An urban food system for agroecology in the 21st century: the example of Dar es Salaam.

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Agroecology more than primary production, needs to be in a supportive food system

"Agroecology is the integration of research, education, action and change that brings sustainability to all parts of the food system: ecological, economic, and social. It’s transdisciplinary in that it values all forms of knowledge and experience in food system change. It’s participatory in that it requires the involvement of all stakeholders from the farm to the table and everyone in between. And it is action-oriented because it confronts the economic and political power structures of the current industrial food system with alternative social structures and policy action. The approach is grounded in ecological thinking where a holistic, systems-level understanding of food system sustainability is required." (Gliessman, 2018: 599)
We don’t need a technical fix agroecology driven by corporations. We need transformation

"While the mission of reform is to mitigate the excesses of the market, its “job” is identical to that of the neoliberal trend: the reproduction of the corporate food regime. Reformists call for mild reforms like social safety nets, fair trade and organic niche markets, and apolitical, technology-focused renderings of agroecology. Global food movements are characterized by two major trends: progressive and radical... The radical trend also calls for practical alternatives, but focuses more on structural reforms to markets and property regimes, and class-based, redistributive demands for land, water, and resources, that is, food sovereignty" (Holt-Giménez and Altieri, 2013: 97)
Global Crisis of corporate food

• Environmental destruction
• Crisis of hunger and of obesity; chronic and acute negative health impacts
• Distantation of people from food and its production
• Inequality
In South Africa

Farm workers grow food but can’t afford decent diet.

1 million black South Africans evicted from farms in the first ten years of democracy (Wegerif et al, 2005)

From 60k+ commercial farms in 1994 to ±35k today.
Polony contaminated with Listeriosis killed over 200 people.

One example of crisis of food system
We need sustainable and regenerative (enriching society and ecology) systems from production to eating

Learning from Tanzania
Feeding Dar es Salaam (5m people), Tanzania. Symbiotic Food System

Multitudes of small-scale interdependent actors in symbiotic relations (more and mostly less formalised) together delivering food at a city feeding scale.

The scale, mode of operation and cultural repertoires fit from the farmers to the eaters. The farmers (wakulima) influence the mode of ordering.

Involves relatively equal actors with limited capital, familiar with each other, operating with established internal & social norms/values even when they are also ‘competitors’

‘Economic’ factors of competition – supply, demand and maximising utility - exist, but alongside norms of collaboration. Collaboration and competition balance each other.

Growth through replication, not ‘scaling up’, actors in sector assist others to start by providing information and introducing them to contacts, etc...

(Wegerif, 2018. Wegerif and Hebinck, 2016)
Maize

Over 6 million farmers with an average of 1.3 hectares. For more than 60% of them sale of food crops is main income

Production went up 88% from 2005 - 15
Traders & Transporters
Processing – Thousands of maize mills in the city
Retailing - Small shops (duka) on most streets.

Creates social spaces.
Most milk is raw delivered through symbiotic system (from urban, peri-urban and beyond). Average herd size is five.

Local system out performs value chain intervention
Urban and peri-urban raw milk supply

Tanga Fresh Value Chain Supply
Shoprite closed its 3 stores in 2014 (Nakumatt took over)

Uchumi supermarkets closed in 2015

Nakumatt closed in 2017
Big investments (e.g. SAGCOT) & land deals in crisis

SAGCOT a growth corridor project launched at WEF Africa in 2010 and G8 as part of Obama’s New Alliance.

• Targeted $3.4bn of investment, $2bn from Private sector.
• By 2016, $70million from World Bank was biggest actually contracted. Still talking of private sector “commitments”, then of $928million. But $500m of that is EcoEnergy, far from investing they are suing the government in the ICSID.
• Value for small-holders “questionable” (West, 2017).

Other Large Scale Land Based Investments (land grabs), like 34,000Ha BioShape (Dutch investor) failing.
The Symbiotic Food System keeps delivering and is ‘economically’ competitive, because:

• No (or low) management overheads even in a complex multifunction and multi-actor system needing high levels of collaboration.

• No (or low) extraction of profit for absent shareholders or lenders.

• Low labour costs due to use of family and ‘apprentice’ labour. Loyalty combined with low expense. This is not exploitative if it offers path to ownership for those involved.

• There is efficient utilisation of capital inputs (without management costs). E.g. trucks and machines fully utilised.
Link to agroecological production

• Default agroecological (at least low external input)
• Experience in Tanzania shows potential to build on farmers’ existing practices for adoption of improved agroecological practices (Mdee et al, 2018). The main input is information and sharing between farmers.
• Farmers and soils have benefitted from this.
• Cuban experience shows can work at a national level, linked to movement building and farmer to farmer extension (Rosset et al., 2011).
• Found small-scale peasant farmers (like in Tanzania) quickest to take up the improved agroecological practices.
Closing thoughts

Scale, human scale and equitable scale, of farms and enterprises is essential.

The symbiotic food system shows we don’t need corporations to feed cities of millions and resists corporate encroachment.

Find and open up the spaces to advance autonomy from corporate capitalist circuits.

Look for new alliances: farmers, traders, processors, retailers? Purposive and symbiotic organising?

Build on and enable what people already do that is regenerative: “a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans” (Ostrom 2010).

As academics: do research that values people’s agency and their existing practices.
References


