

ESSEN.  
MACHT.  
ARBEIT.

FEMINISTISCHE BlicKE AUF  
FAIRFOOD IDEEN



# Networking for sustainable gender-just Food Systems

Feminist views on Swiss FairFood ideas

*By Heike Wach*



# WIDE-Switzerland

- Swiss Platform of the European Platform Women in Development Europe (WIDE+)
- Network of Feminist practitioners established 2008;
- Works on issues of economy of care, social policy and development – provides knowledge and launches discussions;
- organised through working groups such as „Fair Food Systems“, which are open for everyone who is interested;
- Long-standing connections and multiple exchanges as a base for this publication (conferences, hearings, participation)

# Switzerland

- High Quality Food market with comparatively high prices
- Two large retailers with cooperative history (Genossenschaften), promoting responsible consumption
- **Average spending for food: 6.4% of household budget**
- **Relatively large share of sustainability label consumption (ecological and social), such as 9% of total market share with Bio-Label (2018)**

# Swiss Context: Promoting sustainable food systems through political „Initiatives“

- **2005:** „Gentech-frei“ – Gentech-Moratorium
- **2017:** „Für Ernährungssicherheit“ – to change constitution to render food production sustainable, including through trade relations with other countries
- **2018:** „Fair-Food“ and „Food Sovereignty“
- **2020/21:** Drinking water and Pesticides
- .....

In any case these initiatives lead to public debates, raising awareness and in some cases bringing political change

# Essen.Macht.Arbeit: Food – Power - Work

Key Question: Linking Fair Food with Gender Justice:  
What are issues?

**Approach: Networking to give voice to women as:**

- **Researchers** (Bolivia, Rwanda, Ghana, Cambodia)
- **Small-scale farmers** (Switzerland, West and Central Africa)
- **Business women** (West Africa)
- **Activists and Development practitioners** (Switzerland, West Africa)
- „Experts“ (Trade, politics, nutrition)

# A publication across the food system

## **Essen**

- About the Right to Food – Quinoa Production – Precarities in the Swiss Food System

## **Macht**

- Fairtrade – Women's Resistance – Shaping International Trade for sustainability

## **Arbeit**

- Women Farmers in Switzerland – Field Casual Workers in Rwanda – Gender-just value addition

# Food production growth in Rwanda



*Source: Annie Spratt – Unsplash)*

**How the process of  
economizing agriculture  
contributes to widening the  
gender gap**

Development Agenda 2020: Economic and  
social Transformation

- Progressive Gender Policy
- Commercialization of Agriculture

FATE Project, University of Bern  
[www.fate.unibe.ch](http://www.fate.unibe.ch)

# Situation of on-field-casual workers

- **Land fragmentalisation** due to inheritance system makes agricultural land to be a scarce resource;
- **„Vision 2020“**: merging pieces of land towards intensifying agriculture, concentration on reduced number of fruits and vegetables grown on monocultures, provision of seeds and fertilizers by the state via cooperatives;
- Food production increased and changed agricultural system, creating **new job opportunities** in the market;
- **Field casual workers** typically have very small plots of land (gardens)
- **Women** earn 20% less than men and 30% less, if accompanied by a child or when they are pregnant (experience care penalty)

# Trade: Yes! But how?



**Nyagoy Nyong'o is  
General Secretary of  
Fairtrade Africa**



**Elizabeth Mpofu is  
General Coordinator  
of La Via Campesina**

**From what kind of trade do small  
scale farmer families benefit in  
Africa?**

**In what way are they affected by  
International trade agreements?**



**Marie Crescence  
Ngobo is Director  
of Grenier,  
Chairwoman of the  
Board of COSECAM  
and General  
Secretary of RADD**

# Conclusions

- as an alternative approach to conventional trade, Fairtrade production offers new opportunities for a socially and economically sustainable development that can benefit small producers;
- Fairtrade must not be an incentive to grow a product in monoculture. Otherwise there is a risk of increasing food insecurity. Gains from Fairtrade production should to be invested to strengthen nutrition security and food sovereignty at local levels;
- Fairtrade only works in system that rests on justice and equality. The present trade system does not work that way;
- Women are often found in precarious situations, while having to take the last responsibility to feed their households

# Port Loko Declaration – we want our lands back

We, leaders of groups of women affected by the expansion of industrial monoculture plantations, particularly oil palm plantations, coming from all regions in Sierra Leone and different countries from West and Central Africa....



Source: Brot für alle - [https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2017/09/Port-Loko-declaration-Final\\_English.pdf](https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2017/09/Port-Loko-declaration-Final_English.pdf)

# Main messages

- Considering the pivotal role women play in maintaining their families and securing food for their children
- Considering the essential role of land to produce food for our families
- Considering the importance and diversity of the traditional use of oil palms, ranging from food to building materials to medicines, providing over 30 different products of great importance for women's livelihoods;

## **We denounce:**

- the lack of participation of women in decision making processes related to oil palm plantations, as they are neither invited to meetings nor ever consulted, and women in the countries of the region are not even allowed to own or buy land.

# Women demand:

- full participation for women in all decisions regarding the land. Women want the right to own and make decisions over land.
- the right for communities and women to say no to industrial oil palm plantations.
- the respect of the rights of communities.
- the right for women to speak freely.
- that, at the very least, the conditions for handing over lands to companies and the respective contracts are revised and the companies fulfill their promises.
- access to education and safety for their children.
- their lands back from industrial plantation companies.
- protection against intimidation and violence for women and human rights defenders

Conclusion: Gender justice is a condition for sustainable food systems

**Gender is never absent and has to be made visible:**

- Gender sensitivity in food systems leads to issue of care which requires „3-R-approach“: recognize, reduce, redistribute (Development practice);
- Inclusion of gender dimension allows more detailed insights into realities of most vulnerable people in the system – essential role of research;
- Include diverse experiences and voices of women as change makers
- Politics: Can (and must) set favourable framework in terms of laws, budget allocation and trade regimes

# Political reality

- The Swiss population rejected both Initiatives: FairFood and Sovereignty;
- Retailers and traders warned that this would raise prices for food and reduce the variety of products available in the market;
- Consuming sustainable food remains to be the choice of those who can afford to buy label food, which remains to be an attractive market segment for retailers;
- Women everywhere continue to bear major responsibility to assure nutrition of their households – and to push for sustainability
- Slow political process, missed opportunities, but the debate continues with interesting ideas, such as a Nutrition Forum from below (Zürich) and a continuous feminist debate (such as in Bern: „Widerstand am Tellerrand“)

## More information:

- [www.wide-switzerland.ch](http://www.wide-switzerland.ch)
- Demeter (Gender, land and the right to food):  
<https://r4d.demeter.info>
- Port Loko Declaration:  
[https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2017/09/Port-Loko-declaration-Final\\_English.pdf](https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2017/09/Port-Loko-declaration-Final_English.pdf)
- FATE: [www.fate.unibe.ch](http://www.fate.unibe.ch)