

Sustainable family farming needs recognition

Twenty years ago, the first global conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro became a milestone, and there are high hopes that Rio+20 will be an even more significant event. In the previous issue of *Farming Matters* we introduced Rio+20. Since then, the complex preparations for the conference have been continuing.

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In January, the Zero Draft of the outcome document (which provides the basis on which the final resolutions of the conference will be agreed) was published on different websites. Even though this Zero Draft gives an impression of what the outcome document of the conference will look like, much can happen between now and June, so the outcome is not set in stone. Governments, UN agencies and civil organisations will continue to negotiate over the text of the final document, and campaign to put their issues on the policy agenda. Many parties are still working hard to ensure that small-scale sustainable family farmers are not left out of these discussions.

Zero or minus twenty? There has been a truly mixed response to the Zero Draft document. Generally, it is considered a major step forward, in that it talks about sustainable development indicators that go beyond GDP, proposes a Sustainable Development Council, an Ombudsman for Future Generations, and a reform of environmentally-harmful subsidies, including those for agriculture. Yet, many believe the document is too vague and open to too many interpretations. There are also some important

omissions. The document does not mention sustainable agriculture or family farming. How can a document seeking to set the direction of a future “green economy” leave out 400 million farm families? So, what is a “green economy”, and what is the role of sustainable family farming within it? There is a growing conviction that for the economy to become green, it has to be totally redesigned. Hans Herren, one of the authors of the IAASTD report, says that cosmetic changes like “climate smart agriculture” and “sustainable intensification” are not enough, and while the Zero Draft document talks about green jobs, there is nothing about better working conditions (and returns) for self-employed farmers. This suggests that a “green economy” is only about the “money economy”. Vandana Shiva points out that sustainable family farming is about much more than money. It is about decent rural livelihoods, about the management of biodiversity and about democracy and freedom. *La Via Campesina* is arguing that ecosystems cannot be treated as economic goods. And Olivier de Schutter is making the case to establish a mechanism of accountability regarding the right to food.

Recognition The key message to be taken to Rio is that **sustainable family farming needs recognition**. This was the conclusion of a recent global meeting of small-scale farmers’ organisations at IFAD in Rome. They are not alone. All over the world there is a growing consensus among organisations of family farmers, scientists, civil society groups and influential actors within the UN institutions that sustainable family

“The Zero Draft is a minus twenty draft”

Vandana Shiva, Indian scientist and environmental activist

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farming is key to the future of the planet. Major global problems – hunger, climate change and environmental degradation – cannot be solved without recognising and supporting family farmers.

The momentum of alliances that support this view is stronger than ever before. Yet, in spite of tireless lobbying, campaigning and dialogues, it is not clear how strong this message will come through in the outcome document of the Rio conference. There is still fierce resistance from numerous individuals and institutions who do not see sustainable family farming as having any potential. Even within the UN institutions that do support sustainable family farming there are very different perspectives. Some within these institutions still see large-scale agricultural systems as the best option, believing that “low input, by definition, means low output”. Others attempt to subvert the notion of sustainable innovation in agriculture by advocating nanotechnologies and genetic modification. Whom will policy-makers (at Rio and after) listen to? And who will benefit from their political support?

In the fields and in the streets

The Outcome Document of the Rio+20 Conference will provide a general policy framework for several

Joining those in the streets and in the fields. Photo: E. van Walsum.



years. The outcomes of Rio will not be binding on governments, so the “follow through” will depend on the voices and actions of the people in the streets and in the fields: farmers, consumers and civil society. Influential thinkers like Ulrich Hoffmann, Director of UNCTAD, believe that the needed paradigm shift has already started: many positive developments are happening in the sustainable and organic agriculture spheres, millions and millions of farmers are practicing and developing sustainable

“Sustainable family farming is the core of a green economy but it is not mentioned in the Zero Draft. It’s really a joke”

Ulrich Hoffmann, Director of UNCTAD

methods every day. But this shift requires more time and more formal support. A Brazilian civil servant, involved in the organisation of the civil society event that will take place parallel to the main conference, said this with conviction: “the major decisions are made in the streets. Many farmers already made many decisions in their fields. Change is under way, and we have to document and share the experience. Rio+20 has to be owned by the people, not just by policymakers”.

Your voice is important Some of our readers may travel to Rio, but most of you will not be there. Even so you can make an important contribution. If you have a message to share please send it to us. We will compile and publish all the **messages to Rio** that reach us, and take them to Rio. And... do send us your best **photos of family farmers**, women, men and youth, in your area. We want to show the many faces of family farmers to the people that will be meeting in Rio. We hope to get thousands of pictures and to paste them on a very long wall! Send your contributions to info@farmingmatters.org