



3shloy Faje M. Cabanlig



editorial

## kids and food sovereignty

We are aware that to achieving a world where peoples' food sovereignty is a reality demands crucial discussions about food systems, access to and control over natural resources, political and legal debates on gender and on seeds, as well as social struggles and mobilization. But one essential element among these – and progressively gaining more attention – is the role of children.

The future of the struggles for the realization of food sovereignty and the right to food depends on how our children are aware of the challenges regarding how we produce our food, by whom and for whom it is produced. Instead of perceiving children as a market niche, as big food companies have been, we see the youngest generations as the foundation for transforming our food systems. The examples presented in this edition show us how this has been happening all around the world.

Many children also shared drawings and testimonies with us, willing to tell us directly about their perceptions and experiences. These many drawings, pictures and testimonies from children from Ecuador, the Philippines, Colombia and Spain, provide us with inspiration and hope for peoples' struggles for their right to food and food sovereignty.

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## who we are

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

Organisations involved: AFSA, Development Fund, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, More and Better Network, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, TNI, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People.

now is time for  
food sovereignty !

## Box 1

### Fighting against the impact of “Big Food” advertising on children in Colombia

Children have been seen as a lucrative market niche for big food companies responsible for producing ultra-processed edible products, i.e. those with high concentration of sugar, salt and fat. Such products and also sweetened drinks have been one of the main reasons for the growing numbers of diabetes and obesity among children and teenagers around the world. In Colombia, 15.7% of the children aged 5-17 years are overweight; the rates in some provinces such as San Andres Islands are close to 30% putting close to similar rates as Mexico, the country known for having the highest rates of child obesity in the world.

The obesity pandemic among children has expanded at a very fast pace in Colombia: companies see children and teenagers as main consumers of nutrient-poor products. 96% of all advertisement targeted to children in one of Colombian major TV channels was on junk food in a sample done in 2012. Corporations target young audiences through aggressive advertising campaigns, especially via television, the internet and billboards close to schools.

The Colombian parents association “Red Papaz” and FIAN Colombia in cooperation with Educar Consumidores, Vital Strategies and Global Health Advocacy Incubator have therefore developed a broad campaign in the country called “Do not eat more lies; do not give them to your children”. This campaign highlights 1) that children are not just consumers but first and foremost rights holders under special protection in the Colombian constitution; 2) that the obesity pandemic is not about wrong individual life-style choices but rather the result of systemic choices favoring a corporate diet. In this sense, the campaign urges the Colombian state to mandatorily ban advertisement of junk food for children and to transform the existing agro-food system towards agro-ecology and food sovereignty.

## in the spotlight

### The place of child nutrition in food sovereignty

In our political work to raise awareness, educate and mobilize for food sovereignty, what importance do we attach to feeding our daughters and sons around us? Is this a minor issue, of interest only to mothers? Below are some thoughts on why the topic of child nutrition and the active participation, in their own right, of children in our movement is vital for the future of food sovereignty.

### From malnutrition to childhood obesity - what is the dominant discourse?

The public discourse on nutrition and childhood has been dominated by a medical-scientific approach: for decades, the main concern has been undernutrition, so the debate has centered mainly on anthropometric measures such as statistics about weight index by height and age or vitamin deficiency. Recently, increasing rates of global obesity and the overweight have started attracting public attention. FAO's latest report on The State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) states that although malnutrition rates continue to decline, the obesity rate continues to rise. The issue of childhood obesity is therefore likely to become a priority issue on the policy agenda of international agencies.

Obese and overweight children and adults were often seen as problems of high-income countries. However, the prevalence of these disorders is growing in low and middle-income countries, mainly in urban areas. In Africa, the number of overweight and obese girls has doubled from 5.4 million in 1990 to 10.6 million in 2014. In 2014, about half of all overweight girls were from Asia, while in Mexico it is estimated that about 30 per cent of girls are overweight.

What factors explain this pandemic? There are different approaches. On the one hand, international institutions and agencies propagate an individualistic and moralist approach that subtly blames families for not feeding children properly and letting them watch television or the Internet all day long instead of playing sports. According to this approach, the urban lifestyle, with its specific organization of the day, its types of work and its social relations, has changed “traditional” (read “healthy”) dietary habits and replaced them with more “modern” habits, generated by so-called development. The solution proposed by this approach is to better inform and educate consumers so that they make healthier food choices in the supermarkets and encourage them to exercise.

### The geopolitics of the “Western” regime

Obviously, this approach does not question the historical, political, socio-economic and cultural determinants that determine the type of food produced, nor the factors that shape the dietary habits of communities. It is an approach that ignores power relations, oppression and discrimination. It does not ask who makes the decisions and how the urban or “western” diet was imposed on the whole world, a diet rich in fats, sugars, refined carbohydrates, meat and animal products but low in vegetables, legumes and coarse grains. The increase in consumption of these products is closely linked to the agricultural policies of the world's major agricultural powers. These policies introduced a series of incentives (production subsidies, public research, export subsidies), which led to a concentration of production on basic cereals (wheat, maize, rice) and oilseeds. On the other hand, the liberalization of trade in agri-food products and fisheries, as well as the promotion of foreign investment in the entire food chain, have played a central role in the expansion of the role of transnational corporations throughout the food chain.

This global food system made it possible for the diet of “junk food” or highly processed edible foods - such as french fries, refined flour pasta, hamburgers and sweetened beverages - to spread so rapidly around the world.

The “Western” diet has not only imposed itself through physical factors such as geopolitics and economics. It has also relied on a cultural superstructure that allowed it to change attitudes and thus change dietary and cultural habits in order to align them with the goals of the agro-industrial food system. All you need to do is look at the aggressive advertisements of big companies whose aim is to attract the attention of children and young people in order to train their tastes and eating habits from an early age. The table below on the situation in Colombia illustrates this.

## School canteens and peasant agriculture

So far, the main meeting point between child nutrition and food sovereignty has been school canteens and public policies to promote peasant agriculture. Public school feeding programs are part of social policy in several countries around the world. Although these programs have shown to have a positive effect on both regular school attendance and improvement in nutritional status, coverage remains relatively low and is estimated at 15% of the child population. Countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa have important school feeding programs. In the case of Brazil, public school feeding policy aims to guarantee the right of pupils to a healthy diet and, for this reason, has been designed as part of the public policy to encourage local peasant agriculture by establishing a compulsory quota for the provision of at least 30 per cent of food from peasant agriculture to each school. Similar systems exist at the municipal level in Europe and the United States. See below the experience on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia.

## The transcendental importance of child nutrition

A healthy and nutritious diet is essential for the healthy development and growth of children during pregnancy. It is perhaps at this stage of human life that food is most important: not only does it lay the foundations for all subsequent physical and spiritual development, but it gives taste, aroma, flavour, colour and texture to the deepest bonds that connect us, through food, to our families and communities, and to our homeland.

Despite this transcendental importance, the movement for food sovereignty has given little thought to the issue of child nutrition. Is it because this topic is perceived as not being part of the traditional “male” sphere of power but rather related to the spaces associated with femininity and reproduction/childcare?

The fact is that major institutions and health professionals are defining the interpretation of this dimension of food. More recently, food and nutrition has become the focus of major corporate nutrition initiatives such as those of the Gates Foundation.

Several questions then arise: what is our understanding of child nutrition from a food sovereignty perspective? How do we build this perspective in dialogue with the children themselves, but also the teachers, cooks, farmers, vendors, midwives, health educators and others in charge of our food and our community health practices? How can we achieve a fair distribution of tasks and time devoted to reproductive care between mothers and fathers so as to feed our children in a healthy and nutritious way? Within our movement, it is time to give child nutrition the importance it deserves.

## Box 2

### Children and fishing, in Katosi community

*“Though Katosi landing site in Mukono district central Uganda has grown into a commercial landing site handling fish for export, the volume of activities at the landing site has declined over the years. Images of a very lively and busy trading centre when we were children are so vivid in my mind. The sunrise off the lakeshore gave it a golden look. Between 9- 12 in the morning, the place would get busier with boats landing fish, and women processors and traders from all over the country would come to the landing site to buy fish. My mother was entitled to fish from her two fishermen sons in-law daily. Fish was our daily food, eaten in all forms, shapes and sizes as the whole village would be filled with the aroma of smoking fish in the evening.”*  
Margaret Nakato, Coordinator Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), and Executive Director WFF.

The recently concluded baseline study by KWDT in fishing communities reveals that children constitute more than 54% of the entire population in fishing communities (KWDT Baseline report for project inception, 2017). Access to adequate fish for consumption at household level is essential to meet the dietary requirements of children. However, reduced access to fishing grounds and fisheries resources, coupled with fish export has greatly reduced fish consumption by children, as much as adults (if not more).

During an interview with one of the women in Nangoma Landing site she narrated: *“If your husband is not a fisherman, you cannot eat fish these days. And even when he is a fisherman, sometimes he cannot get fish for selling and again fish for eating at home”.*

KWDT has actively engaged women and children in development activities and enhancing their role in restoring the fish stocks as well as reducing pressure on the fisheries sector by supporting women into diverse income generating activities. The best way to ensure children’s right to fish consumption is through ensuring access to fish for women and the local communities.

## Testimonies from children belonging to food producer's communities

### COLOMBIA

# 1

My name is Juan Simón Briceño Ávila and I'm 7 years old. I come from a town called Barinitas in Venezuela. Now we live in a hamlet called Brasil in Viotá, Cundinamarca, Colombia. We live in the country and I like living here, because I'm free to walk and play. My favourite game is boy superheroes, and I play football with my school friends. My favourite dish is egg salad, with lettuce and carrot. The eggs come from some chickens that we have in the coop behind our house. The lettuces come from seeds that we plant in our vegetable patch, and the carrots come from seeds that we also plant in our vegetable patch. The lettuces are ready to be picked when they're big and have many leaves, and the carrots are ready when they have big leaves and the stem is sticking out (the neck of the carrot). I like this salad because I know how to make it, but how I make it is a secret. When it comes to household tasks, I like to give the corn to the hens, although sometimes when I go to collect the eggs I drop them, and sometimes they break. I also feed the rabbits. We have two rabbits: Ramona and Pepe. Ramona is sweet-natured but Pepe doesn't like being cuddled. They really like the leaves from a plant that's called Yellow Dock, but there's another plant that we don't give them because it's bad for them. Its leaves are wrinkled and dark green. I also plant sweet corn and beans with my mum. These are both multicoloured, like a rainbow, and I plant potatoes with my dad and little brother Martin. We like planting lots of things so we always have different things to eat.

### SPAIN

# 2

My name is Salome Schranz Moreno and I'm 12 years old. I go to the Doce Olivos school in Órgiva, La Alpujarra (Andalucía). My family and our friends go to an allotment to work on a collective vegetable patch project. A few days ago we went there for a specific reason: some weeds had grown in the allotment that stopped us from planting. So we decided to do a "torna peón"\* there to speed things up. I put myself in charge of the kids because they're all between the ages of 3 and 6 years old, and I'm 12. While the mums and dads got to work getting rid of the bad weeds, I looked after the little ones. First I told them some stories and then we went to a nearby park. We played, laughed and had fun. Eventually it was dinner time. We went back to the allotment to go for dinner. There was omelette and every kind of vegetable-based thing to eat. We ate, and we enjoyed it. We also go to that allotment to do other things, like sowing and planting. My mum, my dad, Yvon and Raúl, who are two friends of ours, my brother and I, we all went there to harvest olives, including my brother who's 3 years old. When we harvest, we do it from 10am until 5 or 6pm. From 10 to 10.30am we prepare the netting, from 10.30 till 1.30pm we harvest, from 1.30 to 2.30pm we rest and have lunch, and finally from 3pm to 5 or 6pm we carry on harvesting. After a few days we take the olives to the press and then we share out the oil.

*\*El torna peón is: when someone offers to help a friend in their allotment or farm, and after the person has been helped, they in turn help their companion.*

### PHILIPPINES

# 3

Elsa Novo, president of the NKP (Aeta Womens Federation) and Fernando Luis, area manager of Peoples Development Institute (PDI) conducted an interview based on three questions (1) What are your favorite dishes; 2) What tasks in food production do you like most?; 3) What are your favorite games and places to play and have fun?) with 10 Aeta indigenous kids in Zambales participating, ages ranging from 7 to 13 with 5 males and 5 females respectively.

From the group, Miss Elsa Novo, president of the Women Federation of the Aeta Indigenous People in Eastern Barangay of Mt. Pinatubo, Municipality of Botolan facilitated the workshop on drawings, while Fernando Luis noted the answers during the interview. Of the ten kids, six of them like Filipino meat dishes like sinigang pork, pork adobo and chicken adobo while the other four like fruits and Filipino vegetables dishes like pinakbet, kare-kare and others.

On the second question regarding agricultural activities, four of them like planting vegetables, root crops and legumes, two like watering the plants and the other two kids like weeding, but one Aeta child likes plowing and the other one likes to do fallow work.

On the question of games, three of them like basketball and badminton, and 7 Aeta kids like to do traditional games such as hide and seek and Chinese garter.

## Voice 4 - Experience from India: Breastfeeding and food sovereignty

Dr. JP Dadhich MD, FNNF - Director Technical of BPNI and member of IBFAN Global Council, India

The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding for two years or beyond along with appropriate complementary feeding after six months. Breastfeeding is a sustainable and sovereign method of providing food and nutrition to infants and young children, which is critical to the survival, health, and development of children as well as health of their mothers. In India, about 25 million babies are born each year out of which only 41.6% infants are breastfed within one hour of birth. Moreover, only 54.9 infants under age 6 months are exclusively breastfed and only 67.5% children continue breastfeeding at age 20-23 months<sup>1</sup>. It means, a large proportion of children below 2 years are deprived of their right to have a sovereign method of feeding and are dependent on commercially manufactured and marketed products. This is more critical in infants below 6 months for whom breastmilk is the only recommended food.

The underlying reason for the dismal status of breastfeeding practices is a very slow action over a decade on various policies and programmes on infant and young child feeding. This is evident from the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi<sup>2</sup>) report, which reflects there is a need to effectively implement the law to protect breastfeeding (IMS Act<sup>3</sup>), universalize maternity protection, provide access to breastfeeding counseling services by trained and skilled personnel to all pregnant and lactating mothers including during special circumstances like emergencies and HIV and effective monitoring and evaluation of breastfeeding programmes.

1 - <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/pdf/NFHS4/India.pdf> and <https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition/infant-and-young-child-feeding/>

2 - <http://www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/GenerateReports/report/WBTi-India-Report-2015.pdf>

3 - The Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 as Amended in 2003.

# Box 3 "Sem-Terrinha": Brazilian landless workers' movement, children and food sovereignty

Founded 34 years ago, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) is organized around three main objectives: Struggles for land, agrarian reform and for socialism. We are organized on several fronts; namely production, health, youth, culture, education and human rights.

The participation of our children, the so-called "Sem-Terrinha" (Landless Children), within the organization has been present since the beginning in the first occupations, because we believe everyone should be involved in the collective struggles.

This conception led MST to develop over time activities with our children as protagonists. Some examples are: children's "cirandas" (pedagogical spaces for development and care); gatherings of the "Sem-Terrinha", the Journey of Struggles for rural schools, as well as publications such as the "Sem-Terrinha" newspaper and the "Sem Terrinha" Magazine.

Our most recent experience with the "Sem Terrinha" has been the Cultural Journey: entitled "Healthy Eating: A Right of All", this Journey has taken place since 2015 and is at the heart of the debate on Popular Agrarian Reform. It involves children and adolescents in rural schools and encampment schools throughout the country. The main objectives of the Journey are:

1. To strengthen and disseminate different experiences from different regions on healthy eating and its relation with Popular Agrarian Reform;
2. To work together with families on the issue of food and food production in both settlements and encampments;
3. To contribute to the food education of landless families and to the general struggle for the right to adequate food free of

- pesticides;
4. To strengthen initiatives to reorganize school canteens;
5. To study and debate the relations between healthy eating, food sovereignty, agroecology, peasant agriculture and Popular Agrarian Reform;
6. To introduce, in elementary schools, the debate on agroecology and on practices of ecological agriculture;
7. To resume the debate on how the link between education, socially productive work and educational content needs to be guaranteed.

During the Journey hundreds of activities were carried out throughout the country - specific studies in schools on eating habits and food history, understanding what is produced in settlements and research on agro-eco-systems, workshops related to local cooking, field practices and agroecology experiences.

The founding elements of MST's struggles were also present during the activities of the Journey, i.e., there were theatrical interventions, awareness campaigns, public hearings, marches seeking to denounce the use of pesticides and of transgenic seeds, as well as the monopoly and food standardization that has been imposed by transnational corporations and agribusiness.

During the Journey itself, substantial changes took place in the schools where the debate was promoted, abolishing the use of soft drinks and processed foods from school meals, introducing agroecological food produced in the settlements, starting vegetable gardens to supply schools and initiating a native seed bank.

Educate for an understanding that eating is a political act! This is a great challenge that motivates our struggles! Fight and build a Popular Land Reform!



## Box 4 “SATU PO IMPARAI\*” - Environmental and food rural education project

The project was founded in 2007 in Sardinia (Italy) to bring the school world closer to the rural one while valuing the multifunctional role of farms. For the farms it also aimed to enhance their role in passing on the knowledge, heritage and flavours of local food production while highlighting environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The three principal actions are: school walks on educational farms, development of networks of educational farms and the School Canteen Actions, which we will discuss here.

Stakeholders in this action are the Province of the Medio Campidano, The Regional Agency of Laore Sardinia, the local health office, the schools, the farms, the managers of the school canteens and relevant associations that established a working group in 2011 with the following work programme:

1. Analysis of the actual situation of school canteens;
2. Development of a public tendering document for quality, 0km sustainable school meals;
3. Distribution of the tendering document to local councils, monitoring of the school canteen service according to the document and experimentation with new practices.

The Tendering document was developed in June of 2011 and sent to the 24 local councils in the province who provide school canteen

services. The document contained the following proposals:

1. 70% of produce should be certified quality (Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, Organic), traditional, local and with a short supply chain, of which 30% should be organic;
2. Snack foods should be provided from local products;
3. A food education plan should be developed;
4. Other elements of environmental sustainability: water networks, disposable dishware and cutlery should be biodegradable and compostable, ecological detergents and soaps, energy-saving appliances, waste management.

The tender document was adapted in 2011 by three councils and through 2012 and 2013 was adopted by the majority of the rest. In light of subsequent monitoring and recognition received we can say that the project (about which a publication came out in 2015) obtained its objectives with a margin well beyond its best expectations.

The project has given food a “social” value, stimulating positive community relationships and built consciousness and awareness between producers and consumers. It has also opened up a broader discussion about “food education”, equality (equal and quality school food for all), as well as Food Sovereignty.

*\* Learning from the countryside*



## to read, listen, watch and share

### Publications

- Campaign for the regulation of junk food advertising towards children in Colombia: [www.nocomasmentiras.org/nuestra-campana/](http://www.nocomasmentiras.org/nuestra-campana/)
- “Protecting Environmental Child Rights”, terre des hommes: [www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/tdh\\_Environmental-Child-Rights\\_2012-11-final.pdf](http://www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/tdh_Environmental-Child-Rights_2012-11-final.pdf)

- Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child – “Children’s Rights and the Environment”: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/HR-Bodies/CRC/Discussions/2016/DGDoutcomereport-May2017.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HR-Bodies/CRC/Discussions/2016/DGDoutcomereport-May2017.pdf)

### Video

- Campaign in Colombia demanding protection of children against junk food’s publicity (in Spanish): [www.youtube.com/channel/UCQ\\_IPLVAEJ7EAd9I6NlfgoQ](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQ_IPLVAEJ7EAd9I6NlfgoQ)

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