

# **An Interpretation of Discourse on Food Sovereignty and People's Access to Productive Resources**

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# Definition and Discourse on food and People's Sovereignty

The paper assesses the definitional frameworks on “rights to food” in relation to “food security” and “food sovereignty” and thereby link these concepts with the issue of people's ownership to productive/natural resources.

# *Food security and its indicators*

- The Committee on World Food Security, a body set up in 1975 by the UN World Food Conference to oversee developments in food security, adopted in the early 1980s the recognition of food security as a tripartite concept, reflecting the criteria of availability, access and stability.
- OECD suggests that food security has three dimensions: availability, access and utilization, although this source indicates that there is a tendency to characterize it in terms of availability.

Attempts to capture trends in variables that are likely to reflect food security can be broadly categorized into two interrelated sets: those that directly measure shortfalls in consumption requirements, and those that concern the potential to meet such shortfalls.

# ***Food security and its indicators***

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) evaluates two aspects of food security, availability and distribution, both of which capture the extent of the shortfall, and analyze predicted trends through to 2009. USDA. 1999. *Food Security Assessment*. USDA Economic Research Service. Situation and Outlook series GFA-11 Washington DC.

# ***Food security and its indicators***

## **Box 1.1            FAO's food security indicators**

### **Ratio of world cereal stock to world cereal utilization**

A ratio of 17-18 percent is estimated to be the minimum necessary to safeguard world food security.

### **Ratio of supplies to requirements in the 5 main exporters**

### **Ratio of closing stock in the 5 main exporters to their domestic consumption plus exports**

### **Cereal production in the 3 main importers (China, India and CIS).**

### **Cereal production in Low Income Food Deficit Countries (LIFDC)**

### **Production in LIFDC except China and India**

Source: FAO. 1999. Assessment of the Impacts of the Uruguay Round on Agricultural Markets and Food Security. CCP 99/12 Rev. Rome, FAO. October 1999.

The Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has underlined the interdependence of civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to adequate food, on the other: civil and political rights are not only intrinsically valuable, but they are also instrumentally valuable for achieving economic, social, and cultural rights.

# Food Security Indicators by FAO

- At a more aggregate level, the FAO Committee on Food Security reviews a set of six indicators derived from observations of the global cereals market. Although these indicators (see Box 1.1) are confined to cereals, the contention is that they shed light on the global food situation due to the weight of cereals in the overall food basket and thus overcome the difficulty of aggregating over food commodities in calculations of the total food supply and of food imports.
- Review of potential indicators by FAO (2003) points to the fact that those capturing the ability to finance import requirements, by for example export earnings, are likely to be more robust indicators of food security than either those based on the primary indicators of price levels or price instability, or those based upon trends in stocks and flows in global cereal markets.

Democracy, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, and the full and equal participation of men and women are essential for achieving sustainable food security for all.

# ***Food Sovereignty***

- Food Sovereignty is the RIGHT of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances.
- It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.

# Food sovereignty includes

- Prioritizing local agricultural production in order to feed the people, access of peasants and landless people to land, water, seeds, and credit. Hence the need for land reforms, for fighting against GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms), for free access to seeds, and for safeguarding water as a public good to be sustainably distributed.
- The right of farmers, peasants to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced.
- Agricultural prices linked to production costs.
- The population is empowered and facilitated to take part in the agricultural policy choices.
- The recognition of women farmers' rights, who play a major role in agricultural production and in food.

# Food Security Indicators by FAO

- The concept further includes fair trade Food sovereignty is not contrary to trade but to the priority given to exports: it allows to guarantee food security for the people, while trading with other regions specific products which make up diversity on our planet.
- This means ensuring adequate prices for all farmers, supply management, abolishment of all forms of export subsidies, and the regulation of imports to protect domestic food production. All food products must comply with high environmental, social and health quality standards.
- Prioritizes local and regional production before export, allows the Countries/Unions to protect themselves from too low priced imports,
- Permits public aids to farmers, provided these are not intended directly or indirectly to export at low prices,
- Guarantees stable agricultural prices at an international level through international agreements of supply management.
- Review of potential indicators by FAO (2003) points to the fact that those capturing the ability to finance import requirements, by for example export earnings, are likely to be more robust indicators of food security than either those based on the primary indicators of price levels or price instability, or those based upon trends in stocks and flows in global cereal markets.

Food sovereignty is a call to governments to adopt policies that promote democratic, sustainable, decentralized, domestic family-farm and peasant based production, rather than totalitarian, unsustainable, corporate-industrial, transnational export-oriented production.

# *Right to food*

- The right to adequate food is both freedom and entitlement. Freedom from hunger and entitlement to food that meets dietary needs, that is free from adverse substances, that is culturally acceptable, is in large enough quantities, is physically and economically accessible, and with sustainable supply for present and future generations.
- The right to food, and the measures that must be taken, are laid out quite clearly in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, social and cultural rights. Paragraph 1 calls on States to “*recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food .... and the continuous improvement of living conditions*”.

# *Right to food*

Food is an integral part of human rights not merely an item in trade basket.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “everyone has the right to a standard  
of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food,  
clothing, housing and medical care.” (Article 25)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) guarantees an adequate  
standard of living, housing, work, food and health. (Articles 6, 11 and 12)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees the right to life and states that “in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.” (Articles 1 and 6)

In 2004, the 188 members of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adopted Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food.

# ***Food Sovereignty***

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- It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.

# ***Food security and its indicators***

- The right to food is conceptualized as a right of individuals; food sovereignty is advocated as a peoples' right. The right to food is realized when people have access to food that meets specified adequacy standards — irrespective of whether that food is imported or produced domestically, or whether it is produced by family farmers or by agribusiness.
- Food sovereignty goes beyond availability and accessibility of adequate food to favouring food that is produced domestically by family farmers. In other words, while the right to food does not favour particular food security policies (beyond creating a legal obligation to pursue those policies to the maximum of available resources, and to comply with basic principles such as non-discrimination), food sovereignty is linked to a more specific policy orientation — thought not to a readily made set of policies

The concept of "**food security**" is a technical concept.  
The concept of "**food sovereignty**" is a political concept.  
The concept of "**right to adequate food**" is a legal concept.

# Agenda of People's Access to Productive Resources

- Many Asian countries, including Bangladesh, experience seasonal starvation or chronic malnutrition or massive hunger and poverty. Current figures show that there are 500 million people in Asia-Pacific who suffer chronic hunger.
- Although, remarkable growth in agricultural productivity was achieved over the last 30 years through intensification and diversification of crop production in Bangladesh already, 45% of the 160 million people in the country are consuming less than their daily calorie requirements; 53% are also estimated to be living below the poverty line.

# Agenda of People's Access to Productive Resources

- Improving access to natural resources — as the basis for food production and income generation — is a key element of realizing the right to food. However, unlike other human rights such as the right to property (see below), protecting access to resources (access to natural capital, in the “sustainable livelihoods” framework) is not at the very core of the human right to food, but a means to an end — the production or procurement of food. This end may also be achieved through other (complementary or alternative) means, such as through income from employment.

# Agenda of People's Access to Productive Resources

- Because of its different conceptual underpinnings, the political (rather than legal) concept of food sovereignty places more specific emphasis on access to resources. Because food sovereignty “empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture”, it requires “genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights to land, defends and recovers the territories of indigenous peoples, ensures fishing Communities’ access and control over their fishing area and ecosystems, [and] honours access and control by pastoral communities over pastoral lands and migratory routes” (Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty).

# Agenda of People's Access to Productive Resources

- In a country such as Bangladesh, where natural resources (e.g. land, water and genetic resources) are the main source of food availability and accessibility for a large majority, where there are limited off-farm livelihood opportunities or it is inadequate to meet the food requirement, and where the ability of markets to ensure access to food is highly unlikely and constrained, then improving access to natural resources is the focus of the obligations concerning the realization of the right to food.

# ***Peasantry, Trade and Agriculture: Access to resource in Bangladesh***

- In terms of seed, the involvement of new actors has squeezed the decision making power of peasants. Though there is a great demand among peasants for BADC's seeds and they are compelled to buy seeds from market actors which they consider of being low-standard.
- As a finance provider, the peasant get assistance from NGOs and some respect from Bank but they have to go for advance selling since the NGO worker starts knocking at his/her door for installment, few months later of disbursing money.
- No matter the environmental damage or cost incur because of pesticide use, the overwhelming use of pesticide increase the production cost. Simultaneously, the use of fertilizer and high dependency on chemical fertilizer reduce the fertility of the land and increase the production cost per year.

# ***Peasantry, Trade and Agriculture: Access to resource in Bangladesh***

- Therefore, the whole new production relation and market structure have diminished the liberty of the peasants and limited their decision making process to a great extent.
- The peasants are not getting fair price of her/his agro products because of multiple causes.
- WTO agreements such as The Agreement on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and on Sanitary & Phytosanitary Standards (SPS), strengthen corporate control and further displace family farming and peasant production.
- Moreover, it took away women's traditional role as "custodian of seed" and thereby marginalized their role in agriculture. In general this also implies loss peasants' access and ownership on genetic resources.

# ***Peasantry and Access to Land and Water in Bangladesh***

- In rural Bangladesh, one percent of landowners own more than 7.5 acres. Ten percent of landowners own between 2.5 and 7.5 acres. The remaining 89% of landowners own less than 2.5 acres. Thirty-nine percent have less than .5 acres.
- Moreover, there is also a gender inequality in land ownership, in 1996, only 3.5% of agricultural land was titled in the name of a woman. Fewer than 10% of women have their name included on any documentation of property rights.
- Lastly, it has an ethnic dimension. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts regions, the migration of settlers onto land held by indigenous people under customary law has caused ongoing conflict, which has recently elevated.
- On the other hand, Vested Property Law of 1948 continues to institutionalize grabbing of land owned by Hindu citizens.

# ***Peasantry and Access to Land and Water in Bangladesh***

- The growth landlessness has been as follows: 1947: 14.3%; 1970: 19.8%; 1975: 32%; 1984: 46% and 2001: 68.8%. Conflict and political tensions relating to land are high.
- The International Finance Corporation (IFC) ranks Bangladesh 119th out of the 183 countries ranked with regard to the “ease of doing business” but 176th out of 183 on the specific issue of “registering property.”
- Moreover, 10% absentee land owners own 50.6% of the total cultivable land of Bangladesh.
- 52 % of the rural population, which accounts for almost 75% of the country’s population, is landless or holds less than .5 acres of land.

# ***Peasantry and Access to Land and Water in Bangladesh***

- The actual amount of khas land should be higher than 3.3 million acres. Evidence of land grabbing becomes evident as serious mismatch is observed in the official statistics of open water bodies: a total of about 2.3 million acres of water bodies is "missing". Similarly, about 71,000 acres of agricultural khas land is also "missing".
- Agricultural land made up 70% of land area in 2003–05, while urban land accounted for between 8% and 20% (GOB data varies). The amount of land available for cultivation is declining, and 60% of Bangladesh's landowners cultivate one acre or less (World Bank 2009a; ADB 2004c; IMF 2005; GOB 2005; GOB 2010).
- Along with these man-made factors, natural disasters (e.g. river erosion) also contribute in loss of land and hence in increase in landlessness.

# Moving towards People's Resource-based Food Sovereignty

- It is clear that along with access to land, the right to productive resources such as seeds and water are crucial in ensuring Food Sovereignty.
- This highlights need of a comprehensive agricultural reform that gives the poor peasants access and control over the land, seeds, genetic resources and water on one hand while freedom of growing crops which are pesticide free and GM free; guarantees an ecological production for present and future generations; supports the rights of women farmers; protect the traditional rites of the indigenous people; assures access of the traditional fishing communities to open water bodies and strengthens the communities in rural areas.
- Food sovereignty therefore calls for a political struggle to establish the legal entitlement to “rights to food” by ensuring access and ownership of peasantry upon natural/productive resources essential for growing safe, culturally acceptable, sustainable and adequate “food” within a framework that assures entitlement to food for all.

# Moving towards People's Resource-based Food Sovereignty

- The process of market liberalization propagated and promoted by the WB/IMF and faithfully implemented by Bangladesh has led to structural constraints in ensuring “food security”.
- The state at present has no economic wing to intervene and influence the market (as it has already dismantled those mechanism in the name of freeing the private sector from government control) as a result the state depends upon its “armed wing” for delivery of “emergency food rationing” – just as it has to rely upon it for “traffic control” or “fight against corruption”!
- The unequal and unfair trade regime has led to a discriminatory system that paralyzes economies such as Bangladesh from gaining through trade in agriculture.
- The global trade in food has led to expansion of poverty in Bangladesh - the children and other vulnerable groups are exposed to chronic malnutrition.
- Presently the agriculture policy of government is leading to destruction of small farmers and small scale agriculture leading to increased landlessness and further aggravation of rural poverty (reduced access to food and livelihood of peasantry).

# Moving towards People's Resource-based Food Sovereignty

- Within this context, the relevance of a genuine agrarian reform becomes a necessity. The “genuine agrarian reform” would empower the landless and farming people; especially women ownership and control of the land they work and which returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it. Peasant families, especially women, must have access to productive land, credit, technology, markets and extension services.
- Governments must establish and support decentralized rural credit systems that prioritize the production of food for domestic consumption to ensure food sovereignty. Production capacity rather than land should be used as security to guarantee credit. To encourage young people to remain in rural communities as productive citizens, the work of producing food and caring for the land has to be sufficiently valued both economically and socially. Governments must make long-term investments of public resources in the development of socially and ecologically appropriate rural infrastructure.

# Moving towards People's Resource-based Food Sovereignty

- The experience of food crisis, famine, hunger and malnutrition experienced by Bangladesh has already revealed that these take place primarily not because there is not enough food in the market, but primarily because there is not enough purchasing power at the hand of people to procure adequate food.
- The discourse of food security, right to food and food sovereignty help us to realize that in a country such as Bangladesh, entitlement to food cannot be generated only by ensuring availability of food or expansion of non-farm employment opportunities – it would essentially require peoples access to productive resources.

**Thank You!!!**

Welcome to discussion....