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editorial

youth and the democratization of food systems

It's December. Yet another year in our cycle of life is drawing to a close as we search for hope and solidarity in the face of daunting adversities. The world is marred by rising temperatures, erratic weather events, extreme poverty, hunger, wars, conflicts and violence.

A systemic model that placed the interests and profits of the few over those of the many has created this catastrophe. The global industrial food system is a case in point—it is among the largest polluters on the planet. It uses nearly two-thirds of the world's resources but can only feed a quarter of the world's population, leaving behind a trail of destructive and polluting practices along its supply chain. In contrast, peasant agriculture, which still feeds 70% of the global population, sustains harmonious and healthy cycles of food production, distribution and consumption.

It's high time we reminded global food governance institutions and governments that the real solutions to the global food crisis lie in giving peasant communities, Indigenous Peoples, migrant workers, landworkers, small-scale fishers and pastoralists the power and the autonomy to build food sovereignty in our territories. We must rally behind food systems built by and for

the people in an agroecological way that respects the cycle of life in all its forms. A vital element in protecting and multiplying these diverse, decentralized and resilient food systems are the conditions available to the young and future small-scale food producers to engage in the production process. This edition of the Nyéléni newsletter delves into the democratization of people's food systems and the critical need to keep the role and future of the peasant youth in this process.

La Via Campesina Youth Articulation

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Food Sovereignty movement
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who we are

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

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

now is time for food sovereignty!

box 1

African peasant youth in defence of agroecology

Excerpt from a Declaration¹ by LVC's Peasant Youth Articulation members in Southern and Eastern African region.

"We the young peasants, members of La Via Campesina in Southern and Eastern Africa, recognize that agroecology has the ability to restore degraded agricultural ecosystems, including the loss of biodiversity, and sustainably feed many African countries' rapidly expanding populations. Agroecological production systems are diverse and improve ecosystem health and services, making ecosystems more resilient to changing climatic conditions, significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and address socioeconomic barriers that perpetuate injustices and inequalities in our food systems. Additionally, the peasant agroecology approach is transversal, contributing importantly to various layers and dimensions of local social contexts.

We further recognize that Agroecology is the best way to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects, because it uses farming techniques like crop diversification, conservation tillage, green manures, natural fertilizers, biological pest control, rainwater harvesting, and production of crops and livestock in ways that store carbon and sustainably protect natural resources.

We want our governments to take decisive action towards the domestication of the UNDROP which sets platforms for voices from rural communities to be heard and stresses that small-scale farmers, especially the youth, have a right to protect and conserve production resources and the productive capacity of their lands. Our governments must support the creation of conditions for strengthening the skills development of the youth to create ethical and profitable opportunities in areas and activities that protect and restore ecosystems. It is imperative to support peasant family farms in all the diverse ways as they are the key champions of agroecology, a lasting solution to achieve climate justice."

1 - <https://viacampesina.org/en/support-strengthening-of-youths-skill-development-that-protect-and-restore-ecosystems/>

in the spotlight

Climate chaos, COVID-19 and armed conflict have sent shockwaves through the global economy, and these overlapping crises are impacting world food security in unprecedented ways. The current global food crisis worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, nearly 3.1 billion people could not afford a healthy diet, and about 2.3 billion people faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2021.

As indicated by all-time record highs on the UN FAO's food-price index, the global food crisis was aggravated again in March 2022, largely due to supply-and-demand imbalances in grain, oilseed, fuel and fertilizer markets following a spate of geo-political conflicts and wars. The underlying causes of food insecurity are closely linked to structural poverty and unjust trade relations between countries, and similarly to the food price crises of 2008 and 2011, the present-day food crisis is significantly influenced by financial speculation and price volatility in global markets.

La Via Campesina (LVC) and our allies of the global food sovereignty movement continue to resist industrial agribusiness and the false solutions of neoliberalism. We are alert and organized toward the implementation of real, popular solutions for profound social change. End WTO! Build international trade based on peasants' rights, agroecology, and food sovereignty!

The youth are the protagonists of social transformation

The youth are political subjects that have a unique role to play in exercising democratic control over food systems. First and foremost, young people are tasked to learn from history. A historically-informed analysis of social, political, economic, and environmental issues is indispensable to coordinating effective strategies and concrete actions that address their root causes.

Young people are also tasked to analyse the present moment with clarity and precision from our own particular generational perspectives, utilizing concepts like food sovereignty and tools like UNDROP¹ which we've become equipped with through LVC's training processes. In addition, it is essential that the youth continue to seek solutions to existing problems while concurrently striving to secure the rights and well-being of future generations.

The youth are central to food sovereignty struggles—they have the vital task of widening participation and forming new leadership. Over the last decade, several members of our global food sovereignty movement, who converged and organised at the Nyéléni meeting in 2007 in Mali, have emphasised the need for young peasants and activists to take the mantle of the struggle forward. As a result, over the years, through spaces such as the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and others, we have built a unified struggle and created platforms of education and training for young people in the movement coming from peasant, Indigenous, fisherfolk and pastoralist communities.

Meaningful opportunities for the participation of young people at all levels of the struggle for food sovereignty have enabled us to become increasingly integrated into the movement, and through our autonomously organized spaces, we have been articulating our political priorities and proposals for action.

1 - UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).

→ The youth are demanding radical solutions to the current food crisis

Over the last three decades, grassroots social movements have stepped up the pressure on governments to bring in the political and economic democratization of food and agricultural systems. From the beginning we have fought to ensure the direct, effective participation of peasant and Indigenous organizations in the elaboration, implementation, and monitoring of agricultural policies and rural development programs.

Core issues that led to the formation of the international food sovereignty movement remain highly relevant and at the forefront of our political agenda today, including external debt, international trade, and environmental protection, as well as agroecology, gender equality, women's and LGBTTTQI+ rights, and peasants' rights. The youth are raising these banners of struggle in mass mobilizations, communication campaigns, and political education processes. We are also advancing in policy negotiations and advocacy efforts across UN spaces.

Between May and October 2022, LVC youth engaged in consultations organized by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), in collaboration with the FAO and under the framework of the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDDF). The regional consultations revolved around Pillar 2 of the Decade, addressing topics such as youth migration, gender inequalities, land and market access, and the intergenerational transfer of productive resources and knowledge. The process provided space to identify common challenges and discuss policy approaches related to generational turnover in family farming, and its outcomes are intended to contribute to the implementation of the Decade's Global Action Plan. The consultations clearly underscored that comprehensive and genuine agrarian reforms, agroecology training, and adequate farm succession plans are urgently needed to enable the youth to have a future in the countryside.

In June, the youth joined the mobilization against the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference in Geneva. We contributed to internal debates for contextual analysis of the global food crisis as well as public dialogues held in activist spaces and at a university. The youth were also actively part of the delegation that stayed in Geneva to advance peasants' rights advocacy in the UN Human Rights Council. We arranged and attended meetings with Member State representatives in order to gauge their political will to support a forthcoming resolution in the Council to initiate a special procedure for the implementation of UNDROP.

We have also greatly contributed to a policy process in the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), titled "Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems." For over two years, we have been coordinating and actively participating in the youth working group of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM).

We now have political opportunities to organize at the national level and pressure States to implement the relatively good aspects of the CFS policy document, such as recommendations in support of human rights, dignified livelihoods, informal markets, public procurement, urban agriculture, and gender transformative policies, as well as the connection drawn with the UNDDF and the reference to redistributive reforms in the context of the CFS Voluntary Tenure Guidelines.

The long-term sustainability and impact of our collective movement for food sovereignty lie in creating and expanding our alliances across allied sectors, joining forces with both urban and rural movements, workers' unions. An equal emphasis must also be placed in organizing processes that greatly depend on the meaningful engagement and training of youth across the entire movement and allied sectors. The continuity, coherence, and ongoing relevance of the food sovereignty movement relies upon generational renewal through capacity-building for young people, the facilitation of intergenerational dialogue, and mobilizing everyone for transformative social change.

box 2

Latin American peasant youth in defense of food sovereignty

Excerpt from a Declaration¹ by the youth representatives from 11 countries of South America, Central America, North America and the Caribbean.

"As in other productive sectors of the world, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been very negative in the agricultural sector, generating a great social and economic loss. Small- and medium-sized producers have been affected and the lack of government support in some countries aggravated the impact of COVID-19, worsening the social, political, health and economic crisis.

We, the youth, reaffirm our commitment to defend agroecology as an important part of the struggle for food sovereignty and the rights of peasants. We stand in solidarity with the countries of Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia as they resist the interference by and influence of capitalist, neoliberal countries, where agribusiness and transnational corporations continue their indiscriminate onslaught. We denounce the criminalization of the struggles, attacking the sovereignty and autonomy of the peoples, provoking displacements, forced migrations and worsening of poverty in some countries. We call for guaranteed full respect for gender equality, the fundamental rights of the entire population and a life free of violence and insecurity. We also call for the guarantee of the universal right to health to all, and denounce the attempts to monopolise COVID-19 vaccines by the rich countries, thus violating the right to health of the most impoverished countries."

1 - <https://viacampesina.org/en/final-declaration-of-the-continental-meeting-on-youth-and-agroecology/>

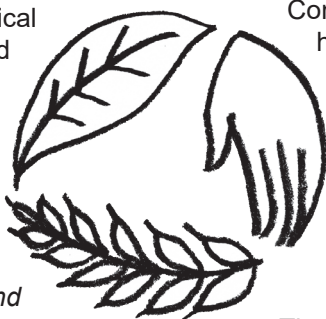


voices from the field

1 Micherline Islanda, *Union of Small Producers, (Tèt Kòle ti Peyizan Ayisyen), Haiti*

The term "food system" designates all the stages necessary to feed a population, from growing, harvesting, and packaging, to transportation, marketing, consumption, and waste. Access to land is a huge problem in Haiti and a huge barrier to food sovereignty. The dominant industrial food system is not sustainable because it does not provide enough nutritious and culturally appropriate food to everyone and additionally compromises the health of the planet. Industrial agriculture is among the major polluters, threatening the survival of future generations.

To address these challenges, we conduct training sessions based on LVC's axes of struggle. We organise young people and gather to study the origin of this domination and economic exploitation. We analyse the actions of the State and the structural and systemic issues that prevent peasants from owning or accessing our territories. We also work on social and cultural domination, access to credit, marketing, processing, handicrafts, fisheries and fish farming, livestock, land tenure, environment, infrastructure, tourism, mining and energy resources, access to drinking water and sanitation. We study local agroecological systems that are important to build food sovereignty. We practise and share agricultural production that is centred on family farming practices.



3 Vimukti (Anuka) De Silva, *Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, Sri Lanka*

The economic, political and social instability in debt-based economies like Sri Lanka is crushing the dreams of young people. Peasant youth, already vulnerable in many ways, face a daunting future. Many of us desperately migrate to cities and other countries for very dangerous and insecure jobs.

The micro-finance loans have trapped women and rural families in a vicious cycle of debt and indignity. Organised as the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform, we are constantly trying to build an alternative political and economic process by uniting the youth to stand up for their rights. The dominant capitalist model considers food as a commodity to trade. Food production in the capitalist framework does not find the answer to hunger in any way. Therefore, we are looking to agroecology and food sovereignty, real solutions for society and the food chain.

2 Chengeto Sandra Muzira, *Zimbabwe Small Holders Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF), Zimbabwe*

In Africa, the organised peasant youth of La Via Campesina play a significant role in pushing the agroecology agenda; we play a significant role in fostering a general understanding and appreciation of agroecology among the general public through a variety of avenues and platforms. Yet, the lack of adequate public policies or public-financial assistance to peasant youth as well as the increasing appropriation of peasant seeds by industry poses a great challenge for the youth here.

Various organizations in Southern, West and Eastern Africa have played a great role in addressing these challenges through capacity-building workshops on agroecological practices. Peasant youth are also encouraged to engage in the different Ministries of Agriculture during policy formulation and implementation. Young peasants in our organisations also receive training on the latest technological developments and the opportunities and threats. For instance, our workshops have debated the dangers of GMOs in the continent of Africa and the growing digitalisation of agriculture.

Organizations such as Kenya Peasants' League, Eastern and Southern Africa Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) Uganda, Zimbabwe Small Holders Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF), Landless People's Movement, West and Central Africa (WECAF) members, União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC), and Confédération Paysanne du Congo (COPACO) have further continued to network and exchange knowledge between young peasant farmers through seminars, conferences and symposiums on agroecology.

4 Marlan Ifantri Lase, *Serikat Petani Indonesia*

The threat of a food crisis can be tamed in Indonesia because in many ways we are still a strong agricultural society. Yet, Indonesia is relying on food imports such as rice, meat, wheat, and also sugar. It is because of the continued application of 'food security' as an approach to agricultural and rural development that the food imports are threatening our society.

The government must accelerate the implementation of agrarian reform and protect our local market as ways to help food producers live in dignity, so that young people can find peasantry and agriculture/food production attractive.

Serikat Petani Indonesia has helped to establish Food Sovereignty Areas (KDP) in our agricultural land and territories. KDP is an area where we make use of natural resources in the area in agroecological manners. We adopt agroecology to produce sufficient, safe, healthy, nutritious and sustainable food by and for the people. We create livelihood support by linking the harvest to dynamic peasant markets in our territories. We promote and practice the cooperatives' economic system to ensure fair prices for the welfare of peasants and local consumers.

box 3

The future of family farming: Discussing intergenerational turnover

Contribution from International Planning Committee For Food Sovereignty (IPC)

The future of family farming—including agriculture, fishing and pastoralism—is threatened by multiple factors such as the effects of climate change, the loss of traditional knowledge and the detrimental effects of food policies which, at different levels, favour corporations over small-scale farmers and profit-making over the right to food. The combined effect of these factors is leading to a gradual loss of family farmers, which undermines food security worldwide. In this already difficult context, the survival of family farming is at greater risk due to the difficulty to ensure generational turnover.

According to the Global Action Plan of UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDIFF), “generational turnover” refers to “the capacity to retain young people on farms and in rural communities” and is one of the preconditions to keep agriculture and food production “viable and sustainable”. In its recent report on Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems, the High-Level Panel of Experts of the UN Committee on World Food Security refers to the notion of “generational sustainability” defining it as “inter-generational collaboration and the evolving, dynamic balance between generations”. In the report, generational turnover is connected to the degree of youth engagement in food systems and particularly: “a carefully built and maintained inter-generational balance and multi-directional exchange of generation-specific knowledge, resources and livelihood strategies can enhance the role of young people in leading successful and endogenous innovation in food systems and contributing to sustainable agrarian, rural and urban transformations”.

What are the barriers which globally prevent generational turnover in family farming? And which visions, policies and actions are needed to overcome such barriers and ensure generational sustainability while at the same time meeting the needs and aspirations of different generations?

Between May and October 2022, the Youth Working Group of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) has carried out a dedicated global consultation to address these questions. The consultation intended to create a space for youth and non-youth IPC members from around the world to gather, discuss their needs and share ideas. Although the analysis of results has not been finalised, the consultation made visible the existence of multiple obstacles which are common across all regions of the IPC.

Among them:

- The marginalisation of family farmers in food systems, including unsupportive legal and policy environments.
- The lack of adequate legal services, enabling policies and physical infrastructure to facilitate the inter-generational transfer of natural resources, farm assets and knowledge and skills, especially outside the family domain.
- The reproduction of socio-cultural barriers rooted in patriarchy and colonialism which make it difficult or impossible for young women, gender/sexually diverse youth and Indigenous youth to access inheritance rights.
- The low economic viability of family farming makes it difficult or impossible for a young person to live and work as a peasant/food producer.
- The decreasing attractiveness of family farming for young people due to the persistence of a social stigma related to being a peasant as well as to the lack of respect for the social status of family farmers.
- The decreasing attractiveness of family farming for young people due to the emerging difficulties of producing food in a changing climate.
- The increasing youth exodus from rural to urban areas due to the lack of adequate infrastructure and services to meet the needs of today’s rural youth.
- The marginalisation of youth in decision-making spaces at different levels (regional, national, international), which often makes youth participation merely performative and undermines the possibility of enhancing youth agency.
- The lack of suitable spaces to ensure intergenerational dialogues about generational turnover as a two-sided process and not only a unilateral transfer from older to younger people.

During the consultation, the IPC Youth WG identified the need to keep our attention on the issue of generational turnover in family farming and continue working on it in close collaboration with other WGs in all regions and with all constituencies as a topic concerning everyone and not only the youth. The aim could be to identify a common IPC position and global strategy to improve generational turnover in family farming. The youth have also discussed the importance of using the outcomes of the consultation to continue influencing the agenda and work of the FAO, particularly in the context of the UNDIFF.

box 4 L'estaca

In this video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S_MHD-jL0o), peasant youth from Europe, organised by the European Coordination of La Via Campesina (ECVC), sing the popular protest song L'estaca by the Catalan songwriter Lluís Llach—one of the symbols of resistance against Francoism. In the song, fascism and all forms of oppression are described as a pole ("l'estaca") to which we are all chained but which, if we pull hard and together, we will manage to bring down. The song has been translated into a multitude of languages, becoming a universal hymn of liberation from all kinds of authoritarian and oppressive regimes and a call to unity towards freedom from all constraints.

The original song in Catalan:

To read the translation of the song in English, the link is <https://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?id=2320&lang=it#agg2955>

L'avi Siset¹ em parlava
de bon matí al portal
mentre el sol esperàvem
i els carros vèiem passar.

Siset, que no veus l'estaca
on estem tots lligats?
Si no podem desfer-nos-en
mai no podrem caminar!

Si estirem tots, ella caurà
i molt de temps no pot durar,
segur que tomba, tomba, tomba
ben corcada deu ser ja.

Si jo l'estiro fort per aquí
i tu l'estires fort per allà,
segur que tomba, tomba, tomba,
i ens podrem alliberar.

Però, Siset, fa molt temps ja,
les mans se'm van escorxant,
i quan la força se me'n va
ella és més ampla i més gran.

Ben cert sé que està podrida
però és que, Siset, pesa tant,
que a cops la força m'oblida.
Torna'm a dir el teu cant:

Si estirem tots, ella caurà
i molt de temps no pot durar,

segur que
t o m b a ,
tomba, tom-
ba
ben corcada
deu ser ja.

Si jo l'estiro fort per aquí
i tu l'estires fort per allà,
segur que tomba, tomba, tomba,
i ens podrem alliberar.

L'avi Siset ja no diu res,
mal vent que se l'emportà,
ell qui sap cap a quin indret
i jo a sota el portal.

I mentre passen els nous vaillets
estiro el coll per cantar
el darrer cant d'en Siset,
el darrer que em va ensenyar.

Si estirem tots, ella caurà
i molt de temps no pot durar,
segur que tomba, tomba, tomba
ben corcada deu ser ja.

Si jo l'estiro fort per aquí
i tu l'estires fort per allà,
segur que tomba, tomba, tomba,
i ens podrem alliberar.



1 - "Siset" is short for "Narcís". It seems to refer to Narcís Llansa, an old man with whom Llach went fishing when he was young.

