



## **Reflections on FAO's International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition held at FAO in Rome 18-19 September, 2014**

During September 18-19, 2014, FAO organized at its headquarters the International Symposium on Agroecology for Nutrition and Food Security attended by more than 300 persons from all over the world belonging to international and national agencies and civil society (MAELA, IFOAM, PANNA, IPC, ABA etc.), Universities, peasant organizations (Via Campesina) and social movements. Given some concerns raised by FAO officials that not all member states were supporting this Symposium, and that therefore the Symposium should focus on the scientific dimensions of Agroecology, SOCLA was invited the night before the Symposium by Via Campesina and the IPC (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty) to define our common response and position at the Symposium.

We all agreed that for FAO to open a space for Agroecology was unprecedented and important, and that we should support that space so that the space continues open and expands. However the group felt that we could do this without compromising our positions, visions, goals and that as SOCLA we would defend the original principles of Agroecology and its history and identity.

Invited members of SOCLA included Clara Inés Nicholls (President), Fernando Funes Monzote (Vice-president), and other members such as Enrique Murgueitio-CIPAV-Colombia, Peter Rosset - ECOSUR-México and Miguel Altieri -UC Berkeley who during the first day participated in various parallel technical sessions delivering talks on Agroecology and its relationship to climate change resiliency, traditional knowledge and local learning processes, energy efficiency, tropical silvopastoral systems and social movements.

SOCLA collaborated in securing the presence of 4 peasants from Latin America: Jesús León Santos from Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca-México (CEDICAM), Julián Andrés Giraldo of the Comunidad del Dovio-Colombia, and two members of the International Coordination of Vía Campesina representing ANAP- -Cuba and MPP (Mouvement Paysan de Papaye (MPP)-Haití who talked during the second day about agroecological practices in their communities and the role of Agroecology as part of their food sovereignty strategy.

Throughout the Symposium presenters exhibited their views about Agroecology as a science, practice and movement enriching the visions on Agroecology, but at the same time it became obvious via the presentations of farmers as well as scientists that Agroecology is much more advanced in Latin America than in other areas of the world. This advance, product of more than 30 years of work by farmers and technicians in our region, was not officially recognized in the Symposium.

Two marked tendencies emerged from the various presentations and discussions held during the Symposium: (a) the vision of international organizations, governments, some members of academia and the private sector that regard Agroecology as one more option or tool with that also includes many 'new green revolution' technologies to fine tune the problems and deficiencies of industrial agriculture, and (b) the vision of SOCLA, Via Campesina, and other members of civil society viewing Agroecology as a fundamental and unique alternative to profoundly transform the current agri-food system confronted with climate, energy and economic crisis.

The lack or little discussion on key issues on Agroecology such as gender dynamics, the corporate control of the food systems and aspects of access to land, seeds and water as stated in the food sovereignty concept was evident but not surprising given the political sensitivities within FAO.

In my opinion the most relevant conclusions of the Symposium although not clearly stated, clearly state that:

- Agroecology consists in a series of ecological and social principles, and is not a box of tools or technological recipes
- Agroecology questions and defies the dominant food system and proposes its radical transformation where producers (peasants) are at the center of this social process
- Agroecological interventions transcend the farm scale to embrace territorial scales and the food system as a whole, including environmental, socioeconomic and political dimensions.
- Agroecology is deeply rooted in a dialogue of wisdoms and its role is to continue linking science with the knowledge, practice and innovation of peasants.
- It is necessary to activate and strengthen a global Agroecology network, where FAO, given its unique international position, should assume the responsibility to help create and operationalize. SOCLA offered its collaboration in supporting this network, while keeping vigilant so that the real dimensions of Agroecology are not distorted or co-opted.

Pending challenges and tasks involve complex and urgent issues such as:

- Development and implementation of public policies to promote the agroecological transformation at the local, national and regional levels.

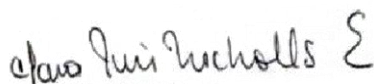
- Strategic articulation of producer and consumer associations committed to the radical creation of new socially just and ecologically sound food
- Need for funding research and extension programs on Agroecology
- Direct support to the efforts by social movements to scale up Agroecology in their territories

In the afternoon of the second day of the Symposium, there was a high level plenary with the official participation of the Agriculture Ministers from Japan, Algeria, France, Costa Rica, and video messages from the Minister of Rural Development of Brazil and the UE Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, and FAO's Director General Sr. José Gracizano da Silva.

The official government declarations supported the concept of Agroecology, but from a perspective that it is a useful tool to overcome many of the problems caused by the Green Revolution. Only the Brazilian Minister stated that for them Agroecology is the fundamental technological-methodological base for the development of family farming.

In his final message FAO's Director General de la FAO explicitly said that Agroecology is opening a window in FAO to what he referred as the "cathedral of the green revolution". At the same time he cautiously stated that Agroecology is one more of the many approaches available to deal with the agriculture and hunger challenges, thus leaving another window open for transgenic crops. The DG said that among the commitments assumed by FAO after the Symposium is to discuss and internalize within FAO's strategic plans the lessons derived from the Symposium, and promised that FAO will organize within the next two years three regional Symposiums in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the last one to be supported and hosted by the government of Brazil. SOCLA proposed to the Brazilian colleagues to hold the regional symposium in conjunction with SOCLA's V Latin American Congress on Agroecology to be held in early October 2015 in La Plata, Argentina, in order to create synergies and secure the presence of a critical mass of SOCLA members.

SOCLA thanked FAO for the opportunity to participate in the Symposium and manifested its disposition to collaborate in future initiatives, but at the same time we manifested that Agroecology in Latin America was created and grew without the official support of international organizations and donors, and that we will continue working with or without support from the international cooperation. This has allowed us to stay true to our principles and advance an agroecological research, educational and dissemination agenda in favor of peasant agriculture which is not negotiable.



Clara Inés Nicholls  
President de SOCLA