

Food Sovereignty Framework: Concept and Historical Context

INTRODUCTION

Although a relatively new introduction to the current discourse on the food issue, Food Sovereignty as a policy framework for approaching the crisis of agriculture and food is fast gaining recognition if not adherence especially among NGOs and social movements all over the world. In fact the term has found its way into official documents of institutions dealing with the issue of food (e.g. FAO). The most common definition of the term is:

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

From a historical context, it can be gleaned that food sovereignty as a policy framework is particularly directed at the perceived negative impact of the unbridled globalization of the economy and particularly agriculture. It is a direct challenge to the policies of the institutions of globalization – the IMF/WB and the WTO.

The concept of food sovereignty is obviously related to other concepts that permeate the discourse on agriculture and food – right to food and food security. The right to food as provided for in the UN declarations defines the role of states in assuring the individual's access to food at all times. Food security refers to the access/availability of food in sufficient quantity and appropriate quality for the citizens at all times.

Food security, thus is a goal of states. For many of them, the goal of food security is a primary concern and is sometimes equated to self-sufficiency in staple food. In the Philippines as well as other Southeast Asian countries for example self-sufficiency in the staple rice is a prime measure of food security.

That and individual citizen enjoys the right to food and that nations and communities and the people as a whole have food security is determined first and foremost (though not exclusively) by a set of policies governments adopt.



This freedom to choose a set of policies is what the food sovereignty framework highlights. The framework holds that the people, states and governments have the inherent right to determine their policies on food and agriculture. In this sense the food sovereignty framework is a means towards attaining food security. Food sovereignty is also directed at overhauling the model of agriculture that is oriented towards export crop production, and likewise critical of the highly skewed patterns of land distribution, particularly in the face of failures of government land reform programs.

The unbridled opening of the economies, the impositions of the IMF/WB through the structural adjustment programs, the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and other related trade agreements have tremendous impact on agriculture in developing countries, particularly in undermining small-scale farming upon which hundreds of millions of smallholders and their families are dependent upon for their survival and in demolishing the capacity of these nations to achieve food security and food self-sufficiency. Unhampered access of transnational corporations (TNCs) to the domestic food markets of developing countries has displaced local products, dampened local production and endangered rural livelihoods. Under the WTO regime TNCs further threaten to take fuller control of agriculture and food production systems in developing countries.

It is in the context of such impositions coming on top of and exacerbating the old problems of the agrarian economy that the framework of food sovereignty assumes a unique historical significance.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE

Agriculture in the Developing Countries

The evolution of food production and agriculture of developing countries from the previous era of colonization to the present era of “globalization” demonstrates a continuous undermining of the capacity of developing countries to achieve food security. The entry of export agriculture in the days of colonialism triggered a series of changes that had profound impacts on food production and food security of developing countries. First, export agriculture signaled the erosion of the self-sufficient character of the peasant economy and ushers in the cash economy. On the one hand peasants are brought into export crop agriculture to earn cash and, on the other hand, detached from the production of food for their consumption. Consequently the procurement of food is now based on cash earned through the production of export crops.

Cash incomes of farm laborers in export crops productions are however subject to the volatility of world prices which can have dire consequences to the farming population. One glaring example is the case of the sugar-producing region in the Philippines. In the mid 80s there occurred a sharp drop in the world price of sugar, which forced landowners to stop production and which immediately triggered acute food shortage for the whole population of farm workers.

Export crop production in developing countries has been confined to a short list of export crops and the prices of these have been falling. Prices of traditional export crops has not recovered since their collapse the middle of the eighties with very negative impact on incomes and the capacity to procure food for peasants in this sector.

Second, export crop production takes away large tracts of prime agricultural land from food production and moreover is the primary driving force for the concentration of land by large landowners. Peasants are thus denied access to land on which they can grow their own food. But at the level of the national economy the country's capacity to produce food is diminished in direct proportion to the development of export agriculture as land and labor are detached from food production for domestic needs. In the Phil and Indonesia, for example large tracts of land previously tilled by small peasant families primarily for the production of food (and other agricultural products) for their own consumption were concentrated by big landowners and subsequently devoted to export crops such as rubber, banana, pineapple, palm, etc. Harvest of small fishers diminish as more and more coastal areas are privatized to give way to production of, for example, prawns for foreign markets

Third, the emergence of trading monopsonies and predatory pricing practices has also devastated peasant economies. Traders control the pricing of agricultural products and there are layers of these merchant monopolies from the village level up to the national markets. At harvest time when there is abundant supply merchants force prices down and raise these as soon as supplies are already under their control hence undermining the capacity of consumers including peasants and farm workers to access food. Hoarding is a common practice especially with critical commodities like rice and corn, legumes, spices etc.

Driven by the need to earn foreign exchange, agricultural policies of many developing countries still favor export crop agriculture up to the present. In fact, the apologists of neo-liberalism bring the justification for this to the extreme. Using the theory of "comparative advantage" they argue that developing countries should concentrate on what they produce best and procure what they do not produce from the world market. One silly application of this was the case of the Philippines when it came up with a plan to reduce the area devoted to rice

production by over a million hectares so that this could be converted to the production of high value crops like roses and asparagus for export!

Chronic shortages in food in many developing countries which otherwise would have the capacity to produce sufficient food for its citizens is at least partly attributed to the contradiction between export crop production and food production for domestic consumption, skewed land ownership patterns and the prevalence of merchant monopolies. There may be natural causes, which can aggravate the situation such as drought, floods, typhoons, pest infestations etc. However, food insecurity is rooted more fundamentally in the structure of agriculture and the underdeveloped economy rather than on natural calamities.

Food Security Prior to SAPs and WTO

Owing to food crisis experienced by many developing countries in the 60's and early 70's, food policies and programs aimed at regulating supply and prices of at least the prime food commodities were put in place by governments. In Asia for example, most if not all governments had a set of policies and state sponsored programs aimed at providing food security for its citizens. These included a state agency to regulate supply and prices of the staple food, land reform first as a tool against insurgency but also formally recognized as a tool for improving agricultural productivity as well as quantitative restrictions on the importation and in some cases in the internal movements of agricultural products being produced within the country in sufficient quantities.

One of the most important policy objectives common to most states in Asia was the goal of self-sufficiency in staple food.

The evaluations as to the efficacy of these measures in attaining the avowed objectives are mixed. The system of food reserves in India for example is credited with stabilizing food supply for the poor. BULOG's monopoly in Indonesia's rice trade is credited with protecting the interest of small producers, which in turn resulted in self-sufficiency in the staple prior to the 1997 crisis.

But the commitments of governments to food security for its citizens were varied. In the Philippines and perhaps in other countries too, this amounted to no more than lip service as the government agencies charged with stabilizing supply and prices of prime food commodities serve the interest of the rich peasants (no more than 5 percent of the total peasantry) or became the milking cow of bureaucrats. The same is true with land reform wherein China, Vietnam, Taiwan and Korea are credited with success while it is a failure in other countries.

The point, however, is there was a general recognition of the necessity for the state to ensure

food security for its citizens. Moreover, there was a general recognition of the sovereign right of states and governments to put into place policies and programs for this purpose without external intervention.

The Green Revolution and Food Security

Ostensibly to solve the impending food shortage, the US in cooperation with other developed countries and funded by the IMF/WB and other foundations launched the green revolution in the late sixties. The objective was to increase productivity per unit area of land especially for grains such as rice and corn. The key to this was research directed at producing new varieties of these crops that are highly responsive to high dosages of external inputs, mainly chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which are under the monopoly control of transnational corporations.

At about the same time infrastructure projects like huge dams were built with financing from the IMF/WB to provide irrigation for otherwise rain fed areas. Coincidence or not, irrigation in fact was a prerequisite for achieving potential yields of the new varieties under the green revolution.

These new varieties and the attendant new technology were introduced to the peasant economy on a massive scale through massive financing by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD-WB) and integrated into the agricultural programs of governments. Rural Banks were set up in town centers of agricultural areas to administer credit and government technicians were mobilized to teach peasants the use of the technology.

The most immediate and visible impact of the green revolution was the creation of an instant market for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. But the impact of the green revolution is more profound. It resulted in structural changes in the food crop sector in countries where it was implemented – the penetration of chemical products into the food crop sector made production dependent on these inputs and increased the cash outlay necessary for production.

Before, the green revolution peasant food crop production relied mainly on natural endowments with negligible inputs other than improvements made by the peasant on the land. The new technology required a much higher level of cash outlay for production, which was provided through loans from the banks initially. This system for formal credit however collapsed soon as peasants defaulted on their loans, which partly explains why high yields could not be sustained. The necessary cash outlay latter was advanced by the merchant and became the basis of more pernicious relationships between peasant and the former. In both the Philippines and Indonesia, for example big merchants advance the peasant needs at planting time

including seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, rent on small farm machinery and even food for the subsistence of the peasant family. The merchant latter at harvest time collects the loan plus interest in the form of the peasant produce at prices the merchant sets.

Some of the claims of the green revolution about raising productivity are obviously exaggerated. However, it is generally recognized that it did increase production. For one the green revolution intensified production by introducing early maturing varieties and year round irrigation system in some areas. Given the conditions prevailing however it is doubtful whether the peasant producer benefited in any significant way from this yield increases. It is more likely that players other than the peasant captured yield increments the most notable of these are the transnational companies through their monopoly of farm inputs and the merchant through profits and interests on loans.

Finally, one of the most important issues concerning the green revolution is its environmental sustainability. Continuous use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides degrades the soil and pollutes the environment. The use of genetically uniform crop over large areas increases the risk of crop failure and so on and so forth. There are also social costs that are already well known.

Agriculture and Food Production in Developed Economies

While agriculture and food production in developing countries remained fixed at a low level, agriculture in the industrial economies rapidly attained high levels of production. This was achieved primarily by massive government support and tight protection for the sector.

For instance, American agriculture, from the outset, has been the recipient of massive government support. The objective of the policy was to develop the full production potential of agriculture. Thus, the American government sponsored researches, facilitated the collection of plant varieties all over the world, built infrastructure like big dams, and practically gave away land for free to farmers who wanted to go into production. This massive support for agriculture resulted in the exponential growth in production such that by the 1930s there was a glut in agricultural commodities, which threatened the viability of American agriculture.

During the war, having the advantage of peace in the homeland while waging war in foreign countries, the US spurred by the needs of the war even increased its agricultural production. When the war ended, the US emerged as the biggest producer in both industry and agriculture producing surpluses that had to be disposed.

The European countries also embarked on a development of their agriculture as part of their

reconstruction efforts after the devastation of World War II. Subsidies and protection measures were used to achieve this goal. By the middle of the 60s the erstwhile deficit in agricultural and food production in the European countries, due the devastation brought by the war, has turned into a surplus.

Subsidies, Dumping and Food Aid

The huge surplus agricultural production in both the US and the Europe is the single biggest immediate threat to the viability of agricultural production in these countries. If not disposed, it can trigger the collapse of prices in the domestic market. Hence, the management of surplus production either through supply management schemes (production limiting scheme) or through the dumping of surplus in the world market or a combination of both has become central to American and European policy regarding agriculture and food. This explains the shifting purposes of subsidies. In the past subsidies were used as tools for encouraging production in the period of developing the “full production potential,” and as a tool for managing (limiting) production.

At present the subsidies make possible the dumping of agricultural products in foreign markets as the way of disposing the surplus so that prices will not collapse in the domestic market. American policy makers today has practically abandoned all production limiting programs in favor of disposing the surplus through dumping or as food aid. The US Farm Bill provides for USD 130 billion farm subsidies to commodities important to millions of farmers all over the world until 2013 while total subsidies among OECD countries has increased to USD 360 billion.

Public funds support these subsidies that ultimately lead to dumping. These subsidies, however, do not go to the family based farmer who on paper is the recipient but is captured by a handful of huge transnational corporations. These corporations control the commanding heights of agricultural production and trade and are the biggest beneficiaries of international agricultural trade.

“Food aid” which has been there for the last 50 years is another instrument for disposing this surplus. Beyond its charitable façade, food aid is directed at the attainment of interlocking political and economic objectives. It is used to earn good will for the donor countries, to expand export market for agricultural products, and to dispose of the surplus. Part of American food aid (under PL480) can be sold in the local markets and considered as loans with low rate of interest and hence become part of the recipient countries’ external debt aside from competing with local produce.

Cheap heavily subsidized food imports as well as food aid has the direct effect of displacing local produce from the local markets and ultimately dampen local production and displace local producers. It is often times argued that the poor benefit from cheap food imports. What the statement hide is the fact that cheap imports take away livelihoods of peasants and other small producers, which undermines their capacity to procure food. When George Bush and the big transnational corporations say they will feed the world we know what they mean – they want to go on dumping their surplus production in the developing countries to maintain if not expand their profits from international agricultural trade at the expense of the peasant and other small producers of the developing countries.

Transnational Corporations and Market Concentration

TNCs are now increasing their control of the food systems. For one, transnational corporations have control over vast markets and simultaneously operate in many countries. Another aspect of the concentration of production and distribution is their integrated operations. They are buyers of agricultural products from family farms, they are into bulk transportation and shipping, insurance and also operate feedlots for livestock or feed mills for the manufacture of feeds for smaller livestock growers. They employ financial instruments such as futures. This integrated operation allows them to dictate terms and allows them to make profits at every turn. If grain is cheap these can be turned into feed for cattle; or they may not make a profit from buying and selling grain but make a killing transporting it. A portion of the profits can come from speculation (futures) that have nothing to do with production or even efficiency in the usual sense.

In the developed countries as well as metropolitan centers of the developing world the distribution of food is increasingly dominated by a fewer but larger distribution chain. These chains can dictate farm gate as well as consumer prices as well as determine to a large extent what food is available to consumers. This growing control has been the concern of many consumer groups all over the world.

Concentration of markets also leads to the rise of industrial agriculture thus intensifying and further concentrating agricultural production and thus leads also to overproduction and dumping. This results in the displacement of family based farms and other small producers in favor of large transnational concerns. Equally important issue is its environmental sustainability. Industrial farming creates environmental problems far bigger than those in the traditional farming systems.

The SAPs, WTO and the Globalization of Agriculture

In the late 70s and early 80s the IMF/WB embarked on a program of structural reforms, which had the effect of undermining the sovereign rights of states and governments to determine their economic policies including those pertaining to food and agriculture. Using the power it has gained as the main source of loans for the developing countries it forced macro-economic reforms on practically the whole of the developing world; simultaneously on over 70 countries at one time using a single recipe for these reforms.

At the level of the national economy these reforms started with a devaluation of the currency through a floating rate system and a squeeze on fiscal spending. The immediate impact of these reforms on the economy was of course harsh. First an inflationary spiral was triggered by the devaluation; incomes were devalued; and the tightened fiscal spending dampened consumption. After the “shock treatment” came a series of reforms designed to “liberalize, deregulate and privatize” the economy with the objective of fully integrating it to the world economy – meaning making it more open and accessible to the entry of international capital, goods and services.

The impact on agriculture and rural development was appalling. In agriculture, SAPs meant the dismantling of mechanisms meant to support and protect domestic agriculture from unfair competition. Agriculture subsidies were drastically withdrawn and removed, regulation of domestic trade of important commodities was abandoned, state food trading and distribution companies were privatized and import controls on agriculture products were dismantled and tariffs reduced. The policies further entrenched commercial export-oriented agriculture production to the detriment of domestic food production and small-scale farming

For all practical purposes the developing countries’ economies had been opened up through the structural adjustment programs of the IMF/WB. No sector of the economy from services to industry to agriculture was spared structural adjustment, which in many countries still are on going. However, the WTO serves a unique function in that it makes the structural adjustments put into place by the IMF/WB permanent. By putting developing countries’ commitments of further opening up their economies into an international agreement complete with punitive actions for any violation of these commitments, the WTO clearly supplants the power of developing countries to govern and regulate their economies. It therefore assumes a powerful role in consolidating a neo-liberal international trading regime where nation-states sovereignty has been substantially diminished. If for example for reason say of public interest a government wants to ban imports on agricultural products due to unfair competition to the local producers it can not do so under WTO rules. Its options are limited to the very narrow parameters of the agreement.

The three pillars of the WTO/AoA – market access, domestic support and export subsidies attest to the lopsided nature of the agreement. Under market access, the agreement provides for tariff cuts on all agricultural products together with a minimum access volume for all agricultural products even if the country does not actually need to import. The agreement prohibits subsidies to agricultural crops beyond ten percent of the value while exempting much of the subsidies of the developed countries through the amber box and the blue box.

The TRIPS combines with the AoA to tighten the noose on peasant agriculture in the developing countries. Even before the WTO, and the advent of genetic engineering, TNCs had overwhelming dominance on agriculture and food system globally. After the establishment of the WTO, TRIPS combines with the AoA to make this control complete. TRIPS by recognizing intellectual property rights and allowing the patenting of life forms gives the TNCs another potent weapon for control of agricultural production and distribution. As a result, poor farmers have increasingly lost their control on seeds and other genetic resources and have become increasingly dependent on unsustainable costly technologies controlled by TNCs.

TNCs at present wield enormous power over agriculture production and trade. No more than half a dozen companies control world trade in grains. A few companies dominate the production of agricultural chemicals, so is the production of seeds and so on. But the potential control made possible by the monopolization of genetic materials, patenting and genetic engineering has raised the level of control on food and agriculture to even higher levels. The potential profits are very high and the monopoly position is strategic that the leading TNCs are in a furious competition to maintain their advantages.

Likewise, the Agreement on Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures has grossly limited the options of developing country governments to regulate imports along food safety concerns and for consumers to have ample information on how food are produced and processed, but has been used extensively by developed countries to set up high non-tariff barriers that discriminate against exports of small developing economies. The setting up of strict international standards that only developed countries can meet has also grave implications on peasant agriculture, as most small-scale producers do not have access to production and processing facilities that meet such standards. On the other hand, the current trade rules restrict consumers' right to choose food through labeling. Moreover, countries could not restrict the trade of genetically modified crops and other products of questionable technologies so long as they could not find a more superior or scientific proof or basis that these processes have indeed serious negative environmental and health impacts.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A FRAMEWORK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POOR PEASANTS AND SMALLHOLDERS

From the emergence of and emphasis on export crop agriculture to the green revolution and finally to the globalization of agriculture through SAPs and the WTO, there has been a continuous undermining of peasant agriculture and small-scale farming in developing countries, which is accompanied at the same time by an increasing control of agriculture and food by domestic agribusiness and transnational corporations.

The trade agreements of the WTO combined with previous episodes of liberalization under IMF-WB sponsored SAPs have locked in-place the policies of economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization of essential government services that have virtually diminished if not removed the active role of the state in developing and protecting its economy and agriculture against unfair competition. The WTO and the IFIs have further reinforced the export-oriented model of agriculture pursued by developing countries that has undoubtedly failed to address hunger and rural poverty. Developing country governments, which in many cases represent their economic elite, by all means also have as much responsibility as the WTO and IMF-WB in that they also have ceded their inherent sovereign right to govern, in exchange for market concessions that benefited mainly their self-serving economic interests. In this situation, food policies that were originally intended to enhance domestic food production for food self-sufficiency and food security have been increasingly abandoned. Import controls or quantitative restrictions on agriculture imports that provide protection to domestic producers were removed and replaced with fast-declining tariffs. Domestic regulation aimed at stabilizing price and supply of basic commodities were abolished and state trading enterprises (STEs) that undertook this function were privatized or are in the process of being privatized.

Thus, indiscriminate liberalization combined with the weakening of government regulation and support systems for agriculture has grossly disadvantaged small farmers and landless peasants in developing countries. Moreover, along with the shifting of government priorities to the commercial and export-oriented sector, domestic food production outputs have stagnated even declined, thus undermining food security and food self-sufficiency of poorer countries. Amidst these constraints, poor peasants have increasingly confronted rising costs of inputs, falling farmgate prices, declining incomes and the continuing threat of displacement and eviction. Import surges and unabated dumping have continuously decimated their products in national and local markets. In consequence, poor peasants have resorted to contracting more debts, while an increasing number have abandoned farming and migrated to urban centers to look for more viable employment, but in many cases, they also end up jobless and more destitute than ever. For many others, rather than shift cultivation to more “competi-

...tive” crops, as government planners would want them to do, they simply mortgaged and sold off their land rights, thus resulting in intensifying land reconcentration. The free trade regime pushed by the WTO, in effect has created more inequalities than ever before.

In such a context, food sovereignty, has become a battle cry for poor peasants around the world demanding to put a decisive halt to unbridled free trade that has trampled upon their basic rights – the right to food, land and livelihood. Food sovereignty for peasant organizations across the world, is an assertion of their rights to their land, water, seeds, and technology and that the exercise of these rights necessitate a shift away from a WTO-dominated agriculture and food system. Peasant organizations from all over the world have been demanding for the immediate removal or dissolution of the Agreement on Agriculture and other WTO agreements that have adversely affected food and agriculture. From their standpoint, food sovereignty is realized when governments and their peoples have increasingly exercise responsibility over how their agriculture policies are shaped. Food sovereignty puts primacy on the people’s development needs over the free trade orthodoxy of the WTO and specifically places priority on promoting and ensuring domestic food production to achieve food self-sufficiency as well as on protecting small farmers livelihoods against dumping and unfair trade.

Defending the Rights of Peoples, Communities and Countries to Determine the Appropriate Policies in Food and Agriculture

The concept of food sovereignty as earlier mentioned is related to the respect and exercise of rights by peoples and nation states to determine the food and agriculture policies that are suited to their specific economic, social, cultural and political circumstances and are explicitly oriented towards achieving national development goals and strategies. Food sovereignty encompasses a set of principles and policies that present an alternative to and directly challenges the dominant neo-liberal trade dogma of the WTO and the international financial institutions.

Many of these policies and programs are not new as we saw earlier; in fact, countries vigorously pursued them in the early phases of their development with the goal of achieving food security, food self-sufficiency, social equity, livelihood and employment. But with the onset of neo-liberal globalization and trade liberalization since the mid-80’s, these same policies that provided support and protection to small-scale agriculture, while admittedly far from perfect and were riddled also with much inadequacies, have been branded as “trade barriers” and have to be discarded in favor of competitiveness and economic growth. Through the WTO and IMF-WB policy impositions, state regulation and protection of domestic agriculture were abandoned as national policies, instead private sector participation or privatization has been encouraged to allow market mechanisms to determine price and competitiveness of

domestic sectors, with the promise of creating enormous welfare gains for society. Agriculture and food policies have been increasingly directed towards promoting export crop production and liberalizing domestic markets purportedly to enhance developing countries' economic growth. In reality, however, most of these policies have only aided the developed world by significantly expanding their export opportunities.

Food sovereignty thus claims back and asserts the rights of peoples, communities and governments to refashion and redirect their agriculture and food policies based on the needs and perspectives of their own men and women producers, peasants, landless farmworkers and the mass of rural poor whose livelihoods have been increasingly threatened and demolished under a regime of economic liberalization.

ELEMENTS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

1. Promoting and protecting domestic food production and markets to achieve food self-sufficiency and contribute to building a vibrant economy.

Food sovereignty puts priority on enhancing domestic food production and protecting domestic markets to ensure food and livelihood security in developing and poorer countries. For many of these countries, agriculture still contributes a sizeable share of their GDP, ranging from 25% to as high as 50%. It likewise provides employment to as high as 70-80% of their labor force and contribute to 40 to 70% of their export earnings. Thus giving priority to improved agriculture productivity and higher production outputs would lead these countries to food security and food self-sufficiency as well as expanded rural employment contributing to a more broad-based growth. It is crucial however that developing countries move away from the dogma and policy of export-led agricultural production and trade liberalization. Programs and incentives for cultivating export crops should be stopped and domestic subsidies instead be directed to small-scale farms that produce basic food stuff. Moreover, it is essential that food crops produced by small farmers and landless agricultural workers must be given priority in the domestic markets, by constructing effective border measures to prevent entry of dumped imports. Such a policy of promoting domestic food production must be complemented with a full range of domestic support measures that could include the following:

- 1) Price support and price stabilization undertaken by a strong and effective state trading enterprise (STE).
- 2) Increased public investments in agriculture in the form of input subsidies, affordable

credit delivery, marketing and post-harvest support, infrastructure and irrigation, research and development, etc.

3) Effective control of imports to guarantee farmers a fair price for their produce and protect them against dumping. Governments should have the flexibility to impose a range of protective measures like import controls, high tariffs even beyond the WTO bound rates, price band systems, etc.

4) Decision-making processes at all levels should allow the broadest participation of smallholders and poor peasants.

It is crucial that agriculture support must also lead to diversification and growth of value-added processing sectors that could generate more employment. In this case, agriculture development must be placed within a broader national development strategy that promotes sustainable cross-sectoral and upstream and downstream linkages.

2. Regulating international trade, particularly curbing agriculture dumping and TNCs control on agriculture and food, outside the WTO framework.

Protecting agriculture markets in developing countries, and in particular protecting agriculture products essential to food and livelihood security of millions of peasants around the world require not only strong domestic regulation on dumped food imports but also an effective regulation of international trade, targeting global trade distortions resulting from dumping and the ever growing concentration of agriculture markets. However, such regulation should be outside of the parameters of the WTO as the institution itself embodies freeing trade for the benefit of transnational corporations, on the one hand, but on the other, institutionalizes and perpetuates dumping and trade-distorting subsidies of developed countries hurting their own family farms as well as the poor peasants in poorer countries.

Today, global agriculture markets are controlled by a handful of transnational corporations that are driving agriculture production to surplus and unsustainable levels. This situation has increasingly wreaked havoc on livelihoods of millions of poor peasants. Curbing the power of transnational corporations in food and agriculture and ending dumping are crucial to achieving food sovereignty. The dismantling of the WTO agreement that allows TNCs free access to the agriculture sector in developing countries is a necessary condition to achieving this.

A strong regulation of international trade must come from a new framework that effectively addresses dumping, international price volatility and market concentration. Important policy instruments include supply management to avoid agriculture surplus production, abolition of all direct and indirect export subsidies to end dumping or the selling of products at the world market at below cost of production, and international commodity agreements to

control supply at the international level to guarantee a fair price for peasants still dependent on a few export crops like coffee, cotton, etc. It is also equally important to institute regulatory mechanisms to control and regulate transnational activities in agriculture and food.

In the final analysis, however, an effective regulation of international trade to address longstanding inequities and imbalances and curb the power of TNCs requires that national governments and peoples take greater control of their food and agriculture – decide what they should produce, regulate their markets, retake access to and control of their land and natural resources, etc. Along this line, state-trading corporations have important roles to play. Instead of privatizing STES, governments should support and strengthen them through bigger budgetary outlays and organizational reforms targeted at organizational accountabilities and corrupt practices. To complement STEs, producer and marketing cooperatives need to be formed and supported, as the combined strength of cooperatives and STEs can provide a strong counter-force to transnational corporations' control in domestic and international market.

Curbing TNC power in agriculture would also require the development, review and strengthening of national and international frameworks or system for recognizing biological diversity, traditional knowledge and practices and community innovations as alternative to the WTO TRIPS regime which institutionalizes monopoly control of seeds and biodiversity by TNCs. Countries must be able to exercise their right to ban patenting of life forms.

3. Increasing men and women's access to and control of their land and productive resources.

The concept of Food Sovereignty promotes the access to and control of men and women farmers, settlers, fisher folks and indigenous peoples over land, seeds, water and other productive resources. The lack of access to land remains a fundamental obstacle to achieving rural development and poverty eradication in the region. In order for smallholders and poor peasants to get an equitable and fair share of the benefits from the land, they must have control of and own the land they till or must have secure land claims and tenure. This requires that government's agrarian reform programs should be able to target the breaking down of land monopolies, particularly huge export crop plantations and implement expeditious distribution of land to poor peasants and secure their legal rights and claims over their land. In relation to securing land rights of poor farmers, traditional tillers, settlers and indigenous peoples, there must also be a recognition and enforcement of communal or traditional systems of ownership, to prevent or deter attempts to privatize common or public resources.

Similarly, there should be made in place mechanisms to secure farmers and indigenous people's rights over plant genetic resources including seeds and their improvements as well as local knowledge. The patenting of life forms, under the WTO TRIPS should not be allowed as it would lead to the monopolization of and control of seeds and genetic resources and consequently entire production systems by profit-hungry transnational corporations.

Finally, in many developing countries today, the delivery of irrigation has been increasingly privatized, in compliance to structural adjustment reforms pushed by the IFIs. This has created tremendous tensions among poor peasants, and in many cases has led to rising incidence of suicides, particularly in arid regions like in India. Increased pressure must be put upon governments that are abdicating their role in providing basic services for their people.

4. Access to Adequate, Nutritious and Safe Food for All.

Food sovereignty recognizes and asserts the individual's right to adequate, nutritious and safe food. The full exercise of this basic human right, however, necessitates that agrarian and food policies are directed towards the above goals – agrarian reform, protection of domestic producers, comprehensive support and subsidy for small farmers, enhanced domestic food production, etc.

An adequate supply of food at the national or international level is not a guarantee of food security for all. While there is global surplus of food, there are countries and entire regions experiencing famines. Moreover, even if national food supplies are enough to meet domestic demand, there remain a significant proportion of the population suffering from acute hunger and malnutrition. Even within households, there also exists disturbing contrasts in food accessibility and security, with women and children having less access to adequate and nutritious food than their male members. Under free trade, such disparities to access to food are even magnified and exacerbated, as national and local economies are increasingly destroyed by predatory practices of TNCs and local livelihoods are destroyed by fierce competition.

With the ideological onslaught of globalization, food security has been increasingly linked to a poor countries' mere access to global food supplies made possible by cheap imports and even food aid. While indeed these could artificially meet rising domestic food consumption, the impacts are debilitating in terms of eroding poor countries' capacity to produce and feed themselves, changing cultural preferences, destroying traditional livelihoods and eroding biodiversity. Clearly food security within the framework of free trade as espoused by the WTO, UN and national governments are at best illusory, at worst they end up exacerbating food insecurity of poorer countries.

In contrast, food sovereignty secures and ensures everyone's right to food through structural and policy changes that address problems of highly skewed distribution of assets and incomes, persistent underdevelopment of rural economies, lagging food production outputs and dwindling public support in agriculture and food production. Hence, food becomes accessible to everybody particularly the poor, not only through sufficient production, but because they have the incomes to procure quality and nutritious food. It has to be emphasized too that food sovereignty recognizes the need for countries to set up their own national regulatory mechanisms to ensure food quality and food safety based upon appropriate criteria and standards that respond to real needs of consumers and do not serve merely as non-tariff barriers. This requires rejecting the standards and obligations imposed by the WTO's Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Measures and corollarily strengthening and improving international regulatory frameworks on food safety, initiated by such as agencies as the World Health Organization and related UN agencies, while at the same time increasing capacity of poor countries to develop improved standards and enforce regulatory mechanisms.

The persistent food deficit problem of low income and food importing countries may have to be addressed through a comprehensive national development strategy that involves diversification of agriculture and food production to minimize reliance on a few export cash crops, generate adequate financing through debt cancellation to build infrastructure and install needed support services for food production, and expand their income opportunities through reduced global trade distortions.

5. Women and Food Sovereignty

The role of women in ensuring food sovereignty is crucial. Women account for more than 50% of the food grown all over the world. In Asia, women account for 65% of household food production, in Latin America, 45 percent and in Sub-Saharan Africa, 70% to as high as 80%. Women also play crucial roles in forestry and fishery, especially in forest product and fuel gathering, small-scale fishing and marketing and processing. Women also contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and plant genetic resources through their knowledge and practice of genetic resource improvement and breeding. However, women's significant contribution has remained underrated and "invisible." Mainstream economics and statistics have failed to account for this, either through lack of disaggregated data or the proliferation of male-biased research instruments. Moreover, even as women toil doubly hard to produce food, they themselves lack access to adequate and nutritious food nor do they have access to and have control of land and productive resources that could provide them more sustainable livelihoods.

Economic globalization and trade liberalization as well as the inherent structural weaknesses

of agrarian-based economies that render peasant agriculture in Third World countries bankrupt have all undermined women's important role in food security and food sovereignty. As small-scale peasant farming collapses under unjust competition from dumped imported products and as women and men farmers are increasingly displaced from their farms, women carry the heaviest burden. Women have to accept more farming jobs to offset lost incomes or are forced to employ in domestic and menial jobs to augment family income, while the male farmers have to migrate to urban centers to look for jobs, thus creating multiple burden for the women members. On top of this, women's care-giving function suffers from government's withdrawal of basic services under IMF-WB sponsored structural adjustment measures.

Food sovereignty thus enhances and supports women's important role in food security by addressing the core policy issues that pose tremendous constraints to agriculture production. Agriculture and food policies within this framework must be able to address specific needs and perspectives of women; increase and strengthen women's access to land, water, seeds, credit and other productive resources; engage and institutionalize women's active participation in policy and decision-making; and support grassroots women organizing.

6. Food Sovereignty Promotes Sustainable Agriculture Practices

Food sovereignty seeks to change the current unsustainable pattern of agriculture production – mono-cropping, dependency on expensive agro-chemical-based inputs, industrial and export-led agriculture production that damages the environment and resource base leading to massive soil erosion, deforestation, coastal and marine resource degradation and biodiversity loss. It promotes a policy shift from one of supporting export-oriented agricultural production to promoting and supporting small-scale farming that supports livelihood of majority of poor peasants. Such a policy has to be complemented by an equitable distribution of land, increased public expenditures accorded to small-scale farming, municipal fishing, and greater farmer participation in agriculture programs including in research and development. The development and wide dissemination of sustainable farming technologies and systems must be given increasing attention both in government –initiated researches and agricultural extension services.

Food Sovereignty as Linked to Economic and Political Sovereignty

As food sovereignty directly challenges the globalization of food and agriculture systems via WTO trade rules and policy impositions of the IMF-WB, it offers a very powerful framework for changing national and global policies on food and agriculture in line with food

security, agrarian reform and sustainable development objectives. By asserting the inherent rights of peoples and nation states to define their own food and agriculture policies based on the needs and interests of the small-scale farmers and landless peasants, food sovereignty diminishes the power of the WTO and rich countries to prey upon national and local economies while increasing the capacity of nation states and peoples to protect their small-scale farming, ensure equitable distribution of land and productive resources and promote diverse sustainable agricultural practices. As such, food sovereignty can effectively put a brake to the liberalization of agriculture and export-oriented agriculture development pursued by developing countries that mainly benefit their transnational corporations and the domestic economic elite in developing countries. Through this, food sovereignty also addresses the enormous economic asymmetries between developed and developing countries that have long prevented the global south from pursuing a more sustainable development path.

Addressing the issue of debt bondage of many developing countries is critical to achieving food sovereignty. Many highly indebted countries are forced to follow IMF-WB prescriptions or loan conditionalities that are aimed at restructuring their agriculture sectors and integrating them more into the world market so that, according to the bank they would earn the foreign exchange needed to repay their debts. It is therefore an integral call for food sovereignty, to cancel poorer countries debts, and particularly those that were forced upon them via inappropriate lending schemes, those that are acquired and squandered by corrupt and undemocratic governments or debts accrued because of unfair trading terms. Many debtor countries today, spend as much as 30%-40% of their annual budget to debt servicing alone. These countries oftentimes have debts that surpass their actual export earnings. In 2001, 41 poorest countries had debts totalling \$213 billion while all countries in Africa where many of these highly indebted countries are found, had a total export earnings of only \$141 billion.

Moreover, in war torn regions or countries where the political freedoms of peoples are increasingly curtailed, the issue of food is also critical.

Food sovereignty thus is intrinsically linked to the struggles of peoples around the world against all forms of economic injustice and for greater economic and political freedoms.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

The WTO and the IFIs continue to subvert the policy space of developing countries as the rules they impose require that domestic policies should be aligned with commitments on trade liberalization. The principle of food sovereignty will have to find recognition in other frameworks that recognize and respect economic and political sovereignty of nations, allow

developing countries to actively pursue national development policies based on their economic, social and political circumstances and promote genuine democratic participation of peoples in national and international decision-making. The UN system could offer such a framework, given that many of its agencies are also working around the issues of hunger, agriculture, employment and trade. Moreover, a number of covenants enshrining the fundamental rights of individuals to food, health, education, just wages and favourable working conditions, etc have been forged under this system. Such frameworks and principles can inform an alternative development framework that would lay down commitments and obligations of nation states to protect people's food sovereignty.

However, much as the UN system recognizes and enforces the principles of national sovereignty and could offer a forum to pursue an alternative framework for food sovereignty, its development agenda and programs have been highly dominated by the Washington Consensus. FAO for instance sees achieving food security of poor countries through increased access to food by way of increased food imports from developed countries which accordingly can produce food more efficiently. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are also being pursued within the current model of open markets and trade-based food security.

There is clearly a crying need for likewise reforming and re-orienting the United Nations, so it can be an effective forum for defending and securing the rights of all peoples. A positive development is that there is now a growing recognition among UN agencies of the flaws and weaknesses of the trade liberalization policy of the 90's and its failure to deliver the promises of economic growth, rising employment and poverty reduction. In fact, some UN studies have concluded that "liberalisation cannot automatically guarantee human development and an increase in trade has not always had a positive impact on human development."

Beyond the UN framework, there have been some emerging proposals from society to develop an International Convention on Food Sovereignty as alternative to the present iniquitous Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) and other similar WTO agreements, where the concept and principles of food sovereignty, the basic human rights of all peoples to safe and healthy food, decent employment, labour rights and protection, protection of the environment, etc, are enshrined and enforced.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

The recognition and exercise of food sovereignty resides in nation states. It is a call for governments to exercise their sovereign right to define and implement democratically crafted agriculture and food policies that meet food security, food self-sufficiency, livelihood security and national development objectives. To achieve this, governments must at the onset,

work towards reversing the present trend in the negotiations in the WTO that continuously constrict their “policy space” to one that increases their options to defend the interest of their people against the destructive incursion of transnational corporations into the economy. In the long-run, however governments must exercise political will to carry out policy reforms away from the trade obligations imposed by the WTO and firmly reject trade agreements that compromise their ability to govern, protect and support their agriculture and food sectors.

At present, much still needs to be desired in democratizing nation states and governments. Many if not most governments of the South and even the North represent their economic elite – big landowning families, agro-business corporations and transnational corporations and thus have huge stakes in perpetuating a neo-liberal policy regime. Most governments have readily succumbed to impositions of the IMF-WB and the WTO. Over the last years, they have engaged in various trade agreements mostly in very secretive fashion and away from public scrutiny. Indeed, there is very little transparency nor democracy in policy and political processes as well as in trade negotiations. Oftentimes, governments of poorer countries sell out their sovereignty readily in exchange for economic concessions, aid and trade preferences, political and military support, and debt financing from IMF-WB, etc.

But recent developments have shown, too, that increasingly governments, because of the past hugely disappointing experience under WTO and with strong pushed and pressure from constituents have been taking up positions ranging from calibrating their liberalization to shielding their agriculture from more aggressive liberalization. This is exemplified by positions from the Group of 20 and the Group of 33 that target the elimination of direct and indirect export subsidies in developed countries and the operationalization of the Special and Differential treatment for developing countries through the concept of Special Products and Special Safeguard measures, etc.

Given this trend, developing countries may still gain more clout in the current trade negotiations by strengthening their position and rejecting manipulation and pressure from the rich countries. However, this would take a lot of political will and greater economic and political independence from these countries, that as of now are not clearly present yet in these countries due to colonial ties, aid conditionalities, and even the self-serving interests of their political leadership.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CSOs

In the final analysis, key to exercising food sovereignty lies in the political strength of social movements that have long advocated not only of food sovereignty but also for greater economic and political self-determination of developing countries. Their political and organizational strength are key to changing economic and political structures both at the global and national levels. They can help shape a system of governance that would truly embody democratic processes and provide the institutional support for the needed economic and trade reforms.

Both at the national and at the international levels, social movements and farmers movements in particular have important roles to play in pursuing policy reforms that conform to the principles of food sovereignty. Increasingly CSOs and social movements have been taking part in formulating policies and negotiating positions. During the WTO Fifth Ministerial, they had figured prominently in strengthening the position of developing countries and LDCs and in pushing them to hold their ground amidst increasing pressure from the US and the EU. At the country levels, people's coalitions have been engaging their governments in matters related to trade positions, domestic policies. In a number of countries, political parties supported and organized by social movements have participated and won electoral seats in the parliament.

However, beyond pursuing and actualizing political strength in formal and legal processes, social movements and farmer organizations have also increasingly engaged in grassroots-based actions that enable the poor peasants to exercise their rights and enable them to take greater control of their land and productive resources. This is seen in numerous claim-taking and peasant implemented agrarian reform such as the land occupation initiatives of farmers in Brazil and the Philippines, farmer's marketing program, farmer's in research and development and through other related grassroots programs that provide wide-ranging support to small-scale farming and sustainable farming practices.

Many national and international peasant organizations are united on the demand for food sovereignty. They include the Via Campesina (Original proponent of food sovereignty), national independent peasant organizations in developing countries in the region under the Asia-Pacific Network for Food Sovereignty, small family farm coalitions and organizations in the North and other peasant organizations. Their common rallying call is to take WTO out of agriculture.

Among NGOs and CSOs, there is now a growing understanding and acceptance of the concept of food sovereignty. Realizing the limits of food security goals in terms of capturing their present engagement in the whole gamut of development work and programs, many NGOs have started to include food sovereignty in their development advocacy. Many of them are united under broader coalitions like the Our World is Not For Sale Coalition.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of food sovereignty, in the context of intensifying globalization is fast gaining adherence not only from social movements, which first raised the call but from various actors, both governmental and non-governmental. Its popularity among movements particularly peasant movements around the world can be traced to the relevance of the concept and the proposed solutions it envisioned to the presently globalized system of agriculture that only reproduces poverty, hunger and inequalities. Food sovereignty seeks and struggles for the recognition and enforcement of the rights of peoples and countries to freely decide the agriculture and food policies needed to combat hunger and poverty. It overhauls the paradigm of global free-market economics that sees the markets as the sole determinants of growth and development and thus sees agriculture merely as producing goods for the export market. In place of this, the concept of food sovereignty proposes a vision of agriculture and economy that meets the goals of equity, food sovereignty, food security, sustainability and people's empowerment. Under this concept is a comprehensive list of policy reforms in agriculture and food that include prioritization and promotion of domestic food production to achieve food self-sufficiency; regulation of domestic and international trade to ensure fair prices for small farmers, end dumping and curb the power of transnational corporations; implementation of genuine agrarian reform to distribute land and assets equitably to men and women farmers; and increased domestic support to small-scale farmers and poor peasants as well as to sustainable agriculture practices. All these reforms can be actualized through active intervention of the state in agriculture production and trade, the participation of men and women farmers and poor peasants in decision-making and the institutionalization of processes that will give them more access to and control of land and other productive resources. Crucial to these reforms are reforms in the international trading regime that should be embodied in an alternative framework for trade rules. Beyond national and international regulatory instruments, however, what remains crucial is the strength of social movements that would ensure that such thorough-going reforms are indeed implemented at the community, national and international level.

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