



DEVELOPMENT POLICIES & PRACTICES

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Sustainable food systems in favour of nutrition

15 YEARS AFTER THE 2008 GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS, THE CRISIS GENERATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS A HARSH REMINDER THAT OUR MODES OF FOOD PRODUCTION, PROCESSING AND CONSUMPTION ARE STRUCTURALLY VULNERABLE. IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE SECOND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL - "END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION, AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE", WE NEED TO CHANGE THESE MODES NOW MORE THAN EVER. GIVEN THE MANY CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION, THIS CHANGE CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH A SYSTEMIC, MULTISECTORAL APPROACH, AT THE INTERSECTION OF HEALTH, AGRICULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES.

The need for change

To ensure food and nutrition security for all, several simultaneous co-related challenges must be met (socio-economic, health, environmental and demographic risks)¹, while considering the impact for future generations. Although actions in the agriculture, food and nutrition sectors remain essential, scaling up to food systems level makes it possible to face all of these challenges. According to the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security, a food system "gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes"².

However, current food systems have demonstrated their incapacity to respond to these issues: the number of people suffering from food insecurity and the various forms of malnutrition has been constantly increasing since 2014³, while the impacts of environmental degradation are being increasingly felt (climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, deforestation, etc.). Some industrialised or globalised food systems are contributing to aggravation of risk factors and reduction of our future capacities (pollution, economic vulnerability, monopolisation of resources, zoonoses, etc.). In-depth change of these systems and promotion of

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GRET is an international fair development NGO that has been working for more than 40 years from field level to political level to combat poverty and inequalities.

more sustainable food systems – i.e. systems that are capable, according to the HLPE, of ensuring “*food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition of future generations are not compromised*” – are now the best alternative in order to provide everyone with a healthy diet that respects the environment.

Which transition to food systems that are more sustainable and favourable to nutrition?

For GRET, a sustainable food system that is favourable to nutrition is a system that contributes to:

- **food and nutrition security**, while ensuring access to a healthy diet for all;
- **environmental integrity**, by preserving ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources;
- **economic equity**, by providing decent employment and income, and fair distribution of value within territories and value chains;
- **social equity**, by providing access for everyone to reliable, quality information on food, and to affordable products in line with people’s nutritional needs and food habits, and by promoting the role of women.

GRET’s action is conducted at territorial level, tackling the challenges of food for the most vulnerable individuals such as pregnant women and children, and those relating to communities’ food supply. Local supply chains have demonstrated their effectiveness in terms of resilience and autonomy, their capacity to improve access to food that is diversified, fresh or locally processed, and by ensuring employment and better income for stakeholders in the chain.

Making the environment an incentive to support change

GRET conducts advocacy for public policies enabling this transition to be supported. For example, its contribution to the international “My milk is local” campaign, or its advocacy and technical support to ECOWAS member States for the adoption of tax regulations, and quality, labelling and marketing standards in favour of healthy local foods. The multiplication of multisectoral policies and increasing integration of nutrition issues in these policies mark noteworthy progress. However, their operationali-

THE KEY ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

In developing countries, women contribute substantially to the rural economy. They make up almost half of the agricultural workforce and play a central role in supplying urban and rural markets. They also play a significant role in households’ economic and nutritional management. Yet women still have limited access to education, services and resources. For example, their rights to property and usage are only recognised for 20% of agricultural land. They are also the first victims of malnutrition, at all ages (FAO, 2016). These many inequalities are now recognised as a major obstacle to economic development and food and nutrition security.

For GRET, gender is a transversal issue which is integrated in its actions. GRET promotes empowerment of women through fair access to decent employment and income, education and literacy, resources and services, and strives to achieve greater recognition of their status, their rights and their social and economic role.

sation and appropriation by territorial stakeholders remain a major challenge. Strengthening of stakeholders in the various sectors at political and civil society level, and the creation and facilitation of forums for intersectoral dialogue are crucial stages to ensure cross-cutting, coherent comprehension of agricultural, food and nutrition issues, and enable pertinent multisectoral actions to be implemented. For example, GRET supported the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to strengthen nutrition-sensitive agriculture skills in its decentralised agricultural technical services’, and created dialogue between community health officers and professional agricultural organisations in the Mouhoun region in Burkina Faso.

GRET also develops specific tools and methodologies to facilitate understanding of cross-cutting sectoral issues, specific to each context, such as nutrition-sensitive management advice for family farms, developed in Haiti.

Territorialised supply chains for quality local food

GRET promotes nutrition-sensitive sustainable agriculture by supporting family farming and agroecology. Family farming produces 80% of food worldwide and is conducive to diversified food systems that are accessible to the most vulnerable people, respect the environment and traditional knowledge, and

Sustainable food systems now represent the best alternative to provide everyone with a healthy diet that respects environment.



generate employment⁴. Agroecology reconciles the three dimensions of sustainability by strengthening the resilience and equity of systems, while ensuring a healthy diet.

GRET also supports re-localisation of agriculture through urban agriculture and shortfood channels, and the development of local value chains. To do this, it provides support to small agrifood businesses, such as parboiled rice businesses in Guinea, in order to make local markets sustainable and increase availability and accessibility of diversified, healthy foods. It strengthens capacities (quality, marketing, management), consultation and collaboration between stakeholders (producers, processors, distributors) within food supply chains, as with the development and implementation of quality standards for unprocessed and processed foods, such as those formalised in a best hygiene practices guidebook for the corn value chain in Haiti⁵.

GRET's territorial approach also includes strengthening of local governance and involvement of local authorities⁶, enabling development of institutional markets, such as supply of yogurts from a local cooperative to school canteens in Burkina Faso.

Agroecology reconciles the three dimensions of sustainability by strengthening the resilience and equity of systems, while ensuring a healthy diet.

Food environments ensuring equitable access to a sustainable healthy diet

The food environment includes availability, and physical and economic access to foods for consumers, as well as social norms or influencing factors such as advertising. GRET's work on supply chains is complemented by social communication, with actions to raise awareness and educate on best hygiene and feeding practices, in order to support behavioural change and increase consumption of healthy foods.

In this way, in Myanmar, GRET combined support for vegetable producers' agroecological transition with awareness-raising on nutrition in villages, markets and schools. GRET also supports social business models for marketing of local foods targeting women and children, and responsible marketing communication, as with the Nutri'zaza social business in Madagascar.

GRET's action is also conducted as part of social protection schemes aimed at increasing financial access for the most vulnerable people to healthcare and a healthy diet.



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→ RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN FAVOUR OF NUTRITION

Transformation of food systems to improve nutrition is central today in international debates. In order to effectively support this dynamic in the field, GRET recommends that development stakeholders:

- **support opening up of sectors to operationalise multi-sectoral policies** by strengthening mutual knowledge and understanding of stakeholders and issues, favouring inter-sectoral forums for consultation and coordination, and by supporting joint development of tools to analyse cross-cutting agricultural, food and nutrition issues;
- **promote territorialised food systems** by supporting and protecting agroecological family farming, and local nutrition-sensitive value chains, and thereby sustainably strengthening availability and accessibility of local healthy foods;
- **raise awareness on nutrition issues among agriculture and food stakeholders, and consumers**, to strengthen consumption of locally and sustainably produced healthy foods;
- **promote food environments** enabling fair and sustainable access for consumers to diverse,



healthy products and to quality information favouring the adoption of a healthy diet that meets populations' various expectations and nutritional needs;

- **strengthen economic empowerment of women** and act in a concrete manner to eliminate gender inequalities impacting their health and their nutrition;
- **implement nutrition-specific actions**, targeting women and children within food systems and health systems to effectively fight against malnutrition.

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- 1 See *Food systems at risk. New trends and challenges*, Dury S., Bendjebbar P., Hainzelin E., Giordano T., Bricas N., 2019, FAO-Cirad-European Commission, 132 pages.
- 2 HLPE, 2017, *Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*, Rome.
- 3 In 2019, 690 million people were suffering from hunger, i.e. an increase of almost 60 million in 5 years. 2 billion people were experiencing food insecurity, with the risk of up to 132 million additional people falling into chronic hunger in 2020 following the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020*.
- 4 United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028, Global action plan, FAO-IFAD.
- 5 Méthélus J., Broutin C., *Guide de bonnes pratiques d'hygiène et de fabrication du maïs moulu, de la production à la commercialisation*, GRET, 2019.
- 6 FAO Framework for the Urban Food Agenda, *Leveraging sub-national and local government action to ensure sustainable food systems and improved nutrition*, FAO, 2019.

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