

# VSF Europa Symposium on Food Sovereignty

## *Finding a common path towards a sustainable development*

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2009, the representatives from VSF Europa network (VSF-E) members gathered in Teramo, at the C.I.F.I.V. (International Centre for Veterinary Training and Information), for a symposium about Food Sovereignty. Several experts from Italian and international organizations involved in food sovereignty, food security and food safety were also present. The objective of the symposium was to draft proposals in order to contribute in spreading and implementing the paradigm of food sovereignty in its different aspects.

The presentations by the representatives of the national VSFs, aimed to underline the footprints of their work in developing countries, explaining how they combine the effort towards food sovereignty with sustainability issues and poverty alleviation. Their work is composed by technical consultancy, awareness raising and political advocacy.

VSF Belgium stressed the importance of food sovereignty as guiding principle for field activities, giving examples from interventions in West Africa, where many local milk producers are currently improving their income and livelihood, by transforming and selling their products over local markets. In particular VSF Belgium is trying to support mini dairies scattered in rural areas, that could work as collecting and transforming centres for milk producers, otherwise disconnected from the main city market.

The Spanish VSF delegation made also some very relevant remarks, showing to the audience the results of a deep self-assessment process, which resulted in reaffirming food sovereignty as the core principle of the organization, inspiring both the field projects and a full range of awareness-raising initiatives held in Spain.

The links between food sovereignty, food security, food safety and a modern vision of the human right to food are very interesting to examine and sort out. Many interventions made by other speakers gave useful insight to this.

FAO Officers Philippe Ankers and Klaas Dietze presented the increased trend of undernourished people worldwide, targeting the current global economic crisis as one of the most impacting reason

of the world hunger. Interesting considerations were drafted considering the global use of food sources, the cereal consumption for meat production, the environmental impact of intensive livestock rearing, the production of biofuels. Some scenarios were presented considering the livestock sector as a key for food security and poverty reduction only if careful policy and institutional reforms are put in place together with public and private investments.

Andrea Gervelmeyer from EFSA focused on experiences about building capacity to improve the safety of animal-source foods and ensure continued market access for poor farmers in sub Saharan Africa. Through combining risk-based approaches to food safety with participatory and gender-sensitive methods, small scale farmers, regulators and consumers could be empowered to jointly identify their food safety priorities and develop pro-poor strategies for mitigation.

Though, it emerged from the contributions of the participants that food sovereignty applies to both developing and developed countries, since one of the core issues regards awareness-raising of consumers and their empowerment as stakeholders within the food market.

For this reason Pietro Venezia, (member of the organic farming label PRO.BER based in the Italian region of Emilia Romagna) reported about experiences of shortening the food chain between producers and consumers and about the actions carried out by small farmers to raise consumers' awareness about the consumption of local products.

An overview of the Development Educational Project carried out by four VSF-E members was presented by the head-of-consortium (AVSF), Carline Mainenti. The main topic of this project is support to small-scale farming as a key-element for eradicating hunger and poverty in the South, with special attention to livestock keepers. The concept of food sovereignty is of great support in all these activities, for bridging north and south, offering to the target groups a clear vision about the global links in the agri-food imbalances, and the urgent need for better governance of the agricultural sector in order to achieve sustainable models of farming and durable food security worldwide.

Undoubtedly, food sovereignty is one of the most innovative and powerful contributors to the debate about food and agriculture issues. It encompasses a full range of ideologic pillars, action lines and priorities, national and international political claims and proposals. These are the result of more than a decade of debates among the most relevant social movements, peasants' organization, people's movements, indigenous people's networks, farmers' organizations of the world.

Due to the great richness and diversity of the stakeholders' communities who contributed to build up the ideologic, practical and political shape of food sovereignty, it is not easy to resume its features and be fully aware of what the concept implies. This is why, after more than one year of work, the leaflet about food sovereignty to be produced by SIVtro within the VSF-E DEP project, turned into a book, whose final draft was presented also in Teramo.

The gathering of such a multiplicity of points of view on the subject of food sovereignty was enriched by the questions and comments from the audience, composed as well by some international experts that were formerly members of some VSF Europa. The public contributed to further examine the ideas of the speakers and the focus of their organizations. By the end of the presentations, a set of shared priorities and recommendations within the frame of food sovereignty was agreed. These priorities should be highlighted in future activities of the VSF-E members, inspire VSF projects in the field as well as to design future domestic actions and hopefully joined ones.

## **VSF Europa Symposium 2009 on Food Sovereignty**

### **VSF Europa common priorities**

A set of shared priorities within the broader frame of food sovereignty was shaped during the final round table of the VSF Symposium held in Teramo on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2009. These points should be highlighted in future activities of the VSF members, to inspire their field projects as well as to design future domestic actions. These include:

#### *FOR THE FIELD PROJECTS:*

- *Supporting small farmers or livestock keepers associations for better access to local markets;*
- *Provide family farmers with tools, land, credit, technical support, training;*
- *Improving the long term follow-up of development aid actions at local level;*
- *Enhance bottom-up approach: beneficiaries should participate in the decision process of their own development;*
- *Consider food safety related aspects of animal derived food products within interventions dealing with food security;*

#### *FOR THE LOBBY ACTIVITIES:*

- *Future VSF-E actions should raise attention about those policies by rich countries that make development impossible, such as subsidizing [intensive] agriculture, aggressive export to unprotected markets, unrul ed trade etc.*
- *Better coordination within the EC among DGs dealing with food trade, food security, food safety and development aid (DG Trade, DG SANCO, DG Agro, EuropAid) is required for coordinated actions and creating favourable conditions to the implementation of food sovereignty principles;*

- *Actions should consider the participation of local communities in decision making and the integration of cross-cutting multi-disciplinary issues (animal health, natural resources management, awareness raising , ..., ...);*
- *Sensitize consumers planning middle to long term impact assessment on food market – on food sovereignty.*

*FOR BOTH FIELD PROJECTS AND LOBBY ACTIVITIES:*

- *Stress the comparative advantages among field experience and working solutions for small scale farmers;*
- *Awareness is a milestone both in the South as in the North;*
- *Targeting consumers; strengthen the demand for local products in the development countries;*
- *More transparency and improving accountability worldwide.*

A smaller list of miscellaneous questions was left out of the list, since they not match the previous categories, but they seem to deserve further examinations. These include the reasons why development aid is not working in a very effective way; the issue of ensuring enough coherence between development projects; but also the need for common good practices and commitments for all VSF-E members, regarding many issues related to food sovereignty: e.g., the kind of food and drinks we offer during our gatherings, but also in our daily office life.

Finally, all the members agreed that DEP activities are out mostly important for contributing to food sovereignty and possibly, the most effective kind of action that the network could do. The importance was underlined to continue to plan new DEP projects, involving several VSF-E members and other organizations and institutions dealing with farming, animal health and food sovereignty.

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SIVtro –VSF (Veterinaries without Borders) Italia, is a non profit organisation, based in Padua, member of the European network “VSF Europa”. It is specialized in veterinary and livestock-related cooperation.

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SIVtro members are professionals and researchers with numerous years of field-experience, both in Italy and abroad. They work with us mostly voluntarily to study, design and carry out the interventions.

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VSF Europa is an international association, a network of ten VSF member organisations. VSF Europa mission is to strengthen its members through knowledge sharing, stimulating synergies, common good practices of interventions in the field.