The future of family farming in Europe in perspective of launching the "UN Decade on Family Farming (2019-2028)". Regional event - 12 March 2019, taking place at the headquarter of the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, in Bucharest.

The Human Rights approach and the focus on the Small Family Farmers, to accomplish the SDGs through the framework of the Decade

Speech of Ramona Duminicioiu – peasant from Romania, representative of the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)

We would like to congratulate the Romanian Ministry for Agriculture, for taking up the responsibility to organize a regional event on the Decade for Family Farming. In fact, five years ago (in 2014) during the International Year for Family Farming, Romania hosted the Regional Conference for FAO Europe and Central Asia. Back then, ECVC and the Romanian peasant organization Eco Ruralis, had the role of hosting the consultation of the civil society organizations, who contributed to the FAO Regional Conference. So it's not a coincidence that in the beginning of the Decade, we meet again here.

But this Decade is a framework with rules that have to be respected. There cannot be a Decade for Family Farming without small scale Family Farmers. We need to be at the center of the process, in order for the Decade to have meaning and to be successfully implemented. La Via Campesina – the international peasant movement - is a member of the International Steering Committee of the Decade for Family Farming, which is the decision making body of the Decade, responsible for overiewing and ensuring the coherent implementation of the Action Plan of the Decade.

There is a lot of data provided by FAO which shows that peasants, small scale farmers feed the world. Not that small farmers can feed the world in the future, but we are already doing it, and we have been doing it for a very long time. But we have not received the support that we need. According to FAO, 90% of all farms in the world, over 500 million farms, are managed by families, and 84 % of all farms are small farms (less than 2 ha). This means that small scale family farmers have to be the priority of the Decade.

We, peasants, have a tremendous contribution for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We manage and maintain the natural resources for food production in a sustainable manner, we contribute to the biodiversity with our work on ameliorating seeds and heterogeneous material adapted to climate change. We produce healthy, diverse and nutritious food for the majority of the people on the planet and in the same time we are, collectively, the largest investor in agriculture. Our money and our work once invested, is not recuperated from public funding, through subsidies and support measures and certainly we don’t benefit from access to credit tailored for our needs.

We are able to feed the world, despite the challenges. Allow me to picture for you some of those challenges that we face. We are in the frontline of dealing with the climate change effects; we are the first ones to find innovative solutions for our crops and animals and for a more balanced environment. We are vulnerable in front of conflicts. Our region is very diverse, including also countries and territories which are in conflicts and where peasant rural communities face dangerous and life threatening situations, such as in Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey and the list goes on. Our access to market is marginal, limited, we face financial and bureaucratical obstacles, we are imposed inappropriate food safety standards that come from the industrial sector, and which applied to small scale production lowers the quality of food; public funding directed towards supermarkets generating illoyal competition and market takeover; there is a worrying phenomenon of privatisation of peasant markets in Eastern Europe, which push peasants our of the markets. Land grabbing and the issue of access to land for young farmers, in combination with the public policies financing land consolidation push us further our of our lands. Poverty and the lack of opportunities in the rural areas generate migration which disconnect people from their families and lands. According to recent UN data from 2015, Romania has the largest rate of migration in the
world, after Syria, and considering that Romania is not a country in conflict, is actually part of the richest economic union in the world, this is an alarming sign of inequality that is not being addressed. We have a big problem with data collection because we, peasants, do not appear in the statistics – which are important tools, because based on statistics the legislators create laws, rules and standards. And because of that, we function in an invisible economy, with no support, discriminated, criminalized sistemically and sistematically.

This is why we need a strong Human Rights approach in the process of the Decade. Very concretely, we believe that the Decade provide us with the excellent opportunity to work together on the implementation and promotion for the use and application of food security and human rights related instruments, which will contribute directly to the support of family farming. Here is a list of instruments that we should start with:

- First and foremost the UN Declaration for the Right of Peasants and Other People working in Rural areas. A few words about the Declaration. It was approved by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, after an unique process of 17 years, that started from the ground, initiated by the peasant communities of La Via Campesina. Some of the fundamental rights that we want to highlight are: the right to natural resources and means of production such as: seeds, land, water; the right to social security and decent work conditions; women’s rights and the importance of youth.
- Secondly, the Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security - (VGGT 2012)
- A third instrument on our list is the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the national food security
- The forth is the policy recommendation: Connecting Smallholders to Markets (CFS 43, 2016)
- Finally, the binding International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture – with a particular focus on the article 9 - The Farmers’ Right to Seeds.

Regarding the European Union, there are several aspects that we wish to bring to your attention. Policy coherence at EU level – policy recommendations and binding treaties negotiated by EU countries in UN spaces need to be respected and implemented in conjuction with EU regulation. A stronger cooperation and transparency between EU institutions in the co-decision process, with a more inclusive participation involving rights-holders is essential. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is not sufficient for protecting the interests and the rights of the small scale family farmers, as the number of small and medium farms are dissapearing at an alarming rate. CAP has a negative effect on local markers and small scale family farming in the global South, therefore we need to address the impact of the EU trade and commercial policies through the Decade. Job creation in agriculture is important but the quality of work conditions must be the main guinding principle. At the moment, the largest public funds go towards large agro-businesses which mainly function with migrant labor, sometimes in contemporary slavery conditions. We have to be careful how we adress the innovation and digitalization. The social element has to play a central role in innovation – peasant agroecology provide us with the necessary tools to frame innovation in a broad context. Machines and electronic technology have to support our work, they cannot replace human labor, because this would only deepen the poverty and it goes against the achievement of the SDGs. Digitalization – particulary when it comes to genetic information, leads to appropriation of genetic resources and enforcement of intellectual property rights in the detriment of human rights.

Finally, a strong human rights approach is fundamental for the sucessful implementation of the Decade and the achievement of the SDGs. We need to use the opportunity to promote the use and application of the UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas. The process of the Decade needs to be inclusive and to put the family farmers - with a particular focus on the smallhonders - at the heart of the process. We wish to work with our governents to achieve all that and we trust ourselves and this process, that it will be possible.

Thank you!