
Food Sovereignty: A positive approach to climate change

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While the planet is already suffering the effects of climate change, civil society groups try to raise the alarm on the fact that the present system of production, trade and consumption is at the root of the problem.

In order to contribute to the process, the international peasant movement La Via Campesina attended the Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen, coming “from all five corners of the world, leaving our farmland, our animals, our forest, and also our families in the hamlets and villages to join you all.” (1)

They stress that the industrial and agribusiness model of agriculture has caused deforestation and conversion of natural forests into monoculture plantations. They state that the current globalised agricultural system contributes to more than half of the total global greenhouse gas emissions, providing the following figures:

- o (i) Agricultural activities are responsible for 11 to 15%,
- o (ii) Land clearing and deforestation cause an additional 15 to 18%,
- o (iii) Food processing, packing and transportation cause 15 to 20%, and
- o (iv) Decomposition of organic waste causes another 3 to 4%.

However, governments present at Copenhagen are not talking about changing such system. On the contrary, agribusiness corporations have a privileged seat at climate meetings and their proposals have been going into the negotiations as carbon trade mechanisms, like large scale tree plantations in afforestation programs.

“Carbon trade mechanisms will only serve polluting countries and companies, and bring disaster to small farmers and indigenous peoples in developing countries. The REDD initiative (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) has already kicked off their land many indigenous peoples and small farmers in developing countries. And more and more agricultural land is being converted into tree plantations in order to attract carbon credits”, warns La Via Campesina.

They also denounce that “the large emissions of methane by industrial agriculture are also due to the use of urea as a petrochemical fertilizer through the green revolution, very much supported by the World Bank. At the same time, agricultural trade liberalization promoted by free trade agreements (FTA) and by the World Trade Organization (WTO) is contributing to the greenhouse gases emissions due to food processing and food transportation around the world.” In spite of that, FAO continues “selling” the green revolution without being challenged by the UNFCCC.

Industrial agriculture is not only a major contributor to climate change but also violates human rights: “Millions of [farmers] suffer violence every year because of land conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Small farmers and landless farmers make up the majority of the more than 1 billion hungry people in the world. And because of free trade, many small farmers commit suicide in South Asia. So

putting an end to industrial agriculture is the only way we can go", says La Via Campesina.

Governments which are not being able or willing to really tackle the necessary measures to stop climate change are confronted by landless and small farmers who do have a proposal to climate change which they put forward at COP 13 in Bali 2007, and brought up again at COP 15 in Copenhagen: "small scale sustainable farmers are cooling down the earth". The proposal is backed by figures that prove that "it could reduce more than half of the global greenhouse gas emissions. This figure comes from:

- (I) Recuperating organic matter in the soil would reduce emissions by 20 to 35%.
- (II) Reversing the concentration of meat production in factory farms and reintegrating joint animal and crop production would reduce them by 5 to 9%
- (III) Putting local markets and fresh food back at the center of the food system would reduce a further 10 to 12%.
- (IV) Halting land clearing and deforestation would stop 15 to 18% of emissions. In short, by taking agriculture away from the big agribusiness corporations and putting it back into the hands of small farmers, we can reduce half of the global emissions of greenhouse gases.

This is what we propose, and we call it Food Sovereignty."

Such proposal would not only help to "cool down the earth", but would also contribute strongly to the well-being of millions of human beings whose rights are being violated on a daily basis by corporate industrial agriculture worldwide. And even more importantly, it would also contribute to the right of the present and future generations to live in a liveable planet.

(1) "Why we left our farms to come to Copenhagen", Speech of Henry Saragih, general coordinator of Via Campesina at the opening session of Klimaforum, December 2009, http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=833&Itemid=1