

Opening Speech by Tilman Santarius

NGO Strategy Dialogue on Energy and Climate, Agriculture and Food Security towards the Great Transformation

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Good Morning. I am happy to look at so many inspiring faces of motivated and really engaged people. (...) Before explaining to you some of the ideas and hypothesis behind what we have put on the agenda, let me introduce some people and say thank you. (...)

I could even welcome more people here in the room, but some had to cancel their flights in the very last minute, because hurricane “Sandy” is threatening North America these days. The occurrence of this hurricane brings us right into the midst of our conference theme: The astonishing series of extreme weather events that hit North America over the course of this year once more gave a face to climate change – actually not a face, but a grimace with which a warmer planet looms on the horizon. The increasing number of extreme weather events – storms, floods, and droughts – destroys more and more agricultural harvests every year, around the globe. Lost harvests make world food prices climb up. And high food prices in recent years have been a key reasons for the historically unprecedented number of hungry and malnourished people. So we see the interdependence of climate and food: **Realizing the right to food requires to keep the climate right!**

And likewise for energy policies: Providing access to energy can easily conflict with the right to food. For instance, Coal India Limited, probably the largest coal mining company in the world, regularly pollutes rivers, forests, and fields, and thus threatens farmer livelihoods. Not to speak of the carbon emissions from that coal, which further aggravate climate change. At the same time the case of Germany and several other countries show that ill-advised policies for renewable energies such as biofuels can also drive up food prices. So we see: **realizing the right to food not only requires to keep the climate right, but also to get the climate and energy policies right!**

And thirdly, even policies for realizing the right to food can do more harm than good – for instance, when they follow a fossil type of second green revolution strategy, which does not accept ecosystem resilience and the planetary boundaries. For example, some governments, world bank projects and even some civil society foundations these days hand out fertilizer starter packages to farmers in the global South. This fertilizer does not only create new dependencies for farmers, it can also further degrade soils, destroy biodiversity, and in the end lead to reduced harvests, while the energy-intensive production of fertilizers adds new greenhouse gases to the air. Let me bring this third type of interdependence into a more philosophical formula: **Only if we accept nature's rights, can we realize human rights!**

Civil society strategies need to be most sensitive to these interdependences. The time for silo mentalities is over. Neither climate nor energy nor agricultural strategies can be developed in a nimbus. Still, silo mentalities characterize the work and the policies of many ministries and international institutions. We as civil society organizations want to and can do better. We want to be ahead, and we want to think systemically. That is why we have brought you as

representatives from organizations working on food, agriculture, climate, and energy to this conference. For we want to strategize in common: **how we can realize the right to food, improve the access to clean energy and at the same time reduce today's human footprint on the planet by acknowledging the planetary boundaries!**

The idea for this civil society strategy dialogue was born three years ago, after the Copenhagen Climate summit. Many of us had left Copenhagen with a depressing feeling. A fair and ambitious global climate agreement could have been a single major multiplier on the way towards sustainability. But this didn't materialize. Many different factors played into the failure of Copenhagen, but we still ask ourselves: What role did civil society play? Did we pursue the most successful strategies? What could we have done better? No doubt: Civil society was super strong on content: hundreds of position papers and policy proposals for burden sharing, for climate finance, for adaptation and more had been developed in the run up to Copenhagen. But in the end, key players were unable and unwilling to find common ground. So now we need to think harder and understand better the impediments that have to be overcome to open a door out of the international deadlock. **How can we help build a proactive alliance, for instance among India, the EU, and China, together with further country groupings such as AOSIS and African countries, in order to bridge the gap between key players and re-dynamise negotiations at the UN level – and beyond the UN level in other fora!** This is what we would like to think about with you in one of the working groups tonight and tomorrow.

If we want to improve civil societies' effectiveness on climate matters, we also need to look at what currently impedes us. Until today, civil society is split on the question of climate equity. But this split is a loss for all sides. It holds too many resources hostage for ideological differences, of which our children will

ask us one day: “guys, did you forget what was going on in the real world while arguing amongst yourselves?” Indeed, what is going on in the real world, are emissions rising and rising and rising. In the first decade of the 21st century, emissions have risen faster than they have done ever before in human history. The first decade of the 21st century saw an increase in energy intensity of the world economy for the first time since 100 years. And the dramatic result of this, as recent research suggests: We have now entered a situation, in which it is practically not possible any more to reduce emissions by an amount that would keep us below a warming of 2 degrees Celsius, let alone 1.5 degrees. Everyone will suffer the consequences, but those poorest and hungriest may not survive it. – So friends, for the sake of those marginalized and poor people on the planet who will suffer the most, we should find ways how we as civil society get past our own stalemates! This conference does not pretend to give full-fledged answers to this. But we can add bits and pieces that may help us finding common ground in understanding climate justice and equity anew. Particularly, we can better integrate human rights principles in our understanding of climate equity. Because if we apply human rights principles to climate change, it follows that we must do everything we can to stop further rising emissions. We should rather cool the planet. **So let us try to find common ground on human rights-based climate strategies for a cool planet!**

I have talked about the interdependences between climate, energy, and food. Yet the economic and financial crisis of the past years once more highlighted another interdependence: between the social and ecological crises we are dealing with, and the state of our capitalist market economies out there. This is an old issue, but it hasn't gone away. It was in 1944 that the scientist Karl Polanyi coined the term “Great Transformation”, which we have taken on as the title for this dialogue. Polanyi stated that in modern, capitalist societies, economic transactions are no longer embedded in a set of social, cultural and religious

norms and values, as they had been for millennia. Economic transactions for the most part have become dis-embedded to solely follow the logic of profit and output maximization. As a result, modern market economies experienced unprecedented growth rates. But this growth is now threatening the carrying capacity of the earth as our physical basis of survival! And this growth often comes at the expense of social exclusion and the further marginalization of those 1-2 billion people that are simply not part of the global market economy. **What is deeply needed, therefore, is to reverse this process and achieve a re-embedding of the economy in societal values beyond profit and output maximization.**

And therefore it is important that civil society promotes social forms of production that can alleviate poverty and create wealth, but that overcome the fatal quest for profit and output maximization. We will discuss the role of agriculture and solar cooperatives as prime examples of social forms of production. And I hope that other concepts of how to foster commons-based production and social networks will be generated during the discussions at this conference. What can civil society do to give these initiatives a boost? How can we better link social struggles on the ground with the kind of advocacy work we do? What do NGOs have to offer to support them? What kind of national and international regulation and economic framework conditions do they need to flourish and amplify? I am sure these are not questions that we as organizations from the fields of agriculture, energy, or climate should leave up to others. **We will not reach our very own goals of food sovereignty, sustainable rural development, and climate protection, if the growth-oriented global market economy remains unchallenged!**

But the forces of our economic systems show only one side of the coin. The other side is the demand side. Both high food prices, and high greenhouse gas

emissions are in part due to high demand for meat, for processed food and all kinds of consumer goods. Imagine this: Today, almost a third of the world's population, more than 2 billion people are global consumers. They live on the average income of a lower middle class person in Germany – with a car in the family, meat for lunch every day, the house full of gratuitous gadgets, vacations on shiny palm beaches. No doubt this consumerism has been invented in the North. Yet today about half of the global middle class lives in the urban centers of the rapidly developing countries all over the planet. No matter if in the North or the South do these “all consuming” lifestyles threaten poor peoples' lands and livelihoods and our planet. **Civil society needs to tackle overconsumption and its drivers squarely.** Too many organizations still do not take up the challenge to confront consumption. Let us join those few who engage in this already! We need more ideas to campaign on strategies for sustainable lifestyles!

So the need for a sufficiency economy and for more sustainable lifestyles can unite the policy agendas of civil society organization from the food, climate and energy field. Yet there are more issues that we as communities can tackle together, and with joint forces. Fossil fuel subsidies, for example. Studies estimate the sheer, unbelievable numbers of 600 billion to 1 trillion dollars of fossil fuel subsidies per year, which mainly play into the hands of climate-damaging energy carriers and industrial, export-oriented food system. **Imagine how much money we could free to support agroecological family farming, rural development and climate adaption, if we could get rid of those subsidies!**

Another issue: The degree of corporate control and oligopolies are outstanding particularly in the energy and agriculture markets. For example, about a dozen companies deliver the majority of the world's fuels for cars; only a hand full of corporations provide about 80% of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; only one

company takes the responsibility for 90% of all genetically modified crops. **For the sake of food security and the emancipation of sustainable energies, we need to democratize food and energy markets!** In this fight of David against Goliath, of civil society against the tremendous capital and political power of corporations, we as civil society communities need to ally, we need to strategize and we need to campaign together!

So let me close by saying that I know we have huge and complex issues on our agenda. The path towards a Great Transformation is not a waltz. It's a tremendous challenge, but we can grasp it as a privilege that we have the freedom to be actors on the scene. So lets take this conference as a responsibility for this freedom, and as an opportunity for all of us. An if we then leave this conference with a few fresh ideas, and by slightly re-adjusting our working agendas in order to be even more effective in our future work, then this strategy conference will be a success. To achieve this, what matters – are you! So this conference depends on your engagement! Take this conference into your hands! And think critically, think creatively, think big!