

Presentation in the context of COVID 19

Platform for reflection and action on the

Sustainable local food system in Pondicherry. A multi-stakeholder initiative

For the past two years, the French Institute of Pondicherry has been organizing a platform for discussions and actions around the sustainable local food system in the Pondicherry area (<https://www.ifpindia.org/content/workshop-local-food-system-pondicherry-discussion-food-sovereignty-and-agro-ecology>). The objective is to bring into the public debate a citizen commitment for livable cities based on sustainable links with their environment, for the preservation of a local agriculture precautionary of precious resources such as water, soil, and biodiversity. What is defended is a common concern for the community of destiny based on the defense of the rights for sufficient and quality food and the rights of those who produce this food. The interest is to organise a reflection and multi-actor dynamics on the theme of food sovereignty and the transition to agroecology.

The platform is part of the RUSE program, financed by AFD, and its ambition is to collectively put forward specific action proposals to bring the issues of sustainable food (from production to processing, distribution, consumption and waste management) to the local political arena.

Food and health crisis

This initiative makes sense at the present time because the food issue is central to the Covid19 health crisis, whether it be around the issues of food accessibility in the context of containment or the continuity of agricultural production. The entire food chain is impacted. The question of the relocation of food production arises as well as that of short circuits, exchange modalities (the place of intermediaries, systems of agreements such as participatory guarantee systems) and the food sovereignty of families and territories. Lockdown encourages urban families to cook, to garden, and to rediscover the use and taste of forgotten vegetables. Gardeners and especially peasants raise the question of seed autonomy. They also question agricultural models and their relationship with nature (loss of agricultural biodiversity, soil life, deforestation, constraints on resources, and use of fossil energy). The agricultural model of the Green Revolution contributed to marginalizing part of the peasantry, those of small farms and landless farmers, forced to migrate seasonally and who are trapped by the lockdown. Confinement has also shown the

importance of regaining food-producing agriculture that is less dependent on markets, the fragility of contract farming, the advantages of agriculture that mobilises family labour, and the role of subsidized food aid (SFP). It is this set of questions that the platform addresses in the public debate. The idea is to bring together a variety of actors throughout the agriculture-food chain to think of local solutions to the food system of the city and its hinterland. The city-countryside relationships are at the heart of the reflection, as is the idea of a holistic approach to global health (from the land to plants, livestock, human communities, landscapes).

Plurality of themes, coherence of articulations, coordination of scales

The 2020 edition was organized around four days responding to different modalities of interaction between the different actors who interact throughout the agricultural and food chains. Two days of debates were first organized around three controversies that structure the organization of actions over time, with the presence of researchers, farmers, citizens, consumers, processors and traders. The first concerned the preservation of the seed diversity of India and Tamilnadu in particular, especially around rice and millet.

To give visibility to the event and to place it in a national and international perspective, the meeting was introduced by several scientific personalities, farmers and citizens. Kavitha Kuruganti, President of the National Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture - ASHA - insisted on the linkage of plural experiences across India. She stressed the place of women from agricultural production to food processing. Shamika Mone, Director of the Association for Organic Agriculture (<http://ofai.org/organisation/>) and also World President of the Intercontinental Network for Organic Farmers - INOFO (<http://www.inofo.org/author/shamika/>; <https://www.ifoam.bio/en/sector-platforms/inofo-intercontinental-network-organic-farmers-organisations>), a member of the global network for organic agriculture IFOAM (<https://www.ifoam.bio/>), invited the farmers of the Pondicherry territory to organize themselves to formally join the INOFO network. Three farmers' organizations, including the Farmers' Union, linked to the Tamil network in Nammazvar, were present and are expected to make a formal commitment to join the network.

The presence of several political figures (the Minister of Agriculture Shri. R. Kamalakannan, of the Government of Pondicherry; Santha Sheela Nair, retired from State Planning Commission, Govt. of Tamil Nadu - Vice-Chairperson); Shri. Vaithilingam, Member of Parliament, Puducherry, as well as Consul Catherine Suard) put the idea of organizing a weekly organic fair

on the political agenda. The idea is to accompany the transition of the Territory of Pondicherry to organic farming like other Indian states.

The second controversy concerned the future of the world's largest food distribution system, the Public Distribution System, which has been fighting food insecurity in India at least since the mid-1960s. Reetika Khera, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, one of the leading experts on poverty issues and a colleague of Jean Drèze, introduced the debates. Frédéric Landy also brought a geopolitical dimension to the issue. It was decided, in conjunction with the University of Pondicherry, to foster public debate (by continuing field surveys on the concerns of the poorest households, including women) on the future of the PDS, between aid in kind and cash aid. The question of including millet in the PDS was also discussed in relation to the right to quality food. In the context of the COVID19 crisis and the containment, the capacity of the PDS to ensure food security for all, especially migrants, is obviously acutely questioned.

The third controversy was about dietary changes and public health effects. The Department of Food Science and Technology of the University of Pondicherry pointed out the benefits of different millet, but also more broadly the access to a diversified diet including local rice varieties. The COVID19 crisis puts the idea of global health at the centre of the debate, meaning concerns about production methods, food diversity and quality, and the preservation of the diversity of eco-agrosystems.

Involvement and citizen initiatives linked to international research networks

Several actions are currently being put in place. The platform aims to bring them together to build territorial coherence. The platform defends the idea that this challenge requires the networking of concrete experiences in local territories and around other modalities of exchanges between science and society. Among the initiatives underway: the analysis of the local food system with the help of the Let's Food Cities Association (<https://letsfoodcities.com/en/lets-food-cities>), the organisation of a weekly organic market based on a participatory guarantee system, the organisation of organic waste recycling (via collection from restaurants) and the establishment of links with a network of gardeners, the search for land for the organization of community gardens and the transmission of agroecological knowledge, work with schools to think about the intergenerational dissemination of plant-food-health knowledge, the link with the

network for fair cities (Milan Pact 2015), a science-citizen group for the setting up of regular debates, the defense of native bees through the diffusion of simple beehive techniques and the understanding of the links with pollination, the organisation of an exhibition on food.

The platform is linked to the network 'Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World' (HaB), IIAS, in Leiden, the Netherlands (<https://humanitiesacrossborders.org/events/local-food-system-pondicherry>). The platform is conceived as an experiment to be disseminated for a redesign of the doctoral curricula of member universities around food. The platform is also one of the examples of the URBAL network (<https://www.urbalfood.org/>) which is experimenting with a participatory method for assessing the impact in terms of sustainability of urban food innovations and is supported by the Unesco Chair Food of the World (<https://www.chaireunesco-adm.com/>).