

FUTURE OF FOOD

5 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

GLOBAL ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

Monday 18 May 2015
Tuesday 19 May 2015

Palazzo Clerici
via Clerici, 5
Milan, Italy

INTRODUCTION

In May 2015, the *Global Alliance for the Future of Food* hosted an International Dialogue which brought together approximately 175 participants – funders, academics, NGOs, civil servants, UN actors, food activists, farmers, students, and others – from 26 countries. Over the course of two days we engaged in an open discussion about food and agriculture systems change. Hosted in Milan, Italy by Global Alliance members *Fondazione Cariplo* and *Agropolis Fondation*, participants worked to explore and articulate positive action and opportunities for change toward sustainable, secure, and equitable food and agriculture systems.

To encourage engagement and dialogue, the boundaries between participants and panelists were blurred through open roundtable discussions creating a safe space for dynamic and honest conversations. Many participants commented that those in the room took risks and placed trust in each other throughout the two-day event. It is not possible to capture the breadth, depth and richness of the dialogue on paper, but several cross-cutting themes emerged. Of course individual participants will have their own lists of key themes. We share our reflections not to present a formal position of the Global Alliance or any of its members, but instead in the interest of encouraging ongoing dialogue and exchange of ideas.

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Trade

The importance of trade was repeated throughout the International Dialogue. Participants suggested that the real competition is not between countries, but between agricultural models. A number of panelists and

“We want to see a major transition in how our food and agriculture systems work. We don’t think the directions they are going in are going to be adequate for them to be resilient to the kind of change and shocks happening.”

Ken Wilson
Outgoing Global Alliance Chair

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participants noted that we need to move from subsidizing monocultures to supporting small farms and biodiversity, and create a system that can provide a living wage/salary for farmers to ensure they can cover their costs. In addition to the connections made between trade and greenhouse gas emissions, the disappearance of small farms, etc., connections were also made between trade policy and health; it was argued that trade has a direct link to the low cost of food and obesity rates. Questions that surfaced included: What are the social and sustainability issues related to trade? How do we lift up community voices and bring the producers of food into trade negotiations?

Climate Change

Climate Change was also a strong theme. Panelists argued that food and agriculture should be central to climate change discussions. Several participants noted the need to address the climate impact of key global issues, particularly the nexus of climate, energy, and water. For example, water shortage is happening faster than we expected due to climate change, with 70% of the population living in areas of high water stress. Panelists said we need to do more to focus attention on this nexus at the international level, and to look at what farmers need in the face of climate change.

Food Democracy

Food democracy was a prominent theme throughout the two-days. Some key questions that surfaced included: How do we expand economic and political democracy so that people can decide what food system they want? How do we bridge the gap between farmers and politicians? How do we make sure that the poor can afford food if the price of food must increase in order to internalize societal costs?

Two primary sub-themes surfaced: a) democratizing knowledge, as a lot of learning takes place outside of universities; and b) the strong connection between food democracy and agroecology. Participants discussed the need to: support organizations engaged in agroecology training; support more opportunities for networking around agroecological movements and higher level colloquia; and foster more critical, in-depth assessments of agroecological systems compared to other approaches. Other sub-themes that surfaced included the need to: build producer-consumer networks locally; foster equity and agroecology in markets; engage with governments to encourage a new perspective on agriculture and food;

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address policies that are barriers to agroecological practices; and pay more attention to cultural approaches to communicating agroecology.

Social Connections

Social connections, particularly related to education, were repeatedly discussed. For example, many participants talked about the education and inclusion of youth and connections to youth movements given the importance of young people and the next generation(s) to sustainable solutions. Education and social connections were also discussed in relations to policymakers. What are the barriers that prevent policymakers from being connected to advocates? Several panelists and participants suggested that the policymaker career track needs earlier interventions with respect to issues, problems, and solutions starting at the university level where policymakers are educated. Important north-south connections were also cited – reform of food systems in the north is needed to make food systems better in the south. However, food systems are often more intact in the global south than they are in the global north and so the social responses and strategies applied may be different. There was likewise considerable discussion about the connections needed between producers and consumers and with those in the middle of the food chain.

“The crisis that food systems are going through today ... provide fertile ground, creating space for coalitions that previously were not talking.”

Olivier De Schutter, Keynote

Responsibility in the System

Given that the framework of the International Dialogue focused on understanding food systems change, there was a lot of discussion about responsibility in the system to incite that change. Of special note were: corporations which were encouraged to continue to understand the environmental, economic and social costs of their businesses and to adapt their business models accordingly; governments at all levels, e.g. city governments that can build effective zoning and planning policies to support local food hubs and sustainable food procurement; civil society initiatives starting locally, and gaining potency and sustainability through national policy; consumer/citizen action which is critical to push for change; and foundations through scrutinizing their endowment portfolios similar to the current fossil fuels divestment campaigns, as well as through what and how they fund and mobilize capital in support of change initiatives.

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CONCLUSIONS

These themes reinforce many of the points made by Raj Patel, Rapporteur and author of the International Dialogue's *Aide-Memoire* which can be found at <http://www.futureoffood.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AGAINST-CHEAP-FOOD.pdf> . In his words "With the right support, movements for systemic change help build a bridge between today's system and the next ... Think systemically, radically, accountably and with hope." It is our hope that the International Dialogue was but one important manifestation of that call to action.