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Ecology/Food

Food sovereignty: we can feed the world

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We live in the context of a multiple systematic crisis: economical, ecological, alimentary, care, energetic... And the capitalist system, far from providing answers to a crisis that itself has generated, bets for a gateway characterized by the same concepts: major privatization of the public services, plundering of the natural resources, technological answers to climate change, giving subsidies and financial grants to private companies and banc institutions.

The food crisis shows one of the most dramatic faces of the current capitalist system, with more than a billion people in the world, one out of six, who starves, especially in countries from the Southern hemisphere. Paradoxically, in the last twenty years, while population has been growing at a 1.14% yearly rate, the production of food has increased in more than a 2% rate. Therefore, and evaluating this data, we can conclude that currently we are producing enough food to feed the population of the whole world. Then, where does the problem lie? Well, that if there is not enough income to pay the price, people cannot eat.

The neoliberal policies applied to agriculture in the last thirty years (green revolution, delocalization, free trade, depeasantization...), have lead us to an increasing food and alimentary insecurity. Food has become a business, a privatized good in the hands of a few companies from the agrifood industry, which have the support from governments and international institutions.

Having to face this situation, summit after summit, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G20, together with the main companies of the sector, are telling us that in order to overcome this crisis a brand new green revolution is necessary, as well as more transgenics and free trade. They want us to believe that the policies that lead us to this current situation will help us overcome the problems generated by these policies themselves.

Local, peasant-like and ecological agriculture

But the alternatives exist. The relocalization of agriculture in the hands of the peasants, will allow us to guarantee a universal access to food. And this has been proven by the results shown in an extended international investigation which lasted four years and which involved more than 400 scientists, carried out by The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), an evaluation project supported by the World Bank, in partnership with the FAO, the UNDP, the UNESCO, government representatives, private, scientific and social institutions, etc., taking as a model the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Evaluation of the Ecosystems of the Millennium.

It is interesting to observe how, in spite of the fact that the report was backed up by all of these institutions, it concluded that the agro-ecological production would provide those least favored, the poorest population, with monetary and alimentary income, at the same time that would provide a surplus for the market, becoming a better guarantee for food and alimentary security than transgenic production. The report issued by the IAAST supported the local, peasant-like and familiar production, and the redistribution of the land in hands of the rural communities. The report was rejected by agribusiness and filed away by the World Bank, even though 61 governments quietly approved it, with the exception of the United States, Canada, Australia, among others.

A research study by the University of Michigan (2007) positioned itself along the same lines, concluding that agro-ecological farms are highly productive and capable of guaranteeing food and alimentary security all around the globe, on the contrary to industrialized agricultural production and free trade. Their conclusions pointed out, even taking as a reference their most conservative estimates, that organic agriculture could supply at least the same amounts as done currently; although, their researchers considered that, a more realistic estimate would be that ecological agriculture could increase the global production of food by 50%.

In the area of commercialization, and in order to break the monopolies of major distributions, has proven essential to support short circuits of commercialization (local markets, direct sales, groups and cooperatives of agro-ecological consumption...), avoiding intermediaries and mediators, and establishing closer relationships between producers and consumers based on trust and mutual understanding, which will lead to a growing solidarity between the countryside and the cities. Currently, the broad distribution (supermarkets, chain discounts, hypermarkets, etc.) monopolize the commercialization chain of food, obtaining the maximum benefits at the expense of exploiting workers, peasants and the environment.

Food sovereignty proves to be the best alternative to end world hunger. It is a matter of returning the control of the agricultural and food policies to the people (peasants, workers, consumers, women...), as well as their access to the land and the common goods (water, seeds...). A food sovereignty which will have to be deeply feminist, recognizing the role of women as a guarantee of food to a global level, and fighting against the oppression, not only of the capitalist system, but also of the patriarchal system.

Contribution to the working group on agro-ecology, food sovereignty and degrowth at the Second Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity. March 26-29th 2010, Barcelona.