



**ICENECDEV(International Centre for Environmental Education and Community  
Development )**

**Farmer Major Group**

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**Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable  
Consumption & Production**

**Sustainable Food Systems in Farmer Communities**

What is sustainability? The sustenance of today's standard of production and consumption without undermining resources for tomorrow. At all levels, sustainability issues are complex and intertwined, with wide-ranging implications across the economic, social and environmental domains. At the micro-level, smallholder farmers and rural communities are no exception.

But what is the contribution of rural communities, farmers and food producers in ensuring sustainability? After all, they have been excluded from the benefits of globalization and capitalism reaped by the major urban areas of industrialized countries. How can we ask rural farmers to renounce the ambitious high-paced unsustainable growth that the developed world has enjoyed for decades? How do global issues of sustainable production and consumption affect local communities? If capitalism and unsustainable growth have insofar excluded rural communities from participation, the same cannot be said of sustainable development, that must manifest itself as a concerted and coordinated action at all the levels of human

activity. And the sustainable action starts with dialogue and understanding. How can we persuade farmers to listen and start exercising more sustainable development practices?

Innovations in sustainable development do not need to be groundbreaking technologies. We do not need giant agrochemical conglomerates to produce the next revolutionary pesticide formula. What we need is an understanding of the broad implications of our actions and the alignment of our interests on win-win long term solutions. *Education*, not technology, is the innovation we are looking for.

We are talking of smallholder farmers who, in spite of their effort and hard work, have remained excluded from access to basic services of health, shelter and nutrition. When global catastrophes arise, farmers are the ones feeling the consequences. When drought strikes, farmers are the ones losing their harvest and endangering the survival of their families. When war and political crisis lead market prices to collapse, smallholder farmers are the ones indebting themselves just to make a living.

And it is with farmers that we should start tackling the sustainability challenge.

*Education* is the tool we choose.

*Education* on the environmental front, showing that the respect of land, the correct use of chemicals and the responsible reduction of waste have both immediate and long-term effect on crops. When we are in the field, we need workshops and concrete scientific applications to demonstrate the detrimental effects of unsustainable production practices. We need to show chemical reactions, practical models of soil degradation and success stories of safeguarding biodiversity while making an economic profit.

Because at the end of the day, profit is what leads unsustainable production. The capitalist system, has not only impeded farmers to lead a decent livelihood (let us think of cruel market dynamics and unscrupulous middlemen who make their livelihood purely on exploiting the Poor), but also captured them in a vicious circle of growing impoverishment and instability. And *Education* can show that ecological respect and sustainable farming practices do result in improved long-term profits while preserving the environment and hedging against the risk of the ever-more frequent climatic catastrophes.

We, who have never learned that “the more is not the better”, are now faced with the hardest challenge of teaching our victims the lesson we have never been able to master. When a farmer looks at the city and aspires to consume more, to be more economically empowered, and to look more like the civilized urban society, who are we to say “no”? Why can't a farmer pursue her ambition as every urban citizen would do?

They, who produce food and livelihood for all of us, are the ones more at risk of undernourishment and economic fragility. They, who have been long excluded from the development project, are now struggling to catch up exposing themselves to unsurmountable risks and vulnerabilities.

*Education* is again the answer to our problem. *Education* that starts with respect, at all levels, of the role of farmers within our society. *Education* that starts in the cities, showing that there are alternatives to the capitalist consumption model, the more is not the better, and every individual is worth of access to her basic human rights.

*Education* that reaches the farmers and makes them conscious of the *value* they have within our society.

There are indeed alternatives to the rush to economic growth so many of our farmers aspire to. *Education* for our farmers to *value* their resources and pursue stability of a secure life rather than ambition to an urban lifestyle is a necessary step to grant sustainability at all levels. Who will feed us if, in our race towards sustainable development, we make again the mistake of excluding our farmers?

Indigenous sustainable development takes into account the desires and ambitions of local farming communities while complying with the directives of the global development agenda. *Education* of our society, at the local and global levels, at the rural and urban levels, and at the civil and governmental levels, can enable us to meet halfway, raising their standard of living while safeguarding local resources.

*Education* on the implications of unsustainable growth and its consequent destruction of the environment. *Education* that poverty is not a stigma, but a situational factor that can be alleviated through hard work and consciousness of one's choices. *Education* to the latest agroforestry techniques enabling the farmers to do more with less while preserving the environment, slowing soil degradation and re-filling the land with the nourishment it has lost.

Finally, *Education* to do more with less. Practical seminars and workshops to demonstrate the farmers how to make a decent living from their spare resources, maximizing yields while retaining the land's potential for future production. *Education* to ultimately show the *value* and *dignity* of farming work, empowering smallholders within their economic capacity to achieve a decent and satisfactory standard of life. *Education* for all, to understand that there is no long-term sustainability if we do not start today from respecting the environment and dimensioning our ambitions to accommodate the needs of each and every of us.