



# Bilim forum 2023

Bilim Forum for Agroecology in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Nilüfer - Bursa  
Turkiye  
10th - 14th of July 2023

## REPORT



BURSA, TURKEY



Schola  
Campesina



Bilim Forum

Europe and Central Asia Agroecology  
Network Meeting



10-14 JULY 2023

Supported by



AGROECOLOGY  
FUND

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks to our noble host, Arca Atay from Ekoder, to the Municipality of Nilüfer and his Mayor Mr. Turgay Erdem, and to Berin Ertuk from Çiftçi-Sen without whom none of this would have been possible. Our special thanks also go to Carolina Rizzi Starr (FAO REU) for her endless energy, sensibility, and passion and to Agroecology Fund, specifically Angela Cordeiro, for truly supporting and funding this forum and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw for bringing extra funds and enable more participation in the forum. Finally we thank all participants who brought their energy and passion and shared their experiences and helped make this convening a success.



*Links to:*

*[Bilim Forum 2023 report from Agro Perma-Lab](#)*

*[Final Communication of the forum](#)*

## Executive Summary

The 2023 Forum of the Bilim was held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of July in Turkey. The purpose of the forum was to foster strong cooperation amongst our organizations, where we shared our experiences and build a common agenda in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for Agroecology and Human Rights. Four days were dedicated to group and plenary discussions where organizations shared their knowledge and experiences on the following thematic: agroecology schools and learning processes, Human Rights and UNDROP, Seeds and biodiversity, Right to Land, Access to market and Building community solidarity in times of crisis.

During the forum we presented the agroecology school toolkit to support the development of training activities in the region and we reaffirmed the utility of our digital platform Bilim for exchanging amongst us in a safe environment. The forum 2023 enabled us to closely collaborate in the near future (UNDROP, Seed legislation, Peasant-seed system) based on new alliances, to develop sub-regional initiatives, to coordinate our advocacy efforts, to strengthen the voice of Eastern Europe and Central Asia small-scale food producers and Indigenous people in global fora. It has been decided to meet again next year for the Bilim forum 2024.

The forum was created as a place of trust and sharing, an opportunity to strengthen the links amongst us, build the solidarity of our network, learn from each other, know each other better and build a common vision and work plan for our Bilim Community.

### *WHAT IS BILIM?*

Bilim is a community of organizations active in Agroecology<sup>[1]</sup> from Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Our community brings together grassroots movements, organizations, NGO's and other groups organizing peasants and small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples, academics, with a special focus women and youth.

The participants of Bilim community are practicing and / or promoting Agroecology on the ground and /or at policy level, with a focus on protecting biodiversity and cultural heritage, placing smallholders' knowledge at the center of food systems. Our work is guided by our cultural diversity and the Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology, UNDROP<sup>[2]</sup> and UNDRIP<sup>[3]</sup>. This alliance is facilitated by four organizations: Schola Campesina, Elkana, Eco Rurales and ADI.

BILIM community is a space for:

- sharing of experiences and knowledge
- alliance and coordination to mainstream Agroecology and Human Rights at policy level
- building concrete solidarity.

Bilim community is open to organizations recommended by Bilim participants<sup>[4]</sup> based on trust and common values defined in Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology.

## Participating Organisations

### *Central Asia:*

ADI, Women of Agrarian Sector Association, Tomiris, Zher Ana-Astana, RUSHNOI

### *Central and Eastern Europe:*

Eco Ruralis, Association of Farmers and Private Landowners of Ukraine - AFZU, Ecoaction/ Ecodia, Agro\_Perma\_Lab, Grădina Moldovei, Hungarian Agroecology Network, Aborigen Forum

### *South Caucasus and West Asia:*

Elkana, Cenesta, Ciftci-Sen, Ekoloji Dernegi, Ekoder

### *Western Balkans:*

ANRD, ZZ Eko Linden, Stina, Okvir Zivota, Alica Foundation

### *Facilitating and Funding organizations:*

Schola Campesina, Jengalab, Henrich Boell Foundation, FAO REU



10th of July



We began with a welcoming word from Berin (Ciftci-Sen) and a session where each organisation introduced themselves and the reasons and ways in which they work. It was a celebration of all the work that we do and all of the different experiences, and skills each organisation brings to the Bilim community.

### *Plenary: Agroecology school*

We began our plenary session of Agroecology schools with an introduction by Andrea Ferrante of Schola Campesina who -based on the existing experiences-framed Agroecology schools and their value. They are spaces that value farmers knowledge in a landscape where local knowledge is in greater danger than ever. They reaffirm the existence and importance of rural communities, their knowledge, and its protection as extremely needed for the future of farming.

As a part of this work, the [Agroecology schools toolkit](#) has been developed. The toolkit:

- A)Reaffirms the 11 pillars of the Nyéléni declaration on Agroecology
- B)Describes horizontal methodology of the learning process that recognises everyone’s knowledge and welcomes different kinds of wisdoms.
- C)Highlight the importance of advocacy and the policies which frame legislation to advance Agroecology and the transformation of the food system.



In addition to the toolkit, the [Bilim digital platform](#) where our networks and agroecology schools can share knowledge and communicate with each other, has been created last year. The development of the platform is still ongoing and [Jengalab](#) (Technology for development professionals) continues the process of co-creation of Bilim digital platform through interviews and focus groups with the Bilim community members.



# Nilüfer'de tohum takası yapıldı!

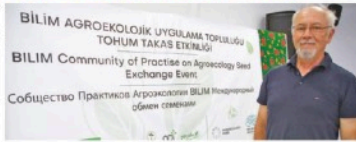
Bilim Agroekolojik Uygulama Topluluğu Tohum Etkinliği'nde 19 ülkeden getirilen yüzlerce tohum çeşidi, Nilüfer'de meraklıları ile buluşturuldu. Etkinlikte, farklı ülkelerden getirilen yaklaşık 7 bin paket yerel tohum takası edildi.



Nilüfer Belediyesi'nin evsahipliğinde düzenlenen 'Dünya Tohumu' ve 'Orta Asya Bilim Agroekolojik Uygulama Topluluğu Forumu' programında Bilim Agroekolojik Uygulama Topluluğu olarak Tohum Etkinliği yapıldı. İnançlı Dönüşler Yürütme'nin düzenlediği programda 9 farklı ülkeden getirilen tohumlar, ilkokullarda ve gençlere aktarıldı. Kurumlar arasında yapılan toplantılar, konuşmalar ve diğer faaliyetler ile ilgili bilgi veren İBBE, Beklediyce Çevre ve İnanç Alan Koordinatörü ve KOİER Başkanı Ayca Akay, etkinlik hakkında şu yorumları yaptı: "Bu etkinlik, yerel tohumların korunmasını sağlıyor."

Dönüşler, tohum, berraklık, nefes tohumu olarak bilinen 40 çeşit tohumu evsahipliğinde buluşturuldu. İnançlı Dönüşler Yürütme'nin düzenlediği programda 9 farklı ülkeden getirilen tohumlar, ilkokullarda ve gençlere aktarıldı. Kurumlar arasında yapılan toplantılar, konuşmalar ve diğer faaliyetler ile ilgili bilgi veren İBBE, Beklediyce Çevre ve İnanç Alan Koordinatörü ve KOİER Başkanı Ayca Akay, etkinlik hakkında şu yorumları yaptı: "Bu etkinlik, yerel tohumların korunmasını sağlıyor."

çiftçi kuruluğu uygun hale getirilerek (zaman zaman) uygulanabilir hale getirilebilir. Kurumlar arasında yapılan toplantılar, konuşmalar ve diğer faaliyetler ile ilgili bilgi veren İBBE, Beklediyce Çevre ve İnanç Alan Koordinatörü ve KOİER Başkanı Ayca Akay, etkinlik hakkında şu yorumları yaptı: "Bu etkinlik, yerel tohumların korunmasını sağlıyor."



*“Agroecology schools are the place where knowledge is shared within communities led by grassroots organizations on a diversity of topics determined by the local context. It can be either in the formal or informal educational system, in a solid structure or without walls”.*

## Sharing of experiences on agroecology schools

Stina shared their experience in setting up agroecology schools with their member organisations over the past three years, visibilising the concept of agroecology in the public entities. They operate successfully with open days on farms where workshops allow for women to share knowledge, experience and practices. With the objective of saving traditions, cultural heritage and traditional food.

*“Agroecology is sharing with everyone. Just people, meeting and sharing on their balconies”*

Çiftçi-Sen then shared their experiences of workshops they conducted in western Anatolia focusing on animal husbandry and grain harvesting. As a group they began to discuss questions of autonomy and the power of the collective, finding experts amongst the group and sharing an experience a group of farmers had resisting the agro-industrial complex and collectively refusing to sell their products at the cheap price.

*“Training or being trained, there isn't that much difference”*

Other organisations then shared their experiences with agroecology schools and the workshops that they organise: The Uzbek women association support rural women in getting the skills they need to start their businesses (in beekeeping for instance) and get out of vulnerable positions. The association also conducted seminars on Agroecology with rural women as a way to value their practices and their roles. Zher-Ana Astana in Kazakhstan is organising cycles of trainings where equipments (for drip irrigation for example) are provided. The agroecology school is

enabling the sharing of knowledge and the solutions for rural populations to emerge, while communicating about rural challenges to the general public. Agro-Perma-Lab foundation in Poland organizes peer-to-peer workshops; educates; creates networks and works for the transformation of the food system to agroecology.

### *Public opening - presentation and voices from the sub regions*

The afternoon began with a welcoming speech of our host Arca Atay and with an inspiring speech from the Mayor of Nilüfer municipality, who stated their happiness at hosting the event and developing sustainability in their region, prioritising health over profit and protecting traditional seeds. They highlighted the efforts made over the past four years, the various urban gardens and eco farm projects starting up with financing in the area. There was then a round of presentations from the Nilüfer Urban Council, the agricultural unions, the seed foundation, nature and cultural associations. Then the members of the Bilim COP introduced themselves and shared their stories with those in attendance.

**11th of July**

### *UNDROP and Family Farming*

Beginning with a presentation on Agroecological family farmers in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the diversity present in the region, the growing processes of cooperation, sub-regional issues, and unfair public policies and funding support, EcoRuralis introduced UNDROP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people living in rural areas.

Within a context where most of our partner organisations come from countries with large rural populations, we had to collectively define the term peasant and begin to understand their role as a food producer, innovator, employer, marketer, educator, scholar, artist, artisan and a supporter of agrobiodiversity. Yet we also discuss what makes Peasants vulnerable and the main issues that affect small scale agroecological farming. This laid the foundation for discussions about the UN negotiation and adoption process, celebrating the political power of peasants to create transformative legislation.

Case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Right to seeds defended by Alica foundation) and Ukraine (monitoring seed rights violation by AFZU) were shared with the group and parallels between the UNDROP and UNDRIP process opened up space for a dialogue surrounding the importance to indigenous rights.

A presentation by the Anna Kansheva, from FAO REU recognising the farmer's role in biodiversity and the work that they do in Europe and Central Asia and their priorities in the region:

- A) Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth (incl. women and vulnerable groups) through inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation.
- B) Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration.
- C) Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate



## *Farmers' Right to Seeds and Biodiversity*

*“We don't want our farmer seed system to be informal, it has to be recognised.”*

CENESTA, spoke on farmers hesitancy to get involved in a project with ancient varieties of wheat in Iran. Yet after positive results with 300 farmers, they have since expanded their work and improved access for farmers to genetic material and facilitate its sharing. Now a national seed bank organises seed exchanges, and the establishment of a seed house. Progress has been made on governance as well as new regulations support local seed banks. Gradina Moldovei, has mapped people working with seeds in Moldova as a first step towards creating a network and



database, as they participate with academics and farmers they have been able to cultivate a relationship with government to be able to ask for support. Elkana, work with participatory breeding much like, CENESTA, yet also with a multiplication and distribution of seeds where farmers would give back 150% of the seeds after the end of the season, growing their collection every time.

Gradina Moldovei, in Moldova, created a network of seed savers across the country, based on a mapping effort. Gradina is developing a seed library with the support of agronomists. This will show public authorities that things are happening on the ground for saving and multiplying peasant seeds. Elkana, in Georgia, is active in multiplication and distributing seeds and seed material for farmers. In Ukraine, AFZU develop similar activities and RUSHNOI in Tajikistan too (seed bank, seedlings, educational activities,...). In Serbia, Okvir Zivota developed a robust methodology to save and conserve seeds, in collaboration with scientists.

*“In rural areas you can live only if you farm”*

Working groups discussed methodology, strategy, and potential alliances surrounding UNDROP and the need to give UNDROP visibility in the policy realm as well as advance their grassroots movements. Knowledge exchange and sharing experiences between organisations is a cornerstone of the methods and strategies of our Bilim community. There remains to be a lot of potential to increase collaboration with academia, include more youth and women in our work, protect genetic resources with seed banks, create and access markets for agroecological products to tell a story about how agroecology protects rural autonomy and promotes healthy eating and resilient local economies and biodiversity. The groundwork to increase collaboration between our community and simply inspire each other has opened up various possibilities.

Our grassroots movements are using Bilim to connect with each other, understand global policy such as UNDROP and the UN decade on family farmer, and use those international governance mechanisms as tools for collaboration, access to funding and more importantly, advancing Agroecology at a local and regional level.

**12th of July**

### *The Right to Land*

Our Plenary on the right to land began with a presentation of the monitoring efforts done by EcoAction to collect information and monitor the damages on land and water due to the war, in Ukraine. The Hungarian Agroecology network shared about the difficulty to maintain land under smallholders' control. Access to land is well regulated in Hungary but also easily bought by people getting easily the status of farmers without actually cultivating the land.



## *Youth and Agroecology*

Tomiris focused their presentation on youth's access to land in Tajikistan, where legislation has slowly begun to accommodate for and encourage a growing young population into farming. This is not without its challenges however as the sector is not attractive for young people, who receive far more appealing benefits in other sectors, access to land still remains extremely challenging and the financial barriers and administrative complexity is keeping youth away from farming. Tomiris is working hard to create a legal and enabling environment for youth in Agroecology, conduct assessments to establish the needs of young people, and provide trainings to teach agroecological values, share knowledge and grow the competences of youth in the region.

## *Access to Markets*

Our Partners Elkana, presented the work they have done to comply with policy with regards to food safety standards and how traditional methods that are carried out in rural mountainous areas in Georgia have simplified health requirements to ensure that traditional cheese making practices are not destroyed by policy. This is a challenge that many traditional producers face around the world. Elkana has been supporting farmer groups to register their products and giving them the security of certification.

Various other partners presented how they manage to access the market directly, through cooperatives (ZZ Eko Linden in North Macedonia), or through fairs or direct selling points (Ekoder in Turkiye, ANDR in Albania) overcoming the need



for intermediaries, and finding consumers accepting their ways of working, supporting biodiversity and creating products with a lack of standardisation. In Nilufer, Ekoder has been working with universities and the municipality to make huge strides creating sales points for peasant farmers, providing a state of the art processing laboratory for farmers for them to access for a small fee, and they have connected over 22 women's cooperatives that operate in the area.

*“One women told me she could sleep finally, [as she could] stop being concerned about water supply”*

Zher-Ana Astana, create effective links between producers and consumers of farm products without the involvement of intermediaries (Example of “Cows on the balcony”), which significantly affects the final price for the consumer and allows them to control the quality of the products produced within their community by creating sustainable links between consumers and producers. A benefit of this approach is to be able to accommodate the needs of the customer much more effectively, investing in long term relationships. During their workshops all participants are encouraged to bring their products to share and buy. Drip irrigation workshops have also been a great success, farmers adopting to tool are teaching other farmers, etc.





**13th of July**

*Building Community Solidarity in Times of Crisis*

This was a very important session of the Forum, focused on the impact of conflicts and civil unrests, which are one of the most pressing risks affecting agroecology and food producers' livelihoods. Partners from Ukraine, Georgia and Southern Anatolia spoke about the importance of solidarity in times of crisis and the role peasants, farmers and rural people play in protecting

the affected communities. Eco Action and farmers from AFZU, our partners in Ukraine shared data and evidence on how the Russian invasion has traumatized and impacted rural society in Ukraine, the livelihoods and the natural resources, particularly on land and water. Despite the terrible impact of the war on farmers, they have proven resilience and capacity to help the others, distributing food to prevent famine and they have been providing shelter and support for internally displaced people. Elkana from Georgia presented the impact of the Russian occupation in the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the lives of rural communities and their resilience in the face of this protracted crisis. In Southern Anatolia, the Turkish participants talked about the earthquake which has impacted the communities affected by the already existing conflict in the region. Ali Bülent, from Çiftçi-Sen highlighted that Capitalism and totalitarianism are our main problems and agroecology is life for people in conflict. Ekoloji Derneği is an organization supporting displaced population in the Kurd part of Türkiye. They shared their experience working a lot with natural building materials, with techniques which they learnt from the refugees, providing many useful details of their work from refugee camps.

The forum concluded with a **plan for future common actions** in the region which included the following;

1. The organization of a Bilim forum in 2024.
2. The improvement and increased use of BILIM digital platform
3. The implementation of an UNDROP campaign at regional level
4. The development of activities, projects and exchanges among Bilim community around Agroecology, inspired by the current strong involvement of a majority of us on Seeds and Biodiversity.
5. The increased participation in FAO REU processes and dialogue with FAO national offices
6. The implementation of actions of solidarity with participating organizations who are experiencing crisis situations.
7. Internal functioning: improve the structure and functioning of Bilim community as well as the governance of the Bilim digital platform

The action plan is a realistic list of priorities considering that BILIM is at a beginning stage of development.

Bilim community is facilitated by four organizations – Schola Campesina, ADI, Elkana and EcoRuralis, which commit to continue to support Bilim as facilitators until (at least) the next Forum through the followings: Community Zoom meetings every 3 months, sharing of information, development of Bilim digital platform in collaboration with Jengalab; and the organization of Bilim Forum 2024.