



Outgoing Council of Convenors report to INOFO GA, Delhi, 8-XI-2017:

INOFO activities 2015-2017 and perspectives

Translations are to be expected.

I: INOFO's External Relations: Since the last INOFO GA in Istanbul, October 2014, the farmers have been involved in their own regional events, as related in regional reports: <www.inofo.org/documents>. Some outstanding ones are mentioned here, directly involving members of INOFO Council of Convenors.

- Lagos, Nigeria: *African Organic Congress*, 5~8-X-2015, After participating in the congress, the INOFO delegation went under armed escort to visit an organic fish & vegetable farm. It was news to the farmer that crops, irrigated by fish effluent and not rooted in soil, might not be certifiable as products of organic agriculture.



INOFO delegates at the AOC, Lagos, Nigeria, Oct 2015

- USA, the newly formed *Organic Farmers Association* carries on the struggle to “keep the soil in Organic”, in opposition to the USDA which has obliged its National Organic Program to allow the organic certification of hydroponically grown foods, despite its own advisory board's 2010 recommendation to the contrary.

- Paris, *COP 21*, December 2015, several organic farmers delegates were present, from all continents, including the Convenor for East Africa. *Below: Organic Farmers delegates with the WFO president (3rd left) at COP21, Paris, XII-2015:*



- New York, December 2015, *United Nations Year of the Soil*: at the closing session Elizabeth Henderson (NOFA) had the last word.. (see from 1h20): <http://webtv.un.org/search/world-soil-day-celebration-and-closure-of-the-international-year-of-the-soils-2015-%E2%80%93-%E2%80%9Csoils-a-solid-ground-for-life%E2%80%9D/4646465699001?term=soils>

- Brittany, France, May 2017, coordination meeting for delegates of African, Asian, Latin American & European organisations resisting Monsanto & C°, with an INOFO delegate present. Farmers from Burkina Faso explained their situation with cotton. Now it appears that some countries, notably El Salvador & Sri Lanka, are moving to prohibit RoundUp and other such toxins, applying the *Principle of Precaution*, in the hope of preventing, for example, the kidney disease that has been rampant among the poorest people.

- *Food Sovereignty campaign 2007-2017* by *La Via Campesina*, usually in coalition locally or regionally with Organic farmers organisations. This campaign now also emphasises Energy Sovereignty as part of the solution to the climate crisis. In many LVC organisations something closely resembling the organic method is apparently used by most farmers, yet they refuse to guarantee their practices, pretending that certification is a bad thing, perhaps because of its incidental association with exploitative export activity, whose organic products must be certified, and... perhaps also because of the cost. A slow burning ideological dispute has consequently soured the relations between farmers in some parts of Latin America. In any case, third party certification is not necessary for domestic markets where PGS is acceptable, yet, by some strange superstitious logic, even smallholders in a PGS and selling only locally are criticised for practising and proclaiming the organic method of production. They are deemed guilty by association, yet those who use different terminology (“agro-ecology”) and who, for supposedly ideological reasons, refuse to guarantee their practices in any way, would seem to be unfairly competing with the organic farmers organised in a Participatory Guarantee System for local markets, and who do effectively contribute towards establishing considerable *Food Sovereignty*.

- Rome, February 2016, *IFAD Farmers Forum*: several INOFO Convenors were present and, afterwards, INOFO Council was invited to join the Steering Committee of the Farmers Forum, thus in future helping to set the agenda for this event that now takes place alternately in Rome and in another continent. The Eastern & Southern Africa *Farmers Forum* took place in Uganda in May 2017, where INOFO's regional Convenors were present. There was in October 2017 another opportunity to be present in Rome, at a session of the *World Food Security Commission* jointly organised by IFAD & FAO.



L to R: Roberto Longo, IFAD; Elizabeth Mpfu, La Via Campesina representative; Charles K. Mubanga, Southern Africa NOFO Convenor; Julie Nakalanda Matovu, Eastern Africa NOFO Convenor; Alessandro Marini, IFAD Country Director Uganda.

Precisely for these situations, organic farmers delegates must have obvious legitimacy. Their grass-roots mandates must be as traceable as are their products at market. This is now becoming a reality, thanks to the IFAD-funded capacity building program which ran for 3 years, 2014-2016. This was the fruit of direct relations with IFAD, thanks to André Leu and the expertise of the staff in Bonn. This program began in January 2014 as top-down “Leadership training” with ambitious candidates chosen from Bonn by the Ifoam Academy. In reality it was a chicken-and-egg situation because, at the end, these self-proclaimed leaders were given to understand that they must at some moment be mandated (delegated)

by their own organic farmers organisations at home. Some were indeed afterwards elected as national or regional Convenors, to act as antenna for several consenting organisations. These newly spun regional networks of organic farmers organisations can now easily and legitimately make their voices heard in public forums, thus collectively defining Organic farmers as a professional class with a voice in the public arena, and maybe even with future capacity for collective price bargaining. Farmers as a social class are still half of humanity, clearly distinct from all the friendly promoters, consultants, experts, tourists, NGOs, government agents, scientists, commercial agents, so many interested parties who love the farmers, love speaking for farmers and telling them what to do, how to do it and... at what price to sell it.

II: Farmers “internal” relations with the other professional interests around the Organic Agriculture Movements

At this point appears a slight ambiguity around the terminology of *external* & *internal* relations, because farmers relations *with* and *within* IFOAM are both, external and internal. Be that as it may, the Organic farmers can and do also now speak in other forums outside the federation and do include in their network plenty of farmers organisations not affiliated to Ifoam. In every situation, it is clear henceforth that only their own organisations can claim to speak for organic farmers.

We are proud to announce, in case nobody noticed, that the farmers now have a greater voice in IFOAM GA. It always was true that every organisation affiliated to Ifoam had a vote in GA, whatever its nature. Each consultant has a vote. Each processor has a vote, just like each trader. Each of the many local offices of certifiers in many countries has one vote each. And an organisation of many thousands of farmers has a vote in GA, one vote. You may well ask, have the farmers noticed that this is an absurdity and somewhat inequitable? Well, yes they have noticed and, in fact, they started to organise about 20 years ago, little by little. So it was a happy event before the last IFOAM GA when INOFO itself, as a self-organised structure representing several millions of farming families, was given one vote in GA. One extra vote, extra-ordinary, for which the farmers must be truly grateful.

Make no mistake, some of the farmers best friends are traders, processors, scientists, educators, technicians, certifiers, consultants, legislators, promoters.., all excellent individuals, all shining champions of the method of production that farmers themselves practice.. at their own risk. And all except the farmers are shining champions of the profitable end product; the primary producers draw no profit from the added value in retail prices of organic products in the North.

Now we hear that *True Cost Accounting* at the top retail end of the market is suddenly fashionable among a certain class of import experts, yet strangely enough, no data is available about actual prices paid at the bottom end of the market, at the farm gate, or somewhere along the dusty *Farm Track* where primary raw materials are collected from hundreds of smallholders. A wholesale buyer's agent in one continent can say: keep your product, it is cheaper in another continent, and there is no way for a farmer to check the story. Indeed, what the peasants get for their work can hardly be called a *cost*, compared to all the other macro-factors that TCA adepts are now proposing to account for, no doubt including the cost of the mining operations for their cell phones and the satellites that connect them. TCA could be a wonderful thing. The peasants would love to see the real cost of all the resources plundered from their lands over five centuries, the cheap labour, the timber extracted for shipbuilding and all the other costs of inter-continental labour flexibility. Surely the slave traders paid for visas & health insurance for each passenger. If all the social & material costs figured in the final prices of tea & coffee, rubber & timber, cotton & silk, bananas & pineapples, sugar & spice.., farmers everywhere would be happy, including the millions of European ex-farmers no longer suffering unfair competition (for things they can produce), who could leave the alienated cities and go back home to the farm and the hunting & fishing, as would all the other landless refugees from the South, whose markets were ruined by subsidised import dumping and whose land was grabbed.

INOFO Convenors Council are proving what can be done with no membership fees and no central office, via direct relations between organisations. Opportunities were taken advantage of, to organise meetings in Nuremberg, Rome & Lagos, not to mention Seoul, Istanbul or Delhi. Of course the regional networks had their own regular or sporadic consultations, including on the occasion of larger events like seed festivals. Reports from the regional networks are presented separately.

This inter-continental network is primarily the sum of the relations within and between regional networks of existing organic farmers organisations. These relations are primordial. INOFO is not itself a new centralised organisation to join. This concept was confirmed at the previous assemblies in Korea & Istanbul. The result is a new forum where organic farmers organisations can decide on common strategy and can mandate their own external delegates in different forums, starting with national or regional farmers events. There are attempts under way to find modest long-term financing for one staff employee for each continent, perhaps seconded from existing organisations, to provide direct support for the regional networks and their face-to-face meetings across national boundaries.

The big impossible things take longer, and even getting farmers delegates to India in November 2017 has been something of a nightmare, due to lack of money, a major pre-occupation over the past year. The concept of effective fraternal relations between Organic farmers organisations has, however, been well defined and is now slowly taking root in working habits, whilst farmers are nonetheless amazingly tolerant of our very own *good* technocrats at every level, who are so deeply convinced that they alone run the Organic agriculture movement. In time we expect, here and there, to see also the results of improved influence on policy-makers at all levels, less by advocacy than by being the living proof of economic, ecological & social regeneration, by being living examples of long-term organic farming practice that all can see. Of course there are overwhelming non-technical problems to solve, such as where the state protects not farmers but only land grabbers; does not protect local markets from foreign dumping, but only protects exports; stands aside when families are driven out of traditional habitat by cowboys, loggers, gangsters, mono-culturalists, conservationists, debt-mongers, you name it. History will tell of the reversal of these trends. There being no end to history, it's never too late.

III: Perspective : the Peasant Class is making a comeback, thanks partly to the Organic Method of Production

There's a reason we forget past history. History is not a straight arrow. It's a meandering river and, as we drift downstream, we forget the land we left behind. For centuries we lived in rural societies, often semi-nomadic, usually as peasants or artisans rooted in the very local economies of the small scale, and rooted in an immediate social dimension. Then, rather suddenly, half of us no longer did so, and lost all memory of that. It must be remembered how unpredictable is historical change, how ephemeral is normality in social history. Private speculators today make public policy, profiting only the growth of private capital, even privatising water & common land and other natural resources, instead of the state being a public service and the nation making policy. If the peasant class is yet half of humanity, its direct political influence is nil. IFOAM is admirable in many ways but, even here, farmers have no influence compared to all the enterprising individual service providers and speculators. This recurring problem is explained by this passage from Arthur Waley « *The Tao Te Ching and its place in Chinese Thought* », his extrapolation from the end of chapter 49 of the works of *Han Fei Tsü*, of only 22 centuries ago (*Arthur Waley, [Allen & Unwin 1934, Grove Press 1958] The Folio Society 2010, pp56-57*):

"Admittedly the life of the peasant is much less agreeable than that of the scholar, the roaming politician, the manufacturer of luxuries and toys. For this very reason the state must do everything in its power to stem the inevitable drift from agriculture, on which the existence of the country depends, into unessential occupations. Above all, the rising influence of the merchant must be checked, for the whole power of the state lies in its power to punish or reward, and the existence of a class which rewards itself, and consequently has no incentive to seek public reward, is a menace to society. The number, then, of those who enrich themselves whether by commerce or by any form of unessential craft, is to be limited to the barest minimum, and their social position is to be the lowest in the state."

Whilst the peasant class is in decline in industrialised countries, it does yet represent about half the world's population! Already in her 2005 essay "*Les paysans sont de retour*" (Actes Sud) Silvia Pérez-Vitoria described the causes and motivations of the resistance of country-folk in many countries against the multinational bulldozer that drives "free" trade and protects nobody and nothing, especially not the farmers freedom to sell in local markets. She demonstrated that the future belongs to the peasants, those who organise. Within the Organic agriculture movements and all around them in the world at large, North and South, the farmers are diligently organising and they are proving the validity of their existence, of their free choice of mode of production, of their economies of the small scale, of their seed sovereignty. They are taking their rightful place in local markets. They are ready to enter the public policy arena, even if it often seems impossible to influence the powers that be because, where only the money is counted, only the money counts.. The moment when the tide turns always was imperceptible.

*Report submitted by the outgoing Convenors Council to INOFO General Assembly, Delhi, 8-XI-2017
See the list of Convenors newly elected to the INOFO Council for the coming 3 years,
plus also reports & news from regional networks, at : www.inofo.org/*