

THE BROKEN INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM: A CALL FOR CHANGE

Our global food system is in crisis. Profit-driven industrial practices harm people, biodiversity, and the environment. Monoculture erodes diversity, while chemical-intensive farming pollutes soil and water. Social inequities persist, affecting marginalized communities. Alternatives like food sovereignty and agroecology offer hope. We must prioritize local solutions, policy reform, education, and collective action. Upholding the right to food is crucial. Let's mend our broken system for a just, sustainable future.

As Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke - ActionAid Denmark, we are convinced that political changes come through popular pressure and transformative coalitions. We support young people in organizing themselves so that they can gain influence to fight for their own rights, for socially just societies where groups living in marginalization are included, and for sustainable development in a broad sense. By integrating these principles into our approach to agroecology, we aim to foster local solutions, policy reform, education, and collective action. Our commitment to youth and activism is reflected in our support for educational programs, financial assistance, and leadership development for young farmers. Together, we can build a future where young people are at the forefront of creating a just, sustainable food system that benefits all.

KEY AREAS

We recognize that numerous organizations and movements have long been advocating for agroecology. In alignment with their efforts, we are committed to supporting the development of grassroots demands for political change at both national and global levels. To do so, we will focus on the following key areas:

1. Prioritize Local Food Production and Public Procurement

- **Shift Focus to Local Production:** Redirecting agricultural policies to prioritize local food production over imports/exports can significantly enhance food security and support local farmers. This shift can reduce dependency on global supply chains, which are often vulnerable to disruptions. By focusing on local production, communities can ensure a steady supply of fresh, nutritious food while also reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation.
- **Public Procurement Policies:** Mandating that public institutions source a significant portion of their food from local, sustainable producers can create a stable market for local farmers. Schools, hospitals, and other public institutions can play a crucial role in supporting local agriculture. This approach not only benefits local economies but also ensures that large sections of the population have access to healthy, sustainably produced food.

2. Support for Young and Independent Farmers

- **State Agricultural Fund:** Establishing a state agricultural fund to purchase failed agricultural properties and lease them to young farmers can provide a much-needed lifeline for the next generation of farmers. This fund can help young farmers acquire land without the immediate pressure of profitability, allowing them to focus on sustainable farming practices. Over time, successful farmers can buy the property, ensuring long-term stability and growth.
- **Educational and Financial Support:** Providing targeted educational programs and financial support for young people entering agriculture is essential. This support can include grants, low-interest loans, and mentorship programs, with a special focus on women. By investing in the education and financial stability of young farmers, we can ensure a diverse and resilient agricultural sector.

3. Market Regulation and Debt Relief

- **Regulate Agricultural Markets:** Implementing policies to regulate the agricultural market can ensure fair prices for farmers and protect the right to sustainable and healthy food. Price controls and subsidies for sustainable farming practices can help create a more equitable food system. By ensuring that farmers receive fair prices for their products, we can encourage more sustainable and ethical farming practices.
- **Debt Cancellation:** Canceling unsustainable debt levels for farmers can enable necessary investments in transitioning to agroecology. Many farmers are burdened by overwhelming debt, which can prevent them from adopting sustainable practices. By providing debt relief, we can support farmers in making the transition to more sustainable and resilient farming systems.

THE CRISIS IN OUR GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM: ROOT CAUSES AND PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

Our global food system, once a lifeline for communities, now stands fractured. Instead of nourishing people, it has become a vehicle for profit extraction. The prevailing paradigm—market-driven policies—has commodified essential resources, including water and food. This commodification threatens not only our well-being but also the very fabric of civilization.

The Root Causes of Dysfunction:

- **Profit Over People:** The industrial food system prioritizes profit margins over human welfare. Corporate giants wield immense power, shaping policies and practices to maximize their gains. In this pursuit, they often disregard the health of consumers, the environment, and local communities. According to the FAO, 820 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, while the industrial food system generates billions in profits for large agribusiness corporations.
- **Monoculture and Biodiversity Loss:** Industrial agriculture favors monoculture—large-scale cultivation of a single crop. While this approach boosts yields, it erodes

biodiversity. Traditional crop varieties, rich in resilience and adaptability, fall by the wayside.

- **Environmental Degradation:** Chemical-intensive farming practices degrade soil quality, pollute water sources, and harm beneficial organisms. Pesticides and synthetic fertilizers disrupt ecosystems, leaving a toxic legacy.
- **Social Inequities:** The industrial food system perpetuates social injustices. Labor exploitation, unequal access to nutritious food, and food deserts disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Additionally, unequal access to land ownership and control over seed patents—especially with the rise of new GMOs—intensifies these inequities. Meanwhile, processed foods contribute to rising rates of obesity and diet-related diseases.

The Emergence of Alternatives:

1. **Food Sovereignty:** A beacon of hope, the concept of food sovereignty asserts that people have the right to define their food systems. It champions local markets, seed autonomy, and culturally appropriate production. By empowering small-scale farmers, food sovereignty challenges the corporate stranglehold.
2. **Agroecology:** At its core, agroecology blends ecological principles with social justice. It promotes diverse farming systems, traditional knowledge, and sustainable practices. Agroecological approaches reduce reliance on chemical inputs, enhance soil health, and foster climate resilience.
3. **The Commons Reimagined:** The resurgence of the commons—a collective mode of development—offers an antidote to profit-driven industrial agriculture. This includes advocating for shared resources and community well-being thereby protecting the most marginalized as well as smallholder farmers. Practical real-life examples of this idea include common land ownership and community seedbanks, which illustrate how collective stewardship can support sustainable agriculture and community resilience.
4. **The Right to Food:** Beyond mere sustenance, the right to food is a fundamental human entitlement. It encompasses access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food without discrimination. Upholding this right requires dismantling barriers—economic, political, and social—that hinder equitable food distribution.

The Way Forward:

1. **Local Solutions:** We will support youth initiatives to develop local, alternative models for sustainable agriculture. Empowering communities to reclaim control over their food systems by supporting local farmers, farmers' markets, and community-supported agriculture strengthens resilience and reduces dependence on distant supply chains.
2. **Policy Reform:** We will build new innovative alliances, communities, and national platforms for change to advocate for policies that incentivize sustainable practices, protect smallholders and prioritize health over profit. To affirm that subsidies should shift from agribusiness to sustainable practices.
3. **Education and Awareness:** We will train and support young agents of change to raise awareness about the broken food system. Developing educational programs that

highlight existing alternatives and possible systemic changes will empower consumers and stakeholders to demand and implement sustainable practices.

4. **Collective Action:** We will build bridges between activist groups and movements to create a global movement. By supporting grassroots initiatives, forming alliances, and advocating for divestment from fossil fuels and industrial agriculture, we will mobilize communities to take the first steps towards reclaiming their right to a sustainable and just food system.

In summary, our food system is at a crossroads. By embracing food sovereignty, agroecology, the commons, and the right to food, we can mend what's broken and nourish a more just, sustainable future.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is Agroecology?

- **Holistic Approach:** Agroecology integrates ecological, social, and cultural dimensions. It's not just about farming practices; it considers the entire food system. This approach recognizes that sustainable food systems involve more than technical solutions. Social and cultural factors shape how food is produced, distributed, and consumed. By considering the whole system, agroecology aims for lasting change.
- **Ecosystem Thinking:** Agroecology views farms as ecosystems, emphasizing interactions between crops, livestock, soil, water, and biodiversity. Ecosystems are interconnected, and agroecology mimics natural processes, enhancing resilience and reducing external inputs. For example, diverse crops attract beneficial insects, reducing pest pressure.
- **Local Knowledge:** Agroecology values traditional and local knowledge, recognizing that solutions must fit specific contexts. Local knowledge accounts for climate, soil, and cultural variations. Farmers' expertise informs agroecological practices, leading to better adaptation and sustainability.
- **Social Equity:** Agroecology promotes fair access to resources, empowering small-scale farmers and communities. Social justice is integral to agroecology. It challenges power imbalances, supports marginalized groups, and ensures equitable benefits from sustainable practices.

2. Difference Between Agroecology and Organic Farming:

- **Agroecology:** Broader scope, beyond methods. It's a paradigm shift in how we think about food systems. While organic farming focuses mainly on inputs (e.g., avoiding synthetic chemicals), agroecology extends beyond this, emphasizing social aspects, biodiversity, and resilience.
- **Organic Farming:** Focuses on avoiding synthetic inputs (pesticides, fertilizers), adhering to specific certification standards. Organic certification ensures

compliance with defined rules. However, it doesn't necessarily address broader ecological and social dimensions like agroecology does.

3. Consumer Prices in Agroecology:

- **Efficiency:** Agroecology optimizes resource use, reducing costs. By minimizing external inputs (e.g., synthetic fertilizers), agroecology reduces production expenses. Efficient use of local resources also contributes to cost-effectiveness.
- **Local Production:** By supporting local farmers, it can maintain or even lower prices. Shorter supply chains reduce transportation costs. Consumers benefit from fresher produce and support local economies.
- **Externalities:** Conventional agriculture's hidden costs (pollution, health impacts) are avoided and inequalities are reduced. Conventional agriculture often externalizes costs (e.g., environmental degradation, health problems). Agroecology internalizes these costs, benefiting consumers and society.

4. Benefits of Agroecology for Consumers:

- **Nutrition:** Diverse crops mean better diets. Monocultures limit nutritional diversity. Agroecological systems provide a variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains, improving overall health.
- **Food Security:** Local production reduces dependence on distant supply chains. Globalized food systems are vulnerable to disruptions (e.g., pandemics, climate events). Local production enhances food security by ensuring availability during crises.
- **Healthier Food:** Reduced chemical use benefits consumers. Agroecology minimizes synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, resulting in safer, healthier food for consumers.
- **Community Connection:** Consumers engage with local producers. Agroecology fosters direct relationships between consumers and farmers. Farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture enhance community bonds.

5. Where Agroecological Models Exist:

- **The Nyéléni Declaration:** In 2015, organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers, workers, and consumers gathered in Nyéléni, Mali. They agreed on a common understanding of agroecology as crucial for building food sovereignty.
- **Social Security from Food:** The concept of Social Security from Food, as promoted by the Collectif pour une Sécurité sociale de l'alimentation, aims to integrate food into the social security system. This initiative ensures universal access to healthy, sustainable food by providing a monthly allowance for purchasing sustainably produced food. The program is managed democratically at the local level, ensuring that all residents have access to nutritious food while supporting local farmers and sustainable practices.

- **Mali:** Mali has shown significant success in promoting agroecology, particularly through the efforts of the Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP). CNOP has been instrumental in advocating for family farming and agroecology, emphasizing food sovereignty and sustainable agricultural practices. They work closely with the government and local communities to resist the industrial farming model and support diverse, sustainable agricultural practices. Land and seed laws in Mali guarantee farmers' rights to choose their crops and farming methods. Government programs promote a variety of food crops, not just maize, leading to a reduction in hunger and an increase in food security.
- **Brazil (Landless Workers' Movement - MST):** The MST in Brazil promotes agroecology and land reform. They organize land occupations and establish settlements where agroecological practices thrive. MST's model includes collective farming, seed banks, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, emphasizing food sovereignty and social justice.
- **India (Deccan Development Society - DDS):** DDS works with women farmers in Andhra Pradesh, India. They practice agroecology, conserve indigenous seeds, and promote community-based food systems. DDS's approach empowers women, enhances biodiversity, and ensures food sovereignty at the local level.