

A women's day at the Organic World Congress

IFOAM, with the aim to highlight the important roles that women play in organic agriculture and to encourage them to take up public leadership, organized a day-long program at its 16th Organic World Congress (Modena, June 2008).



The daily module on women in organic agriculture started in the morning with a Women's Cultural Event. The 20 minutes performance was organized and led by Asha Kachru from India, joined by 20 women from the Italian organic

movement and by congress participants from all parts of the world. The ceremony illustrated, communicated and celebrated the power of the feminine side in all of us. It included dancing, acting, a slide show, ritual lighting of lamps and incense sticks. At the end women delivered simple food to the participants. Afterwards a representative of the women from Emilia Romagna organic movement read an exciting message of peace and welcome to the plenary.

Afterwards a workshop took place at the Chamber of Commerce building. It was in English with simultaneous translation into Italian. The first session, "How women are dealing with organic farming", presented stories on how organic agriculture is effectively improving the lives of women and their families and how women through organic agriculture are empowered in their role in the society. It also looked at which policies have supported the development of organic agriculture and gender equity. Edith Kunihira, from Agro Eco (Uganda) told about the northern Uganda Shea Project experience and Subrahmanyeswari Bodapti, from India, demonstrated the relationship between organic farming and gender. Eli Rydström, a Sweden farmer from Arla, presented some videos with her image for promoting organic milk. Maria Aico Watanabe, from Brazil and Elba Rivera, from Nicaragua, in two different presentations showed the role of women in the agroenvironmental activities. Three presentations were held by Italian women. Indira Franco, from Transfair, about the Organic fair trade as a tool for women empowerment,

Lucia Dallari (Associazione delle biofattorie della Provincia di Modena) about the trend towards a return to a rural way of life and Elisabetta Pozzi, from Moricelli farm, about women's role in bioeducational farms and rural development. During the second session, in the afternoon, Maria Grazia Mammuccini told of how women build networks for conserving biodiversity. Sue Edwards (Ethiopia) related the dramatic situation of women in Africa, in particular in rural areas, where prejudices and lack of information increased people's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Georgina Koomson from Ghana told about her successful experience as an organic farmer and owner of a small processing company in Ghana. The final session of the module, "Proposals for actions", was an open forum debate where participants debated about how the global organic movement can continue to work towards the realization of true empowerment and full



participation of women in all spheres of society and from all parts of the world. The discussion was run with the contribution of experts in women's issues as Gertrude Kenyangi Kabusimbi (SWAGEN, Uganda), Adi Maimalaga (Women in Business Development - Samoa), Asha Kachru ((Straniata - India) and organic agriculture leaders as Jacqueline Haessig Alleje (IFOAM World Board, Philippines). They delivered also recommendations to the IFOAM General Assembly, which met in the days following the OWC. During the workshop, an out of program initiative also took place. Vandana Shiva, the Indian ecologist leader and Eli Rydström, a Swedish farmer spoke together to the women proposing them to build a network linking together organic women from the North and South, for supporting the biodiversity in the world.

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