

C2A Notes

The fight against hunger and the effects of climate change: beware of false solutions!

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Today the fight against hunger and malnutrition cannot be discussed without considering the additional negative impacts linked to climate change. Likewise, any initiative to fight climate change must take into account positive and negative impacts on the food and nutrition security of the most vulnerable populations. This necessary consistency of dedicated policies, mechanisms and funding is crucial. In recent years, however, a number of "false solutions" have emerged, with a negative impact on the food security of local populations and without any contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or of the effects of climate change. In spite of warnings from social movements and civil society, States unfortunately do not seem to be learning from their mistakes or changing their practices accordingly.

Food security and climate change: two issues clearly linked

Agriculture is faced with two realities:

- The farming industry is particularly vulnerable to climate variations. Delayed rain, droughts and floods, which may become more intense and frequent, have devastating effects on small farmers, and jeopardize their production, households' income and local populations' right to food.

These climatic events also have a direct impact on the price of agricultural raw materials at international level, as demonstrated by the 2012 drought in the United States. This episode caused the price of wheat and maize on the Chicago stock exchange to increase by over 50% within a few weeks. The most destitute populations – particularly urban –, who spend up to 75 % of their income on food, are hardest hit by this surge in food prices.

- The farming industry is also a significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter. Although

farming is said to account for about 14% of greenhouse gas emissions of human origin, all the factors associated with it raise its impact to 22% or even 27% depending on the estimates¹. Deforestation to make new land available for agricultural production causes carbon dioxide to be released. Large-scale industrial productions, moreover, create heavy emissions through the use of pesticides and fertilizers. Finally, beyond production, the processing and transportation of goods also contribute to the industry's GHG emissions.

Food systems are currently not managing to meet everyone's needs, with over 800 million people suffering from hunger in the world (FAO - SOFI 2014). And according to some analyses, another 600 million people could suffer from food insecurity by 2080, under the effect of climate change². Climate issues and food and nutrition security can thus no longer be separated. 

¹ See in particular: Food security and climate change – A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition – June 2012; and Agriculture: from problem to solution - Achieving the Right to Food in a Climate-Constrained World – CIDSE October 2012

² UNDP estimate quoted by the FAO

False solution no. 1

When developing renewable energy for transport is detrimental to the environment and the right to food

Since the mid-2000s, several countries have adopted policies incorporating industrial biofuels in transport, particularly the United States and EU Member States. Peasant biofuels produced on a small-scale for self-consumption could offer a good solution to reinforce small farmers' energy independence. However US and EU policies, which have set themselves the objective of making biofuels account for up to 10 or 20% of all transport fuels, have encouraged the development of intensive monocultures for export (sugar cane, oil palm, soybean, jatropha, etc.) in countries of the South.

This production system based on large surfaces does not benefit local populations. Biofuel crops compete with family and subsistence farming, leading to the grabbing of fertile land and water resources and population displacement, and exacerbating the degradation of natural resources (pollution, deforestation, etc.). The

production of industrial biofuels can thus be considered to undermine human rights, primarily the right to food. Furthermore, by diverting part of agricultural production for energy purposes, these new markets disrupt the balance between food supply and demand, thus driving speculation and contributing to the rise in agricultural and food prices. In 2010, for example, 40% of US maize production was diverted from food use for biofuels.

This assessment is widely shared by a large number of actors. Since 2011, several international agencies, including the FAO, the OECD and the World Bank, have stressed the correlation between food price spikes and biofuel policies³. Even more recently, in March 2014⁴ IPCC experts highlighted biofuels' negative impact on the environment and the rise of agricultural prices, and hence on food security. This panel firmly adding to the voices speaking out about the risks tied to these incorporation policies attests to a consensus: it is high time for this to translate into clear political commitments to put an end to the development of industrial biofuels and to mandatory incorporation objectives. 



PALM OIL PHOTOGRAPH - Kim Pin Tan © 123RF

³ Report on the volatility of agricultural prices for the attention of the G20 – World Bank, OECD, WTO, FAO, WFP, UNCTAD, IFAD, IMF - 2011

⁴ Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – IPCC Working Group II report – March 2014

False solution no. 2

When the fight against deforestation translates into land grabbing and the privatization of land and resources

An estimated 10% of greenhouse gas emissions today are due to deforestation. That is why, from the early 2000s, deforestation was included in international negotiations, with the creation of the REDD+ mechanism. This mechanism is designed to encourage countries' efforts to reduce deforestation through a financial compensation mechanism.

This mechanism's architecture has been called into question (governance issues still remain

unsolved), along with its actual performance (preserving the forest there in order to emit GHG here). There is also a lot of uncertainty surrounding the demand for carbon credit, since no compulsory mechanism is currently in place and small farmers and local operators struggle to access these credits.

Moreover, certain REDD+ projects also have negative impacts on local populations and their food security. By privatizing certain forest areas to be protected, these projects can lead to land grabbing, excluding local populations. Local communities and indigenous populations are then deprived of the only space through which they could feed themselves: the forest. 

Diego Cardona – CENSAT Colombia: "This sleight of hand has led to nature being integrated into the value system of international trade" ⁵

"The REDD+ are purely an economic approach. The economic actors of the North finance the preservation of a forest in Colombia or Peru, because it is cheaper for them than to invest in reducing CO2 emissions at home. This sleight of hand has led to nature being integrated into the value system of international trade.

"What about social impacts, on the ground? The local people are no longer allowed to enter a territory that was their source of subsistence and income, through hunting, gathering, agricultural clearance or logging. These operations are defended as being carried out under formal contracts. However, the documents provided – in Peru, Ecuador or Brazil – are written using technical and legal language [...]. Sometimes, they are even only written in French or in English! They violate the international conventions which stipulate that the local people must give their informed consent. How could an Amazonian village chief master a 130-page document written in a language he does not understand?

"In Peru, we investigated a compensation operation which puts communities in an impossible situation: their homes have actually been included in the protected perimeter. They are threatened with eviction or even imprisonment. There you have an indigenous people that no longer has the right to farm, hack paths, build houses, hunt, set up pens for animal husbandry, cut trees to carve out canoes, etc."

And beyond privatizing land needed by local populations to feed themselves, certain projects are very far from meeting the challenge of reducing deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, because in some countries the definition of what constitutes a forest is too broad, certain industrial plantations seek to benefit from this label. But how can one justify large-scale eucalyptus, oil palm or banana tree monocultures receiving financial compensation in the name of

REDD+ when the land had to be cleared in the first place to set up the plantations? Moreover, these are very large-scale industrial plantations, using considerable amounts of pesticides and industrial fertilizers with notorious negative impacts on the environment. At the very least, the criteria surrounding REDD+ mechanisms must therefore be reinforced in order to ensure that they are not detrimental to the fight against hunger and climate change 

⁵ CCFD-Terre Solidaire / Faim et développement magazine – Special issue: Quel modèle agricole face à la crise écologique ? – September/October 2014

False solution no. 3

"Climate-smart" agricultural models including even those most detrimental to food security and the environment

"Climate-Smart Agriculture" is a concept that was originally promoted by the FAO. It consists of three pillars: the sustainable increase of farm productivity and income, greater resilience to climate change, and the reduction of GHG emissions wherever possible. In September 2014, the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture was launched at the Ban Ki Moon climate summit. 17 countries, including France, the United States and Niger, and over 30 organizations (civil society organizations, companies, research organizations, etc.) are now members.

The overwhelming majority of civil society organizations, however, have expressed serious doubts regarding the Alliance, based on an

analysis of the initiative's framework document⁶.

Three major criticisms have been made:

- The perimeter of the practices promoted is not defined by any exclusion criteria or social or environmental standards (giving free rein to the development of GMOs and pesticide-intensive practices, especially as the main private actors involved belong to these industries: YARA, Monsanto, Walmart, McDonald's, etc.). References to human rights are sparse, though the right to food is briefly mentioned.
- Priority in the needs of the different agricultural models is not clearly identified: should family farms adapt or should industrial farming be toned down?
- The governance of the Alliance and its links with the UNFCCC⁷ and the Committee for World Food Security are unclear and risk generating competition and confusion as to each forum's role and objective.

Real solutions do exist!

Family farms in the South and agroecological practices, both low greenhouse gas emitters yet particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, must be given priority in view of their fundamental role for local food security and nutrition, urban planning, resource management, job creation and social stability. While peasant farmers have always had to and known how to develop strategies to face climate hazards and tackle difficult production conditions, the magnitude and speed of climate change require real support to further innovate and invest in more resilient agricultural models, first and foremost designed to feeding women and men.

⁶ Climate-Smart Agriculture': the Emperor's new clothes? - CIDSE, October 2014

⁷ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

As part of its mission to support the collective advocacy of its members, Coordination SUD has set up working committees. The Agriculture and Food Commission (C2A) brings together international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security: 4D, ACF, aGter, Artisans du Monde, AVSF, CARI, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, CFSI, CIDR, CRID, Gret, Inter Aide, Iram, Oxfam France, Peuples Solidaires in association with ActionAid France, Réseau Foi et Justice Europe, Secours Catholique, Secours Islamique, Union Nationale des Maisons Familiales Rurales, and one guest : Inter-réseaux.

The aim of the Commission is to coordinate the work conducted by its participants and to facilitate consultation among its members for their advocacy work with social actors and international policy makers. The members of the Commission reach agreements on who represents Coordination SUD in a range of arenas (Concord in Europe, FAO, WTO, UNCTAD) and share information on current international issues. The Commission is mandated by Coordination SUD to formulate the positions taken by the group during the major institutional meetings on the subject of agriculture and food.

This paper was written by
Maureen Jorand, CCFD-Terre Solidaire.
Translated from French by
Nonta Libbrecht-Carey.

