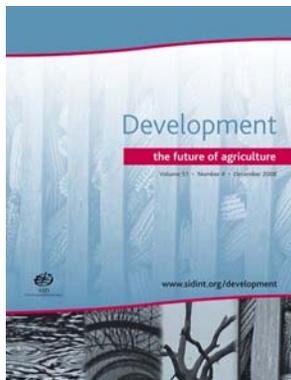


# Food Sovereignty

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## *Aims of the Paper:*

- Deepen the Journal's debates around the global food crisis
- Define the term 'food sovereignty'
- Present the food sovereignty movement
- Present insights of global debates around agriculture and food
- Propose ways forward to achieve food sovereignty

Business as usual is no longer an option. This became clear to participants of the parallel forum on 'Climate Change, Agrofuels and Food Sovereignty', organized by social movements and civil society organizations, which took place in June in response to the High Level FAO Summit on the current food crisis. As heads of state, UN officials and representatives of corporations were gathering in Rome at the FAO headquarters to discuss the possible remedies to rising food prices, members of the *Development* journal's editorial board organized a side event, at the parallel forum, to debate the 'Future of Agriculture', with a focus on globalized food production, corporate concentration in the agricultural sector and the right to food.

This briefing summarizes the discussions that took place highlighting the global UN debate around the food crisis and the issues raised by movements on food sovereignty.

## FAO High Level Summit on Food

The FAO Summit took place in a moment of a major food crisis. This crisis is not new, but its sudden explosion over the last year, with consequent price increases, has focused public attention on the agricultural sector, as land and agricultural and food policies were becoming the main conflict terrain in terms of global geopolitics. Riots in many cities of the globe, such as in Mexico and in Mozambique for rising bread and wheat prices, causing high social disruption are just some examples of the spreading discontent and worsening livelihoods in the North as well as in the South.

Since 1996, when the first World Food Summit was held in Rome, not much has changed in the development paradigm. The neo-liberal model of corporate control over the global food system implemented over the past 34 years (since the last major food crisis), has led to an increase the

hungry from around 415 million in 1990 to today's 862 million and will reach 1.2 billion by 2025, despite the Millennium Development Goals.

In this context the FAO Summit aimed to legitimize UN's work in the agricultural sector, as well as responding to the increased public attention around food prices fluctuations. However, fundamental, long-term institutional and financial problems were not addressed. Instead governments led by agribusiness and philanthro-capitalists (for example the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) were promoting techno fixes such as more agro-industrialization, more value chains to feed those with purchasing power, biotechnology, and even intensification of biofuels, which threatens food supply.

While activists were advocating food sovereignty the serious and urgent food and climate crises were treated by political and economic elites as technical and economic issues that did nothing to question corporate control of world agriculture and the ecological commons.

### Food Sovereignty Summit

The parallel forum on food security was organized by Via Campesina, an international alliance of organizations of peasant, farmers, indigenous people, landless peasants, which developed a comprehensive alternative proposal for restructuring food production and consumption at the local, national and global level. Their manifesto and alternative policy for 'food sovereignty' aims to create community-based ways of producing food in an affordable, sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner.

*'Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food Sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of*

*peoples to food and to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.'*

This social movement has shaped the concept of food sovereignty over the last decade, giving visibility to community and local movements who are affected by conflicts for the access and control over resources.

Two major international conferences on food sovereignty:

- 2000, La Havana, Cuba, World Forum on Food Sovereignty
- 2007, Sélingué, Mali: the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty

In Rome, delegates from organizations of family farmers, peasants, indigenous peoples, civil society organizations and academics have expressed the need for an alternative paradigm which is more sustainable and just, guaranteeing fundamental assets such as land and the need for equal distribution and access to natural resources. Their main contribution was to analyze the structural causes of the food crisis, how to resist state and corporate power relationships and listen to the voices of the farmers and communities. Finally, questions were raised on how to valorize local food systems and smallholders' farming.

### Food Sovereignty

- Via Campesina (2006) 'Sovranità Alimentare. Final Declaration: For a New Agrarian Reform Based on Food Sovereignty.'  
[www.viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=180&Itemid=27](http://www.viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=180&Itemid=27)
- Pimbert, Michel web-based publication, 'Towards Food Sovereignty', [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)
- Holt-Giménez, Eric and Loren Peabody (2008) *From Food Rebellions to Food Sovereignty: Urgent call to fix a broken food system* Food First, <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2120>.

### The food crisis myth

The current food crisis has revived the Malthusian myth that the world doesn't produce enough food for its six billion people. According to Michel Pimbert, IIED, the quantity of food grown is not the real issue, but food distribution and income inequity are the causes of the current rising prices.

Neo-liberal development models based on increased commercialization and privatization of common goods, inequitable property rights have diminished local communities' access to and control of the resources, indigenous knowledge and ecologically sustainable management systems. Transnational corporations gained monopoly control over different links in the food chain:

*'The development industry is gearing up to 'modernize' small-farmer agriculture in the name of a productivity increase that will eliminate small-holders, further subordinate agriculture to reductionist technologies, and reproduce poverty and hunger. ....As such, the outgrower model, supported by the World Bank aims at more investment in agribusiness so to tap the private sector's ability to work across the value chain' in addition to concluding the Doha Round'. (Philip McMichael, Development, 51.4)*

Developing countries have lost capacity for autonomy and self-determination as a direct consequence of the industrial development model expansion rooted in commodity production at all costs.

#### Food crisis

- Wiggins, Steve and Stephanie Levy (2008) *Rising food prices: A Global Crisis*, London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Patel, Raj (2007) *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, London: Portobello Books.
- Walden Bello, *Development journal*, 51.4, 2008
- Klein, Naomi (2007) *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism*, 1st ed. ed. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.

#### Causes of current food crises

The food crisis has not come alone. It came with a deep financial crisis, an unprecedented climate and environmental crisis, an energy crisis and of course, a profound and global social crisis. As this shows, the causes of today's crisis have been manufactured over decades by an unsustainable economic growth paradigm.

Some of the main reasons are:

The growing demand for **agrofuels** to reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by burning fossil fuels, and to provide 'energy independence' for countries who relied on oil, contributed up to 75% of the food price increase. Its scale of production as well as the interconnectedness of agricultural markets globally will continue to have an impact on food production. Regardless of whether feedstocks used are non-food crops such as jatropha or switchgrass, they still impact on the demand for land, water, fertilizer, and other resources, as well as reproducing the tendency towards industrial-scale monopoly production.

#### Food and Agrofuels

- Crutzen, Paul J., Arvin R. Mosier, Keith A. Smith, and Wilfried Winiwarter (2008) 'N<sub>2</sub>O release from agro-biofuel production negates global warming reduction by replacing fossil fuels', *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* 8(2): 389–95.
- Becker, Gero, Evelyn Coleman, Sebastian Hetsch, Yves Kazemi and Kit Prins (2006) 'Mobilizing Wood Resources: Can Europe's Forests Satisfy the Increasing Demand for Raw Material and Energy under Sustainable Forest Management?', Background paper.
- Cotula, Lorenzo, Nat Dyer and Sonja Vermeulen (2008) 'Fuelling Exclusion: the biofuels boom and poor people's access to land', London, UK: FAO and IIED.
- Smolker, Rachel, Brian Tokar and Anne Petermann (2008) *The Real Cost of Agrofuels*, Global Forest Coalition and Global Justice Ecology Project.
- Holt-Giménez, Eric and Isabella Kenfield (2008) 'When Renewable Isn't Sustainable: Agrofuels and the Inconvenient Truth behind the 2007 U.S. Energy Independence and Security Act', Oakland, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy.

**Rising fossil fuel prices** which affect not only transport costs (just less than a third of the production costs in industrial US agriculture), but mainly agricultural inputs, such as the manufacture of fertilizer, which are highly energy intensive.

**Changing food consumption patterns**, like increased preference for meat, fats and sugar products also contributed to the availability of more processed foods in developing countries,

where citizens have moved away from locally grown fruit and vegetables. In this way, cereals are diverted to feed animals rather than people. Agriculture and livestock farming in particular are responsible for more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than transportation.

**Climate change** and the consequent desertification and soil degradation has also contributed to the food crisis. Global warming in many parts of the world has decreased harvests and promoted the spread of crop diseases (ex. wheat fungus in Central Asia).

**Financial speculation** and the investment of hedge, index and risk funds in the futures markets for commodities like grains and other food products, have overwhelmed the market. Local and national food markets were first inundated with cheap imports, and when transnational corporations (TNCs) captured the bulk of the market share, the prices of the food imports on which countries now depend have been drastically raised (Rosset, 2006). These funds have already injected an additional 70 billion dollars of extra investment into commodities, inflating prices increasing the cost of basic foodstuffs wiping out millions of food producers throughout the world.

#### Food and speculation

- Nick Hillyard, [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk)
- Monbiot, George (2008) 'Credit crunch? The real crisis is global hunger. And if you care, eat less meat', *The Guardian*, Tuesday April 15.

The imposition of inappropriate **development models** has spread liberalized markets in which small and medium-sized producers cannot compete with imported food and are driven to bankruptcy. Small-scale producers in developing countries are especially harmed by competition from highly subsidized and capital intensive agriculture, despite neoliberal rhetoric.

Failure to address **gender disparities** also contributes to the social disruption caused by the agricultural policies implemented up to now. There is a general consensus, that women and girls who represent 60 percent of those affected by hunger, yet responsible for producing the majority of food consumed in developing countries, are disproportionately affected by the

current food crisis. Despite the fact that women are the world's principal food producers and providers, they remain 'invisible' partners in development. In many parts of the world today there is an increasing trend towards what has been termed the 'feminization of agriculture'. As men's participation in agriculture declines, the role of women in agricultural production becomes ever more dominant. Women's specialized knowledge about genetic resources for food and agriculture makes them essential custodians of agro-biodiversity. Also, once the harvest is in, rural women provide most of the labour for post-harvest activities, taking responsibility for storage, handling, stocking, processing and marketing.

Yet not only is gendered poverty not being addressed, but women are generally left out of the debate. Grain marketing boards, domestic food security policies or the income support and government spending programmes that once provided a buffer between high prices and the poorest members of a population have been removed, with severe impacts on female food producers.

#### Food and gender

- ActionAid (2007) 'We know what we need. South Asian women speak out on climate change adaptation', *Institute of Development Studies*.
- FAO, <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/agrie.htm>

## Policy Issues

### Mainstream FAO Trade and Agriculture Policies

The global restructuring of agri-food systems is based on the intensive use of fossil fuels for fertilizers, agrochemicals, production, transport, processing, refrigeration and retailing, also contributing to the rising carbon emissions.

The implementation of the market led approach finds expression in the policies now being adopted in Africa. Some call for increased global trade and investment. Others for a new Green Revolution and reliance on the next generation of biotechnology.

WTO Doha Development Agenda will intensify business as usual and promote the liberalization of agricultural trade, compromising in this way

the rights of smallholders in developing countries.

The spread of monocultures, soy and wheat in the US and Brazil for example, has contributed to the depletion of genetic diversity, promoting the spread of genetically modified seeds and crops versus organic farming. Dependence on fossil-fuel-intensive agriculture is so strong that many experts think that Green Revolution technology, and its updated form of genetically modified agriculture, is the only way to feed the planet.

#### **WB and global food politics**

- World Bank (2008) *World Development Report*, Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Zoellick, Robert (2008) 'A 10-point plan for tackling the food crisis', *Financial Times*, May 29.
- FAO, (2008) *Urgent measures required to reduce impact of high food prices on the poor*. FAO, 9 April.
- Rockefeller (2007) *Africa's Turn: A New Green Revolution for the Twenty-first Century*, Rockefeller Foundation.
- OECD, FAO (2008) *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2008-2017*. Paris: OECD, <http://www.agra-alliance.org/content/news/detail/633/>.
- Courville, Michael et al, (2006), *Promised Land: competing visions of agrarian reform*, Food First Books
- Altieri, Miguel, Nicholls, Clara, (2008) *Scaling up Agroecological Approaches in Latin America*, Development, 51.4

#### **EU Policy**

**Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)**, is a partnership, supported by philanthro capitalists to boost agriculture in the African continent. However, AGRA is not new, but reflects a structural shift from state-led development strategies to market-led approaches, reminiscent of the Green Revolution, promoted in developing countries in the 60s.

The genesis of the Green Revolution was a profoundly political affair, motivated by a desire to boost production at any cost to prevent communist insurrection in key developing countries. Simultaneously, the Green Revolution was technologically designed, with the use of high-yielding varieties, irrigation and inorganic fertilizer to obviate the need for social changes

that might have produced similar increases in yield – measures like land reform for instance (Courville *et al.*, 2006). The consequences of this detrimental policy were felt years later and the unsustainable market led approach left wounds in many developing countries (see Zimbabwe, Mozambique, etc).

In this context AGRA, as a market-led approach based on genetic engineering is unlikely to solve the problem of hunger in Africa. Informed public debate is needed to consider other proven African alternatives that may hold more promise for rebuilding African agriculture.

**Global patent trade.** A handful of the world's largest agricultural biotechnology companies are seeking hundreds of patents on gene-altered crops designed to withstand drought and other environmental stresses, part of a race for dominance in the potentially lucrative market for crops that can handle global warming. According to the report by ETC Group, an activist organization that advocates for subsistence farmers, three companies -- BASF of Germany, Syngenta of Switzerland and Monsanto of St. Louis, USA-- are in control of nearly two-thirds of the climate-related gene families submitted to patent offices worldwide. The new 'climate ready' genes will help crops survive drought, flooding, saltwater incursions, high temperatures and increased ultraviolet radiation -- all of which are predicted to undermine food security in coming decades.

**What are policies being proposed to change neoliberal policies, large monocultures and corporate control and assert the claims of people for food sovereignty?**

**International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD).** The assessment suggested that the future of agricultural technology lies in a rich and complex appreciation for how ecosystems function. This kind of understanding uses inputs very sparingly, with a substantially reduced carbon footprint, higher yield, and a more sustainable future, contributing less to climate change shocks, and being more resilient to certain kinds of crop failure. In the conclusions GM crops were discounted as the solution in such a way that industry representatives stormed out of the assessment (Vidal, 2008).

### A critique:

- Bello, Walden (2008) 'Destroying African Agriculture', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Washington DC: Foreign Policy in Focus, June 3.
- IATP (2008) 'Seven Reasons Why the Doha Round Will Not Solve the Food Crisis', *IATP In Fact*, May. Available at: [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org)
- IAASTD (2008) 'Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report'. Available at: [www.agassessment.org/docs/SR\\_Exec\\_Sum\\_280508\\_English.pdf](http://www.agassessment.org/docs/SR_Exec_Sum_280508_English.pdf)
- McMichael, Philip (2005) 'Global development and the corporate food regime', in Frederick H. Buttel and Philip McMichael (eds.), *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development*, Oxford: Elsevier Press.
- Monbiot, George (2008) 'These objects of contempt are now our best chances of feeding the world', *The Guardian*, June 10.
- Rosset, Peter M. (2006) *Food is Different: Why We Must Get the WTO Out of Agriculture*, London: Zed Books.
- Edwards, Michael (2008) *Just Another Emperor? The Myths and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism*, Demos: A Network for Ideas & Action and The Young Foundation.
- Vidal, John (2008), *Change in farming can feed the world*, the Guardian, 16 April

### Via Campesina

The Via Campesina's manifesto on Food Sovereignty calls for the urgent need to recover national food producing capacity, specifically that capacity located in the peasant and family farm sectors. This requires:

- the establishment of public sector budgets, floor prices, credit and other forms of agrarian reform
- the implementation of a land reform, urgently needed in many countries to rebuild the peasant and family farm sectors
- the establishment of export controls, as a number of governments have recently done, to stop the forced exportation of food needed by their own populations
- the design of bioenergy policies adapted to local conditions and needs. In light of the disconcerting effects of the worldwide rush to large-scale biofuels production, governments need to reconsider their objectives for bioenergy production. Bioenergy strategies

should be integrated into a wider rural development strategy, ensuring the long-term protection of their natural resource base

- to protect the national food production, both against the dumping of artificially cheap food that undercuts local farmers, and against the artificially expensive food imports that we face today
- to rebuild the national grain reserves and parastatal marketing boards, that actively include farmer organizations as owners and administrators of public reserves.

These are key steps to take our food system back from the transnational corporations that hoard food stocks to drive prices up (Rosset, 2006).

### Towards a new paradigm

Via Campesina and others, such as those attending the FAO Event and parallel Forum, ask for a change in dominant technological farming practices, towards an agriculture based on agroecological principles, that is sustainable, and that is based on respect for and is in equilibrium with nature, local cultures, and traditional farming knowledge (Altieri, 2008). It has been scientifically demonstrated that ecological farming systems can be more productive, can better resist drought and other manifestations of climate change, and are more economically sustainable because they use less fossil fuel. We can no longer afford the luxury of food whose price is linked to the price of petroleum (Schill, 2008), much less whose industrial monoculture production model -- with pesticides and GMOs -- damages the future productive capacity of our soils.

### Web links

Food first:	<a href="http://www.foodfirst.org">www.foodfirst.org</a>
Grain:	<a href="http://www.grain.org">www.grain.org</a>
IATP:	<a href="http://www.iatp.org">www.iatp.org</a>
ETC:	<a href="http://www.etc.org">www.etc.org</a>
Biofuelwatch:	<a href="http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk">www.biofuelwatch.org.uk</a>
LEISA	<a href="http://www.leisa.info">www.leisa.info</a>
PELUM	<a href="http://www.pelum.net">www.pelum.net</a>
Nyéleni 2007	<a href="http://www.nyeleni2007.org">www.nyeleni2007.org</a>
ROPPA	<a href="http://www.roppa.info">www.roppa.info</a>
WFFP	<a href="http://www.wffpfisheries.org">www.wffpfisheries.org</a>
IPC	<a href="http://www.foodsovereignty.org">www.foodsovereignty.org</a>

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