

Focus :

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

ROUNDTABLE

[GE6]

Grand Auditorium
Palais Brongniart

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WHAT ARE THE GLOBAL STAKES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

MAIN FINDINGS

In an industrialised world in which agriculture makes brash use of fertilisers and pesticides, food sovereignty is a key issue for every country. If current production methods are not modified, the poorest countries will be able to stand up to neither the fierce competition nor the economic, health and environmental problems they are currently encountering. Mentalities must be changed and NGOs and governments must be included in order to make agriculture local and family-based. Agroecology will allow each country to produce locally while providing its population with risk-free food in sufficient quantities. At the same time, measures must be taken in order to protect local production, particularly through technical innovation as well as customs and borders measures. These changes will sprout both from public policy and from committed citizen action.

SPEAKERS

S.E. M. Jean-Paul Guevara Ávila
Ambassador of Bolivia to France

Salia Mahamane
Chairman, Federation of Market-Garden
Cooperatives of (FCMN – NIYA)

Pierre Rabhi
Farmer, writer, philosopher

Adrien Tomarchio
Communication and Development Manager, ACTED

MODERATOR

Tristan Lecomte
Founder, Pur Projet

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

What is the food sovereignty vision?

Adrien Tomarchio presents the key food sovereignty issues from the perspective of a fieldwork NGO. He explains that the Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a yearly report which presents quantitative and qualitative data on hunger in each country around the world. He notes that food security is the right and need of each individual to have access to food, whereas food sovereignty is the right of countries and citizens to implement food security on a local level.

Salia Mahamane explains that in Niger, local production suffers from the fierce competition of cheaper imported food. For example, Niger produces 500,000 tonnes of onions a year, but cannot compete with European production. In order to protect local produce, he argues for quotas and higher customs duties. Increased competitiveness could also be achieved through greater technical and financial resources for developing local production. Despite a harsh climate, Niger has real production capacity.

Pierre Rabhi notes that our societies were initially agricultural before becoming industrialised. Given that the world now has ever fewer small-scale farmers, those that remain are turning towards modern agriculture, which typically entails the use of fertilisers and pesticides. This shift has led to a shakeup in the system, increased poverty among the people and harmful effects on health and the environment. The consequence will be a global food shortage for future generations. In order to steer clear of this catastrophic scenario, the only solution is agroecology. This can be defined as a movement which advocates for respect for ecosystems while taking into account the economic, social and political dimensions of human living. In simple terms, agroecology is based on the laws of life, illustrated by examples such as waste composting and reforestation to name but a few.

How can food challenges be tackled?

Salia Mahamane explains that many African farmers use natural fertilisers instead of their chemical equivalents, partly because they are cheaper but also because they are more effective.

Adrien Tomarchio points out that NGOs have also evolved in terms of the help they provide to farming populations by moving away from one-off interventions in order to favour sustainable and well thought-out projects which use agroecology as a model. This approach includes supporting and strengthening local capacities and reasoning. Furthermore, the intention is that farming populations should be able to move away from subsistence agriculture by introducing innovative techniques. Alongside these actions on the ground, other NGOs are taking it upon themselves to alert public opinion on problems such as food sovereignty and to pass on political messages through reports such as the GHI.

Pierre Rabhi insists on the importance of thinking about what type of society we want to work towards. Agriculture is an important part of our surroundings, but its challenges are to be tackled through a broader outlook which includes a new world vision. There can be no change in our society model without human change.

Tristan Lecomte gives the example of the King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej. In his view, what is essential is not just food sovereignty but life sovereignty. This is why he not only encourages farmers to produce locally on small holdings in order to work towards self-sufficiency, but also to show moderation and to make do and be happy with what one has.

S.E. M. Jean-Paul Guevara Ávila points out that President Evo Morales' project to achieve food self-sufficiency by 2025 can be reached because the country has enough food for its entire population. The country has the vision and ability to reorganise national production and to rethink agricultural production techniques.

SUMMARY OF DEBATE WITH THE AUDIENCE

Is food sovereignty possible in all regions of the world? What about the Middle East, for example? As for GM crops, is it reasonable to allow the private sector and industry to act alone? Shouldn't the public sector intervene?

S.E. M. Jean-Paul Guevara Ávila explains that sovereignty does not simply consist of closing borders, but rather making choices regarding how to organise local production and imports while seeking complementarity

among countries. As for GM crops, they are harmful for human health and public powers should address this.

Can we, as individuals, play an active role in food sovereignty? As a citizen in a country which contributes to food instability, can one hollow out a role to play?

Pierre Rabhi answers that each one of us has of course an individual responsibility which we can put in practice on a daily basis, through boycotts or by choosing to go shopping at a market as opposed to a large supermarket, for example.

REPORTER

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Pamiga

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

- *The Hunger Barometer 2012 Convergences 2015 (in French)*: www.convergences2015.org/fr/Article?id=681
- *Glossary of Food Sovereignty Convergences 2015 (in French)*: www.convergences2015.org/fr/Article?id=598
- Welthungerhilfe/IFPRI/ConcernWorldwide/ACTED (2012). *Global Hunger Index 2012 (GHI)*. www.acted.org/en/world-food-day-2012
- **Mouvement Colibris** : www.colibris-lemouvement.org
- Daniel Nahon (2012). *Sauvons l'agriculture !*, Odile Jacob.
- Pierre Rabhi (2003). *L'offrande au crépuscule*, L'Harmattan.