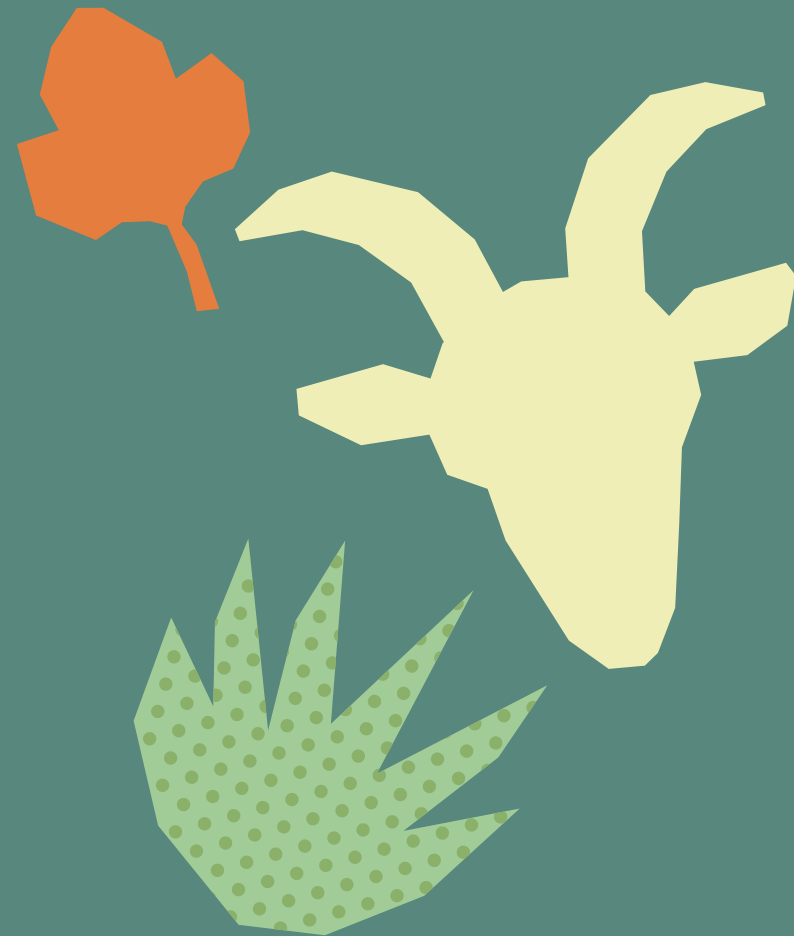


CHAPTER THREE



Sowing, Diversifying, and Reflecting Collectively to Adapt to Climate Change²²

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Networks for Transformation of Agrofood Systems Project, coordinated by Rimisp in the Indigenous territories of Sierra Norte de Puebla (Mexico), Alta Verapaz (Guatemala), and Torotoro (Bolivia).

Maya mythology recounts the creation of the world. They say that in the beginning, the world was in stillness; there was nothing, because the gods went their own ways, without communicating. Until they decided to speak, to exchange ideas, thoughts. And then the idea of creating the world emerged; it was at that moment that they made the decision and said, “Let us create the world, let us create the sea, let us create the plants, let us create maize.” Thus, the gods brought about creation. And so, we, too, need to converse continuously, because conversation gives rise to creation: to create something from what we discuss.

If each person is solving their problems at home, well, that is fine; it is their way. But when we come together and talk, we realize that we all suffer from the same affliction. There is a saying that speaks to this: If I am unwell, but the person over there is also unwell, is everything fine? Do you know the saying? The saying goes, and I will say it with great respect: “Misery loves company.” This means that I am content, I remain tranquil as long as the other person is in the same situation as I am. But if we start talking about why things are this way, one asks: Do the things that happen here also happen elsewhere? How do they happen? And if they happen the same way elsewhere, then what is happening? We need to go deeper, to understand, and that requires these spaces for conversation; it requires joint reflection.

I say this because I want to talk about a particular situation. There is a process of impoverishment. It is not that we are poor, because we are not poor. We are in a process in which we are losing things, and this does not happen because God wills it. It is important to say this: we are not in this situation, as is sometimes said, because God made us poor. God would not truly wish there to be poor people. This process comes from others who are deriving benefit from this impoverishment. They are taking everything from us. They are taking everything from us, and this is something we need to become aware of; it must be discussed. The power groups in this country and globally want to take everything from us.

I will explain it with an example, with an illustration. If everything is gradually taken away from us and we are left with nothing, we have nothing, we need someone to give us something. If we are completely naked, stripped, with nothing, we will have to ask for someone to please give us something so that we can cover ourselves. It is this system that is taking everything from us, little by little, and we do not realize it. How many eggs are sold in the stores? This is an example. Who benefits from us not having chickens? Who benefits from us not planting and having our own beans, when it is possible to cultivate on all these lands and we can also have our own poultry, to have eggs.

Everything is being taken from us. In schools, we were forced to learn Spanish and we are forgetting our language. One day we were told that eating sausage, eating ham, eating cereals, drinking milk, was the best diet. A few years later, the number one cause of death in our country is diabetes. But we were told on television, tirelessly, constantly, that “if you eat sausage, eat ham, if you eat cereals, drink cola, you are modern, you are cool, you are fashionable. And if not, you are backward, you are wrong.” This is a form of violence, a violence we often do not perceive.

What is violence? Violence is not physical; it does not hurt physically, it hurts morally. It is not something where someone hits you and you say, “Oh, that hurts!” No. The violence I am talking about is moral, because if someone tells you, if they make you feel that if you do not eat cereal with milk, you are not fashionable, you are backward, how does that feel? That hurts, doesn’t it? No one wants to feel that way.

I want to share my experience with you; I want to tell you how I lived it. When ham and sausage started to appear, I was a child. This was about 30 years ago. At that time, if you went to a family’s home and they had eggs with ham for breakfast, it was a super cool breakfast. Or to have breakfast with cereal, milk, and banana — that was something else. The people who had that on their table were modern, they were civilized. And the one who had their tortillas, their quelites (edible greens) with salsa and beans, was backward and not fashionable.



One day we were told that eating sausage, eating ham, eating cereals, drinking milk, was the best diet.



So, it is a violence that does not hurt physically. It is a violence that hurts and weakens us morally, and that is why we stopped drinking pulque, we stopped eating quelites, we stopped eating palmos (a flower consumed in certain seasons of the year). There was a time when people, eating sausage, eating ham and head cheese, drinking Coca-Cola and milk, and all of that, well, they felt they were fashionable. Years later, when the number one cause of death in our country is diabetes, is obesity — these are diseases that entered through the mouth.

I have said it before, but I will not get tired of repeating it: not even as a joke would I take a sip of Coca-Cola, because it is my way of saying that I reject and despise it, because it outrages me. The Coca-Cola people are getting rich at our expense. And we are slowly poisoning ourselves. And the worst thing is that this poisoning makes us dependent. For example, once diabetes is diagnosed, that person becomes dependent on pharmacies. And who owns the pharmacies? Almost always, or sometimes, they are the same people.

So, this is part of what we want to reflect on with you. We are inviting you, proposing a conversation, to see how we can reclaim ancestral foods, the foods our grandparents, our parents used to eat, which had their particular characteristics, but were healthy. Today, we still have the possibility of accessing these foods. Those quiotes (maguey stalks) over there, those that have sprouted and are flowering, are dozens of kilos of food. Possibly even tons. If anything, it will end up as firewood or organic matter, but today it is food. Those are dozens of kilos, hundreds if we add up all the communities and villages, that will be turned into organic matter, when we could have used them differently.

Isn't that right, Doña Meche? I remember the first time I saw you, when I met you, you had some palmitos de quiote with egg and quelites on your table. Oh, amazing! How delicious! These are our foods, and we must make the most of them in season, when they are available.

There is someone who benefits from our loss. There is someone who benefits when we lose our knowledge, our stories, our customs, the ways our parents and grandparents taught us. There is someone who benefits from that, from our loss of memory, because in this system there are some who are wealthy and want to monopolize everything, to take everything possible away from the rest and keep it all for themselves. You can see it on television, though there it is reported differently. Death is a business. There are people who get rich by killing. That is their job. And there are many, as we know in Mexico. So, we live in a system of death, and we need to think about how to confront it. We confront that system of death with a system of life. And that system of life is built from the communities, from here.

Specifically, we, together with you, have the challenge in the next two or three years to ensure that there is as much food as possible throughout the year. Growing maize, beans, and broad beans; these are seasonal crops. And if things go well, we harvest once a year, and if not, we harvest nothing. That is why we propose that you grow vegetables. Which vegetables? The ones you want. Two, three, or four, but they must be used—vegetables that will be eaten.

Why do we want to focus on vegetables? Because they have a short cycle. Corn, how long does it take to be ready? When do you plant it and when do you harvest it? It is planted in March and harvested in November, approximately. March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November. Let's say at least eight months for the harvest to be ready. Among vegetables, there are plants whose cycle is as long as three months, and the radish, which is miraculous and ready for harvest in just 28 days. So, we have this great opportunity to plant vegetables continuously, and harvest continuously, which gives us the possibility of having food continuously.

Many people already have their own gardens and irrigation systems at home. So we want to invite those who are interested to join this project, where we aim to collaborate so that we can cultivate, diversify, and harvest. And experiment to see how we can do it better. We want to contribute with netting, shade cloths, and seeds. So far, we have seven varieties of seeds that we can offer: cilantro, radish, lettuce, spinach, carrot, onion, and chard. This is the great challenge: to cultivate, diversify, and harvest. Another point we want to reiterate is that, even amid these situations of water scarcity, it is possible to grow vegetables, as many of you demonstrate every day. You have had your own gardens for some time, which means it is possible. And if we were to visit your homes, it would be rare to find a house without at least one plant. Most have many ornamental plants; at the entrance of the houses there are always pots, and you water them, and there they are — they do not dry out. This means there is at least a little water available to plant and harvest some vegetables.



Growing maize, beans, and broad beans; these are seasonal crops. And if things go well, we harvest once a year, and if not, we harvest nothing.



We would also like to propose that you record how much you harvest. If you harvested a bunch of radishes, if you harvested a bunch of chard, write it down, because we want to keep a record so you can see how much food we are capable of producing in a year. How much you are capable of producing. We must strive to depend as little as possible on food that comes from outside.

Colleagues, another important thing we want to do is monitor how the climate behaves. We want two people to help us monitor the climate on a daily basis. This does not require lengthy reports. There is a template where you simply note whether it was cloudy, rainy, sunny, etc., and that is also recorded. These notes will be compiled so we can observe how the climate behaves throughout the year, and we want to continue this for several years to see how we see the climate evolving. We need at least one or two people from this section to do it, and at least one or two people from the upper section, because, as you said earlier, once you cross from that little hill to here, it is a different climate. Crossing the hill over there, that is another climate. It is not the same, it is not identical, which is why we want to keep records using templates that we will share.

This is the project to which we invite you. We seek to collectively build knowledge about how the maize cycle is adapting to this climate change, while we experiment with our crops. We will record information at least about maize, and if we have the energy, we will do so with other crops as well. We will cross-reference these notes with information about planting and harvesting, to observe how adjustments are being made to the cycle in the face of climate change — that is, the variation in rainfall, the increase in temperatures, the arrival of frosts. In some cases, for example, this could help the maize sprout more quickly, right? It could; who knows? That is why we want to systematize and cross-reference this information, reflecting with the communities. For example, asking, “Don Luis, when did you plant? Don Constantino, when did you plant? Don Víctor, when did you plant?” We want to see how things are working out for them. The one who planted first, how did it go? And the one who started second, how did it go? And so on, observing how the plantings behave and cross-referencing that information with producers from other communities, to see how they are doing it and to create knowledge about how we are adjusting the maize crop cycle in response to climate variability.

We believe that adaptation to these climatic changes is better achieved collectively, through dialogue and sharing, rather than each person acting individually. As the saying goes, it is better all together than for each to fend for themselves. If we do it reflectively, through conversation, I believe we can adapt much more advantageously than if each person tries to adapt alone. We must face this challenge of climate change collectively.

