



Dialogue on Alternatives to Unsustainable Livestock Production

2nd September, 2019 - Kaleb Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Industrial beef and dairy production is a leading cause of climate change. Up to half of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to come from cattle (largely through clearing of forests and other vegetation for pastures). Pollution from extreme intensification of the livestock sector is making matters worse, particularly due to the amount of land needed for soy and other feedstock production. Agro-industries claim that they are 'feeding the world' but they fail to recognize that their unsustainable and inequitable model of food production comes at the expense of cleaner and otherwise more sustainable forms of production. This includes for example, agroecological models and traditional peasant agriculture, which usually lack appropriate forms and levels of support (i.e. policy & legal, financial, etc.).

In the African region, many local communities depend on small-scale livestock farming, however, these practices are slowly disappearing. Massive land-grabbing events currently taking place in the continent are having vast impacts on these practices, with the dynamics varying from region to region. Women are often involved in small-scale agricultural practices, mainly subsistence farming, but there is still too little information available about gender roles in livestock farming and related gender-differentiated impacts of replacing traditional livestock farming with industrial models of production.

As unsustainable livestock production and its alternatives have so many different dimensions, the Global Forest Coalition, in collaboration with Brighter Green and the 50by40 campaign, decided to organize a series of regional roundtables to discuss unsustainable livestock production and the alternatives that are desirable and feasible within regional contexts, in order to deepen understanding around Indigenous landscape management practices and the linkages between addressing unsustainable livestock farming, forest conservation, agroecology, pastoralism and climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. The aim is to build a strong network of indigenous peoples, local communities and other like-minded organizations with significant Global South representation. This will allow to share views, lessons learned, and other expertise around sustainable livestock farming/pastoralism practices and its contributions to curbing climate change and biodiversity loss as well as the current threats to traditional practices.

More than 90 people attended the first dialogue, which was organized on 2 September 2019, back to back to the African Animal Welfare Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The dialogue was opened by the moderators, Kahindi Lekalhaile from the Africa Network for Animal Welfare in Kenya and Simone Lovera of the Global Forest



Coalition, based in Paraguay. Kahindi emphasized that the objective of the meeting was to engage in an open debate and identify key issues of importance related to livestock production in Africa. What are the current trends, and how can we keep them sustainable, taking into account local, national, regional and international policy spaces? Simone pointed at the moral challenges triggered by the industrial livestock sector, which treats billions of animals as mere products rather than living beings. Industrial livestock production is also one of the key causes of climate change, partly due to the rampant deforestation it triggers in Paraguay and other countries. Paraguay is one of the world's largest exporters of beef and the world's 4th leading producer of genetically modified soy, 90% of which is exported as feedstock for the livestock industry.

Both beef and soy production trigger large-scale land concentration and land grabbing, leading to violence against Indigenous Peoples and small farmers and massive deforestation. Sadly, industrial livestock production is rapidly growing in Asia and Africa as well, with similar impacts on animal welfare, women and men, forests and soils, and the climate. Partly inspired by our member group Brighter Green, based in the U.S., and the situation in Paraguay, GFC decided in 2013 to initiate a campaign to address unsustainable livestock and feed production. As a worldwide coalition of 99 NGOs and IPOs striving for rights-based, gender-responsive and effective policies to address the main drivers of forest loss, GFC promotes holistic solutions that take into account all dimensions, including animal welfare. Alternatives to the unsustainable livestock industry can be found outside the livestock sector, in the form of plant-based diets, but also within the sector, as many traditional forms of pastoralism and integrated small-scale livestock production systems have far less impact than factory farming, provided quantitative limits are respected. But we see growing competition between industrial livestock production, primarily targeting urban and overseas consumers, and traditional livestock farming within a local food sovereignty setting, producing food for economically marginalized rural consumers.

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Mia Mac Donald of Brighter Green elaborated on global trends in the expansion of unsustainable livestock production including animal welfare issues. The fact that the world population is still growing and that the food system is increasingly oriented towards animal-based food causes a major dilemma, as 10 - 15 kilo of feedstock is needed to produce a kilo of beef. The climate is under stress and we only have one planet. People who live close to the land feel the impacts of climate change daily. Meanwhile, biodiversity is collapsing. The current global food system is exploiting the planet, and its forests and lands. Data show it is primarily the urban middle class and upper class that are eating more and more meat and dairy. The food we produce is not equitably divided, she said. The people in the marginal areas are not



the main beneficiaries of industrial livestock production. It is not a sustainable food system. The Amazon is on fire, and the main driver is meat and feed, which is wildly wasteful.

We want something that is a lot more fair for human communities and the environment. So what are the alternatives? Small-scale agriculture? Small-scale livestock production is not always sustainable, nor does it always mean higher welfare for the animals; there are also small-scale factory farms in Africa. And how do you deal with pastoralists in times of climate change? How do we bring our alternatives to policy spaces like the UN Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions? There are a lot of systems in place to give us better policies, but often these processes do not hear from people at the frontline. What are some of the areas where we could agree? Scientists are telling us we are running out of time. We need to engage in truly different, deep thinking, Mia concluded.

Tozie Zokufa of the Pan African Animal Welfare Alliance from South Africa briefly elaborated on contemporary trends and impacts of unsustainable livestock production in Africa. He explained that when he started working in animal welfare, he did not know where his food was coming from. But in 2019, he knows. Yet, 50% of the participants in the room probably do not know where his food comes from on a daily basis. When Michael Jackson died, Tozie said, everybody knew about it, but hardly anyone knows where his or her food comes from. Food is a personal choice, but what choices are we making? As Albert Einstein stated, it is a privilege to have knowledge, but it is a duty to act upon it. In 2009 there were 6.5 billion people on the planet and 66% of the marine environment is degraded. How do we navigate this? How do we get out of this?

Amal El Bekri from RAPAD in Morocco, highlighted the trend in her country to buy more and more meat from Argentina, the US and Ukraine. Consumers are not aware of the impacts of meat consumption on climate change, a lot of false information is disseminated, and governments refuse to act in this field. An organization like UN Environment, and international NGOs, should get involved as they can put pressure on governments and raise more awareness about the need for sustainability in food consumption and production [or in food systems].

Kahindi explained that his people, the Samburu, basically only eat meat and dairy so a plant-based diet is not really an option. But they are impacted by climate change problems too. In every successive drought, they lose a higher percentage of animals. An additional complication is that the government forced them to change the breed of sheep and goats they traditionally reared so as to increase productivity. Their traditional red sheep breed was a drought resistant breed, but they are now gone and as a result, they see a higher die-off of sheep now during droughts.

A participant from Zimbabwe highlighted that it was people's appetite for meat that formed the key problem, and that humanity is digging its grave through this



appetite for meat. We need to make tough decisions and set an example for change. Change is easy. You just need to ask yourself whether you want to be part of the system, he added.

It was highlighted in the discussion that we need to send out a uniform message: Are we talking about animal rights, or about animal welfare? There is no difference between the suffering of a cow or a rhino, yet people tend to be more concerned about the latter. Some participants felt that a focus on animal rights would polarize the discussion while a focus on animal welfare might appeal more to the public. They supported sending a message to the broader public that it was fine to use animals in food systems as long as you take care of their welfare.

But other participants said they considered it hard to distinguish animal rights from animal welfare and pointed out that the two were clearly linked. They also questioned whether killing an animal could still be defined as taking care of its welfare.

Some pointed out the animal welfare principles embraced by ANAW and other animal welfare movements. A veterinarian pointed out that it was important to teach people to take care of the welfare of livestock as part of an effort to keep livestock healthy, and that this has economic benefits for the producers too, including in particular for small-scale producers. It was important, too, to create alternative market opportunities for small-scale producers who cared about animal welfare. But he opposed talking about animal rights as, he said, it would be difficult to combine that with livestock production as even dairy production requires mass killing of animals. He argued that the movement would not get very far in Africa if it embraced an animal rights discourse.

The dialogue continued with a presentation by Dr. Zelealem Tefera Ashenafi, honorary member of the International Consortium on Indigenous and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) in Ethiopia, who elaborated on the role of ICCAs in constructing alternatives to unsustainable livestock production. He highlighted that in many parts of Africa, people have been managing areas that are very important for biodiversity conservation and used them for livestock production as well. As a representative of the ICCA consortium he highlighted the role of sustainable livestock keeping in fostering community conserved areas. Traditional livestock keeping in most of Africa used to be sustainable, but now there are many threats. He provided an example of one of the most serious developments is the situation in the North Omo region in South West Ethiopia. The whole area used to be a pastoralist area, but sugar cane has been introduced here and is massively expanding, and this has completely undermined sustainable livestock management.

The sugar cane expansion was accompanied by the construction of a dam in one of the main rivers to redirect water to the sugar plantation. The local communities used to use the areas that were flooded regularly by the river as agricultural land,



but these floodplains have now disappeared. The grazing lands have disappeared too, since livestock management depends on strategically using wet and dry season grazing grounds. As a result, pastoralist communities have been forced to move into protected areas, as they have no other land left. This has created a lot of conflict. Why is this happening? Zelealem asked: Why do we have to destroy these ecosystems and the traditional management practices that sustained them? The introduction of modern farms has destroyed the sustainability of traditional livestock production. He continued: We need to learn more about and recuperate traditional livestock management systems that are good for the environment and the rural economy.

This is a 2000-year old culture that always lived in harmony with nature, but suddenly it has a huge impact on the environment. Now there is a limit on the number of animals a household can keep. Yet, Zelealem added, there are still many cultural habits in Ethiopia that contribute to sustainability. For example, meat and dairy consumption is limited, as there are five fasting seasons in the Christian Coptic Church and two standard fasting days per week, so for about half the days of the year, people who observe these traditions eat plant-based food only.

Kahindi then emphasized the need to develop advocacy strategies to incorporate such useful land use systems as those described by Zelealem in the mainstream economy. Another Kenyan participant highlighted the importance of contextualizing messages, as the situation is different in different continents. A participant from South Africa noted the need to focus on the role of large transnational corporations, as they are the actors that are really benefiting. In South Africa, 20% of the companies process 80% of the food.

It was also pointed out that it is not easy to convince people, as human behavior is not always guided by ethics. It is similar to tobacco use; you don't change people overnight. But if we just talk about people having to change their diets, the process is going to be very slow, we also need to focus on policy-makers. We need to promote alternatives and illuminate other impacts of unsustainable livestock production too, like water supply implications.

Another participant said that sometimes people have to give up vegetarianism due to health reasons, but that it is important to know where the animals you eat come from. The main issue is not meat or no meat, she said, but the industrial food system, and continued by saying that the vegan burger KFC has begun serving in some locations is not sustainable, either, since it is processed in an industrial manner and often made with genetically modified soy. There is a lot of concern about over-processed foods in general, she continued, including processed vegan food. Yet it was emphasized that it is impossible to feed the five regions of this planet through factory farming. Factory farming is one of the biggest polluters, it has major impacts on both climate change and biodiversity. We need to break the silence about these impacts and look for an equal or level playing field for more sustainable alternatives.



For example, participants noted, we should emphasize the need to implement the UN Convention on Biodiversity target on phasing out subsidies and other perverse incentives that promote industries that harm biodiversity, like the livestock industry. We have to reduce our consumption. We are faced with a shrinking base for food production and an increasing global population and all use common resources for crop and livestock production. There is a need to think strategically about long-term food security.

Participants also highlighted the health impacts of consuming excessive meat, and how health experts should be involved in these discussions, together with both environmental experts and veterinarians. Last but not least, the need for proper social services was emphasized. Social support is not easy to come by in certain countries. Advocacy is required to push governments to invest in adequate social services for their own people, so that people do not need to overexploit their own resources to make ends meet.

In her closing remarks, Simone highlighted some of the moral dilemmas we are facing, as even dairy production requires the separation of a calf from its mother. Who decides whether animals have rights or not? Does the human species have the right to decide this? She also emphasized that an animal rights discourse does not have to scare people. In fact, it has become a key motivation for many Northern consumers to become vegan. Trends, including food trends, can be created in fact. For example, US economist John Kenneth Galbraith already wrote 65 years ago that most demand is a creation. That is why the role of perverse incentives is important indeed, even before the Bolsonaro regime came into power, a country like Brazil spent 84 billion USD per year on promoting meat and soy production, and only 115 million USD on forest conservation. Divestment from destructive projects like sugar cane is also essential if we want to create space for alternatives.

In her closing remarks, Mia recognized that it is important to take into account the different context in Africa as per capita consumption of animal-based products is so much lower than in Northern countries. But still, it is very worrying to see existing sustainable options being pushed out by large industries and factory farming expanding in many countries across the continent. And the response is too often “it has to be like this”. But it cannot be like this if we want a future for our children and the other species and the ecosystems on the planet.

The Dialogue in Addis Ababa was the first of a series of open dialogues that will end by August 2020. For more information, please contact Isis Alvarez, isis.alvarez@globalforestcoalition.org