



La Via Campesina



Friends of the Earth International

Statement by La Via Campesina and Friends of the Earth International

at the 17th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Food Sovereignty: A New Model for a Human Right

On May 4th, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, highlighted the unique role of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) on the current discussions about the future of agricultural development. His statements were made during a presentation at the 17th session of the Commission, which is focused on Agriculture, Rural Development, Land, Draught, Desertification and Africa.

De Schutter stated that in order for agricultural development to be sustainable, a focus on human rights is essential, and for that reason it is necessary to move towards a model in which the right to adequate food is a human right. This is what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

De Schutter's proposal promotes a model that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable people, that defines its reference points not only by the levels of production achieved but also by the impacts on the diverse food production ways, and one in which the decision making processes are based on participatory mechanisms.

"Increased investments in agriculture, particularly in Africa, are necessary, yet this must be thought out seriously. The experience gained from the crisis showed that the key question is not merely that of increasing budgets allocated to agriculture but rather, that of choosing from different models of agricultural development which may have different impacts and benefit various groups differently", stated De Schutter to the CSD.

This new model must protect, promote and ensure

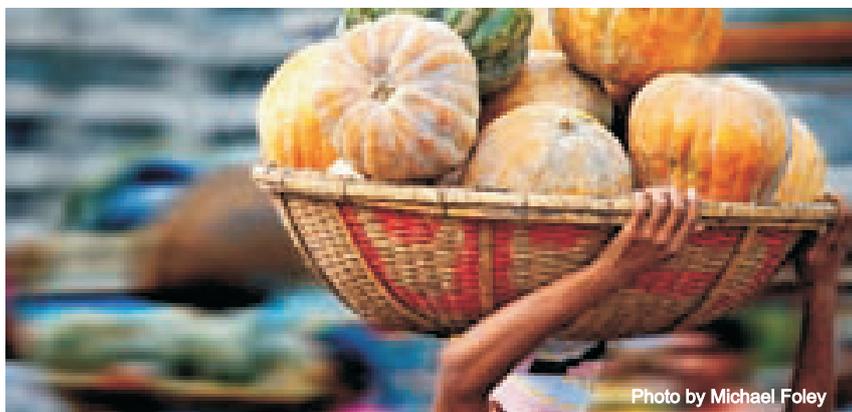


Photo by Michael Foley

the access to, and the control over, land of the small farmers and peasants. It should promote as well the agrarian reform, ensure the access to production resources and protect people against large-scale transnational acquisitions.

This model needs to put into practice alternatives for production that do not contribute to climate change. "Increasing agricultural production must go hand in hand with increasing the incomes of the poorest, particularly small-scale farmers, and switching to modes of production which do not contribute to climate change", highlighted De Schutter.

All in all, it is a model that promotes and ensures, in a sustainable way, the right to food as a fundamental right of communities to produce food and to define what food they want to consume. A model which is "more about 'how to help the world feed itself' than about "how to feed the world," he added.

Time for recommendations

In his recommendations to the CSD, De Schutter included *"the need, not only to increase food production, but to reorient agro-food systems and the regulations that influence them at national and international levels, towards sustainability and the progressive realization towards the right to food."*

He also recommended a reorientation of agrarian sciences, policies and institutions and a need to anticipate the effects of climate change in agriculture, promoting the diversity of agricultural systems able to cope with climate disruptions, including agroecological systems.

In addition, De Schutter called for a World Food Summit with a broad agenda to encourage the international community to address the structural causes of the food crisis and fill the gaps left by the fragmentation of current global governance. The agenda should also include, according to the Special Rapporteur, issues related to the insufficient or inadequate investments in agriculture, deregulation of markets which do not ensure stability or prices, financial speculation on the future markets of agricultural commodities, weak protection of workers of the sector and a search for an adequate regulation of the agrifood chain.

He also urged the CSD to promote the adoption of national strategies to the right to food, which are comprehensive and meant for the creation of sustainable agrifood systems, including production, transformation and consumption.

Finally, De Schutter highlighted the fact that the CSD must contribute to improve the recognition of the small farmers' right to access land by the international community.



He added that for that to happen it is necessary to highlight the unique role of agrarian reform and adopt international guidelines on large-scale offshore land purchases.

Our Path: Food Sovereignty

There are many common opinions on De Schutter's presentation shared by La Vía Campesina and Friends of the Earth International.

We are agreed in defending the right of the peoples to adequate food, highlighting that this implies to recognize that food must be sufficient, nutritious, healthy, and produced in an ecologically and culturally appropriate way. It also implies the right to produce food, the right of peasants and small farmers to produce food for themselves and their communities. Peasants, small farmers and artisan fishers have to play a central role in any strategy to resolve the problem of hunger and poverty.

We are also agreed on the need to ensure the right of the

peoples to access land, and with that aim it is crucial to put an end to land offshore takeovers. We understand that massive land takeovers or acquisitions, meant for agrofuels production, animal feed, tree plantations to produce pulp and paper, and for wood and mining projects, are taking from the farmers, indigenous peoples, fishermen and small farmers the possibility to access this resource. In addition, these acquisitions are the cause of dangerous effects on the environment and on the ability of the communities to have sustainable life styles. In short, their food sovereignty.

But in addition, the right to access water must be ensured and it must be recognized that the peoples should control their own territories. This implies much more than the search for mechanisms to promote their participation in the decision making processes, it entails the control of these processes.



Photo by Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

production of food, and on the urgency to move from an intensive large-scale industrial agricultural system, to local and regional systems that are environmentally adequate and diverse. In the urban context, such sustainability entails the possibility to buy this kind of food in a network of diverse retail markets, which will work as bridges between people and food, links between those who produce it and those who consume it.

In addition, sustainability is completely impossible if the right of the peoples to recover, defend, reproduce, exchange, improve and grow their own seeds is not recognized. Seeds must be the heritage of the peoples to the service of human kind.

Interfering Actors

Clearly, there are key actors that militate against food sovereignty, like the export-oriented production model led by big transnational corporations. International financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Regional Development Banks, as well as multilateral organizations that promote free trade like the World Trade Organization (WTO), are key actors against food sovereignty. The policies of the United States and European Union run also against food sovereignty

Moreover, we agree on promoting solutions to help the world feed itself, to enable communities to produce their own food instead of solutions of those who aim at feeding it.

And this is because we defend the rights of the people to define and control their food and food production systems, local, national, ecological, fair and sovereign. In fact, that is food sovereignty: the ability for people to choose what and how to produce, and how to trade it.

This includes the need for regulation to push back the influence of the corporate sector whose goal is “to feed the world” through their industrial and destructive model of production.

Likewise, we support De Schutter when he prioritized the most vulnerable people. Those who produce and consume food must be at the centre stage of food policies, and should be prioritized over trade and business interests, emphasizing as well local and national economies. It is about giving priority to food sovereignty and the right to food over trade

agreements and other international political and economic instruments.

In the same way, we agree with the Special Rapporteur on the need of promoting production models that do not contribute to climate change. This means, among other things, to promote agrifood systems which are less dependant on fossil fuels, and thus on agrochemicals, machinery, systems free from genetically modified organisms. But also, food should not travel long distances from their production sites to the places of consumption, due to the polluting emissions this causes.

We also want to bring again to your attention the important recommendations of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD)

In this respect, we stress the need to promote sustainable agrifood systems, in their production, transformation and consumption stages. We believe such sustainability lies on local and diversified agroecological

In addition to this, there are a series of initiatives we refer to as “false solutions” which go against peoples' food sovereignty. Among these are the certification schemes which aim at implementing unsustainable production models; mechanisms that aim at the commodification of nature as the clean development mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change; carbon trading, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD); agrofuels themselves, and the new Green Revolution driven in Africa by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

Next Steps

This is the time to defend a sustainable and egalitarian production and consumption model, and bring to an end the production model driven by the big corporations and promoted and financed by the WB, the IMF, the WTO, among others.

Such controls by corporations on our agrifood systems must end.

There is a need to unmask and resist the false promoters of models to block the right to food and food sovereignty, like the WB, IMF, WTO. Their policies have led us to the current crisis, and these actors should not be part of the “international community” looking for solutions.

We call for a collective defense of the right of the peoples to access land, seeds and water and push for agrarian reform.

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