

*Perspectives from  
Social Movements and  
Civil Society*

This article was drafted based on inputs provided through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with social movements, indigenous peoples and civil society organizations, including [La Via Campesina \(LVC\)](#), [World Forum of Fisher Peoples \(WFFP\)](#), [International Indian Treaty Council \(IITC\)](#), and [International Baby Food Action Network \(IBFAN\)](#).

It also reflects contents of the [Viotá Declaration of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition](#) and the current and previous issues of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*, its flagship publication.

The global, industrial, economic bubble unsurprisingly burst a decade ago, yet we are still witnessing and experiencing its effects in our daily lives. It was the inevitable outcome of a model that prioritizes profit at the expense of everything else: our lives, our rights and our nature. The crisis was building for years and a billion people were pushed to hunger because of drastic food price volatility, and as a result of a multi-fold crisis that grew, squeezed and affected our food systems, climate and human rights.

After ten years, the dominant approaches that led to the crisis still persist. During this time, social movements and civil society organizations strengthened their efforts in the struggle for radical socio-economic and political transformations, which are capable of generating the full realization of human rights for all. The questions to be asked now are, how do we move forward and how do we fine-tune our strategies and tools to find the most beneficial way out this crisis?

### **BREAKING THE CRISIS CYCLE**

In the last decade, good progress has been made by social movements in promoting food sovereignty and the human right to adequate food and nutrition in the Global South. These concepts, however, are still not well understood in the Global North. The misconception persists that the right to food and nutrition concerns mostly countries that are plagued by famines and chronic malnutrition, and has very little to do with the increasing rates of obesity and associated non-communicable diseases caused by the widespread imbalanced and industrialized-based diets. The reality is that violations and abuses of the right to food and nutrition are not limited geographically, but manifest in a wide variety of forms across the world. From the refugee camps in Western Sahara and the mountains of Oaxaca, to the rural plains of the Mid-West in the United States and the barrios of Spanish cities, our food sovereignty is still being sabotaged.

Many people underestimate just how globally integrated our food systems are today. So-called developed countries are as much part of the problem as they are part of the solution, and any meaningful progress will depend on a shared analysis and understanding of our global food system and of the meaning of food sovereignty. This starts by acknowledging that the full realization of the right to food and nutrition is incompatible with the current industrial production model, as illustrated by the hundreds of policies that have failed to address this multifold crisis. The rise of right-wing populism and fascism is indeed yet another symptom.

More broadly speaking, nowadays, land grabbing and the corporate capture of agriculture are the two major challenges for social movements. There is an urgent need to find strategies to resist land grabs and assist the guardians of the land and seed (especially the women) to remain on the land, as these two dimensions provide an essential precondition for the realization of food sovereignty. Indeed, this struggle should encompass all natural resources, from forests to rivers and from coastal areas to pastureland. The draft Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, (currently under negotiation at the UN), is an important step in recognizing that there are many different communities whose livelihood depends on access to and control over natural resources. To give but one example, coastline ecosystems and the many fisherfolk communities that depend on them are particularly vulnerable to climate destruction. Access to clean water is also a major concern, and it is important to vocalize struggles around water resources under the banner of food sovereignty. Furthermore, there is a need to protect the pastoralist corridors that are fundamental to these peoples' lives and livelihoods.

#### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Karine Peschard (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies), Priscilla Claeys (Coventry University and FIAN Belgium) and Alejandra M. del Rey (FIAN International) for their support in writing and reviewing this synthesis, as well as to Nora McKeon (International University College Turin, Rome 3 University and Terra Nuova) for conducting interviews with social movements' representatives.

#### Photo

Hundreds of delegates the world over gather at the VII International Conference of La Via Campesina (Basque Country, Spain, 2017). Photo by La Via Campesina.

On a positive note, the last decade has seen growing coordination and solidarity among rural constituencies and innovative approaches by young people to foster food sovereignty. Collective identities are strengthening as they begin to stand together to defend peoples' natural resources. After a decade, we can also see more clearly the articulation between the violence against women and the violence against the environment, and between the maintenance of biodiversity and the promotion of agroecology. Some examples of increased unity across struggles include the West African Convergence of Land and Water Struggles and the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition.

Social movements now have new opportunities to create and seize participatory decisionmaking processes around public policies, at national and regional and also at the UN level. They hail the opening up of institutional spaces, such as the Committee for World Food Security, where the right to food can be discussed and promoted. They are also the driving force behind the growing number of progressive legal frameworks and guidelines that can guide peoples' struggles. The development of a normative framework on the right to food at national, regional and international levels, as well as the Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security are crucial tools for social movements. The increasing recognition of the traditional agro-ecosystems for food production and for the preservation of agrobiodiversity is also identified as an opportunity to advance the struggle. The challenge now is how to implement these tools, and how to translate the opening of institutional spaces into concrete action and towards positive change.

## **FINDING A WAY OUT**

Radical transformations of the dominant socio-political and economic systems, which are under the auspices of capitalism, need to be developed to ensure the appropriation of the commons by and for the people. Social movements must continue organizing at all levels, from the local council to the global community, and across rural and urban areas alike. A major multi-layered mobilization of social movements is required to increase the political awareness of our world and this must be backed by NGOs and academics. We have the urgent task to foster a political understanding of issues that have previously been perceived as unchangeable by the system.

Mechanisms and robust civil society positions must be developed to hold states accountable, using evidence-based advocacy, as this will best counter the increasing influence and power of corporate actors. In our struggles, the right to food and nutrition must be more visibly connected to the other human rights. How can an indigenous community fulfil their right to food and nutrition and self-determination if they have no access to their ancestral territory? How can we achieve a world without hunger if we keep denying the role of women, the pillars of the food system, to bring this about? These clear linkages need more public awareness if we want to fight back deep-rooted injustices.

Within civil society, in order to achieve a better balance and coordination between social movements and NGOs, there is a need to rethink the implementation, conceptualization and advocacy for the realization of human rights throughout the entire spectrum of the actors involved.

Social movements need more resources of their own in order to lessen their dependency on NGOs and to develop more independent analyses, based on their on-the-ground experience. In parallel, academia needs to open its doors to the production of peoples' knowledge, produced on the basis of grassroots experience and the expertise of social movements.

### **TEN YEARS OF CRISIS, A DECADE OF THE WATCH**

This leads us to the conclusion that it is essential that platforms exist for the exchange of information on issues related to the right to food and nutrition, with the voices of social movements and marginalized groups at their core. By the same token, gender mainstreaming and balance, as well as equality between North-South, local-international and rural-urban topics, are crucial to more accurately understand today's world. The *Watch* came into fruition as a need to better assess and react to the crisis. In the past ten years, we have aimed to promote solidarity and serve as a voice to encourage the coordination and sharing of strategies across movements and countries. Given the move toward nationalism and isolationism that we are seeing in many countries, this continues to be vital.

In our exchange with social movements regarding the Watch, the diversity and critical outlook of our articles have been praised and highly appreciated. It seems promising that the Watch has helped raise interest among journalists on new issues, which perhaps were rarely featured before. Publications like ours need to continue to increase efforts and bring to light global food issues. This will ensure that we reach a wider audience, particularly CSOs and institutions working on food security, as well as other grassroots organizations. This brings us closer to another challenge: how can we better raise awareness about social movements' struggles and achievements in other sectors of society, whilst serving as a tool for their struggles, if the language becomes too technical? This one question leads to others: how do we turn the *Watch* into a space for the co-production of knowledge? Should it include non-aligned voices? Should it leave the realm of the written press to explore other forms of communication? These are all challenging and necessary questions that require further discussion.

The fact that current challenges are experienced on a global scale offers unique opportunities for wide-scale mobilization. In this respect, it is important that publications like the *Watch* continue to focus not only on malpractices and violations, but that they also highlight positive aspects, victories, progresses and changes that go in the right direction.

Successful stories inspire others to mobilize and show that our aspirations can be achieved, even if unthinkable at first. We hope that we may continue to make a useful contribution to the struggle for the realization of the right to food and nutrition and food sovereignty, and to the end of this multifold crisis.