

Polish NGOs' contribution to work towards food sovereignty and fighting hunger

Introduction

An important factor heavily influencing Polish farming is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union with its subsidies. Farmers are likely nowadays to sow crops that will grant them EU subsidies. This relates also to organic agriculture. While organic crops still constitute only 1% of the overall production in Poland, in the recent years this sector has enjoyed a significant growth connected to the EU subsidies. Unfortunately, this does not translate into the greater accessibility of organic products on the Polish market.

There is a growing interest in Poland in supporting the idea of local food production and consumption. An increasing number of farmer organizations are interested in regaining control of their food and agricultural systems. Many NGOs support this idea and promote local organic production and responsible consumption through activities aimed at different target groups (students, farmers, policy makers etc.). In general, Polish society understands the need to support local farmers as providers of good quality food produced with environmentally sound methods. The main problem is that trade policy is geared towards big food networks providing food at low prices – unfortunately the price of the product is still the most important factor behind consumers' choices during shopping. Educational and awareness raising programs in Poland (directed mostly at young people) are trying to change this attitude, but any visible transformation will not be possible without the change of the current food policy.

Working for local democracy

Polish activities geared towards food sovereignty are still rather modest, especially if one defines food sovereignty, as does the organization Via Campesina, as the right of communities to decide on their food policy. Nevertheless, there is a number of groups and organizations in various regions of Poland working towards the reform of the law which would allow greater participation of citizens in decision-making processes at the local level. Deciding, for example, how local municipalities spend their funds can be considered a good start to working for food sovereignty. In Sopot, a town in the northern Poland, the local town council has accepted, after two years of campaigning by Sopot Development Initiative¹ (*Sopocka Inicjatywa Rozwojowa*), a groundbreaking resolution initiating in this town so-called participatory budgeting for quite a significant amount of 3 million PLN. In another Polish city, Łódź, participatory budgeting has been introduced in a number of community councils, which can be a good solution in large cities.

Working for local food

If one understands food sovereignty in the broader sense, as a return of the food economy to being more locally based and as activities aimed at building the independence of local communities from external food suppliers, then such initiatives have been on the rise in Poland, though surely they are still not enough.

In 2001 the International Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside – ICPPC² (*Międzynarodowa Koalicja dla Ochrony Polskiej Wsi*) was formed. This organization works for the protection of small, traditional farms in Poland, promotes organic agriculture and opposes the introduction of GMO into Polish agriculture. Its work has been recognised by

¹ www.sopockainicjatywa.org

² www.icppc.pl

mainstream institutions: the Coalition leaders have received the British Airways award and the Goldman Prize (the so-called Ecological Nobel) as well as the Gold Cross of Merit from the President of Poland. The office of ICPPC, located in the Sunflower Farm – Ecological Technology Centre³ in Stryszów, has had numerous famous visitors including Prince Charles and candidates for Miss Supranational 2010.

In 2005, the Publishing House “Green Brigades”⁴ (*Wydawnictwo “Zielone Brygady”*), owned by the Foundation for the Support of Ecological Initiatives⁵ (*Fundacja Wspierania Inicjatyw Ekologicznych – FWIE*), organized Local Food Festival⁶ in Krakow bringing together a significant number of local food producers from the region. The Festival was also an opportunity to promote two publications on the topic: “Local food, global prosperity: Action pack”⁷ and “Bringing the Food Economy Home: Local Alternatives to Global Agribusiness”⁸ by Helena Norberg-Hodge, Steven Gorelick and Todd Merrifield.

Currently, EkoMost Foundation⁹ has plans to organize on one of the markets in Krakow a regular bazaar with local, organic food. A similar initiative, called Biobazar, has been operating already for a few months in Warsaw.

In various parts of Poland, there have been recurrent attempts to set up food cooperatives or organic box schemes delivering organic food directly from farmers to consumers. Unfortunately, they usually disappear over time. Among the latest initiatives of this kind are “Green Fields”¹⁰ (*“Zielona Pola”*) in Jordanowo and “From a Farmer”¹¹ (*“Od Rolnika”*) in Tarnów.

Food sovereignty and working for coherence of European policies

Apart from the abovementioned activities at the local level, equally important is the issue of the coherence of the European Union’s and its Member States’ policies in agriculture, trade and international cooperation with the development of sustainable family agriculture in the countries of the Global South. Without it, communities, for example in Africa, will not have a chance to fulfil their right to food and food sovereignty as their local agriculture is undermined by policies of rich countries. A growing number of European NGOs, in cooperation with farmer organization from developing countries, is becoming involved in the advocacy activities within this topic.

In recent years, also Polish NGOs have been joining these initiatives. Starting in 2006 representatives from such organizations as Polish Green Network¹² (*Polska Zielona Sieć – PZS*), Polish Ecological Club¹³ (*Polski Klub Ekologiczny – PKE*) and Polish Humanitarian Action¹⁴ (*Polska Akcja Humanitarna*) participated in the series of international seminars

³ www.icppc.pl/eko-cel/eng

⁴ www.zb.eco.pl

⁵ www.fwie.eco.pl

⁶ www.zb.eco.pl/festiwal

⁷ www.zb.eco.pl/article/byCategory/48,1

⁸ www.zb.eco.pl/article/byCategory/199,1

⁹ www.ekomost.pl

¹⁰ www.zielonepola.com

¹¹ www.odrolnika.pl

¹² www.zielonasiec.pl

¹³ www.pkegliwice.pl

¹⁴ www.pah.org.pl

organized by Collectif AlimenTerre, an initiative bringing together three organizations: French Committee for International Solidarity¹⁵ (*Comité français pour la solidarité internationale – CFSI*), SOS Faim Belgium and SOS Faim Luxembourg¹⁶. Three seminars were attended also by representatives of farmer organizations from Europe and Africa, consumer organizations as well as political decision-makers.

The first seminar took place in Cameroon and allowed the participants to formalize their contacts and to share their experience. Among the attendees was Jan Ardanowski, at that time the Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Poland.

Next seminar was organized in 2007 in Lublin, Poland. During the meeting the representatives of NGOs from Poland, Brazil, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Ukraine and other countries prepared together the so-called “Lublin Declaration”. The document called on the European Union to grant the Global South countries the right to regional integration and to their own agricultural policy which would allow them to achieve food security and to develop sustainable agriculture. This declaration formed the basis for “An appeal for coherent European policies”, a common position of European and African non-governmental organizations prepared during the seminar in 2008 in Luxembourg.

Since the seminars the cooperation between Polish and European organizations in the advocacy for food sovereignty have become closer. The common advocacy activities are directed mainly at political decision-makers, including especially Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), with the aim of sensitizing them to the issues of food sovereignty and the necessity to take into consideration the food situation of the Global South countries in agricultural, trade and development policies of the EU and its Member States.

Within the frame of the FEED THE WORLD / ALIMENTERRE campaign¹⁷ (kampania WYŻYWIĆ ŚWIAT), coordinated by PZS, PKE and CFSI and co-financed by the European Union, an international seminar “EU policy coherence for development and food sovereignty” was organized in Warsaw in 2010. Among the participant were guests from European and African countries as well as representatives of Polish NGOs, including such organizations as: Polish Humanitarian Action, Institute of Global Responsibility¹⁸ (*Instytut Globalnej Odpowiedzialności – IGO*), Global Development Research Group¹⁹, Homo Faber Association²⁰ (*Stowarzyszenie Homo Faber*) and Social Ecological Institute²¹ (*Spółeczny Instytut Ekologiczny – SIE*). The seminars will be continued in the next years of the campaign in order to strengthen the cooperation between civil society organization and coordinate common activities.

The representatives of the FEED THE WORLD campaign participate as observers in sessions of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) and EU. During sessions they meet with European and ACP parliamentarians in order to get their support for solutions and political decisions coherent with development goals and especially with the fight against hunger and malnutrition in the world.

In 2011 the campaign has been focusing on using the time of the EU Polish presidency as an opportunity to draw attention to the necessity of taking into account the situation in the

¹⁵ www.cfsi.asso.fr

¹⁶ www.sosfaim.org

¹⁷ www.globalnepoludnie.pl/wyzywic-swiat

¹⁸ www.igo.org.pl

¹⁹ www.gdrg.pl

²⁰ www.hf.org.pl

²¹ www.sie.org.pl

countries of the Global South in the ongoing reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, making the trade relations between Europe and ACP countries more fair, and improving development aid so that it would truly help poor communities and protect environment.

The campaign reaches Members of the European Parliament through various means, including a regularly sent international newsletter and publications. In the first 2 years of the campaign two booklets were published: „Policy Coherence for Development to Reduce World Hunger”²² and “The Right to Food. For a CAP Fair to Developing Countries”.²³

PZS has also many activities aimed at raising public awareness on the mentioned issues. For the first time PZS introduced the concept of food sovereignty to the general public in October 2009 in Warsaw during an annual event called NIGHT FOR AFRICA. At the 2009 event specially invited guests from Guinea and France shared their knowledge and experience. The main theme of the film screening and the discussion was the development of sustainable family agriculture as a way of tackling the problem of world hunger. The discussion was followed by a concert.

Since 2010, as a part of the FEED THE WORLD campaign, PZS has organized the travelling Festival of Sustainable Agriculture THE WORLD ON A PLATE. The first edition took place in Wrocław, Kraków and Gliwice. The Festival consists of film screenings, lectures and workshops on sustainable agriculture and ethical consumption, concerts and an exhibition called “Food and Society”. In 2010 the Festival was accompanied by organic and local food fairs in Wrocław and Gliwice, and by the 8th Travelling Film Festival WATCH DOCS – Human Rights in Film in Krakow. In 2011 and 2012 the Festival will be organized in new cities.

As a part of the campaign a photography contest for the young people “Agriculture – nature and people” was also organized. The awarded photos were published by PZS in the educational calendar for 2011. The Next year’s edition of the calendar will feature presentations of activities and projects aimed at tackling poverty and hunger, which have been implemented in the countries of the Global South by Polish and European NGOs.

Additionally, PZS will publish a book “Food and Democracy” dealing with various issues related to food sovereignty. The book will be also available digitally in English for the partners in the Visegrad Group countries.

Apart from the FEED THE WORLD campaign, Polish Green Network implements also a program called Action for the Global South²⁴ (*Akcja dla Globalnego Południa*). It consists of three components: cooperation with partners in developing countries; informational and educational activities in Poland on development cooperation; monitoring of the Polish development aid.

As a part of this programme, PZS cooperates with organizations from the Volta region in Ghana to support the development of local agricultural communities (including support for beekeeping, pineapple growing and the production of batik).

Another PZS campaign, called Buy Responsibly!²⁵ (*Kupuj Odpowiedzialnie!*) aims at educating consumers so that their purchasing decisions would be based on the principles of

²² www.calameo.com/read/000023748848dd4400a64

²³ www.cfsi.asso.fr/upload/brochure_2011ENG_BDEF.pdf

²⁴ www.globalnepoludnie.pl

²⁵ www.ekonsument.pl

sustainable development. Additionally it also tries to influence producers to stop breaking human rights and destroying the environment.

Finally, it is worth mentioning shortly a couple of other Polish organization working for sustainable agriculture, poverty reduction and food sovereignty.

Institute of Global Responsibility²⁶ (*Instytut Globalnej Odpowiedzialności – IGO*) has recently started a couple of awareness raising projects on food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture and the issue of land grabbing. It also cooperates closely with partner organization in Uganda.

The Association Of Economic Consultants Pro-Akademia²⁷ (*Stowarzyszenie Doradców Gospodarczych Pro-Akademia*) participates in an international awareness raising project on the influence of EU Common Agricultural Policy on agriculture in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Green Institute²⁸ (*Zielony Instytut*) has led the preparation of the common position paper of Polish NGOs on the CAP reform in line with the principles of sustainable development.

Indigena Foundation²⁹ (*Fundacja Indigena*) works against factory farming which threatens the traditional agriculture and natural environment.

FER Foundation³⁰ (*Fundacja EkoRozwoju*) has been organizing organic and local food fairs for a few years now and supporting protection of agricultural biodiversity.

Polish Fair Trade Association “The Third World and Us”³¹ (*Polskie Stowarzyszenie Sprawiedliwego Handlu „Trzeci Świat i My”*) has been promoting fair trade and selling its products for many years. Together with other organizations, including Polish Green Network, it has started The Fair Trade Coalition³² to promote the Fair Trade movement in Poland.

Andrzej Żwawa
Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć
ul. Sławkowska 12, II p.
31-014 Kraków
Poland
email: info@zielonasiec.pl
tel./fax: +48 12 431 28 08
www.zielonasiec.pl – www.globalnepoludnie.pl – www.ekonsument.pl



This article has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Polish Green Network and its partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union. The article has been produced also as a part of the project “Central European partnership for sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty” co-financed by the International Visegrad Fund.

²⁶ www.igo.org.pl

²⁷ www.proakademia.eu

²⁸ www.zielonyinstytut.pl

²⁹ www.indigena.pl

³⁰ www.fer.org.pl

³¹ www.sprawiedliwyhandel.pl

³² www.fairtrade.org.pl