

Farmers Agency: Consciously changing traditions

“We are exploring new methods that can become new traditions”

The Stellenbosch group

In the dialogue between Stellenbosch and Surakarta, participants coalesced around the need to question traditions. The Surakarta group shared that they were working on “encouraging their community to look beyond traditional meals which typically include rice three times a day, to find their carbohydrates in other foods that might be more sustainably grown.”

The group from Milpa Alta put emphasis on “exploring new methods that can become new traditions”. The group connected this to how they combine ancestral and ‘scientific’ knowledge in their agroecological methods.

Thus, participants shared the desire to revise traditions in line with an aim to support socially and environmentally sustainable food systems.

Groups also spoke about the introduction of new species into their local traditional food systems and their impacts. Milpa Alta and Highlands participants empathised with each other. For Milpa Alta, a political decision made by the state created a crisis where farmers were forced to switch from corn to nopal production. This resonated with the group from the Highlands as “300 years ago the people from the Highlands were cleared from their land and their ways of life to make way for new farming systems, namely sheep farming.”

The migrating potato: politics of a root vegetable

**Exchange:
Milpa Alta,
México and
Uist, Scotland**

For Uist Islanders, the potato, which originates from South America and was brought to Europe through colonial relations, has become a “symbol for the challenging conditions facing farmers on the islands, while the circular approach to its planting, harvesting, and the fertilisation of the soils, signified the community ties strengthened through organic and sustainable farming.” From this perspective, it appears that the potato became part of a foreign system, in a way that has been beneficial for people and the environment, and ultimately became traditional.

At the same time, the potato played different role in Kenya. The group from Molow spoke about the ‘Irish’ potatoes displacing the sweet potato: “Because of colonialism the sweet potato is for the poor.”

The group from Molow also emphasised how through colonialism the best agricultural land was taken by the colonisers. Colonialism also had a great impact on traditional food: “We received exotic breeds, which displaced the local breeds which were disease and pest resistant but produced less.”

The introduction of other foods and the narratives accompanying these, which qualify them as ‘modern’ or ‘backward’, also impacted cooking and eating practices:

“Most people now would not like to have mokmo, they would have chips instead. The type of foods we made did not need cooking oil and could last a long time in the granary. We used to have maize breeds that grew without fertilizers, but today we rely on the hybrid. So, in two, three days the food is spoiled, and the weevils and pests destroy the food. So, colonialism affects our food and our soils. Today we use pesticide to treat the maize we are storing. The type of food we used to have was good for us.”

However, the group also shared how some legacies of colonialism are being unravelled:

“Today people in Kenya are going back to local breeds like the naked neck chicken. Because they are realising the quality they are receiving through free range, it is sweet meat, and it is tolerant to diseases. It’s a local breed that can brood and produce meat. It doesn’t require a lot of initial capital to start.”

Similarly, the group from Oyo State emphasised how “the introduction of outside seeds decontextualises farming in a way that cultural values are taken away.”

These contributions illustrate the importance participants placed on traditions, both by reinventing them critically or supporting them when appropriate.



Kiondo Molow, Kenya

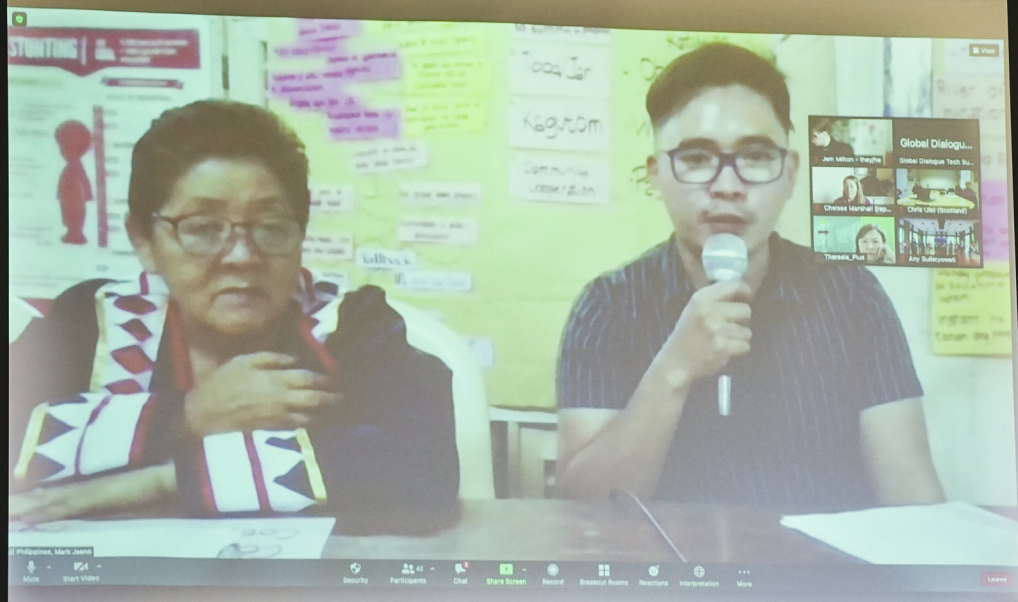
When a woman is to get married she is given some objects which include: a Kiondo, used for shopping and going to the market and to carry some shopping for the mother-in-law and her own mother when visiting each other. A Nyungu (earthen cooking pot), a Muiko (ladle) and a kaihuri (calabash), this sends the message that the girl will now be a mother who should know how to cook and serve food to her family. A packet of salt, to make tasty food for her acquaintances. A sieve to represent that she should choose her words, her friends and be able to make sound decisions.

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

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Global Dialogue organisers welcome participants



Participants from Philippines and Samdhana
in dialogue with participants from North Uist
Scotland