

Food sovereignty: a farmer-led policy framework

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Abstract

The paper illustrates the original propositions of the Farmer First approach using the example of the 1990s Chivi food security project, initiated by ITDG (Intermediate Technology Development Group, now known as Practical Action). It then looks at the changing context both negative and positive. The latter includes a description of the development of the food sovereignty policy framework and how it addresses the core issues of farmer-led policy making emphasising its appropriateness in the context of current challenges. It discusses how food sovereignty policies could provide an equitable food system that benefits not only long-term food provision but also rural livelihoods and essential (agro)-ecosystem functions. It ends with a description of some of the political challenges and processes of changing from farmer-focused food production to farmer-led management of agro-ecosystems and localised food systems as well as, at the same time, moving from delivering food security, *per se*, to working within the framework of food sovereignty.

1. Complex, diverse and risk-prone – the world addressed by Farmer First.

Farmer First was born out of a growing frustration of development workers that (western) technology-driven, top-down approaches to agricultural development were not reaching poorer farmers nor were they helping them to analyse their situation. These development workers, initially NGOs and researchers, recognised the expressed demand of farmers to be more involved with designing and carrying out research building on their own experimentation and knowledge. Farmer First was conceived as a countervailing approach to the Transfer of Technology (TOT) model backed by the World Bank's training and visit (T&V) system of agricultural extension promoted in many countries that were experiencing the so-called Green Revolution.

“These Farmer First approaches reverse parts of the TOT model. Rather than blame farmers’ ignorance or farm level constraints for the non-adoption of agricultural technology, a reversal of explanation points to deficiencies in the technology and the very processes that generated it. A reversal of learning has researchers and extension workers learning with and from farmers and rural people. Roles and locations are also reversed, with farmers and farms central instead of research stations, laboratories, scientists and abstract theories. Analysis, choice and experimentation are conducted by and with farmers themselves, with researchers and extensionists in a facilitating and support role.” (Pimbert, 1994)

These models of extension were also promoted in areas that were ‘complex, risk-prone and diverse’ and untouched by the downsized industrial agricultural technologies of the Green Revolution. In such areas the Farmer First approach was successful. One example was a food security project initiated by ITDG in Chivi District, Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, started in the late 1980s. It was an attempt to find practical ways of responding to the political challenge of reducing food insecurity and food aid disbursements in the more marginal zones of Zimbabwe through improving the resilience of agricultural production. This was seen as a short-term measure in advance of structural land reform that would relocate committed and knowledgeable farmers to better endowed lands. An indicator of the effectiveness of this approach, albeit in a few communities in one District, was its contribution to radical changes in the national agricultural extension service (Khanya-AICDD, 2007).

At the centre of the approach was the priority given to informed choices made by the communities’ organisations including the separate ones of women and men; outside agencies and development

workers had a facilitatory role only. External service providers, for example agricultural extension agents, had to change to fit with this approach that enabled communities to make decisions on issues that affected them.

After thorough community-based selection processes, priority technologies and processes were applied communally – land forming and water harvesting works were built and seed fairs were held for the unrestricted exchange of resilient local varieties of crops and their associated knowledge. The benefits were retained in the communities and the approach spread through local information systems. Understanding and working around gender differences and inclusion of youth in decision making were critical success factors (Murwira et al, 2001).

It was difficult to effect this change in power relations between service providers and communities. However, local government institutions and the existing government agricultural extension services eventually had no option but to accept the changes and become facilitators of indigenous innovation processes, for two reasons. First, techniques such as Training for Transformation played a major role in enabling communities to discover their source of power and for extension workers and local government officials to respect and internalise this in their *modus operandi*. Secondly, the radical transformation of provincial and national level services occurred because the local level processes were located in wider change frameworks and political processes focused on people in marginal areas, and supported, eventually, by farmers' unions.

The Farmer First approach, used by ITDG over many years to support participatory technology development processes and defend the innovation systems of poor rural communities, has taught us a key lesson. Technologies, in the sense of the knowledge, skills, systems and tools used for the sustainable transformation of natural resources, for example, territory, soil, water and agricultural biodiversity, which co-evolve with and are developed and controlled by, often poor, people, benefit them in the long term. The obverse is also often true. (Mulvany, 2006)

2. Changing context in the global food system - 1980s to present

a) Concentrating power over the food chain

In the past 25 years, the technologies and processes, especially seeds, developed by or for the corporate agribusiness sector and protected legally by Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), commercial contracts and use restriction technologies have facilitated the concentration of power in ever fewer hands for the benefit of a privileged and often unaccountable minority. This increasing imbalance of power has challenged and undermined the Farmer First approach as financial resources are moved from research and development to support the production of diverse foods by local farmers to the manipulation of genes needed by industry.

Since the 1980s, agricultural development policies have changed through the recognition of IPRs on naturally and artificially-developed living organisms. This has driven the development of science and technology, and related industries, for genetic engineering, nanotechnology and synthetic biology. These may decisively impact food production, human health and the environment and will facilitate the transfer of power from smallholders to corporate agribusinesses. The conclusion of the GATT Uruguay round negotiations, which ended with the formation of the WTO but without agreement on international agricultural trade, has had profound impacts. Subsequently the development of bilateral and regional free trade agreements containing restrictive clauses requiring countries, among other issues, to recognise IPRs and allow imports of goods produced by protected novel technologies, are a more recent threat to smallholder agriculture. (Tansey and Rajotte, 2008)

The changing rules that govern food and agriculture at all levels – local, national and international – are designed *a priori* to facilitate not local, but international, trade. This reduces diversity and concentrates the wealth of the world's food economies in the hands of ever fewer multinational corporations, while the majority of the world's small scale food providers, transformers, local traders and consumers including, crucially, the poor and malnourished, are marginalised.

One way in which this has impacted on the Farmer First approach can be illustrated by the way in which farmers are being marginalised from control over their seeds. The diversity upon which local

food systems depend is the product of human interaction with nature – specifically through the development of agricultural biodiversity containing a wide range of genetic resources for food and agriculture. This was achieved through the unrestricted exchange of genetic resources between peoples, communities, countries and continents.

The unrestricted availability of seeds, livestock breeds and so on to local food providers is increasingly under threat from, among other things, their privatisation, as required for crop plants by the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), specifically Article 27.3(b). This much-disputed article requires all members of the WTO to provide plant variety protection through patents or *sui generis* forms of monopoly privileges. It imposes a system that weakens informal sector knowledge systems and thereby facilitates the concentration of knowledge and power. (Mulvany, 2005)

This has led to increased concentration of ownership of genetic resources for food and agriculture. For example many thousands of plant breeding companies provided farmers' seeds in the 1980s before the patenting of genes was permitted and in the early stages of plant variety protection laws. In 2002 only 10 companies controlled a third of all sales. By 2004, ten companies controlled nearly half of global seed sales and in 2006 nearly 60 per cent of global seed sales were in the hands of the top ten seed corporations, many of which also dominate the market in genetically modified seeds. (ETC Group, 2007) In livestock production a similar concentration of ownership is also occurring. Only four companies own the genetics of commercial poultry production worldwide (Gura, 2007).

Participants at the 2001 World Forum on Food Sovereignty, however, clearly stated that "Genetic resources are the result of millennia of evolution and belong to all of humanity. Therefore, there should be a prohibition on bio-piracy and patents on living organisms, including the development of sterile varieties through genetic engineering processes. Seeds are the patrimony of all of humanity. The monopolisation by a number of transnational corporations of the technologies to create genetically modified organisms (GMOs) represents a grave threat to the peoples' food sovereignty" (GRAIN, 2002)

This continuing trend of commodification, privatisation and concentration of knowledge and the ownership of genetic resources, through transferring them and their associated knowledge from the informal sector into the formal sector, and from public domain to private ownership results in the loss of control by, and benefits for, the originators of that knowledge and its associated genetic resources, especially farmers, gardeners, livestock keepers and their communities in the informal sector that developed agricultural biodiversity. (Mulvany, 2001)

The authors of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) recognise that the pace and ownership of formal technology generation and adoption has been highly uneven. Industrialised countries, emerging economies and transnational corporations, which have captured significant economies of scale through formal agricultural knowledge, science and technology, will continue to dominate agricultural exports and extended value chains. Agricultural knowledge, science and technology needs to be fundamentally changed and diversified, recognizing differences in agroecosystems and social and cultural conditions, if it is to be useful for providing food, secure livelihoods options for the rural poor and conserving the environment (IAASTD, 2007).

The threat to farmers and farming is no longer confined, however, to the complex, diverse and risk prone areas of developing countries. The concentration of power and inequality of access to productive resources is also occurring within, as well as between, countries in all regions of the world: the threats to agriculture are no longer confined to the rural areas of poor countries. Major displacements of farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and other food providers are occurring in all regions. Many hundreds of millions of Chinese and Indian farmers are being displaced to urban areas. It is reported by Coordination Paysanne Européenne that even in Europe, several hundreds of thousands farms disappear every year (CPE, 2007)..

To illustrate the iniquities of the globalised agricultural system, which threatens farmers and populations in all regions, the following example describes the impacts of interconnected changing agricultural practices and food systems on people in Argentina and Denmark.

“Danish meat production is large-scale and based on soya from Latin America, especially Argentina, where vast areas are planted with monoculture GM soya. Soil is depleted of nutrients and exposed to erosion. The soya producers grow bigger and bigger – and they take in new land from forest and virgin land. Even Danish farmers are losing, as they have to produce ever cheaper food, which is only possible on large farms. Small farmers have to give up in this competition. The Danish environment is also losing out due to a surplus runoff of nitrogen derived from the manure – and therefore derived from the nitrogen extracted from Argentinian soil, which is now depleted! The peasants in Argentina that were originally producing a variety of food (vegetables, meat, milk) are selling their land to the soya producers as their possibilities to produce are undermined by herbicide spraying from the air, or their land is taken away, since many have no papers confirming their legal rights to the land. As local farmers no longer produce for the local people, there is hunger and malnutrition. Hungry people are fed soya in emergency feeding programmes, which is not part of their traditional diet. The Danish population is losing the skills and knowledge to grow and consume a traditional diet rich in local fruit and vegetables and now eats more meat and milk than is good for their health.”

From a discussion between Danish and Argentinian farmers recorded in a report of Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty (Nyéléni 2007, 2007c)

It is generally accepted that climate change impacts the poor hardest. The development of industrial agrofuels however shows that mitigation efforts of industrialised countries may be increasing the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by the poor and reducing the adaptive capacities, flexibility and diversity they require to address climate change. The interest of industrialised countries to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions without necessarily transforming the fundamentals of the energy system they depend upon has increased global attention on the potential substitution of fossil fuels by liquid biofuels and creating a market for them. Governments, agribusinesses and scientists are actively promoting agrofuels as the energy option for the future despite evidence that they are net carbon consumers.

The EC has established a target of 10% share for biofuels in transport by 2020 which will be mainly met through import of biofuels from developing countries. The potential for the production of biofuels is particularly good in tropical countries where higher crop yields and lower costs for labour and land provide an apparent economic advantage over countries with temperate weather. In spite of all the potential benefits currently publicised such as employment generation, rural revitalisation, energy security and recovery of degraded lands among others, the reality is that production systems outside the control of local farmers and based on monocultures are being established and are currently expanding. The significant trade-offs in terms of access to essential land, water resources, biodiversity, food and other environmental services as well as labour conditions, use of fertilisers and pesticides to boost production, the real balance of GHG emissions in the life-cycle of the production of biofuels, indirect impact of leakages and advancement of the agricultural frontier, disadvantageous conditions and negative impacts of small holder contracts with western companies in addition to challenging processes of land reform, insecurity of tenure, structural inequities and lack of voice and representation by small farmers in the same developing countries with potential for exporting biofuels, make this current development another example of the increased risks, opportunity costs and loss of power faced by smallholders farmers due to climate change. (see, for example, Econexus et al, 2007)

b) From corporate-dominated to farmer-led: turning the world’s food system upside down

Since 1993, the global farmers’ movement, La Via Campesina, has been developing and promoting a new approach to food and farming, led by farmers. Not only has the membership of Via Campesina grown significantly in numbers, they have motivated many other social movements and organisations to join the struggle to realise what they term food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a policy framework designed to put food providers and consumers, rather than corporate agribusiness, at the heart of decision making in, what should become, localised rather than global food systems.

The concept of Food Sovereignty was agreed at the International Conference of Via Campesina in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in April 1996.

“We, the Via Campesina, a growing movement of farm workers, peasant, farm and indigenous peoples’ organizations from all the regions of the world, know that food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food. Any discussion that ignores our contribution will fail to eradicate poverty and hunger.

Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where Food Sovereignty is guaranteed.” (Via Campesina, 1996).

Since its launch at the World Food Summit in 1996, where the objective was to encourage NGOs and CSOs to discuss alternatives to the neo-liberal proposals for achieving food security, the development of food sovereignty ideas and principles has gathered pace. There have been important meetings in 2001 – World Forum on Food Sovereignty, Havana, Cuba; 2002 – Forum for Food Sovereignty, Rome, Italy; and 2007 – Nyéléni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty, Sélingué, Mali. It is important to note that the term, originally translated from Spanish, is not a ‘brand’ but a set of principles in a policy framework. Similar sets of principles are also espoused by those who call for food democracy, as well as by many in the agroecology, organic and consumer movements.

Food sovereignty was also developed as a reaction to the impact of ‘food security’ policies. The definition of food security agreed by governments focuses on all peoples having enough food to eat each day, often supplied by imports, but it is silent about where the food comes from, who produces it, and how and under what conditions it has been grown. The result of this limited policy focus has been that smallholder farmers are increasingly forced off their lands as they cannot compete with increases in (often subsidised) imports of food. Food security policies may, thus, contribute to more poverty, marginalisation and hunger. Food sovereignty not only deals with power relations, trade issues, the right to food and knowledge systems it also supports agricultural systems that have been developed based on principles of cooperation with nature. This has led to highly complex agro-ecological systems which provide multiple functions in support of food provision.

The thinking behind food sovereignty contrasts this neo-liberal [food security] approach that believes that international trade will solve the world’s food problem, with a focus on local autonomy, local markets and community action. Perhaps, then, the first issue to stress is that food sovereignty is a process of peoples’ resistance and its conceptualisation cannot be carried out outside the dynamics of the social movements that are central in these struggles.

Turning the World’s Food System Upside Down, (GRAIN, 2005)

The lessons of Citizens’ Juries in India (Pimbert and Wakeford, 2002) and Zimbabwe (Coupe and Lewins, 2007), for example, show that when provided with full information, farmers can select the most appropriate technologies that they need to defend their production systems and the food sovereignty of their communities. These and many other examples show how food providers are resisting the imposition of the dominant agricultural science and technology (See Pretty, 2005; ILEIA et al, 2007; Can Africa Feed itself?, 2007) but few are recorded where they are able to survive for any significant length of time a distorted market and skewed funding of agricultural science and technology. Exceptions include the rapid growth of organic and agroecological markets in many parts of the world; the solidarity of local consumers who promote Community Supported Agriculture systems; and the smallholders who survive economic shocks through barter markets. (Marti and Pimbert, 2006).

There is equally a growing realisation that the current dominant food system is not sustainable for human health and environmental reasons, among others. The health of the planet and people are linked and this requires a fundamental redefinition of existing models of food production and consumption. (see, for example, Lang, 2007)

In agricultural science and technology a new paradigm for research is urgently needed.

“Conventional agricultural research must be reorganised for greater democratic oversight and priority setting to combine the strengths of farmers and scientists in the search for fair, sustainable and locally adapted food systems. Transforming agricultural research is also increasingly necessary to ensure that the food we eat keeps us healthy... local people and citizens should be the ones who decide which new policies and technologies are needed when, where and under what conditions... There is a need to transform knowledge — using ecology as the basis for sustainable agriculture and de-colonialising economics from narrow definitions of wealth... This will require more direct citizen participation in decisions about new technologies, research priorities and policies for food and farming.” (Pimbert, 2007)

A proposal for increasing democracy in decision-making about research and development in agricultural science and technology is shown in BOX 1

BOX 1

Democratising science and technological R&D:
some institutional and methodological innovations (Pimbert, 2007)

1. Use regular citizen panels, consensus conferences, citizen juries, future scenario workshops and referendums to capture the full diversity of interests and values in deciding on strategic research and funding priorities in the social and natural sciences, the allocation of resources and technological risk assessments. Citizens' commissions for science and technology futures should be set up to guide and connect research, training and policy institutions. These deliberative and inclusive democratic procedures will clearly need to be linked into the formal policy process through appropriate reforms that allow citizens to more directly frame policies and regulations. Recent experiences also suggest that these forms of participatory democracy can help re-frame policies on the future of food and farming to reflect broader social interests and goals rather than narrow corporate interests and elite expertise.

2. Open up decision-making bodies and governance structures of Research & Development organisations to allow a wider representation of different actors and greater transparency, equity and accountability in budget allocation and decisions on R&D priorities. Throughout the world, there is a dire need for much wider and more gender balanced representation in these institutions by different citizens: small farmers, tribal people, forest dwellers, fisherfolk, healers but also farm workers, small food processors, retailers and consumers. These bodies set the agenda for the design of policies and technologies for food and farming. They are immensely powerful in that they broadly decide which policies and technologies will ultimately be developed, why, how and for whom. And yet the governance of science and technological R&D is presently largely dominated by men who are increasingly distant from rural realities and moving closer to corporations.

3. Reorganise conventional scientific and technological research to encourage participatory knowledge creation and technological developments that combine the strengths of farmers and scientists in the search for locally adapted solutions and food systems. Effective and interdisciplinary partnerships are needed to link natural and social sciences with indigenous knowledge to address needs and problems in specific local settings that are typically marked by complex and dynamic change. An important goal here is to ensure that knowledge, policies and technologies are tailored to the diversity of human needs and the situations in which they are to be used. This must be on the basis of an inclusive process in which the means and ends of R&D are primarily shaped by and for citizens through conscious deliberation and negotiation.

4. Ensure that knowledge, genetic resources and innovations remain accessible to all as a basic condition for economic democracy and the exercise of human rights, including the right to food and participation. Decisions to issue patents on knowledge embodied in products and processes (seeds, software etc) and national intellectual property rights legislation require more comprehensive public framing of laws and policies based on deliberative and inclusive models of direct democracy.

Such deliberative processes and their results are now being used in several African countries. For example, the outcomes of a Mali citizens' jury as are now being used in negotiations with national governments by the key national and regional farmers' organisations CNOP, Mali and ROPPA, West Africa and the regional civil society network COPAGEN (IIED, 2006) and similar processes have been used in Zimbabwe (Coupe and Lewins, 2007).

This approach fits with the one called for by Via Campesina when it demanded that "the CGIAR, and all other organisations involved in agricultural research, avoid the patenting of knowledge, prevent the privatization of research and the concentration of knowledge by the transnationals." (Via Campesina,, 2000). This has been echoed in more recent statements by Via Campesina, for example at the second Governing Body of the International Seed Treaty. This intervention also dealt with the need for the democratic inclusion of farmers organisations in the work of the Treaty (Kastler, 2007).

The Rome-based UN food agencies and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are cognizant of the problem and are urgently seeking solutions but are constrained by the unequal power in their memberships. The CBD will debate in meetings in 2008 the impact that agriculture, including the production of agrofuels, has on the environment and biodiversity and the need that agriculture has for agricultural biodiversity and thriving agroecosystem functions. The World Health Organisation is concerned by the growing epidemic of type II diabetes due to increasing obesity and the UN office of Human Rights is equally concerned. The UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food said he was "gravely concerned that biofuels will bring hunger in their wake. The sudden, ill-conceived, rush to convert food — such as maize, wheat, sugar and palm oil — into fuels is a recipe for disaster." (United Nations, 2007)

In FAO, the discourse on Farmers' Rights is developing under the aegis of the International Seed Treaty that came into force in 2004. This Treaty should prevent further losses of the on-farm diversity of crop seeds as well as other planting material for food crops, and, in conjunction with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), conserve related agricultural biodiversity and ecosystem functions. These international instruments should ensure that this diversity is freely available in perpetuity to farmers who maintain and develop diversity on their farms.

The Treaty and the CBD recognises that this diversity has been developed in fields and gardens by farmers, gardeners, indigenous peoples and other food providers, over millennia, and that they continue to manage and develop it. Without their unrestricted participation in these activities, however, agricultural biodiversity, enhanced through the exchange of seeds and other planting material between growers, communities, countries and continents that produced a myriad of varieties suited to every social, environmental and food need, will continue to be eroded.

This participation will not be achieved without international recognition of farmers' inalienable rights over agricultural biodiversity and support for their continued production of food crops in diverse environments. The realisation of their inalienable rights over agricultural biodiversity will require recognition of the collective rights of farmers and other food providers and support for their activities. These collective rights encompass a broader range of issues than simply access to and use of seeds. The Governing Body of the Treaty will need to find ways, including through influencing the implementation of other instruments such as those of the CBD, of recognising farmers' collective rights to, *inter alia*: agricultural biodiversity, its sustainable use and the benefits derived from this; territory and land; water; local markets; services including research; as well as rights to organise and to be decisively involved in relevant decision making processes. (See, for example, Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2007)

In the 21st century, for the effective implementation of Farmer First approaches, the decisive inclusion of farmers and other food providers in these political forums needs to be enhanced.

3. The struggle for food sovereignty

Food Sovereignty is being developed and discussed as a counter-proposal to the mainstream development paradigm built on liberalized international agricultural trade, trade-based food security, and industrial agriculture and food production by well-resourced producers. Food Sovereignty has become the new policy framework, championed by social movements, for challenging current trends in rural development and food and agricultural policies that do not respect or support the interests and needs of food providers, local consumers and the environment (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005). At Nyéléni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty the ideas were developed further and actions were proposed. Two outcomes from the forum were the Nyéléni declaration and the synthesis report (Nyéléni 2007, 2007a, 2007b). The core principles of food sovereignty derived from that forum and presented in BOX 2, cover all dimensions of a food system that will provide food in the long-term rather than short-term profits. It focuses on food for people rather than internationally tradeable commodities. It values food providers rather than eliminating them. It localises food systems rather than dependence on inequitable global trade. It puts control locally instead of by unaccountable corporations. It builds knowledge and skills that conserve and develop local food production and rejects alien technologies such as GMOs. It works with nature in diverse agroecological systems

rather than energy-intensive production methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

The original propositions of Farmer First fit clearly into this framework but their interpretation over the past two decades has resulted in a shift further away from the possibilities of farmer-led policies and actions. In his forthcoming paper “The Lost Years” Stephen Biggs notes that the mainstream advocates of participatory technology development have become ‘apolitical’ and are “concerned with management tools and frameworks that would be ‘scaled out and scaled up’”. He notes that “in another context, this type of activity has been called ‘paradigm maintenance’” – unquestioning the power relations and impacts of the dominant discourse. However, Biggs recognises that there are two different types of groups of researchers that have questioned the paradigm. “One of these groups was the scientists and others who were actively engaged in the political arena of science and technology. The second parallel group has been the anthropologists, political scientists and others who were undertaking academic studies that sought to understand how change actually took place in science and technology situations, and to make suggestions for research and development intervention based on this knowledge. He concludes that “it is perhaps these innovators outside of the participatory mainstream who are addressing today’s poverty and social inclusion issues with the innovative ability that is needed.” Such investigators could indeed help elaborate the details of the research and development activities that are needed to support the development of food sovereignty (Biggs, 2007).

In at least 22 national constitutions, the human right to food is recognised and specific processes have been promoted by various governments to discuss and internalise the fundamentals of food sovereignty in their existing legal frameworks. This is a clear sign of political will that recognises the political nature of the food, agriculture and poverty debate and intends to address the inequities of its development in recent years. Examples of this type of process can be found in Mali and Bolivia where after many decades of groundwork, mainly by civil society organisations and social movements, the political space for this discussion has been opened recently and opportunities for new legislation and strategies led and informed by poor farmers and their organisations have finally been realised.

The Bolivian process has been informed by the interest and discussions about food sovereignty, over many years, in Latin America. Throughout the region there is an active process of discussion and promotion of the principles of food sovereignty often complementary to the agro-ecology movement and those involved in campaigns against free trade agreements and genetic engineering. The proposed “corridor of food sovereignty” stretching throughout the Andes of Peru from Ecuador to Bolivia as well as the Central American platforms for food sovereignty are examples of efforts by civil society and social movements to generate debate and influence national and local policies on the subject. Food sovereignty articulates the priorities and strategies that farmers’ organisations consider essential to respond to the daily challenges and risks they face in their own context. An illustration of this importance comes from the Farmers’ Movement of Santiago del Estero (MOCASE - acronym in Spanish) which was formed in 1990 in Argentina to defend local farmers against the increasing aggression from large soybean farmers who were destroying their livelihoods. MOCASE has said that *“food sovereignty is the right to produce and eat what we want. Our strategy is to strengthen our own production and consumption models based on self sufficiency, production of our own food that we produce in our gardens, and the cultivation of cotton and maize. We protect our own culture passed on from our ancestors and including our animals, chickens and geese and our different breeds of goats. Santiago del Estero is a region with low potential and the mountains are our only source for food.”*

With current political changes in the region, openings to promote the debate and strengthen undergoing processes have been established by civil society and farmers’ organisations in which they can voice their demands and lay out their agendas for transformation. In Bolivia national food production is declining and there is increased dependency on food imports and food aid. However, export crops such as soya are on the rise, including the expansion of plantings of genetically engineered varieties, benefiting from policies and legislation enacted by previous governments on behalf of few powerful interests. The interests and needs of smallholder farmers who constitute the majority were systematically neglected.

The process leading to the establishment of a new constitution in Bolivia has witnessed farmers’ organisations and NGOs working together to promote the recognition within the new constitution of

the human right to food. In this context, food sovereignty plays a key role. Food sovereignty is not a new topic in the agenda of these organisations and its adoption by the State emerges from the analysis made of the current dynamics of access to food, the power dynamics inherent to what and how food is produced, who defines food production agendas and the impact of these on poverty and hunger in the population. The coordinating body for the integration of farmers' economic organisations of Bolivia (CIOEC) clearly highlights the monetisation of the right to food that only allows access to food for those who can afford it and the development of policies and strategies that promote the commercial gains of a few actors, neglecting the protection of local producers and consumers.

CIOEC and AIPE (the network of education and capacity building institutions) were engaged in a process during this period, in 280 of more than 314 municipalities in Bolivia, discussing proposed changes, which concern food sovereignty and its relevance to the human right to food, in the recently approved constitution. The process also included a series of Latin American workshops where experiences from the region were shared. Food sovereignty is understood as a process of social empowerment and political will at all levels to ensure the social, economic and political transformation that the country requires. There are already some laws to promote the value of local products, a school breakfast programme based on local products and a proposed law on agro-ecological production that supports the implementation of food sovereignty in practice. Additionally the multi-sectoral programme on 'zero hunger' (PMD-0) is operating in 166 municipalities engaging all relevant sectors involved in food production and promoting the human right to adequate food. Likewise, under a more integrated rural development process, food security and food sovereignty are shaped by the following principles: a) the human right to food, b) revaluing smallholders and indigenous agriculture c) strengthening farmers' organisations and local self management; d) access, quality and food self-sufficiency, e) development of agro-ecological and sustainable production systems; f) institutional strengthening. These are mainstreamed in a series of programmes promoting land reform and redistribution, the human right to food (SEMBRAR), promotion of local and agro-ecological production (CRIAR) and food self sufficiency (RECREAR) (AIPE, 2007).

Food sovereignty could be realised as the Bolivian example illustrates. More broadly, the struggle for food sovereignty was given further impetus by Nyéléni 2007 – forum for food sovereignty described above. At that forum the delegates from the social movements of food providers formulated joint strategies and an agenda to realise food sovereignty through actions to promote this agenda, to resist policies and practices that undermine it and to strengthen the movement for food sovereignty.

Farmer First approaches could support this farmer-led movement to realise the more equitable food sovereignty policy framework but the approaches will need to be embedded in and accepting of the new agenda for a change of paradigm, methodology, power relations and politics.

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BOX 2 – DEFINITION of FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
from Declaration of Nyéléni, 27 February 2007

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
from Synthesis Report of Nyéléni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty

	Food Sovereignty:	is FOR	is AGAINST
1.	Focuses on Food for People:	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.	Values Food Providers:	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.	Localises Food Systems:	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.	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; 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.	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 <i>rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6.	Works with Nature:	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.

These six principles are interlinked and inseparable: in implementing the food sovereignty policy framework all should be applied.