

Food Sovereignty

Brief outline of the basic concepts



SIVtro - VSF Italia

Food Sovereignty

Food Sovereignty is the right of individuals, peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.

Food Sovereignty –Brief outline of the basic concepts

Adapted from “Sovranità Alimentare – una nuova prospettiva su agricoltura e alimentazione”
by A.Dessi, M.F.Nonne, P.Nonne

English Translation: Silvia Forno

Cover image freely taken from the logo of “The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Forum
Parallel to the World Summit on Food Security 2009”

With the support of:

The European Commission
Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale del Mezzogiorno
Centro Internazionale Crocevia

Realized within the project “Promotion of peasant agriculture in southern countries: a key for the
struggle against poverty and for food security of future generations”

AP UE 210203 ED 2006

October 2009

Preamble

The Italian Committee for Food Sovereignty (CISA, Comitato Italiano per la Sovranità Alimentare) to date groups together more than 300 organizations of producers, Non Governmental and Civil Society Organizations, and local governments. In the rest of Europe, and all over the world, a general consensus is growing around the alternative model of development put forward by Food Sovereignty, as well as the participation to networks advocating and taking action on it. Such networks actively promote plenty of events, mobilizing citizens and bringing attention to a range of issues related to the quality of food, the condition of hungry and malnourished peoples, the loss of biodiversity and agro-biodiversity, food trade, food policies, peasants' rights, and the ethical and cultural value of food. Given the extent of the issues covered and endorsed by Food Sovereignty, and the abundance of considerations and publications emerging as a result of this, it is difficult to outline what Food Sovereignty is, and to offer an objective and clear overview of its common elements.

This work is an attempt to clarify the topic, starting from the analysis of the causes behind food crises. It introduces and describes the conceptual "pillars", the policies and the actions needed in order to fully achieve Food Sovereignty. The analysis is also placed in the context of the current reform process involving the United Nations, and the lively ongoing debate on the governance of the global food system.

Introduction

The concept of Food Sovereignty gained an unprecedented political relevance over the last years.

Years characterized by what has been defined as “food wars”, during which we observed – on the one hand – growing oil and food prices, growing profits of agro-business corporations and agrochemical and biotech multinational companies, growing speculation on agricultural inputs and outputs by brokerage companies; and – on the other hand – a growing multitude of hungry people, mostly living in rural areas of poor countries.

Statistics released by authoritative sources, such as FAO, and updated and objective studies, as the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), undoubtedly confirm the failure of many years of attempts to solve hunger and malnutrition; indeed the overall amount of malnourished people (notwithstanding relevant geographical exceptions and positive local trends) keeps on growing, whilst the number of people suffering from pathologies related to excessive and unbalanced nutrition is growing at the same time.

Given these data, it is no longer reasonable to see the issues at stake as independent of each other: it is wrong to blame irresponsible individual behaviours for obesity and diabetes, and the incompetence of local governments for the livelihoods of people suffering from malnutrition. In order to face these problems, it is essential to analyse the logics underpinning food production, transformation and trade at global level. It is useful to start again from the notion of “right to food” (to be updated in the light of the current situation) and approach the issue of food access and production taking into account also the social, economic and environmental impact of different producing systems.

Hence the approach to Food Sovereignty takes on a fundamental value. Several years of field experience by SIVtro and VSF Europe partners led us to endorse this view. We do recognize that the problems of local partners, and livestock keepers all over the world, have their roots in a range of issues which the struggle for Food Sovereignty embraces and faces successfully, also supported by the participation of the direct stakeholders: producers and their representatives, citizens holding governments to account and calling for a redefinition of the balance of power of international organizations dealing with food and agriculture (FAO, IFAD) and those in charge of trade and financial policies (WTO, WB, IMF).

Indeed food crises or “food wars” have multiple causes: not only the difficult access to food or lack of food in itself, but also the lack of wide-ranging and strategic programmes and policies aimed at supporting production systems – at present or in the future – based on multifunctional agriculture, the respect of local contexts and sustainability, and above all the sovereignty of peoples and nations to determine their systems of production and trade of agricultural products and food.

It follows that Food Sovereignty is a concept strictly linked to the right to food and the strategies put forward in order to grant such right in a multifaceted context, characterized by a strong interdependence of biological, environmental, technical, economic, social and cultural factors.

The concept of Food Sovereignty appears for the first time in the second half of the '90s. *La Via Campesina*, jointly with many other associations opposing neo-liberal policies imposed in all developing countries (and not only), identifies in the simplistic logics of profit and liberalization of agricultural markets the root-causes of a process leading to recurring food crises, including the

2006-2007 one. These crises are triggered by the growing dependence of entire populations on agricultural imports and food aid; by the reinforcement of industrial agriculture that threatens the conservation of the genetic, cultural and environmental resources of the planet; by landscape transformation in rural areas; by the eradication of small producers downgraded to a marginal role, often forced to migrate or to turn into agricultural workers for the agro-business; and by the insistence on systems of production that are unsustainable both for the peasant economy and the environment.

Food Sovereignty is a complex concept, whose definitions and implications are inherently dynamic. It builds on the analysis and integration of several factors, which are relevant in order to establish a fair system of food production and management, able to respect the sovereignty of its main actors: small farmers, associations of producers, indigenous communities, artisanal fishers, and also the whole community of food consumers, i.e. the world population at large.

Since the '90s, the concept of Food Sovereignty has been reinforced and enriched by several thoughts, statements and claims. It is gaining growing recognition as conceptual framework for plenty of Civil Society and Non Governmental Organizations, and for an increasing number of producers and their associations.

It is a framework, a political approach for the governance of food and agriculture that promotes a new model of rural and agricultural development, whose pillar is the respect for small farmers, pastoralists, fishers, and for the environment. It is a conceptual framework firmly opposing agricultural development policies fostered by the "green revolution", the WB and IMF, and trade policies promoted by the WTO. Such policies have always sustained the liberalization and global expansion of agricultural markets, the reinforcement of agro-business and the privatization of what is at the basis of food and agriculture: the genetic resources - thus breaking down the inner duality of the seed, which is at the same time factor of production and product, i.e. food.

Such conceptual framework grew stronger and wider to the extent that it can influence, in terms of proposals, development agencies and international organizations dealing with food and agriculture.

Since 1996 (when the concept was launched during the "World Food Summit" in Rome), Food Sovereignty has achieved attention and space for discussion even within the United Nations, thus entering the International Agenda. This is mainly due to the efforts of awareness-raising and coordination of social and civil society movements and Non Governmental Organizations, which actively engaged in networking and in the organization of several forums to promote the concept.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Voluntary Guidelines of the "Code of Conduct on the Human Right to Food" adopted by FAO in November 2004, and the final acts of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) in 2006.

It is clear that Food Sovereignty is no longer limited to the statements of social movements or brave representatives of the United Nations; instead, it is also endorsed at governmental and inter-governmental level as a fundamental reference in the approach to food and its production. Moreover, it has been included in the new Constitution of Nepal and mentioned in the agricultural policies of countries such as Mali, Bolivia and Ecuador. Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Venezuela, Saint Vincent and Grenada, Haiti, Panama, Guatemala, Mexico, Belize and the Dominican Republic) joined a meeting in May 2008 meaningfully called "Food sovereignty and security: food for life". In the final declaration, they encourage the adoption of policies supporting small and medium scale agriculture as a way to move forward after the deep food crisis experienced.

Lastly, and most importantly, the study carried out at global scale by IAASTD from 2004 to 2008 - undoubtedly authoritative and comprehensive - states in the final report: "In order to effectively

address development and sustainability goals, a radical change is needed in the scientific and technological approaches in agriculture and in the dedicated institutions and policies”; hence the need to acknowledge the role of “agricultural communities, family farms and peasants as producers and managers of ecosystems”. By doing so, it endorses the principles and guidelines of Food Sovereignty, and proves the legitimacy of the ideas expressed for more than twenty years by the advocates of this concept.

Why Food Sovereignty ?

Food Sovereignty has its roots in the work of a wide community of agronomists all over the world, thinkers, ecologists, activists, NGOs, and associations. They collected, interpreted and amplified the voice of millions of small peasants. They gave birth to an original and rich concept, producing ideas, arguments and studies. This concept has been building alternatives to the agricultural models and policies developed during most of the 1900s by governments, companies, international organizations and institutions – not only as a reaction to food crises. Indeed industrial agriculture (characterized by strong mechanization, extensive use of chemical inputs and modified seeds) has been first introduced in order to raise yields and profits of agricultural companies in rich countries.

Along with these policies, the principles of industrial development and economies of scale were adapted to agriculture, promising to bring to farms the same profitability of the best mechanical enterprises. At the same time, peasants and livestock keepers were being alienated from land, means of production and knowledge. The notions and skills of those who deal with land for their survival have been downgraded, while technology has been promoted as the driving force of agricultural development and, later on, the panacea for world hunger. In addition, the extensive use of high-yield seeds more suitable for strong mechanization, began to produce devastating effects on the vegetable germplasm. Actually the issue of the loss of agricultural biodiversity (i.e. of locally adapted seeds, the basis of food and agriculture itself) has been risen before the one of “natural” biodiversity by western scientists, agronomists in the research sector or in FAO itself (as Erna Bennett); these scientists started to note the progressive erosion of agricultural germplasm in the areas touched by the green revolution.

But the problems faced by Food Sovereignty are not limited to the conservation of species of interests to agriculture. Due to its complexity, this issue calls for multifaceted and complex answers. Conversely, the simplistic proposals advanced by the agro-business and advocates of neo-liberalism are surprising: their reductionist approach tends to simplify the issue to a balance of inputs and outputs, costs and benefits, markets and opportunities.

It would be interesting to track the evolution of Food Sovereignty along the Forums, global statements, meetings during which its main elements have been discussed, defined and established. However, in the attempt to sum it up, we will just mention the initial step and the most common definition so far. We will then analyse in details its implications.

Food Sovereignty is first enunciated in April '96, in a paper of the International Conference of Via Campesina that defines it as “the right of peoples to preserve and develop their own capacity to produce food, which is fundamental for the food security of the nation and communities, respecting cultural diversity and the variety of production methods”. It focuses on the right of small farmers to produce food, a right that is threatened in many countries by the international and national agricultural trade system.

Since 1996 the definition of Food Sovereignty has constantly been enriched by more and more elements, due to numerous exchanges, meetings, networking, and the dialogue among civil society, UN agencies and other institutional stakeholders.

There are still different interpretations, but this is not surprising: it is not easy to develop an alternative project involving individuals, global conventions and international organizations. Moreover, a project that respects and takes into account the claims of communities whose main resource is diversity – not only biological. *La Via Campesina*, for instance, groups together 149 peasant organizations from 56 nations of three continents. The concept in itself builds on a political discourse where *self-determination* is seen as the main strength of communities to seek

solutions to local problems. Being local communities and contexts characterized by a wide environmental, cultural, social, economic, agro-ecological diversity, their claims and perspectives are consequently rich and diversified.

Coordination and harmonization relied, and still rely, on the efforts of international networks of NGOs, associations and movements of farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers and indigenous peoples. Despite the extreme dispersion, the logistic and linguistic challenges, such networks engaged in very fruitful dialogues. They proved to be able to manage themselves, analyze the ongoing processes and their impacts on the rural world, family agriculture and hungry peoples. They also showed a strong determination to react.

Maybe surprisingly, the positions of NGOs, associations and movements, though starting from very different perspectives, have been converging over time thanks to dialogue and coordination: the definitions and discussions on the political model for Food Sovereignty are converging into a limited set of largely shared points.

In its most common definition, today “Food Sovereignty is the right of individuals, communities, peoples, countries to define their own agricultural, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, and to preserve the capacities to feed themselves and their societies”.

Main elements, areas of action and proposals for implementation of Food Sovereignty

In this section, we outline the main, most accepted and adopted concepts referring to Food Sovereignty, divided into: (i) main pillars and focus, (ii) axes of action, (iii) proposals for policy and programme implementation. We then compare the concept of Food Sovereignty with those of Right to Food and Food Security. With regards to the former, Food Sovereignty goes beyond the legal aspect; with regards to the latter, Food Sovereignty goes beyond the technical aspect: on the whole, Food Sovereignty is a political concept. Though Food Sovereignty has been acknowledged also beyond the boundaries of Civil Society Organizations and social movements, and the policies aimed at its implementation are more clearly defined, there is still a problem: the ways by which its advocates can formulate proposals for its achievement.

Concepts: the pillars of the framework

The main concepts underpinning Food Sovereignty build on the following fundamental elements:

- local agricultural production and consumption;
- access of small farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers and landless people to land, water, seeds, livestock and credit;
- right to food;
- right of small farmers to produce food and be included in policies on the sustainable use of resources;
- the right of consumers to decide what to consume, and to know how and by whom what they consume is produced;
- the right of countries to protect themselves from low prices caused by food and agricultural imports;
- the need for food and agricultural prices to be linked to the costs of production, and the removal of dumping practices;
- the participation of people to decision-making processes on agricultural policies;
- the recognition of women's rights as farmers/peasants who play a major role in agriculture in general and food production in particular;
- agro-ecology as a method to produce food, obtain sustainable means of subsistence, preserve the landscape and environmental integrity.

These priorities have been further developed in February 2007, during the World Forum held in Mali. The Nyéléni Declaration, among other things, states that:

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral, fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food Sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food Sovereignty

implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations”.

On this basis, the following pillars of Food Sovereignty have been unanimously identified:

1. Human nutrition as key element. Food Sovereignty gives emphasis – in agricultural, food, livestock and fishery policies – to the right to adequate, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples, communities, including those suffering from hunger, the under-employed, and those living in marginal and conflict areas. Food Sovereignty rejects the idea that food is a commodity, especially if in the hands of agro-business.

2. The recognition of the value of food producers. Food Sovereignty recognizes and supports the value of women and men, peasants, those who practice family and small/medium scale agriculture (livestock keepers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, forest peoples, indigenous communities), hired workers in agriculture and fishery, including the emigrants, and those who grow, collect and transform food. Food Sovereignty rejects those policies, actions and programmes that do not recognize their value and threaten their livelihoods and existence.

3. Local and localized food systems. Food Sovereignty encourages the interaction between producers and consumers, who should be at the centre of decision-making processes on food issues; it secures food producers from dumping and supports local markets; it protects consumers from low food quality, improper food aid and food contaminated by GMOs and other unhealthy elements. It opposes structural governmental policies, agreements and practices that rely on unsustainable and unfair international markets and give power to unaccountable corporations.

4. Mechanisms of local control. Food Sovereignty puts the control over resources – territories, lands, pastures, water, seeds, livestock, fishing – in the hands of local producers and respects their rights. They are able to manage and share such resources in a socially and ecologically sustainable way, preserving their diversity. It recognizes that local territories do not overlap with political boundaries and ensures the right of local communities to live on, and use, their territories; it encourages the positive interaction of food producers in different areas, territories and sectors, with the aim of contributing to the solution of internal conflicts or conflicts with national and local authorities. It rejects the legal privatisation of natural resources, trade deals and intellectual property rights regimes.

5. It produces knowledge, skills and means. Food Sovereignty encourages proper research systems that support local knowledge, skills and means. It is based on the skills and knowledge of food producers and their organizations that preserve, develop and manage local systems of collection and production, and transfer them to future generations. It builds on local technologies and knowledge. It rejects those technologies, as genetic engineering, that threaten such knowledge.

6. It works with nature. Food Sovereignty uses natural resources, within diversified agricultural systems, relying on agro-ecological and low-inputs methods of farming and production. These methods maximise the contribution of the ecosystem and improve resilience and adaptation, particularly in the context of climate change. Food Sovereignty rejects methods that hinder the beneficial function of the ecosystem, monocultures, intensive grazing, destroying fishing and other industrial production processes that damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

Axes of Action

The main elements of Food Sovereignty can be implemented throughout four axes of action (also defined pillars/areas of action) identified and endorsed by all organizations advocating for Food

Sovereignty even before the Nyéléni declaration. These build on the identification of the clear causes of underdevelopment and of those policies based on the current approach to development that caused - and are still causing – hunger, and hinder poverty reduction in rural areas.

They aim to support the struggle for the implementation of legal, technical and political (national and international) aspects in relation to:

- a. right to food;
- b. access to productive resources;
- c. agro-ecological model of production;
- d. trade and local markets.

a. Right to food. Right to food – now recognized as an individual right – should be promoted and implemented as central element of food policies aimed at ending the violation of such right, and fostering the progressive eradication of hunger and undernutrition.

b. Access to productive resources. Ensuring that small farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers and indigenous communities have access to resources. Promoting the fair distribution of the benefits derived by the sustainable use of their land, water and other natural resources used for agriculture and nutrition. In order to ensure access to resources, a genuine agrarian reform is needed: this should distribute lands to landless people, facilitate control over the land (especially by women) and return territories to indigenous peoples. Access to genetic resources must be free and enduring, with no intellectual property restrictions on seeds, livestock breeds and agricultural biodiversity at large; the integrity of genetic resources should not be compromised by the spread of GMOs and biotechnologies.

c. Agro-ecological model of production. Promoting – by means of development and research policies - models of food production for small farmers and communities based on agro-ecology, and able to ensure food security especially for people more vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition, through the sustainable management of agro-ecosystems aimed at food production for local markets. Agro-ecology is recognized and promoted by many NGOs and CSOs as an alternative approach, and the effective answer, to the pressing need for food and livelihood security, particularly – but not uniquely – for rural communities all over the world living in complex, diversified and risk-prone environments with limited available resources.

d. Trade and local markets. Promoting fair trade policies that allow communities and countries more vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition to produce adequate amounts of healthy and safe food; and that act as counter-force to the current agricultural trade system based on subsidies to exports, artificial low prices, food dumping.

With respect to the last point, everybody agrees on removing the intrusion of WTO in food and agricultural trade policies; and on shaping new policies based on self-determination and self-identification by communities of the solutions more appropriate, environmentally and culturally, to local contexts.

Policies for implementation

Due to its comprehensive nature, any strategy aimed at achieving Food Sovereignty is inherently complex. Food Sovereignty is not simply an approach to change a single policy of a single international regime: it is instead a model to change the overall framework of world agricultural policies. Moreover, the proposals mentioned here could not be easily implemented within the current trade and agricultural regime; they assume a change in the missions of the main bodies and in the goals of international treaties and agreements. That's the reason why Food Sovereignty also advocates for the definition of new institutional models.

Among the reports and statements produced over time, it is possible to identify at least six concrete policy proposals for the implementation and achievement of Food Sovereignty:

1) Setting and adopting the Code of Conduct on Human Right to Food, to govern the actions of the actors engaged in the achievement of such right, including national and international bodies, and private actors as transnational corporations. Five years after the World Food Summit, FAO and its members developed voluntary guidelines for the progressive implementation of the right to adequate food. Civil society's demands for the adoption of the code of conduct have been very influential in fostering the process: the voluntary guidelines of 2003 have been finally adopted by FAO in November 2004.

2) Setting and adopting an International Convention on Food Sovereignty that substitutes the current Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and the related norms of other WTO agreements. These include the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Property Rights (TRIPs), the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement, the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. The Convention should be aimed at implementing – within an international policy framework – Food Sovereignty and fundamental human rights to a healthy and safe nutrition, full and decent rural employment, labor rights and social protection, and to a healthy, rich and diversified environment. It should also set new trade rules for food and agricultural products. Such convention has been mentioned throughout many meetings, as for instance in Thailand in October 2003, and in “People's project – Convention on Food Sovereignty” in July 2004.

3) Creating a World Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, to assess the impacts of trade liberalization on Food Sovereignty and Security, and develop proposals for change. These would include the agreements and rules set by WTO and other international and regional trade regimes, and the economic policies supported by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). The commission should involve and be governed by the representatives of different social and cultural groups, movements of citizens, professional institutions, democratically elected representatives and appropriate multilateral institutions.

4) Reforming and strengthening UN Agencies, so that they are actively engaged in the protection of fundamental rights of every person. Setting the conditions for the UN to be a suitable Forum to develop and negotiate the rules for sustainable production and fair trade. The UN and its agencies have already developed some major Conventions and Treaties, as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (TIRFAA or ITPGR) that FAO formulated according to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

5) Creating an Independent Dispute Settlement Mechanism, integrated within an International Court of Justice, particularly targeted at preventing dumping and, for instance, the presence of GMOs in food aid.

6) Setting an International Treaty on Small Farmers' Rights, legally binding, that define the rights of peasants on assets, resources and legal protections they need to exercise their right to produce. The treaty should be designed taking as reference the UN framework for Human Rights, and be linked to already existing UN conventions. A proposal for the elaboration of an “International Peasant Rights Convention” is currently under discussion in the global network of *La Via Campesina*. A first draft has already been designed by peasant organizations in Indonesia.

Food Sovereignty, Right to Food and Food Security

Within the debate on hunger and malnutrition and on the identification of strategies aimed at their eradication, Food Sovereignty is often mentioned alongside Right to Food and Food Security. As far as the definition and the search for solutions to hunger are concerned, it is important to understand whether these concepts complement each other, or whether they reflect different and conflicting approaches to the same problem.

Food Sovereignty and Right to Food

The Right to Food has been acknowledged for the first time in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art.258); it has then been included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, which came into force in 1976 (art.119) and recognized the right to be free from hunger. It finally gains further relevance with the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food by FAO in 2004: the guidelines provided clear guidance on actions to be taken for the right to food to become reality.

The right to food is therefore an integral component of human rights. As such, it is a legal concept that differs from Food Sovereignty, which is conversely a political concept.

As a human right, it implies that an individual can require the State or the communities of states to respect, protect and fulfil the need for access to food that is adequate and of decent quality. The right to food provides for individual entitlements and related state obligations, which are to be enshrined in national and international laws.

The right to adequate food stands as legal reference, providing the legal standards for those policies and measures each State adopts in order to grant access to adequate food.

The normative content of the right to adequate food has been defined by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the General Comment N.12 (GC12): "The right for every man, woman and child [...] to have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or to the means for achieving it, in ways consistent with human dignity".

Being the right to food a universal right, every person should be able at all times to have access to food or the means to obtain it: such definition is based on the assumption that hunger and malnutrition are caused not simply by lack of food, but by poverty, income inequalities, lack of access to health assistance, education, work, clean water. This is because human rights are interconnected and interdependent. Under this approach, men, women and children become *subjects* entitled to rights, rather than *objects* of assistance. States are asked to respect people's access to food with no discrimination, and to defend it from violations by corporations or international bodies.

The right to food is also the right of those who produce it: it would be meaningless if not complemented by the economic and social vitality of a multifaceted and respected peasant world. Food production is a human activity aimed at satisfying a basic need and a fundamental right: being it embedded in the ecological context and ensuring everybody's living, it inherently contributes to the common interest. In every country agricultural producers have an income significantly lower than urban workers have. "Hence" as stated by Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur for the right to food, "in order to achieve the right to food, there is no alternative to strengthening the agricultural sector, putting emphasis on small-scale farmers".

The right to food focuses on access to resources that generate income and produce food, on States' duties and on the right of people to take action against States if they do not respect, defend and satisfy their access to adequate food.

Food Sovereignty too is about access to food and resources, but in addition it puts emphasis on the control over these resources. It starts from an approach based on individual and community rights (individuals, communities, peoples and countries) to define their own agricultural, fishing, land and food policies. It also includes the right of small farmers, pastoralists and artisanal fishers to have access to resources and fair markets.

Olivier De Schutter himself, in the report “Right to food and to a sustainable global food system” presented in May 2009 during the 17th session of UN Commission on Sustainable Development, stated that “in order for agricultural development to be sustainable, it is fundamental to focus on the right to food. That is the reason why it is necessary to move towards a model in which the right to adequate food is considered a human right.

The right to food approach advocates for the need to focus on the most vulnerable people; to take into consideration not only the levels of production, but also the impacts that different food production systems have on the right to food; and to set a mechanism that strengthen participation in decision-making processes related to food and agriculture”.

Moreover, “it is necessary to guarantee and protect access and control over land for small farmers, as an essential element for the achievement of the right to food; to promote agrarian reforms for their central role in the realization of human rights, food security and sustainable agriculture; and to face the issue of land- grab by big corporations”.

“The progressive realization of the right to food”, De Schutter goes on, “is not a matter of increasing the budget devoted to agricultural development. It also implies the need to choose which agricultural model should be promoted, to understand the different impacts and benefits they produce on different groups”. He underlines that “increases in agricultural production should go alongside increases in the income of the poorest, particularly small farmers, and move towards system of production that do not contribute to climate change”. We need a model to “help the world to feed itself” rather than to “feed the world”.

The concepts underlined by the Special Rapporteur mirror those proposed by the Food Sovereignty framework: Agrarian Reform, Access to Land, Sustainable Agricultural Development – and express a model for human rights implementation based on this.

Food Sovereignty and Food Security

“If the population of a country must depend for their next meal on the vagaries and price swings of the global economy, on the good will of a superpower not to use food as a weapon, or on the unpredictability and high cost of long-distance shipping, then the country is not secure, neither in the sense of national security, nor in the sense of food security”.

Food Security, whose first definition has been adopted during the WFS in 1996, “exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

The concept of Food Security, developed throughout UN Agencies working on food and agriculture, was initially based on the availability at global level of food and food stocks; later on, on the access to exceeding products (imports) for countries poor of food resources. It soon became clear that, in order to guarantee adequate amounts of food, measures should have been taken also at national level.

The notion of national Food Security was then introduced by FAO Plan of Action for Food Security in 1979: it described the ways to achieve better food distribution at national level. The following aspects were discussed: the management of grain stocks, import and export quotas, food aid, methods to improve agricultural production and irrigation. The main focus was on the

availability of sufficient food in local markets and on the ratio population/food availability. Later on, the role of these production-oriented policies in the eradication of hunger and malnutrition started to be questioned. With “Poverty and Famines” in 1981, Amartya Sen brings into the debate new concepts, by introducing the notion of *entitlements* of individuals and groups to access food.

The debate on Food Security gradually shifted from the global availability of food, to individual access to food, till – since the second half of the ‘80s – the notion of individual and household food security.

Over time, the concept of Food Security became more and more comprehensive to the extent that it included in its definition the same fundamentals of the right to food: physical, economic, social, and physiological access at national and local level; food quality and safety; risk of losing access.

Notwithstanding these improvements, the original meaning of Food Security - as general availability of food at national and global level – is still adopted by many international agencies. For instance, in the Human Development Report 2000 UNDP measures Food Security by means of indicators such as the national average of food supplies in terms of energy intake, proteins, fats, food production, imports and food aid. The debate inside FAO and other UN Agencies is becoming more and more oriented towards the “access dimension”, especially through the work of the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information Mapping System (FIVIMS). However, many still focus on food availability at national and global level, including in particular those advocating for the introduction of new technologies to boost yields and productivity.

The notion of Food Security is still focused on general, individual and family access to food by means of purchasing it, hence by means of access to market, food production and availability, imports and food aid. Consequently, it is still focused on dependency.

Food Sovereignty focuses on access and control over resources, and particularly defends the importance of family farming and peasant production to satisfy food needs beyond markets. It defends the importance of agrarian reforms for the entire society, for the availability of healthy, accessible and culturally appropriate food, and for social justice. It supports the social and multifunctional role of agriculture. Food Sovereignty is not against trade in itself, rather it opposes the current international trade practices based on trade liberalization and structural adjustment programmes imposed by international institutions, which threaten small producers and prevent countries to shape and implement independent food policies in their territories. While Food Security consists of a set of objectives for food policies, Food Sovereignty claims to be an alternative to the dominant development model based on international trade, the liberalization of agriculture, and industrial food and agricultural production.

It embraces different approaches - not only technical aspects as Food Security does – to face hunger and malnutrition, promote rural development, environmental integrity and sustainable means of subsistence. It puts emphasis on the self-determination of food and agricultural policies that must respect and support the interests and needs of small farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, and be ecologically, socially and culturally appropriate to the specific local contexts in which they are implemented.

Conclusions - *Our Future is in the hands, and in the mouth, of everybody.*

The proposals for the implementation of Food Sovereignty, nowadays relevant more than ever, assume the engagement of all citizens: producers, consumers, and national, European, international decision-makers of rural and agricultural policies.

Indeed, though we recognize the global dimension of the problem and the relevant role played by economic powers and national and international policies, we believe that people do have a great potential for change. Such potential is not only expressed by social activism, which inspired and supported Food Sovereignty since its beginnings. It also relies on the critical analysis and freedom of choice of any individual as citizen, member of a community and a market within which any consumption choice, as well as any food production and transformation process, is an act of democracy and power.

Consumers should pay more attention to what they eat, with regard to the distance of the place of production, farming techniques, and the respect or violation of human rights along the process of food production. They should ask who benefits from buying food, keeping in mind that eating is an agricultural and political act. Priority should be given to the purchase of local products sold in the so-called neighbourhood markets, and to establish closer relationships between producers and consumers.

Consumers should orient their food choices to products more linked to the land where they live, but also be careful not to consider territoriality as the only meaningful element for a “fair” nutrition. As mentioned by L. Colombo and A. Onorati “Territoriality is meaningless if it is not supported by a sustainable and socially just agricultural system. We are not advocating for autarchy or segregation, strict localism or further confrontation “organic vs. local” as written by Time in 2007. We are rather asking for the integration of agro-ecological sustainability, agro-livestock balance, the recognition of the value of work, nutritional quality, energy savings along the food chain, cuts to greenhouse gases emissions – towards recovering agrarian systems and the legitimacy (also for tax-payers) of an agricultural policy able to support the primary sector. What matters more in the choice for food and policies is the relation between the social and environmental dimensions, rather than local production in itself”.

In turn producers should always respect the agro-ecological principles of food production, be able and willing to communicate the meaning of their work to consumers, and opt for direct trade systems with fewer middlemen. By doing so, they could increase their independence in production, management and market choices, and engage in a relationship with consumers based on trust and solidarity.

Decision-makers themselves, at all levels, should give more emphasis to the inclusion of small and medium farmers in national, European and international development programmes. In the light of this, also the CAP – strongly opposed by economists and liberalists for causing trade distortions – should be changed, instead of dismantled. Public aid for agriculture should not disappear, but be re-oriented towards agricultural models that are sustainable, and socially and economically just. Indeed during the last years the CAP, because of the support mainly given to big farms or entire agro-industrial corporate divisions, has contributed to the disappearance of small and medium farms.

Finally, UN Agencies should take again control over the right to decide on Food Sovereignty, food governance, food security and rural development beyond the logics imposed by WTO, IMF and the WB – and provide more space for discussion with civil society.

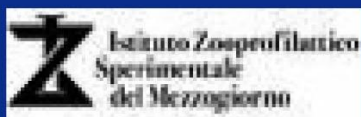


SIVtro-VSF I ONLUS
Società Italiana di Veterinaria e Zootecnia
Tropicale per la cooperazione internazionale
Veterinari Senza Frontiere Italia



www.veterinarisenzafrontiere.it
www.agrobiovet.it

Supported by:



*Istituto Zooprofilattico
Sperimentale
del Mezzogiorno*



*Centro Internazionale
Crocevia*



*Commissione
Europea*