



Food for Life Campaign

Food Sovereignty from a Southern Perspective

*Speech by Angeline Munzara, EAA Food Campaign Coordinator,
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Introduction

‘Eat what you grow and grow what you eat’ is the meaning of food sovereignty from an African context. It means that the small farmers have the power to determine what to grow, how to grow, and what to eat. This is the only way that small farmers can make independent choices on healthy and culturally compatible food. In my speech I will share the perspectives of African farmers with a particular focus on Zimbabwe, on food sovereignty and the challenges they do face to achieve the same.

In Africa, agriculture is the mainstay of most economies and contributes to the livelihoods of farmers. However this highly depends on the following aspects of food sovereignty:

- i) ***Being able to produce for own consumption:*** Small scale farmers want to be able to produce enough for the family and for sale. Agriculture is both for feeding and a source of income to enable farmers to send the children to schools and buy other basic needs. In cases of food shortages caused by droughts, floods, pests and diseases, non access to land and other causes, farmers prefer to have food purchased locally to feed areas that are affected rather than buying from outside the country. This will help to create incentives to produce more surplus food and to keep the local market prices stable.
- ii) ***Having the right to save, use and reuse seeds:*** Most African farmers depend on seeds cultivated within their own communities for as much as 90% of their seed needs. Most of these seed breeders are women, as they produce 70% of the food for use in the region. They carefully select those seeds that respond to various soil types and growing conditions. These seeds do carry particular traits such as stability, disease resistance, drought tolerance and storage quality. They also demand less use of fertilizers and pesticides hence also friendly to the environment. In Southern Africa, seed saved on-farm constitute 95-100% of the seed used for sorghum, millet, food legumes, roots and tuber crops. In Zambia, 95% of the millet crop is grown from farmers’ seed. Even with a commercial crop like maize, small farmers are typically the main suppliers of seed. In Malawi, despite years of effort by the state seed company and private seed companies, commercially improved or hybrid maize covers not more than 30% of the smallholder area. Small farmers constitute by far the largest sector of seed breeders in Southern Africa and they have cultivated the abundant diversity that sustains the continent’s food security. Seed security is therefore a matter of national security because seed is the first link in the food chain process and is the lifeblood of agriculture. The seed industry should not therefore be controlled by few corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta, who controls more than 67% of the seed companies but by family members. In Zimbabwe, there was a shortage of hybrid seeds during the 2008 agricultural season and farmers were encouraged to use farm saved seeds. If corporations are already in control of all the seed with the power to switch on and off the life of the seed, there will not be any local seed to save. Food sovereignty in this case also means having seed sovereignty and empowering the farmers to produce, multiply and save their own seed.

- iii) ***Protection of local markets:*** Small scale farmers require protection of their local markets from cheap food from outside the country. Protection of farmers helps to promote local production and shield the farmers from unfair competition from outside. For example, in Cameroon, the local market was flooded with cheap frozen chicken from the European Union. This displaced the market for local chicken which was sold at higher prices than those from the EU. Protection of local markets will offer greater control to those consuming the food. Food sovereignty therefore puts local producers, consumers, and distributors at the center of food policies and systems.
- iv) ***Protection from land grabbing and agro-fuels production:*** Small farmers in Africa want agricultural models that work with nature & not against it. They do not want to depend heavily on fertilizers and use of chemicals as this is also very expensive for them. To them what is important is intercropping, crop rotation and planting of variety of crops. The danger of relying on one type of crop is when that crop is destroyed by unforeseen circumstances like droughts. The planting of many crop varieties will help with ensuring the survival of some of the crops from these disasters. One of the challenges in Africa is currently on land grabbing to produce agro-fuels. This model promotes the growing of one crop like maize or sugarcane. Cutting down forests for feeding cars does not keep the people in Africa, in charge of their food supply, but rather, sells that right off to the global marketplace. One writer has stated, ‘the amount of grain required to fill the 90-litre petrol tank of a 4x4 vehicle *once* with ethanol could feed one person for a year. The grain it takes to fill the tank every two weeks over a year would feed 26 people.’ The question is whether there should be competition to produce for feeding cars or for reducing the number of hungry people in the world.

Conclusion

Food sovereignty means total independence of a country to be at liberty to make policies that empower local farmers to produce for the consumption of the country. It means small scale farmers having the power to decide what to grow, how to grow it and when to grow it. It is all about having control over the food production systems. In essence it’s having the choice to eat what you grow and growing what you eat.

For more information contact: Angeline Munzara, amunzara@e-alliance.ch

The **Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance** is a broad international network of churches and Christian organizations cooperating in advocacy on food and HIV and AIDS. The Alliance is based in Geneva, Switzerland. For more information, see <http://www.e-alliance.ch/>