

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

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Abstract

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. Food sovereignty is essential for community resilience and response to all disasters, both natural and man-made. Food Sovereignty is based on the concept that food should not be merely a trade commodity. Food is for people's health, sustenance and nutrition.

Keywords: Food Sovereignty, ecologically sound, sustainable

Introduction

The notion of Food Sovereignty evolved through the experience and analysis of the farmers. The world's food supply is still dependant on these people, the small scale food producers. Food Sovereignty ensures that food is produced in a culturally acceptable manner and in harmony with the ecosystem in which it is produced. Traditional food production systems have regenerated their soils, water, biodiversity and climactic conditions, for generations and not eroded the natural systems which modern agriculture is affecting.

Food Security was said to promote the "corporate food regime" by many researchers [1]. Food sovereignty is an evolving concept. It evolved as a result fallacy behind the term Food Security [2]. The "world agriculture" under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture was seen as "food from nowhere". The food sovereignty was the agroecology-based localism ("food from somewhere") which was advocated by various grassroots food movements [1].

The term "food sovereignty" was first coined in 1996 by members of Via Campesina, an international farmers' organisation, and later adopted by several international organisations, including the World Bank and United Nations. In 2007, the "Declaration of Nyéléni" provided a definition which was adopted by 80 countries. Venezuela, Mali, Bolivia, Nepal, Senegal and Egypt have integrated food sovereignty into their national constitutions or laws. Ecuador was the first country to mention food sovereignty in her laws in 2008.

The aftermath of Green Revolution saw the destruction of age old ecosystems by monocultures. Food grain yield increased to feed the swelling human population but in turn dealt the death blow to the rich biodiversity of different food crops. Food sovereignty is often seen in conflict with globalisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation trends [3]. The Green Revolution resulted in increase in food grain but still could not address world hunger as it was silent on the access to the food grains. Many felt that the Green Revolution was out of touch with the needs of majority of small producers and peasants [4]. However the Green

Revolution was instrumental in feeding the masses of many Third World countries including India [5].

Food Sovereignty is not based on abstract theories about profit, growth and GDP. It is rooted in the complex realities of producing, buying, selling and eating food. Food Sovereignty it means the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. It also includes the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Food Sovereignty places high priority on local production for local. It values the production of culturally appropriate foods. Food sovereignty emphasizes ecologically appropriate production, distribution and consumption, social-economic justice and local food systems as ways to tackle hunger and poverty and guarantee sustainable food security for all peoples. The local markets emphasis also supports the use of land for food production rather than for the production of agro fuels and other monocultures. Some advocates of Food Sovereignty firmly believe that it is a movement of decolonization [6].

Traditional agricultural wisdom and food sovereignty

Traditional agricultural systems have developed based on principles of cooperation, integration and dialogue with nature. This in turn has led to highly complex agro-ecological systems. The indigenous farmers are custodians of thousands of years of research and creation that has made such an extraordinary biodiversity-based agriculture possible. The impacts of the technologies for intensive monocultures including those for agro-fuel production, industrial aquaculture and destructive fisheries are having devastating impacts on our local knowledge systems, technologies and environment. Industrial production models are capturing and destroying local markets, the livelihoods of small scale food providers and the diverse ecosystems upon which sustainable, low energy production depends. This industrial model pushes monocultures as well as the use of food crops and land for agro-fuel production rather than to feed people.

Global movement for Food Sovereignty

The landmark international Nyéléni 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali included the participation of 500 representatives who were food producers, consumers and environmental movement activists from around the world. It was the springboard for the global Food Sovereignty movement. At this Forum six principles and the Nyéléni Declaration were adopted. This was followed by a European Nyéléni Forum in 2011 that was held in Krems, Austria, where the Nyéléni Europe Declaration and an action plan were agreed upon. In February 2015, the same movements also participated in the International Forum for Agroecology in the Nyéléni centre in Mali, and contributed to its Declaration. There have quite a few research publications post Nyéléni 2007 [7–11].

Nyéleni 2007, the Forum For Food Sovereignty, was an opportunity for people who harvest and produce food from the forests, waters, and lands around the world to share information and develop strategies to protect their livelihoods and the health of the Earth from the forces that seek to control, contaminate, and destroy them. The thinking about food sovereignty upon which the Forum was based arose as a political proposal submitted by La Vía Campesina during the 1996 World Food Summit. Food sovereignty moves beyond ‘food security,’ which focuses on ways to guarantee sufficient food through food aid, trade, increased production and market mechanisms at national and international levels.

Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty based on Nyéléni Declaration

1. **Focuses on Food for People:** Food sovereignty rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business. It puts people at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies, ensuring sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities; and

2. **Values Food Providers:** Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions of small scale farmers and others who are involved in growing food. It respects the rights of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisher folk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food. It rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue these individuals and threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.

3. **Localises Food Systems:** Food sovereignty puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues. It brings food providers and consumers closer together. It also 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.

4. **Puts Control Locally:** 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.

5. **Builds Knowledge and Skills:** 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 rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate.

6. **Works with Nature:** Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agro-ecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change.

Impact of Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty is essential for community resilience and response to all disasters, both natural and man-made. Food sovereignty is about empowering people both the producers (farmers) and consumers (everyone else) to make the important decisions about food and agriculture. It is the condition where people define their own food and agriculture systems to produce healthy and culturally appropriate food for people through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. Food sovereignty empowers Native households and communities to address issues of hunger and health by cultivating their own healthy, fresh foods.

Food Sovereignty is based on the concept that food should not be merely a trade commodity. Many Food sovereignty advocates argued that the intensive agriculture, the hallmark of Green Revolution failed to alter the highly concentrated distribution of economic power [12]. Intensive agriculture and monocultures used technologies that were dependent on high amount of herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and other harmful chemicals that slowly damaged the soil and associated biodiversity [13].

Food sovereignty seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us. It rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, which 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.

Conclusion

Food is a basic need and a human right: food systems provide livelihoods for nearly a third of humanity and are intimately connected to health and ecosystems. Food is for people's health, sustenance and nutrition. Food sovereignty is rooted in environmentally sustainable production and harvesting, under local control and honouring traditional knowledge. But this is only viable if society values and supports the local food system in the market and through regulation. We need a wider, inclusive process that balances various users' rights and access and leads to sustainable management of the resources, with decision-making power at the local level so that different users can work things out among and between their own communities.

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Websites accessed for additional information

Common information about Nyéléni: www.nyeleni.org

La Via Campesina: www.viacampesina.org

The World Women's March: www.worldmarchofwomen.org

ROPPA – Network of Peasants and Farmers of West Africa: www.roppa.info