

MIJARC General Assembly - May 2008

Resolution on Food crisis

Gathered in Kampala, Uganda, youth of the movements belonging to MIJARC, from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, met in order to deal with current challenges of food, agriculture and rural development. For 54 years, MIJARC has been organising rural young people all over the world to build up a just and fair global society.

1- Food, Agriculture and Rural areas : an alarming present situation

Since several months, food is becoming increasingly scarce and expensive, and it is already unaffordable for many people. According to Josette Sheeran, director of the World Food Program, **"there are 854 million hungry people in the world and 4 million more join their ranks every year.** We are facing the tightest food supplies in recent history. For the world's most vulnerable, food is simply being priced out of their reach". The world's 200 wealthiest people have as much money as about 40 percent of the global population, while about 850 million people go to bed hungry every night. This calamity is **"one of the worst violations of human dignity,"** says former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The competition for grain between the world's 800 million motorists, who want to maintain their mobility, and its 2 billion poorest people, who are simply trying to survive, is emerging as an epic issue. Around the world, rising food prices have made basic staples crops unaffordable for many people, pushing the poor to the barricades because they can no longer get enough to eat. Wheat has doubled in price, maize is nearly 50% higher than a year ago and rice is 20% more expensive than before. Prices for staples crops, which were relatively stable for years, have skyrocketed by over 180 percent in the last three years. And the worst is yet to come. Global food reserves are at their lowest in 25 years and those prices will remain high for years.

The shortages triggered revolts in Haiti where crowd of hungry citizens marched through Port-au-Prince, throwing stones and bottles and chanting, "We are hungry!" in front of the presidential palace. Tires were burned, and people died. It was yet another of the rebellions that are beginning to occur with increasing frequency worldwide.

What we are beginning to face is not just an acute bottleneck, but a worldwide, fundamental food crisis. It affects most of all the poor, who spend a disproportionately large share of their income on food and water. The crisis is so dire that it is obliterating any progress made in recent years in fighting disease and starvation. World Bank President Robert Zoellick warned that exploding food prices threaten to cause instability in at least 33 countries, including regional powers like Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan. There has been unrest in recent weeks in Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, the Ivory Coast and Cameroon, where the violence has already claimed about 100 lives. Mexicans were the first to take to the streets, when they protested against higher prices for cornmeal as the import from US stopped since more and more farmers in the US are selling their corn to agro-fuel producers, who pay a higher price for the grain. With nothing left to lose, people on the brink of starvation are more likely to react with boundless fury.

2- There are several reasons for the food crisis:

- The world population is growing constantly, while the amount of arable land is declining. And because of changing eating habits, more and more arable land and virgin forests are being turned into pasture for livestock. Seven times more land is needed to produce the same amount of calories with livestock than with crops.
- Climate change is causing a loss of agricultural land, irreversible in some cases, as a result of droughts, floods, storms and soil erosion.

- Millions of people displaced by civil wars need food, and yet they themselves are no longer capable of producing food.
- The world suffered bad harvests in 2006 and world economy has been booming four years in a row, especially in Asia and Africa, boosting food demand. At the same time, the record oil prices and the dollar fell. This led to the higher costs of production for all the countries, which has an impact on the whole world prices.
- Speculators are driving up the prices of raw materials. The resulting high oil price leads to "energy crops" being cultivated instead of grain for food or animal feed. President Bush in the US has called for cutting petrol consumption by 20% in ten years, mainly by substituting it with ethanol, backed by enormous subsidies and mandatory targets for converting corn into alcohol. At the same time, the European Union has mandated that agro-fuels should account for 5.75% of transport fuel by 2010.
- The World Bank wants developing countries to introduce market reforms, including the abolition of protective tariffs, a move that often causes massive damage to local agriculture.
- Internal speculations as well as the presence of multiple intermediaries increase the prices.
- Poor distribution and production management systems within the countries and between the countries deteriorate the situation even more than ever.

But these factors are tied to longer-term problems caused by the world's unfair agricultural system. Many of the people who can't afford food today have barely felt any benefits from the boost to production in recent decades.

Some countries have responded to rising prices by stopping exports to keep stocks for their own people but this hit chronic importers like Bangladesh, Philippines and African countries. This is only a short-term fix. We need something radically different to feed the world's growing population and cope with climate change if we want to avoid social breakdown and environmental collapse. With too many people and not enough agricultural land, a struggle for the distribution of the best farmland is taking shape that could turn into a new North-South conflict.

Neo-liberal paradigm an utter failure

Industrialized and export oriented agriculture promoted within the green revolution have led to environmental problems and to the fact that the farmers are driven out of fields. Due to dumping local markets are destroyed and farming is no more an income generating source for small-scale and marginal farmers. The opening of markets of agricultural products, cuts of subsidies for rural areas, cuts of investments in social services, privatization of public enterprises and public services is affecting the agriculture sector. Promotion of the industrialized agricultural production model is leading to unemployment, loss of income possibilities and environmental deterioration. New technologies in the area of genetic engineering, implying high health and environmental risks, and patenting systems on all types of living organisms are further pushing ahead the industrialized agricultural production model and thus created this black era of World food crisis. Rich countries' energy and liberalisation policies have created the problem. Now these countries should help to solve it.

3- MIJARC calls States and intergovernmental organisations, including WTO, IMF and World Bank to :

- Take immediate measures :

- Take immediate measures to support the victims of acute hunger and chronic hunger.
- Scrap agro-fuel targets and subsidies immediately. Ban the expansion of agro fuel production.
- Impose an immediate moratorium on land grabbing, land evictions and expansion of land allocation for agro business.

- Take action now to improve the situation on a long-term perspective :

- Promote sustainable agrarian reforms and other legislative measures to increase the access to land and other productive resources, especially for young people and women.

- Support development activities in rural areas to create job opportunities focussing on local collective entrepreneurship (loans and financial assistance, training...).
- Provide better access to credit and farming knowledge for women farmers - who make up more of the food-growing workforce as men migrate to cities to work.
- Ensure safety nets and other kinds of employment in rural areas for farmers, fisher folks, indigenous people and other vulnerable groups and do more research that is relevant to small-scale agriculture.

- Take decisions to build up another international agricultural and food system :

- Promote Right to food and Food Sovereignty. The first mission of agriculture must be to feed people. When food reserves are too reduced, to use land and produce for fuel industry is nonsense.
- Make regulations at international level on the present expansion of the market led by agricultural liberalization process. Ensure the capacity of national governments to regulate their national agricultural and food security policies, to support local agriculture, to regulate food dumping, to maintain food stocks.
- Promote sustainable agriculture in order to provide healthy and quality food by giving priority to the local food. Implement measures to fully support small farmers and peasants based on sustainable, agro ecological and diversified food production. Promote family farming and sustainable management of natural resources which maintains biodiversity.
- Science and knowledge should be part of a bottom-up, participatory process in which farmers and citizens themselves take centre stage and value their knowledge.

4- Our action :

MIJARC challenges the liberalisation of the world agricultural markets and the public disinvestment in the rural areas. We have to rethink about new policies and new strategies along with alternative development paradigm. The role and importance of agriculture has to be enhanced at a global level. Agriculture is the keystone of development. And people must decide what they want to consume and be able to produce what they need for their alimentation, instead of producing for the needs of other countries (namely northern countries).

In order to face these challenges, MIJARC :

- builds up capacity of young rural people in agricultural production and implement agricultural technologies adapted to local reality.
- Contributes to educate young people to be responsible consumers to enable the future generations to have their right to food
- takes action to improve the quality of life in its diversity in rural areas and the quality of employment, to resist the migration of young rural people.
- sustains collective job creation and promotes activities to develop jobs and new possibilities for income in rural areas.
- encourages its members to orientate themselves to the cooperative self-organisations, in order to have an easier access to seeds, credit with low interest rates, to share the risk, and to create new economic activities.
- Provide training on economical and technical issues for farmers in order to improve production especially in areas where the food sovereignty is not ensured.

MIJARC is open to collaborate therefore with NGOs, state governments and intergovernmental organisations.

In all its activities MIJARC encourages its members to :

- Have a clear position against agro-fuels and GMOs.
- Promote food sovereignty oriented agriculture and sustainable development.
- Promote agriculture with human and environmental responsibility (to avoid the erosion of the arable area).
- Promote new productive activities articulated to markets that generate higher incomes for small farmers.
- Promote strong cooperative organizations of small farmers and rural young people, which should be able to defend their interests and develop common economic projects.