

## Report on the workshop: Women, Diversity and Agriculture

### Strategies for survival and solidarity

**Organisers and moderators:** ✉ [Anna Gyorgy](mailto:anna.gyorgy@wloe.org), Women and Life on Earth (WLOE e.V. [www.wloe.org](http://www.wloe.org)), Germany/USA, Sabine Brückmann, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF e.V. [www.wecf.org](http://www.wecf.org)), Germany

#### Outline:

The goal of this workshop was to identify and discuss ways and means to protect and secure communities, healthy foods and agricultural production by engaging and empowering women. Based on (a summary of) the information, analyses and examples presented at the Tuesday workshop, where do we go from here? We looked for examples of successful campaigns, solidarity actions and networking, and heard from workshop participants from various regions about programs and actions that may be relevant for others.

Thanks to volunteer translators, the workshop invited participation in German, English, Spanish and French.

#### Participating groups:

Women and Life on Earth e.V. [www.wloe.org](http://www.wloe.org)

Women in Europe for a Common Future [www.wecf.org](http://www.wecf.org)

genanet - focal point Gender, Environment, Sustainability [www.genanet](http://www.genanet)

Frauen Netzwerk für Frieden e.V. [www.frauennetzwerk-fuer-frieden.de](http://www.frauennetzwerk-fuer-frieden.de)

#### Presenters included:

**Maria Mies**, co-founder of Diverse Women for Diversity [www.navdanya.org/dwd/index.htm](http://www.navdanya.org/dwd/index.htm)

**Marie Aminata Khan**, Gender Focal Point, Secretariat CBD, The “Gender Plan of Action” in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity

**Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen**, author and academic, Berlin, “The new Gardening and Greening movement: biodiversity from inner city vacant lots, urban farms and community gardens.”

**Farida Akhter**, co-founder of Diverse Women for Diversity, executive director of the Bangladesh policy and advocacy institute UBINIG.

**Hear her speech at the Planet Diversity Demonstration** (English with German translation) at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6UBLKp7zRs>

**Claudia Gimena Roa**, Fundaexpresion – Colombia,  [www.fundaexpresion.org](http://www.fundaexpresion.org), The Campesino School of Agroecology and the Women’s Peasant Association of Santander

**Izabella Byszewska**, Social Ecological Institute (SEI), Poland: Saving and serving traditional foods and dishes

**Sabine Brückmann**, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF e.V.),: Urban-rural partnerships, for instance in Munich and the surrounding region

## **Summary from Sabine Brückmann, WECF:**

The goal of this workshop was to identify and discuss ways and means to protect and secure communities, healthy foods and agricultural production by engaging and empowering women.

The first speaker was Maria Mies, ecofeminist and co-founder of Diverse Women for Diversity. She thought it would be a terrible thing if the whole world was opened up for investors in food. "This will have enormous consequences and not only for poor countries." According to her we have to do something against it. "This is nothing new, we talked about hunger and kept talking about it, in 1996 and in 2008. It's not just the big multinationals, or WTO or the World Bank who follow this policy of globalisation, liberalisation. That is the policy today and was the policy years ago. All the big UN organisations, media, everybody says that we have to produce food in order to combat hunger, but we don't seem to learn from it. We have to fight the big corporations who really profit from this. Food security is the main basis for life on earth, without diversity there will not be life on earth. We have gone back, we are not going forward. "Where do we go from now? It is important to reflect, otherwise we have to repeat the same things again and again. We have to make clear that it is not just poverty in the poor countries that we have to fight; now hunger is threatening the rich countries – it is already visible in the US."

### **We are not gender, we are women**

The next speaker, Marie Aminata Khan from the Montreal secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity, said that a CBD program was training women, and specifically indigenous women, on how to make their voices heard. A critical note from the audience was that it was not the women who should be trained to be heard, but the men who should be trained to listen! Another critical remark was made about the strategic objectives of the CBD concerning gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the field of biodiversity. "We are not gender, we are women. Gender does not exist," was one comment that found a lot of support.

### **Urban gardens**

Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, author and academic from Berlin, presented a slideshow about urban gardening "The new Gardening and Greening movement: biodiversity from inner city vacant lots, urban farms and community gardens." Elisabeth has researched and written about urban gardens in New York City, and presented photos from NYC's Bronx and Harlem. In the Red Hook market in the Bronx, women and youngsters were selling their own garden vegetables. Young boys are proud to build their community market; an informal system in the rich cities as they do not have to pay taxes. There are ever more organic gardens growing in Harlem and the Bronx. Even the richer parts of New York have community gardens. Now there's a second wave of organic gardening attracting young people.

### **Hope**

Next speaker was Farida Akhter, executive director of the Bangladesh policy and advocacy institute UBINIG. She asked the group: "How are you going to feed 6 billion people? But biotechnology cannot feed the world. By 2010 we would feed the world and we still have 850 million hungry people in this world – this is the contribution of biotechnology."

Fortunately, she said, biodiversity has become an issue. The farmers are coming to their big meetings. And when they speak out you can see that that changes the whole thing. In the woman's movement in Bangladesh biodiversity has become a big issue. There is a positive change. That is the hope.


## Food and water

Statements followed from Rosalie Ouoba from Burkina Faso. There men are always approached first when it comes to agriculture and biodiversity, while the women are taking care of the garden and raise vegetables outside the house. Another testimony came from Claudia Gimena Roa of Columbia, a heartfelt report from a mother of a five year old son from a country at war.

Everyone agreed that where biodiversity was intact, there was food and water. Food and water should not be privatised, bought or sold. The Columbian woman heard on her flight to Madrid the crew talking to each other: "We are running out of water for the second class passengers." There is something definitely wrong she thought, when we have to buy water, because then we are impoverishing ourselves.

Izabella Byszewska of the Social Ecological Institute (SEI), Poland told about saving and serving traditional foods and dishes. She got involved in a project bridging between Poland, Ukraine and Germany Green Bridges, where small farmers are rediscovering small varieties of local produce and reintroduc them onto the market. This can bring money into the area, can solve ecological issues and nature and tourism can be developed.

Source: <http://www.wecf.org/>

**Documentation:** A film team is working with WLOE and WECF to document the Women of Planet Diversity, from the opening Demonstration and Festival (especially the Women's Pavilion,  [see](#)) on May 12 through the end of the conference. Workshop presentations and individual interviews were filmed during the congress. The organizers hope that this project can continue and expand, pending additional participation and funding.