

NGO Strategy Dialogue on Energy and Climate, Agriculture and Food Security towards the Great Transformation

Outline for the Global Strategy Retreat, November 1st/2nd 2012, Bonn/Germany

The world is rapidly changing. Geopolitical power is shifting and planetary boundaries become obvious. Never before in history has the number of hungry and chronically undernourished people climbed to such levels, and the prospects to halve poverty until 2015 – and eventually end world hunger – are dire. Climate change and the competition for limited resources require a complete reversion of dominant energy systems and a full recognition of our planetary boundaries.

The crises of climate change, fossil fuel based energy systems and food security are – as recognised by scientists, policy makers, and civil society – increasingly interlinked. Systemic thinking, institutional analysis and multilevel approaches must be applied in order to tackle these challenges comprehensively.

Right to food AND access to affordable energy in the context of planetary boundaries

Today, one billion people on earth suffer constant hunger, at the same time, about 1.5 billion people live without access to electricity, while a large share of those on grid face unstable supply conditions. Yet realizing and improving access to energy for all can conflict with realizing the basic human right to food and the right to water. For instance, the mining of coal, oil or gas often occupies and pollutes land and water. Moreover, given that planetary boundaries are already overstressed, both food and energy production must be environmentally sustainable. Renewable energy sources, including fuel wood, (small) hydro power, or local biogas need not only become affordable and reliable but must also be tapped in ways that preserve ecosystem resilience and minimize greenhouse gas emissions. **This requires joint strategies for sustainable forms of agriculture and the use of energy.** Small scale solutions will be an important part of those strategies.

Bottom-up AND top-down strategies

Multilateral UN negotiations on preserving biodiversity, preventing dangerous climate change, and reversing desertification are ongoing but so far failed to create the momentum to spur the necessary scale of transitions in energy and agricultural production systems worldwide. Given changing geopolitical power relations and the remaining abstinence of the USA, prospects for much increasing political ambition at the multilateral level in the coming years are dire. Several concrete national and international initiatives as well as numerous on-the-ground projects exist to provide access to energy, and to improve food security. This all supports a transformation towards a sustainable and low risk energy and food system. Yet many of these initiatives and projects are single-issue oriented and do not respond to the multiple challenges. And their mosaic diversity does not add up to creating systemic transitions either. **Innovative strategies are needed that build bridges between local projects and national and international politics**, so as to speed up the overall transition and maximize its democratic legitimacy.

Policy engagement AND movement building

Both at the political level and in the field, civil society organisations face increasing pressure from corporate interests that try to tilt transitions towards their benefit. Many access-to-energy initiatives are corporate driven, while the launch of a second “green revolution” in agricultural production is under way. All signs indicate that capital control and political influence of multinational companies will further increase in the years ahead. Civil society organisations will keep playing David against Goliath. **To encounter this power imbalance with joint strategies and diverse roles, building a movement is as important as enhancing strategies to influence politics.** This perspective should allow CSOs to argue in a horizon beyond national restrictions, but taking them into account. Innovative strategies will seek to strengthen civil society’s twin societal supremacy: fighting for the common good, with as broad a democratic legitimacy as possible.

Information on conference and organisers

It is the aspiration of Germanwatch together with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and international NGOs to initiate a discourse of civil society organisations on strategic approaches to the challenges mentioned above and thus build momentum for the needed Great Transformation.

Discussion will focus

- on strategies of NGOs as well as
- on alliances with other civil society actors

how to best shape the necessary transformation.

Debates will be based on

- information exchange,
- sharing of successfully proven policy, social movements and civil society approaches, as well as
- on fresh ideas and innovative methods to tackle the multiple crises.

In approaching two crucial topics within the realm of the Great Transformation (energy/climate and agriculture/food security), we hope to encounter the various synergies that emerge from this gathering of experts and topics. Within this process, intercultural dimensions and the various roles of civil society actors in different regions and settings are highly relevant; the approach will lead along the lines of “common goals and different solutions”. According to discussions inside the steering group, we position the top priority of the Great Transformation in triggering systemic changes towards renewable and viable energy and agricultural systems that reduce not only poverty and hunger and contribute to mitigating climate change, but support the path towards new models of prosperity and real wealth.

The NGO strategy dialogue will be open for broad exchange at an international civil society conference on November 1-2. It will be attended by around 150 international experts from all over the world including 40 representatives from the global south that are fully financed. The conference will be followed by a regional meeting on November 3 2012 for southern participants in Bonn/Germany. The process of establishing content was supported by an international steering group during an official meeting at the Rio+20-Conference. The steering group consists of renowned experts from various continents.

Germanwatch is organising and chairing in co-operation with IATP this entire dialogue, funded by Stiftung Mercator. Germanwatch’s mission is: “...to actively promote North-South equity and the preservation of livelihoods. We observe, analyse and act. In doing so, we focus on the politics and economics of the North with their worldwide consequences”. Germanwatch has longstanding knowledge in the thematic fields of the dialogue and has previously organised similar exchange projects. Working in national and international networks in the fields of climate and food policy, as well as building alliances are key qualifications and operation methods of Germanwatch.

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