

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Nathalie Grima

Project Coordinator, Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust

Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust will be holding its annual Fair Trade festival, WorldFest, on Saturday 9th May at Ġnien l-Indipendenza in Sliema from 10.00am to 10.00pm.

The theme for this year's eight edition of WorldFest, which coincides with World Fair Trade Day, is "Kieku l-Ikel Jitkellem". This theme goes beyond 'Food Security' and focuses more on 'Food Sovereignty. "Food Sovereignty is the right of individuals, communities, peoples and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food



and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies". This is the definition given by the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, a global network of NGOs/CSOs concerned with food sovereignty issues and programmes.

We might take this principle for granted, but a quick look inside our kitchen cupboards and fridge will soon surprise us with how much of our consumption consists of imported products that used to or are still grown locally. This situation is even worse in poor countries, where heavy American and European subsidies lead to the dumping of products such as rice, to countries like India where it is common knowledge that rice is one of the main agricultural resources. In these situations farmers cannot compete with the import market prices and therefore they are thrown into a vicious circle of poverty, because if they don't sell their own produce they cannot afford to buy imported products.

Fair Trade, Human Rights and the Eradication of Hunger

The eradication of hunger will never happen without putting human rights first. This entails, for example, that agricultural policies are introduced so that marginalised farmers have access to productive resources and land, that there is an adequate budget allocation for agriculture and that rural employment is encouraged so that local sustainability is developed and people do not have to move to big cities. It is a known fact that internal migration to cities does not always result in a better livelihood. On the contrary, people tend to end up in exploitative labour markets because they have no other choice in order to survive.

Fair Trade converts this unjust situation into an alternative mode of trade. Local producers in the South are supported to grow local agricultural products and safeguarding the original seeds. In this way, they are also sustaining biodiversity which is destroyed by mass monocultural production. In India, for example, 10 varieties of rice are grown on 70% of the territory. This compares dismally to the 30 000 different varieties that were grown in the past.

“Liberty,” says Vandana Shiva, “is not only the liberty of gaining capital. It is also that of the micro-organisms that can fertilize to produce new seed, of animals that can freely graze on pastures, of small-scale farmers who can save and exchange seeds, and of consumers who have the right to know what they are eating.”

Fair Trade supports other standards such as the capacity building of women. Statistics and studies show that women and children are those who suffer most in conditions of poverty. Fair Trade organisations strive for a gender balance not only in the production chain but also in management roles.

In Fair Trade organisations the sustainability of the producers is guaranteed, because there is a close trade relationship between the workers and importers in the North. The production chain is shortened and prices are negotiated for the greater benefit of the producer rather than to increase the profits of the distributor in the North. Now investors may think this is unprofitable or unsustainable, because a business can never survive in this way. And yet countless success stories prove that Fair Trade can survive with both parties making a decent profit.

The difference is that Fair Trade eliminates workers’ exploitation and all those involved, from producers and small-scale middlemen, to importers and distributors, get their fair share of income. No huge amount of profit is made for the benefit of one player at the expense of another. Therefore the system is radically changed and works well for all those involved. Human rights lie at the very core of Fair Trade.

The 30,000 marginalised farmers involved in the Navdanya Fair Trade initiative in India founded by Vandana Shiva are committed to sustainable agriculture, defending the farmers’ rights and safeguarding rice as one of the best means for achieving food sovereignty.

Global and Local Sustainability



Fair Traders believe in local sustainability, and therefore Koperattiva Kummerç Ġust, for example, supports Maltese and Gozitan agriculture. Given the choice, we prefer to purchase local produce and we would like to be able to buy more local organically grown fruit and vegetables. We feel that not enough is being done to offer farmers the support they need to go organic. This is by no means an easy task, but the local authorities and other players can make the change easier for farmers. We are sure that if more organic produce is available, the demand for it will grow considerably.

This is why this year, Koperattiva Kummerç Ġust will be once again holding WorldFest in collaboration with other local organizations that are active in favour of local agricultural sustainability and food sovereignty. By choosing local produce and Fair Trade products, we believe that we can make a difference in the way global economic, environmental and trade situations are addressed.

As consumers we need to approach our everyday consumption in a more holistic way. This approach

requires, for example, awareness about sustainable food production methods, pesticide-free agriculture and control on meat consumption, running in parallel with the already existing awareness of workers' rights, wherever they are, waste-recycling and environmental protection.

People have become alienated with low price shopping. With all the supermarkets and shopping centres bombarding us with weekly offers and unbeatable prices, it is no wonder that we have established ourselves as a price-conscious society. What is often not on the shopping lists of consumers is the question: How am I affecting food sustainability? Or more bluntly: Are we compromising our own future? Will I be able to buy fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruit in a few years' time? Will I be able to buy rice that is not monoculturally grown or genetically modified? What cancer affecting preservatives does the food I buy contain? Does the cotton I wear everyday contain traces of pesticides? How do my small, everyday choices affect global food security? Are these issues too far removed from our shores to warrant attention?

Consumers still lack a lot of awareness in this field. It is not entirely their fault. The transnational corporations that are everywhere around us use their vast financial resources to brand and advertise their products, and they manage to sideline these issues that would otherwise engage us all as consumers.

WorldFest'09 will be addressing these issues in two public fora. The first one, chaired by William Grech of Food First Malta, will be in English and starts at 6.00pm. The speakers will be Riccardo Franciolini (Italy), Eric Van Monckhoven (Belgium, Italy), Prof. Carmel Cassar (Slow Food Malta), Vince Caruana (University lecturer), and Victor Galea (Ager Foundation, Gozo). The forum that starts at 7.00pm, chaired by Anna Zammit, will be in Maltese. The speakers will be Angele Deguara (Koperattiva Kummerç Ġust), Ġwann Xerri OP, Joe Galea (Koperattiva Rurali Manikata), Evarist Bartolo (PL), Carmel Cacopardo (AD), Philip Mifsud (PN) and Clement Azzopardi (Għaqda tal-Produtturi Gomriża).

For the full programme of events throughout the day, which end with a free concert featuring writers from Malta and Ireland, and music by Danjeli, Antoine Vella and BRIKKUNI, visit www.l-arka.org or www.l-ikel.org.

Collaborating organisations in Worldfest are: Food First Malta, Friends of the Earth, Gaia Foundation, Għaqda tal-Produtturi Gomriża, Global Action Schools, Moviment Graffitti, Inizjamed, Manikata Farmers' Cooperative, Slow Food Malta, The Arabic Culture Information Society and Third World Group.

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