

# Towards Food Sovereignty

Reclaiming autonomous food systems

Michel Pimbert



Reclaiming  
**Diversity &  
Citizenship**

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## Introduction

Throughout the world, civil society, indigenous peoples and new social movements, - rather than academics or professional policy think tanks -, are the prime movers behind a newly emerging food sovereignty policy framework. At its heart, this alternative policy framework for food and agriculture aims to guarantee and protect people's space, ability and right to define their *own* models of production, food distribution and consumption patterns. This notion of "food sovereignty" is perhaps best understood as a *transformative process* that seeks to recreate the democratic realm and regenerate a diversity of autonomous food systems based on equity, social justice and ecological sustainability.

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

Indeed, the emerging food sovereignty policy framework identifies the need for several mutually supportive national and international policies to strengthen the autonomy<sup>1</sup> and resilience of more localised food systems. It recognises that a) today there are still many diverse, local food systems throughout the world, particularly in developing countries; and b) most of the world's food is grown, collected and harvested by over 2.5 billion small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers and artisanal fisherfolk. This food is primarily sold, processed, resold and consumed locally,

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, "autonomy" and "autonomous spaces" refer to a mode of existence whereby a social group or a nation defines its own needs and limits and sets the course of its own development (Illich, 1977).



with many people deriving their incomes and livelihoods through work and activities at different points along the food chain—from seed to plate. Such localised food systems provide the foundations of peoples' nutrition, incomes, economies and culture throughout the world. They start at the household level and expand to neighbourhood, municipal and regional levels. And localised food systems depend on many different local organisations to co-ordinate food production, storage and distribution, as well as people's access to food. Moreover, the ecological and institutional contexts in which diverse food systems are embedded also depend on the co-ordinated activities of local organisations for their renewal and sustainability.





But despite their current role in and future potential for meeting human needs and sustaining diverse ecologies, locally-determined food systems—and the local organisations that govern them—are largely ignored, neglected or actively undermined by governments and corporations.

First, the global restructuring of agri-food systems and livelihoods threatens such “autonomous spaces” as a few transnational corporations gain monopoly control over different links in the food chain (Magdoff *et al.*, 2000; Pimbert *et al.*, 2001; McMichael, 2004). The loss of capacity for autonomy and self-determination is a direct consequence of the expansion of the industrial, heteronomous<sup>2</sup> model of development rooted in commodity production. An important mechanism in this process is what Ivan Illich has termed “radical monopoly”: “the substitution of an industrial product or a professional service for a useful activity in which people engage or would like to engage”, leading to the deterioration of autonomous systems and modes of production (Illich, 1996). Radical monopolies replace non-marketable use-values with commodities by reshaping the social and physical environment and by appropriating



the components that enable people to cope on their own, thus undermining freedom, independence and culture (Illich, 1976).

Second, much of the Millennium Development community sees development as a process in which there will be a reduction in the number of people engaged in farming, fishing and land/water-based livelihoods. It is assumed that small-scale food producers, rural artisans, food workers and many of the rural poor will inevitably migrate to urban areas and find new and better jobs. And indeed, most international and national social, economic and environmental policies envision fewer and fewer people directly dependent on localised food systems and their environments for their livelihoods and culture. Encouraging people to move out of the primary sector and get jobs in the largely urban-based manufacturing and service sectors is seen as both desirable and necessary—regardless of the social and ecological costs involved.

This modernist development agenda and the corporate thrust for radical monopoly control over the global food system are mutually supportive elements of the same paradigm of economic progress. This view of progress assumes that history can repeat itself throughout the world. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a direct relationship between the vast increases in productivity achieved through the use of automated technology, re-engineering, downsizing and total quality management, and the permanent exclusion of high numbers of workers from employment, in both industry and the service sector. This erosion of the link between job creation and wealth creation calls for a more equitable distribution of productivity gains through a reduction of working hours, and for alternative development models that provide opportunities and local autonomous spaces for the generation of use values rather than exchange values (Gollain, 2004; Gorz, 2003; Latouche, 2003).

Regenerating autonomous food systems—with, for and by citizens—is a key challenge in this context. Reclaiming such spaces for autonomy and well-being depends on strengthening the positive features of local food systems and on large-scale citizen action grounded in an alternative theory of social change. These themes are explored in this book.



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<sup>2</sup> Heteronomy refers to a system that is driven by an industrial and productivist rationale (Illich, 1977).

This book is organised into three parts. The first part highlights the global importance of agriculture and food systems for livelihoods and environments today. Recent evidence on the social and environmental impacts of modern food systems is also summarised here. The historical context that gave birth to the concept of food sovereignty is then briefly described, along with more recent efforts to clarify and understand its deeply political character, which is radically different from the dominant neo-liberal economic system. The main features of this alternative policy framework for food, agriculture and land/water use are presented.

The second part provides empirical evidence of the importance of local organisations for sustainable livelihoods and food systems. Specific examples are given to highlight some of the many practical ways in which local, autonomous organisations manage and oversee different links in the food chain, from seed to plate. The roles of local organisations in sustaining diverse food systems, livelihoods and environments, in producing knowledge and innovations, and in designing regulatory institutions are then briefly analysed. The evidence presented suggests that the widespread implementation of food sovereignty partly depends on strengthening such local organisations and their networks.

The third and last part of the book identifies reversals and social actions needed to support locally determined food systems and autonomous organisations. I emphasise here that realising the right to food sovereignty requires transformation in four interrelated areas: the political, the economic, the social and the ecological. Much more critical reflection and action are needed to identify and support those processes that can bring about simultaneous transformation in these interrelated areas. In this context, I critically reflect on the potential of a new politics in the making that affirms the transformative power of the following: citizenship, confederalism, dual power, social inclusion, community control of land and territories, reclaiming knowledge and ways of knowing, agro-ecological approaches and ecological literacy and deepening democracy. In each case, I discuss the implications of these processes of transformation for the food sovereignty movement.





# Chapter 1. Local food systems, livelihoods and environments

Local food systems start at the household level and expand to neighbourhood, municipal and regional levels. Food systems include not just the production aspects of food but also processing, distribution, access, use, recycling and waste. They include the actors that both participate in and benefit from these activities (Tansey and Worsley,1995; Ericksen, 2006). Food systems are directly linked to food security issues, which do not only depend on food production but also on control over access to food and its use (Barracrough, 1991; George, 1984). A significant number of livelihoods and environments are still sustained by this diversity of local food systems throughout the world.

## 1.1. Food systems and livelihoods

Approximately 2.5 billion people—men, women and children—live directly from agricultural production systems (FAO, 2005). The term “agriculture” is used here to encompass crop cultivation, livestock production, forestry and fisheries across a wide range of ecosystems and landscapes. From a livelihoods perspective, agriculture provides occupation, employment and socio-cultural meaning to many small-scale producers. Small-scale food producers are those women and men who produce and harvest field and tree crops as well as livestock, fish and other aquatic organisms. They include smallholder peasant/family crop and livestock farmers, herders/pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, landless farmers/rural workers, gardeners, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples<sup>3</sup>, hunters and gatherers, and any other small-scale users of natural resources for food production.

**Farmers.** Half of all working people worldwide are farmers, and most of the world’s farming population lives in the South (Table 1.1). In sub-Saharan Africa seven out of ten people are farmers. Over large parts of Asia five out of ten people work in the agricultural sector (ILO, 2005). In Latin America and the Caribbean over a fifth of the total labour force is located in agriculture (ILO, 2003). The vast majority of these farmers

are small-scale producers who do their agricultural work by hand (about 1 billion farmers), or by using animals such as bullocks for ploughing (300 million). Smallholders who operate plots of land of less than 2 hectares currently constitute 85% of the total number of small farms in the world (525 million). Most of these farms are located in Asia (87%), while Africa is home to another 8% and Europe to approximately 4%. In Asia, China alone accounts for almost half the world’s small farms (193 million), followed by India with 23%. Other leaders in the region, in descending order, include Indonesia, Bangladesh and Viet Nam (Nagayets, 2005).

In contrast, a relatively small number of farmers in the South rely on modern farm machines such as tractors (20 million). Globally, it is estimated that there are 50 million modern farmers, compared with 1.25 billion peasant farmers.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1.1. Number of farmers worldwide (billion)

	Total population	Active population	Active farming population
World population	6.1	2.6	1.35
North	1.2	0.4	0.045 (11% of total active population in North)
South	4.9		1.29 (59% of total active population in South)
• India	1.1	2.2	0.27 (20% of world total active farming population)

Source: Charvet, JP (2005), *Transrural Initiatives*, 25 January, Paris.

3 Not all indigenous peoples are farmers. Among indigenous peoples who live off the land, some are farmers, whilst others are hunters and gatherers or pastoralists.

4 Obviously, not every farm in the South is run by peasants; similarly not all farms in the North are run by businesses and large farmers.

Whilst comparatively smaller in numbers, many people are still involved in community and family farming in the North. For example, in Italy more than 90% of agricultural enterprises are family-run and part-time, averaging less than 5 hectares of land. Forests and agriculture play extremely important roles in the family-based farming of countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Latvia. Overall, these and other new member states from Eastern Europe have endowed the European Union with an additional 4 million farmers and 38 million hectares of farmable land. Worldwide, small farms occupy about 60% of arable land.

**Urban farmers and gardeners.** Urban agriculture is a significant economic activity and is central to the lives of tens of millions of people throughout the world. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines urban agriculture as “an industry that produces, processes and markets food and fuel, largely in response to the daily demand of consumers within a town, city or metropolis, on land and water dispersed throughout the urban and peri-urban area, applying intensive production methods, using and reusing natural resources and urban wastes, to yield a diversity of crops and livestock” (UNDP, 1996). Urban farmers use smaller tracts of land than rural farmers, often in open spaces that are vacant, unused or unsuited for urban development. This vibrant industry consists of a majority of small-scale farmers and some large agribusiness. It is estimated that some 800 million people are actively engaged in urban agriculture worldwide. The percentage of urban families engaged in agriculture varies from 10% in some large



cities of North America, to as many as 80% in some smaller Siberian and Asian cities (UNDP, 1996). In countries and cultures where women do most of the rural farming, women are also likely to do most of the urban agriculture. For example, 64% of African urban farmers are female, 80% of home gardens in Lima (Peru) are farmed by women, and 67% of the hydroponics cultivators in Bogota (Colombia) are women (The Urban Agriculture network, cited in UNDP, 1996).

**Pastoralists.** In many countries around the world, mobile pastoralists also play a key role in food provisioning. Precise figures are hard to come by, but nomadic and transhumant pastoralists may number between 100 and 200 million people globally. If extensive agro-pastoralists are included, the number rises very sharply, and such people form a clear majority of dryland inhabitants. Pastoral livestock systems are more than simply a mode of livestock production; they are also part of diverse food systems that support this large global population (FAO, 2003).



**Fishers.** Over 90% of the world's fishers live in developing countries, working in small-scale, household-based or artisanal fishing enterprises. Fishing is mostly a seasonal or part-time occupation, peaking in the months when riverine, coastal and offshore resources are more abundant or available, but leaving time in seasonal lows for other activities. This is especially true in fisheries for migratory species and those subject to seasonal weather variations. According to the most recent figures available from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), between 25 and 30 million people are engaged in fishing, with four-fifths of the world's fishers and fish farmers dwelling in Asian countries. Africa, where artisanal fisheries still dominate, supports 6.5% of the world's fishers (FAO, 1999). Other less conservative estimates indicate that about 200 million people worldwide live on fishing and aquaculture<sup>5</sup> (WorldFish Center, 2006; Kurien, 2006).



<sup>5</sup> Aquaculture—the farming in captivity of fish, shrimp and shellfish previously caught in the wild—has expanded globally at an average annual rate of 8.9% since 1970, and now provides about 50% of the fish for human consumption.

**Forest dwellers.** About 60 to 70 million indigenous peoples depend on closed canopy forests for hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation, thereby sustaining food systems rich in biodiversity. A further 350 million rural people live in or on the margins of all types of forests or woodlands, relying on these environments for food, products (timber, fuelwood, medicines...), inputs for crop and livestock production (fodder, soil nutrients...), and services (watershed protection, biodiversity conservation...) (Scheer *et al.*, 2004; CIFOR, 2006).

However, none of the above figures for farming, pastoralism, forestry and fisheries account for all the additional livelihoods and jobs associated with localised food systems. Each link in the food chain offers economic niches for many more people—as millers, butchers, carpenters, iron workers and mechanics, local milk processors, bakers, small shopkeepers and owners of food outlets, for example. The number of different types of livelihoods based on the use of coastal resources in Tanzania is evocative in this regard (Table 1.2).



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**Table 1.2. Livelihoods and the use of coastal ecosystems and resources in Tanga (Tanzania)**

Resource	Primary users	Secondary users
Ocean ecosystem/ seawater	Seaweed farmers, salt boilers, solar salt producers, sea transport workers	Seaweed processors, exporters & users of sea transport; tourism operators
Coral reefs	Lime collectors/burners, house builders, tourism operators, trophy collectors	Builders (cement, limestone)
Fisheries	Fishermen—hand lines, traps, nets (seine & dragnets), dynamite, divers, boat owning fishermen “Visiting” fishermen, trawlers Fisherwomen —beach seining, octopus & mollusc collectors, tourism operators (game fishing)	Men and women fish traders, fish processors (fryers, driers, and smokers), and fish dealers for inland market and for export, tourism operators.
Beaches	Fishermen, fisherwomen, households (sanitation needs), tourism operators	Traders, processors
Mangroves	Pole cutters, fishermen, salt boilers, solar salt producers, lime burners, boat builders, house builders, traditional healers, households engaged in crab & other fisheries, mariculture.	Mangrove pole traders, saw millers.
Bare saline areas	Solar salt producers, brine wells	Salt traders
Rivers	Households, sisal estates, coconut plantations, transport, industries	
Ground water	Households, farmers, sisal estates, industries.	
Coastal forests & woodlands	Households of salt boilers, lime burners, timber cutters, charcoal makers, boat builders, traditional healers, honey gatherers, hunters	Fish processors, sawmillers, transporters of fuel wood

Adapted from Gorman, 1995.



Data on the numbers of people involved in post-production and food processing in urban food systems are limited and fragmented. But the number of livelihoods generated by post-production activities in urban areas is likely to be high for two interrelated reasons. First, large volumes of food are produced by urban farmers in both low and high income countries. For example, according to UNDP (1996), 80% of the poultry and 25% of the vegetables consumed in Singapore are produced within the city. Bamako in Mali is self-sufficient in horticultural products, and some products are shipped outside the metropolitan area for consumption. About 30% of the US agricultural product is produced within metropolitan areas. Cairo (Egypt) reports 80,000 livestock in the city, and in Kampala (Uganda) some 70% of poultry needs (meat and eggs) are produced inside the city. In China, the metropolitan area of Shanghai is largely self-sufficient in vegetable and small-scale livestock production (UNDP, 1996). Secondly, food processing facilities are often located close to or in urban areas, offering urban farmers and gardeners the advantage of proximity. Urban farm produce is sold to a wholesaler or directly to local markets or retail outlets, local food processors and restaurants or to street vendors of cooked food.

The livelihoods and incomes of a huge number of rural and urban dwellers are thus dependent on the local manufacture of farm inputs and on the local storage, processing, distribution, sale and preparation of food. Even in affluent Western countries such as the USA, the UK and Italy, there is strong evidence that localised food systems generate many jobs and help sustain small and medium-sized enterprises. This economic fact usually becomes more apparent when local economies and food systems are displaced by large supermarkets, international competition and the global industrial food system. For example, by 1992 in the UK, the building of 25,000 out-of-town large-chain retailers had coincided with the closing of roughly 238,000 independent shops (grocers, bakers, butchers and fishmongers) in villages and high streets (DOE/MAFF, 1995). When 235,000 small- and medium-scale farms were squeezed out by market competition in the mid-1980s in the US, about 60,000 other local rural businesses also closed (Norberg-Hodge *et al.*, 2002). Since 1991 in Italy, the arrival of superstores known as *ipermercati* has led to the demise of 370,000 small, family-run businesses, including half the country's corner groceries (Grandi, 1998). Whilst the exact numbers are unknown, local food systems have the potential to provide livelihoods, occupation, employment and socio-cultural meaning to a very large share of the world's active working population.



## 1.2. The ecological basis of food systems

Geographically, most local food systems are embedded in complex, risk-prone and diverse environments, where most of the world's rural poor people live. These environments include mountains, hills and wetlands, coastal areas and the vast tracts of the semi-arid and humid tropics. They include the full range of ecosystems, from those relatively undisturbed, such as semi-natural forests, to food-producing landscapes with mixed patterns of human use, to ecosystems intensively modified and managed by humans, such as agricultural land and urban areas. Depending on the context, food systems may either be primarily or exclusively based on:

- Farm lands, with their domesticated and “wild” plants and animals
- Rangelands and migrating livestock
- Marine and freshwater environments and fisheries
- Forests and their many plant and animal foods and products
- Urban/peri-urban environments and small-scale agriculture and gardening
- Any other landscape and ecosystem type listed in Table 1.3.

Within these environments and food systems, the variety of agro-ecosystems<sup>6</sup> is remarkable and comprises polycultures, monocultures and mixed systems, including crop-livestock systems (rice-fish), agroforestry, agro-silvo-pastoral systems, aquaculture as well as rangelands, pastures and fallow lands (Table 1.4). Similarly, mobile pastoral livestock systems span a diversity of landscapes, from the dry rangelands of Africa to the steppes of Central Asia. And artisanal fisheries are located along rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and the open sea, in both temperate and tropical zones.

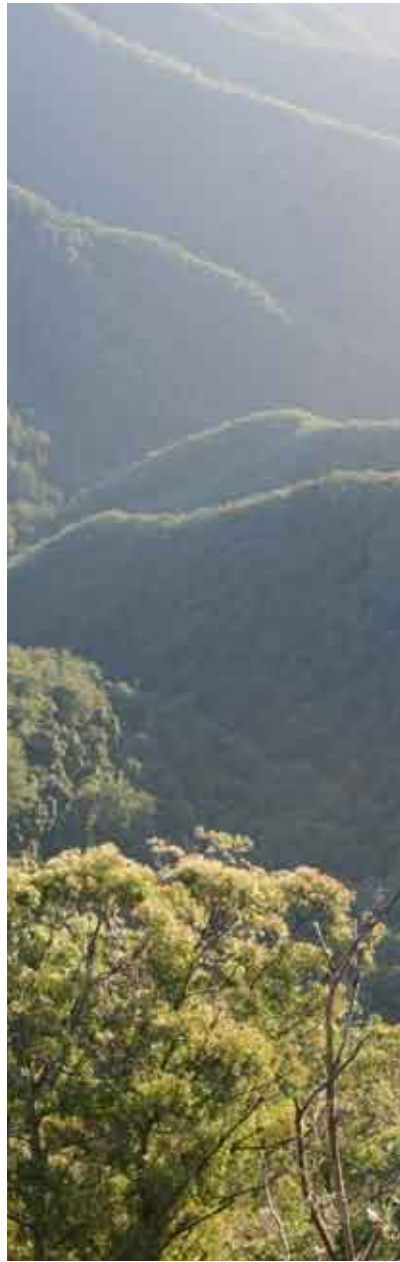
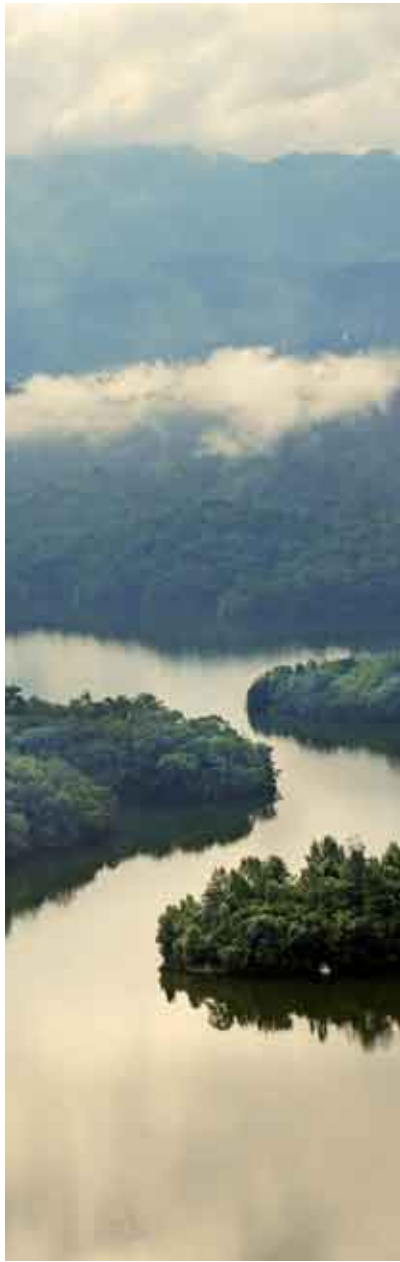


<sup>6</sup> Agro-ecosystems may be identified at different levels or scales, for instance: a field/crop/herd/pond, a farming system, a land-use system or a watershed. Their interactions with human activities, including socio-economic activity and socio-cultural diversity, are determinant.



**Table 1.3. Categories of ecosystems and their importance for agriculture and food systems (MA, 2003).**

<b>Ecosystem category</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Major food and agricultural activities</b>
Marine	Ocean, with fishing typically a major driver of change	Fishing; mariculture
Coastal	Interface between ocean and land, extending seawards to about the middle of the continental shelf and inland to include all areas strongly influenced by the proximity of the ocean	Aquaculture
Inland water	Permanent water bodies inland from the coastal zone, and areas whose ecology and use are dominated by the permanent, seasonal, or intermittent occurrence of flooded conditions	Aquaculture; fishing
Forest	Land dominated by trees; often used for timber, fuelwood, and non-timber forest products	Forestry; gathering; hunting
Drylands	Land where plant production is limited by water availability; the dominant users are large mammal herbivores, including livestock grazing, and cultivation	Crop cultivation (rainfed and irrigated); livestock grazing; hunting
Island	Land isolated by surrounding water, with a high proportion of coast in relation to the hinterland	Fisheries; crop cultivation (mainly rainfed)
Mountain	Steep and high lands	Cultivation (mainly rainfed), forestry, gathering, livestock
Polar	High latitude systems	Hunting
Cultivated	Land dominated by domesticated plant species, used for and substantially changed by crop, agroforestry, livestock, or aquaculture production	Crop cultivation (rainfed and irrigated), livestock, aquaculture, agroforestry
Urban	Built environments with a high human density	Urban and peri-urban agriculture



**Table 1.4. Broad categories of agricultural systems, their characteristics and related agro-ecosystems (Dixon et al., 2001).**

System category	Characteristics	Related agro-ecosystems
Irrigated farming systems	Embrace a broad range of food and cash crops	Cultivated
Wetland rice based farming systems	Depend upon seasonal rains supplemented by irrigation	Cultivated
Rainfed farming systems in humid areas	Often mixed crop-livestock systems	Mountain
Rainfed farming systems in dry or cold areas	With mixed crop-livestock and pastoral systems merging into systems constrained by extreme aridity or cold	Cultivated
Dualistic farming systems (mixed large commercial and small holders)	Located across a variety of ecologies and with diverse production patterns	Cultivated
Coastal artisanal fishing systems	Often incorporate mixed farming elements	Coastal
Urban based farming systems	Horticulture, livestock	Urban
Forestry and agroforestry	Land dominated by trees, mixed trees and crops	Forests
Fishery	Fishing	Marine, lacustrine
Wild game	River fishing, hunting, gathering	Inland water, forests
Livestock breeding	Usually large-scale or intensive systems, and more rarely pastoralist systems	Cultivated, dryland, urban



Moreover, dynamic and complex livelihoods associated with these local food systems usually rely on plant and animal diversity, both wild and in different stages of domestication. Different types of agricultural biodiversity (Box 1.1) are used by different people at different times and in different places, and so contribute to livelihood strategies in a complex fashion. And throughout the world human communities have played a central role in shaping nature's diversity and its associated functions. Cultural and biological diversity have evolved together, the one shaping the other. For example, the gourd shows tremendous varietal diversity because over the centuries people have selectively bred it to meet a multitude of needs, including containers, pipes, scrubbers, floats, musical instruments, penis sheaths, ornaments and food. Plants and animals, both wild and cultivated, have been associated in complex and diverse agro-ecosystems in terrestrial and aquatic environments. At the broader landscape level, recent scientific evidence suggests that virtually every part of the globe—from boreal forests to the humid tropics—has been inhabited, modified and managed for millennia. Over time, human agency has shaped the expression of agricultural biodiversity at the genetic, species, ecosystem and landscape levels.



Whilst contributing to environmental sustainability, agricultural biodiversity and people's manipulation of it also help sustain many production functions in both low external input and high input-output agriculture (e.g. soil organic matter decomposition, nutrient cycling, pollination, pest control, yield functions, soil and water conservation, action on landscapes, climate and water cycling) (Box 1.1).



### Box 1.1. Agricultural biodiversity's role in agriculture and the provision of ecosystem functions

Agricultural biodiversity refers to the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms that are important to food and agriculture and which result from the interaction between the environment and people's management systems and practices. It comprises the diversity of genetic resources (varieties, breeds, etc.) and species used directly or indirectly for the production of food, fodder, fibre, fuel and pharmaceuticals; the diversity of species that support production (soil biota, pollinators, predators, etc.) and those in the wider environment that support agro-ecosystems (agricultural, pastoral, forest and aquatic); as well as the diversity of the agro-ecosystems themselves. As part of the living environment, agricultural biodiversity plays key roles in:

**Decomposition and nutrient cycling.** Decomposer communities are highly diverse and are central to nutrient cycling, organic matter dynamics and other ecosystem functions, although detailed knowledge of the extent and functions of this diversity is limited, especially in aquatic environments.

**Pest control.** Predators, parasitic wasps and micro-organisms play a key role in controlling agricultural pests and diseases. For example, more than 90% of potential crop insect pests are controlled by natural enemies living in natural and semi-natural areas adjacent to farmlands. The substitution of pesticides for natural pest control services is estimated to cost \$54 billion per year. Many methods of pest control, both traditional and modern, rely on biodiversity.

**Soil and water conservation.** Soil, water and nutrient conservation have been improved with the use of windbreaks, contour farming with appropriate border crops and cover crops in a wide range of agro-ecosystems.

**Pollination and dispersal.** There are more than 100,000 known pollinators (bees, butterflies, beetles, birds, flies, and bats). Pollination mediated by components of agricultural biodiversity is an important function in a variety of terrestrial agro-ecosystems. About half of all plant species, including food-producing crop species, are pollinated by animals.

**Climate.** As a source of atmospheric constituents agricultural biodiversity contributes significantly to the chemical composition and properties of the atmosphere and thus has a marked influence on climate. In turn changes in climate have a strong feedback on food and agricultural production.

**Functions in the water cycle.** Agricultural biodiversity plays a crucial role in cycling water from the soil to the atmosphere and back. It also has measurable impacts on water quality.

**Biomass production and yield efficiency.** Diverse agro-ecosystems (fish polycultures, mixed herds, intercroops, integrated agro-sylvo-pastoral) are generally highly productive in terms of their use of energy and unit land area (or unit water volume). This efficiency is largely a product of the systems' biological and structural complexity, increasing the variety of functional linkages and synergies between different components.

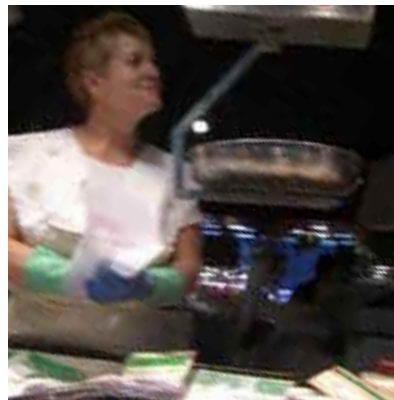
Source FAO, 1999; Pimbert, 1999



In these different ways, agricultural biodiversity provides multifunctional goods and services for agriculture and land use (FAO/Netherlands, 1999). It is also this human managed biodiversity which provides many of the ecosystem goods and services on which the sustainability of all other parts of the food system (e.g. food transformation and preparation) and human well-being directly depend (MA, 2005). As they interact with nature's diversity whilst managing entire food systems, local communities and their institutions actively influence—and often co-create—key ecosystem functions such as:

- the provision of food, water, timber and fibre;
- the regulation of climate, floods, disease, wastes and water quality;
- ecological support functions like soil formation, biodiversity for resilience, photosynthesis and nutrient cycling;
- the basis for culture through the provision of recreational, aesthetic and spiritual benefits and values.

People associated with localised food systems thus live in, and often sustain, ecosystems of vital importance for human well-being and the future of life on Earth (MA, 2005).<sup>7</sup> But despite their vital importance for food security, the economy and the environment, local food systems everywhere are marginalised and undermined by the dominant development model.



<sup>7</sup> The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment documented the dominant negative impacts of agriculture on terrestrial land and freshwater use, and the critical importance of agricultural landscapes in providing products for human sustenance, supporting biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem services (MA, 2005).

## Chapter 2. The making of multiple crises in food, agriculture and environment

For the past 60 years, mainstream neo-liberal policy has encouraged and justified the elimination of small-scale food producers and indigenous peoples who live off the land in both industrially developed and developing countries. This process of undermining and eliminating small-scale food producers is linked with the expansion of a development model that considers small and medium-scale farming, artisanal fishing, nomadic pastoralists and indigenous communities to be outside “modernity”. Farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, fishing communities and indigenous peoples are thus seen as “residues” of history and their eventual disappearance is assumed to be inevitable. This process—which started in industrial countries—has spread more recently into farming and indigenous communities in developing countries, along with the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies.

Throughout the world, small farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples are increasingly being displaced from their livelihood base through a combination of factors, including:

- the imposition of inappropriate neo-liberal development models, nature conservation regimes and industrial technology that erodes indigenous knowledge and ecologically sustainable management systems based on local institutions and rights;
- inequitable property rights which diminish local communities’ access to and control of the resources on which they depend for survival. Land, forests, water, plants, animals and other genetic resources are increasingly becoming commercialised and privatised commodities;
- the spread of liberalised markets in which small and medium-sized producers cannot compete with imported foodstuffs and are driven to bankruptcy. Small-scale producers in developing countries are especially harmed by competition from highly subsidised and capital intensive agriculture that



- produces commodities that can be sold more cheaply;
- falling prices of primary commodities, often brought about by the increased supplies that have been encouraged by World Bank/IMF structural adjustment policies and development assistance, supported by Western governments (such as increased coffee production in Vietnam);
- the withdrawal of government support linked to structural adjustment programmes which leads, for example, to the inability of small and medium farmers to access affordable credit and government services;
- inappropriate food and agricultural research by social and natural science institutes that generates policies and technologies that often harm local livelihoods and environments throughout the world;
- standards for food products, production processes and food marketing that cannot be met by smaller farmers, fisherfolk and pastoralists, and international rules on intellectual property rights that can limit the ability and rights of farmers and indigenous peoples to save and exchange their seeds;
- the growing impact of transnational supermarkets and wholesalers, of grades and standards, and of export horticulture which all substantially favour large farms and corporate-owned operations throughout the world (Reardon *et al*, 2002 and 2003);
- growing demand for biofuels,<sup>8</sup> which is leading to a restructuring of agri-food systems. New strategic alliances between corporations involved in food, agriculture, biotechnology and the petroleum-automobile sectors are creating a new mercantile-industrial biofuel regime (Otsuka, 2007). Impacts include higher rates of environmental destruction as well as food scarcity and rising food prices as farm produce (coarse grains, vegetable oils...) is used to produce biofuels for energy intensive cars, machines and industry; and
- the increasing disparity between the human, economic, social and cultural rights guaranteed by law and their effective enforcement. Conditions of political oppression and marginalisation, together with the lack of access to effective legal protection, leave people vulnerable and with little opportunity to improve their economic and social conditions (ECOSOC, 2007; Ziegler, 2007).

8 Biofuels are fuels derived from crop plants. They include biomass directly burnt, as well as biodiesel from plant seed-oil, and bioethanol from fermenting grain, sap, grass, straw or wood.



These factors also directly or indirectly undermine the economic well-being and survival of local food businesses (from village shops to corner stores in towns); providers of agricultural inputs (fishing gear, farm tools...); and people whose livelihoods depend on food processing and distribution (millers, butchers, bakers ...). Overall, the social costs of this model of development are high. Moreover, today's industrial food and agriculture sector is generating high levels of environmental degradation and its ecological footprint is expanding (MA, 2005). Industrial and newly industrialising food systems are by far the most costly in terms of social and environmental impacts.

## 2.1. The social costs of modern food systems

### Growing malnutrition and food insecurity in the midst of plenty.

Despite the fact that they yield and market large volumes of agricultural commodities, modern food systems are also associated with malnutrition, food insecurity, deepening poverty and social exclusion in many parts of the world. The latest figures from the FAO (FAO, 2006) show that 852 million people are hungry today, an increase of more than 25 million chronically undernourished people since 1996. The vast majority of undernourished people (815 million) live in the developing world, primarily in rural areas. The hunger problem is most serious in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 40% of the population is undernourished. Nine million of the hungry live in the world's richest countries, where, paradoxically, a high level of obesity is also a growing health problem (FAO, 2006; Lang and Heasman, 2004).



**Lower incomes for food providers.** Farmers, fishers and other producers receive an ever shrinking percentage of the price of food as transnational corporate traders, food processors, distributors and supermarkets take

an ever larger share in the global food system. For example, in 1910, 41% of US spending on food went to farmers whilst 15% went to input suppliers and 44% to marketers. By 1990, the farmers' share had dropped to just 9%, with input suppliers capturing 24% and marketing 67%, of every US dollar spent on food. By 1997, US farmers' share of the consumer food dollar had dropped to less than 8% (Smith, 2005). In Germany today, only about 20%

of the price of food goes to the farmer, whereas they received 75% of the share in the 1950s. In Ireland, there were about 36,000 family farms rearing pigs in the early 1970s. Bacon factories spread across the country and about half the value went back to the farm and local community. By 1996, only 70 pig farmers and six bacon factories remained. Only a fifth of the price of bacon now goes to the largely factory farms (Douthwaite, 1996). In today's UK food system both jobs and value are added significantly more at the retail and catering end of the food chain. Farming and primary production provides 540,000 jobs but only £5.2 billion of value added. Retailing provides 1.16 million jobs and £18.8 billion of value added, and catering provides 1.3 million jobs and £21 billion of value added (DEFRA, 2006)

**Agriculture without farmers.** In parallel with declining farm gate prices, farmers have had to pay more for their inputs to production—hybrid seeds, fertilisers pesticides and oil—to run farm operations and machinery. For example, the price of oil has increased significantly over the last three years, reaching US \$100 a barrel towards the end of 2007. The resulting cost-price squeeze is a major reason for the widespread bankruptcies and human misery in the rural communities of some of the richest countries in the world. For instance, in the UK farming industry one in three farmers lives below the poverty line (where average annual income totals less than £14,000), and almost 80,000 farmers have quit the industry since 1997. UK government figures show that some

Value of world trade in bananas

Retailer 40%

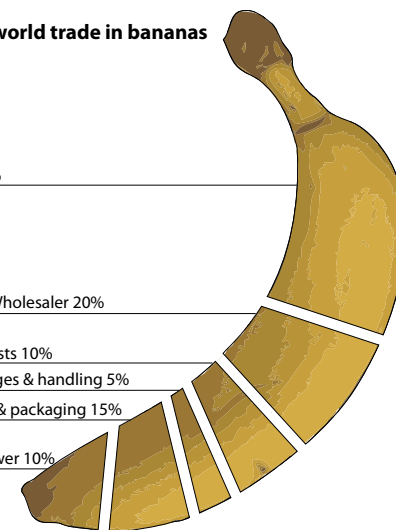
Importer / Wholesaler 20%

Shipping costs 10%

Export charges & handling 5%

Warehouse & packaging 15%

Picker / grower 10%





200,000 farms disappeared between 1966 and 1995. At the time of writing, some 37 farm workers are leaving the land every day. More than one dairy farm closes down every day; 2,125 have closed in England alone since 2002.

Trade policies which favour large farms and agribusiness are also displacing small-scale producers everywhere. The annual UK Common Agricultural Policy budget of £3 billion gives 20% of farmers (large farms and agribusinesses) 80% of the subsidies. Government figures show that 17,000 farmers and farm workers left the land in 2003 because they could not make a living (Lucas, 2001). EU figures suggest that half of north European agriculture will disappear within a

generation (Woollacott, 2001) as small and medium-sized farmers get squeezed out by the institutions that claim to support them. It is likely that Poland alone will lose up to two million agricultural livelihoods as a result of joining the EU (Lucas, 2001).

Similarly, in the USA the number of farms decreased by 64% to less than two million between 1950 and 1999. The US farm population has declined to less than 2% over the same period. And today 90% of recorded agricultural output is produced by only 522,000 farms.

**Dumping and undermined prices.** Selling goods at less than their cost of production—dumping—ruins small-scale producers in both countries of origin and sale.<sup>9</sup> For example, the import of cheap maize from the US to Mexico—ironically, the centre of origin of maize—ruins Mexican producers. Likewise, the export of cheap vegetables from Mexico to Canada ruins vegetable producers in Canada. More often than not, the debilitating effects of dumping are felt by producers as well as by other key actors in the local economy (food processors, local food outlets...). For example, imports by India of dairy surpluses subsidised by the European Union not only had negative effects on family based dairy production but also on the network of local dairies and milk processors. In Sri Lanka there is clear evidence of an unfavourable impact of imports on the domestic production of vegetables, notably onions and potatoes. The resulting decline in the cultivated area of these crops has affected about 300,000 people involved in production and marketing (FAO, 2002).

Following the establishment of the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), cheaper imports now threaten the viability of small farms, pastoralists, small and medium-sized food processors in many developing countries (Berthelot, 2001; Mazoyer and Roudart, 2002). This is of particular concern because in most of these countries a large proportion of the population depends on farming for a living and way of life, e.g. 75% of the population in China is made up of farmers, 82% in Senegal and 67% in India.

<sup>9</sup> Dumping can occur in North-South, South-North, South-South and North-North trade, and is the result of subsidies and monopoly control over markets and distribution.



**Marginalisation and loss of self esteem.** The industrialisation and/or commercialisation of agriculture and fisheries have resulted in the consolidation of agriculture and forest lands, seeds, livestock breeds and other genetic resources in the hands of agribusiness and other large commercial entities, displacing entire communities from their lands and traditional occupations. Displaced farmers, fishers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, food workers and artisans seek insecure, unsafe and poorly paid employment elsewhere. This has resulted in widespread migration of farming, pastoral and fishing families, the creation of new pockets of poverty and inequality in rural and urban areas, and the fragmentation of entire rural communities. Disenfranchisement and disempowerment are common side-effects, especially for women and young people (e.g. see Agarwal, 1994; Barraclough, 1991; Ghimire and Barraclough, 2001; Vasavi, 1999). Women (often the keepers of seeds and of local knowledge about livestock and forest products, medicinal herbs, plants and wild food sources in traditional food systems), are left feeling unvalued and impotent. The fragmentation of families and communities leaves young people with few options for personal development and employment. Low self esteem, isolation and suicides are increasingly common among farming communities. In the United States, suicide is now the leading cause of death among farmers, and is occurring at a rate three times higher than in the general population. Farmer suicides take place at the rate of one person every week in the UK (Norberg Hodge, 2002); calls to the Farmers Crisis Network helpline rocketed by 60% in 2006 compared to the previous year ([www.farmcrisisnetwork.org.uk](http://www.farmcrisisnetwork.org.uk)).



**Forced migration within and between countries.** Forced migration is an increasingly common outcome of modernised food systems as the opportunities for large numbers of people to make a decent living no longer exist. Declining commodity prices, the cost-price squeeze experienced by producers, destruction of habitat and culture due to social and environmental injustices, and the privatisation of social services, health, education and culture, all encourage rural people to migrate to cities in search of better economic opportunities. However, most rural migrants end up living in urban slums, - joining the *Planet of slums* described by Davis (2006). Poverty, hunger and despair often lead people to migrate even further, to other countries. As a result, migration flows between countries and continents are rapidly increasing today, as are the human tragedies and conflicts that often accompany such migration.

Many migrants—men, women and children—die whilst travelling to more “hospitable lands” and conditions for migrants and economic refugees are worsening day by day. The UN International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that more than 200 million migrants live in very difficult economic, social and cultural conditions in their destination countries. Many of these people come from the developing





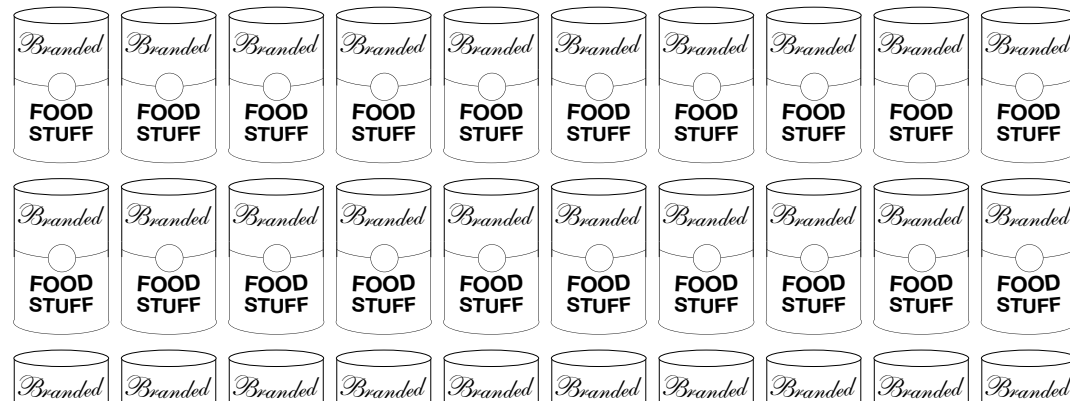
world or Eastern Europe, and are mostly economic migrants from communities of small-scale producers (ILO, 2006b).

Other traumas facing such migrants can include racism, rape and sexual exploitation, human trafficking, the use of migrants for cheap or slave labour, and the treatment of migrants as “second class citizens”. Women comprise about half of all migrant workers,

most of whom have casual contracts and lack access to social protection (ILO, 2006a). The problems faced by migrant women are compounded by their being both women and migrants. Women workers are subject to exploitation, discrimination and often sexual harassment. Male supervisors are often the perpetrators of sexual harassment at work. Seasonal migration is also linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Women are particularly vulnerable socially and economically to HIV/AIDS (ILO, 2006a).



**Loss of cultural diversity.** The globalisation of food systems takes a very heavy toll on cultural diversity. Current knowledge associated with food, agriculture and land use is being lost at an alarming rate—much faster than the loss of plant and animal species (Maffi *et al.*, 2000). On average the world loses one of the remaining 7,000 languages every week. Each of these lost languages signals the loss of a distinct philosophical and pragmatic approach to living and working with nature. At the same time, the extension of intellectual property rights in favour of multinational corporations has increased. This encourages the illicit appropriation of the biological diversity and traditional knowledge nurtured by indigenous peoples, pastoralists, farmers, forest dwellers and local communities (Baumann *et al.*, 1996; Crucible, 1994; Posey



and Dutfield, 1996). Loss of environmental knowledge, practices and institutions will inevitably undermine food security, ecosystems and social systems. The erosion of cultural diversity increasingly compromises the capacity of human societies (particularly the most vulnerable groups) to sustainably manage the environment and successfully adapt to global change (Posey *et al.*, 1999).

*It has been estimated that 20-50% of the world's languages are already moribund, and that 90% (possibly even more) may be moribund or will have disappeared by 2100*

據估計，世界上有百分之二十至五十的語言已經滅絕，且有百分之九十（甚至可能更多）可能滅絕或即將於西元2100年消失於這世界上。

The Rice Bomber是Jim Page在知道楊儒門的故事，專程來台探監，回美後為楊儒門所寫的歌。



Yang, Ru-Men was raised on the family farm  
with the love of the land in the morning and the muscle in his arm  
out in the China Ocean on the island of Taiwan  
it's a story worth the telling and I'll sing it in a song

the family farm is the rock of humanity's anchor  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world war between the farmer and the banker  
the great corporate bullies ride on the money train  
where the farmers stand to lose the corporations stand to gain

Yang, Ru-Men saw the danger comin' from a dark and angry place  
and he thought of all the farmers whose lives would be displaced  
he made calls and he wrote letters but what good did it do  
politicians never read them nor the newspapers too

Yang, Ru-Men went walkin' one night  
the moon shone like a lantern and the stars were shinin' bright  
and there came a voice talkin' so clear inside his head  
maybe it was the ancestors, this is what it said

when god closes a door he opens a window  
when god closes a door he opens a window

Yang, Ru-Men the farmer made a paper box  
he folded in the corners and he weighted it with rocks  
with a little black powder and a little bit of rice  
a warning on the label, words of advice

"Danger" said the paper box, the words were bright and bold  
"do not buy imported rice, our futures can't be sold  
support the local farmers, resist the foreign trade"  
and he left it in the city where his point would sure be made

and he left one at the bank and outside the railway station  
the little paper boxes with their little explanations  
at the government offices, the bomb squad on alert  
but they were only made of paper, no one ever got hurt

they called him the Rice Bomber and they made a great campaign  
they said he was a terrorist and they vilified his name  
but in the farming country when these matters were discussed  
they would tip their hats and smile, and say "he's one of us"

(they said) when god closes a door he opens a window  
when god closes a door he opens a window

seventeen paper rice bombs, seventeen times  
every one of them a statement though they called them each a crime  
and though they scoured through the country side they did not have a clue  
Yang, Ru-Men decided then just what he had to do

he drove to the station to give himself away  
he said "I am the one you're looking for, this is your lucky day  
"my name is Yang, Ru-Men" he said, and he took a little bow  
he said "I did it for the farmers and I do this for them now"

"if you did it for the farmers, well, that's just what you say  
"but we have you in our custody and that's where you're going to stay"  
and justice was a stone wall, it never shed a tear  
they tried and convicted and they gave him seven years

seven years for seventeen little boxes of rice  
what kind of mathematics would arrive at such a price  
at the crossroads of the humanity the future holds its breath  
in the orders of uncertainty anything could happen next

(because) when god closes a door he opens a window  
when god closes a door he opens a window

the family farm is still the rock that holds humanity's anchor  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world war between the farmer and the banker  
one side has the money and the other has the plow  
and its anybody's guess what happens now

I went to visit Yang, Ru-Men, they had him in Taipei  
in the detention center, it was on a visiting day  
I didn't speak his language and he didn't speak mine  
there was Plexiglas between us, we didn't have much time

he said you have to hold your purpose and you have to hold on tight  
have faith in your accomplishments and don't give up the fight  
and when the time was over, when they led him away  
he put his fist up in the air and I can still hear him say

**when god closes a door he opens a window**  
**when god closes a door he opens a window**



[http://www.wretch.cc/blog/zoomment&article\\_id=1910574](http://www.wretch.cc/blog/zoomment&article_id=1910574)

當老天關閉了一扇門，祂會開啟另一扇窗

當老天關閉了一扇門，祂會開啟另一扇窗

## 2.2. The environmental costs of modern food systems

**Land use and biodiversity loss.** More natural land has been converted to agriculture since 1945 than during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries combined. Ecosystems that have been most significantly altered by modern agri-food systems include coastal areas, temperate broadleaf forests and grasslands, Mediterranean forests and tropical dry forests. The conversion of land for producing food, fibre, freshwater, timber, feed and fuel is a main driver of biodiversity loss in modern capital and energy intensive agricultural systems (MA, 2005).

Moreover, industrial models of agriculture promote simplification and standardisation of agro-ecosystems, with reductions in the number of species grown and variability within species. Significant crop and livestock genetic diversity has been lost through the spread of industrial monocultures and increased specialisation at the field, farm and landscape levels. For example, of the 7,098 apple varieties documented as having been in use between 1804 and 1904 in the USA, approximately 86% have been lost. Similarly, 95% of the cabbage, 91% of the field maize, 94% of the pea, and 81% of the tomato varieties once in use apparently no longer exist in the USA (Fowler, 1991). In the Republic of Korea, 74% of the varieties of 14 crops being grown on particular farms in 1985 had been replaced by 1993 (FAO, 1996). Mexico has lost over 80% of its maize varieties since 1930. The loss of livestock genetic diversity is also alarmingly high. In Brazil, only 12 out of 32 native pig breeds are left, and they are all under threat. Of the 2,576 livestock breeds recorded in Europe, almost half are considered at risk. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of mammalian breeds at risk of loss has increased from 33 to 49%; the number of bird breeds at risk of being lost has grown from 65 to 76% in Europe. In 2000, the FAO reported that two breeds of livestock are lost every week and that 1,350 breeds face extinction (FAO, and UNEP, 2000). The loss of this type of biodiversity induces sustainability problems, adds to environmental risk and significantly reduces resilience in the face of climate and other changes (FAO, 1996; FAO and UNEP, 2000; Pimbert, 1999; IPCC, 2007).



**Soil erosion.** Soil is a dynamic, living matrix that is an essential part of the terrestrial ecosystem. It is a critical resource, not only to agricultural production and food systems, but also to the maintenance of most life processes. More than half of the Earth's land surface is intensively used for agricultural purposes such as cultivation, grazing, plantation forestry and aquaculture. Since 1950 one-third of our soil has been profoundly altered from its natural ecosystem state because of moderate to severe soil and land degradation (Oldeman *et al.*, 1990). Expert assessments of soil degradation suggest that almost 75% of crop land in Central America, 20% in Africa (mostly pasture), and 11% in Asia is seriously degraded (IFPRI, 2000). It is estimated that 6% of India's agricultural land has been made useless as a result of salinisation induced by Green Revolution agriculture (Rosset *et al.*, 2000).

The widespread erosion of soil biodiversity is of particular concern too. Soils contain enormous numbers of diverse living organisms assembled in complex and varied communities. Soil biodiversity reflects the variability among living organisms in the soil, ranging from the myriad of invisible microbes, bacteria and fungi to the more familiar macro-fauna such as earthworms, beetles and termites. These soil organisms contribute a wide range of essential functions for the sustainability of all ecosystems, by acting as the primary driving agents of nutrient cycling; regulating the dynamics of soil organic matter, soil carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions; modifying soil physical structure and water regimes; enhancing the amount and efficiency of nutrient acquisition by the vegetation and enhancing plant health. These services are not only essential to the functioning of natural ecosystems, but constitute an important resource for the sustainable management of agricultural systems (FAO and CBD, 2001). It is estimated that the value of "ecosystem services" (e.g. organic waste disposal, soil formation, bioremediation, nitrogen fixation and biological control) provided each year by soil biota in agricultural systems worldwide may exceed US\$1,542 billion (Pimental *et al.*, 1997). Land degradation induced by industrial farming, inequitable land distribution causing overuse or neglect of soils, and economic incentives that work against soil conservation and good husbandry, all undermine these vitally important ecosystem functions.



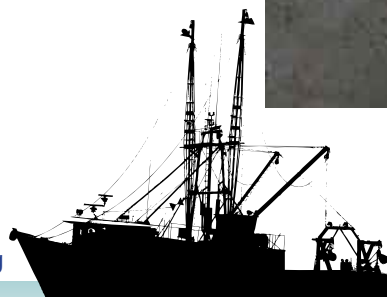
**Fisheries in crisis.** Food production from wild fisheries has been affected by habitat degradation, overexploitation and pollution to a point where most of these resources are not sustainable without external interventions designed to enhance the abundance of fish stocks. In addition, escalating fishing pressure and use of unsustainable technologies have depleted fishing stocks globally (MA, 2005). This leads to an overall degradation of aquatic ecosystems.

Industrial fishing's impact on the marine environment is particularly severe. Overfishing is an unsustainable use of the seas and oceans. Too many fish are caught for the system to support and not enough adult fish remain to breed and replenish the population. According to the FAO, nearly 80% of the world's fisheries are fully to over-exploited, depleted or in a state of collapse. Worldwide about 90% of the stocks of large predatory fish are already gone (SOFIA, 2006). After depleting the most valuable fish stocks, commercial fishing fleets have been moving on to the second most valuable fish and so on. Scientists agree that at current exploitation rates many important fish stocks will be removed from the system within 25 years ([www.overfishing.org](http://www.overfishing.org)).

Fishing down the food web does not only affect target fish species. The increasing effort needed by the industrialised fisheries to catch something of commercial value often means that dolphins and other marine mammals, sharks, sea birds, non-commercially viable fish species and marine biodiversity are overexploited, killed as bycatch and discarded (up to 80% of the catch for certain fisheries). Many fishing methods also have a wider impact on the basic functioning of marine ecosystems. For example, unselective fishing practices such as bottom trawling cause tremendous destruction to populations of non-target species. Industrial fishing is causing the loss of species as well as entire ecosystems. As a result the overall ecological health of oceans and seas are under stress and at risk of collapse. Thus, human societies everywhere risk losing a valuable food source on which many people depend for social, economical and dietary reasons (Clover, 2004; SOFIA, 2006; [www.overfishing.org](http://www.overfishing.org)).



[www.overfishing.org](http://www.overfishing.org)



**Water use and pollution.** Water is required in the production of food such as cereals, vegetables, meat and dairy products. Food production today uses about 70% of all fresh water withdrawals. Irrigation for agriculture is by far the greatest consumer of water and the diversion of more water to food and agriculture threatens environmental sustainability (MA, 2005). Industrialised livestock production is the largest sectoral source of water pollution and is a key player in increasing water use, accounting for over 8% of global water use (Steinfeld *et al.*, 2006). Run-off and seepage of synthetic fertilisers and concentrated sources of livestock waste damage aquifers, rivers, lakes and even oceans, with costly effects on drinking water quality, fish habitat and recreational amenities (FAO, 2006; WWAP, 2003).

The global trade in food reflects a “virtual flow” of water from food commodity exporting countries to importing countries.<sup>10</sup> Thus there is currently a major export of virtual water embodied in food exported from the Americas, South East Asia and Oceania and in major imports in North America, Western Europe, Central and South Asia (Hoekstra and Hung, 2002). Australia, a dry continent subject to periodic

these virtual water flows has been assessed at between 700 and 1,100 cubic kilometres per year (Hoekstra, *et al.*, 2003). The equivalent of 20 River Niles are transferred each year from the developing to the developed world (Pearce, 2006).

This flow of virtual water as a consequence of world food trade is increasing, with some regions being effectively “mined” for water to produce export crops and livestock for the international market. For example, apart from Israel and Jordan, no country in the semi-arid regions of the world has made policy choices to reduce or abandon exports or local production of water-intensive crops, replacing them by imports or higher return crops to allow optimisation of water use (World Water Council, 2004). Moreover, global changes in diets towards more



drought, is the world’s second largest net exporter of this virtual water embedded in its grain, livestock and dairy exports. New Zealand and Australia together supply a third of the world’s traded milk products, and both countries are in the top 12 net water exporters (Chapagrain & Hoekstra, 2003). The scale of

meat consumption also have an increasing impact on water resources. For example, while 1,000 litres of water are needed to produce a kilo of wheat, five to ten times as much water is needed to produce a kilo of meat. If every human being adopted a western-style diet, some 75% more water would be needed for food production globally (Zimmer and Renault, 2003).

**Agro-chemical pollution.** Commercial pesticides affect the health of farm workers and many other non-target organisms and their habitats



<sup>10</sup> The amount of water consumed in producing a product is called the “virtual water” contained in the product (Allan, 1998).

(WWAP, 2003). Over-use and mismanagement of pesticides poisons water and soil. The replacement of natural pest control services with artificial pesticides is estimated to cost US \$54 billion per year (CAST, 1999). Moreover, the addition of massive amounts of chemical fertilisers to agricultural fields in recent decades has resulted in annual nitrogen inputs to ecosystems increasing by 150% and phosphorus fluxes by 4.6% (MA, 2005). The result is eutrophication of water tables, freshwater and coastal environments. This is characterised by dramatic changes in biotic and abiotic conditions, leading occasionally to toxicity, loss of biodiversity and lowering of water quality (Carpenter *et al.*, 1998). Between 1890 and 1990, the total amount of biologically available nitrogen created by human activities increased nine-fold, and human activity now produces more nitrogen than all natural processes combined. Agrochemical nutrient pollution from the US farm belt is the principal cause of the biological “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico 1,500 km away; similar impacts are felt in the Baltic Sea and along the coasts of India and China, as well as in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Similarly, the global atmospheric transport of agricultural pollutants—including greenhouse gases—means that environmental costs are often borne by populations far removed from the site of production (UNEP, 2005).

Global trade in food and agricultural inputs is significantly modifying biogeochemical cycles on a planetary scale. Throughout the modern food system, the large-scale extraction or production, transformation





and consumption of biophysical material entails the displacement and removal of carbon and nutrients (e.g. potassium, phosphorus, nitrogen, calcium and sulphur). For instance, material flow assessments traced the import into Benelux countries of cassava chips from Thailand, destined for feed to intensive animal and poultry industries. The chips contain more potassium than is re-applied in the form of fertiliser to the whole of Thai agriculture. In other words, such production and export represents a form of mineral mining that is rarely noticed and not picked up in market signals. Moreover, the resultant nutrient-rich animal waste leads to surpluses in the destination countries. Much of the decomposed surplus has been ending up in waterways and the air, causing further problems. Similarly, the embedded carbon costs of global food trading and retailing have been estimated for some countries (Pretty, 2002); these are costs that would appear unsustainable in climate change terms.

**Invasive species and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).** Some introduced agricultural crops, livestock, trees and fish have become invasive, spreading beyond their planned range and displacing native species (Mooney *et al.*, 2005; Mathews and Brand, 2004). Genetically modified crop varieties and other GMOs also have the potential to become invasive species or to hybridise with wild relatives, leading to the loss of biodiversity and undermining key ecological processes and services (Altieri and Rosset, 1999; Omamo and Grebmer, 2005; Oksman-Caldentey and Barz, 2002; Wan Ho *et al.*, 2003).

**Agrofuels**<sup>11</sup> There is now growing demand for agrofuels with the prospect of oil production peaking in the next few years and the world running short of fossil fuels. Biodiesel from plant seed-oil, and bioethanol from fermenting grain, sap, grass, straw or wood, are especially in demand. Agrofuels are now grown on a significant scale, competing with food crops. For example, 20% of all corn grown in 2006 was destined for ethanol production.

There is evidence that the large-scale cultivation of agrofuels will significantly increase rates of environmental degradation throughout the world. Critical ecosystems and biodiversity are already being destroyed to plant agrofuel crops in developing countries. Examples include sugarcane (Brazil) and soya (Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil). Biodiversity loss due to oil plantations is accelerating in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Cameroon, Colombia and Ecuador. Large-scale agrofuel production is causing significant deforestation and loss of biodiversity in tropical regions in particular (Smolker *et al.*, 2007).

Soya has been identified as the main driver of deforestation in the Amazon. According to a report of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the price of soya directly correlates with the rate of forest destruction in that region (Morton *et al.*, 2006). Soya expansion has also been identified as the main cause of the high deforestation rates in Latin America's tropical and semi-tropical seasonally dry forests since the late 1990s, particularly in Argentina,

<sup>11</sup> This paper focuses on particular types of biofuels, called "agrofuels" because they are produced by intensive industrial agriculture, generally as monocultures, often covering thousands of hectares, most often in the developing world.



Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil (Grau *et al.*, 2005). Agrofuel expansion is expected to push up the price of soya by creating an additional market for soya biodiesel.

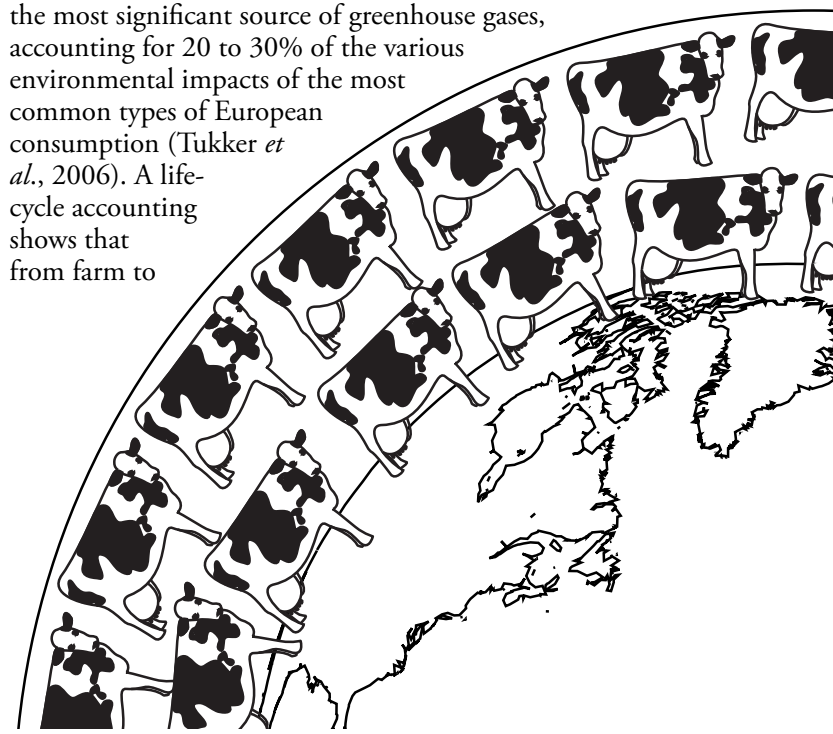
Biodiversity and associated ecosystem services are further eroded by the use of irrigation and fertilisers to boost yields of agrofuel crops. Irrigation depletes lakes, rivers and aquifers, while fertilisers increase the burden of nitrates in soil and water. Impacts include eutrophication, a major threat to fish stocks. Herbicide tolerant genetically engineered (GE) biofuel crops facilitate the use of aerial spraying of herbicides, with serious effects on biodiversity and small-scale farming (Biofuelwatch *et al.*, 2007).

Agrofuels have been presented as “carbon neutral”: their combustion does not add any additional greenhouse gas to the atmosphere since burning them simply returns to the atmosphere the carbon dioxide that the plants removed when they were growing in the field. However, rather than combating climate change, agrofuels may in fact accelerate it. Their production involves considerable emission of greenhouse gases from soils, carbon sink destruction and fossil fuel inputs. The clearance of Indonesia’s peat forests to plant oil palm plantations has caused massive outputs of CO<sub>2</sub> (Hooijer, *et al* 2006; Page *et al*, 2002). Forests that are cut down to plant bioenergy crops release huge carbon emissions. The most disastrous option is to convert tropical forest into cropland, which leads to a net loss (emission) of 200 tonnes of carbon per hectare



(Righelato and Spracklen, 2007).<sup>12</sup> There are also extra costs in energy and carbon emissions from the production and use of fertiliser and pesticides used for growing the crops, of farming implements, processing and refining, refinery plants, transport and infrastructure for transport and distribution. These costs can be quite substantial, particularly if the agrofuels are made in one country and exported to another. Life-cycle analyses of agrofuels generally give a small to negative energy balance; when proper accounting is done, the result is mostly a negative energy balance – the production of agrofuels uses more energy than the energy ultimately generated by these fuel crops (ISIS, 2006).

**Food systems, energy use and emissions of greenhouse gases.** Industrial food systems are heavily implicated in climate change. Animals are responsible for 31% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and nitrogen fertilisers for 38% (Stern, 2006). A 2006 Joint European Research Centre life-cycle analysis found that the food and drink sector was the most significant source of greenhouse gases, accounting for 20 to 30% of the various environmental impacts of the most common types of European consumption (Tukker *et al.*, 2006). A life-cycle accounting shows that from farm to



<sup>12</sup> The Stern Report on the economics of climate change commissioned by the UK Treasury noted that putting a stop to deforestation would be by far the most cost-effective way to mitigate climate change, costing as little as US\$1 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> avoided from being emitted (Stern, 2006).

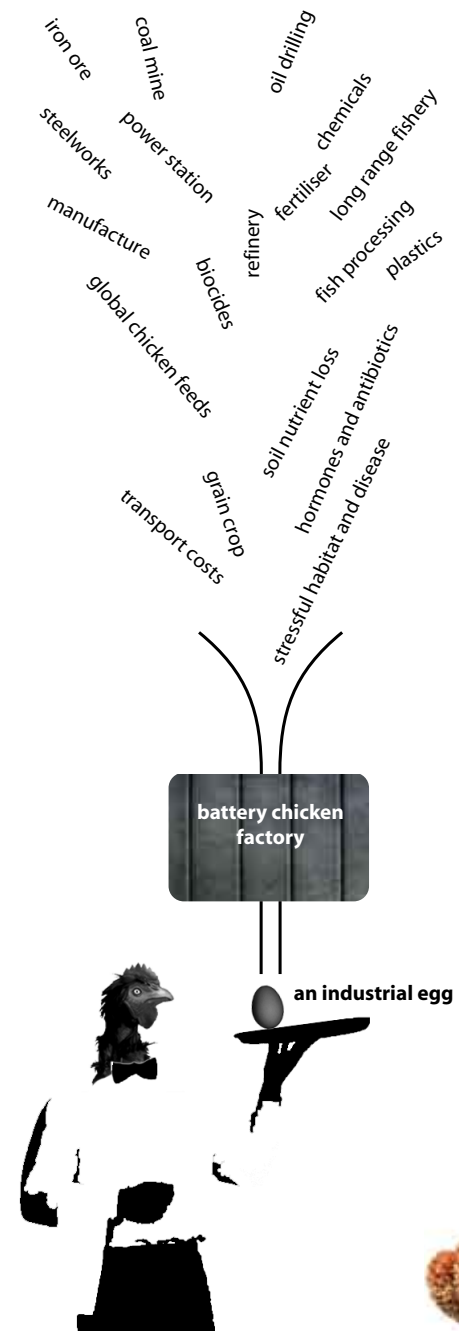
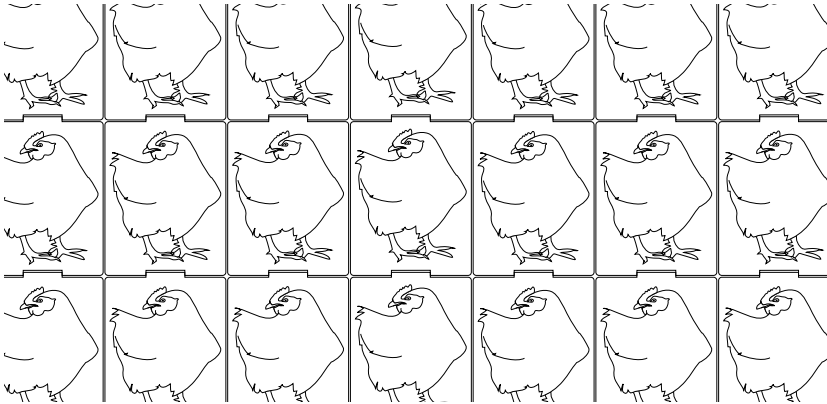
dinner plate, the French food system is responsible for more than 30% of national greenhouse gas emissions (Jancovici, 2004). The EU study concluded that the most significant contributors of GHGs were firstly meat and meat products and secondly the dairy sector.

The modern food system is also a major contributor to global warming and climate change through intensive use of fossil fuels for fertilisers, agrochemicals, production, transport, processing, refrigeration and retailing. Each unit of food energy produced requires many times more fossil fuel energy inputs (Leach, 1976). For example, over 17% of the USA's total energy use is consumed by the country's food system. On average, the US food system consumes 10 units of energy for every unit of food energy produced (Pimentel and Pimentel, 2008). In industrialised countries, between 10 and 15 energy units are spent for every energy unit of food on the dinner plate (Gunther, 2000). Grain-fed beef requires 35 calories for every calorie of beef produced, and a can of diet soda that provides maybe 1 calorie of energy needs 2,200 calories to produce it (70% of which is tied up in the aluminium can) (Heller and Keoleian, 2000). For every energy unit of food transported per thousand air-miles, 12.5 energy units are used (Voeding, 2001; Pirog, 2003).

In turn, the energy sector's ecological footprint as a result of exploration, extraction and infrastructure development is significant. Exploration for hydrocarbons, pipeline construction, uranium mining, hydroelectric dam construction, fuelwood extraction and, increasingly, biofuel plantations can all lead to significant habitat degradation and emissions of greenhouse gases. Such energy intensive industrial food systems and their greenhouse gas emitting energy infrastructures directly and significantly contribute to climate change and its impacts (IPCC, 2007).

In sum, the social and environmental costs of modern food systems are extraordinarily





high. These trends have been described separately here, - possibly giving the impression that each 'crisis' can be 'managed' in an isolated, piecemeal, sector-focussed way. But in the real world of interconnected people, landscapes and food systems, these social and environmental costs combine and amplify each other, with increasingly devastating consequences everywhere. As this conversation between Danish and Argentinean farmers clearly shows, deep *systemic and simultaneous* change is needed to reverse current trends in the global food system:

*"Danish meat production is based on soya from Latin America, especially Argentina, where vast areas are planted with monoculture GM soya. Soil is depleted of nutrients and exposed to erosion. The soya producers grow bigger and bigger – taking new land from forest and virgin land. Even Danish farmers are losing, as they have to produce ever cheaper food, which is only possible on large farms. Small farmers have to give up in this competition. Danish nature is also losing due to a surplus of nitrogen fertilization derived from the manure – extracted from the Argentinian soil (which is depleted!). The peasants in Argentina that were originally producing a variety of food (vegetables, meat, milk) are selling their land to the soya producers as their possibilities to produce are undermined by pesticide spraying from the air, or their land is taken away, since they have no papers on their legal rights to the land. As local farmers no longer produce for the local people, there is hunger and malnutrition. People are fed soya, which is not part of the traditional diet. The Danish population is losing the skills and knowledge to grow and consume a traditional diet rich in local fruit and vegetables and now eats more meat and milk than is good for their health – as does the rest of the Western world."*

From a discussion between Danish and Argentinean farmers recorded in the report of the Nyeleni 2007 Forum on Food Sovereignty.







## Chapter 3. Food sovereignty: a citizens' vision of a better world

The previous section shows that throughout the world, small-scale producers and their environments are directly affected by the combined processes of economic development, liberalisation and the integration of agri-food systems into a globalised world economy. Yet the dominant development paradigm considers it beneficial and even necessary to have less people living in rural areas, farming and depending on localised food systems<sup>13</sup> (Pimbert 2006; Perez-Vitoria, 2005; Ollivier, 2007). It foresees and encourages an exodus of people from rural areas to work in industry and urban-based trade and services (APM-Mondial 2001, Desmarais 2007; Pimbert *et al.*, 2006). Many development programmes are motivated by the belief that those subsistence producers who continue to farm, fish, rear livestock and harvest forests and common property lands should “modernise” as quickly as possible. They should become fully commercial producers by applying industrial food and agricultural technologies that allow for economies of scale (Desmarais, 2007). Those who cannot make this transition should move out of farming and rural areas to seek alternative livelihoods. This modernisation agenda is seen as both desirable and inevitable by most policy-makers, donors, development scholars and several mainstream NGOs.



13 Small-scale producers, peasants and other rural people rarely depend solely on farming for their livelihood. Occupations that are related to local food processing and other sources of livelihoods are commonplace. Therefore the issue is not simply whether less people farm (full-time) but whether people can make a living in rural areas, through a combination of agriculture, land and water use, and associated livelihoods.



However, this neo-liberal path to growth is but one of several possible development models and political choices for the future of food, farming, environment and development. The extinction of farmers, food workers and indigenous peoples is therefore not inevitable. The idea that small-scale producers and indigenous peoples as a group are bound to disappear reflects just one vision of the future—it is a political choice that relies on specific theories of change that can be disputed and rejected.

The knowledge, priorities and aspirations of small-scale producers, and other citizens whose livelihoods depend on food provisioning, are rarely included in policy debates on the future of food, farming and development (Edelman, 2003). When governments do decide to hold public consultations to help guide their decisions, policy experts as well as representatives of large farmers and agri-food corporations are usually centre stage in these debates, rather than small-scale producers, food workers, small food businesses and other citizens. Similarly, when policy think tanks and academics organise discussions to inform the choices of decision-makers it is striking that the voices of farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, food workers and indigenous peoples are largely absent from such processes (Pimbert *et al.*, 2006).

“Food sovereignty” is an alternative paradigm for food, fisheries, agriculture, pastoralism and forest use that is emerging in response to this democratic deficit. This alternative policy framework for food and agriculture is also a citizens’ response to the multiple social and environmental crises induced by modern food systems everywhere. Indeed, many proposals for food sovereignty directly seek to reverse the socially and ecologically destructive nature of industrial farming, fisheries, forestry and livestock management, and the wider food systems they are part of. *“Self sufficiency and autonomy are now political demands, well rooted in the experience of millions of Indians, campesinos, ‘urban marginals’ and many other groups in the southern part of the globe. Re-rooting and regenerating themselves in their own spaces, they are creating effective responses to ‘the global forces’ trying to displace them”* (Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

Food sovereignty is a relatively new political concept. After several years of development, it was first put forward internationally by La Vía Campesina at the UN FAO’s World Food Summit in 1996. Since then many social movements, organisations and people have adopted and taken part in developing the concept of food sovereignty.



### 3.1. La Vía Campesina and the concept of food sovereignty

*“We, La Vía Campesina, a growing movement of farm workers, peasant, farm and indigenous peoples’ organisations from all the regions of the world, know that food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food. Any discussion that ignores our contribution will fail to eradicate poverty and hunger. Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realised in a system where Food Sovereignty is guaranteed.” (La Vía Campesina, 1996).*

La Vía Campesina is an international movement which co-ordinates peasant organisations of small and medium sized producers, agricultural workers, rural women and indigenous communities from Asia, America and Europe. It is an autonomous, pluralistic movement, independent of all political, economic or other denominations. La Vía Campesina is organised in seven regions as follows: Europe, Northeast and Southeast Asia, South Asia, North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. It was formed in April 1992, when several peasant leaders from Central America, North America, and Europe got together in Managua, Nicaragua, at the Congress of the National Union of Farmers and Livestock Owners (UNAG). In May 1993, La Vía Campesina’s first conference was held in Mons, Belgium, where it was constituted as a world organisation, and its first strategic guidelines and structure were defined.



From the beginning, La Vía Campesina distanced itself from large-scale or “corporate” farmers and non-governmental organisations. Its members have always emphasised that it is the initiative of peasants and not of NGOs. At the 1996 World Food Summit, La Vía Campesina refused to sign the NGO declaration as it “felt that it did not address sufficiently the concerns and interests of peasant families” (Desmarais, 2002). La Vía Campesina is also very clear about the kind of farmers it represents, or allows as members. Its relationship with The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) is illuminating in this regard (Box 3.1).

#### Box 3.1. IFAP and La Vía Campesina

Created in 1946, IFAP usually claims to represent farmers around the world<sup>14</sup> in a range of influential institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Desmarais, 2007). However, IFAP was seen by many to be “representing the interests of larger farmers primarily based in the industrialised countries” (Desmarais, 2007). IFAP is considered a “conservative” (Edelman 2003), “reformist or conformist” (Desmarais 2007) organisation that supports the liberalisation and globalisation of agriculture (Desmarais 2007). This is why many of the small-farmers’ organisations were opposed to allowing IFAP and its affiliated organisations to join La Vía Campesina (Desmarais 2007; Edelman 2003). La Vía Campesina was in fact created as a “much needed and radical alternative to the IFAP” (Desmarais 2007), to more adequately represent peasant, indigenous, small family farmers and other marginalised small-scale producers.

14 According to IFAP’s President Graham Blight at the Agricultural Producers’ Caucus of the 1996 World Food Summit, IFAP spoke “on behalf of 83 national organisations of family farmers in 59 countries throughout the world, over half of which are developing countries” (Blight, G./IFAP, 1996). However, as Desmarais explains, several farmers’ organisations in developed and developing countries do not belong to IFAP, for a range of reasons, one of which is the very high membership costs. In fact, IFAP is mostly made up of “elite and corporate producers” (Edelman 2003: 213), and the majority of its organisations are from developed nations, despite IFAP’s efforts to “recruit” more developing country member organisations (Desmarais 2007: 85).





La Vía Campesina's proud adoption of a "peasant identity" is also particularly notable in today's context. Among the multiple terms used to describe small-scale, family-based producers (e.g. smallholders, traditional farmers, subsistence gardeners, petty producers...), the term "peasant" is often laden with negative values and prejudice in many different countries and languages. In "the popular imagination... 'peasants'

represented backwardness" (Edelman 2003). So why has La Vía Campesina chosen to call itself "the international peasant movement"? As Nettie Webbie, a Canadian farmer who is part of La Vía Campesina explains, *"If you actually look at what 'peasant' means, it means 'people of the land' ... it's the land and our relationship to the land and food production that distinguishes us. ... We're not part of the industrial machine. We're much more closely linked to the places where we grow food and how we grow food"* (quoted in Edelman 2003). La Vía Campesina and other contemporary rural activists are trying to "re-appropriate the term 'peasant' and infuse it with new and positive content" (Edelman 2003). Bernstein acknowledges this, saying *"there is a recent fashion to embrace (family) farmers in both South and North under common terms like 'people of the land' or indeed 'peasants'. This typically registers a political stance critical of capitalist agriculture (and agribusiness)"* (Bernstein, 2007).

Indeed, both Marxist and neo-liberal certainties about the "end of the peasantry", the "inevitability of progress" and "modernity" are all being challenged today<sup>15</sup>.

The experience of the *Campesino* a *Campesino* farmer networks in

15 As Walden Bello points out both Marxist and capitalist ideologies have similar views on the future of peasants in modern industrial society. "The two dominant modernist ideologies of our time give short thrift to the peasantry. In classical socialism, peasants were viewed as relics of an obsolete mode of production and designated for transformation into a rural working class producing on collective farms owned and managed by the state. In the different varieties of capitalist ideology, efficiency in agricultural production could only be brought about with the radical reduction of the numbers of peasants and the substitution of labour by machines. In both visions, the peasant had no future" (Bello, 2007).

Mexico and Central America is noteworthy in this regard:

*"Contrary to conventional wisdom, today's campesinos are not culturally static or politically passive. Nor are they disappearing as a social class. Campesino families across Mesoamerica and the Caribbean (and around the world) are constantly adapting to global, regional, and local forces. ... A story of unflagging resistance to decades of a 'development' that sought to eliminate peasants from the countryside and, more recently, to neoliberal economic policies that prioritize corporate profit margins over environment, food security, and rural livelihoods."*

*[this is] a struggle for cultural resistance because campesino culture has withstood both socialist and capitalist version of progress... Even today, campesinos across the Mesoamerican isthmus resist the devastating economic effects of globalization both from their home communities and from the fields, factories, and service sectors of the United States, to which they supply an inexhaustible army of cheap, expendable labor "* (Holt-Gimenez, 2006).

In the face of a development model geared to ensuring the extinction of subsistence farmers, nomadic pastoralists and other small-scale food providers, La Vía Campesina is redefining what it means to be a "peasant". A process of *re-peasantisation* is slowly unfolding as more national and regional organisations proudly embrace the term "peasant" to describe themselves, projecting an alternative identity and modernity rich in meaning and hope for the future. As Annette Aurelie Desmarais says in her excellent study of La Via Campesina:

*"This is a politicized identity. It reflects people who share a deep commitment to place, who are deeply attached to a particular piece of land, who are all part of a particular rural community, whose mode of existence is under threat. This place-bound identity, that of 'people of the land', reflects the belief that they have the right to be on the land. They have the right and obligation to produce food. They have the right to be seen as fulfilling an important function in society at large. They have a right to live in viable communities and the obligation to build community. All of these factors form essential parts of their distinct identity as peasants; in today's politicized globalization, articulating identity across borders and based on locality and tradition is a deeply political act"* (Desmarais, 2007).





consumers, environmental and urban movements from more than 80 countries. This event was held in Sélingué, Mali in 2007: the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty. The broad range of farmers and other citizens involved in these ongoing discussions has decisively shaped the concept of food sovereignty over the last decade.



Since its creation in 1993, La Vía Campesina has held four international meetings<sup>16</sup> to bring together its member organisations, discuss and define common positions, strategies and actions. These actions primarily involved participation in several important international meetings and forums, such as the 1996 World Food Summit and the 2002 World Food Summit: five years later (both of which took place in Rome, Italy and were convened by FAO); the 2000 Global Forum on Agricultural Research (held in Dresden and hosted by the FAO); and the 2001 World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. At all of these meetings representatives of La Vía Campesina stated their opinions and recommendations on issues of agricultural trade, agricultural production methods, genetic resources, land reform, the right to food, and other aspects. Their statements show how they have shaped and developed the concept of food sovereignty.

However, to define the concept more formally and democratically, La Vía Campesina organised two major international conferences on food sovereignty. The first was a gathering of 400 delegates from organisations of family farmers, peasants, indigenous peoples, landless people and artisanal fisherfolk, as well as civil society organisations, academics and researchers from 60 different countries. They met at La Havana, Cuba in 2001 for the World Forum on Food Sovereignty (APM-Mondial 2001). The second event was an even larger gathering: 600 representatives from the same types of organisations, but this time also including rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, youth organisations,



16 1st meeting: 1993 in Mons, Belgium; 2nd meeting: 1996 in Tlaxcala, Mexico; 3rd meeting: 2000 in Bangalore, India; and 4th meeting: 2004 in Itaici, Brazil (see Desmarais, 2007).

### 3.2. Food sovereignty: an alternative paradigm for food and agriculture

The concept of food sovereignty had already been under discussion for a few years when it was released at La Vía Campesina's international conference in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in April 1996. At this conference delegates decided that they wanted proper representation in international fora, such as the World Food Summit. They also expressed the need to encourage NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) to discuss alternatives to the neo-liberal proposals for achieving food security (see Box 3.5).

In the words of La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty is *“the right of each nation to maintain and develop their own capacity to produce foods that are crucial to national and community food security, respecting cultural diversity and diversity of production methods.”* ([www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)). This definition focuses on the right of smallholder farmers to produce food, which is undermined in many countries by national and international agricultural trade policy regulations.

During the 1996 World Food Summit, La Vía Campesina presented a set of mutually supportive principles that offered an alternative to world trade policies and would realise the human right to food. Their statement, Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger (1996), declared that “Food Sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security”. La Vía Campesina's seven principles to achieve food sovereignty are presented in Box 3.2. Subsequent declarations and documents by La Vía Campesina and other organisations have built on these principles since 1996 (Box 3.3).



[www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)

#### Box 3.2. Food sovereignty: a future without hunger

During the 1996 World Food Summit, La Vía Campesina presented seven mutually supportive principles that define an alternative paradigm for food, agriculture and human well-being:

##### 1. Food – A Basic Human Right

Food is a basic human right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realisation of this fundamental right.

##### 2. Agrarian Reform

A genuine agrarian reform is necessary which gives landless and farming people—especially women—ownership and control of the land they work and which returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it. Smallholder farmer families, especially women, must have access to productive land, credit, technology, markets and extension services. Governments must establish and support decentralised rural credit systems that prioritise the production of food for domestic consumption to ensure Food Sovereignty. Production capacity rather than land should be used as security to guarantee credit. To encourage young people to remain in rural communities as productive citizens, the work of producing food and caring for the land has to be sufficiently valued both economically and socially. Governments must make long-term investments of public resources in the development of socially and ecologically appropriate rural infrastructure.

##### 3. Protecting Natural Resources

Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practise sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of



tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals. Long-term sustainability demands a shift away from dependence on chemical inputs, on cash-crop monocultures and intensive, industrialised production models. Balanced and diversified natural systems are required. Genetic resources are the result of millennia of evolution and belong to all of humanity. They represent the careful work and knowledge of many generations of rural and indigenous peoples. The patenting and commercialisation of genetic resources by private companies must be prohibited. The WTO's Intellectual Property Rights Agreement is therefore unacceptable. Farming communities have the right to freely use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds and livestock breeds, which have been developed by them throughout history.

#### 4. Reorganising Food Trade

Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritise production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices. This means that export dumping or subsidised exports must cease. Smallholder farmers have the right to produce essential food staples for their countries and to control the marketing of their products. Food prices in domestic and international markets must be regulated and reflect the true costs of producing that food. This would ensure that smallholder farmer families have adequate incomes. It is unacceptable that the trade in food commodities continues to be based on the economic exploitation of the most vulnerable—the lowest earning producers—and the further degradation of the environment. It is equally unacceptable that trade and production decisions are increasingly dictated by the need for foreign currency to meet high debt loads. These debts place a disproportionate burden on rural people and should therefore be forgiven.

#### 5. Ending the Globalisation of Hunger

Food Sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organisations such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced

code of conduct for transnational corporations is therefore needed.

#### 6. Social Peace

Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalisation in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanisation, repression and increasing incidence of racism of smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated.

#### 7. Democratic Control

Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organisations will have to undergo a process of democratisation to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.

Source: La Vía Campesina, 1996; [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)



Food sovereignty thus implies the right of individuals, peoples, communities and countries:

- to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food, land and water management policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances;
- to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, to food-producing resources and to the ability to sustain themselves and their societies;
- to protect and regulate domestic production and trade and prevent the dumping of food products and unnecessary food aid on domestic markets;
- to choose their own level of self-reliance in food;
- to manage, use and control life-sustaining natural resources: land, water, seeds, livestock breeds and wider agricultural biodiversity, unrestricted by intellectual property rights and free from GMOs;
- to produce and harvest food in an ecologically sustainable manner, principally through low-external input production and artisanal fisheries.

Behind the development of the food sovereignty policy framework lie a global network of social movements, indigenous peoples and civil society organisations, and a number of conferences, fora and declarations which have resulted in several significant statements on food sovereignty (Box 3.3). Solidarity, - and a shared vision of what should be done -, emerges organically through conversations that lead to the mutual recognition of common problems and struggles. As Carlsen reported from a 2006 Via Campesina international forum in Mexico city:

*“For most peasant farmers in Mexico, Asia has always seemed literally and figuratively a world apart. But when Uthai Sa Artchop of Thailand described how transnational corporations sought to patent and control their varieties of rice seed, Mexican peasants realized that the Thai’s rice was their corn. When Indonesian farmer Tejo Pramono spoke of how remittances from sons and daughters working in Hong Kong and the Middle East subsidize a dying countryside, Mexican farmers thought of their own relatives forced to migrate to the United States. Both sides nodded knowingly at the other’s*

*descriptions of the loss of markets to imports, the drop in producer prices due to unfair competition, and government cutbacks to producers except the large exporters. The January tortilla crisis in Mexico found its counterpart in the May palm oil crisis in Indonesia, when the price of both staple foods soared due to diversion to agrofuels and transnational control of markets” (Carlsen, 2007).*

## Soberania Alimentaria



5 minutes



[Alternative viewing on YouTube](#)



### Box 3.3. The emergence of the food sovereignty framework: a timeline of key documents and statements

#### 1996

- *Food Sovereignty: A Future Without Hunger*. La Vía Campesina's 1996 *Statement by the NGO Forum to the World Food Summit*, NGO Forum to the World Food Summit

#### 2001

- *Our World is Not For Sale. WTO: Shrink or Sink*. Our World is Not for Sale Network.
- *Final Declaration of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty*, Havana, Cuba.
- *Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty*. La Vía Campesina.
- *Sale of the Century? People's Food Sovereignty. Part 1 – the Implications of Trade Negotiations*. Friends of the Earth International.
- *Sale of the Century? People's Food Sovereignty. Part 2 – a New Multilateral Framework for Food and Agriculture*. Friends of the Earth International.
- *Food Sovereignty in the Era of Trade Liberalisation: Are Multilateral Means Feasible?* Steve Suppan, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

#### 2002

- *Food Sovereignty: A Right for All*. Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty. Rome, Italy.
- *Statement on People's Food Sovereignty: Our World is Not for Sale*. Cancun, Mexico.

#### 2003

- *What is Food Sovereignty?* La Vía Campesina.
- *Towards Food Sovereignty: Constructing an Alternative to the WTO's AoA*. International Workshop on the Review of the AoA, Geneva, Switzerland.
- *Trade and People's Food Sovereignty*. Friends of the Earth International.
- *How TRIPS Threatens Biodiversity and Food Sovereignty*. Hyderabad, India.
- *Statement on People's Food Sovereignty: Our World is Not for Sale*. Cancun, Mexico.

#### 2005

- *Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localised Food Systems*. Michael Windfuhr and Jennie Jonsen, FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), FIAN International.

#### 2006

- *Agrarian Reform and Food Sovereignty: Alternative Model for the Rural World*. Peter Rosset, Univ. California at Berkeley/Global Alternatives.

#### 2007

- *Final Statement of the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty*. Sélingué, Mali.

Source: Adapted from Windfuhr and Jonson, 2005; [www.nyeleni2007.org](http://www.nyeleni2007.org)



The concept, and the struggle to achieve it, is bringing together farmers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists and all manner of rural groups, from both the South and the North. New issues and challenges are constantly brought up in the debates.

For example, social movements and representatives of small-scale producers<sup>17</sup> recently organised a world forum for food sovereignty in Mali. At the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty (Box 3.4), the participants further developed the political, economic, social and ecological dimensions of this alternative policy framework for food and agriculture. They also sought to strengthen the political power of those advocating for food sovereignty by: (1) expanding the debate outside producer groups to consumer groups and workers' trade unions; (2) building momentum and support among governments who are in favour of food sovereignty; and (3) developing a collective and global strategy to ensure that the right of peoples to food sovereignty is recognised as a specific and full right, and that its defence is legally binding for states and guaranteed by the United Nations (see [www.nyeleni2007.org](http://www.nyeleni2007.org)).



<sup>17</sup> The organisers of the Nyéléni 2007 Forum on Food Sovereignty were: La Vía Campesina, see <http://viacampesina.org>; ROPPA: Le Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Network of farmers and producers organisations of West Africa), see [www.roppa.info](http://www.roppa.info) and [www.cnop-mali.org](http://www.cnop-mali.org); The World March of Women, see [www.worldmarchofwomen.org/](http://www.worldmarchofwomen.org/); Friends of the Earth International, see [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk); World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFFP), see <http://wffpfisheries.org>; NGO members of the Food Sovereignty Network, see [www.peoplesfoodsovereignty.org/](http://www.peoplesfoodsovereignty.org/); IPC – International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, see [www.foodsovereignty.org](http://www.foodsovereignty.org).

### Box 3.4. Nyéléni: shaping the food sovereignty framework

Nyéléni was a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well; she embodied food sovereignty through hard work, innovation and caring for her people. Named after this woman, the Nyéléni Forum brought together, from around the world, some 600 representatives of organisations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements. Held in Sélingué, Mali, between the 23 and 27 February 2007, the event attracted participants from over 80 countries.

The Nyéléni participants deepened their collective understanding and vision of food sovereignty which, according to their final statement:

1. Focuses on food: It puts the provision of sufficient, healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all individuals and peoples, including those who are hungry, under occupation or in conflict zones, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies. It rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component of international agri-business.
2. Values food providers: It values and supports the contribution made by women and men, peasants and small-scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, to cultivating, growing or harvesting food. It rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue small-scale producers, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3. Localises food systems: It brings food providers and consumers closer together; makes providers and consumers central to decision-making on food issues, programmes and policies; protects food providers from the dumping of cheap food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from bad food,



inappropriate food aid and food tainted with GMOs and other potentially unhealthy components. It resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

4. Puts control locally: It gives control over territory, land, water, seeds, livestock and fish stocks to local food providers who can use and share them in socially and environmentally ways and preserves diversity. It rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights.
5. Builds knowledge and skills: It builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers who preserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, develops appropriate research systems to support this and passes on this wisdom to future generations. It rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6. Works with nature: It uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us. It rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy-intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming (see [www.nyeleni2007.org](http://www.nyeleni2007.org)).

For its supporters, food sovereignty is an approach that offers practical solutions for farmers and other citizens in both the North and South. But in all situations, moving towards endogenous food systems that are rich in bio-cultural diversity calls for radical changes in four closely interrelated domains: ecological, political, social and economic. Food sovereignty is not, and cannot be, a piecemeal approach. It entails a fundamental shift away from the industrial and neo-liberal paradigm for food and agriculture (Table 3.1).

The need for such a holistic approach was strongly emphasised by the Nyéléni participants because many actors today are increasingly co-opting the term “food sovereignty” to imply self-sufficiency and



**Table 3.1. Dominant model versus food sovereignty model**

ISSUE	DOMINANT MODEL	FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MODEL
Trade	Free trade in everything	Food and agriculture exempt from trade agreements
Production priority	Agroexports	Food for local markets
Crop prices	“What the market dictates” (leave intact mechanisms that enforce low prices)	Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow farmers and farmworkers a life with dignity
Market access	Access to foreign markets	Access to local markets; an end to the displacement of farmers from their own markets by agribusiness
Subsidies	While prohibited in the Third World, many subsidies are allowed in the US and Europe — but are paid only to the largest farmers	Subsidies that do not damage other countries (via dumping) are okay; i.e., grant subsidies only to family farmers, for direct marketing, price/income support, soil conservation, conversion to sustainable farming, research, etc.
Food	Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated food that is full of fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and toxic residues	A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced
Being able to produce	An option for the economically efficient	A right of rural peoples
Hunger	Due to low productivity	A problem of access and distribution; due to poverty and inequality
Food security	Achieved by importing food from where it is cheapest	Greatest when food production is in the hands of the hungry, or when food is produced locally
Control over productive resources (land, water, forests)	Privatized	Local; community controlled
Access to land	Via the market	Via genuine agrarian reform; without access to land, the rest is meaningless
Seeds	A patentable commodity	A common heritage of humanity, held in trust by rural communities and cultures; “no patents on life”
Rural credit and investment	From private banks and corporations	From the public sector; designed to support family agriculture
Dumping	Not an issue	Must be prohibited
Monopoly	Not an issue	The root of most problems; monopolies must be broken up
Overproduction	No such thing, by definition	Drives prices down and farmers into poverty; we need supply management policies for US and EU
Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)	The wave of the future	Bad for health and the environment; an unnecessary technology
Farming technology	Industrial, monoculture, chemical-intensive; uses GMOs	Agroecological, sustainable farming methods, no GMOs
Farmers	Anachronisms; the inefficient will disappear	Guardians of culture and crop germplasm; stewards of productive resources; repositories of knowledge; internal market and building block of broad-based, inclusive economic development
Urban consumers	Workers to be paid as little as possible	Need living wages
Another world (alternatives )	Not possible/not of interest	Possible and amply demonstrated

Source: Rosset, 2003

isolationist proposals that reject exchanges and complementarities between regions. Other actors cherry pick elements of the food sovereignty framework and ignore others, thereby reproducing narrow approaches that ultimately hamper positive change. This trend is evident in ill-informed or deliberate attempts to equate the notion of “food security” with “food sovereignty” (Box 3.5) as well as in recent government declarations on the need for “food sovereignty” (Box 3.6)

Like any other policy framework, food sovereignty implies a purposeful course of action taken by social actors to address particular issues and advance towards specific objectives. In this regard, policies for food



### Box 3.5. Food sovereignty versus food security

*“If the people of a country must depend for their next meal on the vagaries of the global economy, on the goodwill of a superpower not to use food as a weapon, or on the unpredictability and high cost of long-distance shipping, that country is not secure in the sense of either national security or food security” (Rosset, 2003).*

In a way, the food sovereignty concept has developed as a reaction to the increasing (mis)use of “food security”. The mainstream definition of food security, endorsed at food summits and other high level conferences, talks about everybody having enough good food to eat each day. But it doesn’t talk about where the food comes from, who produced it, or the conditions under which it was grown. This allows the food exporters to argue that the best way for poor countries to achieve food security is to import cheap food from them or to receive it free as ‘food aid’, rather than trying to produce it themselves. This makes those countries more dependent on the international market, drives peasant farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples who can’t compete with the subsidised imports off their land and into the cities, and ultimately worsens people’s food security. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, promotes commonsense principles of community autonomy, cultural integrity and environmental stewardship – i.e. people determining for themselves just what seeds they plant, what animals they raise, what type of farming occurs, what economic exchanges they engage in, and what they will ultimately eat for dinner. In fact, some would argue that genuine food security is impossible without first achieving food sovereignty.

*Source: Peck, 2005; GRAIN editorial, April 2005; La Via Campesina, 1996).*



sovereignty pursue three types of objectives:

1. **Equity:** securing the rights of people and communities, including their fundamental human right to food; affirming and celebrating cultural diversity; enhancing social and economic benefits; and combating inequalities, such as the ones responsible for poverty, gender discrimination and exclusion.
2. **Sustainability:** seeking human activities and resource use patterns compatible with ecological sustainability.
3. **Direct democracy:** empowering civil society in decision-making, and democratising government institutions, structures and markets.

Ideally, these objectives should be pursued in an integrated and coherent fashion, avoiding piecemeal approaches.

So far, the food sovereignty movement has developed a broad policy vision and discourse.<sup>18</sup> And rather than presenting a fixed menu of policy instruments, it identifies a range of policy shifts and directions for national governments and other actors who seek to implement food sovereignty within their societies. These are listed below and further discussed in the third part of this book.

### Enabling national policies and legislation

- Equitable land reform and redistribution of surplus land to tenants within a rights-based approach to environment and development.
- Reform of property rights to secure gender-equitable rights of access and use of common property resources, forests and water.
- Protection of the knowledge and rights of farmers and pastoralists to save seed and improve crop varieties and livestock breeds, for example banning patents and inappropriate intellectual property right (IPR) legislation.
- Re-introduction of protective safeguards for domestic economies to guarantee stable prices covering the cost of production, including quotas and other controls against imports of food and fibre that can be produced locally.
- Policies that guarantee fair prices to producers and consumers, safety nets for the poor.

- Re-direction of both hidden and direct subsidies towards supporting smaller-scale producers and food workers to encourage the shift towards diverse, ecological, equitable and more localised food systems.
- Increase in funding for, and re-orientation of, public sector R&D and agricultural/food-sciences extension towards participatory approaches and democratic control over the setting of upstream strategic priorities, the validation of technologies and the spread of innovations.
- Broad citizen and non-specialist involvement in framing policies, setting research agendas and validating knowledge, as part of a process to democratise science, technology and policy-making for food, farming, environment and development.
- Mechanisms to ensure that the real costs of environmental damage, unsustainable production methods and long-distance trade are included in the cost of food and fibre.
- Clear and accurate labelling of food and feedstuffs, with binding legislation for all companies to ensure transparency, accountability and respect for human rights, public health and environmental standards.



<sup>18</sup> A policy discourse is an ensemble of norms, rules, views, ideas, concepts and values that govern practice and behaviour, and help interpret social and environmental realities.

## Enabling global multilateralism and international policies

- Re-orientation of the end goals of trade rules and aid so that they contribute to the building of local economies and local control, rather than international competitiveness.
- Supply management to ensure that public support does not lead to over-production and dumping that lower prices below the cost of production, harming farmers in both North and South.
- International commodity agreements to regulate the total output to world markets.
- Creation of regional common agricultural markets that include countries with similar levels of agricultural productivity. For example: North Africa and the Middle East, West Africa, Central Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe.
- Protection of the above regional common markets against the dumping of cheap food and fibre, using quotas and tariffs to guarantee fair and stable prices to marginalised small-scale producers, food processors, and small food enterprises. Prices should allow small-scale producers, artisans and food workers to earn a decent income, invest and build their livelihood assets.
- Restrictions to the concentration and market power of major agri-food corporations through new international treaties, competition laws and adoption of more flexible process and product standards.
- International collaboration for more effective antitrust law enforcement and measures to reduce market concentration in different parts of the global food system (concerning seeds, pesticides, food processing and retailing, for example).
- Co-operation to ensure that corporations and their directors are held



- legally responsible for breaches in environmental and social laws, and international agreements.
- Transformation of the current international investment law regime by challenging corporate investor rules. The expansion of current foreign investment rules should be blocked and arbitration processes should be reformed to ensure transparency and fairness. Alternative rules should also be constructed and implemented, focusing on the responsibilities of international investors to ensure sustainable development and enhance environmental, labour and human rights protection.
- An independent dispute settlement mechanism integrated within an international Court of Justice
- An international Convention to replace the current Agreement on

### Box 3.6. Food sovereignty: from radical reorientations to rhetoric

Already, some developing country governments are seeing the value of a food sovereignty policy framework and are taking their own steps to implement it. But some countries, like Bolivia and Mali, have a more radical interpretation than others. For example, the government of Mali was involved in a consultation process with farmers to draft its new agricultural framework law. After more than a year of work, this law has enshrined food sovereignty as a priority for allowing the country to improve rural and urban living standards. Malian farmer organisations and the government are now discussing ways of implementing the food sovereignty framework throughout the country (LOA, 2006 ).

Other countries of the ECOWAS (Economic Union of the West African States) increasingly refer to food sovereignty in their policy statements, albeit in more ambiguous ways, which emphasise only part of the food sovereignty framework and often inconsistently so. Governments of most other developing and developed countries only use the term “food sovereignty” as a rhetorical device. For example, the former French President Jacques Chirac recently co-opted the words “food sovereignty” to describe and justify the continuation of neo-liberal farming policies in France and Europe. He was speaking at the opening of a major agricultural forum in Senegal, in February 2005 ([www.ambafrance-sn.org/article.php3?id\\_article=477](http://www.ambafrance-sn.org/article.php3?id_article=477)).



Agriculture (AoA) and relevant clauses in other agreements of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Within an international policy framework that incorporated rules on agricultural production and trade of food this Convention would implement the concept of food sovereignty and the basic human rights of all peoples to safe and healthy food, decent and full rural employment, labour rights and protection, and a healthy, rich and diverse natural environment.

- Multilateral co-operation to tax speculative international financial flows (US \$1,600 thousand million/day), and redirect funds to build local livelihood assets, meet human needs and regenerate local ecologies.

It is acknowledged that policies for food sovereignty cannot be specified in detail for all people and places. They have to take into account local history and culture as well as the unique social and ecological contexts in which food systems are embedded. In this context, democratic participation and citizen empowerment are seen as crucial for the process of policy-making (who makes policy and how it is made) and the implementation of policies. As Patel puts it, the food sovereignty movement argues *“for a mass re-politicization of food politics, through a call for people to figure out for themselves what they want the right to food to mean in their communities, bearing in mind the community’s needs, climate, geography, food preferences, social mix and history...”* (Patel, 2007). This point will be more fully addressed in the subsequent and closing parts of this book.



The search for food sovereignty is thus part of a wider affirmation of the right to self-determination and endogenous development. New social movements for food self-reliance in the context of endogenous development are arising worldwide. Throughout Latin America and in much of Africa, South and Southeast Asia, farmers, pastoralists, women, indigenous peoples and migrants are organising, linking together with their counterparts in the North. They are gaining support from scholars, activists, consumers and progressive policy-makers (Cohn *et al.*, 2006). The more radical social movements among them are not working for ‘inclusion’ in existing political structures and the dominant culture. Instead they strive to *“transform the very political order in which they operate”* (Alvarez *et al.*, 1998). In this process of transformation, radical social movements are creating alternative identities, new solidarities, alternative social spaces, and alternative political cultures (Eschle, 2001). Critical social movements are thus seeking new meanings and ways of being in the world. Together, they are reframing food, agriculture and the “good life” in terms of a larger vision based on radical pluralism and democracy, personal dignity and conviviality, autonomy and reciprocity, and other principles that affirm the right to self determination (see, for example, Box 3.7: *Towards a Consensus of the Peoples*).



### Box 3.7. Toward a Consensus of the Peoples

We, more than 100 persons of 36 peoples, from 14 countries of three continents, came together over several days in Mexico City, to talk and to reflect together about our realities and perspectives.

We cannot talk on behalf of the communities and peoples to which we belong, and even less on behalf of all of the peoples of the continent. We believe, nevertheless, that the fabric of ideas and attitudes that we have been weaving in the course of our conversations is inspired by them and perhaps can inspire others.

We are suffering, like many others, the consequences of neoliberal policies. Capital has more appetite than ever, but not enough stomach to digest the many it wants to control. Millions of people are becoming unnecessary, disposable. The constituted powers all over the world, allied to the transnational corporations, blindly apply the senseless policies of the so-called Washington Consensus, at an unsupportable human and environmental cost.

More than these evils, known to all of us, we talked about who we are, and of what we form in a rich mosaic of many “we’s” that define us. We talked about the attitudes that make us be what we are, of the difficulties that we confront, of our dreams and of the meaning of our struggles.

The “conclusions” that we reached are only a moment of reflection on a path that we started long time ago, and on which we continue walking. It has not been an easy and straight path. We have been forced to walk it in the middle of conflict, of the confrontation imposed to us. It is a path of dignity and also of rebellion. Who walks today through these paths needs to do it struggling.

One of these “conclusions” is that it seems that there is in the process of formation, at the grassroots, a CONSENSUS OF THE PEOPLES. This consensus, if it effectively would be reached, could articulate and connect their activities, with the full respect to the diversity and autonomy of each community and people, who can live this

consensus in different ways. We hope that others, particularly in the communities, can enrich what we have woven so far, which has, among other things, the following elements.

1. **Radical Pluralism.** We want to create a world in which many worlds can be embraced. That the dissolution of cultures and peoples in order to integrate them into one design on the terms of the old western project of domination is stopped. We want a world in which the cultural differences are appreciated and respected, for them to coexist in harmony, based on a radical pluralistic attitude.
2. **Personal Dignity.** We celebrate the dignity of each man and woman, which nurtures the dignity of their peoples and cultures. Based on it, the richness of their diversity will flourish. The extension of personal and cultural dignity will challenge all the existing political and economic systems, and will demonstrate that they have an oppressive, unjust and irrational character.
3. **Autonomy.** In dignity, we base the de facto autonomy of our communities and peoples. We will continue to struggle until we get its legal recognition. Since the laws of the colonizers, the legal machinery has always been at the service of the powerful and the bad government. The courts are a travesty of justice. Without abandoning our internal normative systems, we continue to re-vindicate the legal and political process; together they form the structure of freedom. We will conquer legal autonomy.
4. **New Political Regime.** The constitutional recognition of the existence, autonomy and self determination of the peoples who form the most profound layer of our societies, could forge a new political regime that leaves behind the structure of domination inherent in the nation state, and is sustained by the sovereignty of the people and preserves it, even in the globalizing disorder.
5. **Subordinate the economy.** We want to reestablish politics and ethics as the center of social life, expelling from it the economic

obsession of the dominant system, that only concentrates privileges in the few. Instead of submitting needs and desires to the competitive fury of the great economic powers, to feed their voracity, we will put the economic operation at the service of the persons, the communities and the peoples.

6. **Radical Democracy.** Given the current disenchantment with so called formal democracy, in which political parties and governments are unable to harmonize the collective endeavors in a just order, we want to base our efforts in our community democracy, that weave a consensus at the grassroots. Democracy can only be where the people are. In our own places we are reconstructing society, with the participation of everyone, in order to generate new social and political consensus.
7. **Conviviality.** We generate a convivial way of life in our communities and neighborhoods. We will not let consumer society, in which he who is not a prisoner of the addiction to products and services he has learned to consume falls victim to envy for those he cannot afford, dissolve it.
8. **Communality.** Before the possessive individualism that continues to affect our daily lives, we raise communality, as a condition of harmony in our living together, with full respect for liberty and the rights of natural and human persons.
9. **Remake the world.** To change the world, and all of its oppressive institutions is very difficult, next to impossible. It seems however viable to construct a new world that is economically feasible, socially just, and ecologically sensible. Those of us who have not let ourselves be restricted by forces and structures that seem unstoppable and pretend to determine everything are already doing it.
10. **Autonomy in exchange.** We resist the false choice between “free trade” and “protectionism”. One hands over power to the corporations, the other to the bureaucrats who often are at the service of the first. “Protectionism” does not protect the people. “Free Trade” does not respect our freedom. Exchanges have to

be controlled from our autonomy, so that the people themselves determine what they prefer.

11. **Socialization.** We resist equally “privatization” and “statization”. We are looking for socialization of goods and services, constructed on the basis of autonomy. It is insane and unjust to turn over social resources and public services to private voracity. Bureaucratic monopolies are not an effective or appropriate alternative. We rather put our trust in a decentralized and autonomous administration of general goods and services, with citizen participation.
12. **Service and Reciprocity.** We want the strengthening and articulation of the coalitions of the discontent with the dominant system. From them, we will widen our interactions, to learn from one another and to offer mutual solidarity, in the spirit of service and reciprocity defining us.
13. **Horizon and Transcendancy.** Our knowing wants to be wisdom. We are oriented towards being, rather than having. The same principle inspired our conversations and is at the center of all our attitudes, behavior and gazing. It is not a doctrinal or ideological principle. It is born from the heart, not the mind. Its name is spirituality.

Mexico City, December 9th, 2003

Source: *Estevá et al*, 2007.



Solidarity, unity and imagination are generating new hope that another food and agriculture are indeed possible. This is well captured in the La Vía Campesina's slogan "*Globalise the Struggle – Globalise Hope*".

However, in the face of the organised power of science, business and mainstream politics, the more diffuse—but networked power—of the growing food sovereignty movement is confronted with many interrelated challenges and constraints.

Overcoming the constraints to achieving food sovereignty partly depends on strengthening local organisations of food providers and on citizens reclaiming power over their lives. The next section of this book describes the importance of local organisations for the management and governance of food systems.



This is the web version of the introduction and first three chapters of a book to be published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Centre for Agroecology and Food Security (CAFS), and the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society (RCC) in 2014.

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The publication of this book has been made possible through the generous support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) of the Government of The Netherlands, the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Irish Aid, Oxfam-Novib (The Netherlands), The Christensen Fund, and the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society.

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Michel Pimbert (2009). Towards food sovereignty: reclaiming autonomous food systems. CAFS, IIED and RCC, London and Munich.

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Full references for this chapter will appear in the final publication

## References

All references cited here can be found at the end of the full book that will be published in winter 2014, *Towards food sovereignty: reclaiming autonomous food systems*. CAFS, IIED and RCC, London and Munich.