

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



DEMOCRATIC
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editorial

nyéléni process: towards a global forum of food sovereignty

Under the eye of Nyéléni, an African woman who defied discriminatory regulations and burned with creativity and agricultural progress, we will find the energy to transform the right to food sovereignty into a beacon for the construction of another world. [Women's declaration on food sovereignty]

As the world lurches from one crisis to another, Nyéléni symbolizes the convergence of our struggles and commitments to build a world free of greed, hunger, exploitation, extractivism, misogyny, racism, discrimination, and violence. Since 2007, Nyéléni has been a space where we meet in order to build collective strategies to advance food sovereignty, rights to land and territories, agroecology, and the rights of all small-scale food providers. Our articulations have given us the strength to organize against capitalism, neoliberalism, corporate power, patriarchy, and ecocide.

Through the Nyéléni meetings in 2007, 2011 and 2015, the food sovereignty movement created the basis for our future position in many global negotiations. These events and the concepts born therein led to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, and the implementation of Farmers' Rights in the context of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

But in the present global context, the food sovereignty movement cannot make it alone. To dismantle agribusiness and corporate power, as well as provide comprehensive responses to persisting systemic crises and the rise of conservative right-wing forces, we need to converge with peoples' organisations facing different forms of oppression and threats. Collectively, we can propose true alternatives for all and advance social, gender, racial, economic, intergenerational, and environmental justice. The Nyéléni meetings are thus essential for building principles, concepts and strategies shared and reinforced by many movements across different sectors, while defending the most vulnerable at local levels.

IPC for Food Sovereignty, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, Crocevia and FIAN

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who we are

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

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

now is time for food sovereignty!

box 1

The right to food sovereignty

The International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali in February 2007 was the beginning of the Nyéléni journey to build a global movement for food sovereignty. The concept of food sovereignty was introduced by La Via Campesina (LVC) in the 1996 International Food Summit a year after the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), with its infamous agreements on agriculture, intellectual property rights, industrial policy, standards, and investment. Social movements, unions, activists, and academics knew that “food security” and “development” were smokescreens to camouflage the expansion of corporate power that WTO rules were designed for. The call for food sovereignty was thus, as much a rejection of corporate, market domination of food, agriculture, and the economy, as it was a rallying cry for people all over the world to reclaim agency, autonomy and capacity to build a paradigm of progress centred on human rights, justice and respect for the planet.

As the concept gained support from a wide array of actors including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food¹, LVC joined hands with other social movements and civil society actors to convene an autonomous and international forum to elaborate on food sovereignty for different constituencies and regions, based on diverse, lived experiences and contexts.

The first Nyéléni forum brought together more than 500 representatives from over 80 countries and numerous constituencies to share knowledge and discuss the multiple dimensions of food sovereignty, from land and water to seeds, breeding, and labour, recognizing the central role of women. These deliberations are summarised in the Declaration of Nyéléni² and the Women’s Declaration on Food Sovereignty³. At Nyéléni in 2007, we started to construct a new right: the right to food sovereignty.

1 - <http://www.righttofood.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/ECN.4200410.pdf>

2 - <https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>

3 - <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article31>

in the spotlight 1

The current political conjuncture: why do we need a new Nyéléni Global Forum?

In the last two decades, the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) has assiduously worked alongside the communities of small-scale food producers, Indigenous Peoples, consumers, and citizens, guaranteeing the rights of those who produce and those who are marginalised. Today, the landmark results achieved by the IPC risk being overshadowed by a complex collision of several deep-rooted crises and the resulting shift in the geopolitical landscape which threatens the principles and values that the IPC has always defended and put forth in the quest for food sovereignty.

The COVID 19 pandemic has shone a light on the connections between different global justice struggles. It has exacerbated existing inequalities and reinforced power imbalances to the extent that many countries tumbled into a deep social and economic crisis where the most vulnerable suffer the most. The voices of those communities calling for systemic change, based on the existing experiences of agroecology and peasant family farming, which are feeding the vast majority of the world, need to be strengthened in a global alliance with social movements and Indigenous Peoples to address this urgent issue so that it is not eclipsed by the immediate issue of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the IPC is organising a new process for the purpose of discussion, not only within the movements struggling for Food Sovereignty, but with a whole new range of movements from different sectors. This new Nyéléni process aims at building responses at the global, regional and local level and tightening alliances with other movements that share the IPC’s vision and struggles, but which come from other fields: labour justice, climate justice, women’s struggles, for example. The process, in which intersectionality is a key aspect, collects the different but overlapping local struggles from the ground and takes them to the global level and will allow the participation of different movements at different levels.

If intersectionality is one innovative aspect in the process of Nyéléni, the second defining aspect is the focus on the process itself instead of only on the final Global Forum: it strives to build an entire process that brings with it all the power of the grassroots movements. As an initial phase of the process, IPC’s regions, working groups, and global organisations will undertake an exercise of internal consultation to reflect on, deepen, and widen the principles and concepts of food sovereignty into the new reality. The outcomes of these consultations will form the backbone of the Nyéléni process. Simultaneously, new alliances will be sought with social movements working on different issues: climate and labour justice, feminist movements, Indigenous Peoples movements, Black movements, and anti-war movements, to create an intersectional convergence towards joint proposals for systemic change.

Ultimately, the Nyéléni process will culminate in the Global Nyéléni Forum, in which hundreds of delegates from all over the world will discuss strategies and solutions for more just, inclusive, sustainable, and diverse food systems, and will relaunch a global alliance that is capable of counteracting the forces that are pushing the world into a deeper, multidimensional crisis.

More info on the Nyéléni process at <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/nyeleni-process/>

in the spotlight 2

Nyéléni: territory, process, and methodology

The International Forum for Food Sovereignty: Nyéléni 2007 (see box 1) was the result of a long regional and international process of cross-sectoral political accumulation. It was a milestone that provided us with principles, a political framework, methodologies, and an agenda of initiatives to continue advancing food sovereignty and the defence of territories and peoples' rights. Nyéléni was also home to two other important international processes on this journey: in 2011, to coordinate resistance to land grabbing (see box 2) and in 2015, to build a common multi-sectoral vision on agroecology and agree on strategies to defend and promote it (see box 3).

Nyéléni is the territory and platform for our multi-sectoral convergence process, which has allowed us to deepen our analysis and positions, make struggles visible and resist their criminalisation, strengthen solidarity links, build cross-sectoral agreements, and agree on initiatives to transform food systems and our societies. It is a common programme of local, regional, and global struggles built on the experiences and knowledge of social movements and organisations.

It is a process whose objective has always been to accumulate forces to strengthen the popular mobilisation of resistance to colonial, patriarchal, imperialist, and racist capitalism, its false solutions and all its forms of exploitation, oppression, and commodification of life, but also in defence of the commons, the sovereignty, rights, and self-determination of peoples and social, racial, gender, economic, intergenerational, and environmental justice.

Our methodology has a founding principle in Internationalist Solidarity on which to implement Dialogue of knowledge (Diálogos de saberes) that, based on the heritage, patrimony and diversity of peoples, cultures, and struggles, builds unity in action, while strengthening territorial organisational processes, since without strong and coordinated organisations, from the local to the global, there will not be sufficient resistance to the power of capital and conservative forces, nor systemic transformations.

These 15 years have been instrumental in raising the visibility of food sovereignty, agroecology, and integral agrarian reform, among others, in international, regional, and local political spaces and institutions, and have motivated various levels of government to implement our agenda. They have also been central in unmasking and denouncing attempts at corporate co-optation of our solutions and have made food sovereignty a political objective of various movements (feminist, climate justice, social justice, among others).

However, in order to dismantle the power of agribusiness and provide a global response to the rise of right-wing conservative forces, it is necessary to converge with peoples facing different forms of oppression, and with them to agree on programmes and strategies for social, racial, gender, economic, intergenerational, and environmental justice.

The Nyéléni process has given the food sovereignty movement the commitment to be a key driver in building a broader social front with the feminist, LGBTIQ+, trade union, anti-racist, class-based oppression resistance and anti-colonialist movements.

box 2

Global alliance against land-grabbing

In November 2011, we, peasants, pastoralists, Indigenous peoples and their allies gathered together in Nyéléni to share our experiences and struggles against land-grabbing with each other. We came to Nyéléni in response to the Dakar Appeal¹, which calls for a global alliance against land-grabbing for we are determined to defend food sovereignty, the commons and the rights of small scale food providers to natural resources.

In this meeting, we clearly identified that land-grabbing is a global phenomenon led by local, national, and transnational elites and investors, and governments with the aim of controlling the world's most precious resources. The global financial, food, and climate crises have triggered a rush among investors and wealthy governments to acquire and capture land and natural resources, since these are the only "safe havens" left that guarantee secure financial returns. Pensions and other investment funds have become powerful actors in land-grabbing, while wars continue to be waged to seize control over natural wealth.

Land-grabbing goes beyond traditional North-South imperialist structures; transnational corporations can be based anywhere in the world. It is also a crisis in both rural and urban areas. Land is being grabbed in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe for industrial agriculture, forest plantations, mining, infrastructure projects, dams, tourism, conservation parks, industry, urban expansion, and military purposes.

But we are not defeated. Through organisation, mobilisation, and community cohesiveness, we have been able to stop land-grabbing in many places. Furthermore, our societies are recognising that small-scale food production is the most socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable model of using resources and ensuring the right to food for all.

Recalling the Dakar Appeal, we reiterate our commitment to resist land-grabbing by all means possible, to support all those who fight land-grabs, and to put pressure on national governments and international institutions to fulfil their obligations to ensure and uphold the rights of peoples.

1 - <https://www.fian.org/en/news/article/dakar-appeal-against-the-land-grab/>



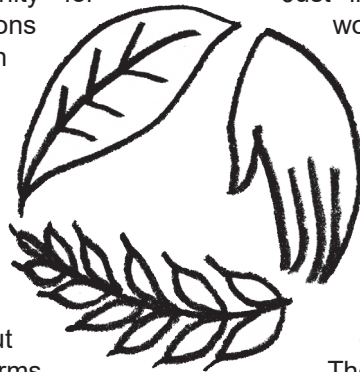
voices from the field

1 Latin America and Caribbean – Alianza

The nights are sacred for the gatherings of my Kuna people in Panama. There, we nourish ourselves with oral history, with the struggles for self-determination of other peoples. There, we embrace the universe, and organize ourselves in the defence of Mother Earth. Nyéléni is the Peoples' Assembly for Food Sovereignty, where we share global struggles, feed ourselves with the strength of the people and the embrace of our sisters and brothers from other continents. For over 500 years the problems have remained the same. The struggle for life, water, territory, have other names and other forms, but continue to be the same problems that each generation must face with new strategies and tactics.

The Nyéléni process is an opportunity for coordination between diverse organizations focused on the defence of Mother Earth and the Food Sovereignty of the peoples. Now, it is extremely important to weave alliances and organizational work in the face of the threat of megaprojects and extractive projects, as well as to define strategies to overcome the impacts of COVID 19.

As with every starry night, with or without the moon, with the sea choppy and storms approaching, the Kuna communities discuss how to solve social, cultural or spiritual problems in the same way that the Nyéléni process is a moment in time to gather the peoples of the world, to sing, to dance, to dream, to understand that we are part of Mother Earth, of Grandmother Sea, of Grandfather Sun and they call us from their shells to start a conversation around the fire, between social movements and Indigenous Peoples, to organize ourselves in the defence of Mother Earth.



2 Europe and Central Asia – Nyéléni ECA

Our world, including Europe and Central Asia, is undergoing a series of inter-related crises: armed conflicts and civil unrest associated with humanitarian crisis caused by war and political instability in many parts of our region. It is an economic crisis that manifests itself in food and energy price increases, and increased vulnerabilities related to loss of employment, access to healthy affordable food, the on-going COVID 19 pandemic, and the on-going climate crisis. The latest crisis is the war in Ukraine, which affects both people and the land, and impacts food security policies in the region and beyond. This crisis has shown us the level of local communities' resilience and the importance of local food systems and of the central role of the Nyéléni space, allowing different constituencies to come together in solidarity and to work on policies related to our struggles.

Just like Nyéléni, the legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her people, small-scale food producers (farmers and fishers alike) in Ukraine, courageously struggle to continue feeding local populations in times of war, including the recent destruction of the national seed bank. But little is written about this, nor is much support provided to them.

The war also contributes to the aggravation of longer-term issues such as climate change. The majority of women and children in several regions are either internally displaced or have sought refuge in European countries. While in Russia, Indigenous Peoples and human rights defenders continue to be repressed.

The Nyéléni process implies a duality of influencing public policies at all levels and independent social movement-building. Social movements of the various constituencies are brought together through this work in intersectional support. The process also includes a broader, more intersectional, and much-needed approach to address the deep multiple crises of economic, social, and environmental issues around the world.

3 IPC MENA region

In the North African region, food sovereignty is commonly understood as a tool for democratisation that can provide major support to rural populations in order to include demands relating to the various threats identified. In this case, water contamination, privatisation of rural land, and the commodification of our food. In contrast, in the Middle East region, food sovereignty is seen more from a political perspective, particularly because of the people's aspirations for the liberation of occupied and/or semi-occupied territories. The new context today calls, more than ever, for a synergy between the discourse and practice of food sovereignty in order to implement the principles in the daily work of the actors involved in the production, distribution and consumption of food.

It should be noted that the past Nyéléni meetings presented a strategic vision for achieving food sovereignty that recognises the contribution of women to peasant agriculture, yet these documents do not take into consideration the issue of gender relations. On the other hand, food sovereignty must be understood as a multifaceted political project in constant evolution, whose substance is highly likely to vary according to the type of collective actors who claim it. In this sense, the Nyéléni process can support social movements in the MENA region to strengthen the convergence among movements of different constituencies. This is key to ensuring the development of the capacities of the social movements via the capacity building of the movements' youth and leaders around food sovereignty.

voices from the field



4 IPC African region

As the national government and private sector continue tightening the space for the family farmer to produce what they eat and eat what they produce by the introduction of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, this destroys the environment. The Nyéléni processes support the promotion of agroecological approaches which encourages socially acceptable, economically viable, and environmentally friendly production while also protecting the natural environment. This approach ensures the promotion and protection of biodiversity conservation. The process further discourages the corporate powers that prevent our family accessing territorial markets with their cheap food and food that puts our health at risk and damages the environment. food sovereignty cannot be obtained where food, land, seeds, fish and livestock are in the hands of corporate control.

The Nyéléni process helps to prevent the privatisation and commodification of native seeds from the introduction and use of new and old GMOs in our farming and food system. We are continuing to face land grabbing by corporate powers, corporate capture of our territorial markets, and challenges created by climate change and other external factors such as COVID 19 and other conflicts.

We believe that the Nyéléni process can support the social movements on the ground in strengthening and promoting collaboration and participation in regional policy dialogues where changes in national public policies happen. The stimulation of movements and the intersectionality of struggles can help in promoting land justice, agroecology, and territorial markets. Together we can enhance advocacy on land, seeds, and water for small-scale food producers.

6 IPC North American region

On April 5 and 12, 2022 the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) organized two online consultations for the North America region (United States and Canada) as part of the Nyéléni process. The dialogues brought together a diverse range of small-scale food producers, rural worker organizations, Indigenous and Native Peoples, scholar-activists, and civil society organizations to discuss the future of the food sovereignty movement and build common priorities for navigating the inter-related food system crises in the region. Over the past two years, COVID 19 has laid bare the fragility of concentrated corporate food value-chains in North America, with farmers forced to dump milk and destroy crops, workers falling sick due to lack of protective equipment and corporate collusion, and rising food insecurity in marginalized communities.

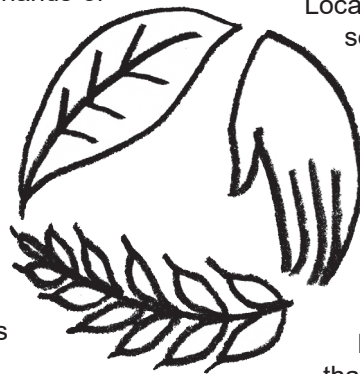
These challenges, coupled with mobilizations against racial injustice and the impacts of the climate crisis on rural communities, have shaped new opportunities for farmer-worker solidarity and union organizing, greater awareness and investment in resilient local food systems, and policy action on equity and justice in agriculture. In this context consultation participants emphasized anti-capitalist, racially just, anti-imperialist, and radically feminist approaches to organizing around land access, dismantling corporate monopolies, advancing agroecology, the right to food, and strengthening indigenous sovereignty.

Since the first forum in Mali in 2007, the political declarations and relationships that have emerged from Nyéléni have shaped the direction and strength of the food sovereignty movement in North America and solidarity actions beyond the region. As this collective work continues, the Nyéléni process provides a dynamic forum for building rural power within and across our communities as we advance the principles of food sovereignty in our local food systems and international policy spaces.

5 IPC Asia and Pacific

Asia and the Pacific, home to 60% of the world's population, is faced with a multitude of challenges in terms of food sovereignty. All around the world, over 2.5 billion small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers and artisanal fisherfolk grow, collect, and harvest food for human consumption. Such localised food systems provide the foundations of our nutrition, incomes, economies, and culture throughout Asia and in the world.

The COVID 19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing challenges to food security such as climate change impacts, disaster risks, shrinking natural resources and degrading environments, use of GMOs, changing demographics and labour profiles, and infrastructure deficits, among others. In the context of growing populations, increasing urbanization, and changes in the food value chain and food industry, the food sovereignty debate is quite crucial.



Local people's loss of capacity for autonomy and self-determination is a direct consequence of the expansion of the industrial, heteronomous model of development rooted in commodity production. We as IPC need to collectively assert and advance the principles and policies that constitute food sovereignty and reject those that aim to further embed corporate interests in our food systems.

The 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.

Gender equity and respecting the voices of the very poor and marginalised remain urgent challenges for the food sovereignty movement and civil society at large. The Nyéléni process can strengthen the organizations of women, men and young people, Indigenous Peoples, farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, migrants, rural workers, fisherfolk and others.

box 3

International forum for agroecology – Nyéléni 2015

At the end of February 2015, organisations and social movements of small-scale food producers, workers, women, Indigenous Peoples, consumers, environmentalists, and human rights organisations met at the Nyéléni Forum to agree on a common multi-sectoral vision on agroecology and strategies to defend and promote it.

Agroecology, it was agreed, is a way of life, a way of producing food, a science, and a movement to transform food systems for food sovereignty and social, racial, gender, economic, intergenerational, and environmental justice. It is based on similar principles that are implemented in diverse ways across a wide diversity of territories.

It was also agreed that the fundamental pillars of agroecology are: solidarity; local territories and the right of peoples and communities to preserve the spiritual and material links to them; collective rights and access to the commons; organisation and collective action; and the different knowledge and ways of knowing of our peoples, and the Dialogue of Knowledge (Diálogo de saberes) as a way to develop, innovate and research.

The forum made it clear that agroecology seeks to transform power structures in society, so that the people control seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, water, knowledge, culture, and other common goods, and ensure a collective way forward to overcome crises.

The forum is a central milestone of the movement, and its agreements are a driving force for the broadening of alliances for the promotion and defence of agroecology and food sovereignty. Read more: <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/agroecologynyeleni2015-2/>

in the spotlight 3

Join the Nyéléni process towards a new Nyéléni Global Forum of Food Sovereignty!

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) is the world's largest alliance of small-scale food producers, including peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists and herders, nomads, Indigenous peoples and organizations, forest dwellers, landless people, urban producers, and rural workers.

The food sovereignty movement has been a dynamic part of the process of transformation and finding solutions; since its emergence as a global platform for the interaction of social movements of small-scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples, it has empowered the struggle of people for their human right to food, against dispossession and land grabbing, has managed to influence several international processes and has given a voice to people for the radical transformation of food systems, such as the historic 2007 Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty.

Today, we face overlapping and deep-seated crises: economic, social, democratic, environmental, health, patriarchal and racist. The COVID 19 pandemic is turning into a profound social and economic crisis in which the most vulnerable will again be the hardest hit: lacking access to healthcare, losing their jobs and income. A major food crisis is also looming in many regions, as people will not be able to afford food.

The current wars have become an opportunity for large corporations, through speculation, to increase the prices of input for food production; transnational corporations (TNCs) are increasingly influencing international institutions, including UN bodies and agencies, in order to receive favourable public policies and regulations. Through the direct influence of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and other high-level (non-governmental) spaces in political processes, corporations have managed to slowly transform the governance principles and practices of UN institutions such as the FAO, as well as the approval of natural "protected areas" under the pretext of biodiversity protection, to continue with the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' territories and natural resources and assets.

Faced with this situation, the IPC proposes to build a space for exchange and convergence among social movements across sectors, since it is imperative, in the current circumstances, to advance in the struggle by strengthening alliances with other global movements. This favours the development of collective strategies, the solidarity economy, protection of Indigenous knowledge and genetic resources, climate change adaptation and mitigation, individual and collective human rights and mutual support action to advance our vision of food sovereignty as a pillar of structural change and push back global capital.

Therefore, we encourage all our peoples, movements, organizations, collectives, and working groups to promote local and regional processes to engage in this new stage of the struggle for a just, resilient, and united world. This is the main goal of the upcoming Nyéléni Global Forum of Food Sovereignty.

