



CITIZENS FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

THE PROBLEM

Increasingly, the current perception of food is shaped by, and based on, the media advertising stemming from dominant globalized, industrialized food systems. The industrial food system presents a systematized and standardized picture of what is nutritious and delicious food. This seemingly healthy and attractive food is distributed via various market outlets to the population in Africa.

An increasing number of people in Africa are detached from the food production system, and they are many now, especially in the urban environment, who do not know where their food comes from. This delinking of production and consumption is

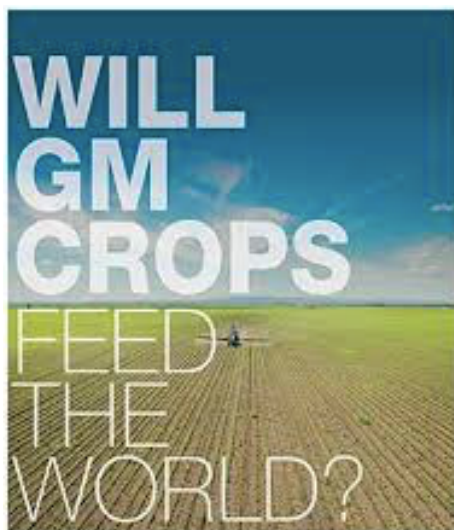


one of the crises that is taking place in Africa. This delinking of consumption and creation is pushing the decrease in the diversity of food that we eat. Fewer and fewer food varieties are promoted and sold in the market. Low diversity is resulting in a health crisis that we are witnessing in the continent. While we have used over 7,000 foods throughout human history to make up our diets, over 80 percent of global menus are now based on a few staple commodities – wheat, rice, soybeans, maize – and limited breeds of livestock (FAO, 2018). The origins and provenance of our food are also mostly obscured, resulting in "food from nowhere" (McMichael, 2009).

Promotion of healthier living based on eating nutritious and healthy food grown in an ecologically sustainable way is still peripheral to the mainstream policies and developments.

While the need to promote the importance of eating nutritious food is picking up as part of Civil Society advocacy, and also being adopted by some international agencies, there's still no strong link between nutritious foods, health, and the food production systems. What is on the rise today is the consumption of processed and fast foods. These are mainly imported and with high sugar and low nutrient levels. With urbanization and economic growth in most countries in Africa, two things have happened: one, the occurrence of supermarkets where imported and processed foods are more popularly sold; and two, the emergence of the so-called middle class and urban citizens who are vital in sustaining the demand for processed and fast foods. Fast food chains are also slowly being embraced in Africa and along with it new consumption habits.

Whereas many civil society organizations such as AFSA are actively campaigning for safe foods and the need for governments to promote consumption of nutritious foods, many governments are seemingly still looking the other way



and instead supporting the infiltration of GMOs and highly processed foods into the food system. The systematic standardization of food consumption/systems is ensuring the loss of biodiversity and hence diversity in nutrition. Small scale producers practicing agroecology are losing land and water sources to large scale companies.

All of this has undermined the fundamental rights of citizens to the satisfaction of basic needs, to freedom of choice, and to a healthy and sustainable environment.

The narrative that large-scale industrial agriculture will feed the growing population is going largely uncontested due to the mostly silent voice from the citizens. While the majority are primarily aware and desire to consume nutritious and healthy foods, they are not actively demanding for the production and protection of these foods through policies that promote and protect agroecology.

This, therefore, presents the need to create a link between the larger citizenry and producers by strengthening the consumer voice to demand nutritious and healthy food.

For the above to happen, citizen movements have to be strengthened to appreciate the concept of agroecology and to demand food and agricultural systems and practices that are healthy, equitable, efficient, resilient, and culturally diverse.

THE SOLUTION

Research: We need to research African traditional food systems, initiatives that are available to produce healthy and nutritious food, the drive in consumer demand for certain kind of food, and mechanisms to counter the promotion of junk food.

Education: We need to educate African citizens on the value of traditional food, on the social and ecological impacts of junk food and on what they can do to avoid the adverse effects of junk food.



Advocacy: we need to advocate for an integrated food system policy in Africa. The production of a food system policy is a very critical exercise that AFSA is planning to undertake at the Regional level. Both the process of producing an African food system policy and the resulting document is essential to build consensus among all of the actors as well as creating a partnership for future deliberate and collaborative action. We also need to work on food labelling in language that citizens can understand.

Mobilization: we need to mobilize African communities in various ways. One way is using art. Art can be utilized by organizing road shows, caravans, videos, etc. We also need to develop a food manifesto where each community is encouraged to develop their own food policy.

KEY MESSAGES

- We need to promote traditional African foods. We need to know what we have before endorsing another food system.
- We recognize that our food is enriched through the seeds and culinary cultures that came from outside and became

indigenized, but we also need to promote our food systems as they have proved time and again to be nutritious and healthy. We also need to be open to include other vegetables and seeds found to be nutritious and healthy and are not disrupting our food sovereignty.

- A lot of food is dumped on Africa through illegal means. Dumping of unhealthy and subsidized foods also creates price competition. We need to be aware of where our food comes from and what it contains.
- What we eat profoundly influences what we produce. The more we delink from the production system, the more our ignorance about what we eat increases. We need to promote agroecology as it is a food production system which produces healthy food while protecting agricultural biodiversity.
- Relying on fast and junk food deskills African food producers. Women in Africa know food production and processing.
- Citizens should know the nutritional value and the health impact of the food that they are eating. Most of the food that is sold in supermarkets in Africa has misleading information on diet and some are written in language that the majority do not understand.
- Export orientation reduces the diversity of our crops, narrows our food choices and reduces the nutritional content.
- Although food aid is crucial to alleviate disaster in some instances, it can also disrupt the local food production system and can be weaponized to influence African citizens to get used to some food and later serve as a market for that food which has come in as aid. So we need to be careful of food aid.



AFSA is a broad alliance of civil society actors who are part of the struggle for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. It is a network of networks, currently with 37 members active in 50 African countries. These include African food producer networks, African NGO networks, indigenous people's organizations, faith based organizations, women and youth groups, consumer movements, and international organizations that support the stance of the alliance.

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