



Contribution of Schola Campesina to the FSN Forum discussion

“Responding to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on food value chains through efficient logistics”

The following contribution will explore two points: 1) the particular resilience of localized food systems -based on family farming- highlighted by the global crisis and; 2) the urgent need to support family farming as a strategic response to the crisis. We highlight the importance of localized food value chains -and its main actor *family farmers*- in alleviating the adverse effects that have been encountered thus far and building sustainable food systems, able to face future crisis.

1. Localized food value chains have demonstrated heightened resilience

The Covid-19 outbreak has attested to the fact that local food value chains provide particularly efficient logistics in comparison to long and globalized food chains. Indeed, global food production has not been significantly affected and -where local markets have remained in operation- no major issues have been reported. Conversely, international trade has been strongly affected due to its inherent globalized and complex logistics.

If we look at the main elements that affect food value chains in times of such crisis, such as: a) the closing of markets, b) the restriction of access for seasonal workers, c) bans on exports (and thus imports), and d) the restriction of trade in agricultural inputs/equipment; it is evident that long food chains are highly vulnerable, affected by all the aforementioned elements, whereas local food chains are only affected by the closing of markets. Based on international trade, globalized food chains have clearly shown their fragility and susceptibility to market volatility (e.g. the meat sector crisis in the US). However, local food chains (such as Community Supported Agriculture) have, in many countries, provided an efficient substitute to long food chains (Urgenci, 2020). We can also herein re-emphasize that globalized value chains are based on heavily industrialized food systems that are also polluters, and that represent the bulk of greenhouse gases emissions in the food and

agriculture sector.

This extraordinary crisis has shown with clear and paramount empiric evidence that family farming - constituting the vast majority of local markets- is providing the bulk of the food consumed by humanity (UNDRP, 2019). Specifically, when taken within an agroecology framework, family farming has demonstrated an incredible resilience and capacity to absorb the unforeseen shock (see Indian case study below). If this were not the case, the current pandemic would have already precipitated an unprecedented food crisis that would have affected a large part of humanity. Today, thanks to the localized structure of food systems provided by family farming, food is available for the population. Furthermore, if the UN warns of a coming food crisis¹, it will be directly expedited by the lack of income and the increased poverty prompted by the global lockdowns. The World Food Programme also states that “COVID-19 will double the number of people facing food crisis unless swift action is taken”.

It is imperative that we acknowledge that family farming is feeding the vast majority of the world and that, on the contrary, the conventional agro-industrial sector, with its globalized structure, is in crisis. In this emergency, family farming and its localized food systems are the crucial components that are preventing us from food shortages.

Box1

Indian agroecology school Amrita Bhoomi welcomes ex-workers of conventional farms

Conventional farms in India have been heavily affected by the COVID crisis, which has rendered many people redundant, in particular women. These women have been welcomed at the Amrita Bhoomi Agroecology School in Chamarajanagar District where they have the opportunity to learn how to grow their own food without using synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. The Agroecology School provides free training and equips participants with all the necessary tools needed to become an autonomous farmer: land, seeds, training and support, equipment, etc.

The impairment of conventional farming systems by the COVID crisis has directly resulted in the loss of livelihoods of many families. Amongst them, 14 women found a new opportunity to make a living in agroecology within localized food chains. Instead of being irreparably sabotaged by the global health and economic crisis, Amrita Bhoomi Agroecology School has safeguarded households from hunger and destitution.

(Interview with Amrita Bhoomi volunteer / June 2020)

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/09/world-faces-worst-food-crisis-50-years-un-coronavirus>

Box2

Bio-distretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre, an Agroecological territory in central Italy, boost the sales of local organic farmers to respond to the increase in demand of quality and safe food coming from families in lockdown in Urban and peri-urban areas

During the lockdown period in Italy, the food consumption patterns have dramatically changed. The Hotel Restaurant and Catering (HORECA) sector, that usually accounts for more the 50 % of the overall consumption, has been drastically reduced. On the other hand, family consumption has been bolstered, as the three traditional meals per day have to be consumed by all the components of the family at home. At the same time, greater attention to health care and food quality have been necessitated by the family demand. In this context, all the short chain sales models, and especially those demonstrating a clear agroecological approach (Nyeleni 2015), like the bio-districts, have garnered special attention by families, especially in urban areas. Italy's bio-districts have clearly defined territories and encompass organic agriculture and food production, a promotion of local community initiatives, cultural heritage, and traditional crafts. Bio-districts foster collaboration between farmers, local residents, tourism operators, local authorities, and other cultural and historical institutes and organisations. Italy has 30 bio-districts.

Biodistretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre is a nonprofit organization that includes the territories of 13 municipalities in the province of Viterbo (50 km north of Roma), with a population of approximately 70,000 inhabitants , and represent an area where more than 300 organic farms are active .

Biodistretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre is an association based on membership. The main aim of the association is to promote sustainable development at the territorial level with an agroecological approach: Other thematic areas included in this mandate are sustainable tourism, renewable energy, environmental protection, and circular economy principles. The Bio-distretto aims to support the local community to transition to a zero-emission model of production. The Bio-distretto promotes the use of renewable energy and is the key actor at local level in creating better conditions to facilitate the realization of the project's goals, as it involves collaboration between the local public authorities, food producers and civil society organizations.

In the Bio-distretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre the farmers and producers grow and sell diverse products: wine, olive oil, cheeses such as mozzarella and sheep's cheese, pork products and saffron, and furthermore operate an agri-tourism business and an international agroecology school .

Many of the products from this area are sold in the main markets of Rome or in smaller local markets, and are also distributed to local families through the use of direct selling schemes . This kind of model is a strength of the biodistrict's small-scale farmers – they are not constrained to one particular market and so they can easily adapt to different situations. In the COVID crises period an increase in sales of approximately 25% has been reported.

The small farmers and producers who live in Biodistrict della Via Amerina e delle Forre are innovators. This is most encapsulated by the fact that they have adapted their traditional farming methods to the demands of the modern world, and yet remain focused on sustainability. The farmers have strong social and cultural principles, and work together with the local community. Part of the ethos behind the biodistrict movement is to go beyond the 'single farm', and to create a holistic and integrated sustainable community.

2. Response to the crisis: supporting family farming

Based on the above analysis, it is evident that the immediate response to the crisis should be to support family farming and its associated organizations, which have the unique capacity to guarantee a food supply to all and to reduce poverty. Grants and credit programs should be immediately directed towards family farming and related organizations to increase their autonomy on seed production, post-harvest management, and access to markets. In the context of the UN Decade for Family Farming (UNDF), all initiatives at national and international level that support family farming should receive funding immediately. We call especially upon IFAD to drastically revise its priorities.

We need to further delineate the situation of the crisis pre-COVID 19 and the one post-COVID 19. The locust crisis in Eastern Africa, and the prolonged drought in Zimbabwe, are emergency situations that have to be handled with context-specific tools and responses that are different to those already outlined above and, more importantly, definitive social protection measures should be implemented. It is imperative not to conflate the two crises, as they need to be addressed separately and with different tools.

We advocate for a new communication by UNDF after the COVID crisis; to call upon all Governments to put the health of local and regional populations at the centre of their actions and responses, and to put people before economic profit and international trade that benefits a handful of powerful corporations. The UNDF Global Action Plan must be revised due to the COVID crisis, which is having an impact on food systems worldwide. A precedence for this has already been set by the food crisis of 2007/2008. Not to acknowledge this impact on food systems will undermine the outcome of the UNDF.

At the same time, we highlight that all Governments have (not always very effectively) tried to guarantee food access to the entire population (food provided by, in the vast majority, family

farming, through localized food systems). This means that they are acknowledging the heightened importance of the right to health and the right to food over any trade rules or transnational agreements.

The observations on the effectiveness and efficiency of local food systems also necessitate a larger and improved support for family farming, including a more rigorous implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), and a structural reform of the global governance of food and agriculture. A governance system out of the purview of the WTO and any bilateral trade agreements. In this sense, a more decisive role should be given to the Committee of World Food Security (CFS), where family farmers have a voice.

The UN institutions and governments should address the above-mentioned points and take the required action needed to ensure that they are successfully and effectively resolved.

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