to eat. Unnecessarily shipping food around world only fattens corporate coffers, while heating the planet. This must stop. Food sovereignty based on agrarian reform and agroecology offers the best hope of truly reversing climate change. And for truly reaching SDG goals. The time for food sovereignty is now!

- We need to redirect public sector investments to much more “equitable” institutional and technological innovations, complemented by rural education and physical infrastructure (transport, schools, farmer-owned storage facilities, local and regional farmers markets, etc). We need an agricultural financing strategy that actually supports peasant and family farmer production, that is not biased toward agribusiness, and that doesn’t burden small-scale farmer families with unpayable debts.
- Women constitute the bulk of the farming population, therefore if knowledge, information and more agroecological technologies are to reach and benefit them, agricultural research and extension institutions need to go beyond just being gender-sensitive, and should proactively involve the leadership of women.
- We need better measures of human progress (based on fairness, equality, cooperation and sharing, etc) to gauge progress achieved. GDP, and a miserable \$1.25/day poverty line, as we have seen in the Millennium Development Goals, serve only to hide the true extent of poverty. Let’s propose measures that reflect reality – reality deep in Africa, Asia, Latin America, where most of the extreme poor are found. We need to focus on inequality above all.
- In the rare cases where there are opportunities for smallholder farmers to derive higher incomes in commodity-specific arrangements (outgrower and contract farming, like in the case of peasants who already grow coffee, cocoa, or tea), farmers and peasants can benefit only when they are members of strong peasant organizations, and when their rights and ability to bargain collectively over prices and other conditions of production are guaranteed and strengthened. In other words, when the playing field is levelled, and unequal power relations are addressed. Government-backed regulation and enforcement should support such a process.
- To reduce and eradicate poverty we need to find ways to redistribute the wealth currently in the hands of 1% of the population, by changing the economic and political system. We cannot have the best of both worlds, because most of the poverty we want to eradicate is a direct outcome of the extreme wealth accumulation of a few, through extractivism, exploitation and overconsumption. One is the result of the other.

- The unfair trade regimes being promoted by the World Trade Organization (which are therefore why hundreds of millions of smallholder farmers, peasants, and even some governments oppose this institution) continue to cause poverty and hunger, to make things worse; and national sovereignty over policies (particularly regulation of markets) has been drastically reduced. Corporations and private investors now play a much bigger role in the implementation of the SDGs; yet they are the very ones who benefit if inequality and unequal power relations are not addressed. You are letting the foxes guard the hen house!
- Small-scale agriculture carried out by peasants and families has been shown to be much more productive per hectare than industrial, agribusiness monocultures. It is also far more sustainable, much more compatible with agroecology, and is a big plus for slowing climate change. But this kind of sustainable and productive agriculture cannot expand as long as so much farm land is the hands of a few wealthy and foreign investors. And this is only getting worse, with the recent explosion of land grabbing. True agrarian reform, like that which we have had in Zimbabwe, is the only solution. I know this first hand. I myself led a land occupation and our land was then granted to our community through the government land reform in Zimbabwe. Even though international “critics” attacked our land reform, I know that it works, and works well.
- In what were once large cattle ranches owned by three large absentee farmers, who grazed just 800 head of cattle and produced no grain or anything else, we are now more than 350 small holder peasant farming families. We raise more than 3,400 head of cattle, and we also produce a yearly average of 1 to 2 tonnes of grain per family, plus vegetables and other products. Way, way more than was produced by the previous large land holders. This is typical around the world.
- Many of us do this using agroecological methods, and our own, local peasant seeds. Thus I have experienced in my own life, and thus I am a living testament the fact that land reform can make land more productive and more sustainable, boost food production for the local and national economy, and offer a life with dignity to the rural poor.
- This experience strengthens our commitment to, and belief in, agroecology and agrarian reform as fundamental pillars in the construction of Food Sovereignty. And in truly achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

I call on everyone here to engage in a serious process of reflection. How can any SDG goals, which leave the root causes of unsustainability intact, achieve sustainability? Let’s stop fooling ourselves. Please. Real alternatives, like those proposed by La Via Campesina and other popular movements, exist. Like agrarian reform, agroecology and food sovereignty. It is time to change tracks, it is time to

directly take on the root causes. It is time for real structural transformation. It is time to put an end to false solutions and business-as-usual. It is time to stop and to reverse climate change, with real solutions. It is time to reverse inequality and unfair power relations. It is time for real sustainable development goals, and a real process to achieve them.

The 200 million small-holder families in La Via Campesina, in Africa, in Asia, in the Americas, and in Europe, stand ready and willing to lend our labour and our force to true efforts to change tracks, to truly save humanity and save the planet. But we cannot do so alone. We need, in fact, we demand, a real change in policy, a real commitment to truly sustainable development.

Thank you.