The journey of Food Sovereignty movements: challenges and future perspectives

Short report of the IPC webinar during the counter mobilization

Wednesday, 27 July 2021

Programme

Moderators: Paula Gioia (Germany, LVC) and Naseegh Jaffer (South Africa, WFFP)

Javier Sanchez (Spain, LVC): Historical view since 1996: building a FS movement including urban movement.

Saul Vicente (Mexico, IITC): IPC achievements in the last two decades: CFS reform, Guidelines and others.

Alimata Traoré (Mali, COFERSA): Example on how Food Sovereignty takes shape in practice, at grassroots level: the work of Malian organization on seeds law.

Tammi Jonas (Australia, AFSA): Examples on how Food Sovereignty takes shape in practice, at grassroots level: how to organize an alliance on food sovereignty at the national level.

Perla Alvarez (Paraguay, LVC): the corporate capture and the situation under COVID-19. The exclusion of social movements from policy processes

Melissa (Colombia, MAELA – IPC WG on Youth): Future: looking ahead for the next 25 years. Challenges to defend the social movements space for food sovereignty and the announcement of the Nyeleni process.

Opening (Paula Gioia)

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) is an autonomous and self-organised global platform of small-scale food producers, rural workers organisations and grassroots/community-based social movements, whose goal is to advance the Food Sovereignty agenda at the global and regional levels.

The IPC gathers more than 300 millions small-scale food producers, sharing the principles of Food Sovereignty. The IPC facilitates dialogue and debate among actors from civil society, governments and other actors in the field of Food Security and Nutrition. Its legitimacy is based on the ability to voice the concerns and struggles that a wide variety of civil society organisations and social movements face in their daily practice of advocacy at local, sub-national, regional and global levels.

Food sovereignty was first presented to the world 3 years after the creation of the global peasants movement, La Via Campesina, and in a moment when social movements and civil society working on food issues started organizing themselves together to counterbalance the neoliberal power threatening local food markets, the environment and ultimately human rights of local communities.

In that context, food sovereignty merged as a paradigm shift to the struggle against hunger and poverty. It merged with the clear understanding that without food sovereignty there is no genuine food security, so it is a pre-condition to achieve food security.

There was from the beginning a clear understanding that the conduction of agrarian reforms and the non-discrimination to access land are key elements to allow food sovereignty to turn into a reality. In the same line the protection of natural resources through agroecological practices is also a basis for food sovereignty.

With all this understanding 1996 the first seed for the formation of the IPC and the broader food sovereignty movement were sawn. And we had several achievements over the past 25 years.

Nevertheless, the current context of the COVID19 pandemic has increased the social crisis of the world today.

And the worker classes have their rights under threat, unemployment, corruption, misery, hunger and violence have increased.

But the crisis is even broader: climate, environmental, economic, democratic, health and also food crisis.

Today as in 1996 food sovereignty remains as the most coherent solution for a systemic shift.

Peasants, indigenous communities, small scale fishers, pastoralists, need to be involved in the formulation of solutions, we need to be truly part of policy making processes, not only getting a ticket to be members of the audience as the UNFSS is doing.

This session will be present the achievements and future challenges of Food Sovereignty movement

Javier Sanchez

- Whenever we talk about history, we must always remember how we were able to build spaces and achieve results from a collective consciousness.

- The IPC was built after the onslaught of the neoliberal model in the 70s and 80s. The Uruguay Round in the 80s tried to put trade on the altar of all citizens' issues; the right to food, peasants' and workers' rights. The famous GATT with the birth of the WTO turns food into a commodity and globalisation into the only key to the future of humanity.

- In this context, peasant movements realised that the voice of peasants was co-opted by the agro-export model and hegemonic governments - EU and USA. In this challenge, the political principle of Food Sovereignty come to the table and it carries the voices of Indigenous Peoples, fishermen, pastoralists, peasants, workers and urban poor at the centre in the UN Rome Based Agencies, where Crocevia created the basis for the platform for the social movements, and the IPC was created.

- Another milestone was in 2007, with the Nyéléni Forum where the basis and principles of Food Sovereignty have been established in the way of commercialisation, production, consumption, distribution as well as peasant rights with special emphasis on women and youth.

- After that, the crisis of 2008 called into question the access to food. However, the platform of social movements was already mature to put the CFS at the centre of the construction of public

policies through the IPC, right when the CFS was totally useless because of the lack of an effective participation of social movements.

Saul Vicente

- In 2008, with the crisis and the presence of corporations in international institutions, the IPC convened an independent consultation to talk about a paradigm shift and restructuring of international institutions on food.

- In this period, there was an important activity of the IPC with the fundamental perspective of Food Sovereignty. The mobilisations of the IPC were fundamental for the reform of the CFS, promoting the participation of different stakeholders. With this reform, the CFS became a very inclusive space. In this reform process, it was recognised:

- the food crisis as a structural crisis
- the CFS as the main inclusive platform on food policy discussion
- the right to food
- Support from the High Level Panel of Experts
- recognition and autonomous space for civil society and indigenous peoples > MSC

- In regard to other IPC achievements, the IPC supported the land tenure negotiations: 3-year process that resulted in the guidelines on land tenure, dedicated to Indigenous Peoples' rights.

- In 2014, the IPC achieved recognition by the FAO Committee on Fisheries of the guidelines on small-scale fisheries.

- In 2014, the IPC had the recognition of the first international symposium on agroecology and the international year of family farming.

- In 2018, the adoption of the UNDROP: an international instrument that recognises the principles of Food Sovereignty and the rights of peasants, considered as the large group of small-scale food producers.

- Currently the summit seeks to undermine these spaces that have been won. Corporations control the UN system. IPC has a great responsibility today to maintain the gains, to fight for the health of mother earth, for the right to food and for the health of the people.

Alimata Traoré

- Why did women organizations come together to defend Food Sovereignty in West Africa? This starts from 2007, when Nyeleni was organized in Mali by social movements for food sovereignty.

- In 2009, we built our cooperative and decided to create an organization for rural women. That's how Food Sovereignty and rural women convergence came together.

- We also wanted to defend our rights concerning the food loss due to lack of conservation, through an advocacy campaign: rural women work with natural resources that are not protected or valorised.

- We got some funds from the government to do these activities, so then we asked for land to plant these trees. The results we can see today are 50 cooperatives under our organization (COFERSA) with 5000 persons that benefit from our work. Now we transform the shea and we sell it directly.

- Through the cooperatives, we reinforce the role of women in order to build autonomy and live with dignity, preserve and share traditional knowledge. COFERSA is a dynamic reality, we are training youth to continue in this direction.

Tammi Jonas (video recorded)

- I will outline what the settler colonial food system looks like in Australia, and what the food sovereignty movement here is doing to radically transform it from the ground up.

- Contemporary agriculture in Australia is predominantly based on an industrial agro-export model, with a strong drive to employ technological innovations aimed at efficiency and productivity. Such models demand constant efforts to scale up production, both responding to and driving the prevailing discourse of the need to feed a growing global population and its ever-increasing desire for meat and grain.

- While governments and farmer organizations boast that a nation of 25 million feeds 60 million, the ecological and human health costs under the industrial model is incalculable and particularly as we enter increasingly riskier climatic times.

- Which is the difference with our members in the Australian Alliance for Food Sovereignty? While average Australian farm sizes are far larger than the global average, our members farm on what are considered very small properties here. Much of our legislation does not even acknowledge the possibility of growing food for a livelihood on less than 40 hectares, though most of our members do this. Moreover, while the age of farmers in Australia is around 56 years old, in the food sovereignty movement our farmers are typically much younger, with many in their 20s and 30s strongly attracted to our movement.

- The formation of AFSA from 2010 to 2012 was one development amongst several concurrent sustainable food systems initiatives and advocacy, but it uniquely brought the language and political framework of food sovereignty to Australia.

- AFSA was founded primarily by urban academics and sustainable food systems advocates, and its early focus was predominantly on consumer advocacy and raising awareness of the problems in industrial food and agriculture systems through various events, social media platforms, a book, and a documentary. However, what started as a largely urban-based consumer advocacy movement has evolved into a farmer-led struggle for agrarian reform and against corporate capture of food and agriculture systems and the systems that govern them.

- AFSA has been working for regulatory and policy reform to support smallholders and local food economies for a decade now. We had a major win in 2018 with the Victorian government that saw reforms to land use planning for pastured pig and poultry farmers. These reforms acknowledge the fundamental difference in how we farm compared with vast sheds of animals – which present a constant risk of the next zoonotic disease like COVID-19.

- Joining social movements at the local level is necessary to keep the global struggle strong enough to face today's challenges.

Perla Álvarez

- We are living in a moment of pandemic that placed the serious food crisis on the world stage when production is not anymore in the hands of peasants.

- Collective demand for Food Sovereignty: we need to strengthen peasant agriculture, small-scale fishing, small-scale livestock farming. Industrialised food causes the ills we are facing, and the pandemic virus.

- Many limitations to ensure food security with the closing of borders. The UN convened this corporate-driven Summit at this particular time, taking out the agencies responsible for food (CFS, FAO, RBA) and bringing the debate to New York.

- We have to transform the food system and we need Food Sovereignty to guarantee our collective rights and the right to food. We are organisations from the countryside with limited connection and we have called this counter-mobilisation. Pandemic uncovered the crisis that we are denouncing, solutions must start from our realities for seeds, water in our territories, without discarding the scientific knowledge that recognises agroecology and ancestral knowledge.

We need to recover the strength of the Social Movements, we remain firm and continue to work on popular Food Sovereignty that will solve hunger but also transform the relations between men and women, and our link with Mother Nature.

Melissa Gil

- Many challenges in defence of Food Sovereignty in the face of the crises of capital. New cycle of pandemic with new challenges for social movements.

- We are defending our territories, with the limitations of COVID-19 pandemic. We have a series of strategies and responses to this health crisis. We have been saying that we must start from the local level to overcome the crisis. Multinational corporations influence international institutions.

- The perspective of indigenous communities fighting for water and land, fighting against sexism and patriarchy. We propose actions for the care of the environment and communities. Challenges to prioritise the participation of all in spaces of formation and political incidence.

- The vision of young people is important to continue defending Food Sovereignty, creating links between rural and urban organisations. A very big challenge is to unify a concept of Food Sovereignty, to generate public policy instruments at all levels. Concentration of world forums such as Nyeleni, which has become a symbol for the struggle of Food Sovereignty.

- Now, we want to announce that the Nyeleni forum is coming back for 2022: it will be launched in September this year and the whole process will start next year. We recognise that the aim of this meeting is to build a common strategy to transform this system and achieve Food Sovereignty. We have more challenges with or without pandemic, it is important to analyse these challenges and converge.

Q&A

1. Civil society & Indigenous Peoples have worked so hard and successfully to reform & reclaim the CFS. But the last 2 CFS policy negotiations (VGFSyN & Agroecology) had very disappointing outcomes due to growing power imbalances and too much control taken by private sector interests well-represented by the US (& other exporting countries - Argentina, Brazil), while the CSM/IP's redlines were constantly crossed and progressive govt views on agroecology (e.g. Senegal) were ignored or cut short. On the one hand, the UNFSS space is clearly entirely unacceptable, no

question. On the other hand, the CFS is not really delivering anymore or enabling us to advance food sovereignty. Where does that leave us?

Everything we achieved with the construction of the CSM and with governments, showed the private sector unprepared because the CFS took on an unexpected prominence. From the processes in New York, the private sector has started bombarding the CFS. To turn the CFS back into a playground for corporations, the Summit is putting it under pressure: the CFS will die or go back to the centre.

However, it is important to strengthen the IPC and the solidarity of social movements. The challenge is very important, how to work after the Summit to encourage the FAO and the CFS not to pick up the results of the Summit, but respecting the democratic processes.

2. What can we do to counter the industrial agriculture messages at the Food Summit in NYC? How can we get the message out that they are silencing those who are closest to the work of food production?

We know that companies put pressure on institutions to legitimise their activities. We know that they destroy life in order to make profit. This mobilisation responds to the great problem of food in the world. We need to guarantee natural resources and our life. We need to strengthen our articulation, to regain our strength. We achieved important changes, now the pandemic is affecting us, but we must raise our voices.

Negotiation is impossible today, in this summit process they are rubbing us out of the decision making of the citizens and their rights.

The agri-food industries need to continue to push their food policies and projects to continue to make huge profits without caring about the health of the people, of the people, of mother earth, and they want the legitimacy that the United Nations allows them. Our voice of counter-mobilisation has hit them hard and they are doing everything they can to ensure that the people and the governments do not hear it. This process has been important to denounce this current situation and now the IPC has a great responsibility for the immediate process in the face of the results of this official Summit. We must prepare ourselves much better for the struggle to come.

Conclusion (Naseegh Jaffer)

Naseegh: very informative session. Need to find a way to continue the discussion and feelings emerged. There is also the notion of human rights/food and nutrition. Human rights are not equal to corporate rights. In that sense, it is a collective right. Important to make the connection: what we need is a food system that places nature at its core and not private corporation. UNFSS is inviting corporations to help solve the problem that they have caused. The people that have caused the problem cannot also find the solution to it. Any solution to the current crisis has to find its origin in small-scale food producers. Any food system has to have people and nature at its core.

Let this be the first of many discussions to come.