

Transforming Agriculture in a Warming World:

Reflections on Civil Society Strategies

By Shefali Sharma (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy) with Tobias Reichert (Germanwatch)

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Overview

We are witnessing the impacts of climate change on agriculture today. Adverse weather patterns such as drought, floods, and erratic rain are becoming more frequent in many countries and increasingly impacting farmers' abilities to respond to these changes and produce food.

Impacts of climate change observed today are particularly alarming given that governments are far from reaching a binding global agreement at the UNFCCC to limit global warming to no more than a 2° C temperature rise. The necessity to act now to address food security and agriculture adaptation in the midst of the climate crisis has never been more urgent. Special attention must be given to small farmers, landless labourers and communities dependent on rural agricultural production, as they are some of the most marginalized constituencies in virtually every country.

At the same time, efforts to strengthen the Right to food have never been greater, even as we face an unprecedented level of landgrabs in the post-colonial era and food price volatility. The Committee on World Food Security approved the [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#) in May; and a roadmap has been agreed in developing the Principles for [Responsible Agriculture Investments](#) (RAI). The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to food has helped elevate the importance of the Right to food in global food crises response and addressing food price volatility, global trade treaties and climate change. The year 2014 marks the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines on the [Right to food](#) and the Special Rapporteur is discussing with social movements, NGOs and governments how we should review its implementation over the last ten years. This is particularly important given that we are on the brink of a second food crisis within four years of the first one. Much of the progress made on reducing hunger was made prior to 2007-2008 and not since the first food crisis, according to the [State of Food Insecurity in the World Report 2012](#). As many as 875 million people still continue to suffer from hunger today.

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A number of encouraging developments at the international level allow us to begin strategizing in new ways and examine the potential for new alliances:

- There is a much stronger recognition after the 2008 food crisis by both donors and governments that greater attention to agriculture investment is key to food security in developing countries.
- Intergovernmental bodies are finally acknowledging that small food producers must play a crucial role in improving food security, and therefore have to be supported.
- The Committee on World Food Security has been revamped to become the main body to help create global convergence and coordination on food security policies and has finally allowed CSOs a space to negotiate outcomes alongside governments. Even the concept of food sovereignty is being negotiated at the Committee on Food Security and will continue to be a key agenda to push through at the CFS.
- The IAASTD has developed recommendations on the redirection of agricultural production systems towards agroecology and away from high input systems of industrial agriculture, while at the same time increasing the productivity of small farmers.

In spite of these positive developments, new and old challenges for a paradigm shift are formidable. High food price volatility and food prices are systemic conditions in the context of climate change, but are highly exacerbated with financial speculation in food commodities, incentives for the conversion of food crops and land into sources for agroenergy in developing countries and lack of political support for physical food reserves.

Most governments also continue to prioritize industrial high-input agriculture and long global value chains which are also linked to large scale foreign investment, increasingly associated with land-grabbing. Rather than promoting agroecological practices, governments and donors are supporting variations of a “second green revolution” aiming to “modernize” small farmers through highly proprietary technological fixes, including through the promotion of GMOs.

Governments have thus far failed to reign in the global agro-industrial complex that binds (very few) global agro-chemical companies (Syngenta, DuPont, Monsanto), grain traders (Cargill, Bunge, ADM), multinational food processors (Nestle, Unilever) with mainstream farmers unions, large scale cooperatives, research institutions and governments themselves. They continue to have a much bigger influence on agricultural policy making than CSOs and organizations representing small food producers. This situation is exacerbated by the fact, that agricultural research in most countries is focused on improving the functioning of this agroindustrial complex rather than how agroecological systems can scaled up with small producers at the center.

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The challenges are by no means small and CSOs working on agriculture have been grappling with these issues for many years, but we also have new opportunities and spaces to deal with these issues. The questions below aim to stimulate a discussion in the Dialogue on Transformation for strategic pathways forward on some of these challenges and opportunities.

Key questions for civil society strategies towards achieving a great transformation

Global Level:

- 1) The CFS has a “policy convergence and coordination” role vis a vis other global bodies on food security. Governments such as the US and others are, however, quick to assert that the CFS cannot dictate to other fora. How do we strengthen the role of the CFS in becoming a body that not only upholds the Right to food, but also has the authority to coordinate global actions on food security and monitor that the Right to food is implemented in decisions involving other fora, including at the UNFCCC? How do we continue to strengthen and enhance the role of CSOs at the CFS?
- 2) How do we ensure that civil society moves towards greater trust and collaboration between social movements and NGOs in our engagement at the CFS and in other international fora? What are the current bottlenecks towards greater collaboration? How can these be overcome?
- 3) How could CSOs help the CFS in promoting and establishing a follow-up process to the IAASTD report, for instance by setting up a process for countries to regularly conduct “national agricultural assessments”? How could the interlinkages among agroecology, right to food/water and climate change be placed high on the agendas for such processes while delivering positive outcomes for poverty reduction and rural development?
- 4) How could the CFS better cooperate with and inform UNFCCC negotiations, where agriculture is primarily discussed in its potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? For instance, how can controversial negotiations about carbon offsets in agriculture be better informed by food security concerns and the Right to food? Likewise, how could REDD discussions about agriculture as a driver of deforestation be considered in a way that primarily focuses on industrial agriculture rather than “blaming” small producers?
- 5) What role should civil society play in steering the UNFCCC in the right direction? Currently, only a handful of CSOs interested in promoting the right to food are entering into the debate at the UNFCCC on an agriculture work program. The large majority of CSOs working on the right to food, food sovereignty and food security are engaged on the CFS and other processes. How can CSOs coordinate better to ensure that the voices of social movements and small food producers effectively reverberate in the agriculture debate at the UNFCCC? How can those at the CFS strengthen the decisions agreed at CFS 39 on climate change and food security?

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6) There is currently a complete lack of coherence in the World Bank’s agriculture policy across IFC, IBRD and IDA. The World Bank’s climate finance unit is piloting agriculture soil carbon sequestration projects financed by the carbon market, while also developing principles for responsible agriculture investment and managing a global trust fund (Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to address food crises. Can CSOs launch a campaign on the need for the World Bank Group to establish an agriculture policy that respects the right to food and ensures coherence across its arms? What resources would it take to achieve this? What would success look like?

7) Can there be efforts to do a collective and collaborative stock-taking on the implementation of the right to food, ten years on, as per UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier DeSchutter’s idea and in light of food price volatility and climate change impacts on agriculture that feeds into policy direction in key fora such as the WTO and the UNFCCC?

8) With the Doha Round in stagnation, the development of the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investments (RAI) and the Voluntary Guidelines, can CSOs come together to discuss and strategize on what a global trade and investment regime should look like that respects the right to food? How do we bring governments on board to do that assessment? What does an international “competition policy” look like that helps to address and dismantle corporate control of agriculture and food? Which international body should create this type of competition policy, if at all?

9) Expensive and proprietary technologies are being promoted as solutions to both the climate change and food security problems—yet a critical need for both is biodiversity and the ability for small food producers to be able to revive, develop, breed and strengthen crops and animals in situ and along with scientists. How can we launch a review of the global intellectual property rights (IPR) regime in light of the current food and climate crises that will be powerful enough for governments to take note and which will not be derailed by the agro-industrial complex?

10) What position should civil society take on the G20 vis a vis the UN as “the body” to address some of the new challenges regarding agroenergy and speculation in food and agriculture? Is there a need for a firewall between financial speculation and that which affects food and agriculture commodities at the international level? Or is it best to leave these issues to advocacy at the EU and US level where national legislation determines these issues?

Regional Level:

1) How can European CSOs effectively challenge the EU towards a coherent agenda on the Right to food, the EU’s trade and investment objectives and its climate change initiatives? Can the CSO campaigns on the CAP better integrate these issues in their advocacy? How so and with what type of alliances?

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2) What lessons can be learned from regional efforts, for example in West Africa, to create grain reserves and how can these efforts be amplified? Several countries are thinking about grain reserves and beginning to collaborate on these issues in spite of the World Bank and others advising against it. How can these efforts be supported in each region?

3) What more can be done to change EU policies and directives on financial speculation that destabilizes agriculture prices and its policies on agroenergy so that they both respect the Right to food?

National Level

1) How can governments achieve policy coherence on the right to food in industrialised countries including by strengthening agroecology in ODA and transitioning domestic support for agroecological practices? Which key countries could be targeted to run a national agroecology campaign? What alliances would be necessary to get a victory? Brazil has now adopted the concept of agroecology and is supportive of it in international fora, how can CSOs build on this progress?

2) Can the power of global agroindustry companies be limited at the national level through competition policy? Many European/US campaigns in 1990s and 2000s focused on symptoms but not the problem. They focused on subsidies to large farmers, but not the corporations and the policies that allow them to drive farmgate prices. What strategies are needed to intervene effectively in political processes that empower agribusiness to dictate farmgate prices and keep farmers dependent on them? What policies and laws must be changed to break the dependency of farmers on large firms and expand support for small cooperatives that practice agroecology? How can we shift our own discourse and challenge the corporate structure of agriculture in developed countries that dictates what farmers get paid and what they produce?

3) How can CSOs better address demand side issues, such as high meat consumption and the consumption of items with a high carbon footprint and long food miles? What are prospects, ideas, and innovative alliances to increase public communication on these matters and set up campaigns on waste and sustainable food consumption?

What does this mean for CSO strategies?

1) How can there be more coherent actions and campaigns addressing the linkage between agriculture, food security and climate change--amongst CSOs that already work on all of these issues as well as amongst NGOs working on only some of these issues?

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2) Is it possible to create a focused, inclusive and global campaign that delivers political victories and results in a greater acceptance of agroecology as the key food security strategy and adaptation solution to climate change?

3) Who are possible partners for alliances in such a campaign (since NGOs are unlikely to have enough political leverage to counter the agroindustrial complex)? How do social movements and NGOs work together on this? How can the numerous agroecology projects and the small producer organizations leading them have a greater cumulative impact for policy change at the national level? At the regional and global level?

4) Have we been creative enough in our own alliances across different constituencies? For instance:

- Consumer organizations – how can we involve them to challenge agribusinesses that capture profits of rising food prices at the expense of both consumers and producers? How can we get them to advocate for systemic changes in government policies to enable just prices for producers and consumers for agroecological production (and therefore enable its expansion)? And how can we create joint alliances to better reach consumers, i.e. within campaigns on sustainable lifestyles?
- Organisations working on health – many CSOs, government departments and even medical associations and health insurance companies educate and advocate for healthier diets and a shift away from a highly processed food diet and a meat intensive diet associated with agroindustry. How can CSOs focused on a shift away from carbon intensive industrial agriculture work with them to move beyond dietary recommendations for individuals and enact policy-level changes?
- Environmental organizations dealing with waste, pollutants, carbon—there are numerous impacts of industrial agriculture on ecosystem health, including greenhouse gas emissions. Thus far, major environmental organizations have focused on the “sequestration” potential of carbon rather than a fundamental shift away from GHG emitting industrial practices. How can we enable a dialogue with the more “carbon” focused NGOs to think more systemically and join campaigns that target structures that create incentives for such emissions i.e. on industrial agriculture. How do we work more closely with organizations concerned with waste to advocate for agroecology?
- Traders and retailers – is there a potential to join closer together with small-scale traders and retailers, as well work with more large-scale cooperatives (i.e. the Coop in Switzerland) that specialize in organic agriculture and prefer to source from such practices? Is there a way to work with them to begin the shift away from dependency on industrial suppliers?
- Workers in the food system—can we begin to deepen work with trade unions and workers in the food system including the processing industry to examine how workers can be better incorporated and have better rights in an agriculture system that supports agroecology?

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