

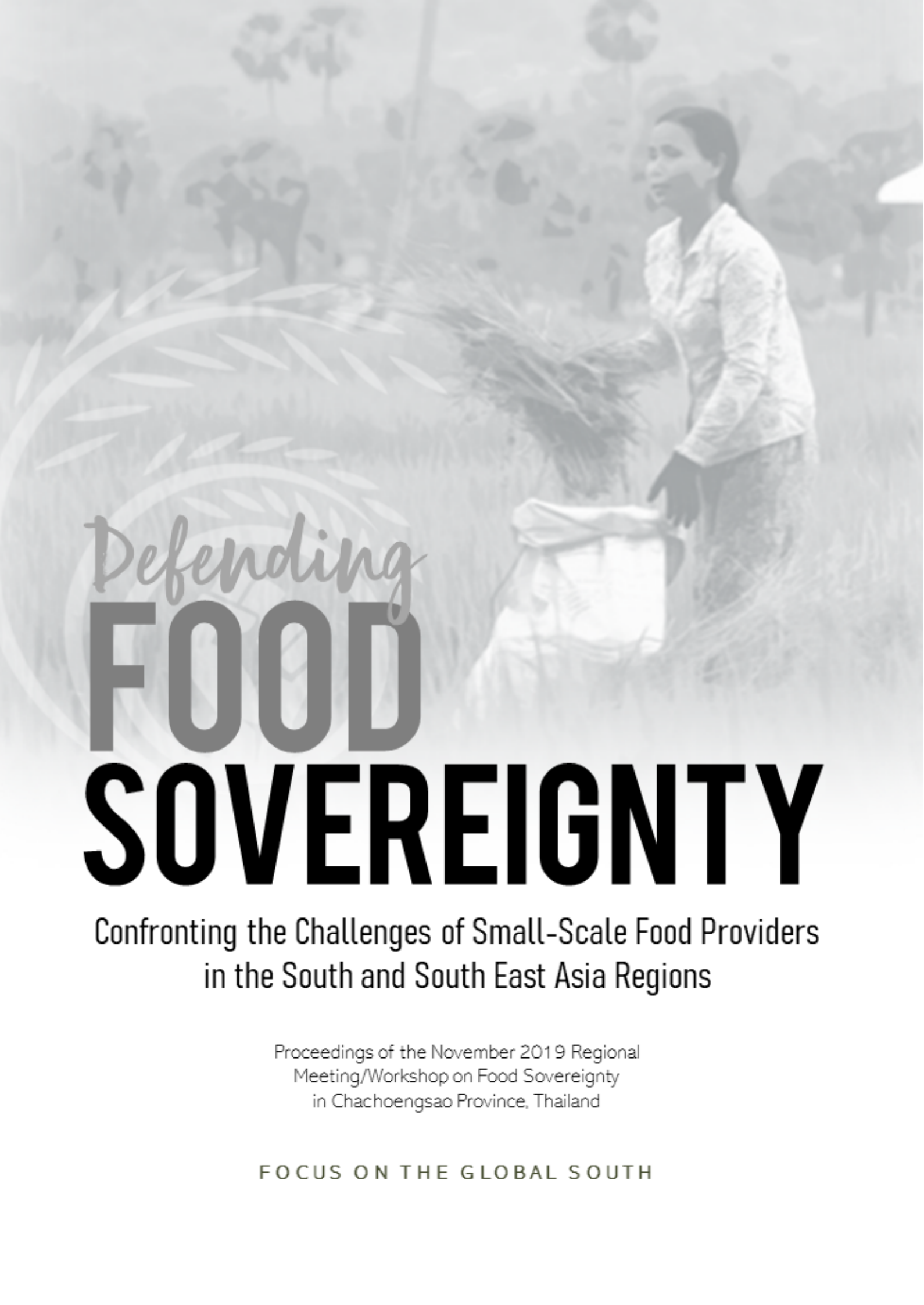
Defending
FOOD

SOVEREIGNTY

Confronting the Challenges of Small-Scale Food Providers
in the South and South East Asia Regions

Proceedings of the November 2019 Regional
Meeting/Workshop on Food Sovereignty
in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand

FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH



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AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CP	Charoen Pokphand Group
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CRC	Convention the Rights of the Child
CSA	Consumer Supported Agriculture
ELC	Economic Land Concessions
ESIA	Economic and Social Impact Assessments
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
IUPGR	International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources
LVC	La Via Campesina
MNC	Multinational Corporation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PCS	Participatory Certification System
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TNC	Transnational Corporation
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UNFCCC	United Nations Convention on Climate Change
UPOV	International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization



Focus on the Global South: The Campaign for Food Sovereignty

Focus on the Global South (Focus) is an activist think tank that has been putting forward critical perspectives and analyses on globalization, development, and governance since its establishment in 1995. Focus' work is founded in its commitment to social, political, economic, gender, and climate and environmental justice. At the same time, Focus has used its resources and skills to support peoples' struggles for rights and justice, peace, democracy, and pluralism to help create and build spaces where peoples' voices can be heard and recognized. Focus conducts research, popular education, and campaigns in close coordination and collaboration with grassroots allies, social movements, and civil society organizations. Focus' work is mainly based in South and Southeast Asia, with its four country offices in Cambodia, India, Thailand, and the Philippines, and the broader Mekong region including Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.



Across the region, neoliberal policies and corporate-driven globalization continue to worsen inequality, precipitate financial crises, enable the corporate capture and plunder of the commons, displace and dispossess communities, and destroy livelihoods and cultures. The unabated extraction of resources by large corporations and governments in their pursuit of larger profits and infinite growth has caused large-scale environmental degradation, massive greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), and an alarming rise in global warming that has not been seen in years. The destructive impacts of neoliberalism have been accompanied by the rise of fascist governments getting their legitimacy through democratic elections, and the consolidation of their rule through anti-establishment rhetoric, divisive politics, and repression of civil liberties and freedom of expression and association. This has led to increased criminalisation, violence, incarceration, enforced disappearances, and killings of individuals and communities asserting their rights. At the same time, backward beliefs that promote

discrimination and violence against certain groups and communities on the basis of their race, ethnicity, class, caste, political belief, religion, and sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) continue to prevail and enable a culture of impunity.

It is within this context that Focus aims to advance peoples' rights, co-document and promote their resistance against dominant oppressive systems, and popularize their alternative visions and practices of development and governance that respect rights, lives, livelihoods, and cultures and work harmoniously with nature. One such alternative that has been advanced and put in practice by grassroots movements and civil society is food sovereignty. The concept, framework, and practice of food sovereignty present an opportunity for small-scale food providers and communities to challenge the corporate capture of food, bring autonomy and dignity back to small-scale sustainable food providers, and build local food systems that are responsive and resilient to the impacts of the climate crisis. Focus aims to promote food sovereignty through popular education, co-documentation, policy proposals, and collective actions to actualize and realize food sovereignty.

The Regional Meeting on Food Sovereignty and Agroecology Exchange

While food sovereignty has long been practised at the grassroots level, the concept has not won the popular support needed to significantly influence government policies and programs as a step towards more meaningful systemic change and transformation. One obvious reason is that capitalist interests and landed elites continue to have control over legislative functions of states. Meanwhile, on the part of social movements, policies and socioeconomic structures needed to mainstream food sovereignty have not been fleshed out sufficiently. At the same time, the socioeconomic realities faced by stakeholders create difficulties in narrowing gaps in knowledge, practice, and movement building needed to generate social pressure for legislative reforms and to effectuate systemic changes.

As part of the initiative of filling in these gaps, the Regional Meeting on Food Sovereignty and Agroecology Exchange aimed to map the challenges confronting small-scale food providers, consolidate their responses to these challenges, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on emerging alternative practices. The sharing of knowledge, experiences, and practices was intended to deepen participants' appreciation of food sovereignty as a paradigm, practice, and movement. At the same time, it was envisaged to



serve as a guide for future campaigns on effectively engaging government institutions towards the protection of the right to food, resisting systems and institutions that threaten local food systems, defending the rights and dignities of small-scale food providers, and putting forward viable community-driven alternatives.

The meeting was organized on November 30 to December 3, 2019 at the Agroforestry Learning Center Phuyai Wiboon Khemchalem in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand. The learning center is located in a 10-rai (1.6 hectares) sustainable agroforestry model farm. The center was established to help build knowledge and awareness on the spirit of *Wanakaset*—a practice that reflects the principles of community self-reliance and harmonious living with the ecosystems and nature. A total of 59 grassroots participants (25 men and 34 women) from six countries, including Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, and the Philippines joined the meeting with the following objectives:

1. Discuss the various concepts around food sovereignty—drawing experiences from various local, national, regional, and international campaigns;
2. Unpack the political economy of food provision, production, distribution, and consumption—identifying issues, gaps, and constraints in terms policies and programs including the unequal access to food, land, water, and forest resources by grassroots communities;
3. Highlight alternative models and practices in food provision and food production from different sectors and campaigners; and
4. Build solidarities and identify strategies, common grounds, and convergence spaces to effectively push food sovereignty campaigns forward.

The four-day agenda also touched upon the multi-dimensional approaches to food sovereignty, with a focus on the political and socio-ecological struggles in food provision, production, distribution, and consumption.



2

Conceptualizing Food Sovereignty



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Confronting the Challenges of Small-scale Food Providers in the Global South

KEY SESSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is food sovereignty?
2. What are the common perspectives and concepts on food sovereignty?
3. What beliefs, practices, and expressions build on food sovereignty?
4. What are the issues, threats, and challenges faced by small-scale food providers?

The Food Situation

The entrenchment of corporate power in global and national food systems has created unequal access to food and the means to produce food across different classes, genders, races, ethnicities, caste, and age groups. This imbalance has greatly disadvantaged the poor, including small-scale farmers, peasants, farmworkers, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, women, and workers—even though they produce most of the world’s food needs. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that smallholder farms produce over 80 percent of the world’s food supply through local food production using ecological systems and sustainable practices.

Contrary to the promises that the industrial food system would reduce global hunger, a 2018 FAO report estimated that around 821 million people across the world are still hungry. Almost 75 percent of these people live in rural areas and depend almost completely on small-scale agriculture for food, employment, and income. Though telling, these statistics do not include the swelling number of people displaced by natural disasters, mega-infrastructure investments, industrial agribusiness, privatization and grabbing of the commons, and armed conflicts.

Despite the severity of global hunger suffered by millions, it was also reported in 2018 by FAO that an estimated 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted globally each year—with one

Food sovereignty emphasizes on the peoples’ power to determine, manage, and control the production, distribution, and consumption of food.

third of all food being produced for human consumption. These sharp contradictions reveal the flaws of the corporate-controlled food system, which produces so much waste while also leaving millions hungry primarily because it views food as a commodity, the means to produce it as capital, and production itself as a business—when in fact all these are rights that should be ensured, protected, fulfilled, realized, and enjoyed by all people.

The spread of COVID-19 and the ensuing government responses to the pandemic have worsened the contradictions of global and national food systems. Travel restrictions within and across countries and the closure of various markets, businesses, and other establishments have resulted in the piling up and wastage of food in production and storage areas. The impact has been heaviest on the livelihood of small-scale agricultural workers and food providers, who do not have enough capital to continue production and distribution of their produce amid lockdown restrictions. As such, workers and migrants who were suddenly rendered jobless and lacking incomes faced acute hunger and homelessness with little support from the state. In India, migrant workers who make up a significant part of the country's labor force had to walk hundreds of kilometers to get back to their hometowns during the lockdown as they were beset by lack of wages and food. On the other hand, poor consumers lacking the capacity to purchase or produce food due to stringent lockdown measures have also suffered from severe food insecurity.

At the same time, the interconnection of neoliberalism and authoritarianism have created an atmosphere where corporate and state-perpetrated crimes are able to thrive with impunity. Justice systems remain beholden to the interests of the elite while policies are often made to favor the interests of corporations and other large investors. The economic, social, and cultural rights of the poor are often sidelined to favor a development paradigm that enables the concentration of wealth to a few. All the while, the rural poor are forced by severe conditions of poverty to reside in areas where they are vulnerable to extreme weather events and natural disasters brought about by the climate emergency that has been significantly provoked by the extractive or resource-intensive operations of large corporations.

In a context where threats against small-scale food providers remain unabated, the need to challenge economic, political, and social structures that disempower, erode, and capture local food systems become critical to ensure human survival. Equally important is the need to surface viable alternatives that reclaim the development discourse away from profiteering and commodification of natural resources.

Food sovereignty offers an alternative framework to the profit-oriented, resource-intensive food system, as it emphasizes on peoples' power to determine and control the production, distribution, provision, and consumption of food. At its core, it seeks to reclaim food production and provision from private and state-supported corporations to the hands of small-scale food providers.

The realization of food sovereignty thus necessitates economic, political, social, and ecological transformation.

Food Sovereignty at its Roots



Food sovereignty was coined during the 1996 World Food Summit by La Via Campesina (LVC)—an international movement of peasants, small- and medium- scale farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous peoples, migrants, and agricultural workers across Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. LVC has brought the term to challenge the food security framework developed by the United Nations and peddled by other mainstream multilateral development organizations.

Food security mainly focuses on the availability of food which entails sufficient and steady supply; people's physical and economic access to food which entails affordability of food and sufficiency of incomes; the safe and healthy utilization of food; and ensuring the stability of all three aforementioned pillars. One of the primary criticisms of food security is that its definition is not concerned with how food is produced, where it is produced, who produces it, and for whom. In addition to this, given its bias towards expanding food supply to ensure availability and accessibility of food, the food security framework is thus inherently inclined to work within the dominant food regime controlled by big corporations that have the capital to meet the steady and massive food supply necessitated by food security.

That this framework favors the neoliberal paradigm is not surprising, given that the framers of the food security model are also proponents of free-market globalization mainly from the global North. As such, food security advocates are also the ones to aggressively push for trade liberalization and the elimination of farming subsidies as well as other protectionist mechanisms in the global South. This is so that agricultural products from the global North—which continue to be subsidized by governments—can have more access to markets in the South.

Food sovereignty presents a different worldview to the neoliberal ideas of competition, liberalization, and economic growth. Its definition, principles, and commitments were more clearly articulated in 2007 during the International Forum for Food Sovereignty that was organized in Sélingué, Mali by a global alliance of social movements. The forum was named after Nyéléni, a Malian peasant woman renowned for her struggles against patriarchal systems in promoting peasant agriculture and food sovereignty. [The Nyéléni Declaration](#)—one of the concrete outputs from the gathering—clearly defined the concept of food sovereignty; outlined its tenets; clarified its economic, social, ecological, and political implications; and set down ways forward for its advocates and practitioners.

[In Focus:]

DEFINING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: THE NYÉLÉNI DECLARATION



Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation.

Food sovereignty also offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. It prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

From this definition, it is therefore necessary for communities and movements supporting and practicing food sovereignty to build solidarities among small-scale food providers, consumers, rural and urban poor, and environmentalists in order to collectively struggle for a world where:

1. All peoples and nations are able to determine their own food producing systems and policies that provide every one of us with good quality, adequate, affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food;
2. Women's roles and rights in food provision are recognized and respected, and women are represented in all decision-making bodies;
3. Food sovereignty is considered a basic human right, recognised and implemented by communities, peoples, states, and international bodies;
4. All peoples in each of our countries are able to live with dignity, earn a living wage for their labour, and have the opportunity to remain in their homes;
5. People are able to conserve and rehabilitate rural environments, fish stocks, landscapes and food traditions based on ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds, livestock, and other biodiversity;
6. Diversity of traditional knowledge, food, language, and culture, and the way we organise and express ourselves are valued, recognized, and respected;
7. There is genuine and integral land policy reform that guarantees peasants' full rights to land; defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples; ensures fishing communities' access and control over their fishing areas and eco-systems; honours access and control over pastoral lands and migratory routes; and assures a future for young people in the countryside;
8. Agrarian reform revitalizes interdependence between producers and consumers; ensures community survival, social and economic justice, ecological sustainability and respect for local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men; and guarantees the right to territory and self-determination for our peoples;
9. We share our lands and territories peacefully and fairly among our peoples, be we peasants, indigenous peoples, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, or others;
10. Decent jobs with fair remuneration and labour rights are assured for all workers;
11. In the case of natural and human-created disasters and conflict-recovery situations, food sovereignty acts as a kind of "insurance" that strengthens local recovery efforts and mitigates negative impacts;
12. We remember that affected communities are not helpless, and that strong local organization for self-help is the key to recovery; and
13. Peoples' power to make decisions about their material, natural, and spiritual heritage are defended, and all peoples have the right to defend their territories from the actions of transnational corporations.

The Nyéléni Forum was attended by more than 500 individuals representing farmers, peasants, artisanal fisherfolk, pastoralists, forest dwellers, migrant workers, urban workers, rehabilitation workers, human rights advocates, indigenous peoples, and consumer groups from 80 countries. It was followed by other efforts to promote food sovereignty at the international, regional, national, and local levels. LVC has played a major role in building and sustaining international peasant networks around the global campaign on food sovereignty,

bringing in allies from environmental movements and civil society organizations. Various organizations, together with communities, also organized popular education initiatives on food sovereignty to broaden awareness on the impacts of global free trade regimes and to advance grassroots practices and strategies that challenge corporate control on food.

[Synthesis of the Presentations:]

“Building Global Solidarities on Food Sovereignty” and “Justifying the Call for Food Sovereignty”



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Karnataka Rajya Raytha Sangha (KRSS)
La Via Campesina - South Asia



SHALMALI GUTTAL

Focus on the Global South

Throughout history, small-holder agriculture has been the predominant method of food production, and environmental sustainability, ecological conservation, and biodiversity preservation are put in high regard. Communities worked collectively with an intent to feed and ensure the survival of their families. This is the core theme by which food sovereignty was conceptualized: a way of life that is free from the burdens of market and profit, in contrast to the reality we see today where food has become a commodity.

We now live in an era where the sustainability of agriculture was destroyed by corporate power and the rights of the people constantly ripped apart in the interest of consumer demand. Subsistence farming systems have been overrun by neoliberal policies that seek to commercialize and financialize rural economies. Fueled by capital, agriculture has become a competition in an arena controlled by transnational corporations—who operate with impunity despite a rising incidence in landlessness, migration, and farmer suicides.

When food becomes profit-oriented, it also becomes a weapon for political control— where government food policies are influenced towards the creation of more wealth in the hands of a few rather than addressing deep-seated issues such as poverty and hunger. Hence the global push for food sovereignty, now an alternative when it should be not, in hope for systemic changes.

“When food becomes profit oriented, it also becomes weapons for political control.”

Food sovereignty is that which holds high the rights of the producers, the consumers, and of nature. Food sovereignty is that where healthy food is produced, distributed, and consumed at the heart of the food production. Food sovereignty defends the interests and inclusions of the next generation. Food sovereignty offers strategies to resist corporate grip in food systems and stands for fair trade. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies—the whole food system is designed to help people rather than to create profit. Food sovereignty is also based on the transformation of the industrial model of agricultural production to agroecology. Food sovereignty responds to the challenges of hunger, climate emergency, unsustainable environmental resource management, and energy crisis.

La Via Campesina (LVC) is playing a major role in constructing the international networks—bringing social and environmental movements, NGOs, and consumers to stop the capitalist attempts and campaign for food sovereignty, using models from grassroots to international levels. LVC also observed how these models were implemented and practiced, as well as spread the knowledge and education around food sovereignty. This was done fundamentally by forging solidarities with various small-scale food providers, sectors, movements and other stakeholders in the food sovereignty discourse—with an aim of dismantling corporate power over food systems and sustaining the struggle for rights over land, water, and forests.

Within all platforms where food sovereignty movements engage in, a common concern is shared: that agricultural policies must be left out from all free trade agreements (FTAs) and the control of transnational corporations (TNCs). All over the world, various studies have already linked imbalances in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) rules and agreements which have worsened the agrarian crises. The rising incidence of farmers' suicides in India, for example, is caused primarily by the inability of local produce to compete in globally-driven markets. As food production becomes more profit-driven, it also ensures the violation of several people's rights as the unbridled expansion of corporate control over agriculture resources intensifies. The current over-industrialization of agriculture is also strengthened with aid from international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and WTO itself.

Today, we see communities being criminalized for asserting rights claims over lands and driven out and pushed into poverty by economic policies and land governance schemes designed to make the most profit out of land use. Today we see rubber plantations spanning across acres of once lush forest areas, community fishing areas enclosed and overrun by commercial vessels, where vast tracts of farmlands are converted into industrial mega-projects. We see activists and rights defenders being imprisoned, killed, and disappeared.

In these contexts, food sovereignty becomes an act of resistance, mainly by communities re-building traditional, cultural, and indigenous food systems and defining the policies that govern them. We saw seed exchanges between movements across regions despite intellectual property laws that regulate them, the widening practice of agroecology by small-scale food providers despite the prevalence of chemical farming, and the greater importance given to women in food production, as enshrined in various international covenants. Through the years we also saw how various communities have organized themselves, with food sovereignty at the heart of each struggle, and used various forms of resistance to reclaim the reins of food production.

In the process, resistance has also promoted valuable expressions of food sovereignty that strengthens solidarity between movements, though geographically separated, have struggled to push for similar rights and reforms. ■

Food Sovereignty and Governance on the Right to Food

Food sovereignty is a basic human right which guarantees the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (La Via Campesina, 2007). The right to food associates with other rights, including the right to land, the right to work, and the right to live in a healthy environment.

The right to adequate food is not just an individual but a collective right where food producers should have a means to access adequate food. The three primary elements of the right to food include:

- A. Availability of food means that food is produced in a quantity and quality sufficient for the people in this and future generations. Food should be available from natural resources where people can produce, process and store.
- B. Adequacy of food means that food has enough and appropriate nutrients. However, appropriate food is different and evolving across the world. According to the United Nations, appropriateness means people are fulfilled with nutritious quality. Food should be safe and free from adverse substances, such as chemicals from food production and processing. In addition, food should be based on cultural and consumer acceptability.
- C. Accessibility of food means that states and governments guarantee that people can access socially, economically, financially and physically to adequate food. Politically, food should be affordable with adequate diets for people regardless of social status, especially vulnerable populations. It ensures that people have a means to make a living to afford the cost of nutritious food. Also, people can commute through good infrastructures to get food.

From a governance perspective, the right to food is a process with aims to collect the needs of peoples, benefitting their wellbeing and contributing to the common good as a whole.

From a governance perspective, the right to food is a process which aims to collect the needs of peoples which benefit the wellbeing of peoples and contribute to the common good as a whole. It also involves transparent decision-making, equal participation of actors, accountability, monitoring, and checks and balances in all decision-making levels.

However, many actions from different actors and platforms, including governments, United Nations agencies, international trade agreements and transnational and multinational corporations (TNCs/MNCs) engage in the governance on the right to food.

- 1. Governments** - must realize and guarantee peoples' right to food in compliance with human rights obligations. Governments have the obligation to ensure that people in their territories regardless of race, sex, religion, class, and social status have access to sufficient food, prevent them from hunger, avail and protect sources of food through legislation, policies, and budget. In a democratic system, a government represented by the people formulates and implements food and agricultural policies by reflecting peoples' interests. Nonetheless, governments have formulated and implemented laws and policies to favor corporations against public goods.
- 2. United Nations System** - In the realm of international communities, the right to food has been recognized and constituted in international and regional conventions/treaties that may impose obligations on states or provide guidelines and principles in the forms of declarations, recommendations, resolutions and reports to state members. Human rights frameworks can be seen as soft laws that depend on member states' compliance.

The right to food is firstly acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) as the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 25.1). The right to food has been constituted in both binding and non-binding international instruments. Particularly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966) inaugurates the right to adequate food (Article 11.1) and the right to be free from hunger (Article 11.2). The right to adequate food is realized when "every man, woman and child, alone and in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food using a resource base appropriate for its procurement in ways consistent with human dignity." (Article 4, International Code of Conduct on the Human Right to Adequate Food, 1997).

The right to food for specific groups is also recognized in international conventions and declarations such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2004) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP, 2018).

In addition to the international framework on the right to food, many United Nations agencies have realized the right to food through various actors and platforms, including the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and Committee on World Food Security (CFS), etc.

- 3. International Financial Institutions and Mechanisms** - International financial institutions and trade organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund

(IMF), World Bank (WB), and World Trade Organization (WTO) have engaged in the governance on the right to food through neoliberal economic and financial policies that influence governments to comply with. Through conditional loans, economic and financial adjustments have transformed food and agricultural policies in recipient countries whereby people lose their resources and powers for food production. In conjunction with structural adjustment policies, WTO is the leading institution that determines trade regulations and policies, especially agriculture sectors based on the trade liberalization agenda.

It also associates with regional and bilateral free trade agreements, for instance, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which aim to lower tariffs to food and agricultural commodities which governments have an important role in balancing trade benefits and peoples' right to food. In addition, food and agriculture agenda are brought to discuss at prominent economic platforms such as the Group of Seven (G7), Group of Twenty (G20), and World Economic Forum (WEF).

4. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) - Undeniably, the neoliberal political economy has increased the roles and influences of MNCs such as Wilmar, Betagro, Charoen Pokphand Group (CP), among others, in the global food production, supply and consumption, thereby increasing monopolization of corporate food regime globally. Particularly, international corporations dominate agricultural production that transforms local food production practices, livelihoods, ways people consume food, health conditions, and the environment. The impacts of corporate control on food and agriculture sectors also transcend boundaries.

The governance on the right to food is a multi-stakeholder process that highlights imbalanced power relations and conflicts of interest. On the one hand, government institutions may invent pro-corporate findings to establish win-win solutions. On the other hand, communities and small-scale food providers do not have the same power to negotiate since the negotiations are not based on human rights, but on money power. That is why Special Economic Zones (SEZs) or development projects have more voices for governments than the voices of people.

5. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) - Small-scale food providers are the principal actors to food security, seeds, land, territory, resources, struggle against climate change, and the conservation of biodiversity. Yet their rights are systematically violated and they are subject to multiple discriminations. As a result of the long mobilization and negotiation of La Via Campesina and its allies, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) on December 17, 2018.

As an international law, UNDROP requires insight and monitoring in a standard setting. States in particular have obligations to protect traditional knowledge, right to food, social security, and right to health. Most of these rights have already existed as human

rights standards. In particular, the right to land and seeds are the new issues listed on. By and large, it aims to better realize, respect, and protect the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, including small-scale agricultural workers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, nomads, indigenous people, and migrant workers (Article 1). Moreover, it also aims to respond to all forms of discrimination and arbitrary actions faced by peasants and other people working in rural areas (Article 3).

The UNDROP outlines key elements of food sovereignty which are the landmark for small-scale food providers worldwide. First and foremost, the declaration aims at realizing the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (Article 7) who can associate to protect their interests and to bargain collectively. Those associations should not be criminalized, marginalized, and oppressed (Article 9). It recognizes the right to participation of small-scale peasants in decision-making processes that generate adverse impacts on their life, land, and livelihoods (Article 10).

In compliance with food sovereignty, peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to adequate food and nutrition as well as to be free from hunger. The UNDROP puts emphasis on the right of small-scale food providers to determine their food and agriculture systems (Article 15). It values commons where small-scale food providers have rights to live, access to, utilize, and contribute to ecosystems sustainably (Article 17 and 18).

As sources of food and livelihoods, states should guarantee that the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas to land, residences, and natural resources should not be arbitrarily dispossessed and protect them from unlawful evictions and displacements (Article 17). Moreover, it realizes the peasants' right to seeds, plant variety, and traditional agricultural knowledge and practices (Article 15 and 19). The endorsement of the UN Declaration also constitutes an important contribution to the international community's effort to promote family farming and peasant agriculture.

While the UNDROP's passage became a landmark for peasant's struggles around the world, difficulties have emerged in terms of influencing government policies to align with its ideals. With shrinking spaces for policy advocacy at national levels, the challenge for peoples' movements rests on building broader knowledge on the bundle of rights presented in the declaration, towards generating social pressure for legislative reform. Second, the Declaration's influence to sway judiciaries and case decisions to favour peasants and other people working in rural areas in legal agrarian conflicts remains to be seen. In addition, it is leveraging power to regulate or dissolve corporate control over natural resources.

[Open Plenary Points]

Conceptualizing Food Sovereignty



1. **Food Sovereignty and Class Dynamics** - The theory of food sovereignty is based from a perspective of inequality, class dynamics, and the struggle for autonomy. In a context where global food regimes are influenced heavily by the expansion of capital and the accumulation of wealth, rural economies inevitably become cradles of poverty, exploitation and dispossession. When land, water, and forest commons are privatized and transformed into assets, the people who depend on it become disenfranchised from certain rights—from human to moral, cultural or even legal rights. Injustice fuels the widening of class divisions, as it flames the clamor to reclaim lost rights as well. With this becoming the backdrop of most agrarian struggles, food sovereignty becomes increasingly important in framing the purpose of various rural resistance movements.
2. **Feminization in Agriculture** - is not a new concept. Women in rural areas have historically been pillars in both food production and in building agrarian movements. In India, several movements led by women have reclaimed and struggled for thousands of hectares of land through traditional farming, The role of rural women has in recent years become more illuminated in terms of their perseverance in sustaining agrarian struggles while ensuring the survival of families and communities at the same time, despite the multiple burdens imposed upon them by patriarchal traditions or policies.
3. **The Threat of Co-optation** - The framework of food sovereignty is principally conceptualized to confront the challenges faced by the rural poor and serves as an impetus to struggle for systemic changes that benefit them. This is however constantly challenged by advocates of neoliberalism in its feasibility as an alternative to the industrialization and modernization of agriculture, to supply the world's growing food needs. Food sovereignty is also under threat of co-optation by corporate movers

to water-down its value systems into something tolerable by dominant economic models and policies that support agro-industrialization, mitigating the impacts caused by the influence of food sovereignty to both producers and consumers (i.e. aversion to GMOs).

4. **Food Sovereignty, Agrarian Reform, and Social Justice** - The right to land is at the forefront of campaigns on food sovereignty. With land being a precursor to sustainable food production, its effective control and utilization by rural communities forms a large part of most campaigns under it. This is with a thrust towards agrarian reform and other redistributive policies or programs. In 2007, India introduced a new land reform law—eliminating all the bureaucratic structure village councils constrict rights to land, affirming independent and equal rights of women. While this is a positive development, agrarian reform policies in India as well as in most countries where they are implemented are often circumvented, amended, or ignored in the interest of preserving wealth and political power.
5. **Hunger and Malnutrition** - While agro-corporations attest that industrialization and modernization is key in addressing rural poverty, small-scale food providers are becoming poorer, agriculture workforces have dwindled, and incidences of rural migration become more frequent. Also, despite the growing demands for food and corporate claims that industrial and value-chain integration have enhanced the world's capacity to produce food, extreme malnutrition and hunger are still experienced in the countryside where most food is sourced. In India, there is a rapid rise in farmer suicides due indebtedness and starvation. In developed "end-user" countries however, obesity and overnutrition have become a rampant social problem.
6. **The Rise of Right-wing Politics** - Right-wing ideologies have placed activists, human rights defenders, and even food sovereignty advocates in grave attacks; from ostracization, to terrorist tagging and public lynchings. People's movements are demoralized and demobilized in seeking economic, social, and cultural reforms. In India, indigenous communities who traditionally eat beef are subjected to various human rights violations by right-wing militants that enforce veganism. In the Philippines, killings of environmental activists have clocked the highest in the world. In Thailand and the Mekong region, advocates of sustainable agriculture, such as Sombath Somphone and Porlajeel "Billy" Jirakchongcharoen are disappeared. This global phenomenon has severely eroded the political spaces where rural movements can seek reform or reclaim rights.

3

Challenges and Threats



DEFENDING
FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY

Confronting the Challenges of Small-scale Food Providers in the Global South

KEY SESSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is the corporate-dominated economic paradigm affecting small-scale food provision and food sovereignty? Who are the winners and losers in the capture of global, national, and local food systems?
2. What is the role of States in advancing corporate interests in food systems? How do governments and corporations work hand in hand to consolidate power and control over food provision?
3. Why is the issue of climate a matter of survival and a question of justice for small-scale food providers? Where does the intertwined issue of climate change and food sovereignty intersect?
4. What are concrete solutions put forward and alternatives practised by different grassroots communities on food sovereignty to address challenges and threats? When can we say that food sovereignty is actualized?

Neoliberalism and the Capture of Global Food Systems

Since the onset of the ideological wave of neoliberalism that swept significant parts of the world in the 1990s, many governments across Asia have relentlessly pursued liberalization of trade and capital accounts, deregulation and privatization of different sectors of the economy, commercialization of social services, and drastic debt-servicing measures including onerous tax increases and massive cuts in government spending. In the global South, these were pursued in accordance with structural adjustment programs (SAP) imposed by international financial institutions as conditions or requirements for accessing new loans.

However, contrary to proponents' promise of development for all, neoliberalism has resulted in severe inequality and dispossession among the most vulnerable sectors and peoples. In conjunction with drastic cuts in government support for different sectors of the economy, the inflow of foreign goods and investments have only further weakened the already



feeble agriculture and manufacturing sectors in many countries in the South. This has worsened poverty and hunger among communities relying on agriculture for their living. Meanwhile, in the interest of extracting greater profits and estranging the labor force, big corporations in control of different sectors of the economy have deprived workers of decent living wages, occupational safety measures, and benefits; imposed unreasonable work hours; strategically evaded the regularization of workers; employed

authoritarian measures such as intimidation, surveillance, and union-busting tactics; among others.

At the same time, with the control of the national capitalist and landed elites over land use management in their countries, the entry of foreign investors has resulted in the corporate capture of land, water, forests, and natural resources in their pursuit of greater wealth and power. This has led to the loss of access to livelihoods, shelters, and other necessities tied to land as well as the destruction of cultures among peasants, agricultural workers, artisanal fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples. These vulnerable sectors and peoples have also had to bear the negative ecological and health impacts of heavy industrial operations. In most cases, they are forced by extreme poverty to either work in the very same industries that robbed them of their livelihoods or to migrate to urban areas to seek employment in the industrial sector. Either way, they are often beset by harsh working conditions.

[Synthesis of the Presentation:] “Challenging Free Trade Agreements”



BENNY KURUVILLA

Focus on the Global South
India Programme

In the international arena, governments have been entering into bilateral, regional, and international trade and investment agreements that are biased in favor of corporate interests. New generations of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) continue to be pushed, with the same destructive policies being further strengthened through agreements such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the revived World Trade Organization (WTO) and several multilateral agreements between Asian, European, and Pacific countries. Under the WTO, new issues emerged in the global trade paradigm, especially intellectual property rights that have become controversial in the agriculture trade negotiations between the North and the

South. The intellectual property rules ensure that the agricultural sector from the global North is protected and highly subsidized, while agricultural products from the South are blocked through the imposition of various import standards. As such, so-called free trade regimes actually institutionalize unfair trade relations where the North is able to have open access to markets in the South while also being able to protect its own agriculture sector.

However, government policies and international trade and investment agreements that favor corporate agriculture have allowed transnational corporations (TNCs) to dominate and control food production and distribution, thereby threatening local food systems. FTAs have undermined local food systems by lowering or removing tariffs on imports, leaving small-scale food providers unable to compete, subverting public policies supporting local markets, locking in low standards in food production and food safety, and criminalizing peasants who save and exchange local seeds. One such free trade agreement that will have devastating impacts on local food systems and food sovereignty is the RCEP, which is currently being negotiated among 10 ASEAN member states and five of their FTA partners—Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.

In addition, many governments promote foreign direct investments (FDIs) which pave the way for foreign investors to grab natural resources and destroy local food systems. For instance, the Cambodian government facilitates foreign investors to grab lands and natural resources of small-scale food producers through economic land concessions (ELCs) without free, prior and informed consent of affected people and comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA).

Apart from FTAs, another key institution that marginalizes small-scale food providers is the imposition of high standards in the international and even domestic trade of agricultural products. These standards require food producers to go through capital-intensive certification processes to supposedly ensure food safety, traceability, higher quality, whether food is produced organically, among others. Producing food that meets these standards would require expensive technology, facilities, skills, and information which small-scale food providers do not have access to. As such, the imposition of these capital-intensive standards has further led to the concentration of food production, processing, and distribution in the hands of big businesses.

Proponents of high-standards agriculture claim that these standards were set up to ensure that the food we consume are safe and their production is ethical and environmentally sustainable. The demand for these standards, they said, were driven by growing concerns on the spread of animal disease and its transmission to humans through food consumption, labor violations in agro-industrial farms, environmental concerns, among others. However, proponents fail to recognize that these problems cannot be addressed by mere standards; they are inevitable consequences of the mass-production-oriented and profit-maximizing logic of corporations that control the global food system. As such, addressing them would require systemic change. ■

“So-called free trade regimes actually institutionalize unfair trade relations where the North is able to have open access to markets in the South while also being able to protect its own agriculture sector.”

[In Focus:]

UNMASKING THE RCEP

The Regional Comprehensive Economic

Partnership or RCEP, developed by the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in the 2000s and later joined by six FTA partners in the 2010s, is predominated by neoliberal policies, consisting of deregulation, free flow of goods and capitals, and cutting of social spending in favor of the privatization

of public services. RCEP is recognized as Asia's largest trade deal. It includes 20 chapters along with the glaring issues, such as access to medicine, agriculture, intellectual property, and services.



The RCEP will have negative impacts on food sovereignty where small-scale food providers will bear the brunt of the deals. For instance, it will reduce tariff barriers for 90 percent of the imported agricultural products from the country members. Under this scheme, 80 percent of Chinese products and 85 percent of Australia and New Zealand's products will reap most of the benefits.

Meanwhile, the Intellectual Property Rules (IPR) chapter in the RCEP will force countries to comply with the 1991 International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV 1991). This patent system has been highly criticized by farmers' organizations and support groups for eliminating the right of farmers to save privatized seeds while also limiting what other plant breeders can do with that seed. This is part of a strong push towards corporate agriculture and agribusinesses, and a concerted effort to undermine farmers' rights.

Furthermore, under the RCEP, different sectors including essential services, farmer's industries (particularly dairy cooperatives), automobile sector, and pharmaceutical sector will face harsh patent laws. The weakening economy will directly impact trade unions with job losses and the governments will lose their ability to protect small-scale food producers.

The RCEP brings about the civil resistance led by small-scale food providers. In India, the farmer's movements ran nationwide protests against RCEP on many accounts. These groups expressed their concerns as they already had experienced from other FTAs that local farmers could not compete in price with imported agricultural products. For instance, Rubber will no longer be self-sufficient crops to generate income and livelihoods for farmers as it becomes an economic commodity grown in all FTA members to compete on price-cutting and 65% of rubbers in India are supplied to import markets.

Contrary to claims by proponents of economic growth as well as industrial agriculture food systems, corporate food production continues to fail in both reducing hunger as well as providing safe and nutritious food. Hunger is increasing in countries whose economies have declined due to heavy reliance on international primary commodity trade. Unfair trade agreements and regulations govern local markets in which commodity prices are controlled by big corporations. Moreover, income and wealth inequality in countries intensifies hunger which heavily impacts on the poor, vulnerable and marginalized people.

The industrialization of food systems pushes farmers to invest in hybrid or genetically modified seeds and expensive chemical inputs that lock them into cycles of debt. This has led to massive disenfranchisement in agriculture and other food producing sectors and, in more severe cases, an alarming number of farmer suicides. Livelihoods of small-scale food providers are fragile amidst fluctuated markets of food. This estranges them from consumers that their rights are thus not recognized by the public. ■

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“Challenging the Expansion of Corporate Control on Food”



NETH DAÑO

Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC)

Large corporations and governments dominate the discourse and policies on food often dismiss small-scale food production as it is claimed as inefficient and ineffective at meeting global food needs to justify the corporatization of the food system. In addition, corporatism takes over decision-making that engenders conflict of interests. The corporate food systems supported by governments use 70% of the world's resources to produce only 30% of the global food supply. Apart from its extremely high climate footprint, the industrial food system is accelerating genetic erosion and reducing the basis of survival of the majority of the world's rural poor who depend on plants for much of their food, fuel, fiber, medicine, and shelter.

Over the years, the corporate concentration in food and agricultural sectors from seeds, farm machinery, agricultural commodities, fertilizers, retails and trading has been consolidating and it is a huge market, worth USD 8 trillion. For example, the four big companies including Vilmorin & Cie, ChemChina, Bayer/Monsanto, and Corteva Agriscience control 53 percent of the commercial seed market globally and these also dominate the global food industries. Nonetheless, only 20% of seeds are entirely

“The agriculture market value drives the big agriculture companies to further resort to cross-sectoral strategies, overlapping the interests of corporate investments within and outside the agricultural sector.”

controlled by corporations, the potential value of hundred millions of dollars while another 80% used by farmers are from traditional seed systems.

The agriculture market value drives the big agriculture companies to further resort to cross-sectoral strategies—overlapping the interests of corporate investments within and outside the agricultural sector. The digitization of farming to increase farm production capacity is more common in developed countries and China, with the main interest of collecting and analyzing data.

Strikingly, horizontal shareholders or common shareholders illustrate that few companies and all of them share common shareholders which generate the conflict of interest in a free market and decision-making processes. For example, Monsanto already allied with other giants in seeds, fertilizers, and machinery. Together with the interconnectivity of digital platforms and the conglomerate power of data consolidation, the market is highly concentrated and has little incentive to compete. It makes room for price manipulation and being the greatest anti-competitive threats to food sovereignty.

In 2016, the world's biggest investment institutions and asset management firms - BlackRock, Vanguard Group, State Street Corporation, Fidelity, and Capital Group collectively owned 12.4% to 32.7% of the shares in leading seed and agrochemical firms like Bayer, Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, and Dow. These investors also bought equity stakes in all of the firms in the same market sector. In this way, monoculture will be intense - with impacts on nutrients, farmer's practices, seed and price control.

In the digitalization era, big data is an emerging issue that exploits and extracts personal data from consumers. The dependence on social technologies and its data pool tends to facilitate cross-sectoral convergences especially in retail businesses such as Amazon, Google, and Alibaba that make profit from consumer behaviors and price control. Personal data security is questionable whether governments are accountable for maintaining data from the exploitation of corporations. ■

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“Food Sovereignty and the Shrinking Spaces for Peoples’ Movements”



FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH
Food Sovereignty Team



With the rise of authoritarian regimes that espouse neoliberal interests, those who challenge neoliberal policies enacted by governments, stand up against abusive corporations, and promote human rights and the protection and preservation of the environment are often harassed and killed with impunity. In their predatory

pursuit of wealth and power, authoritarian regimes have also demonized human rights while deliberately ostracizing and systematically neutralizing groups identified as “enemies of the state”.

In effect, they have effectively shrunk the democratic spaces where civil society—especially the poor and the dispossessed—can assert their rights and challenge abuses in power. This culture of violence and impunity propagated by rapacious political elites and capitalists has intensified with the deepening collusion between large corporations and governments as well as the rise of populist authoritarian leaders in Asia. The latter is primarily attributed to the widely perceived deterioration of liberal democracy in Asia due to its failure to deliver meaningful change and the public’s perception of it as a system that only serves the interests of political elites.

This loss of legitimacy has been strategically optimized by extreme authoritarian, socially conservative, and patriarchal leaders in India, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, and Indonesia as a springboard for capturing and consolidating political power. These leaders have implemented surface reforms to placate voters, while oligarchs and military leaders largely remain in control, restricting peoples’ rights and voices, and enjoying impunity and unbridled access to the region’s resources.

A trend that is particularly concerning in Asia is the rise of neoliberal, capitalist, and politically-socially conservative political leaders, who have been elected into office through the use of narrow nationalism, parochialism, and violent rhetoric to exploit differences based on caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity. These are increasing social polarization and intolerance, obfuscating the real systemic crises of poverty and exclusion.

Rising populist authoritarianism and the continuing elite capture of wealth and resources are intensifying the resistance of peoples’ movements. Defenders of people’s rights, the environment, as well as those who support these struggles, face threats of violence and legal actions, imprisonment and murder. This is evident in the killing of 74 human rights defenders in Asia in 2018, with 39 coming from the Philippines and 19 coming from India. Most of those killed were defending the environment, their land, or other rights against extractive industries and mega-infrastructure.

While campaigns for food sovereignty have taken great strides in the region to build broader and stronger platforms for resistance, gains from past struggles in terms of programs and policies are being reversed by economic and political power holders that aim to protect wealth and interest resurrecting shelved projects won by grassroots and peoples’ movements. ■

“This culture of violence and impunity propagated by rapacious political elites and capitalists has intensified with the deepening collusion between large corporations and governments as well as the rise of populist authoritarian leaders in Asia.”

Climate Change and Threats to Small-scale Food Providers

For small-scale food providers and vulnerable communities, the climate crisis is a matter of survival. All over the world, extreme weather conditions such as typhoons, floods, and droughts have become more frequent and severe, leading to the destruction of livelihoods and massive displacement of communities. The International Organization for Migration in its [World Migration Report 2020](#) states, “Millions of men, women and children around the world move in anticipation or as a response to environmental stress every year. Disruptions such as cyclones, floods and wildfires destroy homes and assets, and contribute to the displacement of people. Slow-onset processes—such as sea-level rise, changes in rainfall patterns and droughts—contribute to pressures on livelihoods, and access to food and water, that can contribute to decisions to move away in search of more tenable living conditions.” However, instead of providing assistance to disaster-stricken communities, governments in connivance with large corporations have taken advantage of the vulnerability and devastation of these communities to introduce commercial and industrial development projects through disaster capitalism.

The scientific community has primarily attributed the extreme changes in climate to the rise of global temperatures, which in turn is caused by the concentration of three key heat-trapping gases or so-called greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere: carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Although the greenhouse effect is a natural phenomenon which helps regulate the earth's temperature, heavy industrial processes such as the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, intensive livestock farming, and the use of synthetic fertilizers have drastically increased the accumulation of these greenhouse gases, thereby pushing global temperatures to abnormally high levels.



In October 2018, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published an alarming report arguing that we only have 12 years (starting from 2018) to make monumental changes to the global energy infrastructure in order to keep global warming between 1.5°C and 2°C—the climate tipping point beyond which we face an irreparable global catastrophe. Otherwise, the world will inevitably head towards catastrophic and irreversible climate crisis that will manifest in drastic rise of sea levels and extreme weather events ranging from severe flooding to equally severe and prolonged periods of drought. These will have severe impacts on agriculture, water resources, coastal ecosystems, urban infrastructure, human health, and food sovereignty.

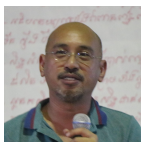
For agriculture, extreme weather such as droughts will increase pest infestation, while cyclones and heavy rains will bring severe flooding, increase runoff and soil erosion, and reduce soil fertility. Both lead to massive damage of crops and thereby alter agricultural productivity. The reduction of small-scale food providers' production capacity will inevitably endanger global food supply and lead to high levels of food insecurity. In fact, the IPCC report estimates that hunger and child malnutrition rate could soar up to 20% by 2050 as a result of climate-related disasters. In terms of water resources, droughts damage watersheds and create shortages for agricultural, industrial, and municipal users.

On the other hand, extreme rainfall will also reduce water quality, and damage water supply infrastructure. The rise of global sea levels will lead to saltwater intrusion and contaminate drinking water resources. As far as coastal ecosystems are concerned, increased salinity and sea levels can damage mangroves while ocean acidification and the rising sea temperatures can destroy fish and marine habitats particularly through coral bleaching. Many of the world's most populous cities are also threatened by the expected rise in sea levels which will displace millions of people. The changing climate is also expected to cause untold threats to human health in the form of rising water-borne illnesses and disease vectors, apart from deaths caused by extreme heat and cold.

There is an overwhelming consensus that climate change is the greatest challenge of the present generation, and addressing it should be the world's topmost priority and a collective responsibility. While the issue of climate and environment is oftentimes discussed as a transboundary, global, and existential issue on the international stage, the most important and critical struggles for climate and environmental justice are being led by common folk, including small-scale food providers at the grassroots level. It is imperative to not see climate and environmental justice as separate from other forms of justice—social-cultural, economic, political, and gender—and that the articulation of the approach to climate and environmental justice should be from the perspectives of grassroots and frontline communities, and that the injustices, struggles, and visions for transformation are all deeply interconnected.

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“Food Sovereignty and Responding to the Climate Crisis”



VAL VIBAL

Philippine Movement
for Climate Justice (PMCJ)

Additional barriers, obstacles, problems, and sufferings are brought about by climate change to small-scale food providers as it complicates the issue of food sovereignty. The state parties to the Paris Agreement of 2015 within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 °C. However, global

temperature is still alarmingly rising years after the outcomes of the Paris Agreement, which are aspirational at best amidst the woefully inadequate and insufficient global climate action.

According to the IPCC Report, we still have about 20 years to solve the problems and decisively act or “all will be lost,” as we reach the point of no return. Scientists have warned that the “New Normal” will be experienced in terms of extreme weather events, and these have devastating impacts to the lives and livelihoods of small-scale food providers, including but not limited to: 1) the continuous increase of sea level due to the melting of ice caps will result to the flooding of lowlands under the sea waters and salt water will be infused in land, greatly affecting irrigation and sanitary water; 2) Diseases and the use of pesticides, epidemics such as dengue outbreak will prevail in all seasons; 3) the rise of 3-4 degrees in global temperature will destroy fish species around the world; and 4) In a 10-year span, the growing number of super typhoons will affect the economy, most especially agriculture and farmer’s livelihoods.

The Paris Agreement requires all countries to significantly reduce GHG emissions to prevent a catastrophic increase in global temperature. The industrialized countries and corporations, who are the biggest contributors to climate change, must take serious and decisive actions and implement climate mitigation policies and adaptation measures. At the same time, peoples’ movements must pressure governments to use their resources and power to act on the peoples’ demands: 1) to supply sufficient resources to farmers and communities so they can efficiently adapt and mitigate climate risks and problems; 2) make a swift and just transition to transform the economy from its dependency on fossil fuel energy to more sustainable and cleaner resources, including promotion of sustainable family farming and peoples’ food sovereignty; and 3) demand developed countries to pay up their ecological debt and mobilize and deploy scaled-up climate finance through financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility.

The climate emergency, together with the crisis of the global economic system and authoritarianism threatens food provision across the world. Food sovereignty is the solution to the climate crisis. Peasants and the global food system must act to ensure food sovereignty and sustainability. We must strengthen our movement to become the Global Movement for Climate Justice. Climate justice is social justice. We must end chemical-based production used by corporations to stop the climate crisis and poverty. We must demand for system change, transform the unsustainable economic system towards ending capitalism, and the commodification of food systems—another world is possible. ■

“We must demand for systems change, transform the unsustainable economic system towards ending capitalism, and the commodification of food systems—another world is possible.”

[Open Plenary Points]

Challenges to Food Sovereignty



1. An organic definition of food sovereignty from the perspectives of grassroots small-scale food providers and a common understanding on challenges, threats, and implications to local food systems would help in understanding the intertwined issues of climate justice and food sovereignty. These grassroots conceptions, ideas, systems, and practices actualized by different communities with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and contexts serve as the building blocks for peoples' food sovereignty.

This would also help in the promotion of food sovereignty at different levels—local, national, regional, and global—as a concrete peoples' alternative that addresses the challenges and offers systemic solutions to the similarly intertwined global crises of neoliberal economic systems, authoritarian regimes, corporate power and control, and climate change.

2. An example of food sovereignty in local practice is the case of the women fisherfolk in the Songkhla Lake Network that operates in three bodies of water of the 13 Southern Provinces (except Yala)—the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, and the Songkhla Lake—their food sovereignty practice is actualized through the artisanal fisherfolk network's use of non-destructive fishery gears. All over Thailand, there are 22 coastal provinces and one freshwater province (Phatthalung) that are committed to responsible fisheries, including not fishing during the reproductive season, a practice that is harmful to young schools of fish. There are 48 fishery organizations, with some registered under the law such as the Artisanal Fisherfolk Confederation Association of

Thailand, with both men and women fisherfolk members engaged in small-scale fishing and use of coastal and fishery resources.

3. Like other marginalized communities relying on natural resources, the women fisherfolk have debt problems, and to deal with these, they have set up a savings group and cooperative where members deposit their money once a month. The savings group intends to promote self-reliance, inclusiveness, and equality away from shark loans (2% lending interest rate instead of 5-10% from the sharks). The network provides welfare to members when admitted as in-patients from THB 100, 300, 500, to 1,000, depending on their period of membership. They have also created a fund to restore the lake environment and made group members feel the ownership of the lake resources and ensure rights-based resource conservation that promotes peoples' sovereignty over energy, forests, land, and water.
4. While both men and women fisherfolk are engaged at the community level, women have less participation so the network empowers them through grassroots capacity-building, people-to-people exchanges, and study trips. This way, they are made comfortable and ready to act when they return to the community.
5. The struggle for food sovereignty must come from the peoples' movements. It is crucial that we continue working with peoples' movements at different capacities, at different levels. The terminology is not so much important as principles, conceptualizations, and values. People may be practicing, living, breathing food sovereignty without using the term. Food sovereignty is an evolving political concept, an act of resistance, an act of survival, a class struggle.

**Food sovereignty
is an evolving
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4

Local Perspectives and Practices



DEFENDING
FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY

Confronting the Challenges of Small-scale Food Providers in the Global South

KEY SESSION QUESTIONS:

1. How is food sovereignty practiced and defended in local communities?
2. How is the food system localized and what roles do women and men play to build the local food system?
3. What are samples of the key models that local communities practiced on food sovereignty?

Reclaiming the Right to Food

Small-scale food providers, such as peasants, artisanal fishers, forest dwellers, and pastoralists learn and know how to build their food sovereignty based on their cultures through their local food systems. Those local food systems encompass abundant natural resources where food providers utilize them to contribute simultaneously to peoples' livelihoods while they maintain environmental sustainability. Small-scale food providers also use food sovereignty to defend local food systems and ecological systems.

Food sovereignty can start small from within a family to community and national levels. Grassroots communities ensure that people have the collective rights to utilize common property resources to produce food and earn a living. It builds community solidarity by engaging women and other vulnerable groups in food production and resource management.

Small-scale food providers ensure that local wisdom and knowledge such as natural resource management, utilization, and conservation, sustainable food production, and appropriate technological production transfer to communities and the younger generation. In addition, food providers and consumers should have a common understanding of safe and healthy food production which builds power to collectively advocate food sovereignty at the policy level and participate in

Importantly, food sovereignty is underpinned by the principles of democracy where people have the power to reclaim territories and knowledge in food production.

decision-making on food and agricultural policies, and withstand corporate control in food and agriculture. Importantly, food sovereignty is underpinned by the principles of democracy where people have the power to reclaim territories and knowledge in food production. In a democratic system, members of parliament (MPs) are representatives of peoples to formulate food policies that benefit small-scale food providers and consumers while decreasing the power of corporations in decision-making on food and agriculture. It ensures that small-scale food providers control over local common property resources, as sources of food, as well as have the power to make a decision collectively in food production, distribution, and consumption.

In Cambodia, small-scale food providers are self-reliant and depend on local resources with minimum external inputs. They grow vegetables and compost cow manure fertilizer from animal husbandry. They use traditional knowledge to preserve local seeds and exchange them with other food producers. They also produce farm-made herbicides and pesticides and make agricultural materials from local resources.



In the Philippines, grassroots communities continue their practices of traditional farming on sustainable use of natural resources, collective land use, seed preservation and food production. At the national level, grassroots organizations of food producers empower and raise public awareness on food sovereignty through political campaigns, mobilization, and popular education.

In India, grassroots communities encourage the government to support ecological friendly farming and promote local knowledge of food production to consumers. In addition, they urge the government to redirect subsidies to local communities instead of subsidizing big food corporations and enact more redistribution policies thereby creating a sustainable distribution of wealth and natural resources for small-scale food providers. Moreover, food and agriculture policies ensure migrants, as a vulnerable group, who are displaced from rural and conflict areas have the rights to access adequate food, sufficient means and resources to produce food wherever they live.

In Thailand and Laos, food production practices are based on traditional knowledge from diverse backgrounds and territories, such as indigenous people, peasants and artisanal fishers. For instance, Karen communities in Northern Thailand produce food by swidden agriculture, also known as shifting cultivation. On the one hand, swidden agriculture ensures that Karen communities have food sovereignty and preserve plant varieties. On the other hand, the practice preserves forest, soil and ecosystem in the long run.

In Northeast Thailand, farmers practice paddy field ecosystems to cultivate rice based on their territories and environments as well as save seeds to maintain crop varieties. In coastal areas of South Thailand, women fishers use traditional gears and wisdom to catch fish that sustainably maintain the marine environment. In Laos, small-scale food providers use an integrated farming practice that brings food sovereignty and preserves the biodiversity of local natural resources to grassroots communities.

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“Understanding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP)”



HENRY SIMARMATA

Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI)

La Via Campesina International Coordinating Committee (LVC-ICC)

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas or UNDROP is a resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 after more than a decade of negotiations. Like any human rights instrument passed by the UN, it is not legally binding though it carries a strong moral force that urges governments to adopt key provisions into local policy. Most of these rights are already enshrined as human rights standards, the new issues are on the right to land and seeds.

Beyond peasants, however, it defines the rights of small-scale food providers or any group or sector that engages in subsistence or household level farming, livestock raising, fishing, forestry, and other activities related to agriculture. The UNDROP also enshrines the right to engage freely, individually or collectively in food production, as well as to independently define methods, processes and technologies to be used therein. It also illuminates the right to agricultural support services from the government, in the form of subsidies, technical and infrastructure assistance, credit and financial services and crop insurances, as well as to be assured of protection and fair and equal access to local and international agriculture markets.

“Most of these rights are already enshrined as human rights standards, the new issues are on the right to land and seeds.”

What makes the UNDROP critical for food sovereignty however, is the expansion of rights that enable small-scale food providers to effectively defend local food systems and traditional, cultural, and ecological methods of food production. The UNDROP emphasizes on agrarian reform and the rights of communities who struggle against criminalization, harassment, evictions, enforced disappearances, and other human rights violations by governments or private entities. It also looks into the rights to seeds and benefits arising from the utilization of plant genetic resources, in a context of growing intellectual property rights regimes that heavily restrict the free usage of traditional seed varieties. More importantly, it urges the passage of national policies that safeguard local food systems economic abuses arising from free trade agreements.

But what is the UNDROP for common rural folk? Understanding key provisions under it can be of great importance in legal struggles or in advocacy initiatives for local and national policy reforms. It also helps in empowering local movements in defense of land and other

territories from corporate capture as well as it can somehow prevent the passage of policies that trample the basic rights enjoyed by small-scale food providers. Finally, this instrument provides a mechanism for redress accessible to communities for cases of rights violations or to amplify their voices at the international sphere. Hence the need to build more awareness and knowledge in fully utilizing this very important rights framework. ■

Women Empowerment in Food Production

Within the context of a patriarchal capitalist society, women in small-scale food production have been the most disadvantaged by the corporatization and industrialization of the food system. The marginalization of women in food production, as a common experience worldwide, is largely a result of the entwinement of the oppressive economic, political, and social structures ushered in by neoliberal capitalism with the equally oppressive patriarchal belief system.

Way before the onset of neoliberalism, entrenched patriarchal values and beliefs have already restricted women's rights; bred physical, social, and cultural violence against women; and feminized domestic work, thereby limiting women's involvement in social, economic, and political activities beyond the domestic space. By conveniently using the patriarchy to justify the underpayment and overexploitation of women in order to generate more profit, the capitalist system has compounded many of the patriarchal system's defining characteristics and thereby exacerbated gender inequality. As such, poor women must now struggle to survive amid conditions of extreme poverty and hunger while also having to grapple with entrenched patriarchal beliefs that limit their capacity to do so.

For women in food production, this has meant their exclusion from modern contract-farming arrangements and unjust compensation for their work under such schemes; limited employment in industrial farms and aquaculture due to heavy mechanization; limited access to markets; and unequal access to land and other productive resources, technology, finance, education, and other relevant services. Furthermore, because they are frequently overburdened with both agricultural and domestic works, women food producers have often had limited participation in decision making on economic and political matters even within grassroots movements.

Women have been working in food production for a long time—ranging from domestic tasks to storing seeds, preparing materials for agriculture, maintaining, harvesting and cultivating crops and seafood, processing harvests, and selling their produce in markets. Nonetheless, it is less recognized that women have a distinct role in food production.

Way before the onset of neoliberalism, entrenched patriarchal values and beliefs have already restricted women's rights; bred physical, social, and cultural violence against women...

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“The Role of Women as Food Producers: The Women Fisherfolk of the Songkhla Lake Network”



BENCHAWAN PENGNOO

Network of Women Fisherfolk from Songkhla Lake
Thailand

Women play a vital role as food producers in the fisherfolk network around the Songkhla Lake. The Songkla River Basin and Lake System is composed of 2,500 fisherfolks and 161 households. Women and men have their own contributions in the food provision. The fisherfolk group empowers women members on their participation to ensure access and management of the natural resources to sustain local livelihoods and food sovereignty.

Beyond livelihood activities, a common concern for women fisherfolk is broadening their participation and involvement in local policy making related to Songkhla Lake and the protection of marine and other natural resources around it.

Women are local food producers and processors. There are 250 fish species that the fisher’s group conserve, make use of, and share with other communities around the Songkhla Lake. As a grassroots and marginalized community, women participation is ensured in national, legal, policy-making and institutional framework. Apart from group building, raising funds and awareness, participation is the key to lasting progressive changes.

As an Islamic community, the core problem is also to challenge the gender role within the community. Women are food producers and local activists. The community recognizes the role of women in food production, food activism and actions for public goods. An ‘Interfaith Group’ is established in the coastal area with objectives on natural preservation, income generation, and food processing in order to promote social recognition of women’s role in the food production system.

The Women Fisherfolk Association of the Southern Region of Thailand is established under the 2015 Fisheries Act. The association is formed as the decision-making structure for fisheries-related issues. Women representatives in the national structure are essential since the local voices are not enough for policy changes and a bigger platform is needed to influence decision-making at all levels.

“Beyond livelihood activities, a common concern for women fisherfolks in Songkhla is on broadening their participation and involvement in local policy making related to the Lake...”

Women around the Songkhla Lake Network and the Artisanal Fishery Network have concerns about the recruitment of second liners and future generations to continue their aspirations. As a result, they raise awareness, sense of ownership, and fisher identity in many ways: on income generation, asserting local heritage in school curriculum, and engaging gender roles and the role of women in the protection of natural resources. Finally, the group seeks to continue sharing their stories, knowledge and common goals on inclusiveness, food sovereignty, food safety, and social justice. ■

Defending and Rebuilding Local Food Systems

Local food systems ensure people have the ability to control and have access to food whilst building the autonomy and self-reliance of people. Local food systems do not only include food production, but they also extend over harvest, processing, storage, supply and exchange. Through this system, small-scale food providers primarily secure nutrition, livelihoods, incomes, and cultural beliefs.

Peoples' livelihoods rely on local food systems abundant with biodiversity. Local food systems serve as sources of food for people and sustain environments. The interactions between livelihood activities and biodiversity are reciprocity. When local food systems contain affluent resources, people depend less on external inputs such as chemicals and pesticides. Peoples' sustainable ways of food production also protect ecosystems. In this case, agroecological agriculture, integrated farming system, and organic farming exemplify practices that simultaneously sustain ecosystems and food systems and eventually contribute to the food sovereignty of communities.

Localizing food systems narrows the gap and builds trust between small-scale food providers and consumers which will empower them to make decisions on food-related policies. While this relationship helps protect food providers from unfair and unregulated trade policies, it ensures that consumers know how food is produced and where it comes from. It builds the right to self-determination and increases endogenous development, rather than relying on uncontrollable factors, especially on multinational food corporations.

Although local food systems are essential for building the food sovereignty of local communities, the prevailing paradigm on development aimed at economic growth deteriorates the environment and people's sources of food. For instance, local food systems have been undermined by turning to monoculture, industrial areas, mining areas, and private properties. Dominant agricultural policies such as export-oriented agriculture undermine the biodiversity of local food systems and local livelihoods. Free trade agreements deprive small-scale food providers their right to protect their agricultural products. A market economy

A market economy also aims at privatizing common properties (land, water, and forest) where small-scale food providers lose their ability and control over productive resources.

also aims at privatizing common properties (land, water, and forest) where small-scale food providers lose their ability and control over productive resources.

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

“The Experience of Hom Duk Hung Village in Defending Local Food Systems”



KITTIMA KUTHONG

Hom Dok Hung Community-Based Rice Group
Thailand

In Thailand, the Hom Dok Hung Community-Based Rice Group exemplifies how grassroots community members utilize their local food systems for subsistence and livelihoods. The group is a community enterprise, located in Ban Noi Lerg Hung Village – also known as Khok Sa-Ard, Sakon Nakhon Province, the northeastern part of Thailand's Mekong ecosystem where all of the local rivers are connected to the Mekong. The villagers adapt their livelihoods to surrounding environments and seasonal climate changes with natural and ecological agriculture to production. The village agricultural land is situated in landscapes, consisting of high plains, brooks and hillocks encompassed with dense rainforest where seasonal flood and drought recur. This is a complex food system that shapes the community culture to live and use natural resources sustainably.

The villagers produce food and receive adequate nutrients from their surrounding ecosystem. They cultivate rice once a year that relies on seasonal rainfall. In the rainy season, the rivers are linked to land creating the lowland floodplain forest where villagers can harvest fish. In addition, villagers collect non-timber forest products, such as herbs, mushrooms, snails and grasshoppers from the affluent forest for consumption. The villagers conduct community research to learn about their local food system and seek ways to preserve plant and animal varieties.

The Hom Dok Hung Community-Based Rice Group plays an important role in preserving rice varieties. The group grows over 50 rice varieties such as purple, red, and white sticky rice on their paddy fields. The group spent seven years restoring native rice varieties that disappeared for over 30 years and currently, the group preserves over 300 rice cultivars.

The group plays a role in transferring traditional knowledge about their local food system and the preservation of native rice varieties to other communities, the young generation, and consumers through numerous opportunities, including exhibitions, traditional events, and community visits.

“The group spent seven years restoring native rice varieties that disappeared for over 30 years and currently the group preserves over 300 rice cultivars.”

The group initiates the community enterprise to sell native rice and other products made by rice such as rice green tea, aromatic rice soap, shampoo, and shampoo bar. They also share their stories about local food production, processing, and distribution through their products with consumers. Through this approach, consumers trust that they will have access to safe and healthy food and support small-scale food providers to protect their local food system, as sources of food. ■

Seed Sovereignty



Seeds are the primary substance of a local food system and agriculture. Seeds are in the hands of small-scale food providers ensuring food sovereignty. They have the right to reserve, replant, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds thereby increasing plant varieties and biodiversities.

Seed policies and its politics are complex and closely related to the issue of knowledge and cultures. Globally, seed policy frameworks govern the rights of food producers to seeds. These include, but not limited to the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (IUPGR), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) – led by the FAO, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) – the issuance of plant breeder rights, the WTO agreement and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) - the enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) regime and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – the predominance of the national sovereignty over biodiversity and community rights.

Through numerous policy frameworks, multilateral trade agreements and intellectual property regime commodify seeds despite a collective resource of people and threaten traditional knowledge about seed conservation and plant breeding. In addition, the bilateral and regional trade mechanisms, such as free trade agreements, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) strongly propose the protection of intellectual property rights but undermine the rights of small-scale farmers to seeds.

These pose a greater risk to food sovereignty as the regime increases the monopoly of corporate agribusinesses over seed and enables biopiracy while the right of small-scale farmers to utilize seeds is set aside. For instance, under the International Convention for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV 1991), plant breeders at big corporations will gain 20-25 years of

The peoples' paradigm of sharing traditional knowledge, seeds, and materials protect biodiversity and sustainability, thereby guaranteeing the rights of peasants and ultimately building food sovereignty.

protection for breeder's rights whereby they control breeds, seeds and plant varieties. In this way, the rights of farmers to seeds will be deprived of. While farmers lose the right to save, reuse, sell and exchange seeds, a small number of corporate agribusinesses have the power to increase the price of seeds. With this scenario, small-scale farmers will bear the cost of expensive seeds, rising 2-6 times, and more expensive food will be the fallout.

Under Article 8 (j) of the CBD, it urges the state members to respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities based on the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources through the implementation of access and benefit sharing (ABS) mechanisms. This facilitates 'access' genetic resource development for the sake of 'sharing benefits' in research initiatives.

Nonetheless, peoples' paradigm of sharing traditional knowledge, seeds, and materials protect biodiversity and sustainability thereby guaranteeing the rights of small-scale farmers and peasants and ultimately building food sovereignty. In this light, governments should formulate and implement national laws to recognize the rights of small-scale food producers and preserve their traditional knowledge of seed conservation and protection. As knowledge is power, sharing knowledge, resources, and ways that small-scale farmers and peasants protect and preserve traditional seeds create seed diversity and food sovereignty on the ground.

[Synthesis of the Presentation:]

"Seed Policies and Politics and its Impacts to Food Sovereignty"



JACOB NELLITHANAM

Bharat Beej Swaraj (BBS)
India

In India, there are more than 2,000 rice seed varieties, and this is within just one state. Seed politics are complex and closely related with the issue of indigenous knowledge and culture. At the international level, several policy frameworks such as International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (IUPGR) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources under the UN Food and Agriculture Organization have defined seed rights. Trade regimes such as the TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) under the WTO as well as other conventions such as the UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) have undermined seed rights by enabling corporate capture and restrictive policies in the usage of seeds. Issues on seed rights mainly fall under question of access, and the theme of privatization. When large corporations go after seed varieties, they mainly work towards influencing policies that

"Sharing is the way that should govern seeds - those who want to produce and provide must have the rights to genetic resources and the potential to share resources and knowledge."

govern how seeds are marketed, and intellectual property laws that enable a monopolization by industrial breeders.

The enforcement of international seed policies or frameworks are divided amongst various institutions. The TRIPS is implemented through international courts, the WTO has power to influence national hard-laws as all agreements are legally binding. On the other hand the rights of peasants and small-scale food providers fall under soft laws, which are not legally binding, and are therefore, difficult to enforce.

Another example is treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides access to knowledge and guarantees the rights of peasants to leverage seed incentives and support for propagating indigenous varieties. But again, enforcement varies between governments, largely depending on national sovereignty policies. Under the national sovereignty policy discourse however, it is often that intellectual property rights regime that takes precedence as it is enforceable in national courts. Further, bilateral trade mechanisms such as FTAs, the ASEAN, and the RCEP enable stronger protection on intellectual property. While the CBD facilitates 'access' in the name of genetic resources development for 'sharing benefits' it is most often that corporate interests, monopoly of usage and profitability that influence such treaties.

What mechanisms then will protect diversity and promote sustainability? In this circumstance, it is the People's paradigm of 'sharing' on traditional knowledge, community seeds and materials. National laws should recognize the farmer's rights enshrined in a larger framework. The preservation of seed diversity and sustainability as well as the protection of traditional and indigenous knowledge on seeds is only possible if the sharing framework advances in various policy spheres.

'Sharing is the way that should govern seeds' - those who want to produce and provide must have the rights to genetic resources and the potential to share resources and knowledge. Regulatory policies and/or regimes restrict and control seed sharing must be re-evaluated, repealed or amended. This is the emerging arena where social movements and civil society must dive into, if the aim is to broaden seed rights and diversity and to advance the sovereignty and rights discourses in campaigns for food sovereignty. ■

Agroecological Practices

Agroecology involves people practising sustainable farming methods that build the health and resilience of the ecosystem while relying less on external inputs such as harmful fertilizers and pesticides. It countervails modern agriculture practices that produce unhealthy and unsafe food, deteriorate the ecosystem, and increase the vulnerabilities of the agrarian society. As engagement in modern agriculture becomes more expensive—with dependence on more chemicals, genetically modified seeds, tools and farm machinery—farmers also find themselves trapped in debt bondages.

In turn, agroecological practices enhance small-scale food providers' reliance on ecological, socio-economic, and culturally sustainable farming systems. Depending less on external inputs, small-scale food providers are able to sustain soil fertility to increase food production and diversify cropping. Agroecological practices ensure small-scale food providers have adequate, healthy, and nutritious food. The practices disentangle food producers from debts as they utilize natural inputs and self-made resources such as natural composts and biopesticides.

As a result, small-scale food providers are able to independently decide what they grow, eat, and sell, and ensure that food is available and accessible for them. Furthermore, they have the ability to control their livelihoods. Agroecological practices can be illustrated in various forms (e.g. agroforestry and organic farming are some of the grassroots practices illustrated during the workshop).

[In Focus:]

LAND JUSTICE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: Learning from the Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT)



Situated in Surat Thani Province, Southern Thailand, the Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT), together with five peasant communities, occupied land from expired oil palm concessions. Since 2008, the communities rebuilt the ecosystem from monoculture with heavy chemical use, and utilized the land through integrated farming and

organic farming practices. Importantly, the community members collectively own and decide the utilization and ownership of the land. The newly settled communities have successfully encouraged their members to practice organic farming, ensuring no chemical and pesticide use from their farmlands for five years. Even though the communities encountered numerous challenges, including human rights violations and forcible eviction from companies and the government authorities, they rely on a community-based economy in which food sovereignty is the priority. The communities also appreciate and recognize women's important role as food producers and empower them to lead community development activities.

Agroforestry

Agroforestry is the concept and practices of forest agriculture encompassing local wisdom agriculture and natural resources coexistence as a forest-like farming system. The overarching principle of agroforestry is to be self-reliant with diverse forest resources. Conceptually, it is a system of farming which preserves biodiversity and ecosystem while people coexist harmoniously with nature and meet basic needs, such as food, medicine, household necessities, and shelter. People utilize natural resources for their needs while ensuring ecological succession. This is a way to balance ecological preservation and people's consumption. It is a philosophy teaching people to respect nature.

Practically, agroforestry is an ecosystem that is composed of seven-level integrated trees cohabitating and living in harmony with each other. Multilayered plants, including perennials, fruit trees, ground covers, vines and creepers, epiphytes and water plants, coexist harmoniously and sustain a healthy ecosystem with minimum external inputs of chemicals. Tall trees have deep roots pulling up nutrients in the ground and in dry seasons, they drop their leaves and make the ground fertile. The seven-level integrated trees not only symbiotically live with each other but they also respond to the basic needs of the people.



Agroforestry enhances land utilization, increases level of independence, and eventually realizes food sovereignty for practitioners. Through ecological diversity, it secures the subsistence livelihoods of people and protects them from external risks such as climate change and fluctuation in the price and markets of crops.

For instance, people can consume tuber crops as a source of high carbohydrates if rice cannot be grown because of drought and flood. Moreover, agroforestry practitioners learn how to utilize forest resources for household utilities. For instance, citrus can be processed into shampoos, coconuts for oil, tamarind for face washing cream, and weeds for hair growth oil. Because of the diversity of the natural resources and their uses, people are able to have 'natural capitals' for decent and sustainable livelihoods.

The *Agroforestry Learning Center Phuyai Wiboon Khemchalerm* in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand exemplifies forest agriculture encompassing more than 700 species diversity of plants where people do not only learn to practice a forest-like farming system but they also learn how to utilize their resources efficiently. The center conveys ways of thinking and practices to younger generations focusing on local food systems that emphasize self-sufficiency.

Organic Farming Practices

The practice of organic farming is a sustainable method balancing ecological conservation and food production which involves depending less on external inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Using self-made inputs and biological management, the practice enhances soil nutrients and ecological diversity ensuring small-scale food providers have sustainable crop yield while simultaneously working in harmony with surrounding ecosystems.

In Thailand, the Sanam Chai Khet Organic Farmers Group, situated in Chachoengsao Province is one of the good examples of grassroots communities that promote organic farming practices and thereby territorializing protected-agriculture areas as the leveraging power against the industrialization agenda reinforced by the Thai government. The group has evolved from the rural development approaches induced by civil society groups for more than 30 years that aimed at strengthening and building the self-reliance of communities. The civil society groups encouraged grassroots communities to interconnect the issues of household famine and poverty by building and linking social protection and community development.

First and foremost, organic farming practices were introduced to communities to build food security with self-reliance. The small-scale farmers left monoculture and pursued organic agriculture and cultivation of vegetables that utilize the surrounding resources, such as animal and green manure to preserve and protect the soil. In the long-term, the group initiated a community savings group that was developed as a cooperative, where women play a leading role in financial management to increase household savings and community solidarity.

The group of small-scale farmers has shared experiences and developed knowledge about organic farming through community-based research which goes hand in hand with local wisdom and practices. Primarily, they use native seeds to grow vegetables that they could collect, preserve, breed, and exchange. They also practise an integrated farming system in which small-scale food providers grow mixed crops in a single plot. These practices ensure farmers have safe and nutritious food, continual food supply and consumption, and a main source of income for the local communities, save on production costs and labor, develop climate-resilient crops, as well as maintain ecological sustainability.



This model has been extended to other communities, with the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) being founded in 2001. More than 600 farmers practiced organic farming on over 2,200 *rai* (352 hectares) of farmland in five provinces, including in Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Saraburi, Nakhon Nayok, and Chonburi. The group has built, shared, and exchanged organic farming knowledge and practices among communities. The network has been

constructed upon community determination and participation to ensure self-reliance and wellbeing simultaneously.

It is a platform where people come together to promote and transfer knowledge on organic agriculture to other farmers. Farmers learn how to save and exchange local varieties of seeds, produce organic compost, practice integrated farming systems and adapt agriculture to climate change. The group also transfers knowledge and practices to young farmers and engages them to work on their farmlands and use technological skills to contribute to the group. They aim at building agriculture as a secure job for the young generation through a standard income that enables them to live with dignity and security. The group aims to expand the number of organic farmers nationally.

The network started its organic practices for its members' household consumption and also sells remnants in markets. Later, the network has also established the standards and certifications of its organic agriculture products at two levels. First, the members set up a Participatory Certification System (PCS) as a common ground and monitoring system ensuring their organic products are safe from chemicals. Second, the group standardizes and certifies their products to meet both national and international standards including Internal Certification, Organic Agricultural Certification Thailand (ACT), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), European Union Organic Certification, and Canada Organic Regime (COR). Moreover, the group builds a preventative mechanism buffering contaminated chemicals from air, water, and soil to their organic plantation. The group has now become the largest organic agricultural producer in Eastern Thailand to supply organic products to people who want to consume healthy and safe foods.

The group continually develops various marketing channels, such as organic shops, farmer markets, schools and hospitals, etc. Importantly, the network pursues a fair trade system, guaranteeing product prices based on actual production cost through community participation, and applies consumer supported agriculture (CSA) as an alternative supply chain to connect food producers and consumers directly. In this way, consumers do not only get safe and healthy foods, but they also learn organic farming practices.

It is a learning platform for people to learn and exchange knowledge about safe food production and organic farming systems.



KEY SESSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the key issues/struggles faced by communities in taking on food sovereignty campaigns?
2. What campaign strategies/practices are effective in advancing food sovereignty at the community and national levels?
3. What regional platforms are available where national people's organizations or campaigns on food sovereignty can converge?

Advancing Food Sovereignty Campaigns

Across South and Southeast Asia, food sovereignty and related campaigns are pushed with varying intensity and within various political spaces. Though most of these campaigns are oriented towards attaining policy reforms, they are commonly entwined with a specific struggle at the grassroots. These struggles are often seen against a backdrop of deep agrarian conflict and increasing threats to human rights. Movements for food sovereignty have gained traction or waned overtime, largely depending on the strength of communities in resisting forces, policies or entities that undermine them.



Key to building this strength is increasing community awareness on the bundle of rights under the food sovereignty framework, along with the need to effectively claim or defend them. For this purpose, agroecology and seed saving play a crucial part, empowering communities to become more cohesive in responding to threats (i.e. cheap agriculture imports, land grabbing, displacement and indebtedness), and moves them toward solidarity and collective

actions. By amplifying sustainable, as well as traditional, cultural methods in producing food, communities are able to redefine food systems and challenge profit-oriented models for rural development.

In Cambodia, various people's movements campaign for agroecology to promote healthy food and preserve ecosystems in a context of increasing hunger in rural areas as well as widespread environmental distress caused by corporate mega-infrastructure projects. The reliance on natural soil, seed, and forest resources is promoted to challenge the overdependence on chemical inputs, the prevalence of biotech crops, and the dominance of industrial monoculture. Making independent choices on growing and raising livestock is also promoted through community-led trainings on integrated farming systems and diversification.

The production of natural fertilizers from livestock manure enabled family farms to reallocate more financial resources (e.g. debt repayments from the procurement of external inputs) to other livelihood needs. By relying less on external chemical inputs, small-scale food providers also rely less on industrial seed varieties or hybrids that depend on them. Traditional seeds become more utilized as natural farming methods become more popular, leading to more community initiatives for seed saving. Rural movements in Cambodia have also pushed strongly for the right to build sustainable local markets that cater to community needs first and protected against cheap imports, opportunistic middlemen and consumerism.

In the Philippines, despite the predominance of agriculture policies that ultimately aim to integrate small-scale food providers to export-driven value chains, the push for policy reforms that place the right to food of communities first are gaining ground. As communities slowly veer away from chemical farming inputs, local governments pass more policies that support sustainable agriculture practices and even agroecology. Engaging local governance has become the new arena for advocacies on food sovereignty in a context where national policies on food and agriculture have recently swayed towards the expansion of free trade as well as greater corporate control on food production and land-use. In the face of worsening rural poverty, local movements push for the passage of key legislation or the enforcement of policies that protect local food systems.

The practice of agroecology also had a pivotal role, not only in enabling small-scale food providers to escape debts incurred under conventional agriculture, but also in sustaining long-drawn struggles for agrarian reform. Land occupations through agroecology aided



communities in asserting land rights' claims and also ensured that food was accessible and available for families in agrarian conflict. This is alongside other community-led campaigns that demand for broader agricultural support services from the government in terms of production, education and infrastructure, as well as the implementation of programs that safeguard communities against hunger and malnutrition.

In India, food sovereignty is an evolving concept that emphasizes on the roles of small actors in food systems and their importance in increasing food diversity, including farmworkers, artisanal fishers, forest workers, migrant workers, pastoralists, food processors, refugees, and other vulnerable sectors/groups that are often sidelined in rural development discourses. While extreme poverty incessantly hounds Indian countryside, government policies that facilitate corporate capture of land, forest, water and even plant genetic resources have exacerbated hunger and malnutrition. In this context, food sovereignty has become a platform for empowerment to enliven small actors to push back against threats to livelihoods.

Food sovereignty ensures small-scale food providers have effective control and the right to freely utilize all available resources for food production. It decentralizes power to local actors who are able to articulate their rights on decision-making processes of food policies. Various campaigns around food sovereignty have also pushed for policies that expand community rights according to gender, social class (e.g. the Dalits) and ethnicity, as well as to implement programs that enable various forms of redistributive justice.

Agroecology has also taken center stage in rural movements, primarily as an alternative to conventional farming systems that aggravate poverty, but more importantly to rebuild historical, traditional, and cultural knowledge in agriculture and food production.

In Thailand and Laos, campaigns on food sovereignty are seen as an impetus towards self-reliance in agriculture, where small-scale food providers are able to independently and sustainably manage and utilize resources within local food systems while prioritizing access, availability, and adequacy of healthy and nutritious food to families and communities first before markets and consumers. Movements for food sovereignty also aim to harness the collective energies of small-scale food providers through agroecology in restoring lost ecosystems and biodiversity from destructive farming practices (e.g. industrial monoculture) and to push back against land-financialization and corporate mega-infrastructure projects that threaten the survival of communities.

Food sovereignty ensures small-scale food providers have effective control and the right to freely utilize all available resources for food production. It decentralizes power to local actors who are able to articulate their rights on decision-making processes of food policies.

Food sovereignty campaigns in Thailand and Laos also aim at enhancing autonomy in the management and preservation of other essential resources in food production such as seeds and plant genetics, livestock species, and technologies. This is alongside influencing local governance and policy directions towards decentralizing food and natural resources management—commonly in the hands of rural elites and power holders. More importantly, food sovereignty movements seek to broaden traditional and culture-based knowledge in food production, considered by many communities as “pearls of wisdom” that needs to be protected and bequeathed to future generations. For example, cultivation practices have shifted in Karen communities from conventional agriculture to traditional river-mountain-small rice paddy field ecosystems. This trend of reverting to traditional farming practices has also broadened toward northeast of Thailand and are actively being transferred to a younger generation of food producers.

These efforts, alongside initiatives to deepen public awareness on the importance of rural communities for food security, create more links between producers and consumers, drumming-up involvement and support.

The primary thrust of campaigns on food sovereignty is to ensure that communities have the right to produce, provide or consume food according to their needs. Food produced must also be healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate. For most small-scale food providers, food is not a mere commodity, but a part of tradition and a way of life. With increasing threats posed by capital to local food systems, a fundamental way forward is on building awareness on the bundle of rights under food sovereignty as well as strengthening solidarities among people’s movements.

This is key in building a broader resistance against corporations, government policies or even market forces that undermine community rights. In solidarity, peoples’ movements are able to reclaim power, enabling them to generate pressure in governance and exercise influence within policy narratives on food.

Key Challenges and Strategies

The points in the following section were drawn from the results of the two (2) principal workshops held during the event.

The first is a break-out session that aimed at: (a) identifying common perspectives and concepts on food sovereignty, by sector, peoples, country and sub-country levels; (b) identifying common practices, expressions on food sovereignty and in defending local food systems; and, (c) identifying common threats, issues and challenges faced by small-scale food providers. The second is a strategy session that aimed at (a) identifying emblematic campaigns at the national level towards broadening support through regional platforms; and (b) identifying strategies, plans, and common actions towards building a collective vision.

The participants in said workshops were composed mainly by national movement leaders/representatives and are divided into three (3) clusters: agriculture, fisheries, and

forestry. The key challenges and strategies below reflect the perspectives of these movements in moving their respective campaigns on food sovereignty forward.

CHALLENGES

- 1. Expansion of Corporate Control:** Countries across South and Southeast Asia are witnessing a shift towards greater corporatization and industrialization in agriculture production. Agribusiness ventures for both food and non-food purposes have transformed local economies and food systems into value chains designed to increase production efficiency and corporate profitability while leaving communities dependent on meager incomes with little to no room for crop/seed diversity.
- 2. Land Conversion:** Related to increasing corporate control, land resources are financialized and converted to non-agricultural use such as housing and real estate, recreational facilities, commercial districts and industrial infrastructure. In the absence of strong policies that govern land utilization, particularly in protecting lands dedicated to agricultural production, land resources will remain vulnerable to exploitation, leading to more incidences of land grabbing, enclosures and evictions of rural food producing communities. In countries where such policies are already instituted, corporate influence in legislative bodies have worked towards watering-down, circumventing or indemnifying themselves from such policies.
- 3. Policy Gaps and Anti-people Development:** From reallocating public financing for small-scale agricultural programs to large industrial growers, the privatization and heavily regulated use of waterways and irrigation canals for community farms, stiff penalties for the utilization and exchange of seeds protected by intellectual property, the forcible eviction of agroforestry communities peoples in “protected areas” delineated for carbon trading, to massive relocation of rural communities for energy infrastructure or mining projects. Gaps within policy frameworks designed to advance people’s rights and to protect their claims over land, water and forest resources are widened further by neoliberal policy “reforms” that favor corporate interest over people-centered development. Advocacy campaigns by people’s movements are often towards instituting reforms, but also to dismantle so-called “development policies” passed without due consultation or referendum. These are masked as progress and growth initiatives, but are mostly directed towards facilitating the agenda and interests of power holders and elites and increasing profitability and control over resources rather than promoting holistic, inclusive, and sustainable approaches for development.
- 4. Export Oriented Agricultural Markets:** At the tail end of most agriculture value chains is the export market. Penetrating these markets is seen as the panacea for rural poverty, at the expense however of local food security. Rural communities are forced directly or indirectly to engage such markets, to align their crops according to consumer demands abroad, and to remain dependent on the promise of bigger profits from this model. This is still apart from the impacts of market deregulation to the

survival of small family farms who are unable to compete due to lack of technical, financial and policy support from governments.

- 5. Violations to Human Rights:** From shrinking spaces in democratically and legally advancing peasants' rights, to actual threats to life and freedoms, rural resistance movements are severely maimed by the collusion of authoritarian governance and corporate capital. Fearmongering, terrorist-tagging, criminalization of dissent, ostracization and other measures to suppress the counterbalance provided by movements in the countryside have become a necessary mean to uphold nationalism and a strong state—a prevailing political narrative that has reshaped public opinion against mobilizing and asserting economic, social and cultural rights
- 6. Othering and Ostracization:** The Government has quite successfully built an “environmental” narrative that the indigenous communities and hill tribes are destroying the forests. The mainstream discourse has often criminalized forest communities and held them responsible for deforestation. This narrative also legitimizes the state’s violation of human rights of forest communities. In fact, in India conservationists have challenged the progressive Forest Rights Act (FRA) that recognizes and guarantees individual and community rights to forest dwelling communities on forest lands that they have inhabited and cultivated historically. Conservationists have argued that these rights are undermining wildlife conservation apart from deforestation. This has threatened the lives and livelihoods of millions of forest dwellers dependent on the forests for their survival.
- 7. Resource Capture and Profiteering:** Corporate capital operates within a framework of extracting maximum profit in its ventures.. To this end, most corporate-led development projects are designed to monopolize control or capture resources entirely, and to exploit the ability of these resources to generate returns. This has manifested in forms of land and ocean encroachments, investment and corporatization in agriculture, fisheries and forestries, towards a development path that is gravely misaligned with the aspirations of communities that depend on it.

In the Philippines, one such project is the Manila Bay reclamation, pushed by the government as an environmental initiative, but displaced thousands of fisher families in favor of creating real estate opportunities and commercial districts. Large infrastructure projects like dams and port projects have affected fishworker communities. In Thailand, construction of large dams have impacted the livelihood of fisherfolk, displaced hundreds of them and taken away their resources. Similarly, in India, port projects have impacted the livelihood of fishworkers and displaced thousands. But fishworker communities from both the countries have relentlessly stood up against violence by governments, environmental destruction and climate crisis.

- 8. Lack of Rights Awareness:** Despite the challenges posed by corporate impunity, most communities are caught unaware by the encroachments on their rights or freedoms. This exacerbates already persistent social problems in the countryside such as

poverty and hunger, and dispels opportunities to effectively and actively resist such encroachments. Beside basic human rights, the lack of awareness extends to economic, social, cultural, and other civil and political rights enshrined in various national and international policies/frameworks.

STRATEGIES

The main challenges in campaigning for food sovereignty is in finding opportunities or approaches where communities can actively assert the rights or resist systems that encroach on it. People's movements overtime, have developed strategies in engaging district, national, regional, and even international policy arenas. But the possibilities of finally attaining the aspirations of movements vary and depend largely on the intensity of struggle and the effectiveness in engaging all spheres/arenas.

Thus, the key to campaign and movement building around food sovereignty, based on the strategy sessions during the event, is on creating linkages between local, national, regional and international policy engagements, and on defining mechanisms where solidarity in struggle and complementation of movement's strength can be fostered; from technical support in research and information sharing, raising awareness and political education, to campaign management, alliance/coalition building, and broadening initiatives for people-to-people exchanges.

Advancing campaigns on food sovereignty, as with any other campaign by peoples movements, relies in facilitating a harmonious inter-relation and a concerted effort by the actors involved in it; where international/national civil society organisations work closely with the grassroots level and where peasant, workers and indigenous people's groups are empowered to actively engage national and international political spaces. In line with these, several points were also raised.

- 1. Raising public awareness on issues:** Raise public awareness on the issues and challenges at national and international level. Solidarity and support for the marginalized and grassroots organizations that are harassed, discriminated against and killed must be ensured. This is illuminated by movements in Cambodia in dismantling corporate impunity in Koh Kong: when the Cambodian Government ignored complaints from the communities on the incidences of land grabbing by sugar companies. The local community found out that Australian investors have large holdings in these companies, hence, channeled their complaints to the Australian Government who in turn imposed penalties and operational regulations against the said companies.
- 2. Solidarity in resistance:** We must build up solidarity with the whole food production system and go beyond food producers. We must also build linkages with cross-sector networks e.g. worker-labor, rural-urban, herders, pastoralists, landless farmers, people facing land conflicts. We must also work and engage with the governments to push rights protection policies, insurance, subsidies by addressing common vision on food

sovereignty for marginalized sectors. Additionally, we need to communicate the impacts of free trade policies to people in general and convince the public to join the movement that protects peasant rights.

- 3. Political education and rights-based learning:** We need to engage and keep learning about international agreements/processes in human rights, a space that we use to support the rights, small-scale food providers. It could be to put an impression on our government. The work and the contribution of women has to be highlighted, they're central to all communities, to food sovereignty, the more fifty percent of population, it's possible central to policy making
- 4. Transfer of traditional and indigenous knowledge and wisdom to future generations:** including the importance of human dignity is extremely important. The modern education system does not regard traditional culture and value and considers it redundant. Capitalist education ignores dignity, respect, and culture as important values. Therefore, there is a need to develop alternative systems of education that considers dignity, knowledge from ancestors as key elements of learning.
- 5. Community-centered/participatory approaches in decision making:** The power of decision-making about forest related issues must remain in the hands of the community. Many countries throughout the world are decentralizing forest management responsibilities in different ways. In this way forest communities can take part in decision making processes that influence or affect their lives. But Governments in Asia are enhancing processes and trends of development which do not have regard for local beliefs, customs and culture.

Conclusion

Food sovereignty is essentially a movement towards self-determination, on autonomy of food systems against corporate control, capital – towards reclaiming and defending the commons, and resisting commodification of food. Food sovereignty is not “anti-market” but it rejects corporate controlled markets and exploitation, and instead seeks to influence the methods of non-exploitative and non-destructive food production, by building and strengthening community markets that would encourage people to move away from competition and move towards cooperation and solidarity. Agroecology is also important towards moving away from conventional practices in food production and monoculture – towards diversifying food systems and agroecology.

There is a need to link realities in the local, national, and international levels towards building solidarity and support to pressure governments and systems. In this regard, community organizing is important in building resistance to policies and systems that undermine food sovereignty and the rights of peoples and sectors. There is also a need to build and strengthen alliances across sectors and movements, between rural and indigenous peoples and other sectors, among professionals, academics, faith-based and rights-based groups, trade unions, and landless workers.

Thus, linkages must be built between communities, via sharing and exchanging of experiences and stories – to understand that while they live in different areas, regions, they face similar trends, threats and realities.

Therefore, grassroots communities, civil society and social movements must not let up the pressure on engaging governments in exacting accountability, for the protection of rights, and for pushing for policy reforms and a governance system where people have more access and control. Special efforts need to be made to involve younger generations in advancing food sovereignty. Local knowledge needs to be shared and transferred to future generations, with respect to tradition, culture and identity – moving away from capitalist systems – towards strengthening traditional knowledge and local systems.

These may be done by constantly learning about international processes especially on human rights mechanisms to support small-scale food providers and the advancement of food sovereignty, highlighting the important work and contribution of women to food sovereignty, initiating campaigns to support and demand social services and protection for all, and supporting communities who are struggling and resisting against rights violations, and exploring ways to extend solidarities to resist authoritarianism and the grabbing of land, water, resources, and territories.

The call for systemic change should have the same intensity with the call for solidarity, especially as communities face compounding threats reinforced by neoliberal forces and the erosion of civil and political rights. Beyond the local purview however, a steady effort to engage international platforms and movements is essential as well towards building support networks that aid in strategizing campaigns, amplifying wisdom and experience, in exacting accountability, and in responding to violations of rights. Building solidarities, however, is a challenging feat that requires transformative actions or exchanges to find common grounds and facilitate openness despite ideological and methodical differences between movements.

Food sovereignty is not just a paradigm for a better food system but also a political tool for uniting communities and movements as it is already integrated to foundations struggles despite the complexity and diversity issues faced by actors in the food discourse. Its framework has no clear-cut method in campaigning, but it provides strategic directions and goals that movements can pursue in asserting peoples' rights.



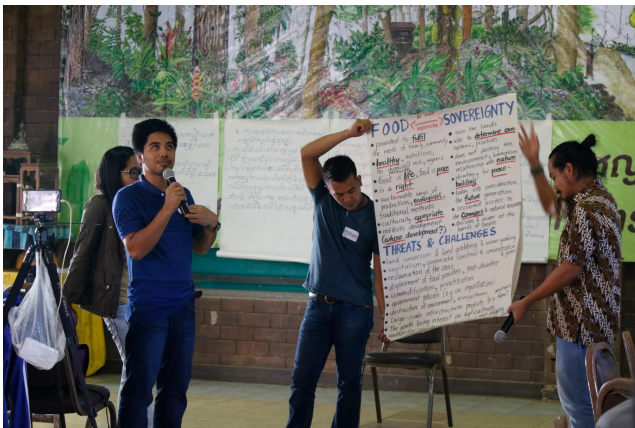
PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT

Regional Food Sovereignty Meeting













Agroforestry and Agroecology Exchange













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