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Editorial

The Food Crisis and Food Sovereignty: A Friendly Reply to the Movement for Socialism

Dr. Vishwas Satgar, Chairperson, COPAC Board

Introduction

It is extremely heartening to find the official newsletter of the Movement for Socialism, featuring a front page article on food. This article confirms that the working class in South Africa are feeling the effects of the food crisis and are not willing to remain silent. This is also contrary to the deafening silence of other components of the organised working class. Moreover, this intervention bodes well for ensuring working class voice and perspectives shape the emerging food sovereignty movement in South Africa. This should be welcomed by all in the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC).

The article entitled: Food Waste, South Africa's Shameful Secret, authored by Cde Christine Olivier, is a hard hitting indictment of our broken capitalist food system. It sharply dissects the contradiction of a food system willing to waste a third of all food produced, worth a staggering R60 billion a year and equal to 2% of gross domestic product, while 13 million South African's go to bed hungry. Moreover, cde Christine argues how such a wasteful food system destroys our soils, uses most of our water, squanders employment opportunities and squeezes the wages of workers in the food system.

Taking It Further

The SAFSC in its analysis of the South African food system, developed through food dialogues across the country in 2014, at its Assembly in February and in the Hunger Tribunal of May 2015, shares this critique. However, we also go further from the standpoint of food sovereignty. Put simply the current capitalist food system cannot be redeemed and hence we have to go beyond it. We have to think and act to meet our food needs beyond the destructive logic of the food system. It is an enemy of human life and nature more broadly. Our analysis suggests the system, caught in the grip of capitalist profit making and globalising corporate power, suffers from other fundamental problems that undermines our society, nature and our future. This includes but is not limited to:

- Malnourishment which is linked to stunting and obesity. Nearly half of all children (43.6%) have vitamin A deficiency, while one in 10 are anaemic, a condition linked to iron deficiencies and can leave children feeling tired and weak. Both conditions result in stunting, or a failure to grow, in children, according to the SANHANES 1 report. Moreover, those receiving enough calories are also not healthy. We are the fattest country in Africa and one of the 20 fattest in the world. Obesity linked to cheap and unhealthy fast food is a death sentence bringing various health problems particularly to more and more young people;
- GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) plant and seed varieties are widespread in South Africa. We have not utilised the precautionary principle to place the onus on the likes of Monsanto to prove GMOs are healthy. In many parts of the world GMOs are banned or are not allowed. Over 80% of maize, a crucial staple in South Africa, is produced through GMOs. What effect does the toxic chemicals and pesticides, used with GMOs, have on the human body? Why is only one crop allowed per season? What effect are GMOs having on biodiversity and eco-systems? Why is there no GMO labeling? Our approach to GMOs have placed the public and nature at risk.
- Food prices for staples like bread and maize are constantly increasing. Most food corporations make super profits from bread. Between October 2013 and October 2014 the cost of the basic food basket increased by about R40 (+8.8%) (NAMC 2014). Food expenditure constitutes about 46.9% of the average monthly household income of the poorest third of the population, but only 1.9% of the average monthly household income of the wealthiest third of the population. Further, NAMC (2014) shows that there has been a 12.4% increase in the price of the 'food plate' of the five items that

are most widely consumed by very poor consumers in South Africa (that is maize, brown bread, white sugar, tea, milk). In this period, brown bread increased massively by 22.8%, milk by 13.2% and tea by 14.3%. This in a context of retrenchments and permanent unemployment.

- Corporate controlled industrial agriculture utilises over 60% of water supply in South Africa. This is due to irrigation systems and in a context of a seriously water scarce country. Our recent droughts further showing the limits of this kind of farming. Moreover, the chemical pesticides used in such farming is also poisoning our water supply.
- One count of South Africa's carbon emissions suggests that 6% is emitted by agriculture, forestry and other land uses. It is not clear if this includes the emissions involved in inputs, emissions from livestock and from transport. This figure is possibly an under count. In the end, industrial agriculture is fossil fuel driven and contributing to climate change. It is also a system of farming that has limited scope for mitigating emissions let alone adapting.
- It is globalised and therefore producing for export markets while South Africans starve. Alternatively it is importing food from far flung parts of the world, adding to carbon emissions. It is also financialised and hence prone to speculative shocks and input price volatility like the oil price.

The Right To Food and Food Sovereignty

The hypocrisy of the capitalist system is further affirmed with its obsession with profits at the expense of undermining the right to food and other essential human needs. This is strongly argued in Cde Christine's article. There is no disagreement here. Actually this common ground can only be strengthened by a food sovereignty perspective on the right to food which also appreciates that the right to food cannot be realised through food security. Food security approaches to the right to food have been around since the seventies and have not asked questions about power in the food system, about nutrition linked to having healthy food choices, about ecology as a basis for farming

and today through neoliberalisation is actually anti-state. Food security approaches to the right to food entrench the power of corporations in the food system. They assume food corporations embody the public interest, are democratic and have the correct answers to the food crisis. This is simply not the case. Food Sovereignty on the other hand believes the realisation of the right to food can only happen if we transform our food system and place control over production, consumption and food culture in the hands of the people. The right to food has to be given meaning by conscious and transformative peoples power. Of course this is not about letting the state off the hook.

Bringing the State In – But On Our Terms

Cde Christine ends her article with an important solution for the way forward. She asserts the needs of the people and the end of food waste "can only be achieved by a popular, democratic and worker-controlled state taking over significant and strategic parts of the food value chain."

Now it is easy to read this as merely calling for nationalisation, even strategically within a very complex food value chain comprising: 36 000 commercial farms, various inputs (3 companies controlling seed, for example), processing (4 companies controlling wheat to bread processing, for example and 4 companies account for 80% of processed food), transport logistics, retail (6 supermarkets control 94% of the grocery market) and consumers (53 million of us). Centralised control and concentration are self-evident and off course make the case for strategic nationalisation. However, there are two other ways of reading Cde Christine's position that assist with bringing her closer to food sovereignty. First, how do we ensure a popular, democratic and worker controlled state? From the standpoint of food sovereignty we achieve this from below by constituting our own power through our own food economies.

This means commoning, in a values (sharing, caring, solidarity, democracy, self management, eco-centric etc) based way, in three areas: (i) building a biotic commons in which land, water, seeds, plants, trees, the biosphere are all organised to sustain life beyond commodification but in common. It also means we live in balance as part of nature. In practice in the SAFSC it means promoting seed banks, seed exchanges, sharing land, agro-ecology, sustainable water use and eating what is produced locally; (ii) a human and cultural commons in which we harness our creativity, labour power and cultural heritage for our common

needs, self emancipation and benefit. In practice in the SAFSC it means worker cooperatives to meet food needs, learning exchanges, activist schools, arts and crafts, our own songs, recipes, cooking methods, healthy diets, solidarity economy networks and assemblies to build our movement power; (iii) a cyber commons in which we utilise information flows as use values to build our knowledge, share experiences, problem solve and promote popular education. In practice in the SAFSC this means collectively shaping our online newsletter content, using our Google list, Facebook page and cellphone technology to ensure sharing and learning, harnessing the webpages to provide links, training tools and problem solving and so on. Commoning is the foundation of popular, democratic and worker controlled power. It is the foundation of food sovereignty, the solidarity economy and ultimately a transformed state.

Second, with commoning the basis of food sovereignty we can also advance from below our own legislation, drafted by us, to push back and limit the corporate controlled food system, but at the same time affirm what is required for food sovereignty. Such a Food Sovereignty Act, supporting local government regulations, must be the basis to transform the food system and reposition the state in favor of our systemic alternative. In short, the food sovereignty approach builds an alternative food system now, while reclaiming the state from below. Cde Christine and the Movement for Socialism should surely agree with such a democratic eco-socialist way forward to address food waste but more generally the food crisis.

Vishwas Satgar is the Chairperson of COPAC and a member of the National Coordinating Committee of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign.



National News

Cooperative Financial Institutions and Cooperative Banks in South Africa

Tebogo Tshabala and Poppy Thubana (Cooperative Banks Development Agency)



CO-OPERATIVE BANKS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

27th Floor, 240 Vermeulen Street • Private Bag X1115, Pretoria, 0001 • Tel: 012 315 5367 • Fax: 012 315 5905 • email: CBDA@treasury.gov.za

The vision of CBDA is to create a strong and vibrant co-operative banking sector that broadens access to, and participation in, diversified financial services to achieve economic and social well-being.

→ **Business plan**

→ **Savings Policy**

→ **Credit Policy (if registering as a Savings and Credit Cooperative)**

A Cooperative Financial Institution (CFI) is the umbrella term for member based deposit taking financial cooperatives, owned and controlled by their members who have a common bond. It is a member-centric institution driven by service to its members to improve the economic and social well-being of its members. It encourages savings in order to provide responsible credit and other services to its members at a fair rate; whose surplus may be distributed amongst its members or towards improving services required by members.

Certain requirements need to be met to be eligible to apply to register as a CFI, these are the minimum requirements:

→ **Common bond**

- A common bond (also referred to as “chain of trust”) is the reason for formation of the CFI, what brings the group together
- In our regulations, three types of common bonds have been identified:
 1. Work based - people employed by the same employer or within the same business district
 2. Associational – having common membership in an association or organisation including religious, social, co-operative, labour or educational groups e.g. trade union
 3. Geographic - reside within the same defined community within a rural or urban district

→ **200 members**

→ **R100 000 in share capital**

→ **Constitution**

The Co-operative Banks Development Agency’s (CBDA’s) mission focuses on the development of the Co-operative Financial Institution (CFI) sector within the context of those who participate in it through:

- Appropriate regulation and supervision
- Innovative capacity development and support
- Promoting the co-operative philosophy and principles
- Building confidence in the CFI sector

Currently there are twenty six (26) registered CFIs and two (2) Cooperative Banks. They are making a difference in their members’ lives and communities; they are well positioned to enhance access to affordable financial services to the majority of the people that are still unbanked. The CBDA is currently working on a banking platform project, with access to the national payment system, a key driver in the success and growth of CFIs. This would also improve the CFI’s penetration levels, product offering and the ability to manage information of members, production of regulatory reports while focusing on financial inclusion.

One of the biggest challenges for the CFI sector is that the model is not well known in South Africa and the perception that it is only for the poor. One of the ways CBDA is working to curb this challenge is by meeting public sector entities and other state owned companies (SOCs) with particular emphasis on collaboration around establishment of employer based CFIs. These engagements will sell the CFI model highlighting its immense benefits and advantages; promote the principles and values underlying the co-

operative model as well as the economic, financial and social benefits of belonging to a CFI.

The Cooperative Banks Development Agency (CBDA) Capacity Building Unit is tasked with developing the Cooperative Financial Institutions' (CFI) board of directors, managers, members and staff. The CBDA is running a number of programmes through direct technical assistance and trainings. Below are some of the programmes:



The CFI sector is often referred to as a “sleeping giant” and “hidden treasure” in South Africa; this is because CFIs have a valuable role to play in South Africa, largely as a result of:



Savings are at the core of the CFI model. CFIs instill discipline as it is mandatory on all members of a CFI to save. This promotes a savings culture; it would improve the currently low savings levels in our Country, through a model that is member-controlled. These savings can also be used for investing in community

enterprises that create jobs, like cooperatives, and so contribute to constructing alternative relations of production and consumption.

CBDA has the following publications:

- Quarterly Review – the purpose of the quarterly review is to inform on the impact the CFI sector has by focusing on selected social, economic and developmental indicators on the sector to highlight the importance of CFIs and co-operative banks in fostering economic and social development.
- The Connection newsletter – the purpose of this newsletter is to keep people informed on the developments in the sector, to serve as a communication tool.

These can be found on this link <http://www.treasury.gov.za/coopbank/newsletter/newsletter.aspx>

For further information and assistance, the CBDA can be contacted at 012 315 5367 or cbda@treasury.gov.za.



International News

The Cooperative Model as a Tool for Shared Awareness in Argentina



The worker cooperative **Creando Conciencia** (Creating Awareness) was born in the year 2005 in Argentina, upon the initiative of a group of neighbours greatly worried about the final disposal of urban solid waste, the problem of urban garbage collectors (“cartoneros”) and the possibility of generating alternatives that could address these problems with social responsibility and sustainability. Based on such concerns, the group began to think about the possibility of designing the process of differentiated waste collection in their own neighbourhoods.

This is therefore a solidarity undertaking that was initiated following two major guidelines: on the one hand the protection of the environment and, on the other, the work reintegration of the unemployed in the northern area of the province of Buenos Aires.

Edgardo Jalil, member of the cooperative, described the start-up phase of the cooperative when the collectors provided their recycling know-how to those who had “the idea in their head, theoretically speaking. They were youngsters who were hired by large waste collection companies for three months and then left out in the cold even though they were knowledgeable about recycling, knowledge that was transferred to the cooperative”, he indicated.

Creando Conciencia managed to generate recycled material of excellent quality since it avoids contamination in each and every stage, which allows them to obtain agreements with large recyclers. Among the tasks performed we find: pickers’ teams and supervisors, selection and classification. These tasks are performed at the cooperative’s headquarters by groups of members of the cooperative, mainly composed of women, who classify materials that had

been pre-sorted by neighbours and businesses. There, recyclable materials are wrapped and compressed, to be later commercialized. Jalil emphasized: “we can negotiate with those companies and we set the terms ourselves because we know how they want the material and, besides, we are always able to carry it in the conditions they want.”

The cooperative **Creando Conciencia** has established a space for training and advice as it intends to both generate and accompany learning processes linked to the environment, destined to their clients, organizations and neighbours that share a commitment towards waste treatment in a responsible manner. Through activities, talks and meetings, the goal is to recuperate and highlight the knowledge of local communities in relation to waste and the latter’s responsible treatment, doing so through social inclusion. Likewise, the cooperative members aim at stimulating a critical analysis of the information related to the environment, to trigger change in terms of knowledge, thought and action as well as improve their setting.

Creando Conciencia is member of the Federation of Worker Cooperatives of the Argentine Republic (FECOOTRA).

Article Source:

<http://www.cicopa.coop/The-Cooperative-model-as-a-tool.html>

Cooperative Supports Community Groups to Develop Renewable Energy Projects in Australia



The **Community Power Agency (CPA)** is an Australian worker cooperative in the field of community energy advocacy and development. CPA was set up in 2011

after returning from visiting all shapes and sizes of community energy in the UK, Europe, North America and India. Inspired by the action of other communities, the cooperative was created to support the growth of community-owned renewable energy projects in Australia.

“We believe that democratically controlled, decentralised renewable energy projects will bring social, environmental and economic benefits to communities across Australia”, say the members of the cooperative.

The Community Power Agency’s mission is to help grow a vibrant community renewable energy sector in Australia, through building the capacity of communities on the ground and working collaboratively with other organisations to address systemic barriers facing the sector as a whole.

For more information: <http://cpagency.org.au/>

Article Source:

<http://www.cicopa.coop/Supporting-community-groups-to.html>



The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC)

Activist diary entry #1

MEET AVIWE BIKO

Be inspired by this activist



My name is Aviwe Biko. I am from King William's Town, Eastern Cape. I am a member of Ilizwi Lamafama (The Voice of the Regional Farmers) and also a member of Dimbaza Agricultural Cooperative. In my co-op, we produce varieties of veggies which we sell to community members and to the nearby schools for their nutrition programme. Through the assistance of Zingisa Educational Project, we organised a number of workshops around the issue of climate change, global warming, and agro-ecological methods of agriculture.

How did you become an activist?

I became an activist because I could see that people have been brainwashed by the capitalist system that created the dependency of our people. The most vulnerable group are rural poor, particularly women and children, who have no access to information and resources. I organised and mobilised them and helped raise awareness on issues that are affecting their food system.

What are the key activities that you do to promote food sovereignty in your community?

After 21 years of democracy 80% of households

are still met with the challenge of poverty, while the government's role is minimal. The Monsantos are in control of the food system in this country and Government policies are in favour of big businesses because their focus is all about the profit. I created a platform where I could share the indigenous knowledge and seeds in meetings, and in Church.

During 2012 I attended an agro-ecology workshop. Here my mind-set was changed and I began to implement what I had learned. I began to understand my origins and my consciousness was raised. As members of Ilizwi, we started a campaign for Seed Recovery and Seed Saving as a tool that can rescue us from the Monsantos. We formed networks with our comrades in Transkei who still have indigenous knowledge and seeds. We managed to recover six varieties of maize seed, i.e. Gastyeketye (it has different colours in one comb), Gambushe (red/purplish), Ingesi elibomvu (red), Ingesi elimhlophe (white), Jamani (also red) and Ntsikivana (it can be red or white but it is a small tiny sweet corn). But before we could put these seeds in the seed bank, we had to follow at least six steps which included conducting various experiments and trials to select the best seed. The last stage, the seed bank, is where you finally invest your seeds. Well trained people are needed to manage the seed bank. They have to provide tight security because criminals can come in and corrupt or contaminate our traditional seeds. When it comes to selling and buying the seeds from the seed bank, we require that a form be filled in with full details.

What are some of the challenges you face as an activist?

Our government is missing the point that people need food not cotton or paprika. These programmes are not addressing the challenge of poverty in our communities. A few years ago Ilizwi conducted a case study in one of our areas that we work with, where government took about 50 hectares to plant cotton as a plan to promote food security in that community. The people became poorer and more vulnerable because their livestock died. This is an example of how government is supporting neo-liberal policies. Rather, we need indigenous seed policies. Such policies can play a crucial role in the realisation of the right to food, and it is the biggest challenge that government faces in supporting our agriculture. Again recovering indigenous seeds from different areas is key to Agro-ecology and key to ensuring the continuation of the

wisdom that we inherited from our ancestors.

What recent events have you attended or hosted to promote food sovereignty?

On the 7th of August 2015 I attended Roundtable on the Gendered Impact of the food system. Women from different provinces shared their experiences of the land tenure system. They have no land access for food production. It inspired me to see that women can voice their opinions, talk about challenges and also come out with a way forward.

What message would you like to give to other food sovereignty activists?

My message is this: The struggle continues. Say no to GMOs. Share the information, and create a space for the 'each one teach one' process.

Remember, one seed can feed millions in this country.

AMANDLA!

Activist diary entry #2

My Experience of the MST Political School in Brazil

Vukile Macingwana

Below is a report by Vukile Macingwana, a rural activist with Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda in Keiskammahoek, about the political school that he had the opportunity of attending with the Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil earlier this year.

From March to May this year I attended the International English Language Course on Political Training for Political Education, hosted by the Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil. The MST is a massive movement in Brazil of peasants and landless workers who fight for land and agrarian reform, for food sovereignty, through land occupations and other forms of struggle. The aims of the school were:

- To strengthen the political training of political educators
- To provide space for exchange between social and political organisations, to promote solidarity and build deeper unity between organisations
- To promote revolutionary, socialist and Marxist ideas as the historical legacy that has been developed through the course of working class struggle

- To discuss the design, content and methodology of political, ideological and organisational training, in order to deepen efforts of the participants' capacity to develop training programs that are tailored to the current moment and their specific context

The school was created in January 2005 and it was built in order to think, plan and develop the political and ideological training of militants and comrades of the MST. The school aims to develop actions that integrate other social and popular, rural and urban movements in Brazil and other countries. MST was formed 31 years ago as the way of responding to the abuse of peasants by the capitalist system, whereby the land was grabbed from ordinary people, the manipulation of the small farmers and farm workers. Education was seen as one of the tools when opposing the capitalist system. The school is named after one of the struggle legends Florestan Fernandes and it was built in solidarity by the community members, bringing different skills and building techniques together, from making bricks to building the actual school. The school was built to sustain the MST movement, students from poor communities and other relevant movements. There is no age limit, women with children can come and attend while the children are being taken care of in the Kids Centre. The education is seen as very important to keep the movement relevant and on point. There are many other MST schools in other parts of Brazil.

On the first day we were divided into our groups, called Nuclear Basis. The role of each Nuclear Basis is for us to coordinate ourselves, coordinate the school and to make decisions through consensus. We also had to name our groups after a passed-on struggle hero. Also, every day we had to participate in what they called Militant Work, which was the work that had to be done for the school to run, like washing dishes, doing laundry, production like working in the orchard, health care and looking after children. There were no people paid to do this job for us, we had to do it ourselves.

We also learned about the importance of doing a Mistica, which there is no formula for but which essentially involves performing song, symbols, love, life, poetry in defiance against the structures that capitalism imposes. It is about celebrating struggle, beauty, freedom and life. It is an important act to sustain us in our struggles. As country representatives we also had to work together to present to everyone key information on our country, such as the economy, struggles, our past, everyday and future concerns.

We also had to choose which classic texts from Africa we would read in the course and present on – we read authors like Steve Biko, Kenneth Kaunda and Chinua Achebe, which made us realise how we have not engaged with these important texts and how important it is to do so! The educational approach of the school is therefore different to traditional education where people are just taught things that will help them find a job and fit into the capitalist system; this education was about a participatory approach in which the aim is to produce people who will continue the struggle for a better world.

We then were separated into several groups to visit the sites where MST is working and assisting. There are different sites with different struggles. Some went to mining operations, a building occupation in the city, indigenous people, housing, settlements and Camps (agro-ecology).

I was appointed to go to the Agro-ecology group (in camps and settlements). One of the main struggles of MST is land reform, but because of disagreements with the government forced occupation becomes the tactic to access land. In the encampments it is where people have been mobilised to occupy the land. First the MST does research on the land they want to occupy: who does it belong to, do they have legal rights, are they using the land according to the law. They then occupy. Poor people who are in the cities with no jobs and proper places to stay are mobilised and also people who lost their land. When mobilising they make sure to get thousands of people who are in need of land and also the trick is to make it difficult for the government and the police to control or stop. The people will be educated about how MST operates and what is the struggle, responsibilities and commitments.

Wherever there is an encampment there is also a school. Students, parents and teachers gather and debate what should be taught in the school, using MST education objectives. From grade 1 students are taught to be responsible, every class having appointed coordinators. They practice chants and struggle slogans. They learn about struggles happening in other countries.

This all happens after the land has been occupied and negotiations with government have begun. The camp is democratically self-organised. When the negotiations are done each family gets land on which cooperatives are established and they collectively decide what each family will grow. Agroecology is the approach to grow, organic ways of growing and taking care of environment. They started by growing

to feed families and later decided to sell. Now there is a national entity where organic producers are selling 30% of their produce to the government and the rest is sold on open market.

There is a lot to learn on how the MST operates and we were asked to design a programme of Political Education. What I have worked on will be coming soon. We also had to come up with a political education programme for our country. I could not come up with the final plan because for me it was important to report back and discuss with my organisation what we can take from the report and adapt it to our programmes.

Vukile can be contact at vkvisual@gmail.com



Worker Cooperative Campaign

Worker Cooperative Activist School: There are alternatives to capitalism

Nokwanda Langazana



The South African economy is run by the few. The system itself is in favor of those who own, control and benefit from the means of production whereas workers who undertake the operations earn peanuts. The rich are becoming richer and poor becoming poorer. Once all the energy, strength and power of workers has been utilised they are retrenched, leaving them with little to nothing. In rural grassroots communities there is land to produce enough food and people are knowledgeable on how to plant their fields.

In some areas people are producing enough that can feed their communities but retail shops are still controlling the market. But crying without an action will not help us. The activist school on worker cooperatives that took place in Stay City, Johannesburg on the 27th to 30th July 2015 conducted by South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFCS) made it clear that there are alternatives. It was great to be invited amongst change makers, cooperators and activists from different parts of the country. We find that when marginalised South Africans take a stand and form worker cooperatives they can work to transform their lives and their communities as worker cooperatives are about workers creating an enterprise that is democratically controlled by them for their own benefits.

I was so pleased to participate in this school which taught me that once we identified challenges it is

worthwhile to use solidarity fruitfully by creating worker cooperatives, but according to our needs and demands. We are the first market before we even look at outside markets that we can serve. We are living in a society that is gradually losing social fabric because of greedy companies that control the business world but we as people can change that. By attending this school I felt it is like a wakeup call to the working class and poor to question ourselves on whether are we on the right boat? If we are, who has the key? If we don't have the key for the boat, are we not in danger of being dropped in the middle of the ocean?

I learned that it is possible as there are case studies of successful worker cooperatives like Mondragon in Spain, Twanano manufacturing here in South Africa and many more in different countries and continents. Importantly, the school was about practical training on the steps to actually set up a worker cooperative, from groundwork steps through to start-up and expansion and consolidation. Steps and processes that we normally consider to be the scary part of setting up a cooperative has been simplified by doing it on participatory process during the school, based on the new worker cooperative activist guide.

I feel that we spend lot of time talking, now let's start doing! I appeal to trade unions that where workers have been retrenched they must not be left hanging;

they have skills that can build solidarity economy in our country. If you are unemployed you are not useless but your hands and brains can feed and rescue an economic situation in our country. Power belongs to workers – it is time to shine and is time to create change. Believe me, there is an alternative of worker cooperatives to create work. Let us be self-sufficient by eating food and use products that we know where they come from. Let's go back to old ways (Masibuyele kundalashe) of food that are not from retail shops but food that is from the soil. Let us reclaim our identity by a living less dependent lifestyle. We can do it. Amandla!!!

Nokwanda works with women on climate change issues on a project that focuses on sustainable farming (food gardens) and water harvesting and renewable energy (biogas digester). She is a community facilitator and workshop coordinator in projects that allow people to decide about their own development. She works with GenderCCSA and Sustaining the Wild Coast (SWC).



Growing Momentum for Worker Coops in Los Angeles, California

Ashley Ortiz, in collaboration with Karen Ochoa and Misty Spicer



This past year, I joined forces with two other Antioch University Urban Sustainability graduate students — Karen Ochoa and Misty Spicer — to research what it would take for Los Angeles, California to develop the tools and capacity to create worker owned businesses.

Working closely with Professor Gilda Haas, and two U.S. cooperative veteran advisors, Tim Huet of the Arizmendi Cooperative Association and Vanessa Bransburg of the Center for Family Life, we embarked on a learning journey that transformed the way that we see the City and our own potential for making a difference.

A worker owned cooperative business is owned and controlled by the people who work there. All worker cooperatives share two central characteristics:

1) worker owners invest in and own the business together (and share in its surplus); and 2) decision-making is democratic, following the general principle of one member-one vote.

There are many successful worker cooperatives in the U.S. and beyond, and they operate in many different industries. Interest in these types of

businesses is steadily growing because coops typically spread wealth more equitably, create better jobs, promote democracy, and ground businesses in their communities.

Our journey began with research into local sectors where the possibility for new worker cooperatives exists, such as food, health care, and waste and recycling. We also went on a study tour of several inspiring Bay Area co-ops that have built successful bakeries, graphic design collectives, and more, and participated in a round table discussion with leaders in the co-op community.



To test and inform our learning process, we turned our research into useful products. For example, we provided an inventory of worker cooperative curricula and other resources to the Community Development Technologies Center that is associated with L.A. Trade Tech College. We conducted a workshop on cooperatives for new and potential worker-owners of the COURAGE home care cooperative that is housed at the Pilipino Workers Center. We also documented our process, products, and on-going activity on our Los Angeles Co-op Lab website.

In the course of our research, we were delighted to find and align with others who are working towards the same goals: The United Steelworkers Union's effort to reclaim a car wash abandoned by its owner and convert it into a co-op owned by those workers, in conjunction with the Los Angeles Union Cooperative Initiative; an electricians' co-op that is training community workers in trade-skills while helping homeowners and businesses convert to solar; and the emerging Solidarity Research Center that seeks to support these kinds of efforts.

We are now putting our research to work in the start-up of Antioch University's Los Angeles Co-op Lab, which is designed to support the development of worker cooperatives and stimulate the creation of conceptual and practical tools to support these businesses. Through these conversations we will continue our support of worker owned businesses in L.A. and continue building connections with the growing network of local and national cooperative developers and worker owners.

For more information about the Los Angeles Co-op Lab check out our website at lacooplaboratory.com or contact Gilda Haas at ghaas@antioch.edu.



Arts and Culture

Cry for Africa: Poem

This poem was written by Elizabeth Moleko, a small agroecology farmer from Sebokeng in the Vaal area. She read it out at the last activist school and submitted it for publication in this newsletter. She plans to write a second poem on the alternative of food sovereignty for the next newsletter.

Cry for Africa

Elizabeth Moleko

We are children of Africa
We cry for our land
Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho unite
We are mad over the Land Act
A terrible law that allows sojourners
To deny us our land
Crying that we the people
Should pay to get our land back
We cry for the children of our fathers
We roam around the world without a home
Even in the land of their forefathers
Social movement union
Land food, jobs and poverty

Song: What a System

The following song was taught to us at the People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Landlessness by Rosa-Linda De Kock from the Southern Cape Land Committee (SCLC), and relates nicely to both food sovereignty and the solidarity economy. The song is sung a number of times over, each time increasing the tempo:

What a system
What a system
What a system
What a crime
We can't mend it
We must end it
End it now and for all time



Activist Resources for Advancing the Solidarity Economy From Below

Activist Guide for Setting Up a Worker Cooperative Launched!

The guide can be freely downloaded at...

<http://www.copac.org.za/publications/create-work-through-worker-cooperatives-activist-guide>.

If you require hard copies, please contact COPAC through the details on the last page of this newsletter.



Worker Cooperative Development: The Low Touch/High Touch Framework

The Democracy at Work Institute, based in the United States, has developed a video tool to assist worker cooperative development. As they say: Worker cooperative development can be a high-impact strategy for creating and saving good jobs, and ultimately for building a fairer economy. But what is it, exactly? In this video, we present a framework for community groups exploring worker cooperative development to answer key questions about the process, the commitment, and what you need to do it successfully.

To watch the very useful video, go to the following link: <http://bit.ly/1LOQsfA>

In the last newsletter we mentioned that a new activist guide was soon to be published, called *Create Work Through Worker Cooperatives: A Guide for Grassroots Activism*. It was launched and used at the recent activist school on worker cooperatives and is now freely available for use. The guide provides steps on how to set up a worker cooperative through various contexts known as the groundwork phase. It then moves onto a start up phase sharing tools for operational worker controlled management, and finally an expansion and consolidation phase to help consolidate the cooperative or work on strategies for expanding the worker cooperative. We are excited to share this essential tool to help strengthen and build worker cooperatives as transformative alternatives in response to the deepening neoliberal crisis exacerbating unemployment, poverty and inequality!



contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter by writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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All back issues of the Solidarity Economy News are available on our website.