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Food sovereignty

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Summary

Food sovereignty is a paradigm on food system transformation advanced by peasant organizations worldwide in response to the commoditization of food of through free trade agreements, deteriorating environmental and livelihood conditions in rural areas and marginalization of the peasantry. Food sovereignty is an alternative to the current global, industrial corporate food regime and involves changes at all levels of the food system with relocalization, regaining control over territories and agroecological production as key strivings. Food is viewed as a basic human right, as opposed to a commodity. Domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency have priority over long-distance trade. Food is regarded a part of culture, heritage and cosmovision. Agroecological practices which restore agrobiodiversity and lessen dependence and indebtedness of farmers are to replace monocultures which are highly dependent on external inputs and harmful to the environment. There is a central role for smallholders and rural peoples in food production, who should (re)gain control over land and territories, individually and collectively, especially women. This is to be realized through forms of agrarian reform that go beyond land re-distribution. Societal change towards peaceful co-existence, equality and care for the earth is an ultimate goal.

Food sovereignty is a research topic in a wide range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, geography, law, philosophy, history, agronomy and ecology, alongside transdisciplinary research on food systems. While first advanced as a mobilizing concept by the transnational agrarian movement La Vía Campesina in 1996, food sovereignty has become a policy framework adopted by various governments and international organizations. The movement has succesfully lobbied the UN and the FAO to adopt new rights and guidelines which bring obligations for governments to protect rural peoples against transnational corporations undermining their access to land, water, forests, seeds. The movement itself has diversified and its definition of food sovereignty has evolved and become more inclusive.

The food sovereignty paradigm has been criticized for being too expansive, complex and unclear. Analyses of the competing discourses of food sovereignty and food security reveal contrasts and complementarities. Scholarly debate has also focused on the position of both peasants and farm workers in the capitalist economy and on processes of de- and re-peasantization.

Societal and scholarly debate on the various dimensions of food sovereignty is ongoing. Academic research foregrounds fundamental questions including what role the state is expected to play, what forms of trade are envisaged, how the rights approach functions, the interplay of different transformative processes, changing economic and ecological contexts, tensions between different social groups and power related challenges. The number of case studies on the struggle for food sovereignty is growing and exhibits wide geographical diversity.

Keywords

Food sovereignty, food systems, La Via Campesina, social movements, agroecology, food security, right to food, agrarian reform, gender equity, peasantry

Introduction

Food sovereignty is a paradigm[i] on food system transformation advanced by peasant activists and supporting movements. In the early 1990s, the transnational peasant organization La Vía Campesina formed to mobilize against the commoditization of food as a result of free trade agreements, deteriorating environmental and livelihood conditions in rural areas and marginalization of the peasantry.

Food sovereignty is an alternative to the dominant global, industrial corporate food regime and involves changes at all levels of the food system with relocalization, regaining control over territories, agroecological production and gender equality as key strivings. Societal change towards peaceful co-existence and care for the earth is an ultimate goal.

Some scholars regard the food sovereignty movement as part of an increasingly connected ensemble of movements for food system reform, each movement voicing specific concerns and ideals (Andrée et al., 2019), while others see it as standing outside for being more radical than other food movements, fundamentally being about 'the transformation … of the meaning of capital, exchange and decisionmaking authority' (Trauger, 2015, p. 10). Movements for food system transformation are also viewed as including reformist, progressive and radical currents (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

Origins and evolution

While La Vía Campesina, an organization of peasant farmers which formed in the early 1990s to collectively defend their rights (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010) is generally credited with coining the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, a scrunity of its origins has revealed that La Vía Campesina advanced the already existing idea of food sovereignty while giving it its own meaning (Edelman, 2014a). In the late 1980s peasant activists in Central America used the term food sovereignty alongside other terms like

food autonomy and food self-sufficiency to protest against the dumping of surpluses from the United States, which undermined domestic production. For various governments in the region, national food self-suffiency was a strategic goal. The National Food Program adopted by the Mexican government in 1983 aimed at 'soberanía alimentaria', which translates as 'food sovereignty' (Edelman, 2014a).

At the World Food Summit in 1996, La Vía Campesina presented a declaration in which food sovereignty was explicitly conceived in opposition to the FAO's concept of food security, food sovereignty being defined as 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity' (LVC, 1996). With the International Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) reached in 1994 after the Uruguay Round of GATT-negotiations and the creation of the WTO in 1995, food had become a globally tradeable commodity. WTO-rules allowed overproducing countries and regions such as the US and Europe to sell agricultural commodities at thirty percent or more below cost on global markets, a practice known as 'dumping' (McMichael, 2014b). This aggravated the already precarious position of peasants, who were increasingly marginalized as a consequence of structural adjustment and the new free trade agreements. They felt that the trade agreements and interventions 'would bring them to the brink of extinction' (Rosset, 2013), a model of 'agriculture without farmers' being pursued (McMichael, 2014a). More generally La Vía Campesina demanded an end to the injustices, oppression and violence rural people were encountering in defending their land rights and livelihoods. Peasant activists have faced criminalization and violence in many countries worldwide (Desmarais, 2015). On April 17 in 1996, nineteen Brazilian landless peasants were killed by the military police during a march for land rights. To commemorate this massacre and to mobilize for action, La Vía Campesina holds an International Day of Peasant Struggle every year.

In their 1996 Rome declaration, La Vía Campesina set out a number of principles of food sovereignty: 1. Food is a basic human right 2. Genuine agrarian reform which puts land, credit and productive resources in the hands of peasants 3. Sustainable agriculture to protect natural resources 4. Reorganization of the global food trade to prioritize production for domestic markets and to end dumping 5. The regulation of transnational corporations 6. Social peace; an end to the forced displacement of peasants and the use of food as a weapon 7. Democratic control of the international food system (LVC, 1996; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005, p. 17).

In 2000, a coalition of 52 civil society organizations gathering peoples' movements of food producers, including La Vía Campesina, established the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) to develop common positions and to communicate these to relevant international organizations (Wittman et al., 2010). Since the early 2000s, the committee has functioned as an intermediate between the FAO and civil society and has organized international and regional meetings on food sovereignty.

At the World Food Summit in Rome in 2002, a refined definition of food sovereignty was presented: '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. Food sovereignty means the primacy of people's and community's rights to food and food production, over trade concerns' (LVC, 2002). The rights-based approach of food sovereignty (see section Rights-based approach) is more clearly visible, and the rights no longer primarily accrue to nations, but to peoples and communities.

The list of requirements to achieve food sovereignty formulated by the 2002 Forum included the removal of agriculture from the WTO, an end to the neoliberal economic policies imposed by the World Bank, WTO and IMF, an end to genetic engineering and the patenting of life and enshrining food sovereignty in international law (LVC, 2002).

In 2007, at the Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty organized by the International Planning Committee (the name being a tribute to a legendary peasant woman), more than 500 representatives of peasant movements, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, migrant workers and ngos from 80 countries gathered in the village of Sélengué in Mali and formulated a collective definition of food sovereignty:

'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 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. Food sovereignty prioritizes 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.' (Nyéléni Forum, 2007)

The Nyéléni definition is widely cited, but also subject to much criticism (see section Academic debate and critique). At the Nyéléni Forum, six pillars of food sovereignty were identified (see Box 1).

Box 1 The six pillars of food sovereignty (Nyéléni Forum, 2007)

Focuses on food for people: The right to food which is healthy and culturally appropriate is the basic legal demand underpinning food sovereignty. Guaranteeing it requires policies

which support diversified food production in each region and country. Food is not simply another commodity to be traded or speculated on for profit.

Values food providers: Many smallholder farmers suffer violence, marginalisation and racism from corporate landowners and governments. People are often pushed off their land by mining concerns or agribusiness. Agricultural workers can face severe exploitation and even bonded labour. Although women produce most of the food in the global south, their role and knowledge are often ignored, and their rights to resources and as workers are violated. Food sovereignty asserts food providers' right to live and work in dignity.

Localises food systems: Food must be seen primarily as sustenance for the community and only secondarily as something to be traded. Under food sovereignty, local and regional provision takes precedence over supplying distant markets, and export-orientated agriculture is rejected. The 'free trade' policies which prevent developing countries from protecting their own agriculture, for example through subsidies and tariffs, are also inimical to food sovereignty.

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. Privatisation of such resources, for example through intellectual property rights regimes or commercial contracts, is explicitly rejected.

Builds knowledge and skills: Technologies, such as genetic engineering, that undermine food providers' ability to develop and pass on knowledge and skills needed for localised food systems are rejected. Instead, food sovereignty calls for appropriate research systems to support the development of agricultural knowledge and skills.

Works with nature: Food sovereignty requires production and distribution systems that protect natural resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, avoiding energy-intensive industrial methods that damage the environment and the health of those that inhabit it.

The important role women play in food production and their lack of control over resources has been acknowledged by the food sovereignty movement from the beginning: La Vía Campesina's Rome declaration demanded equal rights for women with regard to land and other resources. Women have been at the forefront of the movement since its inception and the struggle for gender equality has become more prominent over the years (Monsalve Suárez, 2006). In 1998, activist women peasants in Latin America demanded that women are represented equally in their regional organization and in 2000 the rule of gender parity at all organizational levels was adopted by La Vía Campesina (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). The World March of Women started to build alliances with the food sovereignty movement from early 2000s onwards, incorporated food sovereignty in its strategic vision in 2006 and contributed to define it in feminist terms (Masson et al., 2017). At the fifth conference on food sovereignty held in 2008, attention was drawn to the fact that true gender parity was not

yet a reality within the movement and the position of women in society was discussed explicitly, identifying 'intimate relationships between capitalism, patriarchy, machismo and neo-liberalism' (LVC, 2008 in Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). As part of a commitment to achieve equitable gender relations, a world campaign to end violence against women was launched.

By 2008, the concept of food sovereignty had gained wide traction in social movements, UN organizations, governments and academia (Desmarais, 2015). Several countries were drawing up food sovereignty laws. By 2008, food sovereignty was enshrined in national law in Venezuela, Senegal, Mali, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Nepal and Bolivia (Edelman 2014a). The context was notably different from that of the mid-1990s. The world was in the midst of a food crisis as prices spiked and food riots broke out in thirty countries (McMichael, 2021). Between 2005 and 2008 food prices had doubled, with rising oil prices and financial speculation among the causes, accompanied by a shift from food crops to biofuel crops (Hopma & Woods, 2014; McMichael, 2021). On a more structural level, the number of people without enough food had risen by 25 percent since the mid-1990s.

Important changes in global agriculture, such as emerging markets for biofuels and more generally 'flex crops' (De los Reyes & Sandwell, 2018) meant, among others, that less land and resources were available for food production. The consequences of the demand for biofuels were wide-ranging, from rising prices of food staples, evictions and displacement, to loss of biodiversity, less healthy diets, water scarcity and other environmental impacts (De Schutter, 2008). Proponents of food sovereignty saw the worsening climate, environmental and agricultural crises as linked (Wittman et al., 2010) The IPC argued that the crises were used as opportunities for further corporate control of agriculture and territories as 'value-chain agriculture' meant that farmers were becoming part of an agri-food infrastructure with contracts for agro-inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and delivery of produce to corporate actors in the chain, primarily for export (McMichael, 2021).

In 2009, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, a UN-led assessment comparable to that of the IPCC, defined food sovereignty as 'the rights of peoples and sovereign states to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies' (IAASTD, 2009). The report concluded that corporate concentration in the food system had negative consequences for health, environment and social equity, that trade liberalization threatened food security and that heavy reliance on technological solutions could exacerbate poverty and inequity. In many respects the IAASTD-assessment underwrites the principles and pillars of food sovereignty as advanced by La Vía Campesina and the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty, presenting a comprehensive set of policy options to transform the food system (Ishii-Eiteman, 2009). Recommendations included strengthening the small-scale farm sector, especially women farmers; a revision of intellectual property laws to recognize farmers' rights to save and exchange seeds; strengthening local and regional food systems; supporting multifunctional, biodiverse, agroecological farming; implementing equitable trade, market-based incentives and full-cost accounting and mobilizing the public and private sector to realize the

transformation. Five years later, in his final report to the Human Rights Council, the special rapporteur on the Right to Food called food sovereignty ‘a condition for the full realization of the right to food’ (De Schutter, 2014) (see section Rights-based approach).

Also in 2009, the UN Commitee on World Food Security (CFS), which had been established in 1974, was reformed as a multi-stakeholder platform for issues of global hunger and food insecurity. Through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM), a diverse range of CSOs working on food related issues formulate common policy positions for the CFS. Actors in the movement speak with one voice while the diversity of viewpoints of participating Community Supported Organizations is respected relatively well (Claeys & Duncan, 2019). The CFS has become one of the most important policy making spaces for the global food sovereignty movement and the CSIPM has significantly shaped CFS’ policies, but there are setbacks as well. Food sovereignty scholars note that structural injustices go unchallenged and that the productivist model of agriculture continues to be the norm, in line with corporate agendas. A strategic partnership between the FAO and the World Economic Forum signed in 2019 may be a signal that ‘stakes’ are gaining primacy over ‘rights’. The United Food Systems Summit of 2021 also provides evidence of a shift in this direction (McMichael, 2021; MacInnis et al., 2022).

In the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their territories, food is central. In the early 1990s, coalitions of Indigenous Peoples in Latin-America participated in the formation of La Vía Campesina (Grey & Patel, 2015). Between 2009 and 2011, in the context of a People’s Food Policy Project to define a national food sovereignty policy for Canada, indigenous peoples advanced the concept of indigenous food sovereignty to call attention for their traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and food distribution practices. They insisted a seventh pillar should be added to the six pillars formulated by the Nyéléni Forum, namely that ‘food sovereignty understands food as sacred, part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define culture and community’ (Desmarais & Wittman, 2015). For Indigenous movements, a strong version of food sovereignty forms part of political struggles against exploitation and colonization. Food sovereignty implies a refusal of colonial territorial boundaries. It involves day-to-day struggles of resistance, as Indigenous peoples continue to be dispossessed of their food harvesting grounds and waters (Grey & Patel, 2015; Daigle 2017).

The countries where food sovereignty has been pursued by various levels of governments provide a mixed picture (Trauger et al., 2017). By 2018, food sovereignty was enshrined in national law in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Venezuela, Senegal, Mali, Nepal, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Argentina (Azzariti, 2021). The implementation of these laws has however proven elusive in Ecuador and Bolivia, where ongoing land concentration, foreign land acquisitions, resource extraction and export-oriented agriculture are working against food sovereignty (Claeys & Peschard, 2020). In Venezuela, institutional changes towards food sovereignty have materialized, yet food imports and state farms rather than smallholder farms are relied on for food security (Dekeyser et al., 2018). In Nicaragua, institutional changes have failed to strenghten local control over food systems (Godek, 2021). Elsewhere,

efforts to democratize food policies have taken the form of participatory processes for the formulation of national food policies, for instance in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia and of municipal food policy councils, which are a growing phenomenon in North America and Europe (Claeys & Peschard, 2020).

In 2013, delegates from La Vía Campesina formulated a declaration in which food sovereignty was defined as 'the fundamental right of all peoples, nations and states to control food and agricultural systems and policies, ensuring every one has adequate, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food'. It was emphasized that the struggle for social justice concerned people from both the countryside and the city. Already in the early years, this had been a core tenet of some of LVC's members, such as the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (McMichael, 2014a).

While the movement had grown and broadened substantially since the food crisis of 2007-2008[ii] conditions on the ground to achieve food sovereignty had worsened. Large-scale investment in industrial agriculture aided by multilateral institutions, offshore land acquisition by food dependent states and a push towards contract farming for smallholders came to be known as the 'land grab' (McMichael, 2015). A number of lock-ins are also reinforcing globalized industrial agriculture: 1. the economics of scaling-up; 2. export orientation, 3. consumers expecting cheap food; 4. 'Green Revolution' oriented research and education; 5. short term thinking in politics; 6. 'feed the world' narratives; 7. yield and productivity indicators; and 8. concentration of power (IPES-Food, 2016). Markets for farm inputs, agricultural commodity trading, and food processing and retail are reaching high levels of concentration (Clapp, 2021).

Digital agriculture, including 'smart farm' technologies, are also expected to transform agriculture. A global 'digital divide' in access to digital infrastructure preclude the participation of the majority of smallholders (Mehrabi et al., 2021). At the same time, digital strategies and 'data sovereignty' have become a focus within the food sovereignty movement (Wittman et al., 2020; Fraser, 2020).

In 2021, 25 years after La Vía Campesina made its first declaration at the World Food Summit in Rome, the movement's declaration opened as follows:

'Food Sovereignty is a philosophy of life.

It offers a vision for our collective future, and defines the principles around which we organize our daily living and co-exist with Mother Earth. It is a celebration of life and all the diversity around us. It embraces every element of our cosmos; the sky above our heads, the land beneath our feet, the air we breathe, the forests, the mountains, valleys, farms, oceans, rivers and ponds. It recognizes and protects the inter-dependency between eight million species that share this home with us.

We inherited this collective wisdom from our ancestors, who ploughed the land and waded the waters for 10,000 years, a period in which we evolved into an agrarian society. Food Sovereignty promotes justice, equality, dignity, fraternity and solidarity. Food Sovereignty is also the science of life – built through lived realities spread across countless generations, each teaching their progeny something new, inventing new methods and techniques which sat harmoniously with nature.

As holders of this rich heritage, it is our collective responsibility to defend it and preserve it.' (LVC, 2021)

The manifesto calls on young peasants and workers to lead the fight, and to build alliances with a wide range of actors from civil society, academia and governments.

Food sovereignty and food security

La Vía Campesina advanced food sovereignty at the World Food Summit in 1996 as a counter-concept to food security, a notion employed by multilateral institutions. The concept of food security had been introduced by the FAO at the 1974 World Food Conference and had been subject to several reformulations. Originally, there was an emphasis on agricultural productivity growth to guarantee sufficient world food supplies, adequate redistribution of these supplies within states, and price stabilization (Patel, 2009; Jarosz, 2014; Borras & Mohamed, 2020). In the 1980s, the emphasis shifted to the purchasing power of individual households and free trade as a guarantee for well-functioning markets. Food was viewed as a commodity like any other, subject to the law of supply and demand. Trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation and opening up economic markets became key to food security as conceptualized by multilateral organizations like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (Schanbacher, 2010).

In the 1996 Rome Declaration, the FAO stated that 'food security exists at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.' (FAO, 1996). In this declaration poverty is regarded as the root cause of hunger and policy responses are in the economic and technological sphere: hunger is to be combated through trade, employment, increased production, innovation and food aid. In other words, food is seen as a tradeable commodity, rather than as a human right, and hunger is to be combated through adequate redistribution (Wittman, 2011). La Vía Campesina's declaration, on the other hand, stated that 'food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food' and food sovereignty was called 'a precondition to genuine food security' (LVC, 1996). In La Vía Campesina's view, structural adjustment policies and trade liberalization had destroyed the fabric of rural food production and were causing rather than solving world hunger. Their declaration stated that 'this corporate agenda takes no account of food security for people. It is an inequitable system that treats both nature and people as a means to an end with the sole aim of generating profits for a few. Peasants and small farmers are denied access to and

control over land, water, seeds and natural resources. … Long-term food security depends on those who produce food and care for the natural environment' (LVC, 1996). La Vía Campesina denounced the view of food as a commodity and the overall market logic, invoking instead the right to food and founding the concept of food sovereignty on universal human rights (see section Rights-based approach).

Over time, both food security and food sovereignty have seen alternative framings and definitional shifts and while the concepts are regarded as opposites in some respects, they are considered complementary in others (Patel, 2009; Edelman, 2014a; Jarosz, 2014; Noll & Murdock, 2020). Food security revolves around adequacy of supplies and nutritional content, without attention being payed to the social control of the food system, how the food is produced and delivered and what the environmental and health impacts are (Patel, 2009; Akram Lodhi, 2015; Edelman et al., 2014). Scientific and technological solutions are regarded key, with a crucial role for genetically modified seeds to increase yields (Hopma & Woods, 2014; Weis, 2020). Food sovereignty, on the other hand, centres on agroecological production practices and opposes the industrial model of agriculture characterized by large-scale monocultures of transgenic crops and agrofuels (see section Food sovereignty and agroecology). The logic of productivism is seen as causing food insecurity and malnutrition instead of solving it (Altieri & Toledo, 2011; De Schutter, 2014; Sage, 2014). Food security and food sovereignty are also viewed as reflecting divergent conceptions of justice, with food sovereignty being more encompassing as it addresses a wide range of concerns, including indigenous models of justice, democratic culture and environmental justice (Noll & Murdock, 2020).

In the IAASTD report, food security and food sovereignty are viewed as interrelated concepts covering access, distribution, security and equity. In specific countries and contexts, food activists may also employ either of these terms in their struggles, or prefer other terms, like food justice (Jarosz, 2014). Shifts in the definition of food security have furthermore brought the concept closer to that of food sovereignty (Carlile et al., 2021).

Human rights approach

Food sovereignty is a human rights-based concept (Patel, 2009; Monsalve Suárez, 2013). It builds on, but also differs from the right to food as an individual human right, as it involves multiple rights, some of which are collective. The right to food is a fundamental human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN) played an instrumental role in advancing the right to food at the UN level by calling on the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to work on the contents and the realization of the right to food. States have a core obligation to take the necessary action to realize (to respect, protect and fulfill) this right (Eide, 2008). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights held consultations which resulted in General Comment no. 12 to the right to food, which formulates the right to *adequate* food: 'The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to

adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients.' (Eide 1999, p. 45) In 2000, the Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, to work on the progressive realization of this right. In 2004, the FAO adopted detailed Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security, also called the Voluntary Guidelines for the Right to Food, and established a Right to Food unit. In his final report, the first Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, stated that food sovereignty offers an alternative vision that can better ensure the right to food (Ziegler, 2008). The second rapporteur, Olivier de Schutter, concluded that food sovereignty is a condition to the full realization of the right to food (De Schutter, 2014).

Since its founding, an important part of the struggle of La Vía Campesina has revolved around claiming new rights concerning food, especially collective rights (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010, Monsalve Suárez, 2013). From the early 2000s onwards, La Vía Campesina and its members worked on a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, which included the right to land and territory, the right to means of agricultural production, the right to the protection of agricultural values and the right to biological diversity (Claeys, 2015). The adoption by the UN General Assembly of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 gave a major boost to the process, as it recognized indigenous peoples as subjects of collective rights concerning land and territories (Monsalve Suárez, 2013). In 2008, La Vía Campesina adopted the Declaration of Rights of Peasants, Women and Men, which was brought to the UN Human Rights Council in 2012. In 2018, after six years of negotiation, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). Representatives from organisations of pastoralists, fisherfolk, agricultural workers and indigenous peoples contributed inputs, concerns and specific rights claims (Claeys & Edelman, 2019). UNDROP recognizes food sovereignty as a human right, stating that 'peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to determine their own food and agriculture systems'. The declaration enunciates individual and collective rights around land, seeds, water, and other natural resources, granted to peasants and other people working in rural areas, which people should enjoy as individuals but also 'in association with others or as a community'. The Declaration also clarifies states' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil these rights, and to take all necessary measures to ensure that transnational corporations and business enterprises are in a position to regulate, respect and strengthen these rights as well (UNDROP, 2018).

The food sovereignty movement has also advanced human rights in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), by way of the Civil Society Mechanism (CSIPM), examples being the adoption of Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests by the CFS in 2012 (CFS, 2012; Claeys & Peschard, 2020) and the formulation of drafts of Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in 2021 (MacInnis et al., 2022).

Food sovereignty and agroecology

A broad understanding of agroecology which integrates social, political, economic, technical and epistemic dimensions of food systems is considered part and parcel of the food sovereignty framework (Rosset & Martinez-Torres, 2012; IPES-Food 2016; Pimbert, 2019). Agroecology has been defined as a science that applies ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agricultural ecosystems (Altieri, 2019), as simultaneously a science, a practice and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009; Gliessman et al., 2019), as transdisciplinary research on social and ecological sustainability of food systems (Helenius et al., 2019), as an alternative paradigm to corporate-led food systems (Anderson et al., 2020) and also as part of a new paradigm for biodiversity conservation (Perfecto et al., 2009). Agroecologists argue that traditional peasant agriculture, the basis of the food sovereignty movement, has great potential to render the food system more resilient. By restoring local self-reliance, regenerating agrobiodiversity, producing healthy foods with low inputs and empowering peasant organizations, agroecology can provide a basis for food sovereignty (Altieri & Toledo, 2011). Small-scale farmers have a long tradition of practising 'natural systems agriculture' in the form of, among others, raised fields, polycultures, agroforestry systems, integrated rice-duck-fish systems and silvopastoral systems (Perfecto et al., 2009; Altieri, 2019). Agroecology entails reducing dependence on external inputs, thereby reducing farmers' indebtedness and improving their living conditions, as well as their overall autonomy (Van der Ploeg, 2010). Productivity on small-scale farms can go up significantly with the adoption of agroecological practices, contributing simultaneously to agrobiodiversity and food security (IAASTD, 2009; De Schutter, 2011; Wittman, 2011). Since resilience to climate disasters partly depends on agrobiodiversity, agroecological farms have an advantage compared to conventional farms also in this respect (Altieri & Toledo, 2011). Minimizing social, economic and geographical distance between producers and consumers, an agroecological principle, can contribute to food sovereignty in and around urban areas (Oteros-Rozas et al., 2019). Agroecology favours better nutrition since greater diversity on the farm and a shift away from monocultures results in more diverse and more nutritious food, as it contains more anti-oxidants, less pesticide residues and less toxic heavy metals (De Schutter, 2018).

In 2015, at the International Forum for Agroecology in Nyéléni, delegates from a range of food sovereignty organizations and movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people formulated their own collective vision of agroecology (Nyéléni Forum, 2015; see Box 2). Mutual strengthening between the food sovereignty and agroecology movements is considered important to build countervailing power to the dominant agro-industrial system (Gliessman et al., 2019). A narrow understanding of agro-ecology as a set of technologies including, among others, 'sustainable intensification' and 'climate-smart agriculture' is seen as incompatible with the food sovereignty framework (Anderson et al., 2021). Instead 'transformative agroecology' is called for by food sovereignty scholars and activists (Pimbert, 2018).

Agroecology pillars and principles, International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, Mali, 2015 (summary) (Nyéléni Forum, 2015)

Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It can be practiced in many different ways, based on local realities and cultures.

The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales.

Territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships to their lands.

Collective rights and access to the commons are fundamental pillar of agroecology. Sophisticated customary systems are to be preserved and strengthened.

The diverse knowledges and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to agroecology. Knowledge is developed through dialogue, learning takes place horizontally, peer-to-peer and based on popular education.

The core of our cosmovisions is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. As humans, we are part of nature and the cosmos.

Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Local food systems are built through collective self-organization, action and solidarity between rural and urban people.

The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. Implied are minimal use of external inputs, an economy based on solidarity and direct, ethical, fair relations between producers and consumers.

Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. The peoples who feed the world ought to have control over seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge and the commons.

Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward. For agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration.

Youth are the stewards of agroecology, carrying forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to social and ecological transformation.

In tandem with the ascendance of the food sovereignty paradigm, agroecology is increasingly supported by UN institutions. In 2014, the FAO organized a first International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition, in 2018 a second one, and the FAO Council approved 'The 10 Elements of Agroecology' in 2019 (FAO, 2018a). Powerful actors in the corporate sector however tend to understand agroecology in the narrow sense, as a set of production tools, compatible with genetic engineering (Gliessman et al., 2019). Agroecology rooted in food sovereignty is systematically challenged in the CFS (MacInnis et al., 2022) and governments present conceptions of agroecology that run counter to food sovereignty (Pimbert, 2018).

In his final report, the second Special Rapporteur to the Right to Food called for a shift to agroecological modes of production and spoke of a new paradigm focused on well-being, resilience and sustainability (De Schutter, 2014). The third Special Rapporteur enumerated positive aspects of agroecology, echoing many aspects of the food sovereignty paradigm as well: 'Agroecology avoids the use of dangerous biochemicals and pesticides; supports the local food movement; protects smallholder farmers, including women, and small fisheries; respects human rights; enhances food democracy, traditional knowledge and culture; maintains environmental sustainability; and helps to facilitate a healthy diet.' (Elver, 2020, p. 19) In an update of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), it is concluded that a transformation from the unsustainable conventional, industrial model of agriculture to an agroecological model is necessary and 'fully able to nourish a world population of 10 billion people by mid-century' (IAASTD, 2019, p. 11). The fourth Special Rapporteur underwrites the optimism regarding agroecology as an alternative paradigm, stating that 'agroecology … has proven to quickly lead to the tangible realization of the right to food' (Fakhri, 2021, p. 6).

Agrarian reform

A demand for agrarian reform has been part of the food sovereignty paradigm from the beginning, but it has significantly shifted in its contents (Rosset, 2018). Within the context of structural adjustment and its aim to attract investment to rural areas, the World Bank promoted so-called market-assisted or market-led agrarian reform as an alternative to state-led reform. In market-led land reform, redistribution takes place through privatized, decentralized transactions (Borras, 2003). In the process, peasants actually lost lands with many communal and public lands becoming private property, landlessness increasing and more land becoming concentrated in fewer properties (Torrez, 2011; Rosset, 2013). In opposition to market-led agrarian reform, La Vía Campesina advocated so-called genuine agrarian reform, building strategic alliances with the FoodFirst International Action Network (FIAN) and the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN) (Borras, 2008). In 1999 La Vía Campesina and FIAN launched the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR) declaring that 'Genuine agrarian reform cannot be carried out through market mechanisms … Future agrarian reforms must balance the needs of peasants and family farmers with those of fisherfolk, indigenous people, the landless, pastoralists and other rural peoples, and must be true agrarian reform that guarantees these peoples' total access to and control over the land and its resources' (Torrez

2011, p. 51). CGAR also reports on violations of the human right to food in the context of agrarian reform, e.g. when reform fails to be implemented and/or agrarian reform activists and organizations experience repression (Monsalve Suárez, 2006).

At a GCAR-meeting in Porto Alegre in 2006, indigenous organizations called for a shift from focusing on 'land' to a more inclusive category of 'territory', with an emphasis on the right to self-determination of peoples in their territories (IPC, 2006; Rosset, 2013). The objective of genuine land reform was reformulated in terms of defending and restoring indigenous territories and balancing the needs of rural peoples, including peasants, pastoralists, fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, landless people, riverine and coastal peoples and migrants (IPC, 2006). Taking into account the needs of all these actors and finding means of peaceful co-existence became a core challenge of land reform as envisaged by the food sovereignty movement, in which traditional land use systems including common property systems could potentially serve as models (Rosset, 2013). In 2016, the meaning of agrarian reform again widened and now came to include 'not only landless peasants, but all of the working classes and all of society', to be fought for by an alliance between rural and urban working people (Rosset, 2018).

The UNDROP also extensively states the right to land of: indigenous peoples, local communities working on the land, transhumant, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, the landless, as well as hired (migrant/seasonal) workers, and the duties of states in this regard (UNDROP, 2018). The Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) foregrounds the importance of community land-rights in combating climate change, and view securing these land-rights as one of several 'missing pathways'. Securing collective land-rights is viewed as key since collectively managed territories contain globally significant stores of carbon (Dooley et al., 2018).

Agrarian reform in relation to gender equality poses specific challenges. Reforms aimed at strengthening women's individual land property rights are deemed unsatisfactory as women's land (use) rights involve many different kinds of rights (Park et al., 2015). There are complex challenges to be overcome as in communal tenure, women may be discriminated against because men often have control over these lands, while land gained through individual land titling tends to get lost to the market (Jacobs, 2015). The central question is how to strengthen women's rights to land in different land tenancy systems (Monsalve Suárez, 2006). In this regard, the UNDROP is viewed as inadequately addressing women's rights (Martignoni & Claeys, 2022).

Gender equality

Food sovereignty scholars have discussed women's rights and the fight for gender equality as integral elements of the food sovereignty paradigm and argued for a stronger and more systematic articulation of the gender problematique in food sovereignty analysis and practice, also in relation to other dimensions of power and inequality within communities and across classes (Park et al. 2015, Jacobs, 2015; Navin, 2015; Portman, 2018). Primary arguments for

the importance of gender analysis to support broad and deep change towards genuine gender equality are that women play a large part in agricultural production, both subsistence and cash-cropping, but that in many cases they lack power over resources and their work continues to be underestimated and underpayed (Agarwal, 2014; Jacobs, 2015). Fewer than 15 percent of agricultural landholders around the world are women and 85 percent are men (FAO, 2018b). Overall, women own less land than men, and the land they own also tends to be of poorer quality (FAO, 2018b). Subsistence farming is in large part a women's activity, but women have been driven off subsistence plots and their traditional roles in growing, harvesting and preparing food are undermined by agricultural globalization (Park et al., 2015; Navin, 2015). The responsibility women carry for family food security and their role in food culture and knowledge go often unacknowledged (Park et al, 2015). At the same time, women suffer disproportionately from hunger and malnutrition (Patel, 2012). Gender equality would improve nutritional and health outcomes for communities as a whole (De Schutter, 2014).

The egalitarian ideal of food sovereignty can be a basis on which to address gender inequalities, if based on a systematic analysis of social differentiation (class, gender, ethnicity), avoiding generalizations (Park et al, 2015; Navin, 2015). Feminism and ecological feminism also provide important theoretical and practical resources with which to fight for gender equality (Ellinger-Locke, 2011; Portman, 2018; MacInnis 2022).

Re-localization and international trade

In its initial Rome declaration La Vía Campesina demanded a reorganization of the food trade, being fiercely opposed to the free trade agreements that were being concluded at the time. According to the declaration states should prioritize domestic production and food self-sufficiency, exports should no longer be subsidized and prices should be regulated in both domestic and international markets to reflect true costs of production (LVC, 1996). Being perceived as hostile to international trade, the movement later clarified that 'food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to food and to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production' (LVC, 2003). In 2002, the IPC identified the promotion of equitable trade policies as a priority area for action (Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). At the Forum in Nyéléni in 2007, international trade was once again being diagnosed as unsustainable and dominated by transnational corporations. The Forum called for a reduction of international trade in food and demanded democratic control by producers and consumers. Local markets on which small-scale food producers such as peasants, pastoralists and fisherfolk sell their products should receive priority and there should be mechanisms in place to stabilize food prices (LVC, 2007). Altogether the movement calls for a re-localization of the food system, with shorter links between producers and consumers, and an end to the WTO. In the Nyéléni declaration it is also stated that food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples (LVC, 2007). In a declaration of the European branch of La Vía Campesina, it is stated that international trade should be allowed under certain circumstances: firstly, where domestic production cannot meet needs and secondly, where surpluses are available for export after priority has been given to domestic food provision (ECVC, 2010).

Academic debate and critique

Food sovereignty is a contested concept, and scholars view this contestation as crucial to furthering the political project that it entails (Grey & Patel, 2015). Definitions of food sovereignty have been critized for being expansive to the point that the term has become a free-floating signifier (Edelman, 2014a), but it has also been argued that this expansiveness reflects a deep reorientation in the relationship with food, society and humankind (Noll, 2020). Formulations of food sovereignty by the transnational agrarian movement have been called contradictory (Agarwal, 2014), under-theorized (Bernstein, 2014) and homogenizing over class and gender inequalities (Masson et al, 2017). At the same time the overall equivocality of the food sovereignty concept has been viewed as a strength (Patel, 2009; Edelman et al., 2014) and as reflecting a strategic dilemma (Weis, 2020).

Scholars have noted that there are many tensions and ambiguities in the idea of food sovereignty as called for by La Vía Campesina and the wider movement. Tensions exist for instance between individual and collective rights and between national and local food sovereignty (Patel, 2009; Agarwal, 2014; Trauger, 2015). An emphasis on family farming and farming on 'one's own land' is in tension with the fight for gender equality, as family farms are often patriarchially structured and many land rights systems are patrilinear (Patel, 2009; Agarwal, 2014; Jacobs, 2015). A right of consumers to freely choose their food, including food from far away, is in tension with the re-localization ambition (Beuchelt & Virchow, 2012) and a right of farmers to choose what they want to produce and how is in tension with the call for agro-ecological production for local markets (Agarwal, 2014). The food sovereignty movement's position on trade has also been criticized for being ambiguous and unclear (Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Chaifetz & Jagger, 2014). What would re-localization as far as possible entail? What about the millions of smallholders who produce agricultural commodities for export? What is 'culturally appropriate' food? What sort of institutions are needed for small farmers to secure better positions within trading networks? What is the stance towards fair trade and other certification schemes? How may food self-sufficiency of countries be threatened by climate change? (Edelman et al. 2014, p. 915-918).

Ambiguity is furthermore noted over whether private property, wage labour and market activity are compatible with food sovereignty (Weis, 2020). Food sovereignty would imply rethinking the property regime in the context of land reforms (Torrez, 2011). Demanding the state to undermine private property is, however, a paradoxical affair as the liberal state is grounded on private property (Trauger, 2015).

The broadness of the food sovereignty concept also makes that it covers a very wide range of political challenges (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015). Food sovereignty is a call for transformative social change (Desmarais & Wittman, 2015), a civilizational movement (McMichael, 2014a), a counter-hegemonic project aiming for pluriversality (Dunford, 2020). Radical change is called for along ecological, economic, political, social and epistemic dimensions (Pimbert, 2018, 2019).

At two international conferences in 2013 and 2014 on the subject of food sovereignty, jointly organized by Yale University, the Transnational Institute (TNI), the Institute for Food and Development Policy (FoodFirst) and the Institute for Social Studies (ISS), challenging questions deserving further academic research and debate were identified. Food sovereignty and peasant activists took part in both conferences and contributed as authors of papers, a number of which appeared in special issues of academic journals dedicated to food sovereignty (Edelman et al., 2014; Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015; Shattuck et al., 2015).[iii]

Food sovereignty and the state

From its inception, the food sovereignty movement has opposed neoliberal policies through which states have ceded power to the market (Alkon, 2013). From the 1980s onwards, the developmentalist state in which agriculture functioned as a national economic sector with protection subsidies, economic regulation and government purchases, gave way to globalized corporate agriculture, the current 'corporate food regime' (McMichael, 2005). The new regime is characterized by international, privatized food governance and an important role for biotechnology in capital accumulation (Hopma & Woods, 2014).

The initial definition of food sovereignty as the right of each nation to define its food policies suggests a strong role for the state. In the 1990s, food sovereignty implied bringing power back from the market to the state, in order for the state to defend the rights and livelihoods of peasants (Shattuck et al., 2015). Later definitions of food sovereignty emphasized collective action and self-determination of peoples and communities. For a reform of food systems towards food sovereignty, states ought to control the dominant actors in the agri-food system. They should also become democratically accountable towards marginalized groups (De Schutter, 2019, p. 23). More generally the power dynamics in food systems that create and perpetuate inequity and unsustainability are to be addressed (Anderson & Leach, 2019). The implications of food sovereignty for states, markets and civil society are farreaching and sometimes paradoxical (Trauger, 2015). However, a dual understanding of food sovereignty as both national control and people's control over a country's food system need not be contradictory. The food sovereignty movement has to navigate multiple, competing sovereignties (Shattuck et al. 2015). The relationship between individuals and polity in food sovereignty may furthermore be guided by communitarian, republican and other democratic ideals (Noll, 2020). A range of traditions of radical thought have influenced the struggle for food sovereignty, including but not limited to: collectivist anarchism, (heterodox) Marxism, liberation theology, Ghandian self-rule (*Swaraj*), feminism, deep ecology and decolonial thought (Pimbert, 2018; Dunford, 2020).

The use of the term 'sovereignty' also raises fundamental questions, such as the appropriateness of the term given its legal-political meanings associated with the nation-state (Monaghan & Smith, 2018), how to conceive of multiple layered and competing sovereignties (Patel, 2009) and how indigenous conceptions of self-determination differ from eurocentric ones (Grey & Patel, 2015; Daigle, 2017). Fundamental questions around sovereignty however cede to the background when the concept is valued for its practical usefulness in political

struggles and understood in terms of transnational solidarity and civilizational struggle (Fakhri, 2018; McMichael, 2014a).

The peasantry

It is estimated that smallholders (defined as farms smaller than 2 hectares) produce roughly 35% of the world's food, while accounting for 84% of all farms worldwide and operating on 12% of all agricultural land. The largest 1% of farms (larger than 50 ha) are estimated to operate more than 70% of farmland worldwide (Lowder et al., 2021). Smallholders thus produce a significant share of the world's food on a small share of the world's farmland.

From a food system reform perspective which acknowledges existing power relations, strengthening the position of smallholders in food chains would contribute to the development of peasant agriculture and poverty reduction in rural areas. In the process of liberalization and globalization, smallholders have been severely disadvantaged by socio-technological choices favouring large farms, specifically the big transnational agri-food actors (De Schutter, 2019).

Food sovereignty scholars have been engaging in debates about de- and repeasantization and the position of the peasant in the globalized capitalist economy, elaborating various strands of theorizing on 'the agrarian question' or 'the peasant question', i.e. the prospects for the peasantries, in world-historical perspective. The concept of depeasantization refers both to dwindling peasant numbers and an erosion of peasant practices (Araghi, 1995; McMichael, 2012; Van der Ploeg, 2018). In the context of agricultural modernization, a transition from peasant agriculture to entrepreneurial agriculture has been pursued deliberately, especially from the 1960s onwards, the peasantry being seen as an obstacle to change (Van der Ploeg, 2018). Current depeasantization under globalization involves 'dispossession by displacement' of the world's peasantries and is linked to deruralization on the one hand and hyperurbanization on the other (Araghi, 2012). In contrast, repeasantization is a struggle for recognition and autonomy. Peasant farmers are resilient and resourceful and their numbers can increase, even under adverse conditions. A regrounding of farming in local ecology, especially around soil fertility and animal fodder, a return to the mixed farm, multifunctionality and new local markets and ties to the local community are dimensions of repeasantization. Farming economically, involving a substitution of capital by labour and thus restoring the centrality of labour is another aspect of repeasantization (Van der Ploeg, 2018).

The contrasting concepts of de- and repeasantization, the peasant as a central subject in food sovereignty and the complex realities on the ground have given rise to many questions and critiques. What is the peasantry, to begin with? A distinction has been drawn between peasant farmers, entrepreneurial farmers and capitalist farmers, with peasant farming being grounded in a self-controlled resource base (Van der Ploeg, 2018). Contrasts have also been drawn between peasant agriculture on the one hand and corporate, industrialized agriculture on the other. These categorizations have invited criticism, as it is unclear if and how peasant farming operates outside the capitalist economy. According to critics, many smallholders are better viewed as simple commodity producers engaging in 'capitalism from below'. As a category,

the label of peasant lumps together different social categories and classes which should be differentiated. Smallholders may for instance exploit the labour of others and semi-proletarians who make a precarious living by combining farming with other activities are not autonomous peasants (Bernstein, 2014; Jansen et al., 2021). Cooperative movements would equally extend capitalist relations within the corporate food regime (Jansen, 2014). If, on the other hand, the struggle for autonomy is seen as an ongoing process, smallholders indeed experience more autonomy when they for instance use on-farm resources rather than external inputs and credit, combine self-subsistence with market crops, and/or sell their products on local markets, so called 'nested markets' geared to revalorizing farming (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Van der Ploeg, 2020). The growing phenomenon of Community Supported Agriculture is a case in point (Roman-Alcalá, 2017).

The food sovereignty movement has also been criticized for romanticizing and essentializing the peasantry (Bernstein, 2014; Soper, 2020). In a version of agrarian populism, food sovereignty portrays peasants as 'capitalism's other' in a binary scheme without any social differentiation. An abstract and unitary conception of the peasant to whom all sorts of virtues are attributed brackets socio-economic differences, interests and constraints. It is furthermore unclear whether 'the peasant way', i.e. low-external-input, labour-intensive farming could feed a growing world population (Bernstein, 2014). It is also questionable whether the majority of peasants consider agroecological ways of farming for local markets viable. In reality, many may choose industrial production methods and international markets to maintain viable agrarian livelihoods. These on-the-ground realities of peasants need to be taken into consideration and peasantness should not be defined by the ideal type of a peasant and the binaries which the food sovereignty movement tends to employ (Soper, 2020). Idealized notions of the peasantry also persist in land redistribution programmes as women's role in food production and everyday gender inequalities are mostly silenced. Land redistribution often has detrimental effects on married women, who tend to lose autonomy and decision-making power. Gender issues in divisions of labour, household relations and land allocation practices thus need to be addressed explicitly (Jacobs, 2015) (see also sections Agrarian reform; Gender equality).

From the perspective of the food sovereignty movement, on the other hand, 'the peasant way' has shown to have a mobilizing force. The name peasant used to have pejorative connotations, but has been proudly embraced by La Vía Campesina (Desmarais, 2008) and has underpinned a new rights framework at UN level (see Rights-based approach). In the UNDROP, a peasant is defined as 'any person who engages or who seeks to engage alone, or in association with others or as a community, in small-scale agricultural production for subsistence and/or for the market, and who relies significantly, though not necessarily exclusively, on family or household labour and other non-monetized ways of organizing labour, and who has a special dependency on and attachment to the land.' (UNHRC, 2018, p. 4). At the same time, food sovereignty activists emphasize that it is not just a peasant's project, neither is it exclusively a project of La Vía Campesina, but a political project, 'a process of accumulation of forces and realities coming together from citizens of the entire planet' (Nicholson quoted in McMichael, 2014a). La Vía Campesina furthermore notes that 'peasant is an all encompassing term used

to recognize the landless workers, the farmworkers, fishers, migrants, pastoralist, food artisans' (LVC, 2021).

Concluding remarks

The transnational agrarian movement La Vía Campesina has successfully advanced food sovereignty as a paradigm for food system transformation, actively building alliances with other social movements. The concept of food sovereignty gained wide traction in civil society, academia, UN-organizations and various levels of government. Advancing food sovereignty as a rights-based concept has resulted, among others, in the UNDROP and a number of voluntary guidelines which provide a legal basis for aspects of food sovereignty.

Conditions on the ground to achieve food sovereignty have arguably worsened. The financialization of food and agriculture and the concomitant concentration of farmland and food chains in fewer hands is ongoing (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). Existing inequities in the world's food systems have widened, while the extractive productivity paradigm undermines ecosystems, soils and biodiversity, disrupts mineral cycles and requires farmers to rely on fossil-fuel based machines and chemical impacts (Fakhri, 2021). Overall, global hunger and food insecurity are on the rise (Borras & Mohamed, 2020; FAO et al., 2021; FIAN, 2021).

At the same time the struggle for food sovereignty and its twin paradigm agroecology has arguably intensified. Experiences in both rural and urban settings are adding up to a body of knowledge and a basis for political power to work towards paradigm change.

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Acronyms

CFS Committee on World Food Security

CSIPM Civil Society Mechanism

ECVC European Coordination of La Via Campesina

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization

FIAN Foodfirst Information and Action Network

GATT General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GCAR Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform

IAASTD International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development

IMF International Monetary Fund

IPC International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty

IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LRAN Land Research and Action Network

LVC La Vía Campesina

UN United Nations

UNDRIP United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UNDROP United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

WTO World Trade Organization

[i] Scholars debate over the question whether food sovereignty should be regarded a concept, movement, slogan, paradigm, frame, process, political project, ontological alternative (see e.g. Edelman, 2014; Masson et al., 2017). This article concurs with the view that food sovereignty may be all of this, and uses these labels contextually, keeping in mind that the 'origins' of the idea and practices of food sovereignty appear to be non-academic (Edelman, 2014; McMichael, 2014a).

[ii] In 2008, La Vía Campesina united 149 organizations in 69 countries, in 2015 160 organizations in 80 countries and in 2022 to 182 organizations in 81 countries, representing more than 200 million small producers.

[iii] The whole series of conference papers is accessible at https://www.iss.nl/en/research/research-networks/initiatives-critical-agrarian-studies/food-sovereignty-critical-dialogue-20132014-conference-papers-series