

Farmers as caretakers of food systems

“The way Indigenous Peoples manage and protect our ancestral lands is because our lives depend on them”. Philippines Calamianes Group

Many participants emphasised that food systems, many of which tend to be Indigenous, where relationships of reciprocity between humans and non-humans are maintained, have the power to address the climate and environmental crisis.

The group from the Philippines composed of Indigenous fisherfolk shared a song about reclaiming their Tagbanwa ancestral lands and waters, and how their knowledge and way of relating with these lands can protect them from industrial systems:

“There are no more fishes, because of trash that abounds, until the deep floor, even the land and the mountains, are also in the same state, we have our traditional food, and we also have rights to our ancestral domain, that is what we ask for support for, that we and our children be safe, even the next generations of the Tagbanwa’s in the Calamianes too.”

The group from Coastal Kenya spoke about their sacred places as a way in which social and cultural practices ground relationships of respect with the environment. Through honouring these sacred places, people receive guidance on how to live and are provided with food and health. However, many sacred places have been destroyed, like a place where hunters used to ask big stones for permission to hunt, or waterways that are now polluted or diverted, where people would ask the goddess of water for permission to fish. This group asked other participants:

“Do you have traditional leaders, like our Council of Elders who are custodians of the sacred forest, who do this? What are the sacred places for you?”

The group from México City and Milpa Alta spoke of a Maya practice to institutionalise relationships of care. The practice consists of placing Mayan clay in a field where beans are sowed. A pact is made with the clay asking for protection to your crops. The level of protection that you ask for is the level of commitment you must give, establishing a two-way relationship with benefits and responsibilities.

The group from Milpa Alta emphasised their belief that with recognition of our spiritual and cultural connection with the land we can develop the respect that we need to address the environmental challenges we face. For the group, this recognition was embodied in the use of ancestral agroecological practices which result in high quality produce and in turn support local markets. The group from Johannesburg agreed with this approach and spoke about how their communication with the Earth is sacred “how she shares with us signs of drought through ants coming out of the ground, and how the moon tells us when to harvest.” The Johannesburg and the São Paulo groups were interested to learn that in both places primary producers plant and harvest according to the moon.



Kishie The Highlands, Scotland

“Mostly women used kishie to carry salt fish into the hills to trade for butter, grain, they had a complete diet because of this”

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

Farmers hold critical knowledge of the food systems which they are embedded in. As local actors, this knowledge enables them to understand what can and cannot be done. For many participants speaking about their Indigenous food systems, sustaining social and cultural practices is integral to sustainable food systems. Thus, the role of the farmer goes beyond 'food production' to one that takes care of the very food systems that allow us to live.

North Uist participants shared how they have started to repurpose disused fishing gear such as nets in their food growing projects. The Molow group were inspired by this as they are not aware of the recycling of these materials in their community.

The Surakarta group were very interested to hear methods of organic growing that are used in Stellenbosch such as using chicken manure as compost for fertilisation.

Participants from Johannesburg and Milpa Alta found a similarity in their passion for using of biological pest control to substitute agrochemicals. They shared practical knowledge on the matter as well as ways in which more farmers could be encouraged to adopt such practices. Participants from Johannesburg, South Africa and México found a similarity in their passion in the use of biological pest control to substitute agrochemicals. They shared practical knowledge on the matter as well as ways in which more farmers could be encouraged to adopt such practices.

Johannesburg participants talked about their style of organic farming, using intercropping, crop rotations, and drip irrigation to farm sustainably. For example, they use spring onions as natural pesticide, and drip irrigation helps them to save water as it goes directly to the plant. Lack of water is a big challenge, so they use mulching to avoid water loss

Following a question of how the North Uist islanders dealt with low light during the winters, they responded saying that they used very little light-growing techniques. Instead, they traditionally use the winter months for propagating and preparing for the growing season in spring and summer.