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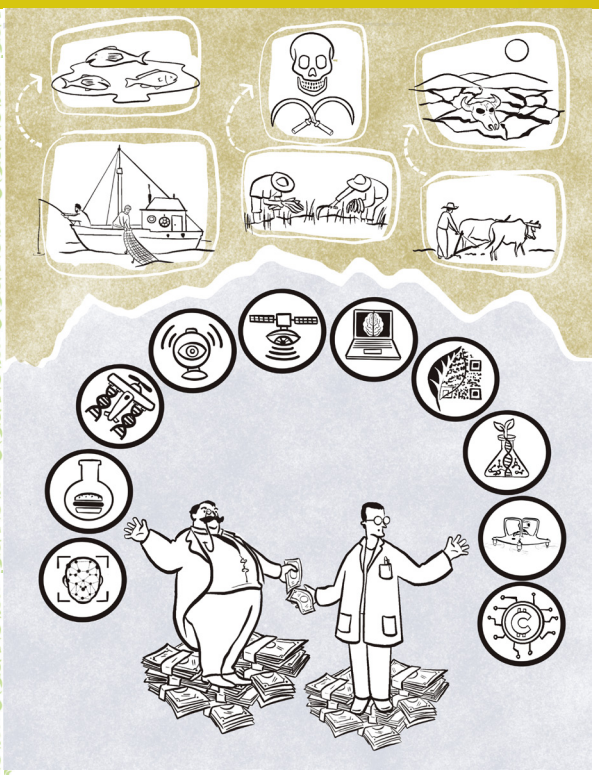

Illustration: Andrea Medina for ETC Group
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who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter is the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: AFSA, ETC Group, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Transnational Institute, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People, WAMIP.

editorial

how multilateral and other international platforms affect food sovereignty

For many governments and policy makers, food has come to be viewed as a commodity rather than a right. Global food governance increasingly serves corporate interests through market- and business-friendly agreements which are normalised in a wide range of multilateral institutions. People's livelihoods and nature are being traded away via economic and financial deals that benefit corporations and elites in different sectors and countries, but threaten the conditions necessary for peoples' food sovereignty. This threat is now being compounded by corporate techno-fix approaches to climate change and biodiversity crises.

In this issue of the Nyéléni newsletter, we describe how trends in multilateral and other international platforms are impacting food sovereignty in ways that will be decisive for the future of food and peoples' self-determination. We unpack the different processes in which unfair exchanges are being perpetuated and opaque concepts promoted.

As trade and investment fora continue to advance industrial food systems and global supply chains, the proliferation of so-called 'Nature-based Solutions' (NBS) is masking new ways of commodifying nature, territories and livelihoods. By assigning land, soil, water, forests and biodiversity the impossible task of making up for the pollution caused by industries elsewhere in exchange for monetary remuneration, a new front of commons enclosure is opening up, which is being enabled, measured and monitored through new technologies. Corporate capture of political and economic agendas is a common factor in all these scenarios; spreading out and embedding in multilateral institutions through multistakeholderism. A glaring example of this is the 2021 Food Systems Summit and the subsequent establishment of a UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, which seeks to hijack the ongoing food governance conversation. A further example is the discussion on Data for Food Security and Nutrition in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), driven by none other than the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

It is clear that we need to collectively mobilise and resist on an even larger and more coordinated scale than ever before to challenge and reverse these trends across a range of multilateral and other 'negotiating' arenas.

ETC Group, FIAN International, Focus on the Global South

box 1

Digitalization of food systems: 'Big Data' won't feed us

During its fifty-first session, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), issued recommendations for the collection of data for food security. Since 2021, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) insisted that data recollection won't solve the historic and structural problems at the core of hunger and malnutrition. Aspects like the governance of digitalization, conflicts of interest (since the main promoters of 'data re-collection' are the world's techno-titans), the importance of other knowledge systems, the environmental impacts of digital tools, and the need to assess the digitalization of food systems, were brought to the negotiations by the CSIPM. Below are the words of Patti Naylor, member of the National Family Farm Coalition and co-coordinator of CSIPM Data Working Group during the plenary on October 24[1]:

These policy recommendations fall short in many areas. Dangers to future food security and the environment were not addressed, neither were surveillance and privacy violations or monopolistic control of digital processes that enable the corporate control of the global food system. The document insists in "data" as the tool for achieving food security while huge amounts of data are already being collected and not driving the policies needed. The extraction of data joins the exploitation of human labor and the extraction of natural resources. As the seriousness of risks become more evident, these discussions around data and digital technologies must continue.

1 - https://www.csm4cfs.org/csipm-data-working-groups-statement-at-cfs51/

in the spotlight 1

Red alert: 'NbS' and 'nature tech' are techno-fix traps!

The idea of 'Nature-based Solutions' (NbS) sounds positive and innocuous but is, in fact, neither. NbS is a highly ambiguous term increasingly used to greenwash corporate profiteering via policy arenas that are supposed to be tackling global climate, biodiversity and food crises. Because of this ambiguity, NbS is being used to promote a huge variety of proposals, from plantations and wetland conservation, through to genetic engineering of plants and soil microbes[1]. Technical and market-based approaches, and a focus on 'enhancing' nature (including by excluding peoples from their lands) are the order of the day.

In 2022, NbS was incorporated into a range of intergovernmental agreements including in: fourteen resolutions at the fifth UN Environment Assembly; UNFCCC COP 27 Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan; the Convention on Biological Diversity Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; and a resolution of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands COP 14[2]. This has been accompanied by a barrage of corporate NbS proposals:

"The…number of corporate 'NbS pledges' has exploded. But as there simply isn't enough nature to go round, companies are pushing for technological means of "enhancing" nature, such as bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) projects and other geoengineering technologies."[3]

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is also insidiously cementing the technofix approach as essential to NbS, arguing that "nature-based solutions can be transformed through nature tech into solutions that are scalable, transparent and trustworthy"[4]. Here the WEF is spinning a carefully worded narrative about positive-sounding 'nature tech', to promote techno-fixes as the only way forward. This is not only untrue, but a dangerous distraction from real solutions.

The term 'technofix' is popularly understood as a technical solution to an urgent problem. Usually, however, it is nothing more than a 'fix' addressing the symptoms but not the root causes of a problem (because the promoters of the technofix would go out of business).
Technofixes may also increase the risks of negative impacts. For example, Solar Radiation Management (SRM) technologies have been proposed to reflect sunlight back into space[5]. This could have untold impacts on weather patterns and food production, but could nevertheless be hard to stop once started, because of the risk of 'termination shock'—a rapid acceleration in climate change that would make adaptation infinitely more difficult than it is now[6], including for food producers.

It is alarming that the technofix agenda is gaining ground so quickly, when the consequences could be so severe. This seems to be partly because of technology development being seen as politically neutral and always progressive—even though this is not the case[7]—and partly because of a reckless reliance on corporate actors to deliver technologies for the public good. These power imbalances are rarely disclosed or countered.
We in civil society need to collectively challenge and discredit the use of techno-fixes in all policy fora.

1 -https://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/files/geoengineering_in_climate_negotiations_final.pdf
2 - https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/environment/nature-based-solutions_en
3 - Quote from the No to Nature Based Dispossessions statement, March 2022: https://greencloud.gn.apc.org/index.php/s/2XrdY5dx9W4EACw
4 - https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/12/nature-based-solutions-are-essential-for-tackling-the-climate-and-biodiversity-crises/
5 - https://www.geoengineeringmonitor.org/cat/technologies/solar_radiation/
6 - https://www.geoengineeringmonitor.org/2022/03/high-risk-geoengineering-technologies-wont-reverse-climate-breakdown/
7 - https://www.etcgroup.org/content/politics-technology

in the spotlight 2

The Global Trade-Investment Regime: formalising theft and destruction

The global trade and investment regime is built on a history of extractivism and exploitation of nature, labour and wealth by corporations largely from the global north, but with increasing numbers from the global south as well. With roots in the colonial era, this regime is a powerful political economic force that is threatening peoples' food sovereignty, subverting democratic multilateralism and endangering the planet. A watershed moment in global trade architecture was the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, that was lauded by many governments for putting in place a rules-based multilateral trading system. In reality however, WTO rules have favoured the economic interests of wealthy countries, with market access firmly at the centre of all negotiations. Its numerous agreements on agriculture (AoA), intellectual property rights (TRIPS Agreement), industry (Non-agricultural market access negotiations—NAMA), health/safety standards (Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures—SPS), services (General Agreement on Trade in Services—GATS), investment, government procurement, trade facilitation, fisheries, e-commerce, and environmental services are designed to secure corporate control over the goods and services necessary for everyday life through progressive trade liberalisation.

Over the past two decades, the WTO has been accompanied by a new genre of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and economic partnerships that can be bilateral, plurilateral, regional and trans-regional, for example the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and most recently, the Indo-Pacific Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). These agreements are more ambitious than the WTO in terms of enabling foreign corporations to operate in domestic markets, intellectual property protection, investor protection and shaping domestic regulation. TRIPs plus provisions in FTAs allow pharmaceutical companies to own data on the safety and efficacy of medicines, de facto extend their patent periods and create drug monopolies, and significantly delay the production and marketing of generic drugs. They also demand participating countries to join and follow International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) rules, which favour corporate agribusiness and biotechnology companies.

One of the most dangerous provisions of these agreements is investor rights protection through Investment State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms by which investors can sue governments over public policies, laws and regulations that constrain their operations and profits including, for example, taxation, labour, environmental and pollution laws. ISDS arbitrations incur huge costs to taxpayers in legal fees, court appearances and payments for damage, and discourage governments to regulate in the public interest.

The WTO and FTAs are faces of corporate driven globalization, and prioritize opportunities for corporations to profit over the rights and capacities of small-scale food producers, workers, Indigenous Peoples and people. They supersede multilateral conventions on human rights, environment and biodiversity, and distort concepts of sustainability, inclusivity and accountability. The structural failings of this model and its governance regime are evident in recurring food, financial and public health crises, collapsing supply chains, dispossession of small-scale food producers and accelerating climate change. Negotiations are characterized by power asymmetries among countries, opaque backroom deals and coercion parading as consensus. This regime must be dismantled and trade-investment governance embedded in principles of food sovereignty, peoples' rights, dignity, solidarity, and respect for nature.

voices from the field 1

IPEF: Secretive negotiations over the future of the Indo-Pacific economy

As international trade deals continue to evolve, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is being negotiated between multiple nations in the Asia-Pacific region. With the United States taking the lead, its members include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Despite its claims of trans-regional economic cooperation, critics argue that the IPEF is designed to advance U.S. corporate interests and provide an avenue for them to influence national regulation in critical sectors such as agriculture, labour, environment, manufacturing, services and digital technology. A significant point of contention surrounding the IPEF (as in other trade-investment agreements) is its secretive negotiations, shutting out public and democratic scrutiny, checks and balances.

Joseph Purugganan from Focus on the Global South summarized civil society concerns, stating[1]: *"The consensus was evident: IPEF, despite being touted as a new model for trade, appears to be heavily tilted towards mega-corporations and tech giants. The lack of transparency in its negotiations and the haste to finalize it, compounded by the geopolitical tussle between the U.S. and China in the Asia-Pacific, raises red flags. Governments are urged to carefully reflect, to place their citizen's welfare above corporate windfalls, and to ensure that the IPEF, in essence, aligns with the aspirations and rights of those it stands to affect."*

1 - https://focusweb.org/press-release-indo-pacific-economic-framework-ipef-under-scrutiny-civil-society-raise-alarms-on-its-potential-consequences/

voices from the field 2

Exclusion and discrimination at the FAO World Food Forum

Melissa Gómez Gil, MAELA, Colombia

The FAO World Food Forum demonstrated the exclusion and discrimination of historically marginalised populations and communities, such as young people, women and rural communities. There, spaces for dialogue and the exchange of experiences were created, but they lacked the tools and mechanisms needed for interpreting. The accommodation and catering facilities were inadequate for those (like us) who had travelled from our territories, perhaps for the first time, to a country with a currency that is three times the value of our own national currency.

We felt that our right to food was being undermined by offering us their crumbs because they think that we are used to a violent system of social inequality; and this clearly replicates both the state of inequality in which we live in our own territories as well as the xenophobia that we experience in “first world” countries. Perhaps the experience for some was exciting for the simple fact of being in Rome or being at the FAO headquarters, but the truth is that for the young people of our social movement it was a traumatic experience without any safeguards or dignified conditions in which we were allowed to participate fully.

in the spotlight 3

Hydra with a Thousand Heads: How corporations privatise international decision-making

Corporate power, the industrialization of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and market concentration in food systems continue rising. Seizing seats at the decision-making table of various international public institutions has been instrumental to maintain and increase corporate power. How are corporations increasing their influence in UN agencies dealing with important issues related to food sovereignty?

- Seventy percent of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) budget comes from voluntary contributions, including those from philanthropies and corporate associations. FAO does not disclose how much money it receives from the corporate sector.
- FAO has intensified its collaboration with the corporate sector in its strategic framework for 2022-2031. Besides Crop-Life International, it has signed agreements with the International Fertilizer Association, Google and Unilever, among others. Source: https://www.fian.org/files/files/CorporateCaptureoftheFAO-EN.pdf
- Coca-Cola was one of the sponsors of the climate COP 28 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. The chief executive of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), will be overseeing the upcoming round of global climate negotiations as president of COP28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Source: https://kickbigpollutersout.org/articles/world-groups-condemn-announcement-oil-executive-cop28-president and https://gizmodo.com/coca-cola-sponsor-cop27-climate-change-1849716645
- Crop-Life International participates in technical expert groups of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Business associations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the World Economic Forum, which include major agribusiness corporations, have established coalitions to promote sustainable solutions that protect corporates’ interests but do nothing for the environment. Examples include offsetting mechanisms (such as ”No Net Loss”, ”Net Gain”, ”Nature Positive” and ”Nature-Based Solutions”), self-reporting, self-regulation and self-certification. Source: https://www.foei.org/publication/corporate-capture-nature-of-business-report/

Another way to increase corporate influence in UN institutions is to change the manner of policymaking. Instead of relying on intergovernmental processes of negotiation with clear rules of the game, many forms of multi-stakeholder initiatives with informal policy outcomes and a strong presence of business-friendly networks are mushrooming.

The UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 convened by the UN Secretary General was the biggest of these initiatives so far. Despite not having an agreed plan of action by governments, a UN Food Systems Coordination Hub - hosted by FAO and jointly led by the UN Deputy Secretary-General and the heads of the Rome-based agencies (FAO, World Food Programme—WFP, and International Fund for Agricultural Development—IFAD), WHO and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created as a parallel structure to existing institutions such as the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). This Hub enjoys more than double the budget of CFS while the latter continues struggling for funding. National governments are not part of the governance structure of this Hub. In other words, a corporate-friendly UN bureaucracy is de facto deciding which policies to promote.

The FAO World Food Forum (WFF) is a large event trying to match investors and countries. It is organized around three main pillars: the Global Youth Forum, the Science and Innovation Forum, and the Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum. It provides a large platform for corporate actors to promote their business solutions.

Democratizing decision-making around food systems is at the very core of the food sovereignty movement. We must counter the corporate capture of the United Nations. Building on our vision on food and peoples’ sovereignty and human rights, we need to further develop our proposals and strategies for inclusive global food governance and the democratization of the United Nations in a broader sense.

voices from the field 3

Digital tsunami: A technology that is not discussed with the peoples creates exclusion and dependency

The following testimonies were obtained during the two year discussion, among diverse peasant, Indigenous, local community and family farmers organizations, on the digitalization of food systems, prompted by the "Data Work Stream" inaugurated by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2021.

Digitalization in agriculture and food is perceived as a driver of profit, more than a series of tools and processes that can ease work in the fields and benefit the majority of non- industrial agriculturalists. There is awareness that this technology has not been developed by the peoples for the peoples, but comes from the corporate world and intends to create dependency and exclusion, just like other agricultural innovations throughout history. —Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) Vision statement on Data.

"A farmer is now forced to produce food in a different way, which is not conventional or traditional, but dependent on technology." Moayyad Bsharad, LVC-MENA Region, land worker.

The selection of certain data, and ignoring other data, is sometimes used to justify a political or profit-oriented goal. An example of a political goal comes to us from the occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza. —CSIPM Vision statement on Data.

"Using Data collection on the food systems in Gaza and [the] analyzing [of] it by the occupier which holds power, the Israeli occupation was able to calculate an average of calories per person by which people do not starve but never feel well fed. Through this weaponization of food based on very accurately calculated Data, the Israeli occupation aimed at putting direct pressure on the population in Gaza through a form of collective punishment to drive them to abandon certain political choices they have made". Mariam Mohammad, Coalition of Lebanese Civil Society / Arab Network for Food Sovereignty.

nyéléni process: towards a global food sovereignty forum 2025

Voices from our allies

Dražen Šimleša, RIPESS Int.
https://www.ripess.org

The Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS Int.) doesn't envisage a real and alive social solidarity economy (SSE) without food sovereignty and vice versa—our constituencies are inseparable and mutually supportive. We are standing on the position that today polycrises are rooted in the rules and design of today's economic system. That is why we support transformative potentials in the global struggle for a better world. The area in which this growth obsessed, destructive economy and political system is the most visible is our food sector. We can see it from the position of small farmers and women in rural areas over the situation involving soil and biodiversity, to public health and monopolisation of the food sector. That is why work on food sovereignty and agroecology is important for a social solidarity economy. We see our movements as streams of the same river, as parts of the same ecosystem.

Within SSE constituency we are already working on many crossing points and overlapping areas. Our members are active in the promotion and implementation of territorial food systems, collective farms/farm shops (small local cooperatives), collective/shared food production and processing, territorial public procurement, preservation of the Commons (land, water, seeds, etc.), producer/consumer solidarity with shared risks and benefits, and general improvement of health. In those areas, among others, we can see the connection between SSE and FS.

Our input can be seen through highlighting the above mentioned close related programs, projects and activities.

We will continue to work on solidarity within our societies and the needed transformation of the neoliberal capitalist economy that is endangering the planet, small food producers, women, minorities, and all other groups that are not running the profit-above-all agenda. RIPESS Int. can also provide support for building capacities and knowledge with education activities and trainings on SSE and FS.

box 2

Financing for development: a systemic perspective

Struggles for food sovereignty are completely tied to the rules that govern the global economy. Be it how financial speculation and instability affect food, fuel, and fertilizer prices; how unsustainable indebtedness and unfair trade deals, rooted in colonial dynamics, have kept so many countries dependent on food imports and commodity exporting; or how the deregulation of global finance has been pushing farmers and rural communities out of their lands as these are bought by financial actors seeking profitable investments.

This is where the UN Financing for Development (FfD) process comes in as a space to advance on the systemic changes we urgently need to see. The FfD process is unique, as it is the only democratic space in which global economic governance is addressed, while the issues of climate change, inequalities and human rights remain at its core. The FfD has its historical roots in the active discontent of Global South countries surrounding the structural flaws in the design of the international financial architecture and the inequalities that define it.

Momentum is building on international cooperation to face multiple crises. In recent months, the UN FfD process has regained steam due to two major steps forward: The approval by consensus of a resolution tabled by the Africa Group for an intergovernmental process on tax cooperation at the United Nations, and the momentum building towards the fourth Financing for Development Conference, which is expected to take place in 2025.

The issues of tax dodging and illicit financial flows, which have been raised by developing countries since the inception of the FfD process, cost governments around the world hundreds of billions of dollars in lost tax income every year. Decades of economic deregulation, corporate tax cuts and tax holidays to attract foreign investors have enabled a global land rush and the concentration of corporate power in food systems. These are resources that could be invested in public purchasing from agroecological producers, or in climate resilient and decentralized rural infrastructure to support local food systems, for instance.

The fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025 would be a key moment for global mobilization and public pressure on debt justice. Supporting demands for debt cancellation and the reform of the global debt architecture would also be relevant to food sovereignty movements, as many countries trapped in debt have been forced to shape their economies around destructive large-scale industrial agribusiness exports, in order to earn the dollars needed for debt repayment.

In line with the new Nyéléni process and upcoming Global Nyéléni Forum, strategies for creating just and ecological food systems can only be strengthened by alliances with civil society organizations and social movements demanding a systemic transformation of the international financial architecture.

For more info on this check the article by Flora Sonkin and Iolanda Fresnillo, https://www.sidint.org/news/article-un-financing-development-best-chance-democratise-global-economic-governance

to read, listen, watch and share

- Multistakeholderism and the corporate capture of global food governance - *https://foodsystems4people.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/EN_Analysis-report-2023_FS4P.pdf*
- Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM), Vision Statement on Data for Food Security and Nutrition - *https://www.csm4cfs.org/csipm-vision-statement-on-data-for-food-security-and-nutrition/*
- Collective statement, No to nature based ~~solutions~~ dispossesions, *https://www.etcgroup.org/content/no-nature-based-solutions*
- CSOs' letter to the Commerce Minister on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) - *https://focusweb.org/cso-letter-to-the-commerce-minister-on-the-indo-pacific-economic-framework-ipef-and-india-joining-the-trade-pillar/*
- Focus on the global South, Envisioning A Better World Without the WTO - *https://focusweb.org/publications/envisioning-a-better-world-without-the-wto/*
- Fian International and Corporate Accountability, World Food Forum captured by corporate interests - *https://fian.org/files/is/htdocs/wp11102127_GNIAANVR7U/www/files/WEB_FACTSHEET_13_10_2023_v3.pdf*

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