

The Role of NGOs in Promotion of Organic and Conventional Agriculture

Agriculture is a crucial part of every society. Basically all agricultural practices impact the environment. Industrial agriculture is more often recognized as negative factor influencing the environment, public health and rural communities. There is a danger of soil loss and erosion which reduce crop yields and endanger water system (Tegmeier and Duffy 2005: 64). Also there is a question if Earth is capable to produce enough food in the future. Those are the various reasons why NGOs are interested in the agricultural topic. In this essay we will focus on how different non-governmental organizations around the globe deal with pertinent problems of organic and/or conventional agriculture.

First, it should be noted that there is a lot of stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Farmers, including big corporate farms and small family farms, are among the main ones. The farmers producing organic food have to be included, too. Another very important group are the corporations which produce seeds and fertilisers. Smaller industrial/chemical companies may have different intentions than the corporate ones. Another important stakeholder are state institutions and governments, whose interests can vary when it comes to agriculture. Furthermore, supranational organizations such as UN and EU influence agriculture through their regulations, funding and policy. Scientific research also plays a certain role, therefore scientists and universities should be among stakeholders. Consumers are also an important interest group, since they define the demand and the price of the product. The last group are supermarket chains, small retailers and, finally, shops which specialise in organic food.

One of the worldwide NGOs which are interested in agricultural is **Slow Food International**. Slow Food started as a movement in Italy and it was opposing the globalization of food. Slow Food has developed into a worldwide organization and nowadays it has supporters in 150 countries. Their goal is to support local agricultural and local producers. In their opinion agricultural and food should be local, clean and it should have respect the traditions of the region and the environment. Preserving the biodiversity is also a very important for them. They have several ways how to achieve their goals. Most important is education. Slow Food has established the university in Italy for educational purposes. They start with farmers. They encourage both farmers and consumers to keep the local tradition and to buy food from local producers and support local agricultural. There are various ways how they try to bring consumers and producers together. There are food festivals, workshops, field trips. The most visible project is The Ark of Taste where Slow Food keeps the most notable local food specialities. Together with the product

they mention the area and farmers which produce such a food. When Slow Food was movement against globalization, they ran demonstrations. However, they do not do that anymore. According to Slow Food statements, they are mostly financed by membership fees (both farmers and consumers may be members) (See FAQ 2015). Other financial sources are sponsors, foundations and institutions. The oldest national association Slow Food Italy is the only one which is able to raise money by them. This association issues a various publications, where they also sell promotions space and they organise special events such as Salone del Gusto. All money which is raised in this way is reinvested back into the organization.

Navdanya (Hindi: “nine seeds”) is a non-governmental organization found in 1987 by an Indian scientist and environmentalist, Dr. Vandana Shiva (Nierenberg 2013). The movement deals with various issues of Indian farming, namely soil protection, promotion of organic products, and combating biopiracy. The philosophy behind the activity of this NGO is so-called “Earth Democracy”, understood as seed, food and water freedom. In order to fulfill its mission, the organization uses various strategies. During its 30-year existence Navdanya created 122 seed banks in 18 states of India and Bhutan, which are used to support local farmers, especially after natural disasters (tsunamis, earthquakes, floods) (See Introduction to Navdanya 2015). More importantly, the organization fights the so-called biopiracy through lawsuits against privatization or patenting of crops/seeds by corporations (e.g., Monsanto) (See, for example, European Patent Office 2012). Finally, Navdanya raises awareness about the importance of organic farming both through scientific research and educational activities. For example, the organization has its own organic farm in Uttarakhand, North India, where it conducts research on sustainable farming (Nierenberg 2013). Furthermore, the members of NGO created The Earth University with various courses, such as biodiversity protection and agroecological practices (Nierenberg 2013; Introduction 2015). The work of Navdanya is funded through public donations and grants from non-profit organizations, such as Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation and Center for Food Safety (CFS) (Cultures of Resistance 2015).

Another non-profit organization involved in solving agricultural problems is **International Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside (ICPPC)**. Just like Navdanya, ICPPC works to protect and support small farms throughout Poland. For example, the organization launched the project “Straight from a Polish farmer” to protest the law banning small farmers from selling the household produce (See Gazeta Wyborcza 2015a). The protest included farmers' demonstrations in city centers with them selling their preserves (pickles, jams, etc.) (Ibidem), open days at the local farms, participation in congresses, putting up stalls with “illegal” produce in different Polish towns, organising educational/entertaining meetings (e.g., carving), and, finally, collecting signatures against the law (Ibidem). The protests have brought fruit: on October 1, 2015 Polish minister of agriculture signed a new law allowing small farms to sell both processed and unprocessed food without registering as a firm (Gazeta Wyborcza 2015b). ICPPC also promotes healthy and ecological lifestyle by organising workshops in its “Ecocenter” – a farm in

southern Poland producing ecological and traditional products and working on renewable energy (See www.eko-cel.pl). Just like Navdanya, the Coalition works on crowdfunding basis: anyone can donate on the NGO's website. However, the financial activity of the organization could be more transparent as there are no financial reports available.

Bioinstitut is a Czech-based non-profit organization working on research and educational activities in the field of organic agriculture both in Czech Republic and Central and Eastern Europe since 2004. Unlike Navdanya and ICPPC, Bioinstitut deals only with scientific research and popularization of academic findings. The organization conducts research in cooperation with various universities and research centers (e.g., Palacky University in Olomouc, OSEVA – Research Station, etc.). Furthermore, Bioinstitut publishes books and brochures about organic farming and organises seminars regarding the methods of ecological agriculture and state/EU policies connected with it. This NGO receives its funding mainly through grants both from the Czech government and non-profit organizations, such as Civil Society Development Foundation, European Social Fund, and Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (See www.bioinstitut.cz).

Kenya Institute of Organic Farming (KIOF) is non-governmental organization operating throughout Kenya and the Eastern Africa region. The Institute is located in Juja town on the Nairobi-Thika Superhighway (See the KIOF website). It is a non-profit organization and has no other commercial purposes, but exists solely for the benefit of the public. Its main objectives are facilitating rural development and education in organic agriculture and related marketing services. KIOF is committed to promoting organic farming as an environmentally friendly approach to sustainable food production. It was officially established in 1986 to train and promote organic farming methods, mainly among smallholder Kenyan farmers. Initial programmes carried out in the former Central and Eastern Provinces of Kenya proved successful as they encouraged low cost farming. As a result, organic farming became exceedingly popular, leading to rising demand for general information and training on organic agriculture from all over East Africa (Brüntrup-Seidemann 2011). The KIOF activities are focused on environmental information and education, and they are divided into five distinct services: Training, Extension, Information Dissemination, Participatory On-Farm Research, and Consultancy. The services include training of farmers and organising regional workshops, participatory on-farm research, consultancy services and demonstration centres, as well as managing a library and producing various publications. The organization puts out a monthly newsletter as well as a quarterly magazine known as Mambo Leisa – previously it was called Foes of Famine. KIOF works closely with young people in such programmes as the Students Training Programme, providing advice and instruction on how to grow organically and take advantage of the market opportunities for organic products. The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology has recently launched the Diploma in Organic Agriculture course. This course is a joint venture between KIOF and the Department of Horticulture in the Faculty of Agriculture.

Another African organization dealing with agricultural problems is **One Acre Fund**, founded in Kenya in 2006. The NGO received its first funds from the Echoing Green Foundation in the form of a two-year start-up grant. The grants quickly started to accumulate, with One Acre Fund being awarded funds from the Draper Richards Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and USAID, among others. The NGO receives funding from over ten foundations. It is also partly funded by private donations (See Five Innovative NGOs in Agriculture website). One Acre Fund's primary goal is to create efficient networks supporting smallholders farming. The organization offers a comprehensive "market-in-a-box" that lends farmers crucial agricultural inputs (\$80 seed and fertilizer loan), trains them in sustainability techniques to improve farm profitability, and increases market access and improve storage to help farmers sell their goods. Their simple model has already reached over 60,000 farmers in Kenya, Rwanda, and Burundi, and they project that they will reach 1.4 million farmers by 2020. One Acre Fund's field staff is supported by professional headquarters in each country, providing finance, accounting, HR, logistics, marketing, and administration services. Internally, the Fund looks a lot like a regular private-sector company. It has also built the capacity to launch one new country operation per year for the foreseeable future, and currently has "exploratory" pilot operations running in several new countries (See www.oneacrefund.org).

World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC) is a non-governmental, non-profit agricultural research institute founded in 1971 and based in Taiwan, with regional offices throughout Africa and Asia. The NGO is committed to alleviating poverty and malnutrition in the developing world through the increased production and consumption of nutritious and health-promoting vegetables. The Center mobilizes resources from the public and private sectors to disseminate AVRDC's improved varieties and production methods in developing countries. AVRDC relies on external funding to conduct its research and development activities. The financial requirements are funded mainly by contributions, grants and donations from member and non-member countries and organizations, as well as private donations. The Centre has 6 hectares under organic production for research. Research is largely focused on comparative studies of different varieties of pak-choi, sweet corn and rice (for features such as mortality and fresh biomass production) and an effectiveness evaluation of green manure species. In addition, the Centre has established field boundaries to protect against pesticide drift and a small agroforestry plot for research on intercropping of tropical fruit trees and vegetables. The Center's work is built around four global themes: Germplasm, Breeding, Production and Consumption, which address the entire vegetable value chain (See www.avrdc.org).

The Asociación Cubana de Agricultura Orgánica (ACAO) was founded in 1993 as part of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s 'Agroecological Lighthouse' programme. Due to the severe shortage of hard currency for the importation of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, Cuba was forced, in the early 1990s to begin to practice organic agriculture on a nationwide scale. ACAO created a

number of exemplary farms, serving as a demonstration to other farmers, policy makers, etc., of what is possible. It held dozens of workshops around the country, produced its own magazine with a good mix of general and technical articles, and created an accredited agroecology course at the Agricultural University of Havana. A network of 10 regional documentation centres also got established. In addition, ACAO held international conferences on organic farming, hosted numerous delegations from around the world and helped to develop a master's Degree in Sustainable Development at the University of Havana. The primary goal of ACAO was both to demonstrate that organic farming systems can be superior to the high-input, capital-intensive kind in all important respects, and to persuade policy-makers, scientists and farmers that there should be no going back. Within four years the membership of ACAO spanned the whole agricultural sector, from farmers and farm managers to extension agents, researchers, professors and government officials. In addition to its base in Havana, ACAO developed local chapters in most provinces and each member got active in his or her own workspace. promote the idea that the current use of organic methods should be considered a permanent transformation of Cuban agriculture. In 1999 ACAO achieved formal recognition by the Cuban Government and became the Grupo de Agricultura Orgánica (GAO) within the Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forest Technicians (ACTAF), an institutional change which gave it more freedom of action and influence with the Cuban Government. By 2013, GAO's programmes and functions had been taken over by the Agroecological Program within ACTAF (Wright 2006).

It is important to keep in mind that although the presented NGOs often share their qualms and aspirations, they might operate on different levels and each have their own niche. Therefore the methods they use may also differ: for example, Kenya Institute of Organic Farming and One Acre Fund focus primarily on promoting broader education and usage of organic farming and concentrate on facilitating training and education in these fields, whereas Navdanya participates in active protests against biopiracy by filing lawsuits against privatisation or patenting of seeds by corporations, and the International Vegetable Centre positions itself as mainly research-oriented.

Therefore, the analyzed organizations use different approaches to support organic and/or conventional agriculture. However, some of the methods can be improved in order to make the NGOs' work more efficient. For example, the organizations can – and should – cooperate more closely when it comes to challenging legislation unfavourable for organic farming. This is especially the case of European Union NGOs, which can exert a greater influence on decision-makers both in their home countries and in Brussels once they act in coordination with each other. Furthermore, putting the agricultural problems – even those on the local level – in a global perspective could be more helpful for raising public awareness. For example, linking the dangers of worldwide pesticide use to the local community and vice versa – how the use of chemical agents in a certain setting can affect the ecosystem generally. And, finally, the analysis of NGO mission statements revealed that it is often too broad or

general, thus the missions of organisations are not always entirely clear or appear to be too ambitious. Therefore, introduction of clarity to the aims of an NGO can help to seek funding and public support.

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