What role for researchers in supporting agroecology as a path to food sovereignty?

Professor Michel Pimbert
Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience
Coventry University, UK
Agroecological research and innovation

• Agroecological solutions are not delivered top down. They are developed through respectful intercultural dialogue between scientists and farmers/citizens, - building on peoples’ local priorities, knowledge and capacity to innovate

• Shift from a transfer of technology model of R&D to a decentralised, bottom up, and participatory process of knowledge creation tailored to unique local contexts in rural and urban areas

• Knowledge intensive, transdisciplinary and based on principles of cognitive justice
Farmer participation throughout the research cycle to expand knowledge democracy:

- the framing of national policies for science and development
- the choice of upstream strategic priorities for R&D, including decisions on budget allocations by funding bodies
- during scientific and technological research – the production and validation of knowledge in the natural and social sciences, as well as the arts and humanities
- in evaluating research results and impacts, including risk and sustainability assessments.
Transforming knowledge and democratising ways of knowing depends on two complementary approaches:

• democratizing science and technology research, with increased funding for public research and transdisciplinary approaches that include peoples’ knowledge

• de-institutionalizing research for autonomous learning and action, with an emphasis on strengthening horizontal networks of grassroots research and innovation as well as citizen oversight over the production of knowledge.
Strengthening local organisations that facilitate self-managed research & grassroots innovation

• Farmer-led horizontal networks of peer-to-peer learning and knowledge creation throughout the world

• *Campesino a Campesino* in Central America

• L’ Atelier Paysan (France) and Farm Hack (USA and UK)
Democratising Public Research and Transforming Knowledge

• New roles and ways of working for researchers
• A shift to transdisciplinary and participatory research that respects and includes farmer & peoples’ knowledge
• Organisational transformation
• Protecting public research from corporate control and censorship
Professional reversals and organizational transformation

• Emphasis on participatory skills as well as enabling attitudes and behavior needed to learn from farmers/citizens (mutual listening, respect, gender sensitivity, empathy etc.)

• Rewards and incentives to engage in power equalizing transdisciplinary research with farmers & citizens

• Transforming organisational cultures and operational procedures: shifts from hierarchical and rigidly bureaucratic structures to ‘flat’, flexible, and responsive research organizations
Protecting public research against corporate abuse and control

• Job security in university education and research

• Safeguards against the corruption of science by corporations

• Re-inventing research institutions for the common good through alliances between researchers and citizens
The bigger picture: time and material security are pre-requisites for democratising knowledge

• Without farmers on the land there is no participation and co-inquiry possible

• Deep policy changes needed to reverse economic genocide of farmers and give more material security to farmers

• Wo/men need free time needed for democratic deliberations, citizenship, and practice of the art of participatory democracy