



Forum Umwelt
und Entwicklung



The seven pillars of sustainable, small-scale farming and food sovereignty in the Global North and South

A position paper of the Working Group on
Agriculture and Food (WG A&F)
of the German NGO Forum on Environment
and Development

Pillar 1: Democratizing food systems

Sustainable food systems – from production to processing and the consumption of food – must be developed and implemented democratically. Agriculture and food is relevant to us all. Democratizing food systems can be conducted at various levels: Negotiation processes must be carried out at the local, national, regional and global levels. A large number of stakeholders are involved in the negotiation processes to reshape the political framework of food systems, including not only policy makers but also farmers as well as activists, consumers, envi-

ronmental and human rights groups and other interest groups.

In particular, sustainable food systems recognize the benefits of small-scale producers and farms. They are the largest investors in the agricultural sector and key contributors to the production of food worldwide. Their demands and needs must therefore be the focus of any agricultural and food policies. Educational programs that teach ecological sustainability, social justice and good nutrition form an important basis for democratizing food systems.

Pillar 2: Ecosystem approaches to agriculture

Sustainable agriculture and food systems make use of environmental resources through practices and production methods that are diverse in terms of agroecology (and environmentally friendliness). They rely on a limited use of equipment, or they forego it all together. They increase resilience and adaptation to climate change. The long-term preservation and promotion of the natural soil fertility is at the core of sustainable agriculture. A requirement for sustainable small-scale farming is land-related livestock husbandry and species-appropriate handling of farm animals in terms of the rearing, feeding, transport and slaughter of these animals. Animals must not be cloned or patented. Breeding targets must focus on the welfare of the animal and not on maximizing profits. Food production is adapted to the context-specific environmental conditions without overexploiting or polluting resources. The preservation of habitats for plants, animals and people, including herders and indigenous communities, is essential for food security. This type of agriculture makes it possible to preserve natural ecosystems in the long term. In order to ensure this happens, agricultural production must be adapted to lo-

cal needs and not oriented towards the global market. Small-scale agriculture relies on a variety of crops as well as on an unlimited right to the reproduction of seeds and plants. Foregoing risk-based technologies such as genetic engineering is an important part of ensuring a farmer's agricultural future. We reject the patenting of plants and seeds. The in-situ conservation of traditional varieties and their development is essential for conserving biodiversity, food security and resilient farming in times of climate change.

Sustainable agriculture and food systems are based on traditional and local knowledge and the skills of local producers and organizations. They are dynamic and necessary innovations, and research programs are developed and implemented with the participation of all stakeholders. They therefore meet the needs of producers and consumers and the environment. Agricultural training, research and science must move beyond the hitherto dogma of "grow or give up". Much more, the pursuit of sustainable agriculture and food system adheres to education and research approaches that focus on social justice, ecology and solidarity.

Pillar 3: Food sovereignty and local production

Sustainable agriculture and food systems contribute to reducing social inequalities and therefore achieving global justice. The equitable distribution of land and priority access for producers to land and water are of vital importance. First and foremost, they rely on the production of food for direct consumption by humans. The production of food, for example, has priority over energy production from renewable raw materials or the production of cash crops for the global market. Sustainable agriculture and food system primarily make use of local, regional and national domestic markets. In the interests of the necessary global exchange of goods, a sustainable agriculture and food system focuses on fair trade and on international solidarity, in particular between producers on every continent and consumer.

The preservation and revival of local food markets is an important part of a long-term strategy to effectively

fight hunger and poverty. Livelihoods can be maintained and new employment opportunities created in rural areas thanks to the sustainable development of local production and processing systems to produce good food. A close link between producers in rural areas and the consumers in cities increases the awareness in urban areas for good agriculture and food.

We reject production technologies that threaten present and future generations or force them into situations of dependency, just as we reject institutions, agreements and practices that promote unsustainable and unjust international trade or that further solidify or expand the power of transnational corporations. Clear limits are set for corporations with regard to competition and investment policies as well as construction and environmental laws, and precedence is given to developing regional value chains for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Pillar 4: Human rights are ensured

Sustainable agriculture and food systems contribute to human rights, in particular, to ensuring the human right to food for all worldwide. General and specific human rights obligations form the international legal framework for government action – both domestically and beyond their national territories.

Within the scope of their general human rights obligations, states must abide by the principles of non-discrimination, equality, transparency, accountability, participation and the rule of law, with particular consideration for discriminated and marginalized sections of the popula-

tion, such as the landless, herders, small-scale producers, women, people with disabilities or indigenous peoples.

As part of their specific obligations, states must respect, protect and fulfill the right to food so that all people have access to food that is quantitatively sufficient and qualitatively healthy, affordable and culturally adequate. Access to resources such as land, water, education or seeds is particularly necessary for local producers. Their traditional and legitimate rights are respected and protected, and the sustainable use of natural resources is monitored in democratic processes.

Pillar 5: Fair prices and good payment for labor

Every type of agricultural business management must cover costs for producers and at the same time must be affordable for a broad range of consumers. A small-scale sustainable agriculture system requires, at a minimum, prices that cover costs in order to ensure that farmers and their employees make a living with dignity. Sustainable agriculture and food systems respect and promote the rights of the workers, such as the right to organize, ensuring their occupational safety or their social security. This also applies to

migrant or seasonal workers. The ILO core labor standards are implemented and a living wage is paid. Governments in the Global North and South create the necessary legal framework (e.g., labor laws, inspections, coherent agriculture, trade and investment policies). This means that the national, European and international agricultural policies promote small-scale farms that operate diversely as well as environmentally and climate friendly, handle their animals humanely and secure good jobs in rural areas.

Pillar 6: A healthy mix for a healthy diet

For a good physical and mental development and healthy lifestyle - in addition to an adequate supply of calories - essential micronutrients such as iron, iodine and vitamin A must be ensured. This can only be accomplished in the long term by eating a balanced diet.

An agriculture system that promotes a healthy diet produces a wide range of nutritious and diverse foods, particularly fruits, vegetables, potatoes and grain but also fish, meat, milk and eggs. Agriculture based on high yields and the use of preservatives, artificial flavors and flavor enhancers as well as saturated fat have a negative impact on the quality of food. Agroecological agriculture aims to locally produce such diversity, also in small-scale

structures, with positive effects for the healthy diet of the farmers and consumers. It also reduces the use of hazardous pesticides that pose serious health and environmental dangers. Medication for animals is used exclusively for each specific animal in individual cases and not as a prophylactic. Growth hormones must not be used in animal feed. In order to preserve nutrients, the storage and preservation of food as well as the manufacturing processes of food can be improved. People are informed about a good and healthy diet, and this includes information on the need for nutrients as well as the nutritional content of foods. Access to fresh, locally produced products is ensured.

Pillar 7: Gender equality

In sustainable food systems, women working in agriculture have equal rights and they generate a decent income as food producers. To achieve this, women need access to land, water, seeds, as well as education and support. They must be equally involved in developing legal framework and strategies for agriculture and in food security programs. In addition to the same opportunities as men

for political participation and decision-making power, women must also live free from violence. Violence against women results in poverty and a lack of access to resources. Combating violence against women and girls in all its forms and the right to self-determination of women and girls is an important requirement for implementing the right to food of women and girls.



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