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editorial

food sovereignty: resisting corporate capture of our food systems

This year marks 25 years since the paradigm of food sovereignty was launched at the World Food Summit 1996 in Rome as a direct challenge to market-based food security promoted through the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Food sovereignty asserts the autonomy and agency of small-scale food producers and workers in the face of increasing corporate power over the entire realm of food. Since its launch, the food sovereignty movement has grown, diversified, and birthed numerous initiatives to address historical and emerging injustices, inequalities, rights abuses, and oppressions. Today, the movement is at the cutting-edge of real systemic change, with millions of people all over the world engaged in and supporting solidarity economies, agroecology, territorial markets, cooperatives, the defense of land and territories, and the rights of small-scale food producers, workers, migrants, indigenous peoples, women and people living in protracted crises.

Ironically, this year, the United Nations convened a Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) that is the polar opposite of food sovereignty. The structure, content, governance and outcomes of the UNFSS are dominated by actors affiliated with the World Economic Forum (WEF), as well as government and UN officials who believe that successfully tackling hunger, unemployment, climate change and biodiversity loss requires the central involvement of corporations since they have capital, technologies and infrastructure that surpass most nations and the entire UN system.

The coincidence of these two moments clearlyshows fundamentally opposing ideas about food systems. The UNFSS adopts a lens that serves the interests of the industrial, globalized, corporate controlled food system. By deepening dependency on corporate dominated global value chains, and capital-intensive and market mechanisms, this approach sidelines human rights and impedes real transformation of food systems. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, tackles root causes of hunger and malnutrition, emphasizes democratic control over food systems, confronts power asymmetries and calls for radical economic, social and governance changes to build just, equal, territorially rooted food systems that are in harmony with nature, revitalize biodiversity, and ensure the rights of people and communities.

Corporations are using their considerable resources to co-opt the conceptualization and governance of food systems through financing, trade, investment, and multi-stakeholder platforms. The UNFSS is a dangerously perfect example of corporate designed multistakeholderism, where corporations can influence public decision making at the highest level but make no public interest commitments themselves. The UNFSS process has been characterized by a lack of transparency in decision-making and strong involvement of corporations in all parts of its structure, posing serious problems of accountability, legitimacy, and democratic control of the UN.

Over the past year we have demonstrated our ability to mobilize across multiple constituencies around the world against the corporate capture of food and for food sovereignty. We have succeeded in challenging the legitimacy of the Summit and prevented formal agreement to the creation of new institutions, such as a panel of experts on food systems. The *Counter-Mobilization to Transform Food Systems* organized from July 25-28 reached almost 11,000 people world-wide.

Food is a basic need and a human right: food systems provide livelihoods for nearly a third of humanity and are intimately connected to health and ecosystems. We need, therefore, to continue strengthening the convergence of food, health, environmental and climate justice movements, and continue to rise up against corporate food systems that are destroying our planet and our communities.

FIAN and *Focus on the Global South*

box 1

Multistakeholderism: the new corporate weapon

Multistakeholderism is an evolving model of governance that brings together diverse actors that have a potential 'stake' in an issue, in order for them to arrive at a collaboratively formulated agreement or solution. For example, stakeholders in a proposed coal mine could include project affected communities, government officials responsible for approvals, investing companies, project financiers, environmental NGOs, etc. A completely misleading assumption here is that all stakeholders are equal in rights, obligations, liabilities, power, and capacities. But although the rights of affected peoples to their lands far outweigh the rights of external investors to acquire them, their capacities to prevent land-grabbing are often undermined by the financial/political power of investors. At a global level, multistakeholderism contradicts multilateralism, where governments (duty bearers) take decisions on global issues on behalf of their citizens (rights holders) which translate to obligations and commitments that states and international organisations are expected to implement. This includes regulating business activities and holding enterprises accountable when they cause harm.

The rise of multistakeholderism coincides with the mainstreaming of neoliberalism from the 1980-s onwards, increased corporate involvement in various sectors through public-private partnerships, erosion of legitimacy of the multilateral system, reduction of development finance at national and international levels, and rise of venture philanthropy where corporate investors finance social-environmental goals. Over the last 20 years, multistakeholderism has spread into approaches to address extractive industry, industrial agriculture, climate change, land and environmental governance, food and nutrition, internet, and the Sustainable Development Goals, and been boosted through the Global Redesign Initiative and other platforms of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Multistakeholderism blurs the distinctions between public interest and private profit, and human rights and corporate interests. It enables corporations to dominate decision making on critical development issues and evade legal-material accountability for their operations. It presents a direct threat to participatory democracy and just, human rights-based governance.

in the spotlight 1

Resisting the corporate capture of food!

The corporate capture of food is based on the belief that transnational corporations are essential for providing food and that their interests are aligned with the public interest. Its proponents portray corporations as better equipped than governments and civil society to draw up the rules and policies that shape our food systems. It is a dangerous worldview which allows corporations to control increasing shares of land, water and fisheries, to quasi-monopolize commercial seeds and intensively use pesticides and chemical fertilizers. It fails to recognize and address the harm that transnational corporations are causing. If this corporate capture is to dominate spaces such as the Food Systems Summit (FSS), the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) or the UN's organization for food and agriculture (FAO), it will further undermine democracy, self-determination, and peoples' sovereignty.

The FSS has been organized to secure corporate control over food systems amidst the increasing pressure to address the failures of industrialized food systems. Through FSS, the UN may end up helping to consolidate a new ecosystem of powerful actors attempting to privatize governance for a corporate-environmental food regime. These actors are Northern governments, the EU in particular, business platforms such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD); philanthropies such as the Gates, Rockefeller, Stordalen and EAT Foundations and the Global Alliance for the Future of Food; multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN); international NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Care, as well as corporate-friendly scientists.

Our boycott effectively challenged the legitimacy of the FSS and prevented, for the moment, the creation of new, corporate aligned institutional structures. Our concern in the immediate future will be to resist the capture of the CFS - including the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition - and the Rome based UN agencies, particularly the FAO. As a food sovereignty movement, we have pushed for the democratization of these institutions so that they are more responsive to small-scale food producers claims. In the last 25 years, we have had partial victories. However, all this is in danger now. The multi-stakeholder coalition mentioned above is now pushing for CFS and FAO to follow up on the Summit results. They want to import from FSS the working methods of multi-stakeholder governance, i.e. ignoring existing rules of procedure; privileging ad hoc coalitions of action without known rules. These coalitions will surely lack transparency, multilateral inclusion, clear decision-making and accountability mechanisms, and will divert resources from the public programs of the UN agencies to these ad hoc, semi-privatized initiatives. We must resist this attempt and continue struggling for strengthening our communal and public institutions all the way from local to global so that food sovereignty can flourish.

in the spotlight 2

Corporations and food systems

Over the past few decades, corporate presence in food systems has expanded significantly across the world, enabled by the aggressive promotion and adoption of neoliberal economic and financial policies by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and most governments. Corporations have become powerful actors in practically every sphere related to food systems: production, storage, processing, packaging and labelling, distribution and retail, safety and quality standards, financing, consumer preferences, research, regulatory frameworks, etc.

Through mergers and acquisitions, a small number of agro-chemical and agro-food transnational corporations have formed mega corporations and greatly increased their economic power to determine what crops livestock farmers grow/raise; what equipment, seeds and breeds farmers use; production technologies, facilities and work conditions; procurement and retail prices; and dominate various aspects of national-international food supply chain and markets. Because of their easy access to finance capital, corporations are able to invest in and use the latest digital technologies to gain information about prices, consumer behaviour, land and water availability, genetic properties, etc., and exercise control over different components of food systems.

Especially worrying is the expansion of corporate power in national, regional and international policy, regulatory and governance frameworks. Corporations use their financial clout and large market presence to shape policies, laws, regulations, social-environmental programmes, economic incentives and subsidies to secure their operations, financial gains and market power. Corporate lobbyists and experts work directly with government and multilateral agency officials to formulate trade-investment agreements, intellectual property protection and taxation rules, food and environmental safety standards, and immunity mechanisms from social, environmental and financial accountability. Corporations finance research and outreach to support their interests in policy debates and boost popular acceptance of their operations.

Through a complex, extensive network of business councils and multistakeholder platforms and processes, corporations present themselves as a necessary, positive force in addressing climate change, hunger, environmental destruction, pandemics and other crises, obscuring their own roles in creating and deepening these crises. The UNFSS is dominated by such an network within the WEF, and legitimizes partnerships between multilateral agencies, corporations and international NGOs and think-tanks, completely undermining the hundreds of millions of small-scale food producers and workers who feed much of the world through diverse, territorially rooted food systems.

The so-called solutions to the urgent problems facing the world emerging from the UNFSS are basically expensive, corporate controlled schemes, and patent protected technologies and products that will further expand corporate power into our food systems. They will divert much needed financial resources away from public goods, services and programmes, and perpetuate an unjust, unequal economic system in which the rights of people and communities will be secondary to corporate profits. To dismantle corporate power, we must challenge and change the governance structures through which it is gaining ground.

box 2

The Nature fraud

“Boost Nature positive food” is one of the UNFSS Action Tracks and the term nature positive has become almost synonymous with the “nature-based solutions” for food production being promoted by the FAO and others. Analyses of proposals being made in the UNFSS, FAO and other spaces show that nature positive is the latest concept being used to co-opt and undermine agroecology. It strongly promotes sustainable intensification as a solution rather than real transformation and prioritises yield and stability, but does not address social, cultural and political dimensions of transitions to sustainability, including power dynamics and governance. By this metric, more intensive production systems that produce less carbon emissions per unit of yield are considered better than diverse, low input systems. Nature positive repackages several false solutions such as conservation agriculture, nutrient optimization and improved plantation management without addressing the corporate drivers of the industrial model, and its social and environmental impacts.

An even more dangerous side to nature positive framing in the UNFSS is its links with the push for “nature-based solutions” to climate change, in which agriculture and sustainable intensification techniques can be brought into carbon offset and market schemes by highly polluting corporations such as fossil fuel companies and agribusinesses. Sustainable intensification techniques lend themselves well to carbon offsets since they can focus on single practices designed primarily to generate carbon credits. Nature positive framing threatens to co-opt and corrupt genuine solutions such as agroecology and community forest management by lumping them together with dubious and destructive practices and linking them to opaque market-based schemes. “Nature-based solutions” to climate change are already being co-opted by fossil fuel and agribusiness corporations. They claim to be investing in sustainable intensification as a nature-based solution while expanding their massive land grabs and failing to cut actual carbon emissions.

box 3

For a different food system without smoke and mirrors

In just a few years, the design of food systems has become an area where the most valued attributes are a large scale, totality, entrepreneurship, monoculture, innovation, and technology. These are important attributes from a capitalist perspective, which are only concerned with a production model and consumption to be achieved in a fantasy that does not view people as interdependent or eco-dependent beings. This model rewards extraction-based formulas that destroy territories without even achieving what should be the main objective: to provide food and nourishment for all. It is clearly a failed model, but it is one that is maintained because it can sustain and reinforce multiple interests. It is a model that has turned a right – to adequate food and nutrition – into a commodity to be used in speculation, with the complicity of various agents and public policies at multiple levels. It is a failed model, but it is one that is sustained through an illusion that renders those who truly sustain and feed the world invisible.

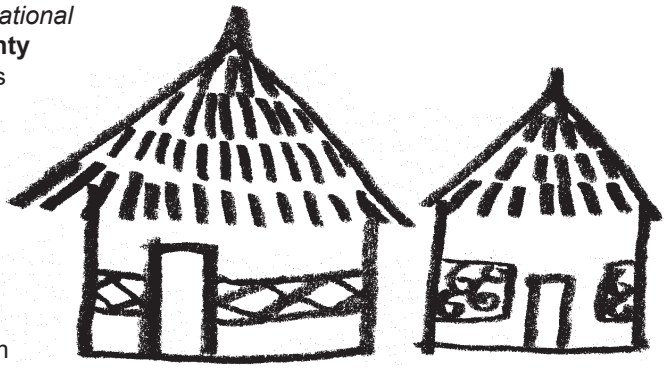
These policies and narratives intended to define a food model on the basis of power imbalances and the interests of a select few are the smoke and mirrors of illusionists who, on the one hand present a completely unequal development model as the only option, while on the other hand hide the numerous inequalities it creates in various territories, the precarious realities of many agricultural workers without whom this model would not work, and the reality that it is, in fact, now possible to feed the world in a sustainable and equitable manner.

In this invisible reality, it is small-scale production, a community outlook, agro-environmental initiatives and unequally distributed care work that falls to women and keeps the world turning, as well as the hands of agricultural workers. This year, the pandemic has changed the view of this scenario; it has shaken its foundations and revealed the secrets of the illusion, while showing that the underpinnings it tries to conceal are strong and adaptable and that there are no tricks that can predict or avoid a response from nature. As a result, those who are closer to Mother Earth, those who know her, care for her, respect her and interact with her, are those who are able to listen to her response and adapt to it, although not without paying a high price; even though they are the ones who are cooling the planet, they are also those who are most affected when it rebels.

The transformation needed in the food system requires us to be aware of illusory tricks, confront the realities that are made invisible, and take care of the environment to maintain stability and ensure that we do not become unbalanced. The struggle for this involves sowing seeds and beginning interactions, remaining in territories and preserving communities and their knowledge, for each harvest, for the knowledge that we are interdependent and eco-dependent beings, for each farmers' market left, for each group of peasant women raising awareness and for each space where we have an impact so that public policies stop playing illusory games and work instead to protect peasant realities and preserve their future.

who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter is the voice of this international movement.**



Organisations involved: AFSA, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, TNI, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People.

now is time for food sovereignty !

voices from the field

1 Sri Lankan farmers against pesticides

Chintaka Rajapakse, MONLAR (Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform), Sri Lanka

The use of agrochemicals has had disastrous consequences in the past decades. The widespread use of these chemicals has contaminated the soil and the water, which has directly led to the increase in cancers and kidney diseases. Not only has this negatively affected public health, but the overuse of agrochemicals has also undermined food sovereignty, unravelled the ecological balance, and led to the extinction of many animal and plant species. Since almost all agricultural inputs used by Sri Lankan farmers are imported, it has allowed certain companies to build oligopolies.

It is in this context that, as the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), we have supported the government decision to ban the import of all agrochemicals with immediate effect. The Agriculture Ministry said it would convert the State-owned Ceylon Fertiliser Company Ltd. into an institution that would produce, supply, and distribute organic fertilizer in association with local government institutions. It is a welcomed step forwards. We must now make sure that this is also implemented in practise.

The previous government also took a decision to promote organic agriculture in 2016. Unfortunately, that initiative failed completely by 2018, and Strategic Enterprise Management Agency (SEMA), which was entrusted with implementing the program, was also closed. We must draw lessons from international experience and make sure that the new initiative is implemented successfully. Several farmers are also worried about the short-term implications of this decision. The government must recognise their anxieties and make sure that their concerns and worries are immediately addressed, and lay out a clear roadmap for implementation of this policy.

box 4

UN Food Systems Summit: Are we transitioning to a corporate-environmental food regime?

We have heard all those fairy tales before - how we can turn nature into a financial asset to save the planet from further environmental destruction But it is not a question of providing the right financial incentives. We need radical approaches that heal eco-systems and not compensate corporations for continuing their dirty practices while taking part in “greenwashing”. Hijacked by the interests of big corporations, the organizers of the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) happily picked up these old stories of carbon markets and REDD+, despite their proven failure. Food systems should now be financialized and become targets of speculative investments, because that seems to be the only way to finance the “costly” transformation towards sustainable food systems. Using the umbrella term “nature-positive production”, another label was added to the many corporate-led solution proposals of the summit, based on digital innovation, techno-fixes, bio-economic and market-oriented approaches, such as climate-smart agriculture and sustainable intensification. People-centered, cost-effective and socially and ecologically just solutions such as agroecology are already on the table. But these ideas are drowned out in the big corporate solution pot without taking into account the actual differences.

The European Green Deal is already full of this “climate-smart” narrative. With the “carbon farming initiative”, for instance, a new business model was created to reward farmers who sequester and store carbon. The UNFSS jumped onto this “green capitalist” bandwagon of the EU, promoting carbon capturing approaches to create “sustainable” food systems by improving soil health. Manifested in the nature of neoliberal capitalism, this pathway is likely to enable a transition towards a “corporate-environmental food regime” (Friedmann, 2005). This new, third food regime is reflected in the UNFSS’ multi-stakeholder framework that provides corporations legitimacy in shaping global food governance. Friedmann (2005: 259) argues that this regime induces a struggle over the “weight of private, public and self-organized institutions”. In such a process, food is no longer a public concern but a private investment.

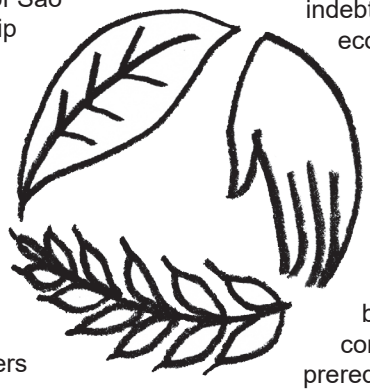
The current trajectory of the UNFSS allows financial investment companies to buy shares in large agribusiness corporations who control the proposed “nature-positive solution” models. But we cannot allow the finance sector to gamble with people’s livelihoods. In the name of environmental sustainability, the whole meaning of food is changed from an edible good to a financial commodity. Thinking back at the devastating consequences of the food crisis in 2008 that made millions of people go hungry, it should be clear that food must be excluded from financial speculation. Certainly, if this corporate-environmental food regime consolidates, it will “deepen longstanding processes of dispossession and marginalization of peasants and agrarian communities” (Friedmann, 2005: 257). In the end, small-scale producers might be even excluded from the whole agricultural food production process as the world starts “farming without farmers”.

Reference:
Friedmann, H. (2005): From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes. In: Buttel, F.H. and McMichael, P. (eds.): New directions in the sociology of global development. Research in rural sociology and development, Vol. 11. Oxford: Elsvier, 229-67.

2 Mobilizing for access to healthy food

Miriam Nobre, member of SOF (Sempreviva Organização Feminista), and an activist of the World March of Women, Brazil

In Brazil, the Covid-19 pandemic has made, not only social inequalities, but also economic activities that are essential for sustaining life, such as food more evident. Small-scale farming has been hit hard by the suspension of markets and public procurement, which had already been affected by Bolsonaro's misgovernment. Direct commercialisation networks, especially with responsible consumption groups, have established themselves as an alternative. Due to this alliance, women and quilombola farmers from Vale do Ribeira, in the state of São Paulo, have expanded their membership and their cultivation areas, asserting the defence of their territories and ways of life against threats from mining companies, dams and monocultures with intensive use of pesticides. At the same time, allied groups and collectives in the Greater São Paulo region have also grown and increased their presence in the peripheries, guaranteeing access to good food for indigenous Guarani people, students deprived of school meals, workers and single mothers.



These initiatives are in opposition to the financialization of school feeding programmes. São Paulo City Government, for example, in the face of no face-to-face classes, stopped school feeding programmes and purchases from farmers, instead making a food card with monthly values of 10 to 20 Euros per child available to them. Alongside the increase in food and cooking gas prices, this solution is good for Alelo card administrators and supermarkets.

Groups that organise themselves around multiple and decentralised forms of donation, sale and production in agroecological food gardens in the periphery (re)create a food culture embedded in respectful relationships between people and between people and nature. We are growing in numbers and diversity. The Black rights movement has long protested against the humiliation and murder of Black people in the peripheries at the hands of supermarket chains such as Carrefour. Now they are coming together in this movement so that we have access to good food by ourselves. We recover our health and lost flavours, and free territories from transnational food corporations in the city too.

3 Africans speak out against corporate hegemony over seed and food systems: farmers' rights now!

Sabrina Masinjila, African Centre of Biodiversity (ACB)

As part of the global counter-mobilisation against the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), the online event Seed is power: Reclaiming African Seed Sovereignty brought civil society and farmer-led movements together to express their rejection of the current seed and intellectual property protection laws. These serve as instruments that continue to entrench industrial agriculture, furthering corporate interests at the expense of smallholder farmers' rights, whose farmer managed seed systems are increasingly marginalised, and even criminalised. This is linked to systems that reinforce indebtedness, inequality, social exclusion and ecological crises.

Instead of adopting seed and plant variety protection laws based on the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) 1991, governments should put in place legally binding and discrete measures to recognise and support farmers' rights to save, exchange and sell seed, unrestricted by the commercial imperatives of transnational corporations. Central to this is autonomy – a prerequisite and core component of the exercise of rights by family and community farmers and peasants.

Thus, legally binding and enforceable protections are urgently needed against patents, plant variety protection laws, commercial seed laws and digital sequence information, which all erode the exercise of farmers' rights. Most importantly, the conception of these rights needs to be grounded in a wider vision of food sovereignty that encompasses the rights of both urban and rural dwellers to nutritious and culturally appropriate food – especially for the poor, and for women in particular, who are the main custodians of seed and life, yet they often exist in precarious circumstances, under the weight of patriarchy and economic subordination. Such contexts make it clear how seed is about more than just the act of farming, but also social relationships of care and solidarity, which are also crucial for wider progressive action. Draconian seed regimes are therefore also a direct attack on community, and on our ability to work together in solidarity for a better future.

To rise to the challenge of our ecological and social crises, farmers' rights should not simply be defended, but actively deepened and widened as a core organising principle of our food systems.

More info at https://www.acbio.org.za/seed-power-reclaiming-african-seed-sovereignty-africans-speak-out-against-corporate-hegemony-over

box 5

Digitalisation in Indian agriculture

Agriculture in India is rife with precarity, leaving vulnerable, marginalised populations (e.g., women and landless workers) historically excluded from land ownership. Large-scale digitalisation in agricultural value chains will deepen indebtedness and power asymmetries[1].

Broadly, digitalisation in agriculture comprises of three categories: robotics, crop and soil monitoring, and predictive analysis[2]. All of these rely on one crucial ingredient: data.

The economic value of data rests with its ability to show patterns in aggregated big data, and in providing individualised, targeted advertising which is used by large corporations as a profit-making opportunity.

The uses of data in agriculture are far-reaching. Information on sales and prices of commodities can assist in agricultural marketing. Conditions are also ripe for automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in warehouse operations[3]. More threateningly, farmers' data can be used in credit-scoring algorithms which determine their access to financial services, excluding historically vulnerable groups.

Digitalisation predates COVID-19, with private sector involvement entrenched in policy approaches such as Doubling Farmers Income by 2022 and NITI Aayog's National AI Strategy. However, the decimation of agricultural supply chains during the initial months of the pandemic accelerated the pace and reach of digitalisation. E-commerce platforms, for example, capitalised on the moment: Ninjacart's B2B demand went up by 300% during the initial months of the pandemic[4].

The pandemic has also spurred policy and legislative steps. Agricultural reform legislations passed in the middle of the pandemic with little parliamentary debate, encouraging digitalisation in a private sector led financialised model at the cost of farmers and small-scale producers[5]. This is already visible in partnerships signed between the government and Big Tech companies, such as the MoU for building the Agristack platform, signed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Microsoft in April 2021.

These trends can lead to end-to-end consolidation of agricultural value chains by platform and agricultural corporations. Pushing ahead with digitalisation in the absence of appropriate data, AI and platform governance will leave this sector ripe for corporate harvesting, resulting in market consolidation among a few large players.

Instead, the role of the private sector must be carefully negotiated, to ensure that data resources are geared towards the basic needs of farmers and their self-determined empowerment[6]. Digitalisation in agriculture also requires decentralised and federated architectures that preserve the constitutional authority of state governments to regulate this sector[6] towards ensuring public interest.

Lastly, engagement with the legacy problems in Indian agriculture, such as usurious lending and power asymmetries[7], by prioritising the interests of farmers and marginalised populations is a crucial pillar of responsible and development-oriented digitalisation.

1- ASHA letter to the Ministry of Agriculture, on file.
2 - https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/1664/Taking-Stock-of-AI-in-Indian-Agriculture.pdf
3 - https://focusweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Big-Tech-Jan2021.pdf
4 - https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/COVID19_Accelerating_the_use_of_digital_agriculture_FINAL.pdf
5 - https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10455752.2021.1936917
6 - https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/add/IT-for-Change-IDEA-Response.pdf
7 - https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/add/IT-for-Change-IDEA-Response.pdf

one does not sell
the earth
upon which
the people walk

Tashunka Witko, 1840 –1877

voices from the field

4 Indian farmers protest against agriculture laws

Chukki Nanjudaswamy, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), India

We are witnessing a shift towards public-private partnerships in policymaking spaces across the world. A recent example is the UN Food Systems Summit emerging from a strategic partnership between the World Economic Forum and the United Nations. The Summit represents a hostile capture of global governance by Corporate interests. But such trends are also happening at the national level.

In the middle of the pandemic in 2020, the Indian government hastily passed three laws related to agriculture, using their brute majority in the parliament, with little consultation with farmers to appease corporations. Under the guise of reform, these laws will usher in a free-market-based, export-oriented agricultural system in India, similar to those of Europe and the US.

These agriculture laws will marginalize small-scale farmers and destroy their autonomy in deciding what to produce, when to produce and how to produce food. India's public procurement systems need reform, but not the kind where they are entirely side-lined and a free-market system completely takes over. Food is crucial for everyone.

Corporatization of agriculture has devastated the autonomy of food producers and consumers everywhere. It makes food an object of speculation and leads to the loss of biodiversity and nutrition. It has a severe impact on nature due to altered land use, industrial storage and processing systems and industrial transport that ships food to all corners of the world.

Farmers in India are now more aware of these dangers than ever, as they have seen how small-scale producers of the US, Europe and Canada have vanished and been replaced by large industrial farms. In India, millions are dependent on agriculture, forests and fisheries. That is why, for more than a year, protests have been raging across the country. Our demands are clear - repeal the agriculture laws, have public consultations, and bring in reforms that small-scale farmers urgently need.

to read, listen, watch and share

- Many resources are available on the website of the Peoples' Autonomous Response to the UN Food Systems Summit, *https://www.foodsystems4people.org*
- Opening Declaration of the Counter Mobilisation to Transform Corporate Food Systems, *https://www.csm4cfs.org/final-declaration-of-the-counter-mobilization-to-transform-corporate-food-systems/*
- Teaser of the Peoples' Counter-Mobilisation, *https://youtu.be/KVGkBV55XnQ*
- Social Movements are boycotting the UN Food Systems Summit 2021. Here is why: *https://vimeo.com/575872913*
- Many articles in English and Spanish are available at *https://linktr.ee/academicsonUNFSS,* such as:
- UN Food Systems Plants Corporate Solutions and Ploughs Under Peoples' Knowledge, *https://agroecologyresearchaction.org/peoplesknowledge/*
- The UN Food Systems Summit: Obstructing the Transformation of Corporate Food Systems, *https://www.fian.org/en/publication/article/the-un-food-systems-summit-obstructing-the-transformation-of-corporate-food-systems-2810*
- An IPCC for Food? How the UN Food Systems Summit is being used to advance a problematic new science-policy agenda, *http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/GovBrief.pdf*

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