



ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA



## Food Sovereignty Systems:

Feeding the World, Regenerating Ecosystems, Rebuilding Local Economies, and Cooling the Planet – all at the same time.

The vast majority (70%) of the world's population is fed and nourished by local, ecological systems of food production<sup>1</sup>. But these systems are severely threatened and undermined by industrial systems of agriculture that are controlled by corporations and promoted by governments. These industrial systems have exacerbated or even created the multiple crises of rising food prices, poverty, climate change and biodiversity loss. Industrial agriculture and the global food system contribute an estimated 44-57% of global greenhouse gas emissions<sup>2</sup>. This is ignored at our peril.

Since the idea of producing food as an industrial product to maximise profit was introduced, corporations have accelerated the race to control more and more aspects of the food system, including land, water, seeds, markets. Industrial agriculture is driven to maximise what it can extract from the soil, at literally any cost. Soils are becoming starved, and addicted to chemical fertilisers and inputs, destroying biodiversity and resilience.

The idea of Food Sovereignty developed as a response to the crises facing the world's farmers and food systems. It was not developed by economists, politicians, academics or corporations. The concept of Food Sovereignty evolved through the experience and analysis of the people on which the world's food supply still depends: small scale food producers themselves. It is therefore not based on abstract theories about profit, growth and GDP. Food Sovereignty is rooted in the complex realities of producing, buying, selling and eating food. It is not a new idea, but rather it recognises all the dimensions of a healthy, ethical and just food system.

Food Sovereignty is thus a more holistic system than Food Security. It recognises that control over the food system needs to remain in the hands of farmers, for whom farming is both a way of life and a means of producing food. It also recognises the contribution of indigenous peoples, pastoralists, forest dwellers, workers and fishers to the food system. It ensures that food is produced in a culturally acceptable manner and in harmony with the ecosystem in which it is produced. This is how traditional food production systems have regenerated their soils, water, biodiversity and climactic conditions, for generations.

For Africa, facing climate instability and food crises, recognising and protecting Food Sovereignty systems is more relevant and urgent than ever

# A Global Movement for Food Sovereignty: Story of Origin<sup>1</sup>'''

**1980s and 1990s** – Growing corporate dominance of the global food system through WTO/ GATT inclusion of agriculture. Agricultural trade liberalisation leads to food production being increasingly controlled by corporations and focused on the export market. Governments pressured to promote this industrial, corporate-led model of agriculture to address hunger and create wealth.

This leads to communities losing control over their food, seed, markets, livelihoods, land, environment, health and culture.

**1996** – La Via Campesina international conference. Peasant and farm leaders agree that “Food Security” no longer sufficiently describes communities’ needs, nor acknowledges the need for their livelihoods, dignity, culture and health from food production. Food security does not take into account how food is produced. Industrial food production inevitably leads to a perverse destruction of ecosystems and farming communities, resulting in an increase in hunger and poverty as communities are displaced from their way of life.

Instead of solving hunger, liberal economic policies have exacerbated, and created it. Via Campesina proposed the recognition of a radical alternative, which still feeds us but is being undermined: Food Sovereignty. This concept puts control of land, water, seed and ecosystems back into the guardianship of those who produce food. It is based on principles of democracy and

justice, values which are clearly missing from the neo-liberal approach. At the momentous 1996 meeting, 11 Principles of Food Sovereignty were defined, and these were then integrated into La Via Campesina’s Position on Food Sovereignty.

La Via Campesina then took the work forward, looking to strengthen collaboration with other international partners, to spread the message and deepen the thinking of Food Sovereignty as a viable solution for our local and global food systems.

**2001** - Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS), the international coalition of groups challenging global economic liberalisation, helped to develop the Peoples’ Food Sovereignty Network, which collectively produced a Peoples’ Food Sovereignty Statement. The World Forum on Food Sovereignty was held in Cuba in 2001.

**2002** – Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Rome, in conjunction with the World Food Summit.

**2007** – Nyéléni International Forum on Food Sovereignty, Mali. The conference is named after Nyéléni, the Malian goddess of fertility. The forum was attended by 500 people from 80 countries. Participants included farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, migrant workers and consumers. There was widespread consensus that Food Sovereignty is integral to local cultures and based on local knowledge. Food Sovereignty reverses the dangerous disconnect



between production and consumption and democratises the food system.

Intense discussions at Nyéléni refined the definitions and common themes, down to “6 Principles of Food Sovereignty”.

**2009** – **Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa** (AFSA) born, bringing together a network of African networks working on a range of issues, from farming and agroecology to indigenous peoples’ rights and related advocacy.

**2010** – In Canada, The People’s Food Policy Process add a 7<sup>th</sup> Principle to Food Sovereignty: Seed is Sacred.

**2011** – Nyéléni Europe meeting in Austria and the founding of the European Food Sovereignty movement.

# Food Security or Food Sovereignty?

So what is the problem with Food Security? In 2001, the FAO defined their objective of achieving Food Security as: "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

While this objective may sound good, the concept of Food Security has been mis-used to justify policies that prioritise only yield and the delivery of food to consumers by any means. It has become divorced from any consideration of how that food is produced and by whom. It is mis-used to justify and encourage the industrialisation of agriculture, food aid, the use of genetically modified seeds, the shifting of food production from diverse crops for local markets to monocultures for export, and the liberalisation of markets where small producers are put out of business by subsidised imports.

Food security is also the stated objective of the Green Revolution, now aggressively promoted in Africa by the Alliance for a New Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA). AGRA promotes expensive, subsidised fertilisers, pesticides and hybrid seeds, a concept that is not economically or environmentally sustainable. It puts the private sector in charge of seed supply and replaces public and local seed systems. As it has shown us in India, the Green Revolution literally kills farmers, with hundreds of farmers committing suicide as they are trapped in debt. In reality, the Green Revolution approach destroys local seed systems, reduces resilience and creates a high level of dependency on subsidies and credit, putting small scale farmers at high risk. Despite the rhetoric, it is in practice, the direct opposite of food sovereignty.

Policies based on this narrow understanding of Food Security have also failed to protect consumers from soaring food prices. Thus, under Food Security practices prescribed by governments, business and FAO, world hunger is growing, faster even than population growth. Despite scientific hi-tech approaches, hunger is increasing. Food has increasingly become a commodity for maximising profits for the few rather than actually feeding people. Never before was the inequity of the global food system more starkly evident than during the Food Crisis of 2007-08. As people were starving,



agribusiness and commodity traders reported record profits. This crisis demonstrated clearly how neo-liberal policies have replaced production of local food to feed the country, with export crops to feed international markets. This has created dependency on fickle and volatile markets for export and import of food, and as a result communities worldwide are now highly vulnerable to rising food prices. In some parts of the world, the price of staple foods rose as much as 500% during 2008<sup>4</sup>.

It is clear that the globalised and industrialised food system, is failing to meet neither the needs of the world's people nor sustain the ecosystems on which food production depends. Real food security is impossible without first achieving food sovereignty.

A different model is urgently needed, one that works with the farmers, communities, soils and biodiversity, on which food production depends. Instead of focusing merely on production and trade, the Food Sovereignty framework serves all elements of the system - farmers, communities, ecosystems, climate, markets and consumers everywhere. It is a holistic approach which is mutually enhancing at every level, bringing coherence to the food system. It also recognises that women are central to achieving this goal and challenges the escalating violence against women in Africa.

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## Nyeleni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty Definition of Food Sovereignty (from the Declaration of Nyeleni)

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.

### Six Principles of Food Sovereignty

	Food Sovereignty	Is FOR	Is AGAINST
1.	<b>Focuses on Food for People:</b>	Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies;	and <i>rejects</i> the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business
2.	<b>Values Food Producers:</b>	Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food;	and <i>rejects</i> those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3.	<b>Localises Food Systems:</b>	Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms;	and <i>rejects</i> governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
4.	<b>Puts Control Locally:</b>	Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities;	and <i>rejects</i> the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
5.	<b>Builds Knowledge and Skills:</b>	Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations;	and <i>rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6.	<b>Works with Nature:</b>	Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to " <i>heal the planet so that the planet may heal us</i> ";	and <i>rejects</i> methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

## Food Sovereignty Systems: Mutually Enhancing and Just

Food Sovereignty	Industrial agriculture
<b>Seed</b>	
Seed is sacred, which means it is precious and cannot be owned, controlled, manipulated. It symbolizes life's cycles, potency and potential.	GM of seed has enabled corporations to claim falsely that they can own and patent seed. Seed is turned into a commodity through which to increase profit and control of the food system.
As recognised in the CBD, local and indigenous communities have enhanced agrobiodiversity and genetic diversity over millenia.	The industrial system fails to acknowledge that it still relies on the genetic diversity that local and indigenous people have created over centuries, as the basis to develop its own proprietary varieties.
Farmers' Rights were established in response to the corporate drive to own living seed. This is the inherent right to save, exchange and sell seed – the ancient practice which is at the foundation of enhancing and spreading diversity.	Instead of enhancing diversity, industrial agriculture is making the global food system dependent on a few varieties, which increases vulnerability to shocks and disturbances.
When farmers control their own seed they always have the ability to grow their own food even if they have no money.	The industrial food system creates dependency. Farmers have to buy seed each year. No money, no seed – or growing debt which has led to farmers suicides.
<b>Livelihoods</b>	
Ensures that small-scale food producers have control over land and access to seed, ensuring they are able to plant seed every season and develop varieties to suit many different needs.	Patented GM crops and hybrids prevent farmers from saving or developing their own seed, and means they must buy seeds and external inputs from corporations every season. This increases seed companies' profits, but reduces farmers incomes.
Supports small-scale food producers, where farmers, fishers, pastoralists, are able to govern their own land and make decisions about the livelihoods they want to engage in.	Through pressure from industrial farming systems, farmers may be forced to sell their land because they cannot compete with the low prices of food produced with imported and industrial agriculture. They often become poorly-paid workers on plantations, or leave farming altogether.
Values traditional knowledge, and the knowledge and skills of small-scale food producers.	Only values scientific knowledge, seeds or machinery developed and patented by corporations.
Farmers' livelihoods are more stable and secure if they control their own seeds and agro-ecological farming systems which require low inputs, and if they sell to local markets which provide more stable prices.	Farmers livelihoods' are vulnerable, as they are dependent on expensive seed and chemicals and fluctuating global market prices for their cash crops.
Small-scale food producers can be paid a fair price if they sell to local consumers and local markets, or organise themselves into co-operatives and sell to local markets where they can negotiate fair prices.	Supermarkets force down prices paid to farmers, leaving them with decreasing incomes.
<b>Reliable Supply</b>	
Diversity of seed & crops enables farmers to meet a range of needs & challenges, especially in the face of climate instability.	Monocultures mean crops are more vulnerable to pests, diseases, climate change and poor soils.
Food sold locally for local markets, ensuring access and stable prices for consumers.	Fertile land and water is used to grow cash crops which are exported, and not for feeding local people.
<b>Health &amp; Nutrition</b>	
Communities benefit from better health & nutrition by growing and eating a diversity of foods.	As diversity disappears from farms, communities' diets become narrow, and dependent on just a few imported staple foods. This often leads to poor health as a result.
Foods and production are free from harmful chemical pesticides, fertilisers and GM genes, and are safe and healthy for consumers and farmers.	Foods may contain untested GM genes, pesticides or fertilisers, which may pose a risk to human health and to farmers who apply them.

Food Sovereignty	Industrial agriculture
<b>Climate Change</b>	
A diversity of seeds, crops and livelihood options enable farmers to have more options to meet changing weather patterns from climate change	Corporations offer only minimal seed options. Developing for new conditions takes many years to develop. GM and hybrid seeds often require perfect conditions of soil, rain and fertiliser, meaning increased likelihood of crop failure due to climate change fluctuations.
Does not use fertilisers and pesticides, and therefore does not contribute to climate change.	The production of fertilisers and pesticides releases large amounts of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) that cause climate change.
Increased organic matter in soils leads to increased absorption and sequestration of carbon, thus reducing climate change.	Fertilisers destroy the organic matter in soil, oxidizing the stored carbon and releasing CO <sub>2</sub> from topsoils, thus further contributing to climate change.
Healthy soils full of organic matter – greater water retention means resilience to drought, floods and erosion. Recuperated grasslands through traditional management systems.	Fertilisers kill the organisms that build up organic matter in soil. Without organic matter to retain water, soils become dry, dusty and susceptible to drought, erosion and compaction, and more vulnerable as climate change strikes.
Food is sold locally and not transported globally, meaning fewer food miles, and mitigating climate change.	Food is airfreighted, transported, refrigerated, processed and packaged for export– all contributing CO <sub>2</sub> to climate change.
<b>Biodiversity</b>	
By working with Nature, protects on-farm biodiversity, crop diversity, soil and water conservation and local ecosystems.	Pesticides and fertilisers poison biodiversity (including beneficial insects) and soil and water systems. Monocultures lead to the disappearance of agricultural biodiversity.
Seeds developed by farmers do not contain genes from different species, and therefore do not threaten other crop varieties or related species.	GM crops irreversibly contaminate local varieties and related species with GM genes.
As recognised by the CBD, farmers have enhanced agrobiodiversity over millenia.	Industrial agriculture reduces genetic and agrobiodiversity to such an extent that in 1996 the FAO declared the erosion of agrobiodiversity to have reached danger point.

(continued from page 3)

Food Sovereignty expresses “the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments.”

Its holistic approach ensures that each aspect of the food system builds a just, regenerative and resilient system for food production, distribution and consumption. It is a framework that on one hand is simple and self-evident, and yet it delivers multiple benefits, in a holistic system, which can respond to emerging and complex challenges.

The word “Sovereignty”, or “Soberania” was chosen for its significance in the region where the movement was founded. Latin America has a history of peasant-based social movements, and the term “soberania” has a clear political meaning. “Sovereignty” does not, as some people occasionally think, just refer to kings and queens! It refers to communities’ or nations’ collective power, their rights and responsibilities, empowerment, autonomy, independence and

freedom to make decisions about issues that affect them. It essentially means “Power to the People”. When the Latin American farmers’ movements met at the La Via Campesina conference in Mexico in 1991, the term “Food Sovereignty” thus had a powerful and layered resonance for most participants.

At the Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, 2007, 500 participants agreed that food sovereignty was essentially based on 6 key principles, and offered a clear framework that defined what is needed, and what must be rejected.

In Canada in 2010, a citizen-led process to develop “The People’s Food Policy” embraced the above 6 principles of Food Sovereignty. Through the enthusiastic involvement of indigenous First Nations peoples in the process, a seventh key principle emerged: that “**Seed is Sacred**”, as it is part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define and sustain culture and community.<sup>5</sup>

# Food Sovereignty Needs Trade and Investment Rules that Favour Localism, and is fair to food producers

The Food Sovereignty movement prioritises the protection of domestic and local agricultural production. This will require a fundamental shift in global trade rules<sup>6</sup>, resulting in less international trade. Long distance trade in foods should focus on those things which cannot be produced in every region, such as traditional “cash crops” of coffee, tea, etc. The more recent cash crops which dominate African production such as flowers, baby sweetcorn, mange tout, asparagus and green beans etc can predominantly be produced in the same countries or regions that import them – so they do not actually need to be traded internationally in the vast and growing quantities that they are at present. Trade rules, combined with subsidies, also leads to ‘dumping’ of cheap food, a worldwide practice, that destroys local livelihoods.

However if international trade in goods such as coffee, tea and bananas is to continue, and to still contribute to food sovereignty through the rediversification of local economies and environmental protection, it must follow the principle of ‘Fair Trade Miles’<sup>7</sup>. This involves a mixture of ‘fair trade’ and the limiting of ‘miles’ between producer and consumer in order to minimise fossil fuel contributions to climate change. The creation of national and regional common markets is one way.



Another way is to change the aim of international trade, to favour localism, rather than global competitiveness.

## International Food Sovereignty Movement

One of the key strengths of the Food Sovereignty movement is that it shares a common vision between Northern and Southern communities. It contrasts strongly with the competitive basic premise of the economic liberalisation of agriculture, which sets farmers and markets against each other - meaning that for someone to succeed, somebody else must lose.

Food Sovereignty means that farmers and communities from all over the world can work together towards the common cause of strong, resilient, locally-controlled food systems based on ecological and ethical methods of production.

For example, when Northern governments claim that African farmers benefit from growing export crops to sell internationally, the European Food Sovereignty movement can amplify the voices of African farmers affirming the need for Africa to grow its own food for its own consumption. Similarly, as governments in Africa aim to replicate the Northern liberal model, stories about the local food revolution

taking place in Europe, with communities and consumers increasingly demanding locally and ecologically-produced food, are increasingly being shared in the South.

The Food Sovereignty movements in Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America and North America are growing and spreading. A follow-up to the Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty took place in Austria in August 2011, billed as “Nyéléni Europe”, to build the European movement, and strengthen its connection with its international brothers and sisters.

Food Sovereignty also includes Energy Sovereignty, a rights-based, people centred approach towards energy generation, distribution and consumption, linking the Climate Justice movement with the Food Sovereignty movement.

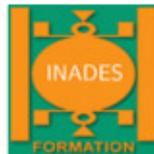
Most of all, Food Sovereignty is about people, about building communities that care, that can maintain a healthy balance between spiritual, cultural, physical and social dimensions of life. It requires us to change our thinking, to believe another world is possible.

The **Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)** is committed to amplify the call for Food Sovereignty in Africa and globally, and to challenge those initiatives which undermine it.



# AFSA

ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA



## Footnotes

- 1 ETC Group report "Who will feed us?" 2009
- 2 GRAIN report "Small farmers can cool the planet" 2009
- 3 Wiebe et al "The Origins & Potential of Food Sovereignty" Oct 2010
- 4 E.g. Case study of Wolaita, Ethiopia in "Agrofuels and the Myth of the Marginal Lands" ABN, Gaia Foundation & others, 2008
- 5 Resetting the Table: a People's Food Policy for Canada, April 2011.
- 6 For a detailed rewrite of the World Trade Organisation's rules into those of a World Localisation Organisation, see Colin Hines' "Localisation: a Global Manifesto" Earthscan 2003 p. 136.143
- 7 Fair Trade Miles' was originally proposed in Colin Hines and Vandana Shiva: A Better Agriculture is Possible: Local Food, Global Solution A Discussion Paper Prepared by the International Forum on Globalization & Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, June 2002.)

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Plate forme Sous Régionale des  
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PELUM

Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage  
(COPAGEN)

## COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS



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