A participant from Molow Kenya and a participant from Mexico City, Mexico discuss their hopes for food systems

The Global Dialogue's Emerging Conversations

Farmers' lived experiences of climate change

"The rainy seasons have changed, making it harder to grow crops. They have changed their times and they are shorter."

Global Dialogue Participant

For many participants, climate change is already seen to be having impacts. The conversation between participants in Johannesburg and in many provinces in Indonesia agreed that the effects of climate change are increasing and threatening food production in each region. The group from Johannesburg saw floods, soil degradation, heat, and lack of water as climate change impacts. Similar conversations involving participants from Coastal Kenya, the Philippines, Molow, Milpa Alta, México City, México; Bandung, and North Uist took place, particularly mentioning a change in the time and duration of seasons.

Participants also highlighted the impacts of climate change on traditional food systems. Groups from Molow, Coastal Kenya, and the Philippines[12] agreed that the seasons changing has made it "harder to plant and grow traditional crops." Groups from Johannesburg and Indonesia[13] saw the negative effects of climate change as having the potential to put at risk valuable knowledge:

Climate change and food lived experience Exchange: North Uist, Scotland and Molow, Kenya

In a conversation between North Uist in Scotland and Molow in Kenya, participants found a sense of shared experience of the similar challenges they face due to climate change. Both groups spoke about unpredictable weather with longer periods of dry and wet spells and the impact of this on the growing season.

In Molow, crops are planted at the usual time of year "but due to the increased dry season, the rain doesn't come in time and the crops dry up." When this happens, people do not have enough means to access seeds and try again. Further, the dry season dries the rivers and farmers' "livestock often die". When there is an excess of rain, "it can be so wet that crops are also spoiled", putting farmers' livelihoods at risk.

North Uist responded with their own experience of crop failures "due to longer wet spells, crop diseases have increased. Potato crops, which are a staple in the country, are particularly impacted by this, leading to crop failure".

Both groups felt connected by the fear of sea levels rising. North Uist, an island with parts of land below sea "can already see the rising sea level and fear what this is going to mean for us in the future". A fisherfolk from Molow on Lake Baringo "can already see the effects of rising sea levels and fish populations disappearing as a result".

Yet, North Uist reflected that for them, the effects of climate change resulting in seasonal variability were less extreme than those that were being recounted by the Molow group in Kenya.

"Indigenous knowledge, techniques and approaches are being threatened by climate change, which in turn threatens food security. These approaches and knowledges also provide important lessons for more sustainable production and must be protected and valued."

Similarly, on farmers' knowledge, a participant stressed the importance of understanding farmers' lived experience as valuable knowledge:

"There is no argument from this side that producers have real knowledge of plants, animals, soil. They have fewer meteorological stations, fewer than there are farmers. But their information is real."

What are some of the food and farming based solutions for climate change, and who is involved in the decision-making process?

Groups shared specific actions that they were involved in taking in relation to climate change. In Molow the group spoke about the change to using biogas to reduce pressure on forested areas. In North Uist the group shared that they have started repurposing disused fishing gear such as nets in their food growing projects. The group from Bandung shared that they have 26 varieties of rice and that they are:

"Trying to have rice varieties that are suitable for both the rainy and dry season, to fight global warming, this will help us to grow our food better. With technology and education, we could have more productivity."

At the same time participants from South West Scotland and the NFU Canada were concerned that calling some actions 'climate change solutions' was problematic:

"Agro-industrial developments, dams, deforestation and burning of fossil fuels" are affecting local and traditional food systems, while simultaneously these activities drive climate change which, again, impact local and traditional food systems:

"It is problematic that some of these causes, like hydropower, are even referred to as climate solutions...Large-scale wind energy likewise competes with land use for food production in Scotland and elsewhere. This "global north" agenda is all well and good but not when it sacrifices people, land and water and promotes a transition to a green future that leaves behind the people who are most affected by climate change and fails to question who benefits most from solutions."

For many farmers present, climate change is already impacting their livelihoods. At the same time many are taking actions in their daily practice to mitigate these. The call to take these lived experiences seriously highlights uncomfortable questions regarding the sources and types of knowledge that are being valued and included in responses to climate change.

Guaje
Milpa Alta, México

Huaje a kind of pumpkin, you take out all its seeds and the shell becomes really hard. We use this to carry water and store things. It is a beautiful and useful thing that we use in our country.

Object brought by participants to represent something that they are proud of in their food systems.

Chemuku Wekesa introduces Rabai community group to share dance and food ceremony with Global Dialogue participants