

Report of the Forum on Livestock Diversity: Defending Food Sovereignty and Livestock Keepers' Rights

September 1-4, 2007
Wilderswil, Switzerland



Defending livestock diversity is not a matter of genes, but of collective rights.

The representatives of 30 organizations of pastoralists, indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers and NGOs from 26 countries in both the North and the South came together in Wilderswil, Switzerland to discuss the role of livestock diversity in our livelihoods, production systems and cultures, and to plan our future strategies to defend our diversity. We met in parallel with FAO's International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources held in Interlaken. The Forum was facilitated by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty with the strong support of the LIFE Network, League for Pastoral Peoples and SWISSAID.

Issues related to plant genetic resources and the industrial model of agriculture have been treated for many years by farmers' organizations involved in the food sovereignty movement, but livestock production has not received the same attention from social organizations or civil society. However, with the growing presence of pastoralists, herders and Indigenous Peoples in the food sovereignty movement, and recent opportunities like the Nyeleni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty, livestock production models, and the livelihoods of small livestock producers – whether pastoralists, small farmers, indigenous peoples or sedentary herders – are starting to get deserved attention.

"We are diverse but we all want an agriculture of a human dimension and to remember that we are defending ways of life. The industrial model kills diversity."

Denys Duchesne, Union
Paysanne, Quebec

The present Forum on Livestock Diversity was a key moment to address livestock issues in a food sovereignty framework. In a forum that attempted to represent the complexity of the realities of diverse constituents of livestock

keepers, issues of access and control over territories, models of production, and collective rights came up strongly. Despite the diversity of constituents represented in the Forum, small livestock holders found themselves united in the framework of food sovereignty which highlighted common threats, while giving space for each to keep their specificities.

Industrial model of livestock production

A major theme of the Forum was a critique of the industrial model of livestock production. While countries like Canada and France have experienced industrial production at its most “advanced”, other countries of the south are just starting to experience it - such as Philippines, Pakistan and Korea – and others see it as a threat, especially when the link is made between the industrial model of production and the international trade system - such as Niger. Industrial livestock production in the south increasing very rapidly and is starting to overtake the north. For instance, Brazil has bypassed US as the largest meat exporter and Asia is not producing more milk than Europe. Southern governments are encouraged – through development aid, research cooperation, etc. to put aside their local breeds in favour of industrial breeds that produce huge quantities. In both north and south publicly funded research programmes, subsidies and regulations all favour the industrial production model over smallholder production. Yet this risky and high cost system is providing more and more of our food: globally, one third of pigs, one half of eggs, two thirds of milk and three quarters of broilers are produced from industrial breeding lines

The main reason for the loss of local animal breeds is the industrial system of livestock production, linked with global trade of these products. In this system of production and trade, local breeds are being kept only for niche markets for wealthy consumers.

Local breeds have been developed and sustained by local communities and the destruction of these communities is also resulting in the loss of the breeds. The communities of small-scale herders, both in the north and south, are losing their livelihoods in the following ways:

- land grabs and evictions based on systems of private property ownership
- forced sedenterisation policies and disruption of pastoral migration routes
- liberalization of markets
- contract farming (herders receive all inputs from the company that buys the product)
- large scale economic development projects such as mining (and their consequences such as the privatisation of water resources by transnational companies)
- agrofuel production schemes
- policies that aim to conserve nature through national parks and protected areas
- the imposition of trade rules that enable dumping, which destroys local markets, and that force the production of food based on the industrial model for export
- structural adjustment programmes and the privatization of land, water and veterinary services
- the drive for proprietary technologies, such as cloning and genetic modification.

“We were told that European farmers receive subsidies and that they are destroying us. It is very important to know that they also face similar problems.”

Edgard Lorenzo Capcha Condori,
Chirapaq, Peru

The important contribution of small holder livestock keeping to the economy is something that has received very little attention and needs to be examined closely. Even the few studies that have been done have shown that local, small production plays an important role in economies (FAO has recently done a

study on this). A study in Canada showed that small-scale herders face either no or less debt than the large-scale producers. But such studies are deliberately not followed up and not taken into account in decision-making. The government wants to export its expensive, high-tech industry to southern countries, even if this means denying the results of research.

Industrial livestock production requires high levels of investment in technology and receives subsidies and other resources, which distort markets. The costs of production are very high also because many of the inputs have to be imported. Many governments – increasingly in the south – have been investing heavily in industrial livestock production, for example by giving subsidies to the point that today industrial production is growing 7 times faster than smallholder production and the countries of the south are overtaking the countries of the north in terms of production. At the same time, many of the costs are not even taken into account because they are externalised and therefore governments and citizens are forced to pay them, such as the costs related to environmental pollution and treatment for health problems.

“Imported US meat is causing health problems, but it’s cheap and people don’t really know about its health effects. Farmers are struggling to preserve their production, but they are isolated from the people.”

Yi Jeong Ok, Via Campesina,
Korea

Industrial production is plagued by a number of health crises. This model of production is detrimental to the health of both humans and livestock. Marketing strategies are used to encourage high and unhealthy quantities of livestock products for consumption. Health measures that facilitate the global trade of industrially produced livestock are destroying our local small-scale production. Sanitary and hygiene regulations are defined under the control of the World Trade Organisation responding only to the demand to liberalise markets. The standards of health and quality of livestock products must respond to the needs of consumers and not the needs of industry. As in plant breeding, the hybrid animal breeds are based on very few lines and are therefore genetically poor, very unstable and vulnerable. They are kept alive by the high use of medication. Their genetic similarity and vulnerability has led to crises such as the bird flu epidemic. The quality of feed is very low in the industrial production system and the animals are raised in very unhealthy living conditions. As a result of eating the products of this type of production, humans are less resistant to diseases. There is a further danger that low quality and unhealthy livestock products are sent to markets in the south.

The high levels of investment required has led to an unprecedented concentration of, and dependence upon, the livestock breeding industry. Animal breeding is less and less in the hands of herders. Like plants, industrial breeds of livestock are based on hybrids which means that producers can’t do their own breeding, but must purchase new stock from the breeding companies each year. Within the livestock industry breeding and raising of animals is now totally separated. As mentioned above, breeding companies depend on very few breeding lines; most cattle and poultry and pig factory farms all over the world are using these breeding lines. Increasingly in the north, herders and farmers who want to have a sustainable way of production (such as organic farmers) are not able to find suitable breeding stock. Animal feed is bought and grown in the South (e.g. Brazil) and special feed is needed that makes the animals grow very rapidly which is very costly. The breeds are vulnerable to environmental conditions and diseases. Producers have contracts with breeding firms which force them to purchase breeding stock, feed and veterinary services from them. There is more concentration in the breeding sector meaning that there are fewer, and larger, breeding companies worldwide. For example, there are only four globally operating poultry breeding companies worldwide with only two of them controlling half of the world’s egg production.

Since there is overproduction in the north, their products are dumped at very low prices on the markets of the south, which forces small holders in the south out of the sector.

The industrial model has led to the following consequences:

- loss of small and family based production;
- smallholder bankruptcies and suicides;
- economic dependency, including through importation of feed; destruction of environment;
- young and new herders cannot enter into production because of economic barriers;
- breakdown of social relations;
- government research and breeding policies geared towards “high productivity” with the indiscriminate introduction of new breeds which have caused the loss of local breeds.

Livestock keepers’ rights and farmers’ rights

A major part of the discussion of the Forum was on the issue of the rights of livestock keepers, which is a concept developed by some civil society organizations in 2002 following the model of the concept of farmers’ rights.

“The fight for rights is about a process, not a product. One mistake we [NGOs developing the concept of farmers’ rights] made was to ask governments to negotiate what our rights should be. In fact, we should be making spaces at the international level for local voices.”

Henk Hobbelink, GRAIN

The concept of Livestock Keepers' Rights has been developed since 2002 by NGOs and pastoral organisations, notably the League for Pastoral Peoples and the LIFE network. They are now described as a bundle of rights including:

1. Recognition of livestock keepers as creators of breeds and custodians of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture
2. Recognition of the dependency of the sustainable use of traditional breeds on the conservation of their respective eco-systems
3. Recognition of traditional breeds as collective property, products of indigenous knowledge and cultural expression.
4. The right of the livestock keepers to make breeding decisions
5. Right of livestock keepers to participate in policy making processes on animal genetic resources for food and agriculture issues
6. Support for training and capacity-building of livestock keepers and provision of services along the food chain.

The discussion helped to clarify that the rights of livestock keepers are not only related to breeding, but also include other rights that are essential for truly sustainable livestock production systems: the right to land, water, veterinary and other services, culture, education and training, access to local markets, access to information and decision making.

There was also a discussion about the history of farmers' rights, how that concept was developed, and what are the challenges it currently faces in order to draw lessons for the movement to fight for the rights of livestock keepers. The groups (mainly NGOs) who first launched the call for farmers’ rights have put too much priority on talking with governments and not enough on talking with communities. Another lesson is that whether the issue is the rights of farmers or livestock keepers, the rights should be broadly conceived, and not just focusing on genetic resources. Similarly, we must make links

“The use of the word “rights” in “intellectual property rights” are not rights as we understand them, they are in fact monopoly privileges. We need to use more clear and appropriate language.”

Patrick Mulvany, Practical Action, ITDG

between the privatization of plants/crops and other types of privatization (such as land, water, etc.).

The NGOs who developed the concept of farmers' rights came to believe -- wrongly -- that the inclusion of “access and benefit sharing” (ABS) in the Convention on Biological Diversity was a big victory for them, but in fact they now believe that ABS helps to advance privatization of biodiversity. One problem was that NGOs made a very big issue of biopiracy whereas in fact it may not have been such a real danger. The response of the industry to accusations of biopiracy was to come up with the proposal of ABS which has led us down the wrong path. The real danger today is not really biopiracy or genetic engineering for animals (although it could become more important in coming years), but the industrial model of production. IPRs (intellectual property rights) are a problem insofar as they sustain the industrial model.

Collective rights vs. intellectual property rights

The concept of collective rights was developed by indigenous peoples and recently recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The fight for recognition of their collective rights has been crucial for indigenous peoples because they play an important part in many indigenous societies. But even in non-indigenous communities, it is clear that ownership, knowledge and innovation at the community level are often of a collective nature, therefore local knowledge and biodiversity can only be protected and promoted through collective rights. In Italy, for instance, there are laws to defend collective rights over genetic resources.

Collective rights are incompatible with intellectual property rights systems because these systems enable exclusive and private monopoly control. It follows that there must be no patents or other forms of intellectual property rights on biodiversity and the knowledge related to it.

Exclusive and private monopoly control is also problematic because it makes impossible types of land use that rely on sharing access between different users. The imposition of exclusive use of land by one group in areas where access was shared has led to many conflicts and wars throughout the world. What is needed is to revive and develop ways of sharing access to land and other resources with pastoralists, indigenous peoples, small farmers and other food producers according to equitable, but controlled, access.

Collective knowledge is intimately linked to cultural diversity, particular ecosystems, and biodiversity and cannot be dissociated from either of these three aspects. Any definition and implementation of the rights of livestock keepers should take this fully into account. It is not possible to conserve animal diversity without protecting and strengthening the local communities that currently maintain and nurture this diversity.

Governments should accept and guarantee collective rights and community control over natural resources, including communal grazing lands and migration routes, water, and livestock breeds. They should engage

“In our cultures we have not had the same concept of ownership of land and natural resources as was introduced by the colonizers. We have always had the concept, not of ownership, but of right to access. Now our herders and farmers are thinking of exclusive ownership because it was imposed on them. But as soon as you adopt exclusive ownership of land pastoralism dies. Exclusivity means that land has only one use so how do you defend diversity? The role of our organisations is to defend diversity.”

Bouréïma Dodo, Association pour la Redynamisation de l'Élevage au Niger (AREN), Niger

in creating legally binding international instruments which would oblige States to guarantee the full respect of these rights.

How to move forward

The participants developed a common vision for moving forward: livestock keeping that is on a human scale; that fits into a food sovereignty framework; and defending a way of life that is linked deeply with our cultures and spirituality and not just aimed at production. With this overall vision, we developed the following action points:

“During the Soviet period we had only industrial livestock production, but now in remote areas of Kyrgyzstan, pastoralism is making a comeback.”

Akylbek Rakaev, Kyrgyz Sheep Breeder's Association, Kyrgyzstan

- Building our capacities to organize ourselves to counter the pressure to conform with the industrial model;
- Fighting for our lands, territories and grazing pastures, our migratory routes, including trans-boundary routes;
- Building alliances with other social movements with similar aims and continuing to build international solidarity, including with consumers based on the health and environmental arguments that favour small-scale over industrial production;
- Continuing to further develop alternative research approaches and technologies that allow us to be autonomous and put control of genetic resources and livestock breeding in the hands of livestock keepers and other small-scale producers;
- Organising ourselves to conserve rare breed;

- Finding ways of sharing access to land and other resources with pastoralists, indigenous peoples, small farmers and other food producers according to equitable, but controlled, access;
- Developing alternatives, such as direct producer-consumer links;
- Increasing awareness in northern countries of the impact of the industrial model, northern countries' policies and foreign aid on the south (such as the destruction of local markets);
- Supporting the many local struggles that exist but that have very little repercussions at the international or even regional level.

“The young generation of farmers in my region are more interested in diversity, whereas their parents were working according to the industrial model.”

Jean Louis, confederation Paysanne, France

FAO and the International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources

The FAO Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources contains a good analysis of some of the key causes behind the destruction of the biodiversity of domestic animals and the undermining of the livelihoods of local communities that nurture this diversity. The Report squarely points to the industrial livestock system as one of the main forces behind this destruction.

However, in the Global Plan of Action there is nothing that addresses these causes. Instead of addressing the cause of the problem, which is the industrial model of production, their main proposed solution is to promote *ex situ* conservation, i.e. keeping genetic material in gene banks. The livestock industry knows that it's on the verge of collapse because of its dependence on a very narrow genetic basis. The Global Plan of Action is a plan to get support for the livestock industry to sustain itself at the cost of governments that must pay for the conservation of the genes that are of interest to the industry.

Currently most conservation of livestock breeds is community-based, in other words most of the genes are not in the gene banks, therefore the FAO conference is giving far too much importance to conservation through gene banks. Since *ex situ* conservation is expensive, the Plan does not even aim at conserving all genetic material, but rather asks governments to choose, on a scientific basis, which genes they want to lose and which they want to keep. The main point of the Plan is that diversity is being lost and this must be accepted and governments therefore must find the genes that they want to conserve. The question is, how can we know what material we might need in the future and that should therefore be kept? Other problems with depending solely on gene banks are that they link the genetic diversity of breeds to a particular production system, the high-cost industrial model, and take the genes out of the hands and control of the communities.

Other elements of the Plan that were criticised were that any legal instruments should be devised at the national - and not international – level, and that any support to livestock conservation should not be trade-distorting. Financing for the Plan was the most controversial issue throughout the negotiations.

For the participants of the Forum, it was totally unacceptable that governments should agree on a plan that does not challenge the policies that cause the loss of diversity, nor even commit themselves to make any substantial financial engagements to implement their own Plan.

Since we do not agree with the governments or FAO on the fundamental issues there is no point in trying to influence the direction of the FAO plans. Their policies are changed by pressure, not lobbying to change a word here or there in the conference documents.

Annex 1: Interaction of civil society with the FAO conference

1. Reading the result of our Forum, the Wilderswil Declaration on Livestock Diversity, in the plenary of the FAO Conference
2. Organizing several side events during the FAO Conference
3. Co-organizing with the Swiss government an equal footing debate between civil society and governments
4. Meeting with FAO staff to understand better the process of the conference negotiations

Annex 2: Wilderswil Declaration on Livestock Diversity

Attached

Annex 3: Agenda of the Forum

Attached

Annex 4: Participants

Attached