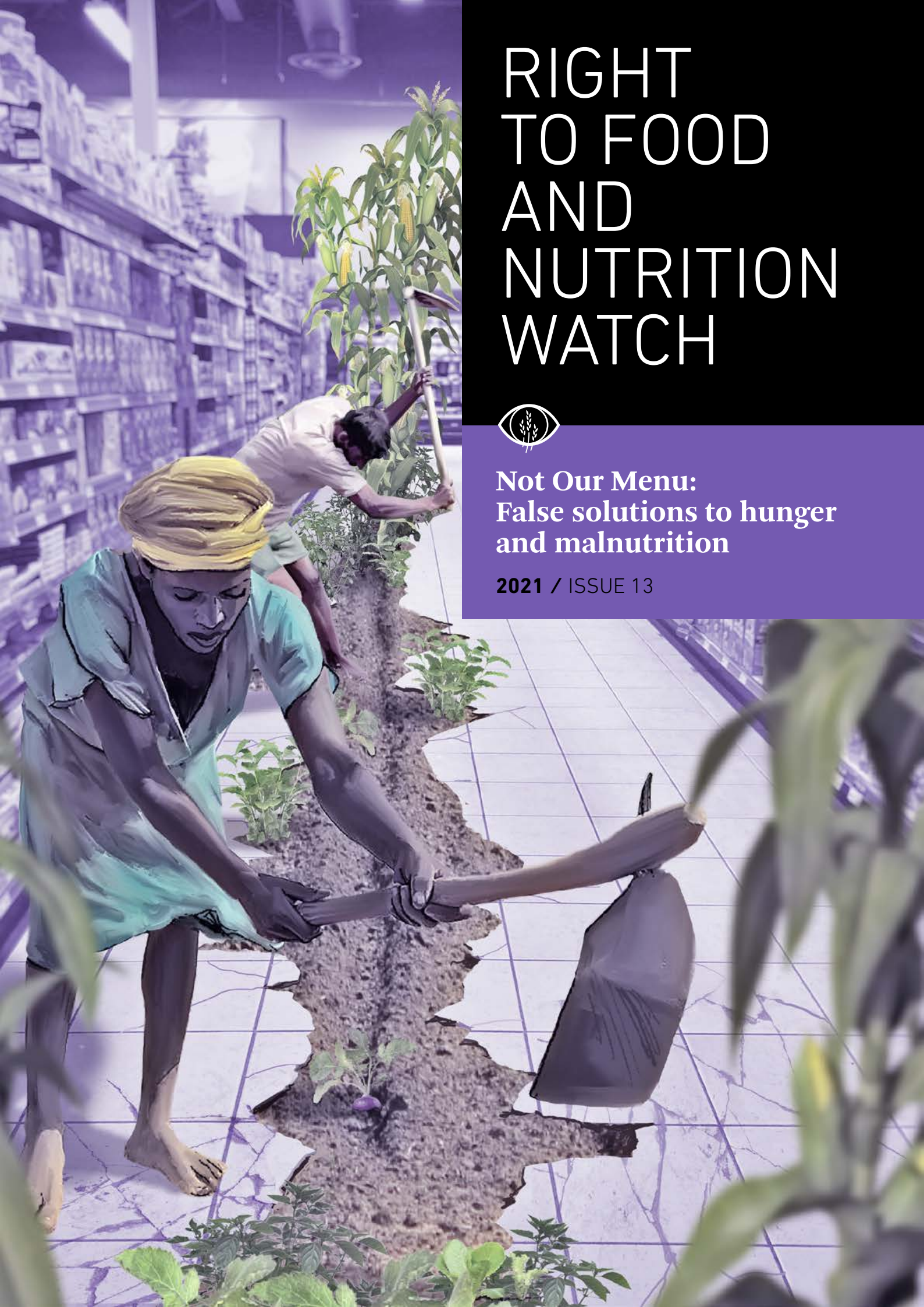


RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION WATCH



**Not Our Menu:
False solutions to hunger
and malnutrition**

2021 / ISSUE 13



GLOBAL NETWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION



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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color	HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts of the UN Committee on World Food Security
CEPAL	The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	UN	United Nations
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women	UNDROP	UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
CFS	UN Committee on World Food Security	UNDRIP	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
COFI	FAO Committee on Fisheries	UNFSS	UN Food Systems Summit
CSM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security	VGFSyN	Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization	WEF	World Economic Forum

01

THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'FOOD SYSTEMS' DISCOURSE AND CORPORATE SOLUTIONS TO HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

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“Although the concept [food systems] does not entail specific proposals nor solutions to current food systems crises, the way how different actors describe and interpret the term ‘food system’ has a bearing on which direction the debate takes.”

THE RISE OF THE FOOD SYSTEMS NARRATIVES

In recent years, the concept of ‘food systems’ has gained prominence in several global processes.¹ While there is no unified definition,² many definitions tend to cover the different steps and actors involved in the production chain, spanning from producers to consumers. Some include health and nutrition outcomes, as well as economic, environmental, and social externalities. Although the concept itself does not entail specific proposals nor solutions to current food systems crises, the way how different actors describe and interpret the term ‘food system’ has a bearing on which direction the debate takes.

At first, this emerging ‘food systems’ concept appears to point to a paradigm shift. It seemingly moves away from the limited approach of ‘food security’ toward a more holistic understanding that recognizes the interactions of various actors as well as the way humans, nature, and food are interconnected. A closer look at how the food systems concept is defined by the UN in its various processes, however, reveals a different picture. For instance, the definition of ‘food systems’ provided by the CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE)³ initially omitted values, which are pertinent to a human rights perspective. Later, the HLPE added principles such as sustainability, equity, inclusiveness and agency to its definition.⁴ Similarly, this reductionist approach can be gleaned from the CFS negotiations on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN), followed by those on the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches. It is also discernible in the preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). In short, the mainstream narrative of the UN on food systems fails to address the structural drivers

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PHOTO | © Lyza D. Gardner

¹ Some of these processes are: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the debates around the United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit; the recent negotiations at the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of firstly the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN), and secondly the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches.

² HLPE. (2017). *Nutrition and Food Systems - A report of the High Level panel of Experts of Food Security and Nutrition*. FAO. Available at: www.fao.org/3/i7846e/i7846e.pdf; HLPE. (2020). *Food Security and Nutrition, Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030*. FAO. Available at: www.fao.org/3/ca9731en/ca9731en.pdf; FAO. (2018). *Sustainable Food Systems. Concept and Framework*. Available at: www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf; and IPES Food. (2015). *The new science of sustainable food systems. Overcoming barriers to food systems barriers*. Avail-

that shape agro-industrial food systems such as trade, financialization,⁵ patriarchy and neo-colonialism. And it equally fails to sufficiently define the new food paradigm required for more just, sustainable and healthy societies.

Over the past 60–70 years, a dominant global food system has emerged despite the existence of multiple forms of food systems. Serving the interests of a few powerful actors, this dominant food system is characterized by the agro-industrial model and marginalizes other existing food systems. It has increasingly globalized ‘food’ and ‘value’ chains, has global trade and investment at its core, and goes hand in hand with corporate concentration, which works in the interest of powerful countries and large companies.⁶

The dominant approach to food systems is problematic for the following reasons⁷:

- **It makes use of human rights only marginally or superficially**, including through the lack of recognition of food sovereignty and the absence of focus on marginalized groups.
- **It does not recognize food systems as a matter of public interest and policy convergence**. Instead, it conceptualizes food as a commodity, rather than as a commons and a human right. It presents a fragmented understanding of food systems, which ignores the complex interconnections between a wide range of areas.
- **It is based on a partial analysis of the unsustainability of the current agro-industrial model**, focusing only on greenhouse gas emissions, forest devastation, and loss of biodiversity as challenges that need addressing with technological solutions, which actually perpetuate the exclusion of indigenous peoples, peasants’ communities and marginalized groups.
- **It does not recognize power relations and the structural determinants of food injustice**, such as trade and investment. It underestimates the governance reforms needed to ensure democratic accountability (including corporate liability) and safeguard public spaces from conflicts of interest. Moreover, it ignores states’ obligations that are enshrined in human rights instruments. Instead, this approach prefers non-binding regulations such as codes of conduct and ethical norms, and focuses, for instance on adequate consumer choices, and multi-stakeholder schemes.⁸
- **It legitimizes the dominant economic and development model**. This approach does not question or clarify why the current hegemonic global food system and agro-industrial production model failed to respond to hunger and malnutrition, and why this system is precisely at the core of the problem. It sees food systems as something linear and focuses on food supply chains. This promotes the idea that small-scale food producers should be integrated into global value chains, instead of ensuring that their food sovereignty is respected and protected.
- **It focuses on market-based approaches as solutions**. As such, people are seen as consumers and not as rights holders. This is the logical result of neoliberal reasoning, and alludes to its functional facet. This includes the creation of hierarchies within food systems, whereby production becomes more important than cultural, spiritual and/or religious aspects of food. Moreover, a market-centric

able at: www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/NewScienceofSusFood.pdf

3 HLPE. (2017). *Supra* note 1.

4 HLPE. (2020). *Supra* note 1.

5 Financialization is defined as “increasing importance of financial markets, financial motives, financial institutions, and financial elites in the operation of the economy and its governing institutions, both at national and international level.” See: Epstein, G. A. (2005). Introduction. In Epstein, G. A. (Ed.) *Financialization and the world economy*. Edward Elgar Publishing. p.3. Available at: www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/financialization-and-the-world-economy-9781843768746.html

6 ETC Group. (2021). *Who will Feed Us? The Peasant Food Web vs the Industrial Food Chain*. Available at: www.etc-group.org/whowillfeedus. Bello, W. (2007). Free Trade vs. Small Farmers. TNI. Available at: www.tni.org/es/node/11368

7 Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM). (2021). *CSM problem analysis document of the UN Food Systems Summit*. Available at: <https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Com-mon-analysis-EN.pdf>; CSM. (2021). *CSM assessment of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition*. Available at: www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CSM-FSN-WG-Background-document-on-VGFSYN.pdf

8 FIAN International. (2020). *Briefing Note on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives*. Available at: [www.fian.org/files/files/Briefing Note on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Final e revised.pdf](http://www.fian.org/files/files/Briefing%20Note%20on%20Multi-Stakeholder%20Initiatives%20Final%20e%20revised.pdf)

approach imposes a narrative that favors industrial models over traditional ways of food production and acquisition. It is underpinned by an interpretation of development that does not necessarily respect peoples' right to a dignified life, nor does it protect the planet. It renders the magnitude of the world's food problems and their determining factors invisible, including ecological collapse. Moreover, this approach analyzes biodiversity and environmental issues from a business, profit-oriented, point of view.

- **It uses an individualistic and fragmented approach.** Because people are considered consumers first and foremost, they are perceived as 'windows for business opportunities' and not as part of society and nature. In this individualistic approach, wellbeing and nutrition are products to be sold, not human rights. Furthermore, it makes communal institutions invisible and turns companies into problem solvers.
- **It adopts a narrow view of 'nutritious' diets, instead of healthy and sustainable diets.** This approach disregards the fact that food is one of the broadest expressions of human history. Food is all about social and political issues. This means that diets are conditioned by power relations, gender balance and equity, culture, spiritual values, planetary health, working conditions, and migration, among other issues.
- **It pretends to be the result of scientific neutrality.** This approach is based on 'scientific evidence' that is frequently produced by institutions and persons who have conflicts of interests, and who ignore traditional knowledge. This partly leads to a focus on new technologies to solve problems, which ultimately masks issues of power.

This critical view to the dominant approach to food systems derives from the political context within which it has gained its momentum: multi-stakeholderism⁹ and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs),¹⁰ as promoted by the SDGs. Here, the food systems concept is applied to support corporate-led solutions to hunger and malnutrition, and ignores the fundamental values of the UN Charter. Therefore, a considerable number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and social movements, mainly gathered in the CFS Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM), contest the dominant approach to food systems that is currently mainstreamed in international debates. They actively advocate plural, human rights-based, and food sovereignty-based approaches.¹¹

Others remain skeptical and hesitate to refer to the concept of food systems for different reasons. For instance, 'food systems' as a term is still unknown to many, especially in the Global South. In India, the concept is still foreign to many CSOs and they may likely not accept the term because it originates in and is associated with the Global North. In Colombia, FIAN Colombia, for example, prefers to continue advocating food sovereignty and the human right to food and nutrition, which are not linked to the term 'food systems', in their opinion, but rather to '*procesos alimentarios*'.¹² This term literally means 'food processes' but is more comprehensive in its scope. Some also fear that because the term 'food systems' originates in the Global North, it may become a new colonial imposition, thereby mainstreaming narratives that are developed by a small group of rich elites, and leave out the rights and voices of the excluded and marginalized groups of society.

⁹ Multi-stakeholder initiatives, often also referred to as 'partnerships' or platforms, are initiatives that bring together a variety of actors ('stakeholders') that are identified as having a stake (i.e. an interest) in a certain issue, and should therefore play a role in addressing it. Our critique specifically refers to the inclusion of corporate actors on a par with state authorities and civil society organizations, although they are different in nature and in their relation to public interests.

¹⁰ The World Bank refers to the following definition of PPP by [PPP Knowledge Lab](#): PPP is "a long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility, and remuneration is linked to performance". For more information please visit: ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview/what-are-public-private-partnerships

¹¹ CSM. (2021). *Positioning on the 2021 Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition endorsed by Member States on the 47th Plenary Session of the CFS*. Available at: www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/EN_CSMPositioningVGFSyN_FINAL.pdf; CSM. (2021). *CSM Vision*

In our opinion, the tension of forces between the corporate solutions that are behind the incomplete and faulty food systems approach, and those of other approaches as defended by CSM constituencies and their organizations,¹³ is still enormous. Under the current imbalance of power, it is difficult to ensure that the concept of food systems is used to encompass all the obligations, legal elements and principles to which states have committed to in the UN Charter, the Human Rights Bill, and in general in the existing and rich legal framework of the right to food.¹⁴

FOOD SYSTEMS DISCOURSE AND CORPORATE SOLUTIONS

What solutions do the corporate-led agendas under the dominant food systems approach propose to end hunger and malnutrition? The solutions are predominantly founded on a globalized model of development that creates ever-increasing divergence between those rendered rich and powerful and those rendered poor. Advanced technologies,¹⁵ big data and financialization throughout the entire food systems are proposed as effective solutions to meet the food needs of the world's population.

Considering that millions of people in the world today are digitally excluded, the decision to base policy decisions on data that is mainly collected and managed through digital technologies (which are in the hands of a few powerful actors), also has an impact on the realization of the right to food. Technology and digitalization are a form of exclusion as part of the exercise of power.¹⁶ These solutions are also sold as ways to control the climate crisis now and in the near future. However, they are clearly 'false solutions', because they are based on a partial analysis of reality, and disregard the structural determinants of the challenges we currently face. What's more, they fail to question the rules of the game, which continue to favor those who have always won. Such solutions are 'windows of opportunity' for business, as mentioned above. A case in point is the use of fortified food, which has been powered by the SUN Movement.¹⁷ Fortified products have historically been declared as solutions to food and nutritional problems, but in fact they are a great business opportunity for formula producers who receive access to a market of consumers who in turn risk becoming dependent on their products. They disconnect people from the key cultural, spiritual, economic, social and environmental aspects of food.¹⁸

BIG STONES IN THE WAY OF RIGHT TO FOOD AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY STRUGGLES

To confront this threat, small-scale food producers and their supporters are proposing grassroots-emerging solutions. These solutions aim to advance towards a humanity that can better feed itself, whilst respecting dignity and food sovereignty. However, in practice small-scale food producers and right to food defenders face several challenges.

The first challenge is the **weakening of public institutions and public policies**, which has created conditions for corporations to increase their power. In the recent wave of populist authoritarian governments, corporate interests are aided through the privatization of public services. In this context, states are brazenly neglecting their constitutional and international obligations while conceding more power to corporations. The problems of hunger and malnutrition are seen as individual and moral issues, thus policy measures tend to neglect the social determinants of hunger and malnutrition. Consequently, people – especially those in situations of vulnerability – are made to believe that hunger and malnutrition are the result of their

on Food Systems and Nutrition: An alternative to the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSYN). Available at: <https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/EN-vision-VGFSyN.pdf>; Fakhri M., Elver, H.; De Schutter, O. (2021) *The UN Food Systems Summit: How Not to Respond to the Urgency of Reform*. IPES. Available at: www.ipsnews.net/2021/03/un-food-systems-summit-not-respond-urgency-reform/

12 *Procesos alimentarios* refers to the complex chain of events or moments that result in human nutrition or the 'food fact'. It is a multi-dimensional process, circular in its appearance and spiral in its evolution. Its linkage is not rigid, since, in certain circumstances, a certain element may precede or succeed another, or may even not be present. These moments or links are: the procurement of food (which includes production but is not reduced to it); food processing (which includes industrial processing but is by far not the most important); food exchange (which is not only the market); food consumption; biological utilization; and the regeneration of vital, spiritual, material and biota capacities, which are a precondition for restarting the food process. See: Morales González, J.C. (2021). *Derecho a la alimentación y nutrición adecuadas y Soberanía Alimentaria desde los estándares internacionales de derechos humanos*. In: FIAN Colombia. (forthcoming). *Cuarto informe sobre la situación del derecho a la alimentación en Colombia*.

13 The CSM consists of 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless, women, youth, consumers, urban food insecure and NGOs. For more information please visit: www.csm4cfs.org/

14 Suarez Franco, A.M. (forthcoming). *The right to food*. In Cantú, H. (Ed.) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Commentary* (XXV). Brill-Nijhoff. Available at: www.fian.org/files/files/Suarez_Franco_RTFN_article_IIDH.pdf

15 For example, precise farming and mechanization (thus reduced human labor) in production, and digitalization.

16 GRAIN. (2021). *Digital control: how Big Tech moves into food and farming (and what it means)*. Available at: <https://grain.org/en/article/6595-digital-control-how-big-tech-moves-into-food-and-farming-and-what-it-means>

17 FIAN, SID, IBFAN. (2019). *When the SUN casts the Shadow*. Available at: www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow_En.pdf

18 For a more in-depth analysis of some of these corporate-led false solutions, and how small-scale food

own failures, rather than the consequence of structural issues. This means that they rarely point their fingers to abuses of power, and indeed to the dominant economic and agro-industrial model.

In India, for example, the government is curtailing state subsidies for food earmarked for people suffering from hunger, thereby reducing the distribution of grains to those who do not have access to food.¹⁹ These regressive measures, together with the impact of COVID-19, are pushing people toward starvation.²⁰ Such measures are closely linked to the influence of corporations in governance bodies, which took off 7–8 years ago, and is now coming full circle. These corporations plan to push 70% of farmers off the land in a legal but unjust way. The influence by corporations to change policies is forcing millions of farmers to give up or lease their land to corporations for large-scale farming, and will thus be ultimately rendered landless.

The second challenge refers to **the narratives and tactics** that are used by the corporate sector and its lackeys in government in the food systems' debates. They frequently use words that are closely associated to social movements, such as 'human rights', 'gender equality', and 'agroecology'. However, this is merely an attempt to capture people's minds, and to block their natural instinct to question things. The superficial uses of 'kidnapped language' (e.g. on Twitter), along with new complicated and intimidating terms, are all part of this false narrative. This is called co-optation. The every-day use of imposed narratives negatively affects people's ability to name and define their connection to food according to their cultures. One example of such co-opted language is 'agroecology'. For social movements 'agroecology' brings together knowledge, science, and practice, and is clearly connected to social and gender justice and human dignity. And yet the term has now been reduced to a mere technical concept by the business sector.²¹ Through these tactics, concepts are separated from their historical and political context and are manipulated to serve the purposes of those who deceptively use them.

Brazil is one poignant example of the two challenges mentioned above. The country was a pioneer in promoting the right to food and nutrition of its people under the leadership of former president Lula. The term 'food and nutrition security' was conceived as a broad, holistic concept that is intrinsically connected to the right to food and to food sovereignty. Nonetheless, the term is used in a fragmented way by the current authoritarian regime, which has practically destroyed all the public policies that turned the concept into a reality for many. Furthermore, this government deploys tactics to fragment people's strategies, preventing sustainable results and structural changes. It also transforms rights-holders into beneficiaries of public budget, thereby denying their agency.²²

The third challenge is industry's attempt to convert **data into a key criterion for policy decisions, and to keep 'hard' 'scientific' evidence as the only valid knowledge, while disregarding conflicts of interests**. Information and science are without a doubt essential for decision-making. However, the importance and value of traditional knowledge and local communities' day-to-day experiences must not be neglected. It is often traditional knowledge that feeds scientific research with new ideas. And yet the millenary knowledge that Indigenous Peoples have acquired over centuries of observations is sadly romanticized and disregarded, even when it is relevant to key policy decisions.

producers and their supporters are resisting: see articles "Food Banks and Charity as a False Response to Hunger in the Wealthy but Unequal Countries"; "Aquaculture, Financialization, and Impacts on Small-scale Fishing Communities"; and "An Imperceptible Growth: Healthy Food and Transformative Solidarity" in this issue of the Watch.

19 Gotoskar, S. (2021, March 12). NITI Aayog's Proposal to Cut Food Subsidies Will Worsen India's Rising Hunger Problem. *The Wire*. Available at: thewire.in/government/niti-aayogs-proposal-to-cut-food-subsidies-will-worsen-indias-rising-hunger-problem

20 The Wire Staff. (2020, December 13). Hunger Index Among Poor in 11 States Continues to Be Dire Post-Lockdown: Survey. *The Wire*. Available at: thewire.in/rights/hunger-watch-survey-lockdown

21 HLPE. (2019). *Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*. FAO. Available at: www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf; Friends of the Earth International, Transnational Institute, and Crocevia. (2020). *Junk Agroecology*. Available at: <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Junk-Agroecology-FOEI-TNI-Crocevia-report-ENG.pdf>

22 Santarelli, M., Burity, V., et al. (2019). *Informe Dhana 2019: autoritarismo, negação de direitos e fome*. FIAN Brasil. Available in Portuguese at: fian-brasil.org.br/informe-dhana-2019-faca-download-aqui/

For example, the UN Food Systems Summit created an independent group of leading researchers and scientists (the Science Group) who are responsible for ensuring the ‘robustness, breadth and independence’ of the science that underpins the summit and its potential outcomes. Nevertheless, the public is not informed about how these members were selected, or how their research topics are decided upon. Most of these researchers are men, the majority of whom are white and have nationalities from and/or work in the Global North. There is also an imbalance of expertise, which is more focused on agricultural economics than on health, regenerative production practices (such as agroecology and traditional practices), and human or social sciences. Considering the UN Secretary General’s call for a “collective action of all citizens to radically change the way we produce, process, and consume food”,²³ the Scientific Group’s profile raises serious doubts about the breadth of the vision being applied to food systems. It also casts doubt on what their priorities are for change, given the urgent task to restructure food systems towards sustainability and health.

²³ UN Web TV. (2020, September 4). Deputy Secretary-General Briefing to Member States on the UN Food Systems Summit 2021. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/summit-provides-information-updates-un-member-states-briefing>

SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW FOOD SYSTEMS PARADIGM BASED ON REAL SOLUTIONS

We would like to emphasize the following points in our critical analysis of the dominant approach to food systems:

First, it is critical that social movements and CSOs **defend the common character of public institutions, and participate in the design, adoption and implementation of policies, in line with existing human rights obligations of states and democracy.** Public institutions shall be at the service of the common good, and not at the service of corporate interests. The efforts to preserve democratic public institutions, to retake captured institutions and to advocate human rights-based public policies also requires denouncing situations of corporate interference, conflicts of interests, and/or the replacement of public institutions by multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. It also means demanding rules to hold corporations to account, and to regulate conflicts of interests.

Second, at this critical juncture, it is essential that social movements and CSOs **pro-actively differentiate between solutions that aim to achieve the public good, human dignity, the protection of nature and the reduction of inequalities, and those that serve to maintain a socioeconomic order focused merely on profit.** We need to pay attention to attempts of co-optation and green- or blue-washing that can make us fall in the trap of false solutions.

Third, since one shoe does not fit all, it is also vital to **seek a broad, pluri-cultural set of solutions based on a diversity of knowledge.** These should go beyond those receiving more visibility and propaganda from the hegemonic system, which is based on trade and investments and is aimed at maintaining consumption and growth at the cost of despoiling nature, including humans as part of it. Therefore, we need to value and incorporate the people’s practical knowledge that comes from careful observation of natural cycles, as well as the specific needs of each group. Peasants, traditional rural communities and Indigenous Peoples have proven that they have answers to hunger, malnutrition, and the realization of the right to food. Based on centuries of experience and observation, their solutions are more caring for nature, helpful in increasing resilience and regenerative practices, and key in facing the current environmental collapse. They have always understood land, water, and

seeds as commons, as opposed to their commoditization. Their practices to protect and promote the diversity of seeds and plant varieties is fundamental to ensure environmental balance and nutritional diversity. As guardians of nature and its diversity, they do not just benefit their communities, but also contribute to the preservation of the planet.

Fourth, it is critical to **recognize and protect peasants and Indigenous Peoples' contribution to the realization of the right to food**. The pandemic has dramatically exposed the failures of today's dominant agro-industrial food system, showing that it contributes to the destruction of ecosystems and the creation of conditions for the propagation of zoonosis. Moreover, it imposes ultra-processed foods on people, putting their health at a higher risk of non-communicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes. That, in turn, makes us more vulnerable to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. At the same time, small food producers such as peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and agricultural workers, feed the majority of the world's population,²⁴ and produce food in a more sustainable and healthy manner. The pandemic is confronting our societies to actively debate and negotiate the much-needed systemic changes in our food systems worldwide. The contribution of peasants and Indigenous Peoples to the enjoyment of the right to food shall be put at the center of those debates and negotiations and their rights shall be respected, protected and fulfilled.

Fifth, and lastly, a **holistic approach to food systems, based on human rights and on food sovereignty and enriched by environmental law principles**, is a strong tool to identify real solutions in the fight for social justice, including food justice. A holistic approach includes the full recognition of women, Indigenous Peoples, peasants, pastoralists, fishers, food systems workers and other historically marginalized sectors, as rights holders, as recognized in international human rights standards, including those specifically addressing the rural world, such as: the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and People working in Rural Areas (UNDROP); various Conventions of the International Labor Organization; and General recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

A human rights-based approach that centers on food sovereignty is relevant and useful, because it considers the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and its grounding values as a core of food systems,²⁵ and focuses on the international obligations of states as duty bearers. Human rights put people and the planet at the center of governance, recognize people's agency and demand that the powerful minority does not exploit our communities and ecosystems for their profit.

²⁴ FAO. (2014). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in Family Farming Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2014/en>

²⁵ CSM. (2021). *Supra* note 7.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and purple gloves, is focused on mending a fishing net. She is sitting in a cluttered workshop or storage area, surrounded by various fishing equipment, including nets, ropes, and plastic bags. The background shows wooden structures and hanging items, creating a sense of a busy, traditional fishing community workspace.

02

AQUACULTURE, FINANCIALIZATION, AND IMPACTS ON SMALL- SCALE FISHING COMMUNITIES

Carsten Pedersen, Yifang Tang

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“The growth in production, increased political backing and substantial capital investments in aquaculture [...] give rise to some serious problems [...].”

This article first describes how aquaculture has rapidly become the fastest growing food industry and most attractive investment opportunity for capital markets today. It then sheds light on the human, social and environmental cost of aquaculture’s ten-fold increase in production over the last four decades. Lastly, selected case studies demonstrate the negative impacts on the livelihood of small-scale fishers in India, Thailand, and Ecuador.

HISTORY OF AQUACULTURE: A LONG TRADITION

The history of aquaculture dates back several thousand years.¹ Hundreds of different species of finfish, seaweed and mussels have been cultivated worldwide by both fishers and non-fishers. In Asia, the rearing of fish in rice fields is an ancient practice of peasants that continues until the present day, providing an essential source of nutritious food for local populations. Fish ponds made with large stones have been used for centuries by coastal communities in Africa to trap fish in rivers as well as at low tide, a method still common in South Africa. Ponds have also been used to breed carp fish in China for over 2000 years. Meanwhile, in coastal waters of Europe, oyster farming can be traced back to the Roman Empire when oysters were once a staple food of the working class, long before it became a delicacy for wealthy elites.² These examples illustrate that aquaculture is not new.

GROWTH OF AQUACULTURE UNDER CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM

From the late 1960s onwards, following the invention of granulated fish feed and technological development of solid and less expensive materials for nets and cages,

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PHOTO | Kesinee Kwaenjaroen

¹ History of Aquaculture (ND). Available at: www.chesapeakestem.org/assets/History_of_Aquaculture.pdf

² *Ibid*

aquaculture production slowly started to expand. By the mid-1980s, aquaculture production was captured in the statistics of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Recognizing the sector's socio-economic importance, in 1998 the FAO produced its first report on aquaculture as part of its fisheries statistics yearbook series. According to this report,³ the total aquaculture production from inland and marine waters amounted to 16.5 million tons in 1989. With a relatively constant growth rate of 6–7% per year, the global production reached a reported 114.5 million tons in 2018 – including fish, crustaceans, mollusks and aquatic plants.⁴ Most aquaculture produce is consumed in China, followed by the European Union, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States.⁵ As explained by the FAO: “a milestone was reached in 2014 when the aquaculture sector’s contribution to the supply of fish for human consumption overtook that of wild-caught fish for the first time”.⁶

This significant and continued growth in production is made possible through technological development, capital investment, and aquaculture-friendly policy reforms. Recent policies illustrate the increasing support by governments and inter-governmental institutions in the name of feeding a growing population, creating jobs, combating overfishing, and addressing climate change.

The UN Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (COFI) clearly positioned aquaculture as the ‘future of food’ at its 34th session in February 2021. Attended by over 100 governments and inter-governmental bodies, COFI called for enhanced financing, research, data collection and technology development, policy development and greater international coordination to promote aquaculture.⁷ One FAO initiative in pursuit of this agenda is the development of the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture. The overall euphoria for more aquaculture is also reflected in the opening speech of the FAO Director-General, Qu Dongyu, who acclaimed that “[t]he potential of a modern aquaculture to grow and feed the world is extraordinary”.⁸ FAO’s State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture report (SOFIA, 2020) points out: “Growth in demand for fish and fish products needs to be met primarily from expansion of aquaculture production”.⁹

Another clear indication of the growing political support for aquaculture is the position that the sector has attained at other international gatherings. For instance, at the World Economic Forum (WEF), aquaculture has been on the agenda since 2017. Similarly, the Norwegian Prime Minister launched the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy,¹⁰ while the former Swedish Deputy Prime Minister launched the Friends of the Ocean Action Coalition, a multi-stakeholder initiative.¹¹ The high-level panel – a self-appointed ‘club’ of fourteen heads of states and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean – pushes for policy reforms and other means to advance aquaculture.¹² The WEF-hosted Friends of the Ocean – another self-proclaimed group of leaders from governments and inter-governmental bodies, NGOs, academia and business including financial institutions (e.g. Coca Cola, Yara International) – promotes aquaculture as part of its broader ocean agendas.¹³ Although they operate outside of the government realm, these clubs add political weight to an ever-increasing drive for aquaculture through the participation of and support by heads of states and other senior government officials.

This political support coupled with aquaculture-friendly reforms are necessary to legally ensure private property in aquaculture (e.g. concessions of coastal land and the sea), as well as economic feasibility (e.g. environmental deregulation). Such reforms are evolving fast in many countries. One example is India’s Blue Economy

3 FAO. (1998). Fishery statistics: Aquaculture production. *FAO Yearbook of Fishery Statistics* 86(2). Available at: www.fao.org/3/a-x7461t.pdf

4 *Ibid.*

5 EU Science Hub. (2018, September 27). *How much fish do we consume? First global seafood consumption footprint published.* Available at: ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/how-much-fish-do-we-consume-first-global-sea-food-consumption-footprint-published.

6 FAO. (2016). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) - Contributing to food security and nutrition for all.* FAO, p.2.

7 Personal observations at 34th session of COFI, 1-5 February 2021; COFI. (2021). *Draft report of the thirty-fourth session of the Committee on Fisheries – for adoption.* FAO.

8 FAO. (2021, February 21). *Fisheries and aquaculture are a critical part of global agri-food systems transformation, says FAO Director-General.* Available at: www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1371547/icode/

9 FAO. (2020). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture - Sustainability in action.* FAO, p. 105. Available at: doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en

10 High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy. Available at: oceanpanel.org

11 Friends of Ocean Action. Available at: www.weforum.org/friends-of-ocean-action

12 See: Costello, C., Cao L., Gelcich S. et al. (2019). *The Future of Food from the Sea.* World Resources Institute. Available at: www.oceanpanel.org/blue-papers/future-food-sea

13 Between 1–5 June 2020, the Friends of the Ocean together with WEF hosted the Virtual Ocean Dialogues. This dialogue replaced the UN Oceans Conference on Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14), which was postponed due to COVID-19. It was endorsed by many heads of states from around the world as well as Director-Generals and other seniors from various UN bodies. For more information, please visit: www.weforum.org/events/virtual-ocean-dialogues-2020/

Program (Sagarmala) and its 2020 Fishery Policy, which promote coastal and marine aquaculture. A vast number of countries are also developing Marine Spatial Plans, which include aquaculture as a central pillar for economic growth.¹⁴ Thanks to the trade and investment policies already in place – such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Free Trade Agreement – the aquaculture sector has become mature enough for investment. Recent data on mergers and acquisitions show that the sector is now attracting finance capital in the same way that agriculture and farm-land were an investment asset for finance capital, especially following the Great Recession.

Yet, aquaculture is historically dominated by relatively small or medium-scale players, with tens of thousands of producers (including producers of fish feed) scattered across the globe. Now, however, the aquaculture sector has undergone a rapid change in ownership and production concentration. In India, for example, the feed sector for shrimp aquaculture has become extremely concentrated: Avanti Feeds has increased its share of the total Indian shrimp feed market to 47% in 2019.¹⁵ Since the 2008 financial crisis, a few transnational corporations including MOWI ASA, Thai Union Group, Nippon Suisan Kaisha, Austevoll Seafood, Maruha Nichiro and Cargill, have positioned themselves as top players through mergers and acquisitions. Together they control the majority of global aquaculture production, including fish feed.¹⁶ More recently, the Walton family and Bill Gates have invested in aquaculture, and according to Undercurrent News,¹⁷ 28 deals were made by financial players (e.g. pensions and private equity funds) in 2018, up from 21 the year before. Antarctica Advisors is also speculating that private equity heavy weights such as the world's largest buy-out giant, Blackstone, are eyeing up deals in aquaculture.¹⁸

IMPACT OF AQUACULTURE ON SMALL-SCALE FISHING COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES

The growth in production, increased political backing and substantial capital investments in aquaculture do, however, give rise to some serious problems. On the one hand, aquaculture is causing damage to both nature and climate. On the other hand, it leads to dispossession of masses of people, including fishing communities who contribute to half of global landings in wild capture fisheries and employ over 90% of people in fisheries.¹⁹ The following three case studies from India, Thailand, and Ecuador illustrate what is at stake.

The worldwide shrimp industry boom in the late 1980s incentivized India to introduce aquaculture to earn foreign earnings. A series of policy reforms has since paved the way for extensive shrimp cultivation, and today over 20,000 farms cover an area of 143,000 hectares. This expansion of aquaculture has led to land degradation, denial of fisherfolk's access to fishing grounds, and dispossession of land, as echoed by local fishers at the Blue Economy Tribunal.²⁰

One example is Chilika Lake in Odisha. The lake is India's largest brackish water lagoon and biodiversity hotspot. It has also been the source of livelihood for some 40,000 local fishers for decades.²¹ In the late 1980s, the state government encouraged non-fishers and corporations to invest in shrimp farming, thereby introducing aquaculture-friendly policies (e.g. leasing of land) and subsidies to promote the sector. This has created an occupation category of new land owners (local and non-local elites) who gradually 'decommonize'²² the lagoon that was previously accessed, shared and used as commons. What's more, these new actors do not shy away from illegal practices. State authorities have failed to control and combat illegal shrimp farming, thereby exacerbating negative impacts. For example, tradition-

¹⁴ MSP Roadmap. *MSP Around the World*. Available at: www.msp-global2030.org/msp-roadmap/msp-around-the-world/

¹⁵ ICICI Securities. (2019, August 20). *Avanti Feeds: Maintain 'Buy' with a target price of Rs 400*. Financial Express. Available at: www.financial-express.com/market/avanti-feeds-maintain-buy-with-a-target-price-of-rs-400/1680141/

¹⁶ MSP Roadmap. *Supra* note 14.

¹⁷ Undercurrent News. (2020, March 10). *Gates Foundation invest in Greece's Philosfish*. Available at: www.undercurrentnews.com/2020/03/10/gates-foundation-invests-in-greece-philosfish

¹⁸ Antarctica Advisors. (2019, April 18). *Could Blackstone go fishing for deals with new \$22bn-plus fund?* Available at: antarcticallc.com/could-blackstone-go-fishing-for-deals-with-new-22bn-plus-fund/

¹⁹ FAO. *Supra* note 6, p. 133.

²⁰ Blue Economy Tribunal is an independent people's tribunal. Six tribunal series were held between August and December 2020, based on studies exploring the social, economic, ecological and political Implications of the 'Blue Economy' across the Indian Ocean region. For more information on the verdicts, please visit: blueeconomytribunal.org/

²¹ Gandimathi A., Jones S., and Jesurethinam. (2021). *Socio-Economic Environmental and Political Implications of Industrial Aquaculture on Small Scale Coastal Fishers and Fisher Women in India – Odisha*. Legal Aid to Women (LAW) Trust, p. 18.

²² According to Nayak and Berkes, 'commonisation' is a process "through which a resource gets con-

al fisherfolks, a majority of whom are from marginalized castes and tribal groups (Adivasi) have lost their customary rights. As custodians of the lake, the traditional Chilika fishers can no longer rely on fishing to sustain their livelihood. Moreover, they lament the changes in the lake's ecosystems (loss of fish catch, increase in salinity of coastal freshwater aquifers and ground water, change of currents, etc.), and increased waterborne diseases due to worsened water quality. Collectively owned farmland and grazing lands are being turned into shrimp farms, impacting the local food systems.

In addition, women are compelled to engage in construction-related income-generating activities outside of their communities. They often face verbal abuse and physical assaults, as they are caught in conflicts between fishers and non-fishers. As fish stocks decrease, so does household consumption of fish, and women are among the most affected because they experience malnutrition the most.²³

While shrimp farms are still owned by a large number of small corporations, the development trajectory under contemporary capitalism could soon result in centralization of farms in the hands of fewer and larger units. The feed industry is already heavily centralized (as mentioned above) and could allow industry owners to invest in farms, thereby securing ownership of the entire value chain. In sum, unrestrained shrimp aquaculture has caused a rise in economic and social inequality between traditional fisher communities and non-fishers, changing the entire social fabric around the Chilika lake.²⁴

In Thailand, in the face of declining fishing resources caused by industrial overfishing, aquaculture has emerged as a viable economic activity. Situated in the Gulf of Thailand, Ban Don Bay is the largest breeding site for marine shellfish. The expansion of shell farms (mainly mussels) that started in the 1990s, has led to a phenomenon known as 'narrow sea', which entails encroachment of the sea by private persons and corporation. Small-scale fishers are seeing their access to coastal marine resources denied, and, as they now have to travel further out to fish, their income has dropped. To make matters worse, they are criminalized by private owners of shell fish aquaculture, while corporations gain more control over the local sea food market. Indeed, an income survey conducted by Walailak University (2011) shows that the local fishers' income has not only reduced, many have actually lost their livelihood and suffer from indebtedness.²⁵ They are thus forced to take up construction work and other irregular jobs.²⁶

Under these circumstances, the women's burden of maintaining the household economy and ensuring food for family members has increased. As of today, 59% of Thai coastal fishing areas have been lost to aquaculture (both legal and illegal).²⁷ Yet, due to the farming methods used, increased shellfish farming in common waters not only affects the catch of local fishers, it also destroys the underwater environment.

In Ecuador, shrimp aquaculture started in the 1970s and continued to expand until the 2000s. In 2008, the government 'legalized' shrimp aquaculture through Executive Decree 1391, thereby giving concessions for aquaculture. The sector accounts for 17% of Ecuador's foreign exchange earnings (2019 figures) and enjoys state-backed investment and incentives, such as an exemption from paying the water tax. Spanish and Chinese investments have recently flourished as a result of more investor-friendly legislation.

verted into a jointly used resource under commons institutions that deal with excludability and subtractability". 'Decommonization' refers therefore to a process "through which a jointly used resource under commons institutions loses these essential characteristics". See: Kumar, Nayaka P.K, and Berkesa F. (2011). Commonisation and Decommonisation: Understanding the Processes of Change in the Chilika Lagoon, India. *Conservation and Society* 9(2), 132–145. p. 133.

²³ Gandimathi et al. Supra note 21.

²⁴ Costello et al. Supra note 12.

²⁵ Sawusdee, A. (2011). *Fishing Status and Management Proposal in Bandon Bay, Suratthani Province, Thailand*. Walailak Journal of Science and Technology, 7(2), 89-101.

²⁶ Thipyan, C. *Study information on the development of joint fishery management model of fishery communities in Ban Don Bay area*. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suratthani Rajabhat University.

²⁷ Sustainable Development Foundation. (2020). *Strengthening Evidence-based Advocacy for Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Justice in Small-scale Fisheries and Coastal Aquaculture in Thailand*. Swedbio. p.12

One problematic issue is that the exemption of water tax does not consider the quality of water which is returned to the estuary. Given that no water purification treatment is required, water pollution and contamination of mangrove ecosystems is on the rise. The expansion of shrimp aquaculture has led to the dispossession of estuarine harvesters and fishers of their territories, which are rich in mangrove forests (part of the commons they relied on). They are thus denied their ancestral fishing access and territorial rights.

As the area earmarked for harvesting and fishing diminishes in size, so does the income of local harvesters and fishers. With an average monthly income of USD \$80 per family, poverty is widespread among these populations. They also lack basic needs such as health care, education, and water. The jobs they were offered in the shrimp sector are often informal and poorly paid.²⁸ According to official data, 150,000 to 250,000 persons were employed in the entire shrimp aquaculture value chain in 2015 and 2019, respectively.²⁹ Taking into consideration that 250,000 hectares of coastal area is now designated for this purpose, a simple calculation reveals that this sector generates one job per hectare, far below the amount that the mangrove ecosystem could provide fisher families with. Another alarming development is the increase of violence and killings since the government permitted shrimp sector personnel to carry guns. Between 2008 and 2018, more than ten harvesters fell prey to shrimp pond security guards in the province of El Oro.³⁰

In conclusion, coastal and marine aquaculture are now among the most attractive food industries. During the past few years, this sector has become a priority investment asset for corporate and finance capital, and through mergers and acquisitions the production is becoming extremely centralized in the hands of fewer and bigger owners. In the words of human rights activist Khushi Kabir from the Bangladeshi organization Nijera Kori:

*The promotion of culture fisheries [has] created a huge displacement. [In] areas where shrimp aquaculture was more practiced, poverty increased to the highest levels in the country as those who practiced aquaculture were making money by exploiting the local people whose traditional income sources were destroyed [by] grabbing their land.*³¹

But fisher peoples, small-scale fishers and fish workers do not stand by in silence. All over the world, they are denouncing the 'blue economy', which they view as the grabbing of their territories in the name of so-called 'development projects'.³² In the face of mounting evidence that aquaculture and financialization impact their communities, small-scale fisher movements are fighting back to reclaim controls of their territories, restore the natural environment, and advance their food sovereignty agenda.³³

²⁸ According to various testimonies, a temporary shrimp farm worker earns between USD \$15-20 for a 10-hour work day, while, as per another testimony, a shrimp farm worker earns around USD \$400 a month for a 24-hour job. In the packing sector, women are mostly employed casually and are paid 0,10 cents per pound for peeling and cleaning the shrimps. Many women are in search of jobs in shrimp farms as other occupations have disappeared. See: Torres Benavides, M. and Valero, J.P. (2020). *Investigación Proyecto Equiterra Conflictos en el ecosistema manglar de la costa del Ecuador – El desarrollo de la acuicultura industrial del camarón frente a los Derechos de los pueblos de recolectores y pescadores de los estuarios - Período: 2008–2018*. p.26.

²⁹ Ecuador National Chamber of Aquaculture. For more information, please visit: www.cna-ecuador.com/

³⁰ Torres Benavides, M. and Valero, J.P. *Supra* note 28. xvii, p. 11.

³¹ Kabir, K. (2020, November 25). Testimony at the Independent People's Tribunal on the Implications of Blue Economy in East Coast of India. Available at: blueconomytribunal.org/india-east-coast-tribunal/

³² World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) (2021, February 23). *International Conference on the Impacts of the Blue Economy Report*. Available at: worldfishers.org/2021/02/24/wffp-international-conference-on-impacts-of-blue-economy-response-of-the-affected-peoples-23rd-february-2021-4pm-to-630pm-indian-time-ist/

³³ See: International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). (2021). *Statement in response to Agenda Item 7 - Contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EN_IPC_Statement_Agenda_Item_7_Contribution_of_fisheries_and_aquaculture_to_the_implementation_of_the_2030_Agenda_for_Sustainable_Development.pdf



03

FOOD BANKS AND CHARITY AS A FALSE RESPONSE TO HUNGER IN THE WEALTHY BUT UNEQUAL COUNTRIES

*Alison Cohen, Kayleigh Garthwaite,
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“Today's persistent and climbing rate of food insecurity is a foreseeable by-product of systems that rely on 'low-road capitalism' and corporate culture, systems that have a disproportionately negative impact on marginalized communities.”

FOODBANKING ON THE RISE

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the food injustices and inequalities felt by too many in the so-called 'Global North', particularly those in marginalized communities – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). In response, governments and the private sector have increased emergency food aid initiatives, but they have not addressed the true causes of food insecurity. Nor have they followed the lead of those experiencing food insecurity and poverty, or those communities organizing and working reciprocally to produce and distribute food sustainably. Today's persistent and climbing rate of food insecurity is a foreseeable by-product of systems that rely on 'low-road capitalism'¹ and corporate culture, systems that have a disproportionately negative impact on marginalized communities. Moving forward, countries in the 'Global North' (such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom), can continue to go down the same path that led us here, or they can realize and embrace a different path. The opportunity in this new path is to rebuild a more equitable society and to recognize that emergency food aid is not the solution to the structural and systemic issues that are the underlying causes of food insecurity.

In the past year, there have been striking increases in food insecurity in the Global North. In the U.K., for instance, independent food banks saw unprecedented increases in the need for emergency food parcels throughout 2020. The latest data from the Independent Food Aid Network, a network for unaffiliated food aid providers, showed a 190% rise in the number of three-day emergency food parcels distributed by 83 independent food banks from May 2020 to May 2021.² The Trussell Trust, the U.K.'s largest food bank franchise, released figures in April 2021 showing a record 2.5 million emergency food parcels distributed to people in crisis, repre-

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PHOTO | Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina

¹ Label attributed to the University of Wisconsin-Madison sociologist Joel Rogers. In a capitalist society that goes low, wages are depressed as businesses compete over the price, not the quality, of goods. So-called unskilled workers are typically incentivized through punishments, not promotions; inequality reigns and poverty spreads. In the United States, the richest 1% of Americans own 40% of the country's wealth, while a larger share of working-age people (18-65) live in poverty more than in any other nation belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For more information, please visit: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html

² Independent Food Aid Network. (2020, December 22). *Independent*

senting a 33% increase over the previous year.³ The U.S. had miles-long queues at food pantries and soup kitchens,⁴ emphasizing the depth and reach of food insecurity. U.S. food banks provided the equivalent of 4.2 billion meals between March and November 2020,⁵ with at least 80% of them supporting more people than they did before the pandemic. In Canada, food banks struggled to stay open and meet the rising demands placed on them.⁶ In all three countries, these growing numbers of the ‘newly hungry’ brought charitable food aid to the attention of many people for the first time. And while these emergency efforts may feed people for the moment, they do not address the reasons they must seek these services in the first place.⁷ It is clearer than ever that it is simply not possible to ‘foodbank’ our way out of persistent food insecurity.

Accompanying this increased demand for food has been a wider, and concerning, rise in the direct funding for charitable food provision through governments. For instance, the U.K.’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) pledged £16 million (USD \$ 22 million) for FareShare and WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), and for a fund for smaller food distribution charities in England.⁸ In the U.S., the Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced an additional USD \$850 million in Congressional coronavirus relief on top of standard funding for food banks. They also expanded the (now ended) Meals-to-You public-private partnership,⁹ working with the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, McLane Global, PepsiCo, and others, to deliver more than one million meals a week to students in a limited number of rural schools closed due to Covid. In April 2020, the Canadian government announced a release of up to USD \$100 million to Food Banks Canada and other food rescue organizations through the Emergency Food Security Fund to „help improve access to food for people experiencing food insecurity due to the Covid-19 pandemic“.¹⁰ These increased funds all seek to respond to the problem of increased food insecurity. But increased food insecurity is a symptom of deeper problems, and increasing the funds to food charities does not begin to address these underlying issues.

BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR COMMUNITIES HIT HARDEST BY COVID-19

Additionally, although every community in these countries has been changed to some degree by the pandemic, its impacts have not been uniform. BIPOC communities, people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, and single mothers, are among the people whose lives have been the most violently affected. Black and Indigenous Communities have contracted the virus at extremely high rates, sometimes as high as 10 times more than non-racialized groups, as seen in Toronto, Canada. People with low incomes have been pushed further into poverty.¹¹ In the U.K., „one in 20 low-paid workers had fallen out of a job in each quarter since the pandemic struck“.¹² There is nothing inherently vulnerable about these communities, but their collective ‘vulnerability’ has been institutionalized by state policies and structures, and their positions further marginalized by the effects of the pandemic.¹³

These hard truths of the pandemic – the ways in which marginalized communities have overwhelmingly borne the brunt of its impacts – are often erased in government messaging around COVID-19. This intentional invisibilizing of racialized, poor, and disabled people’s lived realities in mainstream narratives helps to depoliticize the problem – the problem of the pandemic, the problem of poverty, the problem of food insecurity. We cannot continue to talk about food insecurity with-

Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK February to November 2019 and 2020. Available at: [IFAN REPORT 22.12.20 FINAL.pdf?id=3360657](https://ifan-report.22.12.20.FINAL.pdf?id=3360657)

- 3 See: www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/
- 4 Martelli, S. (2020, December 14). *Hunger spikes, demand rises for US food banks.* BBC News. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55307722
- 5 Himmelgreen, D. and Heuer J. (2021, February 2). *How food banks help Americans who have trouble getting enough to eat.* The Conversation. Available at: theconversation.com/how-food-banks-help-americans-who-have-trouble-getting-enough-to-eat-148150
- 6 Harvey, A. (2020, April 11). *Canadian food banks struggle to stay open, just as demand for their services skyrockets.* The Globe and Mail. Available at: www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/toronto/article-canadian-food-banks-struggle-to-stay-open-just-as-demand-for-their/
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- 9 See: mealstoyou.org/
- 10 Government of Canada. (ND). *Emergency Food Security Fund.* Available at: www.agr.gc.ca/eng/agricultural-programs-and-services/emergency-food-security-fund/?id=1585855025072
- 11 Toronto Foundation (November 2020). *The Toronto Fall Out Report. Half a year in the life of COVID-19.* Available at: torontofoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Toronto-Fallout-Report-2020.pdf
- 12 Partington, R. (2021, January 22). *Low-paid workers in UK more than twice as likely to lose job in pandemic.* The Guardian. Available at: www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/22/low-paid-workers-in-uk-more-than-twice-as-likely-to-lose-job-in-pandemic
- 13 For example, in 2019, a Canadian-based study reported that Black households were 3.56 times more likely to be food insecure than white households. In the U.S., “more than 60% of counties with majority Native populations were very food insecure

out talking about colonialism, poverty, racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and ableism. While we have heard political leaders assure us that ‘no one will be left behind,’ the harsh reality is that communities are being left behind every day. Increasing the number of meals distributed by food banks does not alter this reality.

These underlying truths, and the outcome they have led to, was inevitable given the realities of our current systems. The U.K., the U.S. and Canada are colonial, ‘capitalist’ countries, a shorthand label that stands for a variety of governmental arrangements that, in part, support economic systems rooted in private ownership of goods and resources. Capitalist countries differ, among other things, on the amount and nature of regulations they have, the degree of institutional political control, the type of tax system in place, and the presence and strength of a social safety net.¹⁴ The ‘low road’¹⁵ capitalist societies herein are economic structures that began on the backs of enslaved people and today continue to excessively and negatively impact BIPOC Communities. In low-road capitalist societies the regulations are low, the tax structure favors those with money, and the wealth inequality is extreme.¹⁶ A small sector of the population becomes inordinately wealthy from the labor of both low-wage workers¹⁷ and the most marginalized,¹⁸ and food insecurity is one of the prices paid for maintenance of this status quo. Under this type of system food banks reinforce these conditions, by providing emergency access to food without challenging the structures that create these inequitable conditions in the first place.

Whilst it might be easy for some – particularly those who benefit from whiteness and intergenerational wealth – to ignore these underlying imbalances during so-called normal times, inequalities in wealth, health and access to adequate nutrition are exacerbated¹⁹ during a crisis and become harder to overlook. Instead of confronting these underlying issues head on, governments have instead accepted increased food insecurity as an unfortunate reality instead of a solvable problem. This tolerance for what should be an unacceptable state of affairs further institutionalizes the reality of food insecurity. As a manifestation of this acceptance, these societies have turned to corporate partners and food banks to increase capacity rather than address poverty or societal structure. In a crisis, this does more than continue the status quo – it actively benefits those at the top and grinds down those at the bottom.

ALLIANCES BETWEEN CORPORATIONS AND FOOD AID PERPETUATE POVERTY

In all three of these nation-states, increases in the provision of charitable food have been accompanied by growing corporate partnerships.²⁰ For example, corporations donating food to food banks during the pandemic have benefitted from both tax credits²¹ and public relations boosts²² while deepening the alliance between corporations and food banks, an alliance that pre-dated and will likely outlive our current crisis. This also builds on the negative partnership between corporate greed and government safety nets that existed before the pandemic. Under this immoral accord, corporate behemoths exploit their workers, disproportionately BIPOC individuals, while overpaying top executives. This forces low-wage workers to rely on government programs for survival,²³ while freeing up corporate cash for donations for which they receive tax breaks.²⁴ In this way, these corporations are effectively creating the conditions that breed and perpetuate poverty and food insecurity.

And while many small stores have struggled over the past year, business at the large-

in 2019”. A 2017 UK report found that more than half of the households participating in an emergency food program included people with disabilities, while three-quarters were experiencing ill-health and associated financial insecurity. Data collected during COVID-19 showed that one in 10 (9%) of people that were referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network identify as Black or Black British. This is three times the rate of the UK population (3%). These numbers highlight the systemic hierarchies which have always existed, and which the pandemic has exposed.

¹⁴ The many faces of capitalism are reflected in the numerous labels assigned to different forms of capitalism, including laissez-faire capitalism, responsible capitalism, shareholder capitalism, unrestrained capitalism, oligarchic capitalism, predatory capitalism, etc.

¹⁵ *Supra* Note 1.

¹⁶ See: Pew Research Center. (2020, January). *Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer Than Half Call It a Top Priority*. Note that there are many ways to measure income inequality, yet regardless of the methodology used, economic inequality in the U.S. is more pronounced.

¹⁷ For example, Westmoreland, one of the largest coal companies in North America, filed for bankruptcy a year after giving large bonuses to its executives. A bankruptcy judge held that the company could end health benefits for hundreds of retired miners and their families, prompting the company’s lawyer to announce: “This is not the retirees’ fault.... It’s not the company’s fault. It’s just the market[.]”.

¹⁸ For example, Mylan’s CEO Heather Bresch raised the price of life-saving EpiPens more than 400% while her compensation climbed from \$2.5 million in 2007 to almost \$19 million in 2015.

¹⁹ Menon, R. (2020, December 29). *Covid-19 and the Nightmare of Food Insecurity*. The Nation. Available at: www.thenation.com/article/economy/covid-hunger-inequality/

²⁰ See: Egan, M. (2021, January 26). *America’s Billionaires have grown \$1.1 Trillion Richer During the Pandemic*. CNN Business. Available at: edition.cnn.com/2021/01/26/business/billionaire-wealth-inequality-poverty/index.html

²¹ In the U.S., under the Federal Enhanced Tax Deduction for Food Donation, businesses can deduct up to 15% of net income for food donations.

²² Fisher, A. (2020, April 22). *The COVID Crisis Is Reinforcing the Hunger Industrial Complex*. The MIT Press Reader. Available at: theader.mitpress.edu/

est retail companies has boomed – the same corporations that lobby against minimum wage increases, break up unions, and refuse to provide paid sick days are profiting off of this global pandemic.²⁵ In the U.S., under the Federal Enhanced Tax Deduction for Food Donation, businesses can deduct up to 15% of net income for food donations. These companies have passed none of the extra profit onto their lowest paid frontline workers, and even those given ‘hazard pay’ during the pandemic have rolled back these programs while CEOs receive millions in salary.²⁶ The end of hazard pay not only put these monies back in the pockets of shareholders and corporate elites, it also undermined racial, ethnic, and gender equity as BIPOC communities and women are overrepresented among the retail frontline workforce. These companies position themselves as the ‘benevolent employer’ with initiatives like hazard pay and food waste donations while they continue to exploit workers’ rights behind the scenes, effectively driving the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on BIPOC and low-wage workers.²⁷

It is no coincidence that those being forced deeper into poverty and food insecurity themselves predominantly work along the food chain – migrant farm workers, meat-processing warehouse workers, and grocery store workers.²⁸ These ‘frontline heroes’ risking their lives to put food on tables across the Global North are struggling to feed themselves and their families as a result of this corporate culture of exploitation.

These arrangements allow governments to further sidestep their responsibilities, and it also contributes to an unfortunate public perception. Not only do the people who volunteer in and donate to food banks often mistakenly feel that they are helping to solve the problem, it also focuses their gaze on the immediate symptoms of the problem, instead of the root causes of the problem itself. It is crucial, then, that emergency food provision is not framed as ‘the’ solution to those in the Global North. It is time to stop focusing on band-aid charity responses and time to begin focusing on the structures that drive food insecurity, and to shift away from top-down responses that further embed social inequities.

MUTUAL AID AND COMMUNITY RECIPROCITY AS A ‘TRUE SOLUTION’ TO HUNGER

Realizing a holistic human right to adequate food and nutrition can shift the conversation beyond food access and charity, and also uncover solutions that strike at the systemic root causes of hunger and poverty. In the same way that the causes of food insecurity were palpable long before the COVID-19 outbreak, the responses to the increased need for food and income during these times are also not ‘new’. Grassroots organizations and their communities, and global social movements, have a long history of organizing and responding to the needs of those seeking food and income – from mutual aid to solidarity brigades, to increased household and community food production. There is now a resurgence of communities organizing around mutual aid – a set of principles guiding the interdependent, horizontal and collective care extended to those who are in community with one another. These actions are embedded in reciprocity, a practice which has long been the bedrock of Indigenous wisdoms and a means of survival for Black communities. Indigenous Communities’ cosmic understandings of the world are rooted in the obligation to preserve the abundance that is intrinsic to life, including for the coming generations. These worldviews are recorded among the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg in the Northeastern part of Turtle Island with ‘The Dish With One Spoon’ *Wampum*.²⁹ The notion of ‘a common pot’, a bountiful dish that nourishes an entire community equally, ensures that its people not just survive but thrive with dignity.³⁰

mit.edu/the-covid-crisis-is-reinforcing-the-hunger-industrial-complex/
Note that Smithfield, a large pork producer and the target of lawsuits detailing environmental racism, has garnered favorable press for donating millions of pounds of protein to food banks during the pandemic.

23 Rosenberg, E. (2020, November 18). Walmart and McDonald’s Have the Most Workers on Food Stamps and Medicaid, New Study Shows. Seattle Times. Available at: www.seattletimes.com/business/walmart-and-mcdonalds-have-the-most-workers-on-food-stamps-and-medicaid-new-study-shows

24 For more information on the corporation response to food insecurity during the Covid pandemic, including USD \$10 million to organizations helping increase food access, please visit: walmart.org/how-we-give/walmart-orgs-response-to-covid-19

25 Abdelbaki, R. (2020, May 10). *For the Owners of Loblaw’s, Ripping Off Canadian Workers Is a Family Business*. Jacobin. Available at: www.jacobinmag.com/2020/10/loblows-westons-coronavirus-workers

26 Melin, A. (2021, May 13). *Kroger, Blasted for Ending Hazard Pay, Gave CEO \$22 Million*. Bloomberg. Available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-13/kroger-blasted-for-ending-hazard-pay-gave-its-ceo-22-million

27 Kinder, M., Stateler, L., and Du, J. (2020). *Windfall profits and deadly risks: How the biggest retail companies are compensating essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic*. The Brookings Institute.

28 Chen, Y-H., Glymour, M., and Riley A., et al. (2021). Excess mortality associated with the COVID-19 pandemic among Californians 18–65 years of age, by occupational sector and occupation: March through October 2020. *PLoS ONE* 16(6): e0252454. Available at: doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0252454

29 Wampum are traditional shell beads used by Indigenous communities in the Western North Atlantic crafted into belts that are used to tell stories. For more information, please visit: www.onondaganation.org

30 Brooks, L.T. (2008). *The common pot: the recovery of native space in the Northeast*. University of Minnesota Press.

COVID-19 has made visible the necessity and strength of mutual aid models of community-care and self-actualization for communities most impacted by social and economic inequities. These models of solidarity and reciprocity are necessary for survival in times of crisis. And their history of *susūs* (community-led savings associations deeply rooted in African histories) support groups today: tradespeople that educate one another, farmers that share seeds, neighbors that grow vegetables in a community lot, and families who shop at cooperative grocery stores. These are examples of what a ‘true’ solution to ending food insecurity could look like, and „a powerful vision of an alternative society – one in which we are no longer imagined as individual brands, consumers, entrepreneurs in endless competition, but a collective connected by compassion, cooperation, and the spirit of participatory democracy“.³¹

This pandemic has elevated mutual aid and models of community reciprocity,³² abiding through the organizing efforts of women of color,³³ into our collective consciousness. These avenues may lead to true food sovereignty and power building, even if they are the bane of societal structures that require divisions, resource extraction and control over labor. While COVID-19 has been a significant threat to our public health, it has also breathed life into contemporary forms of community reciprocity. Going forward, community leadership, together with structural changes at the state level – income-based approaches, right to housing, decent and fair wage work – need to be prioritized in order to make sure that we build a system that is truly inclusive and does not leave anyone behind, while taking care of one another in the meantime. This may be the only true foundation of a self-determined and just society where everyone has the right to live with dignity and abundance.

31 Whitley, M. (2020, July 14). *Why ‘Mutual Aid’? – social solidarity, not charity*. Open Democracy. Available at: www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/why-mutual-aid-social-solidarity-not-charity/

32 Sitrin, M. (Ed.). (2000). *Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid During the Covid-19 Crisis*. Pluto Press.

33 Fernando, C. (2021). *Mutual aid networks find roots in communities of color*. abc news. Available at: abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/mutual-aid-networks-find-roots-communities-color-75403719

AN IMPERCEPTIBLE GROWTH: HEALTHY FOOD AND TRANSFORMATIVE SOLIDARITY

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“Food [...] is one of the areas in which there is the most communitarian and re-localizing innovation [...].”

It is well known that COVID-19 has exacerbated an already precarious food and nutrition situation in many countries. Over the last five years, the number of people affected by food insecurity in Latin America has been on the rise. In 2019, a third of the population, amounting to 191 million people across the region, suffered from moderate or serious food insecurity.¹ Among those affected, there are almost 20 million more women than men: 32,4% are women, and 25,7% are men.² The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, CEPAL) calculated that the number of people living in poverty increased to 209 million by the end of 2020 – 22 million more than the year before.³ Following decades of austerity policies, weakened public institutions have prevented states from providing the necessary responses to comply with their human rights obligations to tackle the current crisis. What is even more worrying are the clearly regressive measures that states have taken amid the crisis. One example is the flexibilization of employment in Ecuador, which made working conditions even more precarious.⁴ Another example is the downsizing of food reserves in Brazil just as the pandemic hit, following the dismantling of the Companhia Nacional de Abastecimento (National Supply Company, CONAB), which had been set up at the end of 2019.⁵

Amid the crisis, in addition to documenting state violations committed either through their actions or by omitting their obligations, we have also compiled social organizations' initiatives that seek to promote solidarity and a sense of community in moments of hunger and concern. In our view, these initiatives are ways of reaffirming human dignity, peoples' sovereignty, and their capacity to persevere in the face of adversity. This article intends to reflect more in depth on some of the

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PHOTO | Mario Macías Yela

1 FAO, FIDA, OPS, WFP and UNICEF. (2020). *Panorama de la seguridad alimentaria y nutrición en América Latina y el Caribe 2020*. Available in Spanish at: doi.org/10.4060/cb2242es

2 *Ibid.* p. 16.

3 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL). (2021). *Panorama Social de América Latina 2020*. (LC/PUB.2021/2-P/Rev.1).

4 See: fianecuador.org.ec/2020/09/01/informe-crisis-alimentaria-en-ecuador-nuestro-derecho-a-la-alimentacion-en-tiempos-de-covid-19/.

5 Peres, João and Victor, Matioli. (2020, September 19). *O governo deveria estocar arroz, não você*. Available at: ojoioeotriga.com.br/2020/09/o-governo-deveria-estocar-arroz-nao-voce/

self-managed initiatives that have emerged in two Latin American countries: Ecuador and Brazil. Based on interviews with members of the Movimiento Sem Terra (Landless Movement, MST), the Movimiento dos Pequenos Agricultores (Movement of Small-Scale Farmers, MPA) in Brazil, and of the Huancavilcas/Santa Elena communities, the Corporación de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas de Flores (Association of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of Flores, COCIF), the Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas de Esmeraldas (Union of Peasant Organizations of Esmeraldas, UOCE), and the Centro Agrícola Cantonal de Quevedo (Agricultural Centre of Quevedo Canton, CACQ), as well as through consultations on social media and by reviewing other sources, we seek to understand how these initiatives emerged, how they work, what their scope is, and which actors are involved. We conclude by assessing the extent to which these initiatives are merely conjunctural one-offs, or whether they constitute an alternative for reinventing social relations, and relations of production and care.

RANDI RANDI: FOOD BARTERING AND SOLIDARITY AMONG PEOPLES

Randi randi (a Quichua term which means ‘barter’, ‘to give and receive’, or ‘to give for the sake of giving without harm’) is an ancestral custom that peoples from Latin America practiced as a way of trading their goods. It consisted in exchanging goods of the same value or importance. In the current context of COVID-19, this action is regaining ground. Bartering demonstrates that, in times of crisis, solidarity among peoples is crucial, and that money-based commercial transactions are not the be-all and end-all.

During the pandemic, lockdown measures imposed by the Ecuadorian government led to, among other measures, the closure of local markets, the prohibition of peasant and indigenous fairs, and the banning of informal trading and artisanal fisheries. These measures predominantly impacted rural sectors. Hence, between March and May 2020, several indigenous, peasants’, and fishers’ organizations started practicing food bartering in order to address food needs. Two thousand families from 27 communities in the Flores municipality (Riobamba Canton) benefitted from food bartering undertaken with CACQ (Quevedo Canton), in which 150 families from across six CACQ communities participated and benefitted. In parallel, UOCE also engaged in food bartering: 500 families from their grassroots communities participated by donating food, which benefitted 956 families from across popular neighborhoods in the province of Esmeraldas. They locally bartered with fishing families. Approximately fifteen tons of food from peasant farms were donated to Huancavilcas communities.

Meanwhile, the Movimiento Nacional Campesino (National Peasant Movement, FECAOL) also engaged in food bartering.⁶ According to their reports, this initiative was nation-wide. Approximately 1000 indigenous and Montubio families participated in fighting against the food crisis in Ecuador, in alliance with Mujeres sin Límites (Women without Limits), the Tungurahua prefecture, and the Conferencia Plurinacional e Intercultural de Soberanía Alimentaria (Intercultural Conference of Food Sovereignty, COPISA). A novelty was FECAOL’s establishment of peasant pharmacies in several popular neighborhoods of Guayaquil to supply local people with medicinal plants, as access to health centers was limited during the pandemic.

⁶ For more information, please visit: www.alainet.org/es/articulo/206824

In addition to food bartering, people also shared culturally adequate recipes that stem from rural women’s cooking pots. These are alive with wisdom and traditional knowledge, in particular about medicinal plants that women from peasant and indigenous organizations preserve in their respective territories. These plants mostly

helped to strengthen the immune system of consumers, but they also served to recuperate the living memory of healthcare. Women in these organizations prioritize life and show how important it is to care for earth and for the reproduction of life, and how this can become an objective for all community members. This is what these women mean when they speak of food sovereignty. In addition to exchanging native seeds, the produce they exchange stems from diversified and agroecological food systems. The food is used to partly cover their own families' needs, while local markets are supplied with any surplus produce. These families grow food in an environment of tranquility and safety and do not feel particularly vulnerable to the virus. Indeed, thanks to their surrounding diversity, they are able to produce independently without relying on agrochemicals.

Several operational modes and strategies were implemented to organize the bartering. First, they surveyed available produce in peasant farms. Then they brought it all to a single space where the food was adequately packed to then be transported. Logistics were in the able hands of young people who collectively led all activities. They also reached out to municipal governments to count on their support in mobilizing local people to collect and then distribute food for bartering. According to young members of CACQ – who have formed their own political and agroecological unit named Machete y Garabato (Machete and Scribble) – bartering is an act of live currency. This is because exchanged produce not only has a nutritional and economic value, it also represents the work values of peasants and Indigenous Peoples who grow food agroecologically and in harmony with nature. In the face of lockdown, self-organization was fundamental. Coordinators were able to obtain some safeguards that enabled them to move with no restrictions. This was also the case with families who needed to move to see to their harvests.

MINGA⁷ AGAINST HUNGER: “WE ARE NOT DONATING OUR SURPLUS. WE DISTRIBUTE WHAT WE PRODUCE”

In the face of hunger and food insecurity unleashed by measures to contain the pandemic, members of peasant organizations (interviewed in Brazil and Ecuador) spontaneously organized solidarity actions to feed homeless people and unemployed persons who had been evicted. There were varied ways of providing food: donations of produce from camps, settlements and peasant farms; donations of food baskets; access to meals through soup kitchens; and access to locally established food banks where food could be donated to. It is hard to ascertain the size of these initiatives, but evidence shows that they were significant. MST affirms that they are developing solidarity actions across 24 states in Brazil, while MPA works in 13 states. In Ecuador, our research only covers the coastal province of Santa Elena, and coastal cantons of Quevedo and Esmeraldas, as well as the canto of Riobamba de la Sierra. MST reported that it donated 3,400 tons of food between March and September 2020,⁸ and MPA registered a volume of 1,100 tons by February 2021 (Huancavilcas communities reported having donated 11 tons of vegetables, benefiting 600 families). In Brazil, a collective action named Real Food mapped over 300 initiatives between August and October 2020, led by both urban and rural social movements, peoples' organizations, and grassroots groups which emerged to bring together healthy food producers with consumers.⁹

Access to healthy food had already been a major concern of Brazilian society before the pandemic, and as the current crisis hit, it received renewed attention. Healthy food became a cornerstone of efforts to build new urban-rural relations. Interviewees emphasized that it was not about charity, but rather about solidarity. It was not enough to just distribute food; rather, it was necessary to work closely and jointly

⁷ Minga is an indigenous traditional form of community or collective work with different purposes.

⁸ Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (MST). (2020, September 9). *Desde o início da pandemia, MST já doou 3400 toneladas de alimentos você*. Available at: mst.org.br/2020/09/09/desde-o-inicio-da-pandemia-mst-ja-dou-3400-toneladas-de-alimentos/

⁹ See: acaocoletivacomidaverdade.org/

with urban dwellers to better understand where food comes from, who produces it, and under which conditions. They highlighted how important it is for the urban population to place value on peasant agroecological food production, and even to learn how to create agroecological vegetable gardens in cities. In this sense, different food solidarity initiatives implied securing collective ways of addressing food-related issues. One example is Brazil's municipal councils for food and nutrition security. Another example can be seen in people's food committees weaving new types of social and community relations. In some cases, local health agents participate,¹⁰ covering tasks that go from organizing local food banks, to training in social rights, and even to training in agroecology for community vegetable gardens. Similarly, MPA shares how food distribution channels have been restructured so as to adjust to health security protocols that were established to contain the pandemic. MPA youth reinvented operations to distribute food. For example, in Rio de Janeiro they signed an agreement with over 80 workers from the Independent Taxi-Drivers' Association of Santa Teresa to distribute food to consumers' addresses. This agreement not only benefitted food consumers overall, it also helped taxi drivers who had seen their incomes drop due to reduced mobility during the pandemic.¹¹ Youth was also at the forefront of the Huancavilcas community experience, as they organized transport and distribution logistics of donated foods. In Brazil, many of the initiatives to restructure social relations to feed people are documented in databanks such as the following: <https://agroecologiaemrede.org.br>.

CLOSING REMARKS

The pandemic has triggered an era of uncertainty and volatility, with structural reconfigurations taking place at several levels. Arturo Escobar affirms:

Food [...] is one of the areas in which there is the most communitarian and re-localizing innovation (that is, innovations that break with the patriarchal, racist and capitalist ways of living). One example is the emphasis placed on food sovereignty, agroecology, urban vegetable gardens etc. These re-localizing activities, especially if they are agroecological and 'from below', enable us to rethink national and international production frameworks, everyday common things, and urban-rural relations [...] This re-localizing builds on a series of strategic verbs: to eat, to learn, to heal, to dwell, to build, to get to know. It goes well beyond reducing our ecological footprint; it involves significantly reorienting how we design the worlds we live in.¹²

It is therefore essential to understand the potential that lies in these experiments and proposals in order to forge new pathways to realize the human right to adequate food and nutrition. To this end, it is key to closely follow the initiatives that we have humbly documented in this article. This type of experience has not only emerged in Brazil and Ecuador, but also in Latin America as a whole, and across other continents. Clearly, these are not charity initiatives that seek to mitigate the hunger crisis unleashed by COVID-19. They do not replicate social relations of domination that strengthen the industrial market-centric model of production and distribution of junk food. Rather, these initiatives are self-organized by peasant and indigenous producers (not by supermarkets or companies), which are reconfiguring relations of food production and distribution in such a way as to strengthen a social and solidarity economy.¹³ What's more, it is worth noting that these initiatives have improved access to healthy agroecological food for people who have limited resources. This is a significant achievement. Until now, discussions had mainly been about guaranteeing that agroecological production receive sufficient support from consumers. They were not necessarily about guaranteeing that those with a high level

¹⁰ Local health agents are trained by social or community organizations (sometimes in cooperation with municipal authorities) to assist people with public or community health issues, especially in early detection of problems and prevention practices.

¹¹ Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores (MPA). (2020, April 15). *Campanhas do MPA asseguram a distribuição de alimentos saudáveis durante a pandemia da Covid-19*. Available at: mpabrasil.org.br/noticias/mpa-asseguram-a-distribui-cao-de-alimentos-covid-19/

¹² Escobar, A. (2020). El pensamiento en tiempo de pospandemia. In R. L. Segato et al. *Pandemia al sur*. (1st ed., pp. 31-54). Prometeo Libros.

¹³ The Constitution of Ecuador, in Article 288, stipulates that the Ecuadorian economic system is a social and solidarity system, thereby placing the solidarity economy on a par with the public and private economy. The goal is to promote a

of food insecurity gain access to healthy food. It is fundamental that we assess how to ensure that this trend continues. Equally important is the fact that these proposals are de-commodifying food. They reaffirm communitarian values to guarantee the production of healthy food that also reaches those most in need. It is essential that in the future we research more in-depth how these social and community initiatives are reshaping relations with public and governmental institutions, and are secured as spaces in which to exercise autonomy and the realization of rights.

new development model which the Constitution defines as “*sumak kawsay*” (in Spanish “*buen vivir*”). The Movimiento de Economía Social y Solidaria del Ecuador (Social and Solidarity Economy Movement of Ecuador, MESSE) describes the social and solidarity economy as follows: «a way living together among people and with nature which satisfies HUMAN needs and guarantees the sustainment of LIFE, through a COMPREHENSIVE approach, by means of the strength acquired from ORGANISING, and by applying ANCESTRAL knowledge and practices to transform SOCIETY and build a culture of PEACE».

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