

Press Kit (english)

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1. Objectives of the forum

In face of the failure of neo-liberal politics and the deterioration of living conditions of urban and rural populations, food sovereignty is of interest to a diverse number of political groups and movements.

Food sovereignty is the right of people to define their own policies regarding food production (agriculture, fishing...) and to protect and regulate their own production and agricultural markets. Food sovereignty differs from "food security" which limits itself to searching for ways to guarantee sufficient food through trade. The principle of food sovereignty resolutely opposes neo-liberal politics and proposes the development of models of production, distribution, and consumption based on solidarity and respect of communities and their environment.

A collective composed of Via Campesina , ROPPA (Network of Farmers and Producers Organizations of West Africa), The World March of Women, The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers, The World Forum of Fisher Peoples, The International Planning Committee of Food Sovereignty, NGO Members of the Food Sovereignty Network, and Friends of the Earth came together to organize Nyeleni 2007, the Forum for Food Sovereignty.

600 delegates from five continents will come to Mali in February 2007 to represent their groups involved in matters of agriculture and food.

This Forum will reaffirm the right to food sovereignty and define its economic, social, environmental and political implications. It will put in place an international dynamic to obtain the recognition of the right of Food Sovereignty.

The organizers wanted this Forum to take place in Africa where agriculture occupies a central place and where numerous farm and urban families suffer from hunger in spite of an abundance natural resources.

The natural choice was Mali, a democratic country where civil organizations and trade unions enjoy freedom of expression and action. Mali is one of the first countries on the planet to have made food sovereignty the top priority of its new law of Agricultural Orientation.

The civil society of Mali also successfully took up the challenge of the Polycentric World Social Forum which was held in Bamako, January 19 – 23, of 2006. This experience will be invaluable to manage the logistics of the World Forum on Food Sovereignty.

Objectives of the Forum

To define a global and collective strategy so that the right of food sovereignty is recognized as a specific and full right, one that is legally binding for governments and guaranteed by the United Nations.

To strengthen our position in the balance of power so that we can attain food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a citizen's proposal. It is not a proposal for sectoral reform, aiming only to benefit food producers be they farmers or fisherfolk.

In fact, food sovereignty has repercussions on every sector of society. By guaranteeing fair prices to farmers it allows them to live in their communities and it reduces migration to cities. It is a global citizen's proposal which will only succeed and be accepted at an international level if it is actively supported by those sectors of society which do not produce their own food directly.

Nyeleni 2007 will provide an opportunity to strengthen dialogue with workers' trade unions and international consumers' organizations to better understand collectively the repercussions of the recognition of the right to food sovereignty on access to food.

To create meeting spaces with governments who are in favor of food sovereignty.

Mali is about to adopt a new agricultural framework which declares food sovereignty a priority objective.

The countries of the ECOWAS refer explicitly to food sovereignty ever more often. Other countries, such as the members of the G33, develop proposals which are very similar to food sovereignty without using the same term. These recent developments show that more and more countries have stopped believing that neo-liberal policies can provide an answer to the hunger and poverty suffered by growing sectors of their populations, and they're ready to try new ways to solve the problems.

The WFFS will provide the opportunity to think about the best strategies to ensure that nations actively support food sovereignty at the international level.

2. Mali and the village of Selingue

Mali is a continental country in West Africa. It covers a surface of 1.240.192 km² (more than twice that of France). It shares borders with seven other countries: Algeria in the North, Niger in the East, in the Southeast is Burkina Faso. The Ivory Coast and Guinea are to the South. To the West are Mauritania and Senegal.

Mali usually has three seasons:

Cold from November to February (average temperature 21 degrees)

Hot from March to May (average temperature 30 degrees)

Rainy season from June to September-October (average temperature 25 degrees)

These seasons are divided among three climates: Saharan, Tropical, and Sahelien.

Mali has more than 30 rivers and is crossed by the 2 biggest rivers in West Africa, the Niger and the Senegal.

Mali's population is estimated at approximately 12,000,000 inhabitants, including these ethnic groups: Malinkes 6%, Bamanan-dioulas 33%, Peulhs 10%, Sonrhais 7%, Tamasheks 5%, Senoufos 9%, etc. Approximately 80% of the population is rural, the remaining 20% is made up of townspeople.

Mali has a young population with almost 49% being less than 15 years old.

The official language is French. The national languages are Bamanan, Peuhl, Sonrhai, and Soninke.

The birthrate is 51/1000, and the infant mortality rate is 104 per 1000 births. Mali will count more than 20 million inhabitants in the year 2025.

Mali has a rich historical past. From the third to the seventeenth century several great African empires succeeded one another: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. When it was conquered by France at the end of the nineteenth century, it became the Sudan, forming part of the AOF.

Mali is divided administratively into 8 areas.: Kayes, Koulikoro (the Bamako capital), Sikasso, Segou, Mopti, Tombouctou, Kidal, and Gao. Each area includes a certain number of "circles" headed by a prefect. The basic communities are the urban communes covering the principal agglomerations and the rural communes formed by the villages.

Since the fall of the dictatorship in 1991, Mali has experienced a democratization of its political life. There are numerous parties, freedom of the press is guaranteed by the government, citizens can create unions to improve their standard of living and to take an active part in the formation of public policy.

Agriculture occupies a central place in the economy of Mali employing 75% of its citizens. Prone to climatic risks, it can generate important food surpluses, or following insufficient rainfall, not enough to feed the population.

Cotton is the principal source of foreign currency and the subsidies of the countries of the North, in particular those of the United States (and in a lesser extent of the European Union) cause many difficulties for the small cotton producers of Mali.

The farmers of Mali are organized within dynamic and representative trade associations. CNOP, the National Coordination of Professional Farmers Organizations of Mali, is a member of ROPPA and Via Campesina. The CNOP stood as candidate in November 2004 so that the organizers of the Food Sovereignty Forum held in Mali could introduce this concept on the African continent. This candidature was accepted by all of the organizations on the steering committee. It seems indeed important to organize international meetings in Africa to reinforce the sharing of experiences between African civil society and the social movements of other parts of the world.

The government of Mali is committed to a process of consulting farmer organizations in working out a new law of Agricultural Orientation. At the end of a year's worth of work, the Law registered Food Sovereignty as the priority of its agricultural policies which the government must implement to improve the living conditions of the rural and urban populations.

In May 2005, Mr. Ousmane Youssoufi MAIGA, Prime Minister of Mali met with an international delegation which came to propose holding a Food Sovereignty Forum in Mali. Mr. MAIGA was very favorable to the proposal and assured the delegation that his government and his country would provide all the necessary support to enable the Forum to be a success.

The many Malian and Bamakoise associations demonstrated at the World Social Forum in January 2006, that they possess the human resources and dynamism to organize an event of the magnitude of the Food Sovereignty Forum. Fortified by the experience of the World Social Forum, a significant number of these organizations want to take part in this new challenge.

The Village of Selingue

The Forum for Food Sovereignty will be held in the countryside, in Selingue, a village located 140km from Bamako near the hydroelectric dam on the river Sankarani, a tributary of the Niger River, near the border of Guinea.

This choice was made expressly so that a discussion about agriculture and food would take place within a rural and farming framework.

It is a political decision which seeks to find a parallelism and a coherence between food sovereignty proposals and the means to implement them.

CNOP and its various organizations always hold their important meetings in the countryside. They want to benefit from the occasion in order to learn more about the daily lives of the Mali people. Beyond the agriculture and food issues, Nyeleni 2007 wants to create the conditions for the emergence of a vast citizens debate far from corporate influence and the defense of sectoral interests.

Near a hydro-electric plant, Selingue offers electricity all year long.

Arrangements for the 600 delegates to be housed in optimal comfort in Selingue are as follows:

The Selingue hotel's 23 villas can accommodate 200 people. The other participants will be housed in lodging built for the occasion and used thereafter as headquarters for Malian organizations and CNOP.

Some of the boxes will be constructed with native materials and traditional methods.

About 50 of the other dwellings will be built with more durable materials to be used by Malian organizations as a center for meetings.

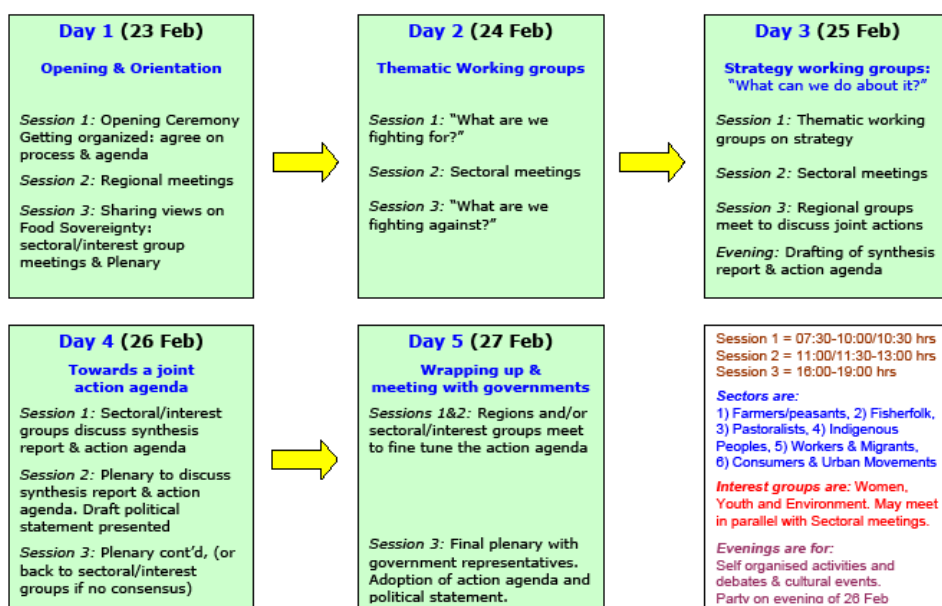
The village of Selingue has half a dozen rooms big enough to accommodate workshops of about 60 people.

A light structure with a 600 person capacity will be built from local materials.

CNOP and the farmer organizations of which it is comprised, is responsible for the infrastructure necessary for a successful Food Sovereignty Forum.

3. The Program At A Glance

NYÉLÉNI 2007 AT A GLANCE



4. The Participants

Around 500 participants coming from 98 countries will take part in the forum. They were selected in the various areas of the world in order to ensure a balance between the areas, the sectors, as well as a gender balance. They were selected among the social movements and the organizations which signed "The call to participate the action for Nyéléni" and which have been taking an active part already in activities relating to food sovereignty at the local, national and regional level.

5. The Steering Committee

The steering committee is in charge of organising the World Forum for Food Sovereignty. Other organisations not listed here, especially workers' trade unions and consumer groups, have been invited to participate in the Forum and to take part in its organisation.

The steering committee is made up of two people per organisation, one a delegate from the region of Africa, the second from another part of the world.

The World March of Women



The World March of Women is an international network which struggles against all forms of discrimination. The WMW campaigns for equal access to natural resources and to work. It denounces neo-liberal policies which have worsened the situation of women.

The WMW carries out awareness-raising campaigns and educational activities to combat poverty.

Contact : Maryam Nobre – Brazil - e-mail: minobre@marchemondiale.org

Via Campesina



La Vía Campesina is an international movement made up of peasant organisations of small and medium farmers, farm workers, women and indigenous communities from Asia, Africa, America and Europe. It is an autonomous movement, plural in nature and independent of any other movement, political, economic or otherwise. It is made up of national and regional organisations which remain strictly independent.

The movement is organised in 8 regions: Europe, Northeast and Southeast Asia, South Asia, North America, the Caribbean, Central America, South America and Africa. Maryam Sissoko (Mali) Paul Nicholson (Europe)

International secretariat (Djakarta): Tel. +62217991890

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World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF)

World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers was established to uphold human rights and social justice for fishermen. In some parts of the world, they are still beaten and killed for questioning the seizure of fishing quotas by multinationals, or for opposing the establishment of fish farms that destroy natural reserves.

Even in nations where government and corporate actions are more subtle, cross-border organisation is necessary to protect fishing resources against pollution and destructive fishing practices.

Secretariat: Pedro Avedano - 102 Bank - Suite 202, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5N4 Canada info@foro-pescadores.com

World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)

The World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) fights to defend the interests of fishing communities against big corporate interests in the fishing industry.

Secretariat: Herman Kumara – No. 10, Malwaththa Rd., Negombo, Sri Lanka.

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Friends of the Earth International

Friends of the Earth International was created in 1971 by four organisations from France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Today it is a federation of 71 national-level groups, more than 5000 local groups and over 1.5 million members. They mobilise on joint international campaigns against nuclear energy, whale hunting and the use of biotechnology in agriculture. Friends of the Earth International has been campaigning since 1996 for the recognition of the right to food sovereignty.

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The ROPPA - Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Network of Farmers' and Producers' Organisations of West Africa)

The ROPPA was created in July 2000 during a meeting in Cotonou of around 100 peasant leaders mandated by their organisations. It is a grouping of peasant organisations from 10 West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo). This group is not closed and it intends eventually to include farmers' organisations from other countries in the sub-region.

IPC - International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty

The IPC is based in Rome and plays the role of liaison bureau between the civil society organisations interested in food sovereignty and the UN agencies involved in agriculture and food questions.

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6. What is Food Sovereignty?

"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture policies, to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade so as to attain their objectives of sustainable development, to determine to what extent they want to be autonomous and to limit the dumping of products on their markets".

Food sovereignty is thus an alternative to the neo-liberal agricultural policies imposed by the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. A growing number of organisations make references to this proposal without really understanding or accepting its eminently political nature, which is in stark opposition to the dominant capitalist economic system.

An increasing number of leaders from the political, trade union or associative worlds use the term *food sovereignty* whilst trying to restrict its meaning to that of an isolationist proposal, synonymous with self sufficiency and rejection of exchanges and complementarities. The Forum will be an opportunity to reaffirm in a positive manner the fact that the struggle for the recognition of the right to food sovereignty requires work on four interlinked levels, which will be debated and detailed during the meeting in February 2007. These are the political, the economic, the social and the ecological levels.

Nyeléni 2007 shall pay special attention to clarifying the following points, which were defined in 1996 and re-established in 2001:

- **Prioritise** production by peasant and family farms of food for the domestic and local markets, using diversified and ecological production methods;
- **Ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their production**, so that domestic markets are protected from cheap imports which constitute dumping;
- **Guarantee access to land, water, forests, fishing areas and other resources** so as to promote true redistribution;
- **Recognise and promote the role of women** in food production and ensure that they have equal access to productive resources and can enjoy ownership of them;
- **Ensure that communities have control of productive resources**, rather than corporations buying up land, water, genetic and other resources;
- **Protect seeds**, which are the very foundation of our food and of life itself, and ensure that farmers can exchange and use them freely. This implies rejecting patents on life and adopting a moratorium on genetically modified crops;
- **Invest public funds** to support the productive activities of families and communities, with particular emphasis on promoting autonomisation, local control and food production for the local population and markets.

The principle of food sovereignty was first launched by the international peasant movement Via Campesina in 1996 during the FAO World Food Summit which took place in Rome.

Since then this proposal has started to play a key role in the debate on agriculture and alternatives to neo-liberal policies. Before the introduction of the concept of food sovereignty, food security was limited to searching for ways to guarantee sufficient food through trade, whether at national or international level. The principle of food sovereignty puts agricultural producers at the centre of the debate, and supports all peoples in their right to produce their own food independently of market conditions.

The principle of food sovereignty promotes the development of alternative production, distribution and consumption models based on a new logic, far removed from that of neo-liberalism which has always given the central role to markets and trade liberalisation, and which considers that only international markets can solve the problem of food insecurity.

The right to food sovereignty has been discussed in many forums, networks and conferences, such as the World Social Forums, the More and Better campaign, the “Notre Monde n’est pas une marchandise” (Our World is not a Commodity) Network and the Geneva Conference on the WTO which was held in November 2004. In June 2002 the NGO Forum for Food Sovereignty was organised in Rome alongside the FAO World Food Summit, allowing all parties with an interest in food and agriculture issues to meet and exchange views. Most of these organisations, as well as an increasing number of networks and alliances, now see food sovereignty as a credible alternative that will allow the implementation of food and agriculture policies appropriate to the needs and aspirations of all the peoples of the planet.

There is also increasing interest in food sovereignty in institutional circles. The FAO is engaged in a high-level dialogue with non-governmental organisations from civil society in order to put together specific measures aimed at putting food sovereignty into practice.

The Special Rapporteur for the UN Commission on Human Rights, Jean Ziegler, gave the principle of food sovereignty a central role in one of his reports

The government in Mali is involved in a process aimed at bringing this principle into national legislation.

We believe that a Forum in 2007 will offer a new opportunity to achieve greater recognition of food sovereignty and to strengthen the actions and campaigns aimed at implementing it. During the five days of the Forum the participants will not only be asked to clarify what the right to food sovereignty means and what its implications are for food and agriculture policies in their own regions and countries, but will also consider a global and dynamic strategy to ensure that food sovereignty is taken into account and applied at both international and local levels.

9. Media Accreditation

The media are invited to cover this event and meet its participants. However, only accredited journalists will be accepted at Sélingué. We would ask that you kindly fill in the on-line accreditation form at www.nyeleni2007.org.

Apart from a few exceptions, we request that journalists cover their own expenses, including local and international travel, accommodation and food.

Reasonably priced food will be available at Sélingué.

Communications, Internet, Telephone

Our modest budget and the rural setting of the forum mean we are unable to provide a fully-equipped press centre with all the facilities (computers, etc) to which you may be accustomed. Nevertheless, 512 Ko WiFi internet access, sufficient for sending articles and photos, will be available on site. Those of you with laptop computers will be able to work from Sélingué, and you can also use mobile phones on the forum site. Conditions in Sélingué will be those of a simple African village, and the area tends to be very dusty (which could damage delicate electronic equipment). However, internet connections are available in Bamako.

For further information, visit our website at www.nyeleni2007.org

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Get Connected to Nyéléni Info!

Forum coverage by a team of journalists, photographers, radio and video producers, bloggers and writers.

Sign up to the on-line e-mail list on www.nyeleni2007.org

