

FOOD

FILES

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Women and Agriculture

**Participatory Rights-based
Food Programme**

**Climate Change and
Sustainable Agriculture**

Food Sovereignty



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Contents

FOREWORD	03
FILE	
Women Feeding Cities Alice Hovorka and Femke Hoekstra	04
Rights-Based Food Programmes: Fighting Hunger and Inequality from the Grassroots Adriano Campolina	08
From PRA to PLA and Pluralism: Practice and Theory Robert Chambers	14
Rights-Based Territorial Development Initiative: A Very Short Introduction José Ferreira	21
POST-IT	
The Exchange and Systemisation of Brazilian Women's Experience in Agroecology Ana Paula Lopes Ferreira and Vanessa Schottz	25
Increasing Production and Income through Quality Seed: Case of Senegalese Groundnut Farmers Moussa Faye and Fatou Mbaye	29
Struggle for Land: An Indian Experience C. Nicholas, Amar Jyoti Nayak and Esther Mariaselvam	32
Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture: Adapting for Change in India Suman Sahai	36
DOSSIER	
Weaving a Network to Build and Defend Food Sovereignty in Guatemala Ronnie Palacios	38
CLIPS	
Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in Agriculture in the Changing Climate Harjeet Singh	41
AGENDA	
How to Remedy the Food Crisis: Exploring Causes and Effects at the National Level Aftab Alam Khan	46



FOREWORD

Food Files has been on hiatus for two years due to many unprecedented organisational challenges, but is finally back to engage everyone in a critical and fruitful discussion on food security. The **FILE** section provides background articles by renowned academics, researchers, ActionAid staff and members of its key partners; the **POST-IT** section showcases ActionAid's food rights work on the ground; the **DOSSIER** section highlights the work of the International Food Security Network (IFSN) and its partners; the **CLIPS** section explores inter-thematic work between food rights and other themes within ActionAid; and finally, the **AGENDA** section sketches current and emerging issues in the global food system.

We bring you this edition of *Food Files* at a time when food insecurity, land grabs, ecological degradation are all orders of the day. Nonetheless, smallholder farmers, women farmers, landless communities, forest dwellers, fisherfolk and others deriving their livelihoods from land and natural resources, as well as organisations working alongside them, have demonstrated, time after time, their alternatives and shown resilience against this stark reality.

Women's role in ensuring food security

In spite of the gender gap and odds stacked up against them in terms of unfavourable access to land and other productive resources, lack of decision making and bargaining power within households and in communities, women ingeniously and painstakingly feed their families. Many are growing vegetables in backyard gardens and vacant urban spaces; they are producing, processing and marketing groundnuts in Senegal; and they are involved in agroecological food production in Brazil – validating, documenting and systematising their own experiences and knowledge. In spite of this remarkable success, the struggle continues particularly for the recognition of women as farmers in their own right, and equally for the involvement of men in both the productive and reproductive spheres within the household.

Different research methodologies

Be it human rights-based approach or participatory development methodologies, ActionAid works to ensure that theory is translated into practice, and that our work has real and positive impact and empowers the communities that we work with. This is the second cross-cutting theme of the magazine.

Access to, control over and sustainable use of land and other natural resources

The next set of articles deals with the crucial issue of land rights and sustainable use of natural resources in the context of climate change. As climate change threatens agricultural productivity and people's resource-dependent livelihoods, greater support is needed for climate resilient as well as environmentally and socially appropriate approach to agriculture and for disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Power of networking

Strong local solutions, connected and supported through a network that lobbies and fights for its members' rights, is crucial in the fight for food sovereignty. This is precisely what REDSAG (National Network for the Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala) is doing in Guatemala.

Averting a second food crisis

The final article of this issue illustrates the negative impacts of high food prices on poor people's lives and livelihoods; the important role of local production in keeping food crisis at bay; and the need for the G20 and the international community to take urgent actions to address the precarious situation.

We hope this issue will stimulate interesting debates and that it will inspire many readers to join us in realising the right to food.

Ruchi Tripathi
Head of Right to Food Theme
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Women Feeding Cities³



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Urban women farmers come together in Cape Town, South Africa.

Introduction

Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition have become critical urban problems. Meeting this challenge, in many cities around the world, women play a crucial role in household food production by growing vegetables in backyard gardens and vacant urban spaces, raising animals, and trading fresh and cooked foods. These activities boost household nutrition, generate income and build social inclusion among the urban poor.

Women's role in feeding cities, through formal or informal means, has become more challenging recently given the mounting global food crisis. Millions of people are being pushed deeper into poverty and hunger, and in many of the world's poorest cities, people can suddenly no longer afford the food available on store shelves. This increases the time and energy that urban women spend on producing food and/or procuring monies for foodstuffs. For many women,

this means that their families will suffer not only in terms of not having adequate (let alone fresh) supplies of food on hand, but also because they will have less money to pay for school fees or health costs. Beyond daily struggles to secure food for their families, women's own potential for empowerment is limited in the longer term given the need to focus on the here-and-now demands of urban food production and procurement.

Women's vital and increasingly hindered contributions to food security, however, are largely unrecognised by city officials, economic planners and development practitioners who tend to concentrate on the industrialisation of food production. Further research is required to analyse gender dynamics in urban agriculture, and mainstreaming gender into existing and future planning and policy endeavours is essential to ensuring recognition and support for women's role in feeding cities.

Gender in urban agriculture

Studies have begun to quantify the contributions of women and men to various types of urban agriculture, and results confirm the centrality and diversity of women's roles. Women are the majority among urban farmers in many cities around the world, but they tend to predominate in subsistence farming, whereas men play a greater role in urban food production for commercial purposes. The important distinction between subsistence and commercial production of food – with planners often prioritising the latter – has frequently rendered invisible women's central role in feeding cities. Similarly within households, women are often marginalised and accorded lower status than men because they engage in subsistence rather than commercial farming.

The predominance of women in urban agriculture can be ascribed to two factors: first, women bear the responsibility for household sustenance and well-being; second, women tend to have lower educational status than men, and therefore more difficulties in finding formal wage employment⁴. In some contexts, men predominate in urban agriculture activities because of their access to land and resources, as well as the socio-economic status created by this activity.

As a largely informal-sector activity, urban agriculture is especially effective and efficient for married women with children or women heads-of-households because it can be performed close to home and combined with other household responsibilities. Urban agriculture also can be undertaken with relatively low capital, technology, and inputs. It is thus attainable and affordable for women with limited education and resources, and often stimulates the use of indigenous practices.



© Diana Lee-Smith

Woman farmer in Addis Ababa increases her income through urban farming.

At the same time, the challenges facing women who aspire to participate in urban agriculture are numerous. For example, women face severe constraints in accessing, using, and/or controlling land in cities, compared with their male counterparts. Men tend to have the first choice of any available vacant land, leaving women with low-quality or less secure plots of land, often located at a considerable distance from home. Even within households with adequate land resources, wives may be at a disadvantage in terms of access to these plots⁵.

Key gender issues

The following key issues should be taken into account when assessing and setting up projects or programmes to analyse gender in urban agriculture and food security:

Division of labour

A number of common differences in the roles of men and women in urban agriculture can be observed across various cultural and socio-economic contexts, including the division of responsibility for certain crops, delineation of dry- and wet-season farming and division of labour at organisational and community levels. Also, traditional divisions of labour continue to exist in urban households, such that women are responsible for reproductive and subsistence-oriented tasks while men are primary breadwinners, taking on formal jobs in the economy.

BOX 1

Gender division of labour in Kampala, Uganda⁶

Urban agriculture in Kampala takes place predominantly on private land, in back yards and on undeveloped public land. Due to rapid urbanisation and population growth, people are increasingly utilising hazardous places that are unsuitable for growing crops. Such places include road verges, banks of drainage channels, wetlands and contaminated sites, such as scrap yards and dump sites for solid and liquid waste. Most of the farmers in these hazardous locations produce and sell their food, with a higher proportion of women selling food directly to consumers. This may be attributed to the nature of crops grown. Specifically, men grow crops on a larger scale and sell them on a wholesale basis to retailers, while women sell directly to consumers in the neighbourhood. In general, a higher proportion of the men sell some of the food that they produce from farming activities; women use the food crops to feed their families. The percentage of farmers who sell all of the food grown on contaminated sites to consumers is higher among women, who consequently use the funds to buy other foodstuffs from the market.

Differences in knowledge and preferences

Differences in knowledge exist between men and women in terms of the cultivation of certain crops and animals; the application of certain cultural practices (for example, women in the Andes know more than men about seed selection and storage, herding, processing of wool and natural medicines); the use of certain technologies (for example, men generally have more knowledge of irrigation techniques, chemical inputs, and castration of bulls); and within certain social domains (for example, men may know much more about formal marketing channels, whereas women may know more about informal barter relations). Also, men and women normally differ strongly in their preferences and priorities in relation to their main roles and responsibilities (for example, regarding commercial or subsistence-oriented production goals); location of plots; mode of production (for example, single versus multiple cropping); and use of the benefits (for example, for household consumption or for sale).

BOX 2

Gendered differences in knowledge and preferences in Nakuru, Kenya⁷

Information about the knowledge, opportunities and constraints of men and women in respect to livelihoods and nutrition was obtained from a diagnostic study in which 85 male-headed households and 70 female-headed households were interviewed. The participation of men and women in the project has helped in tapping and exchanging their knowledge and skills in vegetable production and dairy-goat rearing. Women had a lot of experience and care in tending vegetables, including the production of traditional African vegetable seeds, while men knew more about the milking of goats, their reproductive cycle and health issues. The knowledge and skills of both men and women in vegetable production and dairy-goat rearing have, however, been improved through training.

Access to and control over resources

This refers both to productive resources and benefits of production. Productive resources include land, water, inputs, credit, information, and technology, and interpersonal networks and organisations. It also refers to access to and control over one's own labour. The benefits of production include cash income, food, and other products for home consumption, sale or exchange. Gendered access to and control over natural resources, specifically, often means that women have rights of renewable use (such as harvesting leaves from trees) while men have rights of consumption (such as harvesting the tree itself). For female heads of households, access to resources is often limited to those of poorer quality, and

the consequence is lower agricultural production levels compared with male heads of households. Access and control are highly influenced by structures and processes at the macro level where socio-cultural ideas determine which roles men and women play, what responsibilities they each have, and the value placed on these roles.



Women preparing harvest for the market in Accra, Ghana.

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BOX 3

Accessing credit in Accra, Ghana⁸

In general, urban farmers do not have access to formal credit schemes in Ghana. This is mainly because farmers, particularly women, cannot meet the collateral demands of the financial institutions. In addition, most of the urban female farmers have limited space for cultivation and do not own land. In spite of these problems, some have managed to create a win-win situation with the vegetables sellers in terms of access to informal credit. Sellers pre-finance farming activities by providing seeds, fertilisers, pesticides or cash in order to obtain the vegetables subsequently produced. Sometimes, sellers order the products before cultivation, through verbal agreements based on trust and confidence. The final sum of money received by the farmer may differ from the initial sum agreed on, as demand and supply might have changed during the growing period. Similar situations have been observed in Lome, Togo and Cotonou, Benin in West Africa.



In Carapongo, Lima, Peru, women farmers have limited decision-making power in public and community organisations.

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Decision-making power

There is a close relationship between access to and control over resources, and the power to make decisions. Within the household, decisions are taken on the sale of products, land or animals, the production process itself (what to produce, when, where, why, how), development of infrastructure, whether to save or invest, and whether some members of the household should work on the farm or take other jobs outside the household. Productive activities can strengthen the position of women in household decision-making processes. For married women in particular, urban farming offers more than the opportunity to augment their family's food supply; while still within the margins of what is culturally expected of these women, participation in urban agriculture gives them access to their own source of income and thus strengthens their position in intra-household negotiations.

Culturally, urban agriculture is often seen as a marginal economic activity, and women may have good reason to maintain this image⁹. Box 4 illustrates how men's views on urban agriculture can change once it has proven to be a profitable activity.

BOX 4

Men's views on urban agriculture in Lima¹⁰

Of the total number of productive family units (PFUs) in Villa Maria del Triunfo, a municipality in the southern part of Lima, Peru, 76 per cent are controlled by women and 24 per cent by men. Of the total number of PFUs, 82 per cent practice urban agriculture recreationally and consume what they produce, while three per cent (all headed by women) practice urban agriculture with the goal of supplementing their family income. 15 per cent (all headed by women) see urban agriculture as a strategy for the potential generation of supplementary family income. Fewer men than women participate in urban agriculture, because men generally do not see this activity as a viable strategy for the generation of direct income. They therefore dedicate little time to it and give priority to other income-generating activities. However, they are interested in taking the next step and using the products of urban agriculture to generate income, particularly through processing activities. The current purposes (recreational and self-consumption) of urban agriculture in Villa Maria del Triunfo avoid conflicts within families about access to and control over resources and benefits of home gardens. Women make decisions about intervention from men, since this activity does not at present generate visible economic income and is therefore not relevant to men. However, when the possibility of generating visible income through commercialisation arises, men want to take part in decision making. When striving to make urban agriculture an income-generating activity, it is necessary to identify strategies to avoid conflicts and inequalities in control over the benefits arising from home gardens.

Within the community, contacts and participation in local networks and organisations often facilitate access to and control over productive resources. Women's groups play a pivotal role in this context, such that their activities are often co-operative mechanisms through which individual women successfully pool resources, skills, information, time and energy.

Gender mainstreaming

Literature suggests that urban agriculture projects that integrate gender issues to a high degree tend to have more positive effects, not only on the position of women but also on poverty alleviation, household food security and health. Gender mainstreaming can provide a means of establishing urban agriculture research and project-planning methods that facilitate appropriate, effective, and beneficial policy and planning interventions in urban areas. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that urban agriculture activities help women to feed cities through their daily activities, as well as facilitating women's self-empowerment such that it allows them to change their inequitable circumstances relative to men and determine their own paths of development.

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3. This article is based on: Hovorka, A., De Zeeuw, H. and Njenga, M. (eds.). 2009. *Women Feeding Cities – Mainstreaming gender in urban agriculture and food security*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing c/o Portland Press. The book draws attention to women's crucial role in bringing food to the tables of urban households, and especially to the ways in which low-income women locally produce, carry, or trade food in multiple strategies to keep their families food secure. Furthermore, it provides researchers, development practitioners, and local government officers guidelines and tools to ensure the centrality of gender concerns in future projects and initiatives related to urban agriculture and food security. The book is based on the experiences gained in the "Cities Farming for the Future" programme of the RUAF Foundation (International Network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security) and "Urban Harvest", the System-wide Initiative on Urban and Periurban Agriculture of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which have sought to bring attention to gender issues in research, policy, and development interventions relating to urban food production and urban food security. The book is available by ordering through Practical Action Publishing or online at www.ruaf.org. Permission for republication of this article was given by the authors.
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Adriano Campolina¹

Rights-Based Food Programmes: Fighting Hunger and Inequality from the Grassroots



Through the HungerFREE campaign, ActionAid was able to influence local authorities in many communities around the world to ensure rights holders' access to their entitlements.

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Summary

This article aims to deepen the debate about the quality of food related programmes at ActionAid. It also proposes the need to build coherence of ActionAid's work through the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and to build up an alternative agricultural and rural development paradigm that emphasises small holding agriculture, agroecology and the central role of women in these activities.

Introduction

ActionAid adopted the right to food as one of its strategic priorities in the 2004-2010 international strategy, *Rights to End Poverty*, with the recognition that realising the right to food is not only relevant for poor people's lives, but also for delivering effective local agriculture and livelihoods programmes and national and international campaigns work.

Even before the strategy, ActionAid had been implementing a wide range of food rights activities in thousands of communities across the world. At the community level, ActionAid was supporting poor smallholder farmers mostly around technical assistance to agriculture, credit and inputs, seed banks, breeding and reproduction of local varieties, soil and water management, processing and marketing and land rights. At the national level, some countries were deeply involved in advocating for laws and policies to ensure the right to food, land rights, trade policies, and in few cases, agriculture regulations such as anti-genetically modified organisms (GMOs) policies.

Internationally, ActionAid's policy influence work focused on how to ensure the realisation of the right to food in the free market-dominant multilateral trade negotiations under the World Trade Organization (WTO), followed by an international campaign to stop corporate abuse of market power. Since 2005, ActionAid has been implementing a single international campaign, the HungerFREE campaign - coordinating multi-country mobilisation and influencing effort to bring about changes in law and policy required to eradicate hunger.

A few years later in 2007 and 2008, the food crisis hit the world in an unprecedented way, and the high prices of staple foods pushed more than 100 million people into food insecurity, rendering the total number of people vulnerable to hunger escalate to more than one billion.

This crisis and its devastating social and political consequences brought agriculture, food sovereignty and food security back into the centre of public debate, where conflicting paradigms on how to sustainably feed the world are influencing various levels of policy response.

Amidst such harsh context, ActionAid has deepened its understanding of the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), through the development of a conceptual paper followed by a detailed publication, *Action on Rights: Human Rights Based Approach Resource Book*, launched in 2010. At the same time, ActionAid's Right to Food Theme made a significant effort to innovate and expand the quality of local level food programmes with the pilot activity called the "Territorial Development Initiative (TDI)" in Guatemala, Ghana, Mozambique and Nepal².

However, the reality is that ActionAid and its partners are currently implementing a huge number of distinct local food programmes that are informed by the diverse methodological portfolio created in the development sector - including participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), integrated rural development (IRD), territorial development and so on. One could argue that these local level activities are not necessarily implemented in a way that builds a robust and coherent programme that deepens our HRBA and advances an alternative rural development model.

Considering the recent deepening of the HRBA, the TDI pilot programmes, the heated debate about what agricultural model should be pursued, and more importantly, the importance of building our comprehensive response and position about the food crisis - this article intends to promote an understanding of how ActionAid could build a coherent, yet diverse, approach to its right to food programming, linking our work at local, national and international levels in a way that allows us to build an alternative agricultural model that addresses the structural causes of hunger.

BOX 1

Key Components of ActionAid HRBA Programming

Empowerment Component (power within)
 With poor and excluded rights holders and their communities, organisations and movements
 For enabling their collective analysis, identity and actions
 Examples: rights awareness; consciousness-building; organising and mobilising; and addressing immediate needs

Solidarity Component (power with)
With citizens, partners, supporters through networks, coalitions and alliances
For enlarging support (including money) voice and actions to strengthen the power of poor and excluded people
 Examples: alliance and platform building; networking with other rights holders and civil society allies; public awareness-raising; mobilizing supporters and citizens globally

Campaigning Component (power over)
Targeted at duty bearers (state and non-state actors and institutions) that violate or deny rights
For a change in policies and practices; opening political space, and building public opinion
 Examples: local, national and international campaigns; public policy and budget monitoring; advocacy and influencing processes; claiming and enjoying public policies

ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Agricultural Model

All ActionAid programme activities - from local level support to smallholder farmers to international campaign to fight hunger - should be guided by the HRBA and feed into our vision of an alternative agricultural and rural development model and food systems.

The most important aspect of the HRBA is to understand the politics in which women farmers, poor farmers (and peasants in general), landless farmers, forest dwellers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, youths, slum dwellers and all people vulnerable to hunger are seen as rights holders, as opposed to passive beneficiaries of development interventions. This substantial conceptual leap means that we recognise and understand the existence and importance of the right to food, and that everyone is entitled to this right by the virtue of being humans. This right is defined internationally in a number of covenants and guidelines, as well as nationally in a number of national constitutions and/or infra-constitutional regulations.

However, it is well known that one on every six human beings is denied of the right to food and is vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. This requires that our programmes be grounded in a solid understanding of the structural causes of such violations - identifying who the perpetrators are and which duty bearers should fulfil, respect, protect and promote the right to food. Moreover, our programmes should strengthen the capacity of the rights holders to build solidarity and to increase their awareness of their entitlements; their consciousness of the structural causes behind the denial of their rights; their political capacity to claim their rights in alliance with other rights holders and citizens and to hold the duty bearers accountable. Beyond any isolated activities, our programmes should aim to change unequal power relations. This focus on changing power dynamics implies that the rights holders themselves should be on the driver's seat of the change process. The aforementioned ActionAid HRBA resource book³ identifies three inter-related programme components: empowerment, solidarity and campaigning (See Box 1).

Building a robust and coherent food programme also requires a critical understanding of the agricultural development model and the food system. In fact, the recent food prices crisis was an unequivocal indicator of the failure of the dominant agro-industrial system.

For the past 40 years, the debate in agricultural development was dominated by a paradigm that favoured agricultural systems based on mono-cropping by large scale farms; extensive use (and in many cases dependency) of external inputs, such as seeds of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) and hybrids and more recently genetically modified varieties, fertilisers, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides; huge market concentration of agriculture inputs, food processing, transporting and retailing of few transnational corporations (TNCs); and a gradual reduction of the role of the state and its public policies on regulating and/or promoting food security. This model promoted the concentration of land, and in some cases, the eviction of poor farmers, the dismantling of the state apparatus on agriculture in many countries - e.g. the dismantling of research and extension services, public credit schemes, commodities markets, price regulation and food security oriented stocks.

The food crisis can be interpreted as a spectacular failure of such paradigm, and most stakeholders now recognise that reducing the state's role in promoting agriculture and food security was a substantial mistake. However, many decision makers still continue to opt for more of the same paradigm, and even the responses to the recent and ongoing food crisis highlight further investments on agribusinesses, mono-cropping, large scale plantations and the like.

In this context, it is also very important that all our programmes take into consideration an alternative view of agriculture that can fight the structural causes of hunger at all levels. Indeed, ActionAid's field experience and policy analyses indicate the need to promote sustainable agriculture. This model of agriculture is less dependent on external inputs, and instead, optimises the use of local resources which is based on small-holding farms. It also recognises and prioritises the role of women farmers; reduces the environmental impact of agriculture and the vulnerability of farm systems to climate change and natural hazards; emphasises local markets and processing; is based on poor farmers', especially women's, control and ownership over land, seeds and water; and is adequately supported and regulated by the state who is ultimately responsible for the fulfilment of the right to food. Therefore, all our programme interventions, at whatever level, should embody the HRBA and promote sustainable agriculture and agroecology, smallholder farms and women farmers.

HRBA Programming Components

Empowerment Programmes

Changing unequal power relations is crucial for fighting poverty and injustice, and it plays a central role in the HRBA. ActionAid's empowerment programme interventions include: raising awareness, building critical consciousness, and organising and mobilising rights holders.

Raising awareness is not just a one-off event, but rather a continuous process through which communities of rights holders will, over time, develop an understanding of what their entitlements are. Yet, raising awareness may not be effective if it is not accompanied by an understanding of: how the violations of rights occur; who the perpetrators are; and what duty bearer should do to guarantee the fulfilment of the rights.

This critical consciousness development is a long-term process which requires a comprehensive strategy, and more importantly, a close trust relationship between ActionAid, its partners and local communities. Activities for building critical consciousness are particularly great for highlighting the role of women in communities, exploring how women's subordination happens, and how their rights are constantly violated by various perpetrators.

At the outset of any local food programme, there should be a comprehensive right to food analysis of the community, its territory and its relations with other stakeholders. This is not an academic application, but rather a community awareness-raising and mobilisation exercise. From the appraisals stage and throughout the implementation process, local food programmes must be anchored in an in-depth understanding of what entitlements are and what power dynamics shape community relationships.

Various international covenants and guidelines⁴ provide a general framework to understand what entitlements are guaranteed at the international level. Even if the right to food is not sufficiently defined at the national level, it might well be the case that a given state is signatory of other international conventions and guidelines, guaranteeing entitlements to the population. These international commitments are important as they create a policy space to assess, monitor and influence the realisation of the right to food at the national level.

Understanding what entitlements are stipulated in national legislations is also important. Not only understanding the constitutional and infra-constitutional regulations on the right to food, land tenure, access to water and farmers' rights, but also mapping relevant food policies, programmes, regulations, and customary and traditional mechanisms is equally instrumental.

However, this in-depth understanding of entitlements, laws, programmes, policies and institutions is only useful when it can engender a widespread awareness with the rights holders. Currently, there are various awareness-raising tools, techniques and strategies, such as Reflect circles and participatory rural appraisals (PRAs)⁵. PRAs, for instance, not only engages and raises the awareness of the rights holders, but also brings to light different power relations and rights violations (and its causes) that are prevalent in local communities⁶.

In addition, addressing immediate and basic needs serves as a platform for long-term empowerment. It has been said many times that service delivery should not be an end in itself. This means that ActionAid should not implement a programme activity such as seeds banks just for the sake of providing seeds to affected families. This specific intervention should be implemented so that participating families can gain greater awareness and critical consciousness about their rights and entitlements. For instance, meetings to plan for seed banks could also serve as an opportunity to discuss the farmers' entitlements to seeds (and beyond) and public services. The process of building seed banks could also strengthen the capacity of local farmers' organisations and allow them to liaise with other broader organisations and movements.

Finally, addressing immediate needs could also pilot popular alternatives that could bring about positive changes in public policy. For instance, a successful locally procured midday meal scheme in the schools could inform a campaign for a regional or national school meals programme; and a successful programme to breed local varieties according to the ecosystem and the needs of the poor farmers could inform a national agenda on agrobiodiversity.

As communities progressively understand themselves as rights holders, it becomes equally important for them to organise and mobilise themselves to claim their rights. Establishing or strengthening women farmers' associations, farmers' cooperatives and unions, and landless movements is a key part of ActionAid's food programming. Moreover, such grassroots organisations should be empowered to monitor the extent to which

duty bearers are fulfilling their obligations and what should be done by different duty bearers (e.g. mayors, agriculture ministries, food processing companies, extension office, etc.) to ensure the progressive realisation of the right to food.

Solidarity Programmes

Organising and mobilising rights holders at all levels is fundamental for bringing about real and sustainable changes in power relations. However in many cases, this is not enough; attracting the support of other movements, rights holders and citizens is also crucial. ActionAid's solidarity programmes aim to make rights struggles visible to the society and to build alliances to strengthen the power of the poor.

For instance, in creating food security networks, ActionAid and its partners not only involve farmers' organisations - the primary rights holders in most cases - but also networks of other groups, such as students, doctors, journalists, academics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to increase the collective ability to bring about social change.

In many cases, individual rights struggles at the local level are isolated and invisible, and can only become visible through solidarity networks and coalitions. For example,

When planning local solidarity programmes, there is a need to think through the existing opportunities that allow the establishment of solidarity links and to apply pressure for change at national or international levels. It should also be noted here that financial support is another form of solidarity. In fact, cross-continental campaigning has added the importance of transforming financial supporters into campaigners who can engage in solidarity action with rights holders.

Campaigning Programmes

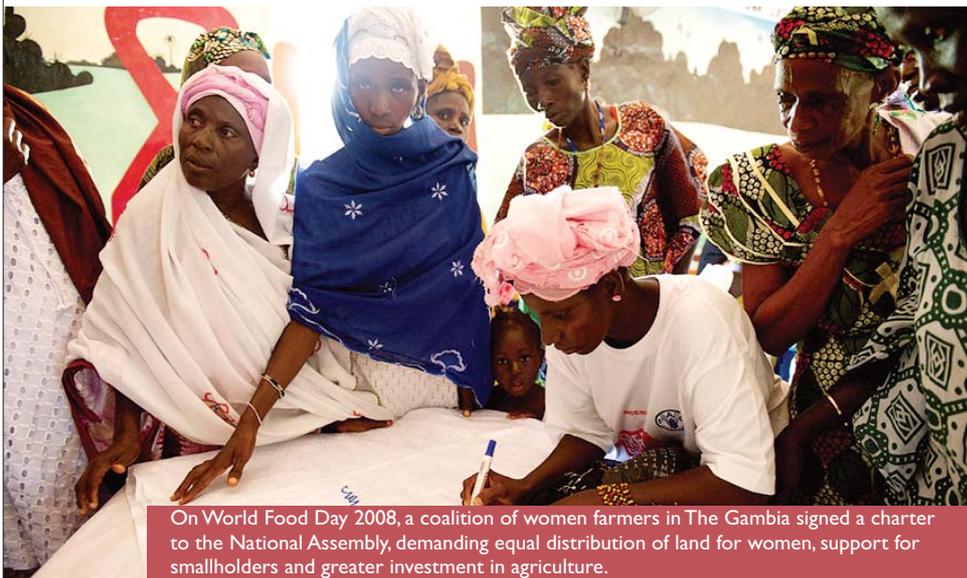
In the HRBA, the need to influence duty bearers is taken into account in all programme interventions, and should be carefully designed to manage the risks inherent to power change processes. When rights holders are aware of their rights and entitlements, they become critically conscious of how exclusions happen and is perpetuated; they also understand what they want the duty bearers to do to end such injustice. Hence, it follows that empowerment and solidarity programmes should be buttressed by an effective strategy to influence decision makers and duty bearers to meet their obligations.

Campaigning programmes on the right to food can be about ensuring that communities benefit from technical assistance from public rural extension workers; guaranteeing the right to food in national constitutions; and/or advancing greater commitments from rich countries to finance agricultural and rural development programmes. Campaigning creates and harnesses people's power through organisation, mobilisation and communication around a simple but powerful demand, in order to achieve a measurable political or social change.

Through the HungerFREE campaign, ActionAid was able to influence local authorities in many communities to ensure rights holders' access to their entitlements on employment, technical assistance and access to credit. In all cases, it has been very important to ensure that the rights holders and their organisations and movements are driving the campaign efforts, shaping their focus, objectives and strategies

accordingly. In short, ActionAid campaigns are conducted in a way that strengthens the leadership, organisation and capacity of rights holders.

Given the recent priority on food security in the global policy arena, ActionAid's right to food national



On World Food Day 2008, a coalition of women farmers in The Gambia signed a charter to the National Assembly, demanding equal distribution of land for women, support for smallholders and greater investment in agriculture.

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in addressing the unequal power relations between a large retail company and rural workers in South Africa, it was necessary for ActionAid not only to organise the workers, but also to mobilise the solidarity of consumers in other countries to expose the deeply-entrenched injustice.

programmes should also, with its partners and allies, try to identify what changes on policy, public programmes and laws are needed to combat the structural causes of hunger and inequality. This again requires an in depth analysis of the food system in a given country and also a strong campaign, followed by robust propositions that are evidence-based and rooted in local alternatives.

Integrating the Programme Components at Various Levels

These programme components are intrinsically inter-related. ActionAid's close engagement with rights holders and their communities allows for a comprehensive programme that can strategically coordinate empowerment, solidarity and campaigning at all levels. That said, the fulfilment of rights or substantial advances towards sustainable agriculture requires sufficient implementation of all three programme components. At the same time, it also requires well connected local, national and international programmes.

However, it is easy to notice a horizontal disconnect between the three components within one local programme, or a vertical disconnect between programmes at the local, national and international level. Reconnecting these programmes components and different levels of programme implementation require a strenuous effort.

First, more time and reflection need to be allotted to the appraisal and initial planning stages, especially at the local level, so that proper rights diagnosis can be conducted. Subsequent local programme strategies need to weave all components together and promote effective community participation. Finally, these strategies should be constantly reviewed and revised based on our accountability systems. In all stages of strategy development and implementation, ActionAid should encourage close participation and ownership of its partners and communities, as well as its country programme staff, campaigners, policy researchers and fundraisers. Moreover, it is also important for national programmes to involve all internal and external stakeholders and take into consideration local priorities while building the capacity of field programming staff.

Challenges and the Way Forward

It is my view that ActionAid has advanced considerably in defining its HRBA and making clear political options for women farmers, smallholders and sustainable agriculture. Nevertheless, some challenges remain in our approach and practice. For one, local productive alternatives must be diversified, as the ecosystems and social relations in which they are implemented are multifarious. However, from this diversity, we should also be able to accumulate evidence that would allow us to strengthen our alternative propositions. This would require greater coherence, particularly in terms of promoting agroecology, supporting women farmers and building our capacity to systematise the impact of our local food programmes.

At the moment, the way we analyse, organise people and claim rights within social protection programmes (e.g. school meals, employment guarantee schemes, food guarantees and cash transfers) is still incipient. In the same light, the way we analyse and intervene on right to food violations in urban areas is just nascent. There is also a room for us to develop our approach further on the intersections between food, livelihood resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) and adaptation to climate change. By the same token, ActionAid could also benefit more strategically from its proximity to poor communities in monitoring how the recent food price volatility affects the poor and the excluded.

1. Adriano Campolina (Agronomist, MSc Agriculture, Development and Society) is the Executive Director of ActionAid Brazil.
2. See related article in this issue: "Rights-Based Territorial Development Initiative: A very short introduction" by Jose Ferreria.
3. ActionAid. 2010. *Action on Rights: Human Rights Based Approach Resource Book*. Johannesburg: ActionAid.
4. The "Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security", for instance, covers broad areas, such as democracy and governance, economic development strategies, market systems, access to resources and assets (labour, land, water, genetic resources, and services), safety nets, food aid among others. For more information, see: FAO.2004. *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*. Rome: FAO.
5. The aforementioned Territorial Development Initiative (TDI) combines these techniques. The initial territorial diagnosis explores not only power relations and institutions, but also different types of land usage in a community, market and political relations within a given territory, which leads to a participatory development plan that supports the collective agenda of the rights holders.
6. See related article in this issue: "From PRA to PLA and Pluralism: Practice and Theory" by Robert Chambers.

Robert Chambers¹

From PRA to PLA and Pluralism: Practice and Theory²

Introduction

Since the mid 1970s, there has been an accelerating evolution of participatory methodologies in development practice. One part of this has been a sequence known by its acronyms – Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). These are sets of approaches, methods, behaviours and relationships for finding out about local context and life. All three continue to be practised and are in various ways complementary.

RRA began as a coalescence of methods devised and used to be faster and better for many practical purposes than large questionnaire surveys or in-depth social anthropology. Its methods include semi-structured interviews, transect walks with observation, and mapping and diagramming, all these done by outside professionals. In the late 1980s and early 1990s **PRA** evolved out of RRA. In PRA, outsiders convene and facilitate. Local people, especially those who are poorer and marginalised, are the main actors. It is they, typically in small groups, who map, diagram, observe, analyse and act. The term **PLA** introduced in 1995 is sometimes used to describe PRA but is broader and includes other similar or related approaches and methods. Because of the continuities and overlaps, this methodological cluster or family is sometimes referred to as PRA/PLA or even RRA/PRA/PLA. Some, as in Pakistan, have sought to accommodate the shifts in practice by taking PRA to mean participatory reflection and action. Increasingly, practitioners in this tradition have moved beyond these labels and created new and specialised adaptations, some of these with other names. While continuing to use and evolve PRA methods and principles, many have become eclectic methodological pluralists.

The evolution of RRA, PRA and PLA

In the origins of PRA, the largest stream, though, was the confluence of agroecosystem analysis³ with RRA⁴. RRA had semi-structured interviewing at its core⁵.

Agro-ecosystem analysis crucially contributed sketch mapping, diagramming, transects and observation. The big breakthroughs were then the discoveries (or rediscoveries, for there are almost always antecedents) that, with light and sensitive facilitation, local people could themselves make the maps and diagrams, and that, especially when they worked in small groups, what they presented demonstrated a complexity, diversity, accuracy and for many purposes relevance far superior to anything that could be elicited or expressed using earlier extractive or observational methodologies. This led to the practical principle that 'They can do it' applied to activity after activity, recognising that local people had far greater abilities for analysis, action, experimentation, research and monitoring and evaluation than had been supposed by outside professionals or by themselves.

In the early 1990s, the main features of PRA emerged with three principal components: methods; behaviour and attitudes; and sharing⁶.

PRA methods, as they are often called, are visual and tangible and usually performed by small groups of people. These are the most visible and obviously distinctive feature of PRA. Maps and diagrams are made by local people, often on the ground using local materials but sometimes on paper. Many sorts of maps are made – most commonly social or census maps showing people and their characteristics, resource maps showing land, trees, water and so on, and mobility maps showing where people travel for services. Using earth, sand, stones, seeds, twigs, chalk, charcoal, paper, pens and other materials, and objects as symbols, women, men and children make diagrams to represent many aspects of their communities, lives and environments. The methods include

time lines, trend and change diagrams, wealth and wellbeing ranking, seasonal diagramming, Venn diagrammes, causal linkage diagrammes, and proportional piling. Matrix ranking and scoring are used for complex and detailed comparisons. And there are many variants and combinations of these and other methods or tools.

Behaviour and attitudes, later construed as mindsets, behaviour and attitudes, were from early on regarded by many of the pioneers as more important than the methods. They were the focus of a South-South international workshop which led to the publication of *The ABC of PRA*⁷, where ABC stands for attitude and behaviour change. Some behaviours and attitudes were expressed as precepts (see Box 1) like 'Hand over the stick', 'Don't rush', 'Sit down, listen and learn' and 'Use your own best judgement at all times'.

Sharing initially referred to villagers sharing their knowledge, food, and the sharing of training, ideas, insights, methods and materials between organisations, mainly NGOs and government. By the mid 2000s, the sharing component has come to include relationships. The key phrase 'sharing without boundaries' came out of an international workshop of PRA practitioners, and sought to make doubly clear the principle of openness and sharing between methodologies⁸. It was also a pre-emptive strike against the claims of branding and exclusive ownership which go with some methodologies.

In the 2000s, PRA and PLA have diffused, borrowed and interpenetrated with other approaches. They have evolved and merged into a new creative pluralism⁹ in which earlier traditions survived but in which many methods have been evolved and adapted. Many of the early PRA practitioners have become more reflective and self-critical¹⁰. Others continue in earlier, sometimes routinised, traditions. For many, it remains associated with group-visual activities, and with behaviour, attitudes and relationships of facilitation which empower participants. In parallel with the persistence of traditional PRA and of other established participatory methodologies, more and more practitioner/facilitators have become creative pluralists, borrowing, improvising and inventing for particular contexts, sectors and needs.

Reflecting critically on the evolution of PRA, theory has been implicit and has co-evolved with practice. As with RRA earlier¹¹, theory has been induced from and fed back into practice. Practice itself was driven and drawn not by academic analysis, nor by a reflective analytical book like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹², but by the excitement of innovation, discovery and informal networking. The main pioneers were not academic intellectuals but workers and staff in NGOs in the South, especially India, and a few from

research institutes in the North, all of them learning through engagement in the field. And the detail of the methods came from the creativity and inventiveness of local people, once they had the idea of what they could do, as well as from the outside facilitators.

Spread and applications

From 1990, the spread of PRA was rapid throughout much of the world¹³. By 2000, practices described as PRA were probably to be found in well over 100 countries, of the North as well as of the South. They were being used by all or almost all prominent INGOs and many of their partners, by many donor and lender supported projects, and by a number of government departments, for example in India, Kenya and Vietnam.

BOX 1 Precepts of PRA	
Precept...	Indicating...
Introduce yourself...	Be honest, transparent, relate as a person
They can do it...	Have confidence in people's abilities
Unlearn...	Critically reflect on how you see things
Ask them...	Ask people their realities, priorities and advice
Don't rush...	Be patient, take time
Sit down, listen and learn...	Don't dominate
Facilitate...	Don't lecture, criticise or teach
Embrace error...	Learn from what goes wrong or does not work
Hand over the stick...	Or chalk or pen, anything that empowers
Use your own best judgement at all times...	Take responsibility for what you do
Shut up!...	Keep quiet. Welcome and tolerate silence

With rapid spread, however, bad practice became rampant. The methods were so attractive, often photogenic, and so amenable to being taught in a normal didactic manner that they gained priority over behaviour, attitudes and relationships, especially in training institutes. Manuals proliferated and were mechanically taught and applied. Donors and lenders demanded PRA. Much training neglected or totally ignored behaviour and attitudes. PRA was routinised; people's time was taken and their expectations were raised without any outcome; methods were used to extract information not to empower; and

consultants claimed to be trainers who had no experience. In short, communities were 'PRA'd'. Some in Malawi were said to have been 'carpet-bombed with PRA'. Just as academics began to wake up to what had been happening, there was much to criticise. The looseness of the principle 'Use your own best judgement at all times' could be liberating, giving freedom to improvise and invent; and it has supported much brilliant performance and innovation. But equally, it could combine with an exclusive fixation on methods to allow sloppy and abusive practice.

In parallel, the applications of PRA approaches and methods, not alone but often combined and adapted with others, have been and continue to be astonishingly varied. They are constantly evolving and being invented. To at least some degree, all entail an element of participatory research. Most have never been recorded or published¹⁴. In addition, there have been innumerable applications in other rural and urban domains, not least in community and local planning¹⁵, market analysis¹⁶, health¹⁷, food security assessment¹⁸, water, sanitation¹⁹, organisational analysis, personal experiential learning and change, and policy analysis. In multifarious domains, there have been innumerable applications in participatory monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment²⁰, with an increasing methodological pluralism and emphasis on learning and adaptation²¹.

Co-evolving streams of participatory methodologies

Beyond this bald illustrative listing, more sense of what has happened can be given through the following four examples of parallel and intermingling participatory research and action which have gone or are going to scale.

Farmer Participatory Research

Farmer Participatory Research²² and Participatory Technology Development²³ have been a strong trend gaining widespread acceptance. Important distinctions were made by Biggs²⁴ indicating degrees of farmer participation, from researcher design and control to farmer-design and control. From the late 1980s, there has been a progressive shift towards the latter, as indicated by the many activities and publications of the system-wide Participatory Research and Gender Analysis programme of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). As with streams of PRA and PLA, the capacities of local people, in this case farmers, were found to exceed by far what professionals had thought they were capable of. One example was the successive involvement of farmers in seed breeding with scientists. In 1987, it had been radical to involve them in selection of later generations in

the breeding process; but pioneering scientists²⁵ found that farmers' involvement in the whole process, including selection of the original crosses, substantially improved outcomes. Worldwide, farmers' research and participation in research have been spread through the International Agricultural Research Centres, National Agricultural Research Institutes, and INGOs.

Reflect

Reflect is a participatory methodology which combines Paulo Freire's theoretical framework on the politics of literacy with PRA approaches and user-generated materials from PRA visualisations²⁶. Piloted through action research projects in El Salvador, Uganda and Bangladesh between 1993 and 1995, it has spread through the work of over 500 organisations including NGOs, community-based organisations, governments and social movements, in some 70 countries²⁷. A standard manual was soon abandoned as considered too rigid²⁸. Local differentiation and ownership are now marked. Reflect has taken many different forms with 'immense diversity'²⁹. At the core of Reflect are facilitated groups known as Reflect circles. These meet regularly, usually for about two years, and sometimes continue indefinitely. The balance between literacy and empowerment has varied. Analysis by circles, combined with networking, has confronted power and abuses and asserted human rights. Reflect's core principles include: starting from existing experience; using participatory tools; power analysis; creating democratic spaces; reflection-action-reflection; self-organisation; and recognition that Reflect is a political process for social change and greater social justice. These principles are manifest in *Communication and Power: Reflect Practical Resource Materials*³⁰, the outcome of a widespread participatory process. First put together in 2003 in a loose leaf form, its sections include Written word, Numbers, Spoken word, Images, and Reflect in Action, with a strong emphasis on empowerment to enable people to do their own appraisal and analysis, leading to their own awareness and action.

Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS)

The new spatial information technologies, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS), remote sensing software and open access to spatial data and imagery, empower those who command them. Differential access can lead to gains to powerful people and interests to the disadvantage of communities and local people, further marginalising those already marginalised. PGIS is a generic term for approaches which seek to reverse this. By combining PRA/PLA and spatial information technologies, it has empowered minority groups and those traditionally excluded from spatial

decision-making processes³¹. Local people have been trained to use the technologies to construct their own maps and 3-D models³² and use these for their own research. These maps and models differ from the ground and paper maps of PRA in their greater spatial accuracy, permanence, authority and credibility with officialdom, and have been used as 'interactive vehicles for spatial learning, information exchange, support in decision making, resource use planning and advocacy actions'³³.

Applications have been many. They have included³⁴: protecting ancestral lands and resource rights; management and resolution of conflicts over natural resources; collaborative resource use planning and management; intangible cultural heritage preservation and identity building among indigenous peoples and rural communities; equity promotion with reference to ethnicity, culture, gender, and environmental justice; hazard mitigation for example, through community safety audits and peri-urban planning and research³⁵. PGIS applications have been documented³⁶ for countries as diverse as Brazil (Amazon), Cameroon, Canada, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Namibia, Nicaragua, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. In addition, there are '... hundreds of non-documented cases where technology intermediaries (mainly NGOs) support Community-based Organisations or Indigenous Peoples in using Geographic Information Technology and Systems to meet their spatial planning needs and/or achieve some leverage in their dealings with state bureaucracy'³⁷. An indicator of the power of mapping has been its restriction through the Malaysian 2001 Land Surveyors Law, passed after a community map in Sarawak had been instrumental in the legal victory of an Iban village against a tree plantation corporation³⁸.

By the mid 2000s, PGIS had become a widespread form of 'counter mapping'³⁹ enabling local people to make their own maps and models, and using these for their own research, analysis, assertion of rights and resolution of conflicts over land, and often reversing power relations with government organisations, politicians and corporations.

Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS)

PALS was pioneered by Linda Mayoux and is 'an eclectic and constantly evolving methodology which enables people to collect and analyse the information they themselves need on an ongoing basis to improve their lives in ways they decide'⁴⁰. Core features are the inventive use of diagram tools⁴¹, their integration with participatory principles and processes, linking individual and group learning, and the adoption and adaptation of approaches and methods from many traditions. Typically, diagram tools are designed and piloted, and incorporated in a manual for each context⁴². Applications and developments of PALS have included

women's empowerment with ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives), an NGO in Gujarat⁴³, participatory monitoring and evaluation with KRRC (Kabarole Research and Resource Centre) in Uganda, and impact assessment of microfinance in several countries.

These four examples are original and distinct methodologies, which to varying degrees draw on and share PRA/PLA approaches, methods, behaviours and mindsets and have creatively invented and evolved their own diverse and varied practices. Like Reflect and PGIS, all can be seen as forms of, or closely related to, participatory action research. All frame and facilitate sequences of activities which empower participants to undertake their own appraisal or research and analysis, come to their own conclusions and take action.

Theory: Understandings from practice

Focusing on PRA experiences and also drawing on the four examples above, three clusters of principles can be distinguished. These are evolutions of the original three principal components of PRA becoming: behaviours, attitudes and mindsets – precepts for action; methods – visuals, tangibles and groups; and sharing – pluralism and diversity.

Behaviours, attitudes and mindsets: Precepts for action

Empowering processes require changes of behaviours, attitudes and mindsets, and typically changes of role from teacher to facilitator and from controller to coach. To promote and sustain the spread of good PRA, the practical theory has been expressed as short and simple precepts (See Box 1) with the idea that these will embed and spread as expressions and behaviours; and that the experiences these bring will transform attitudes, predispositions and mindsets among "uppers" and transform relationships with "lowers".

One basic reversal is through asking 'who?' and 'whose?' and answering with 'theirs', referring commonly to lowers, in practice often local people and most of all to those who are poor, weak and marginalised. The overarching question 'Whose reality counts?' forces reflection on how powerful outsiders tend to impose their realities on local people, especially when they are bringing 'superior' knowledge or technology.

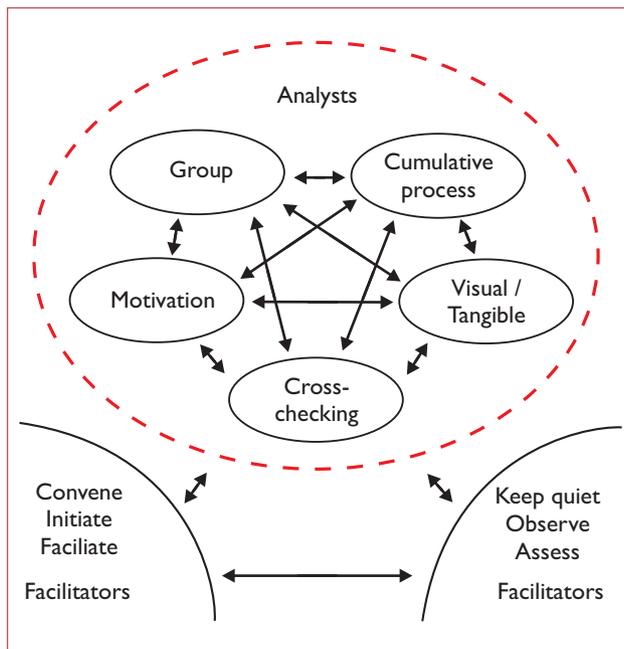
Methods: Visuals, tangibles and groups

Many PRA methods involve visual and tangible expression and analysis, for example mapping, modelling, diagramming, pile

sorting or scoring with seeds, stones or other counters. These are usually but not always small group activities. What is expressed can be seen, touched or moved and stays in place. These visible, tangible, alterable and yet lasting aspects contrast with the invisible, unalterable and transient nature of verbal communication. Symbols, objects and diagrams can represent realities that are cumbersome or impossible to express verbally. These visual and tangible approaches and methods reverse power relations and empower lowers in five ways.

The first is *group-visual synergy*. As in Figure 1, group motivation, cross-checking, adding detail, discussing and cumulative representation generate a positive sum synergy through which all can contribute and learn⁴⁴. A facilitator can observe and assess the process for its rigour of trustworthiness and relevance. The outcomes are then empowering through collective analysis and learning, and credible through an output created and owned by the group.

Figure 1



The second is *democracy of the ground*⁴⁵. Much PRA mapping and diagramming levels or reverses power relations by taking place on the ground. Those taking part have less eye contact, talk less, and can dominate less easily, than in normal upright positions face-to-face. Hands are freer to move tangibles than mouths are to speak words. Those who are more powerful, sometimes older men, may not get down on the ground at all, whereas those who are younger and women may.

The third is the *representation of complex realities and relationships*. Visual and tangible approaches and methods enable local people and lowers generally to express and analyse complex patterns of categories, comparisons,

estimates, valuations, relationships and causality, across an astonishing range of topics—from social and census maps of communities to causal and linkage diagrams of poverty; from scored matrices for varieties of crops and domestic animals to different forms of violence; from characteristics of different sorts of sexual partners to seasonal analyses of work, income, debt, expenditures, sickness and other aspects of life; from on-farm nutrient flows to priorities for local development, and much, much else.

The fourth is *using visuals as instruments of empowerment*. Over the past decade, rapid developments have generated a new repertoire for subordinate and marginalised people. The geo-referenced maps of forest and other peripheral people give them credible and potent aids for asserting and securing their rights and boundaries. Making three-dimensional PGIS models have enabled local communities to express and display their knowledge and realities, and to plan, whether for land management, conservation, or cropping patterns. Large PGIS models can hardly fail to belong to communities and be retained by them. And they provide a natural and efficient locus for dialogue and decision-making⁴⁶.

The fifth is *participatory numbers*. A diverse and versatile family of innovations has evolved to generate numbers and statistics from participatory appraisal and analysis⁴⁷. Practical issues concerning standardisation and commensurability, and ethical issues concerning ownership and use have been recognised and tackled. To a striking degree, the numbers generated by lowers and local people through participatory methods and processes have been found to combine accuracy, authority and utility. In the Philippines, for example, when bottom-up statistics aggregated from village health workers replaced less accurate and less relevant top down statistics, insights led to a policy change that reduced deaths⁴⁸.

These five ways in which visuals, tangibles and numbers empower people often combine and reinforce each other. Their force is more than their sum as parts. Together, they have been found to be potent means for transforming power relations, strengthening the power of lowers and local people not just to understand their realities but to take action, and to negotiate with uppers and with outside powers that-be.

Looking forward

Beyond PRA, brands and boundaries

The PRA label has been a problem, spreading often without PRA principles and practices. In the 1990s, by claiming some sort of ownership of PRA, a few consultants negated

its spirit of sharing; but in the 2000s, this has become less evident. Another problem has been how some have misunderstood PRA. Sadly, too, some working in other traditions have regarded PRA as competitor rather than colleague. This may have contributed to some other action research practitioners' surprising lack of interest in the added value of PRA approaches and methods, and to their seeing PRA as extractive research conducted on local and poor people, not research conducted by and with them as in the movements, methodologies and applications described above. In these movements, as amply documented, practice and theory have been oriented towards empowering those who are marginalised and weak, using new approaches and methods to enable them to do their own appraisals and analysis, and to gain voice and take their own action.

Much of the discourse and practice has now moved beyond PRA. It is less clear than it was what PRA can usefully be said to be. The use of some PRA methods is quite stable and practical: wealth ranking (also known as wellbeing grouping), for example, is extensively used by INGOs and their partners as a means of enabling people in communities to identify those who are worse off according to their own criteria. At the same time, the best practice is often improvised and invented performance in ever changing conditions, leading to continuously evolving diversity.

The inclusive meaning of the term PLA has helped here, as for example by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance⁴⁹ for whom PLA is:

“A growing family of approaches, tools, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to present, share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate, reflect and scale up community action... [and] a way to help people to participate together in learning, and then to act on that learning”

It is no longer, if it ever was, the spread of PRA, but inclusively of participatory approaches, attitudes, behaviours, methods and mindsets that deserve priority; and that is something in which practitioners from all traditions can share. Part of that is the capacity to adapt and innovate. There may always be trade-offs between standardisation and scale on one hand, and creativity and quality on the other. But in moving from practice that is fixed, wooden and branded into one that is more flexible, pliant and unlabelled, the frontier agenda shifts from reproducing methods to:

- modifying behaviour;
- enhancing repertoire – the range of things a person, a facilitator, knows to do, and

- fostering creativity to find new things to do and new ways to do them.

Paradigmatically, this is part of the shift from things to people, from top-down to bottom-up, from standard to diverse, from control to empowerment. Brands, boundaries, ego, exclusiveness and claims of ownership dissolve to be replaced by openness, generosity, inclusiveness and sharing. Central to these transformations are personal reflexivity and institutional change. Congruence between the personal and the institutional is a predisposing condition for participatory processes in groups and communities, and for the continuous discovery together of ways of doing things which fit local contexts.

A new eclectic pluralism

In 'Shifting Perceptions, Changing Practices in PRA: From Infinite Innovation to the Quest for Quality', Andrea Cornwall and Irene Guijt⁵⁰ – both early pioneers of PRA – review the excitement of the initial community of practice, the seeding of diversity and the poor practice that came with the rapid spread of PRAs in the latter 1990s, and how there came to be many approaches and pathways. They highlight the quest for quality, and they also see a 'new pluralism':

“Across a spectrum of areas of development work now are people who have engaged in some way with PRA. Participatory learning and action approaches have come to be used in a myriad of settings, in ways that are so diverse that they have given rise to entirely new areas of work – whether in policy research, learning, participatory governance or rights-based development work ...”

The creative diversity of this new pluralism is brought to light by a review by ActionAid of its participatory practices⁵¹. These differ by country and within countries, and confront issues of participation, power and rights. While ActionAid may be exceptional among INGOs for encouraging and reporting on such diversity, the NGO sector in general has in the past decade been a major seedbed for the creative proliferation of methodologies. This new pluralism is eclectic. The approaches, attitudes, behaviours and mindsets variously identified and named as PRA and PLA are just one part of this. PRA group-visual methods remain powerful and useful, but many practitioners have moved on from relying on them as heavily as they did and now improvise more, borrowing and bringing to bear a wider range. So there are many springs as sources, and many mingling streams, confluences and branching flows. A new world of practice opens up.

From PRA and PLA experiences, we learn that this is less a matter of methods and more of ways of living, being and relating. In participatory approaches and methods, there will always be a case for seeking common standards and

principles. At the same time, by inventing and improvising each time anew for the uniqueness of each challenge and opportunity, the scope for adventure and discovery will never end.

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Rights-Based Territorial Development Initiative (RBTDI): A Very Short Introduction



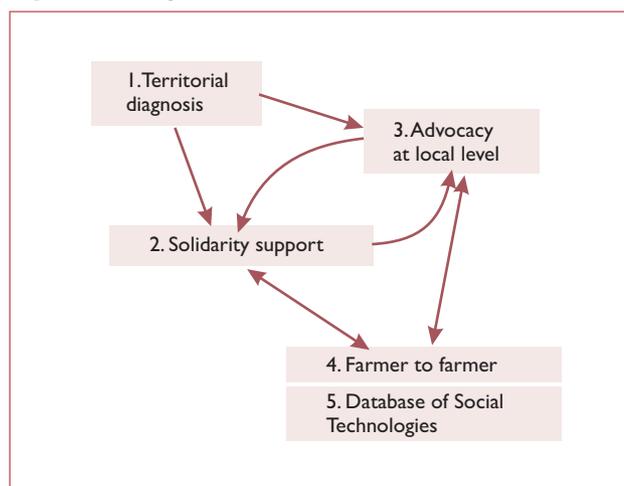
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Brazilian farmers and technicians visit the district of Manhiça in Mozambique as part of the Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange Programme of the RBTDI.

Introduction

In 2008, ActionAid's Right to Food Theme launched the Rights-Based Territorial Development Initiative (RBTDI) with the aim of improving programme quality at the local level. At the time, there was a growing need to leverage the quality of food rights work in ActionAid by 1) increasing the coherence of programmes at all levels-local, national, regional and international; 2) increasing inter-thematic partnerships and integrating capacity-building and advocacy work; and 3) improving short to long term livelihoods of local communities through not only political change but also adoption of appropriate technologies.

Figure 1: Components of RBTDI



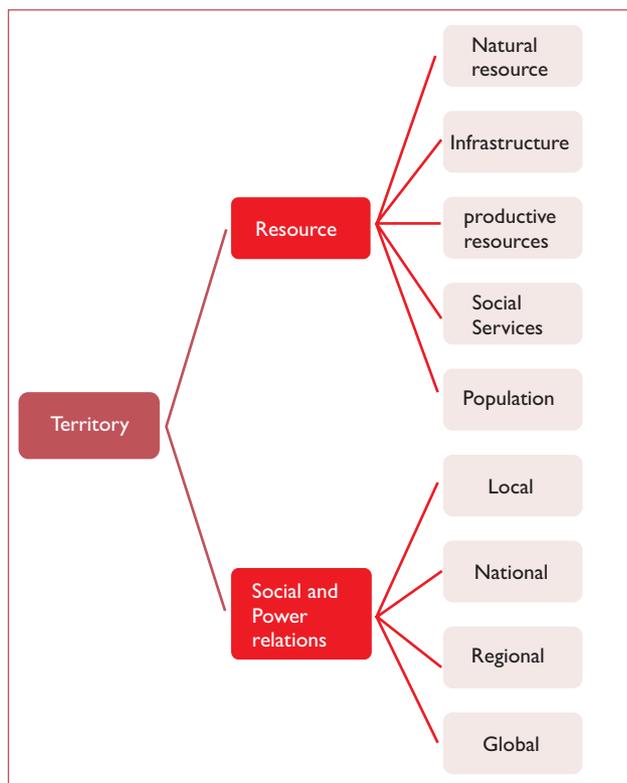
RBTDI was born out of various participatory approaches to rural development, including agrarian systems framework² and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)³. RBTDI is a methodology made up of five major components (Figure 1). It starts by a diagnosis that provides a framework for other four activities. Solidarity support is interlinked with advocacy at local level-influencing the state and duty-bearers with alternative solutions for rural development. Farmer-to-farmer exchanges and social technologies are complementary tools that facilitate the dissemination of ideas and adoption of best practices between communities and organisations beyond the local level.

How RBTDI Works

Territorial Diagnosis

Territory is an interesting word; it has Latin roots *terra* meaning land and *terroir* meaning fear. From this, territory can be defined as a bounded physical area with natural, human and socially constructed resources that are governed by unequal power relations (Figure 2). From this, territorial development becomes a social construct that entails a set of historical, cultural, economic, geographical, environmental and institutional relationships that create certain types of identity and purpose commonly shared by those occupying the territory—both private and public actors.

Figure 2: Defining Territory



To address the unequal power relations in a given territory, one first needs to identify the “driving forces” - i.e. a set of interconnected events that result in a change of the current reality. These events should explain how the territory became what it is today, and it should be a basis on which the future can be forecasted. Through participatory tools such as resource maps, historical timelines, scenario and quality matrix, time diaries and Venn diagrams, the following forces are identified:

- Main actors involved and their interests;
- Resources used for political bargaining (e.g. money, political legitimacy, technical knowledge); and
- Power imbalances and gender inequality.

These tools not only help recognise the power dynamics between stakeholders, but also how these power relations interact with resources to either frustrate or realise the right to food.

BOX 1

Understanding power relations in Niamina East District, The Gambia

In the Niamina East District, The Gambia, farmer households are divided into two classes: first comers and new settlers. The former are the ones that first cleared the fields during the initial stage of community settlements and subsequently became full owners of the land. The latter group of farmers are those who arrived much after and who can only borrow or rent land from the former. Territorial diagnosis has revealed that there is a widespread assumption among the farmer households that women cannot do the hard labour-intensive farm work, and thus cannot own land and other resources. Historical analysis also showed that during the Green Revolution in the 1980s, women were not allowed to access mechanical inputs as their use was forbidden by men. In short, territorial diagnosis of Niamina East District showed that disputes for land and other resources were in the domains of men, in which women are mostly excluded.

Solidarity Support and Advocacy

Based on the findings of the territorial diagnosis, the next stage of RBTDI aims to build and strengthen the capacity of grassroots organisations so they can create solidarity, network and successfully advocate for political change. Participatory approaches such as Reflect and Farmer-to-Farmer exchanges play a role in organising and empowering farmers and in sharing local innovations that improve livelihoods. These processes imbue them with a sense of ownership and enhance their capacities in local leadership to propel the development process and to carry out advocacy work.

Advocacy work can be integrated with solidarity support in several ways. First, solidarity support can help farmers

recognise themselves as legitimate rights holders and that they can demand their rights to the government and other duty-bearers. Second, when local government service is delivered, rights holders can help gauge its effectiveness, help promote it to become a best practice and demand its integration to national level policies. They could also challenge the government and carry out further advocacy work to demand adequate agricultural policies and/or equitable delivery of social services.

In the context of decentralisation, local state or municipal offices become important entry points for advocacy work. RBTDI is designed especially, but not exclusively, to help farmers and other groups to bargain for resources provided by these local government offices. With more and more participation from local communities in the initiative, it is possible to identify common concerns shared by farmers, and this can be used for campaigning at national and global levels.

BOX 2

Building solidarity and capacity of communities to fight against monocrop plantations in the Southern Coast of Guatemala⁴

Territorial diagnosis in the Southern Coast of Guatemala has revealed that the region is characterised by extensive large-scale monocropping of sugar cane, bananas, palm oil and rubber, and that poor peasants are finding it extremely difficult to plant and grow food in their small parcels of land or even to lease their land to produce basic foods. In the past five years, a significant process of monopolisation and concentration of land have taken place, and many peasant communities are in a struggle with banana and palm oil agribusinesses who have built fences around their estates to protect them from floods during the rainy season and to divert the natural course of the river to irrigate their fields in the dry season. This unscrupulous practice of corporate farms has evidently reduced the amount of arable land for smallholder farmers, increased the exploitation of water resources and endangered forests and biodiversity. Despite these negative consequences, state institutions are nearly non-existent in the region and the municipal government is supporting larger farms at the expense of smallholder farmers.

In 2009, ActionAid together with its partner, Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), began supporting smallholder farmers to organise themselves and to build their capacity in order to advance the progressive realisation of the right to food. ActionAid and CUC implemented several training programmes to men and women in the Southern Coast, which emphasised raising communities' awareness of the right to food and women's rights, as well as sharing knowledge on agroecology so as to help farmers become more resilient in the context of climate change.

Arturo Lopez, a 52 year old farmer from Carrizales communities shares his experience over the last ten years: *"The construction of the fences by agricultural enterprises started after Hurricane Mitch of 1998 to protect their plantations. This in effect altered the natural course of the river. During the rainy season, water flooded*

the area of 'pampas' where nobody could plant anything. As a result of the construction of these walls around export mono-crops, water from rain and storms now inundate smallholder communities' crops, destroying everything. We started asking the government authorities to find solutions, but large estate owners have been just blaming it on the nature and climate change. Since 2005 until now, we have always lost one of two of our corn harvests, and we are finding it difficult to make our ends meet. It is a complicated situation. Now there is some dialogue with higher authorities and some commissions have arrived in the community to perform evaluations. We even recorded a video to document our situation, but nothing has been resolved so far. What they really want is for us to leave, to put pressure on us and buy our land for little money. Some people have even come to offer projects to us so that we keep our mouths shut. But we did not let them. If CUC had not supported us, everyone would be on his/her own and trying to do something individually. But we are now stronger that we stay together with solidarity."

The organisational and capacity building of ActionAid and CUC has prepared communities in their struggles against the government and agribusinesses. In response to the recurring loss of crops and assets due to floods, a total of 21 communities acted together with CUC and the Catholic Church's Social Pastoral for Land to make their voices heard. Towards the end of 2010, they had influenced the government to establish a Verification Commission with the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office and the ministries involved in the issue, and to re-open the case of the Southern Coast that had been shelved since 2005. The results of this process will be significant for other communities around the region, which face similar conditions and problems.

Exchanging Best Practices

To take advantage of local innovations around RBTDI, ActionAid has developed several forms of knowledge exchange not only between farmer communities, but also between countries. First, the Database of Social Technologies⁵ allows local communities to share their best practices and look for inspiring examples. Social technologies are products, methodologies or organisational processes developed by local communities or in interaction with them, which contributes to improved quality of life, employment and income generation through local development processes. Second, the International Farmer to Farmer Exchange Programme⁶ allows members of national farmers' organisations to visit other countries, meet other farmers and learn from their experiences. This programme is a horizontal learning methodology used to strengthen farmers' movements and their capacities, as well as to promote shared learnings and disseminate agroecological practices and social technologies. This exchange not only consists of farming knowledge, but also organisational innovations.

BOX 3

Farmer-to-Farmer Exchanges in Africa⁷

Mozambique was the first country to carry out RBTDI in Africa. In 2008, two farmer-to-farmer exchanges took place in Mozambique: a national one and an international one.

In the national exchange, 35 participants from different regions, including farmers from the district of Manhiça, came together to share experiences on agroecology and improving access to markets. Farmers also learned about soil fertilisation, organic crop management, crop rotation, control of crop diseases, direct breeding, soil cover, food processing and other agroecological practices. The international exchange was between Brazil and Mozambique. Farmers and technicians from different regions in Brazil visited the district of Manhiça with other farmers from different regions in Mozambique. This exchange focused on alternative methods of production in dry areas, food processing, improving access to markets and coping with conflicts for land.

Other farmer-to-farmer exchanges were organised between The Gambia and Senegal in 2008 and 2009. Initial territorial diagnosis in The Gambia pointed out that, at the local level, farmers were facing problems in the groundnut sector - i.e. low quality seeds, low soil fertility that resulted in low production and productivity. They also faced marketing problems and difficulties in accessing credit. In this light, an exchange programme was proposed in Senegal, where ActionAid was supporting local farmers' organisations and their programmes to multiply seeds and to improve farmers' access to government policies and decision-making. As a result in 2008, women smallholder farmers from The Gambia visited Senegal to see how groundnuts were produced, processed and marketed and consumed. In return, Senegalese farmers visited The Gambia in 2009 to share and learn about Gambian farmers' organisational capacities and production activities.

In November 2009, another farmer-to-farmer exchange was organised between Kenya and Tanzania. During this exchange, farmers from Kenya visited three cooperatives in Tanzania to learn how they function, what their challenges are and how they go about dealing with them. They also learned how Tanzanian farmers were negotiating cashew nut prices with the government and how they were organising themselves in the market. Based on this experience, Kenyan farmers created a marketing board for cashew nuts and demanded the government to provide space for them in the government body responsible for fixing prices and providing technical support to the cashew nut sub-sector; two farmers now have a seat in the government committee as result of this effort.



Farmers from Brazil and Mozambique exchange their knowledge on different production methods in dry areas.

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Conclusion

In summary, RBTDI employs a set of methodologies and tools—territorial diagnosis (including historical and gender analysis), solidarity support, advocacy and knowledge exchange—to better guide the design and implementation of rural development programmes. The Territorial Diagnosis Handbook⁸ was launched and circulated in 2008 in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The RBTDI is one of many participatory methodologies employed by ActionAid, and it allows a comprehensive analysis of a territory—its natural resources, farming systems, power dynamics and gender relations—while improving the capacities of local communities to fight for their rights in solidarity with others. It also allows organisations like ActionAid to better design and provide technical support for not only immediate social and economic needs of rural farmers but also long-term sustainable livelihoods and management of natural resources.

1. José Ferreira is an independent community development consultant and has worked with ActionAid International in developing the RBTDI from 2008-2009. This article has been further elaborated by Youjin Chung, Executive Editor of *Food Files*.
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6. See related article in this issue: "The Exchange and Systemisation of Women's Agroecological Experiences" by Ana Paula Lopes Ferreira and Venessa Schottz.
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The Exchange and Systemisation of Brazilian Women's Experience in Agroecology



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Women discuss various methodologies to systematise their experiences in agroecology.

Introduction

The exchange of experiences between farmers is not a new practice. This interchange of knowledge has always occurred in public spaces, as in public markets. Nowadays, this process is increasingly being supported by organisations that understand the value of expanding farmers' knowledge. In fact, the growth of agroecology in Brazil has been

driven by the discussion and systematisation of farmers' experiences, as well as the promotion of knowledge exchange between farmers and agricultural technicians.

Systemising farmers' experiences generally revolves around the role of the family. Yet, it does not problematise the gendered roles in family farming nor the unequal power relations within households. For example, issues such as gendered

division of labour and productive planning, and women's political and economic autonomy are not adequately reflected in the systemisations. Unsurprisingly, women are often rendered powerless, voiceless and invisible both in the productive and the reproductive sphere.

To challenge this inequality, more and more women have been demanding their needs for a space in which they

can organise themselves, share experiences and develop procedures for systemising agricultural knowledge that are held specifically by women farmers, peasants, agro-extrativists, indigenous peoples, 'quilombolas'³, 'quebradeiras de coco babaçu'⁴, riverine women among others.

In order to explore the interface between grassroots action and agroecology, not only in the field of production, but also in terms of gender relations, ActionAid Brazil initiated the project: "Exchange and Systematisation of Agroecology Experiences Led by Women" in March 2008. This process rose out of a partnership between ActionAid's project on "Disseminating the knowledge from farmer to farmer: Trading experiences and strengthening the agroecology movement"⁵, and the Brazilian National Movement of Agroecology (ANA)'s project on "Women Building Agroecology"⁶.

The project involved 21 organisations and grassroots movements from the Northern states of Paraíba, Maranhão, Piauí, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Bahia and Ceará, and the Southeastern state of Minas Gerais (See Box 1). While some organisations were already

systemising women's experiences as part of their institutional practice, others were less familiar with the practice, if not new to the process.

The Process and Methodology of Systemisation

The main aim of the project was to create a space for women to exchange their experiences around agroecology and to strengthen their capacity to systemise their knowledge. By employing a participatory methodology and providing a set of questions that guide participants with key issues to be discussed (see Box 2), ActionAid Brazil and ANA tried to enable women farmers and technicians involved in the project to carry out the systemisation themselves. All groups were encouraged to utilise different participatory tools and activities, such as workshops, interviews, and group dynamics among others (See Box 3).

The process of systemisation consisted of the following steps:

1) "Local commissions" were formed for the mapping of experiences; a proposal for a participatory methodology was constructed; and the first workshop was organised.

2) The first workshop was held in the municipality of Afogados da Ingazeira in Pernambuco state on 10-11 March 2008 with the following objectives: learning and reflecting on women's agroecology experiences developed by each organisation; thinking of the role of systematisation in various organisations and in women's lives; and agreeing on a schedule for the systematisation of experiences. A total of 60 women - i.e. three from

BOX 1

Organisations and grassroots movements that participated in the exchange

Associação Quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas (AQCC), Assessoria e Serviços a Projetos em Agricultura Alternativa (AS-PTA)/Polo Sindical da Borborema, Associação em Áreas de Assentamento no Estado do Maranhão (ASSEMA), Centro de Agricultura Alternativa do Norte de Minas (CAA/NM), Casa da Mulher do Nordeste (CASA), Centro das Mulheres do Cabo (CMC), Centro de Desenvolvimento Agroecológico (Centro Sabiá), Centro Feminista 08 de Março (CF8), Comunidade Semeando o Futuro (COMSEF), Associação Conviver no Sertão (CONVIVER), Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas da Zona da Mata (CTA-ZM), Esplar Centro de Pesquisa e Assessoria, Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional - Pernambuco (FASE-PE), Fórum das Mulheres de Mirandiba, Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu (MIQCB), Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas - Alagoas (MMC-AL), Movimento das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais do Nordeste (MMTR-NE), Movimento de Organização Comunitária (MOC), Movimento das Mulheres Sem Terra do Maranhão (MST-MA), Rede de Mulheres de Remanso, Serviço de Assessoria a Organizações Populares Rurais (SASOP) and Instituto Feminista para a Democracia (SOS Corpo).

BOX 2

A set of questions to guide the systemisation

- Reflecting on the past and the future trajectory of the women's lives, identify the context in which women's farming experiences are developed.
- To what extent do the experiences promote women's political autonomy?—e.g. stimulating their participation in different public decision-making spaces.
- To what extent do the experiences contribute to generating income and financial autonomy of women—e.g. increasing value of their products and improving their access to markets. Are women able to use their income autonomously? What strategies do they develop to gain financial autonomy?
- Throughout their experiences in agroecology, were there any changes concerning women's relationships with their children and/or partners? What about the division of domestic labour? Do women realise that their work is more valued by their communities and families? Do they notice any progress in realising women's rights from their experiences in agroecology?

each organisation - participated in the workshop⁷. Each organisation briefly presented their experiences on women and agroecology, and three field visits were conducted in Sertão do Pajeú with support from CASA and Centro Sabiá.

3) After institutional proceedings, each organisation and grassroots movement

BOX 3

Some participatory methods used in the systematisation process

Venn Diagramme: It is a diagnostic tool that stimulates discussions on topics related to regional institutions and women's groups. The institutions are classified in circles of three different sizes (big, medium and small) according to the power they have.

Life River: This activity allows a collective discussion about themes that were lived or dealt with through time-in the context of the group, local community or region. It allows a comparative analysis of the change in attitudes, behaviour and relationship, as well as identifying the origin or impulse for these changes. Women are encouraged to register in the shape of a river (through drawings, pictures, collage) important events and incidents that the group identify as stimuli or obstacles.

Timeline: A timeline is drawn and women are encouraged to describe the group's trajectory by identifying the moment when they first started experimenting with agroecology, their own achievements, challenges and perspectives for the future.

Daily Routine: Women are encouraged to name all the activities they perform from the time they wake up to the moment they go to bed. This tool helps to visualise the work carried out by women in the productive and reproductive sphere, women's intensive day work and the family's division of chores.

developed its own systematisation process from March to November 2008. In parallel, a "methodology commission" was created by the Working Women's Group of ANA, ActionAid, AS-PTA, Polo Sindical da Borborema, Assentamento Dandara, Esplar and CASA. The role of the commission was to coordinate methodological processes and to discuss how meetings will be organised and conducted. During this stage, the commission identified several organisations and movements that required in loco support visits from the Administration of GT Women of ANA.



Andrelice Silva dos Santos from Bahia, who took part in the 3rd workshop, shares her experience in agroecology: "In the agroecological system, everyone wants to be included and can be. There is room for the wife, the husband, the daughter and the son...Unlike monocropping in cocoa where men dominated decisions, women now fight and acquire independence to plant other crops."

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4) The second workshop took place on 3-5 December 2008, in the municipality of Cabo de Santo Agostinho in Pernambuco state. The workshop aimed to circulate the systematised experiences, to evaluate the participatory methodology, and to deepen the understanding of some

themes that came up more frequently in the systematisation - i.e. violence, political and financial autonomy, innovations in gendered division of labour and youth leadership. Moreover, exchange visits were carried out in north-eastern Brazil so that women could have the chance to experiment with new agroecological methods.

5) From December 2008 to April 2009, new elements to the final text of the systematisation were concluded from the debates and learnings from the second workshop.

6) The third workshop took place on 9-10th February 2010, in the city of Triunfo in Pernambuco state. The main purpose of the workshop was to deepen the debate on violence against women in agroecology. This was based on discussions and findings that there are several cases, in addition to physical violence, in which women are oppressed by men (e.g. men preventing women from practicing agroecology either by contaminating crops with pesticides or by limiting their access to credit).

7) The final document *Mulheres e Agroecologia: Sistematizações de experiências de mulheres agricultoras (Women and Agroecology: Systematisation of experiences of women farmers)* was published in 2010⁸.

The exchange visits and sharing of women's local experiences in the workshops were extremely important to the systematisation process, because they reiterated both the importance of women's role in the promoting and leading the practice of agroecology, and the role of agroecology in improving women's lives. Furthermore, the political-pedagogy embedded in the systemisation enabled women to problematise the conflicts and difficulties they faced in championing agroecology and to come up with solutions to tackle their challenges.

Conclusion

The systemisation process was uniquely characterised by rich and diverse participatory methodologies. Some women opted for encouraging collective systematisations while others opted for individual systematisations focused in groups.

The majority had the opportunity to meet other women and to exchange their experiences, concerns, problems and solutions. Some created a system of sending and receiving letters, while others made films. Some systematised their experiences through poetry and music. There were several follow-up meetings and seminars in the communities which enabled women to complement and supplement their knowledge around agroecology. All in all, the process deeply influenced women and their communities, and further motivated them to continue to systemise their experiences.

For many, the common notion that women are "helpers" and that their labour has less value than those of men has been demystified. In many cases, the systemisation of agroecology experiences served to show women and their families the importance women's economic autonomy-including the control and use of income raised by women. It has also opened up discussions about organising and opening women's own markets and increasing access to other farmers' markets. Politically, it served to unveil diverse types of unique and common oppressions suffered by women. Indeed, the project has motivated a growing number of women to build water harvesting tanks, to take part in the presidency of Rural Workers' Unions, and to come together to discuss their access to markets and to public policy decision-making.

While this project has made clear the important and growing presence of

women in the productive sphere, it has found that men are not proportionally increasing their participation in the reproductive spheres - i.e. chores, childcare, care for the elderly and nursing. This project hence brings to future debates the issue of gendered division

of labour and the society's incapacity to partake in domestic labour or to see it as a social responsibility. Undoubtedly, this is an area that needs to be further explored and strengthened in the future work around women and agroecology.



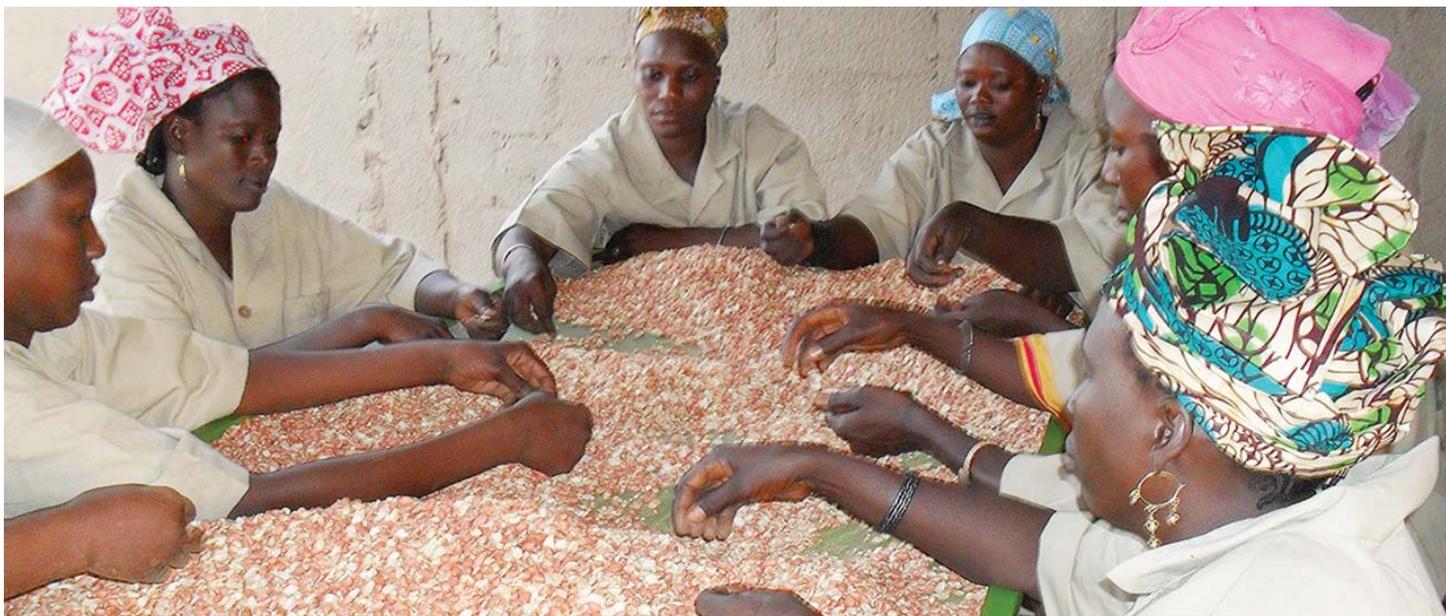
Vanda, a farmer from Paraíba, sells her products at the agroecological fair. Her experience encouraged other women farmers in her community to adopt agroecology.

© ActionAid Brazil

1. Ana Paula Lopes Ferreira is the Coordinator of Women's Rights Programme in ActionAid Brazil.
2. Vanessa Schottz is a member of Technical Team of Working Women's Group of Brazilian National Movement of Agroecology (ANA).
3. Quilombolas are the descendents of slaves who escaped from slave plantations that existed in Brazil until abolition in 1888. Many Quilombolas live in poverty.
4. The 'Babassu coconut breakers' live in the 18 million hectares of forest between the Amazon and the semi-dry areas in the northeast of Brazil, where few public policies guarantee peoples' basic rights and land distribution is highly inequitable.
5. The first exchange meeting organised through this Farmer to Farmer project took place in Paraíba, in May 2007. This meeting pointed out the need for the project to incorporate a more careful study of the theme of gender.
6. The objective of the 'Women Building Agroecology' project was to increase the action of GTWomen of ANA through the process of exchange and systematisation of women in agroecology; to give visibility to the experiences developed by women of the agroecology movement; and to create references to public policies.
7. Three participants from each organisation consisted of one technician/secretary and two farmers, agro-extrativists or 'quimbolas'.
8. ActionAid Brasil. 2010. MULHERES E AGROECOLOGIA: Sistematizações de experiências de mulheres agricultoras. Volume 1. Rio de Janeiro: ActionAid Brasil. Available at: [http://www.actionaid.org.br/Portals/0/Docs/livro-Mulheres_e_Agroecologia.pdf]

Moussa Faye¹
Fatou Mbaye²

Increasing Production and Income through Quality Seed: Case of Senegalese Groundnut Farmers



© Fatou Mbaye

Women farmers of the Taiba Niassene GIPA (Group of Inter-village Peanut Producers) are sorting groundnuts at the processing unit supported by ActionAid Senegal.

Introduction

ActionAid Senegal has been working in the regions of Fatick and Kaolack to support farmers in the groundnut sector since 2002. These regions are part of the former “peanut basin”, where peanut farming was not only the main source of income for farmers, but also the key source of nutrients for many people and

livestock. Despite its significance, the groundnut sector has been facing various problems since the 1970s.

Whilst accounting for more than 80 percent of Senegal's overall exports in the 1960s, groundnut exports fell to 40 percent in the 1970s, finally plummeting to 10 percent in the 1990s³. Although Senegal's groundnut exports financed the country's food imports, particularly cereals in the

past (e.g. rice and wheat), the case is no longer true⁴. The groundnut crisis of today is largely attributed to falling prices, decreasing productivity due to ineffective agricultural policies and unfavourable weather conditions, as well as increasing competition for oil imports among many others.

Despite of this dire situation, groundnuts still occupy 80 percent of total cultivated land in Senegal, and 73

percent of farmers are involved in the sector. Since the full liberalisation of the groundnut sector and the privatisation of the official groundnut marketing and processing company (SONACOS) in 2002, farmers have been facing more problems and challenges, especially those relating to the availability of fertilisers and good quality seeds and the marketing of products.

Implementation of the Seed Multiplication Programme

Groundnut farming plays a central role in fighting poverty in rural Senegal. Being both food and cash crop, groundnuts represent the main means to securing farmers' livelihoods. The Seed Multiplication Programme of ActionAid Senegal aims to support groundnut farmers and especially women in organising, increasing productivity, marketing and processing products in order to revitalise the groundnut sector. This programme also includes an advocacy element—pushing the Government of Senegal to develop adequate and sustainable agricultural policies.

The programme was implemented through the following steps:

- **Strengthening farmers' movements:** First and foremost, ActionAid Senegal supported farmers to organise themselves at the local level to build solidarity and to cope with the challenges of groundnut liberalisation. Subsequently, ActionAid Senegal facilitated their association to the Cadre de Concertation des Producteurs d'Arachide (CCPA), one of the most powerful groundnut farmers' organisations working at

the national level. CCPA is a member of the Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR), a national platform of farmers, and its members are consulted in all decision-making in the groundnut sector. Women are actively involved in all activities and are well-organised to control their production with the support of CCPA.

- **Supporting groundnut marketing:** ActionAid Senegal started its marketing support activity in 2003 after the full liberalisation of the groundnut sector in 2002. With this support, farmers were able to access credit from rural banks and to commercialise their products. Marketing support was particularly important because in many rural areas, farmers are not well organised and they are often vulnerable to exploitation by the country middlemen. This support activity has consequently allowed farmers to commercialise more than 8,000 tonnes of groundnuts.
- **Supporting seed stock reconstitution:** This activity was implemented by CCPA with the support of ActionAid Senegal and the Senegalese Institute of Agriculture Research collaboration (ISRA). Starting in 2005, the aim of this activity was to increase farmers' access to good quality seeds in Kaolack and Fatick regions. This was crucial especially taking into account the fact that good quality seeds could increase the agricultural productivity by up to 35 percent. In 2009, CCPA succeeded in advocating for government subsidisation of good quality and affordable groundnut seeds. As a result, seeds were sold to its members for 100 FCFA (about US 20 cents) a kilo instead of 250 FCFA.

After the first cycle of seed multiplication⁵, total seed production amounted to 2964 tons in 2010. As a result of this success, CCPA has been certified by the government as an organisation that is capable of producing and multiplying selected seeds⁶. With this recognition, CCPA now participates in the negotiation of groundnut prices and continues to influence the government to provide adequate subsidies to farmers. Moreover, CCPA has become a credible and respectable farmers' organisation that is able to access credits from the national agricultural development bank.

- **Supporting groundnut processing:** Based on a situation analysis carried out together with local communities, it was found that the best way to cope with falling prices is to add value to groundnuts by processing them. In turn, ActionAid Senegal initiated a project to set up a groundnut processing unit, which has improved the livelihoods of smallholder women farmers through increased income from sales of groundnuts and groundnut oil, cake, soap, paste, flour and so on. Such value-added products attracted different customers and prices, and at the same time, they allowed for women's socio-economic and political empowerment which enabled them to participate and be included in decision-making processes.

Consciousness Building Process

Since 2002, ActionAid Senegal has been working with local communities using participatory approaches for all stages of programme implementation—including needs assessment, planning, implementation of activities and

monitoring. Reflect was one of the methods used to empower women and to engage them in development issues in the communities. In addition to the participatory approaches used in the process, several training workshops have been organised to address issues related to the role and responsibilities of citizens, entrepreneurship, women and leadership. Undertaking power analysis, encouraging women's participation, and networking and exchanging of experiences with others through participation in various fora and field visits have been important tools for building the consciousness of poor people, especially women.

Women's Rights

In the past, women's role in agriculture was to "help" men in cultivating and especially in harvesting crops. Most of them still do not have the access to or control over land and other means of production. Credit and seed distribution are generally diverted to men who have

control over land and natural resources. ActionAid Senegal has been supporting women to gain access to and control over land and other productive resources. Through the Seed Multiplication Programme, women farmers were able to cultivate 2340 hectares in 2010. In the wider groundnut sector, women are now organising themselves to collect their harvests and to market the products themselves. Furthermore, they are now actively participating in the decision-making process of CCPA.

Advocacy

Through the Seed Multiplication Programme, poor and excluded people have been able to critically engage with duty-bearers through organisations like the CCPA and CNCR. Thanks to these organisations, poor groundnut farmers are now less threatened by middlemen who have been benefiting the most from agricultural liberalisation. Women are now more aware and critical towards the local government. On Rural Women's Day in 2009 they submitted

a charter to the government, claiming the realisation of the right to food through: fair access to land and seed, adequately valued agricultural products, equitable access to credit, effective marketing system, roads and other public goods and participation in public policy decision making.

Opportunities and Challenges

Through the programme, power relations have been shifted significantly in villages between men and women, poor and excluded farmers and the rich. Women now have more opportunities to access and wield control over resources and are more aware of their opportunities to participate in economic debates and decision making on agriculture at local and national levels. The remaining challenges are to produce good quality processed food for sale and consumption and to ensure that credit is adequately distributed to women.

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1. Moussa Faye is the Country Director of ActionAid Senegal.
 2. Fatou Mbaye is the Right to Food Coordinator of ActionAid Senegal.
 3. Freud, C. et al. 1997. *La Crise de l'Arachide au Sénégal: Un Bilan-Diagnostic*. Paris: Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD).
 4. Boccanfuso, D. & Savard, L. 2005. Impacts Analysis of the Liberalisation of Groundnut Production in Senegal: A Multiple Household Computable General Equilibrium Model. Research Group in International Economy and Development Working Paper 05-12. Québec: Université de Sherbrooke.
 5. A seed multiplication cycle usually takes four years before the seeds are available to farmers.
 6. From this experience, the government has developed a similar seed multiplication programme with the support from the European Commission (EC). It has requested that CCPA distribute seeds to other regions in compensation for subsidies.

C. Nicholas¹
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Struggle for Land: An Indian Story



Vadamalaiyaur Dalits struggle for access to and control over the land.

© Esther Mariaselvam

Introduction

Dalits are economically marginalised and excluded social groups who are considered untouchable in the Hindu caste order. They are without access to productive assets, and their marginalisation often extends to tolerating conditions comparable to slavery and inhumane treatment.

In 1982, the 'Depressed Class' (DC) land, known as Panchami land, was allocated to Dalits by a government decree (See Box 1). Several studies carried out by the Old Madras

Presidency ascertain that the "DC Land Act" distributed around 1.2 million acres of land to the Dalit people. Nevertheless, despite years of struggle to retain access to and control over land, many Dalits today remain landless, having been alienated from Panchami land by those with power.

However, in January 1992, a historically significant case took place in which the rights of Dalits to DC land were upheld; the Madras High Court ruling had required that caste Hindus return all DC lands to their rightful owners. This judgment

coincided with the Centenary Celebration of Doctor Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution and an iconic figure of the Dalit liberalisation. The culmination of these events provoked a renewed vibrancy to the Dalits' struggle for land. Public debates were generated; widespread DC land rights movements followed; dialogues on the reclamation of Panchami land in the Dalit villages emerged; and young Dalit people began to check the Land Register of their respective villages to find out more about the status of their land entitlements.

BOX 1

History of Panchami Land

In 1862, a British officer of the Madras presidency presented a report on Dalits' living conditions to the British government. In his report, he described their social exclusion and lack of access to cultivable land. He explained that the Brahmin or Vellala castes owned most of the available land in all the villages while Dalits, by contrast, were landless and oppressed agricultural workers. In the report, he recommended that the law be fairly amended so that village land belonged to the people living on it and cultivating it, instead of to their landlords and land title holders. He further recommended that the State take up responsibility for helping Dalits to cultivate their lands.

The report initiated heated debates in the British Parliament, and in 1982, the DC Land Act was enacted, followed by the Government Order 1010 (dated 30 September 1989) giving powers to the Indian Administration to distribute DC land to the Dalits in India. This was given under the following conditions:

- For the first ten years, those who were assigned land should not, by any means, sell or mortgage the land to others.
- If they wanted to sell, mortgage or lease the land assigned to them after ten years, they could only do so with another Dalit.
- DC land transfers which did not abide by the above-mentioned conditions would be declared illegal.

Thus, if DC land was bought by caste Hindus, it would be in violation of the 1982 Act, and Revenue Divisional Officers would be entitled with full powers to cancel the transactions and to reassign the DC land to the Dalit without compensation to the caste Hindu.

Land Struggles and the Role of the Dalit Land Federation

In Karanai village of the old Chinglepet district, local Dalits discovered that they were entitled to more than 600 acres of land in their village, most of which was in the possession of caste Hindus. They submitted a memorandum to the concerned Revenue Officials to restore their lost land. After making repeated presentations to the concerned officials without response, the local people installed a symbolic statue of Doctor Ambedkar on their Panchami land in September 1994. However, instead of restoring their land, the officials removed the statue and took it to their local office.

Outraged by this act, Dalits of Karanai village mobilised thousands of people to march through the streets of Chinglepet. They demanded the restoration of Panchami land and the reinstallation of the Doctor Ambedkar statue. As the protest became more intense, the police resorted to indiscriminate firing. Two young Dalits, John Thomas and Elumalai, were tragically caught in the fire and died as martyrs to the Dalits' cause. This incident not only strengthened the Panchami land movement, but also sparked widespread protests by Dalit movements across the State of Tamil Nadu.

The official Panchami Land Restoration Movement was formed in Tamil Nadu, and Dalit intellectuals such as Professor Thangaraj and Professor Brindavan Moses began to investigate the status of Panchami land. Through access to government records, they were able to provide the movement with detailed statistics

on the availability of Panchami land across different districts of Tamil Nadu. Civil society organisations (CSOs) working with Dalits have used the documentary evidence of these studies to educate and mobilise them in Tamil Nadu. They have been empowered by this information to demand access to Panchami land from Revenue Officials, and requested that the details of Panchami land be made publically available (by displaying information on land availability in different villages at the offices where the Annual Land Tribunals were held).

Despite these efforts, landless Dalit families were still unable to take possession of the land allocated to them. With the complex web of civil litigation and laws challenging them, the Dalits soon realised that community-level mobilisation was the key to their success. Only with a concerted community effort and organised action did they have a chance of claiming their land. With this conviction, Dalit activists of 20 or more organisations, lawyers and academics, came together to form the Dalit Land Right Federation, known as Dalit Mannurimai Koottamaippu (DMK). DMK was established in 2001 in six northern districts of Tamil Nadu and Union territory of Puducherry to support and enable the Dalits' struggle for land⁴ (See Box 2).

BOX 2

A Story of Struggle

This is a story of Mrs Alamelu, a 55 year old Dalit women farmer in the Vadamalyanur village:

"Dalits are a minority in our village. We have been struggling for many years to reclaim our Panchami land. In April 2008, the women in our village, with the help of DMK, approached the Revenue Department to restore our land. There had been many obstacles from the caste Hindus and bureaucrats. When we decided to

hold a peaceful protest in front of the Taluk Office, the officials called for a Peace Committee meeting between the Dalits and the caste Hindus who had grabbed the Panchami land. The meeting was held on 4 August 2008, and it was decided that the officials would pass appropriate orders on 7 August. Until then, nobody should enter the land. A board was put in front of the Panchami land, with the following warning: 'This land in survey numbers 132/3, 134/1 and 134/5 is a Panchami land and caste Hindus are restricted to occupy'.

But no action was taken on the 7th. The warning board was pulled down by caste Hindus and they ploughed the land for cultivation. On seeing this, we lost trust in the Revenue Department. On the morning of the 8th, with the support of DMK activists, we went with two hired tractors, ploughed the land and successfully took possession of it.

On 3 December 2008, the Revenue Department issued land titles to 35 Dalit women. All local women collectively sowed black grams, hoping to develop the land to grow organic food in the future. DMK has trained us in organic farming methods, and we hope to have healthy food in the future and be able to provide quality education to for our children."

DMK has formed Village Community Action groups in 320 villages, and the Village Action Committees (VACs) spear head the land struggle in respective villages. Each VAC represents all Dalit families, with both men and women selected as its committee members. The main tasks of the VAC members are to identify Panchami land, conduct village meetings, and facilitate the process of selecting the most vulnerable families for land ownership before filing applications to the Revenue authorities. DMK encourages collective applications for land titles, as individual applications are more susceptible to manipulation, harassment, intimidation by powerful

landlords, bureaucrats and complex litigation.

Using the Right to Information Act (RTI), DMK has been able to obtain DC and other land details which had hitherto been kept as a close guarded secret by the officials (see Box 3). Training on land literacy is regularly imparted to VAC members to demystify land laws. By providing education on laws, map reading and land measurement skills, DMK has enabled local people to question official decisions, detect the manipulation of land deals, and effectively take possession of the land after it has been issued.

DMK adopts various strategies to mobilise the communities and pressurise the government. Their core focus is on building community actions. Mass rallies, public hearings and mass applications on Land Tribunal Days⁵ are some of the most effective strategies employed by DMK. With these efforts, approximately 1200 acres of land has been released, and is now owned and cultivated by 1000 Dalit families.

Women, Land Struggle and Organic Farming

Most Dalit women are agricultural wage labourers and are actively engaged in food production. However, the percentage of land-holding female agricultural labourers is minimal. Even with efforts like the DC Land Act, the Land Laws of India do not recognise the ownership of land by women. In many cultures, wives and daughters are viewed as property themselves, and deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes dictate that women cannot own property in their own right.

While much has been done through policy agendas to promote women's civic and political status, legislation concerning women's equality within the household and society at large has not been reformed. Thus, women experience discrimination in matters of inheritance, widowhood or divorce, with disastrous consequences that affect their dignity and well-being. At a

BOX 3

Reflections of DMK Activists

"In previous years, our network was mobilising the Dalits to petition the officials to restore the Panchami land wherever our network identified it. This approach was not very effective, as the officials were reluctant to identify or acknowledge the Panchami land, and even more reluctant to restore the land to the Dalits in the villages.

In 2008, we decided to approach this issue more specifically. DMK volunteers used the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005 to collect details of Panchami land from the Revenue Department. We collected data on Panchami land in 15 districts of Tamil Nadu under RTI. With the help of local Village Administrative Officers, we consolidated the information and started cross checking these details in all our working villages. We were thus able to identify the extent of Panchami land distribution, the land survey numbers, to whom the Panchami land was assigned, and the present caste Hindu occupant.

With an accurate collection of background information, we submitted targeted memorandums to the Union Rural Development Minister in Delhi (under whom the Department of Land Affairs functions) and to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu state. We demanded that the authorities immediately act on this issue. As a result, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu immediately forwarded our memorandums to all the District Collectors for prompt action. Meanwhile, our Network activists mobilised the landless Dalit women agricultural workers to apply for land to the officials with specific details. This coordinated and communal approach worked very well and the officials started to take necessary action."

broader level, discrimination in land rights is contributing to increased poverty, food insecurity, conflict and violence against women and even to environmental degradation. Generally, there is continued resistance and/or indifference from political leadership, legislators and administrators to secure justice for women through agrarian reform processes.

The struggle for land rights has, until now, not been as strong as it should have been. This is largely due to the fragmented nature of rural, remote and excluded communities where these women live. In addition, women are often not recognised as "farmers" in their own right, and they do not have strong movements to advocate their rights to governments and other duty-bearers. Dalit women are doubly discriminated against: first because they are Dalits and second because they are women. Many women have also raised the issue of how men of the family are spending the meagre family income on alcohol, while forcing women to borrow money from high interest money lenders. As a result, there are many cases of land alienation, mortgaging of family assets and increased incidences of domestic violence. Women's empowerment and land rights would therefore go a long way in ensuring and increasing domestic security.

In this light, the land struggle of DMK is not only about acquiring land, but also about understanding unequal gender and power relations and making a conscious attempt to change the position of women. While supporting land struggles, DMK is also providing training to Dalit women to take up collective organic farming wherever they have reclaimed the land. They are trained in traditional farming methods, watershed management and animal husbandry, and DMK aids them in collecting and preserving traditional seeds. All of this helps women farmers to grow their own food that is healthy and sustainable.

Ensuring Smallholder Farmers' Rights to Production Entitlements

The National Commission for the Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), led by Professor Arjun Sengupta, reports that 85 percent of the farming communities in India are small and marginal farmers. They own less than 2 hectares of land and own 43 percent of the operated cropped area, with 50 percent output. In contrast, 6 percent of the large farmers own 57 percent of the operated area, and contribute 50 percent to the crop production⁶.

This analysis establishes the importance of small and marginal farmers in Indian agriculture. Though smallholder farmers constitute the overwhelming proportion of farmers in India, they face disproportionate constraints. The role of public policies and programmes has shrunk, and as a result, government intervention has not been able to overcome the inherent diseconomies faced by small and marginal farmers. Smallholder farmers are unable to reap even the smaller benefits from the government programmes that larger sized farms can access.

In this context, DMK land struggle faces head on the challenge of ensuring production entitlements for a new generation of farmers. It disseminates information about various government programmes and encourages Dalit families to take part in the decision-making process of the local government. With these changes, the village planning can target resources and development needs for Dalit farmers, such as credit, land and water. DMK has also successfully mobilised resources from both the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) and the small farm grants available from agriculture development banks, in order

to enable land development, irrigation facilities, seeds procurement and other input supports.

Conclusion

In recent years, Dalit movements have seriously taken up the issues of land rights and dignity as integral part of their ongoing struggles across India. Yet, these struggles remain local and isolated. In order to exert pressure on the state, local struggles have to be united and broadened.

With this in mind, several Dalit organisations have come together at the national level in August 2006 to form the National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movement (NFDLRM) - a network 33 Dalit land rights movements, active in 12 different states⁷. DMK in particular has taken a lead role in bringing together various movements from five southern states of India.

Now that land rights struggles have transcended from the local to the national level, the day is not far when it will build alliances with the global land movements. The history of land struggle in the world is a bloody one. However, DMK has established that with an increased community consciousness, knowledge and skills and through the collective action and active participation of women, a peaceful struggle of poor people can be organised.

1. Mr. C. Nicholas is a founder of National Dalit Land Rights Federation and leader of Dalit struggle in Tamil Nadu
2. Mr. Amar Jyoti Nayak is the theme leader of Right to Food and Livelihood theme in ActionAid India. He is actively engaged in the policy research on sustainable agriculture and Land Reform.
3. Esther Mariaselvam is the theme leader of Women's rights theme in ActionAid India supporting Women's Right to Land and currently leading a multi country programme on Women right to Land supported by European Commission in India.
4. DMK now represents more than 3000 families.
5. "Jama Bndhi" or Land Tribunal Days are organised by Indian state authorities in various locations and on different days to enable groups to submit petitions on land issues. They also provide important opportunities for DMK activists to campaign on land rights. VAC leaders track land issues in their villages and communities, collect evidence, and organise petitions to bring up at Land Tribunals in their areas.
6. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector. 2008. A Special Programme for Marginal and Small Farmers. New Delhi: NCEUS.
7. In March 2007, they organised a South Zone Consultation, which was represented by the movements of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry. This consultation led to the formation of State Chapters in all of the States involved. Likewise, three other regional consultations were organised in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Suman Sahai¹

Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture: Adapting for Change in India



Shakuntala Parihar walks past her failed crops due to drought in Pratappura Chattarpur Madhya Pradesh, India. There is an increasing need to adopt climate resilient sustainable agriculture, especially in drought-prone areas.

© Prashanth Vishwanathan/Bloomberg/ActionAid

Introduction

Agriculture is critical for human survival. It is also one of the sectors that climate change will have the worst impact on. Indeed, there is now growing evidence that the impacts of climate change are unfolding at a pace much faster than those predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in their Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). Very high losses in agricultural production, ranging from 20 to 40 percent, are expected to occur, especially in Africa and South Asia. However, apart from being a victim of climate change, agriculture is also thought to contribute to it. According to various estimates, it is suggested that in India alone, agriculture could contribute around 25 to 30 percent of national greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Rejecting the Dominant Unsustainable Agricultural Model

Small and marginal farmers contribute 50 percent of crop production in India. Those farmers make up 85 percent of agricultural labour and of them, 40 percent are women². Despite their importance in Indian agriculture, most

smallholder farmers have been driven into penury due to recurring drought, crop failure and state neglect.

The high input, mechanised, monoculture promoting and agrochemical based model of agriculture that is being endorsed in most parts of the world (including India) further marginalises small farmers. Furthermore, intensive agrochemical farming with its large carbon footprint is obviously unsustainable for the future. In short, such model cannot help smallholder farmers cope with the emerging challenges and threats from climate change; it can only exacerbate the problem.

This unsustainable model urgently needs to be replaced with a sustainable, climate resilient, and environmentally as well as socially benign model of agriculture. Agriculture must effectively adapt to the changing climate, in a manner which minimises or eliminates production losses. At the same time, GHG emissions from agriculture must also be minimised or eliminated in order to meet the global target of containing the rise of average temperatures to below 2 degrees Celsius.

Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture

An alternative agricultural model must have the following elements in order to successfully move away from the dominant unsustainable model:

■ **Water conservation and harvesting**

The most important step in adapting agriculture to climate change will have to be the conservation of water wherever it falls. Rainwater harvesting, creation of village level water bodies and watershed development, combined with

maximisation of food production, must become a core strategy to help farmers cope with the vagaries of the changing climate.

■ **Conserving the genetic diversity of crop plants**

Conserving genetic diversity of crops is recognised as the key to helping farmers cope with climate change. Promoting agro-biodiversity at village level through Zero Energy Gene Seed Banks (such as the model developed by the Gene Campaign³) means conserving the gene pool and those genes that will be needed to breed new crop varieties to cope with droughts, floods, soil salinity and other environmental challenges that will inevitably accompany climate change.

■ **Reducing water use and agricultural waste**

By adopting new practices, such as the System of Rice Intensification, farmers can adapt to climate change with minimal losses. The System of Rice Intensification is a water saving, methane emission reducing rice cultivation strategy; this step alone would significantly reduce GHG emissions from agriculture.

■ **Bio-organic substitutes**

Agriculture can be made more sustainable and highly productive by replacing chemical fertilisers and pesticides with bio-organic substitutes to the extent possible. By making this change, carbon footprints can be reduced, and reducing the use of nitrogenous fertilisers will also reduce nitrous oxide emissions.

■ **Food and nutrition gardens**

To buffer the most marginal and poor sections of the society from the reduced food production resulting from climate change, household level food and nutrition gardens will provide supplementary food supply and much needed nutrition.

■ **Minimising mechanised agriculture**

Promoting labour-intensive rather than mechanised agriculture has the benefit of reducing energy consumption, and thereby carbon emissions. It also provides employment and income to small farmers and peasants as well as landless agriculture labourers.

■ **Questioning genetically modified (GM) crops**

There is a need to examine the role of GM crops being promoted as the answer to climate change. A critical analysis needs to be done of what, if anything, this technology can contribute to agricultural and food security. In addition, bio-safety regulations in India and other countries need to be examined to check that regulatory processes ensure safe GM crops and food.

Conclusion

A climate resilient as well as environmentally and socially appropriate approach to agriculture, such as those above, can be as productive as the high input and energy intensive approach to agriculture that has been relied upon for decades. Furthermore, sustainable agricultural methods can also provide long-term food security in the face of frequent and extreme weather conditions. Lastly, the role of small and marginalised farmers in championing climate resilient sustainable agriculture must be re-emphasised and further explored.

1. Dr Suman Sahai, who has had a distinguished scientific career in the field of genetics, was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2011. In 2004, she received the Borlaug Award for her outstanding contribution to agriculture and the environment. Dr Sahai has served as a faculty member at the University of Alberta, University of Chicago and University of Heidelberg. Upon returning to India, she organised the Gene Campaign, an organisation dedicated to protecting farmers' rights and food and livelihood security.
2. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector. 2008. *A Special Programme for Marginal and Small Farmers*. New Delhi: NCEUS; ActionAid. 2010. *Fertile Ground: How governments and donors can halve hunger by supporting small farmers*. Johannesburg: ActionAid.
3. For more information on the Gene Campaign, see: <http://www.genecampaign.org/Sub%20pages/zero-energy-genseedbanks.html>

Ronnie Palacios¹

Weaving a Network to Build and Defend Food Sovereignty in Guatemala



Seed banks provide a space where people can swap seeds and share knowledge, while at the same time preventing reliance on mono-crops and promoting biodiversity.

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Introduction

Guatemala is located in a region of the world with enormous biological diversity, the centre of origin for more than 7,500 native plant species. Despite having excellent agroecological conditions for agricultural production, Guatemala possesses one of the worst scenarios of inequality, poverty and malnutrition in the Americas. The majority of its population experience heightened

forms of social and economic exclusion, which is exacerbated by national and global neoliberal policies.

It is this contrast between biological wealth and human poverty which compels REDSAG (Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala/National Network in Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala) to explore ways to protect and value both rural biodiversity and the livelihoods of local people. REDSAG, formed by

more than 200 grassroots organisations from all corners of Guatemala, is a space for addressing these issues and coordinating social and popular actions. REDSAG members converge to defend people's food autonomy, rebuild local practices and to pressure the State in ensuring the population's right to food and self-sufficiency.

REDSAG: Changing the Rules of the Game

Experience of small farmers clearly demonstrates that proper management of natural resources can provide high-quality and nutritious food. Despite this, many agricultural initiatives pursued by the government are negatively affecting biodiversity, with their methods contaminating and destroying native species. Furthermore, Guatemala's biodiversity and food security are threatened not only by the negative consequences of climate change, but also by genetically modified (GM) crops that are closely connected to the economic interests of large agribusinesses.

By promoting sustainable and attainable small-scale farming, we can free farmers from their dependency on pesticides and conventional technological packages which damage livelihoods and the environment. Revitalising traditional technologies, valuing and preserving seeds and providing a practical, scientific and political approach in conjunction with strategic lines of action will enable farmers to attain food sovereignty.

The Government of Guatemala, past and present, have all pursued macroeconomic policies based on farm exports. The country's Vice-President Dr Rafael Espada recently issued statements supporting the production of GM seeds and foods. In response, REDSAG delivered a letter to the Vice-President rejecting this stance and demanding respect for various laws on biological diversity and food security; recognition of the country's biodiversity as a collective heritage; and commitment to reducing poverty and malnutrition in Guatemala (See Box 1).

Furthermore, the majority of the programmes and projects that are currently being promoted by the government are aid-based and do not necessarily promote long term self-sufficiency. In other words, the lack of protective initiatives leaves the country open to exploitations, such as those by profiteering multinational companies.

REDSAG seeks to enhance the discussion of biodiversity and food sovereignty to protect the country from injustice. It implements scientific and social analyses, builds alternative proposals and visualises threats in order to combat them. These initiatives are combined with the practical successes of its member organisations to provide systems of working which can be widely disseminated across the network.

BOX 1 REDSAG letter to the Government of Guatemala

"REDSAG demands ... Respect for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Law of the National Nutritional and Food Security System and Food Security Policy (PSAN), specifically those sections relating to the principles of transparency, food sovereignty, sustainability and precaution ... Commitment to declare the country's biodiversity a collective heritage, not an exploitable asset, to be promoted through the equitable distribution of benefits and the use of this biodiversity to feed the population, to reduce poverty and to counteract the threats posed by the latter ... Respect for the free self-determination of peoples, their nature, the recognition and promotion of indigenous values, their ancestral forms of knowledge, and the forms of coexistence in the conservation and defence of biodiversity and natural resources ... Application of the Precautionary Principle,

established by the Convention on Biodiversity and the Policy on Nutritional and Food Security, to ban the importing, selling and experimenting with GM seeds and foods and to place the onus of proof on those promoting the latter ... Introduction of laws that protect native germplasm and ban the importation, experimentation and cultivation of GM seeds..."

Five Thematic Areas

REDSAG bases its work on participatory methodologies that stimulate the involvement of local communities. Its work is structured into five thematic areas to ensure that it addresses the full range of problems that communities face:

1. Sustainable small-scale farming and seed recovery

Strengthening and rebuilding sustainable farm production is essential for realising food sovereignty. Seed fairs, for example, provide a space where people can meet to swap seeds, share knowledge and learn from others. Events such as these aid the diversification of products and encourage sustainable organic farming; they also work to mitigate harmful reliance on monocrops and promote biodiversity. The development of seed banks to conserve and value local creole and native seeds is another key element in ensuring local food systems, protecting biodiversity and providing sustainable food sovereignty for Guatemala.

2. Promoting rural indigenous economy

REDSAG promotes economic solidarity and responsible consumption at the local level, while resisting agricultural liberalisation that negatively affects rural workers and small farmers. REDSAG's School of Sustainability represents a participatory, dynamic and alternative economic model. The School seeks to train young men and women whilst incorporating day-to-day political action and theoretical and practical support to social movements.

3. Protecting the environment and promoting responsible access and use of natural resources

Promoting farmers' rights to access natural resources (biodiversity, land and water) and their engagement in the sustainable use of these resources is essential for ensuring food security and food sovereignty. The Mesoamerican Week for Biological and Cultural Diversity, which began in 2001 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, supports grassroots communities, social leaders, activists and organisations campaigning to defend local territories, and provides a platform for these groups to define strategies and alternatives in response to the threats posed by mega development projects and other negative aspects of the neoliberal model.

4. Promoting healthy diets and raising awareness of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

REDSAG promotes healthy diets and access to safe and culturally appropriate food. This area of work is boosted by the School of Health and Nutrition - comprised of male and female delegates from various regions around the country - which monitors GMOs in the country. In one pilot case, the delivery of food containing GMOs to families in the San Mateo Ixtatán community was monitored regularly over a period of several years. As a result of the research, REDSAG was able to raise the consciousness of the affected community about the effects of GM foods, and to press the authorities to exercise better control over food distribution and delivery.

5. Investigating current issues and external threats

REDSAG investigates and raises awareness of current threats to food sovereignty, such as GM seeds, climate change, labour conditions and the food crisis. Scientific studies, such as those on agroecology, provide essential support to the political discussions that REDSAG participates in. These studies hope to inform effective proposals for defending food sovereignty, by identifying emerging problems and incorporating them into our policy dialogue.

Conclusion

REDSAG has grown by combining individual and technical expertise with well-coordinated collective action. We have been informed by years of knowledge and experience gathered from our member organisations and the communities that they represent. We seek to be plural, political and practical in order to effectively realise food sovereignty in communities across Guatemala.

Many REDSAG member organisations are now able to produce high-quality and nutritious foods by making sustainable use of natural resources, learning from ancestral practices, exchanging and protecting their native seeds, and integrating appropriate technologies to their livelihoods strategies. Like nature itself, we continue to regenerate, evolve and make use of experiences, practices, knowledge, capacities and diverse energies to work towards our goal of 'Defending and Building Food Sovereignty.'

1. Ronnie Palacios is the Coordinator for REDSAG (Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala/National Network in Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala).

Harjeet Singh¹

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in Agriculture in the Changing Climate



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Agriculture in developing world is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Smallholder communities will require a significant infusion of new resources to avoid the most disastrous consequences of climate change.

Introduction

The world is witnessing an alarming increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters. Between 2000 and 2007, about 98 percent of 234 million people affected by disasters suffered from climate related hazards, predominantly floods and windstorms, followed by droughts². During the 1987-2006 period, the number of reported disasters related to hydro-meteorological hazards (droughts, floods, tropical storms, wild fires) showed a significant increase: from an average of 195 per year in 1987-1998 to 365 per year in 2000-2006³

Disaster risk results from the combination of a potential damaging event, the hazard; and the degree of susceptibility of the elements exposed to that source, the *vulnerability*. The recognition of vulnerability as a key element in the risk notation ($\text{Risk} = \text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}$) has led to a growing interest in understanding and enhancing the positive capacities of people to cope with the impact of hazards. These *coping capacities* are closely linked to the concept of *resilience*: the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt and maintain an acceptable level of functioning.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) includes the systematic development and application of policies, strategies and practices to avoid (prevention) or limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse effects of hazards, thus strengthening the coping capacities and resilience of local communities and households⁴. In 2005, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was adopted by 168 countries "to substantially reduce disaster losses in lives, and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."

Climate change is altering the face of disaster risk, not only through increased weather related risks and sea-level and temperature rise, but also through increases in societal vulnerabilities from stresses on water availability, agriculture and ecosystems. DRR and climate change mitigation and adaptation share a common space of concern - i.e. reducing the vulnerability of communities and achieving sustainable development⁵ while the former is defined as the first line of defence for adaptation by the United Nations (UN).

Agriculture in the developing world is particularly vulnerable to climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that in some countries in Africa, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent by 2020, and in Central and South Asia, crop yields could fall by up to 30 percent by 2050 as a result of climate change⁶. India alone could lose 18 percent of its rain-fed cereal production. Seventy percent of the world's extreme poverty is found in agricultural areas⁷, where farmers depend on rain for their harvests and where too much or too little rain spells disaster⁸.

ActionAid's field work confirms that climate-induced declines in crop production are already happening today. In the face of this threat, farmers have begun to respond to failing crops and increased hunger by adopting sustainable, low-input agriculture techniques that increase their food security. The right to food is firmly established in international law, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25.1), the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11.1 and 2) and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24.1). According to General Comment 12 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to adequate food is realised "when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement."⁹

However, little has been done by national governments and international community to recognise their efforts and

support them with adequate capacity building initiatives and resources to reduce the enhanced risk posed by climate change over food production. In 2008, ActionAid conducted a field research in five countries where it works with community partners and developed case studies that highlight the impact of climate change on agriculture and food production and the efforts made by poor people to reduce disaster risks and adapt to the changing climate. The summary of the findings drawn from the report, *Time is Now: Lessons from farmers adapting to climate change*, is given below.



Soil less agriculture (hydroponics) in South West Bangladesh.

© Mokit/ActionAid Bangladesh

Farmers adapting to climate change

Bangladesh

Located between the Himalayan Mountains and the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change and its impacts. More than 75 percent of its people live in rural areas and agriculture represented 19.61 percent of the country's GDP in 2006¹⁰.



Households process fodder for future use.

© Tanjir/ActionAid Bangladesh

People living near the rivers of Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal are used to floods. Although yearly floods have at times contributed to agriculture by bringing moisture and nutrients to the soil, nowadays, the intensity and severity of floods have been sharply increased. Most climate models predict that 17 percent of the total area of Bangladesh along the coastal belt may be under water by the end of the twenty-first century due to rising sea levels. This will increase salinity intrusion, which is already having a negative effect on soil fertility. Seasonal droughts in the northwestern region of Bangladesh are also causing serious damages to crops and food shortages.

Local communities have taken the following measures to reduce the impact of disasters caused by climate change:

- Raising the bed of their vegetable fields;
- Modifying their cropping patterns;
- Harvesting water from canals and ponds;
- Improving soil moisture retention through mulching and increasing the amount of organic matter in their soil;
- Preserving fodder for their cattle;
- Practicing hydroponics (soil-less agriculture) for vegetable production;
- Women's drying food in order to preserve it for the lean season; and
- Women's kitchen gardening.

Brazil

Recent models of climatic behaviour suggest that the north and north-eastern regions of Brazil are likely to be the most dramatically affected by climate change. It is being projected that the Amazonian region will become hotter and drier, which may affect water availability.

Extreme climate events, such as the drought that struck the west and southwest of Amazonia in 2005, may become more frequent with serious social, environmental and economic consequences. Droughts have a strong negative impact on river navigation (the region's main means of transport), farming, electricity generation, fishing and forest production. Farming families as well as indigenous populations of the Amazonia are therefore directly and indirectly affected¹.

The semi-arid region of Brazil which is home to more than 15 percent of the Brazilian population is the most vulnerable to the impact of climate change. In this region, the most optimistic scenario suggests a temperature increase of between 1°C and 3°C, and a drop in rainfall between 10-15 percent by the end of the twenty-first century. In the pessimistic scenario, however, temperatures could rise between 2°C and 4°C and rains could diminish by

15-20 percent compared to current levels causing a huge fall in agriculture production and availability of water resources.

In Brazil's semi-arid region, there is a growing and dynamic movement involving union organisations, civil society, communities and organised groups of farmers who have come together in response to the decrease in food production due to climate change primarily due to droughts, and are now beginning to rethink how they farm. Some of the strategies used to reduce disaster risk are:

- Diversification of productive species;
- Using numerous varieties of the same species and diversification of planting periods;
- Planting several varieties such as beans, broad beans, maize, sorghum, manioc (cassava), fruit trees, fodder crops, trees that produce timber and firewood in a single area of cultivation;
- Planting crops in succession in small areas of land at different times of the year; and
- Planting small fields over various weeks to increase the chances of harvesting the food needed for survival.

Ghana

Agriculture in Ghana is predominantly carried out by small-holder farmers (on plots of up to 1.5 hectares) with some plantations such as cocoa, rubber and oil palm. Livestock production (goats, sheep and cattle) is more predominant in the Northern Regions of the country. In Pwalugu in the Upper East region and Ejura in the Ashanti region of Ghana, about 70 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture.

During the field research in these two areas, farmers mentioned that rainfall has become 'erratic, inadequate and unreliable'. Sometimes, the rain period is extremely short or is interrupted during the growing period. As a result, the amount of rain is too small for any harvest to be meaningful, and water supplies are threatened. At other moments, the rain is so strong that it generates floods. The time when rain comes has also become unpredictable, which makes it very difficult for farmers to decide when to plant their crops. Farmers also notice that the nights are colder while the days are hotter than before. The increase in heat waves not only has an impact on agriculture but also has a detrimental effect on health as well. The dry season is also reported to be longer than before. Consequently, finding food and water for animals becomes really difficult. Bush fires have also become more frequent and threaten people's lives, assets and livelihood. The depletion of the vegetative cover also leads to severe erosion.

In order to survive in the changing climate, farmers are making the following efforts:

- Livelihood diversification by opting for non-farm activities to deal with failures of crop production and animal rearing;
- Women taking up petty trading and cottage industries that add value to harvests by making cassava powder, shea butter and etc. and selling them in local markets
- Diversifying crops to increase the chances of harvesting something even when the weather is uncertain;
- Using mixed cropping and mixed seedling techniques by sowing sorghum with maize or millet;
- Planting late or early maturing varieties of same crops;
- Replacing cereals with local varieties such as groundnut and watermelon that adapt to local environment and can be sold to purchase other food;
- Using traditional practices of planting on ridges and mounds to take maximum advantage of little rain; and
- Using particular local plants and weeds that contribute to reducing pest damage without costly pesticides.

Malawi

Agriculture is the main driver of Malawi's economy, contributing up to 39 percent of GDP and employing 80 percent of the country's labour force. About 6.3 million Malawians live below the poverty line, the majority in rural areas. More than 90 percent of Malawians living below the poverty line rely on rain-fed subsistence farming to survive. Climate change and weather extremes are having a huge impact on the country's agriculture sector, affecting agricultural productivity and therefore resulting in food shortages and chronic hunger. Crop losses related to natural disasters, such as drought, floods and flash floods, as well as crop failure due to erratic and unpredictable rainfall, pose a great danger to food security, especially for poor and marginalised communities.

Rainfall data from 1990 to date shows that the Districts of Salima, Chikwawa and Nsanje - where this study took place - have been subjected to climate change and weather extremes in most years. There were recorded droughts in the Shire Valley and Salima during the 1994/95, 1999/2000, 2001/02 and 2004/05 seasons, which resulted in total annual rainfall between 400 and 800mm; this is hardly enough to sustain crop production. Salima was also subjected to floods during the 1997/98, 2002/03 and 2005/06 seasons, which resulted in losses of property; destruction of infrastructure; siltation of rivers; destruction of crops such as maize, sorghum, millet and rice; diseases like malaria and cholera; malnutrition and hunger.

Local communities and households are making efforts to enhance their resilience to climate led disasters by:

- Diversifying their agricultural production;
- Using organic manure instead of chemical fertilisers; for instance, farmers in Salima use the 'Chimato' system where vegetative material is composted in special mud structures;
- Cultivating winter crops using the residual soil moisture from river banks or flooded areas;
- Growing a second crop of maize that is planted at the end of the rains in March and harvested in winter by communities living along the rivers; and
- Initiatives taken by groups such as Salima Women's Network on Gender (SAWEG) to engage in activities to diversify their livelihoods--such as selling cakes and scones, brewing beer, making traditional pots or weaving baskets and mats.

Vietnam

As an economy heavily dependent on agriculture, climate change is putting Vietnam under severe pressures. According to government sources, 73 percent of the population is suffering from the negative impacts of climate change and environment degradation. Poor people are particularly adversely affected. The trend and intensity of natural disasters such as typhoons and floods are increasing in Vietnam. In 2007 alone, a series of disasters killed 462 people, injured another 856, seriously affected 763,081 households, destroyed 9,908 houses and inundated 173,830 hectares of crops¹².



Nguyen Thi Gai feeds her livestock.

© Than Van Anh/ HCCD Vietnam

Moreover, the high level of seawater increases the salinity of soil and reduces the fertility of agricultural land. While affected communities are constantly searching for solutions, the increasing frequency of disasters is overwhelming the ability of local communities to cope with the impacts of climate change. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2007/2008 Human Development Report points out that natural disasters

represent a major cause of poverty and vulnerability in Vietnam¹³.

As indicated in the UNDP's 2007/2008 Human Development Report¹⁴ if the temperature of the earth increases by 2°C, 22 million Vietnamese people will lose their houses and 45 percent of the land used for agriculture in the Mekong River Delta, the granary of Vietnam, will be submerged under sea water. Although it receives a lot of rain, Ha Tinh province - where this study was conducted - also has to face severe droughts. Many people indicated that the irregular situation in the hot season recently led to a new phenomenon: "drought even when there was no sun". As a result of increasing droughts, the fields retain less water and paddy fields cannot adapt in such situations, even when irrigated. Flash floods often happen in the mountainous districts of Ha Tinh and neighbouring provinces. Such floods cause major damage to people's homes and household assets, as well as impacting on the livestock and agricultural production.

Floods, storms and typhoons are now recurrent phenomena in Vietnam. In order to protect lives and livelihoods, farmers are taking the following steps:

- Farmers are getting organised and forming flood and storm prevention committees that help farmers in accessing information on modifying their crops and adopting different techniques through agriculture extension stations;
- Members of women's unions, farmers' associations and youth organisations are supporting the implementation of agriculture practices that reduce risks from natural hazards;
- Farmers are using short-day varieties of maize and other crops to harvest before flood season;
- Seedlings are being covered with plastic sheets in cold season to prevent the damage from cold weather;
- Poultry and pigs are raised on banana rafts and cows and buffaloes are moved to higher places during floods;
- Some salt producers have raised their garden ground by up to one metre in order to build warehouses for salt storage and preservation; and
- Families practicing aquaculture are using air ploughs and coconut branches to prevent aquatic livestock from being affected by air shocks when the weather changes.

Conclusion

The above findings demonstrate that although communities are already taking steps to adapt to climate change and build resilience, their efforts will require a significant infusion of new resources to avoid the most disastrous consequences forecast by the IPCC. Rich countries, which are historically responsible for generating the lion's share of GHG that cause climate change, must now provide the necessary funds to enable poor countries to adapt and reduce disaster risks.

The participation of vulnerable communities, particularly women, must be central in formulating DRR and climate change adaptation policies and programmes. National governments must work towards harmonising these policies with regular development initiatives that ensure communities' access to and control over natural and productive resources and build their resilience to effectively respond to climate shocks in order to maintain food production and practice sustainable agriculture.

1. Harjeet Singh is International Climate Justice Coordinator for ActionAid International.
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3. Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). 2007. *Annual Statistical Review: Numbers and Trends 2006*. Brussels: Université Catholique de Louvain. This dramatic increase in the number of reported disasters is also related to improvements in reporting of smaller scale disasters.
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Aftab Alam Khan¹

How to Remedy the Food Crisis: Exploring Causes and Effects at the National Level



© Frederic Courbet/Panos Pictures/ActionAid

Rising food prices has plunged many local people deeper into the miseries of hunger, poverty and denial of basic human rights. Alicket Masenda, a 52 year old farmer in Sande Village, Malawi says: "I am affected by the rising food price because I don't have any income and can't buy anything. My children had no food since the morning."

Introduction

The 2008 food crisis shook the world with riots, toppling of governments and a record rise in the number of hungry people to 1.02 billion. In response to the crisis, many international donors and national governments took several measures including relief assistance to address the needs of food insecure populations worldwide. Although the

prices started to decline in September 2008, they struck back in June 2010 to tease the promises of the global community. In March 2011, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) announced that its Food Price Index rose for the eighth consecutive month to hit the highest level since 1990. The World Bank estimates that this rise in food prices has pushed 44 million people into extreme poverty in low-and-middle income countries². This time

around, the impact went beyond riots and regime changes, to instigate revolutions in many Middle Eastern countries³. The challenges facing food prices, hunger and agriculture are not temporary. They are here to stay unless fundamental and substantial changes are made to the ways in which the global food system is governed.

National factors behind food price rise

A 2011 ActionAid study⁴ has revealed that many national factors, in addition to global ones such as growing demand for biofuels and speculation on food commodity markets⁵, are responsible for the rising trend in food prices. Such national factors include high cost of food production; rising cost of electricity and petroleum products; taxes on food items; conflicts, violence and their attendant displacements; lack of credit for farmers; exploitation by middlemen; dependency on imported food; soil degradation and drought among others.

While the global food crisis received the lion's share of attention in the news media, soaring food prices at the national and local level were largely neglected; poor local communities had to bear the brunt of the tribulation of high prices while some responsible governments were struggling to come up with viable solutions.

Effects of high food prices on the poor

Indeed, rising food prices, together with other challenges like climate change, has plunged many local people deeper into the miseries of hunger, poverty and denial of basic rights to food, health and education. Poor people in local areas now eat less nutritious and lower number of meals; vegetables, milk and meat have gone

off the table. People are now eating wild fruits, and in many areas, they take only one meal a day. In Rwanda, for example, many communities remain hungry for days without any food. By the same token, smallholder farmers, labourers and artisans, such as those in the Purulia, India, are suffering from increased food insecurity due to low availability of jobs in their communities owing to drought. However, one of the most disturbing situations can be seen in Tangulbe, Kenya, where people are forced to eat animal carcasses.

Besides hunger, rising food prices and climate change are negatively affecting poor people's little but precious assets. A recent ActionAid survey, which took place in January 2011 across 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, underscores important price trends at the local level and how they are impacting communities on the ground. The survey found that in many countries, there have been dramatic increases in the selling of animals at throw away prices. In Kenya, for instance, the price of a mature bull was below Ksh 10,000 (about US\$116) compared to the normal price of Ksh 20,000. In Ghana, people are selling their land due to prolonged food unavailability, while increased indebtedness is becoming a common reality for most countries surveyed. Moreover in many countries, the struggle to feed hungry stomachs has run over other basic needs such as health and education.

Importance of local production

The survey also confirmed that production at the local level is the key variable which enables communities to minimise or escape the negative

impacts of rising food prices. In fact, local production is an important determinant for local food prices and food security - i.e. prices may rise in one area and decline in another depending on the status of production. For instance in Kenya, local people of Cheptais witnessed a drop in maize prices from Ksh 30 per kilo in July 2010 to Ksh 11 in January 2011, while those in Khwisero rose from Ksh 13 to KSh 18 during the same period due to low crop yields.

Into the bargain, climate change has a significant impact on local food production⁶. Indeed, the survey showed that local communities in Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, India and Kenya are particularly affected by droughts. Similarly, high bean prices in Brazil were attributed to the production shortfall resulting from droughts. Furthermore, floods in China, Ghana, Pakistan, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and extreme cold weather conditions in Afghanistan and Vietnam have all led to decreased local production.

Who benefits from rising prices?

It has been argued that poor farmers may actually benefit from high food prices. To the contrary, however, nearly all field areas in which ActionAid works reported no tangible benefits to smallholder farmers from rising prices. Rather, those who benefit are usually large-scale farmers and agribusinesses that are engaged in export production; as a Bloomberg report notes, "U.S. farmers would benefit [from rising prices] because they have the supply to meet the demand in the global market"⁷. For smallholder farmers in poor countries, most of the food is

used either for household consumption or sale in the local market.

How to remedy the food crisis

On the remedial side, the survey highlights the significant role of the state in minimising the impact of high food prices. Government support for agricultural inputs and cash for work programmes in Brazil, Ethiopia and Rwanda have provided some relief to farmers against the rising cost of agricultural production. Similarly,

social protection programmes such as food distribution and mid-day school meals in Brazil, India and Vietnam have helped to build community resilience against price shocks. Moreover, increasing minimum wage rates in Bangladesh and Vietnam has helped poor people to adjust themselves to rising prices.

Nonetheless, such state support is being provided by only a handful of governments in selected areas and communities. In order to avoid a second food crisis, national governments, the World Food Programme (WFP), the FAO and other international organisations

need to amass substantial support from the international community.

For 2011, the G20 is prioritising on food security issues. The international community expects that the group will work together to ensure sustainable and just food systems that will reflect the needs of smallholder farmers, especially women, and the challenges of climate change. At the same time, these measures will need to be complimented by international regulation of commodity speculations as well as national and regional buffer stocks, food reserves and safety nets.

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 5. A massive expansion of investment in under-regulated commodities derivatives through commodity indexes by non-traditional investors, such as hedge funds, pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and investment banks, have accelerated price movements in food commodity markets between 2002 and 2008. For more information, see *Ibid.*, p. 9.
 6. Not only food crops, but also non-food crops play an important role in ensuring household food security. For instance, local people in Rumphu, Malawi, suffered food insecurity due to drop in tobacco sales.
 7. Javier, L.A., Kolesnikova, M. & Wilson, J. "Wheat Heads for the Biggest Gain in Half a Century on Export Bans". Bloomberg. 6 August 2010. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-08-04/wheat-surges-to-22-month-high-on-russian-drought-corn-soybeans-advance.html>.



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