

## "Reclaiming Food Sovereignty in Africa"

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## Introduction

### Noah Zerbe and Brian Dowd-Uribe

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In 1996, members of Via Campesina, the international movement of peasants, small farmers, landless people and agricultural workers, coined the term "food sovereignty," asserting the right of people to define their own food production systems. Via Campesina's assertion was codified by the 2002 World Food Summit Forum on Food Sovereignty, in which representatives of more than 400 farmers' organizations defined food sovereignty as,

The right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, 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 means the primacy of people's and community's rights to food and food production, over trade concerns.

This right was further clarified with the Declaration of Nyéléni, issued by the Forum for Food Sovereignty meeting in Sélingué, Mali, 27 February 2007. The Declaration of Nyéléni asserts that

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

Food sovereignty represents a fundamental break from the traditional logic of food security. Food security deals only with the ability of individuals to access a certain amount of food each day. Food sovereignty, by contrast, asserts the broader rights of individuals and communities to determine what food they will eat as well as how and where that

food will be produced (Rosset, 2003). In a sense, then, food sovereignty represents an effort to reassert local control over our daily food choices, emphasizing the rights of communities and individuals to make meaningful choices.

An emphasis on local control of the food system starkly contrasts with prevailing trends in agricultural development. Over the past two decades, corporate control over the global food supply has expanded. International financial institutions, governments, corporations and philanthropic groups have intervened to redress perceived problems in African agriculture via the expanded use of new seed technologies, the integration of African food markets into the global economy, and the coordination of food policies within regions of Africa.

As noted in the ACAS Food Sovereignty Task Force statement in this special issue of the ACAS Bulletin, such interventions are deeply problematic. Each centers on the integration of the most prosperous African smallholders into global food markets best characterized as oligopolies. At nearly every stage of the production process, from the purchasing of farm inputs through the processing, distribution, and marketing of farm outputs, a handful of companies dominate the market. Four companies (ADM, Bunge, Cargill, and (Louis) Dreyfus, collectively referred to as the ABCD group), control between 75 and 90 percent of the global grain trade. Four seed firms (Monsanto, Dupont, Syngenta, and Limagrain) control half of all global seed sales. Six agrichemical firms (Dupont, Monsanto, Syngenta, Dow, Bayer, and BASF) control three-quarters of the global agrochemical market (Lawrence, 2011). Food sovereignty challenges the assertion of corporate control in agriculture. Such corporate control has been advanced through numerous avenues, most notably through the promotion of genetically modified seed and the expansion of intellectual property rights that usually accompanies them. Instead, food sovereignty emphasizes improving local production by smallholder farmers

using sustainable, low input methods like permaculture. And it prioritizes production for local consumption rather than for commodification on global markets. Above all, though, food sovereignty builds on the idea of local control over our food system, promoting alternatives to the global neoliberal food system that continues to leave nearly a billion people, including 240 million Africans, hungry and malnourished (FAO, 2011). The articles in this special issue of the ACAS Bulletin speak to a re-emerging food movement in Africa. As a whole, these articles trace the contours and tensions in the food sovereignty movement. In so doing they give a vivid portrait of a movement that presents an African alternative to the neoliberal vision of food security defined predominately in terms of market access.

In "Philanthropy and Sovereignty," Ashley Fent uses a critical feminist framework to engage with the work of the Gates Foundation's agricultural development programs in Africa. Specifically, Fent argues that the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) builds on a model of agricultural development that threatens rather than promotes food sovereignty on the continent. Her gendered analysis offers a powerful lens through which to understand the depolarization of agricultural development and farming technologies in Africa. The next two articles, Brian Dowd-Urbe, Carla Roncoli, and Ben Orlove's "Water Grows Dry: Dry Season Framing, Food Sovereignty, and Integrated Water Resource Management in Burkina Faso," and Miriam Chaiken, J. Richard Dixon, and Agy Herminio's "Food Sovereignty and Safety Nets: NGOs in Northern Mozambique" both seek to ground the question of food sovereignty in specific case studies.

In the case of Burkina Faso, Dowd-Urbe, Roncoli, and Orlove assert that specific state interventions intended to promote expanded access to irrigation have resulted in an increasing orientation towards market rather than subsistence production while simultaneously raising questions about the sustainability of production methods. This reveals

tensions in the food sovereignty movement on the role of markets and technologies in spurring greater food sovereignty. The article asks what is the appropriate level of market integration and technology adoption to promote food sovereignty. Moreover, this case study explores how the recent implementation of integrated water resource management can promote greater local control over water resources driving food production, though much progress remains to be achieved.

Chaiken, Dixon, and Herminio's analysis of the work of the NGO Save the Children in Northern Mozambique offers a more positive conclusion. There, interventions intended to promote food sovereignty, improve access to food, and increase overall local welfare following the country's protracted civil war had real effects. The article outlines some of the key findings from the success of the program. Yet the authors also note that contemporary developments threaten to undermine food sovereignty in the region. The cooptation of land and resources, particularly through resource extraction and land appropriation, threaten to undermine the progress made to date. William Moseley's "Famine Myths: Five Misunderstandings Related to the 2011 Hunger Crisis in the Horn of Africa" (reprinted in an updated format from *Dollars and Sense* magazine's March 2012 issue) similarly provides an analysis of the breakdown of food sovereignty. Using a case study from the 2011 crisis in Somalia, Moseley seeks to critically assess the misconceptions which often guide discussions of food crises and famines. He dismisses the myths that famines are caused by drought or overpopulation, and that a new green revolution could resolve the crisis. Instead, he advocates a solution that prioritizes local food sovereignty.

In "The Global Politics of Local Food," Noah Zerbe asks a slightly different question. Zerbe begins by offering an analysis of the general trends towards globalization and commodification of national food systems over the past thirty years, arguing that numerous emergent alternatives should be seen

largely as a response to the failures of this globalized system. He then examines several nascent alternatives in Durban, South Africa, but finds that despite a history of anti-neoliberal protest and social movements that emphasize decommodification, few efforts are underway to frame an alternative food system in food sovereignty terms.

Food sovereignty has the potential to unite local struggles for access to food, water, and land from around the world. The struggle for food sovereignty is the struggle for the future of African agriculture. Whether that future is one in which farmers rely on expensive inputs to produce specialized produce for sale on global markets as dictated by global markets while millions of their compatriots go hungry, or one in which communities control their own future and where addressing the challenges of hunger is a central aim of food and agricultural policy, depends on the degree to which food sovereignty is adopted as the organizing principle for production in Africa. It also depends on the degree to which the food sovereignty movement, and those sympathetic to the movement, engages those elements driving African agriculture towards greater corporate control.

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# Philanthropy and Sovereignty: A Critical Feminist Exploration of the Gates Foundation's Approach to Gender and Agricultural Development

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## Introduction

In 2008 a group of us began a campaign in Seattle called AGRA Watch, through which we have challenged the Gates Foundation's participation in the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). We developed analyses and actions that contested AGRA's and the Gates Foundation's understandings of hunger and poverty in Africa, and that showed that the Foundation's impacts on the ground are often very different than the claims it makes about its work. The Foundation has been under increasing scrutiny from civil society organizations around the world for funding corporate agricultural research institutions, while claiming that it supports smallholder's and women's agriculture.

The Gates Foundation is not particularly novel in its approach to gender and development, and it reiterates much of the discourse on gender within the development industry. However, we find a feminist critique of the Gates Foundation necessary for two main reasons: first, they are the second

largest philanthropic foundation in the world, after IKEA's charitable branch, with an endowment of \$36.4 billion. Their financial dominance gives them enormous influence over international development agendas. Second, a targeted analysis of their work can highlight problematic assumptions about women and gender that have been critiqued more generally by transnational feminists (e.g. Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988).

The Gates Foundation's *Gender Impact Strategy for Agricultural Development* (GISAD), published in 2008, appears to be the Foundation's most comprehensive public statement about its approach to integrating gender and agricultural development (although the document *Creating Gender-Responsive Agricultural Development Programs*, published in 2012, merits future analysis). In this paper, we investigate how gender is understood within the Gates Foundation's approach to gender and agricultural development, and we bring more general feminist critiques to bear on the Foundation's work. We then analyze how this idea of gender interacts with discourses of food sovereignty. Although we are presently focusing on the GF's gender discourse, we recognize a need to further develop impact assessments based more heavily on empirical data.

## Frameworks

According to Ann Vogel (2006), philanthropy exemplifies a number of elements that remain central to the U. S. capitalist ethic and self-image: an emphasis on personal responsibility and a limited state; voluntarism and aspirations to attain the "American Dream;" and the logic of how social welfare and wealth ought to be redistributed (637). Philanthropy in American society thus has enormous power, both ideologically and financially, and is one means through which the U.S. exports hegemonic ideas about civil society and democracy (Vogel, 2006). Philanthropy also integrates aspects of gender analysis that are in line with these ideologies, which in turn works to redefine the very notion of gender.

A number of scholars have traced the adoption of the “gender agenda” within development agencies and the implications this has had for feminist engagement with development (Cornwall, 2007; Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007). Feminist concerns with gender as a locus of power relationships have often been mainstreamed, diluted, and depoliticized within the frameworks of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD). The development industry has reduced gender to essentialisms that are divorced from historical and material power relationships, and has presented women either as abject victims or heroines. This bureaucratization of gender converts a nuanced and contested social construct into a singular empirical reality and a point of philanthropic intervention.

Development organizations are concerned with solving problems; as James Ferguson (1994) has argued, attempts to locate and distill a “solvable” problem have often led to misrepresentations of less developed countries through the bureaucratic “development” apparatus. Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) state, with particular reference to gender, that it is “almost a necessary condition for institutionalization for ideas to be blunted and reduced to slogans and ideals—they need to be domesticated to fit the exigencies of agency procedures and priorities” (7). The Gates Foundation’s approach to gender is inevitably shaped by the nature of what philanthropy can and cannot do, and by its understanding of its role in global development; specifically, gender is targeted as a point of intervention within a broader “problem-solving” framework around hunger.

### **Transforming Men, Transforming Agriculture**

In the Gates Foundation’s conception of gender, men and male-dominated societies are understood as denying women access to productive resources, thereby inhibiting growth and increasing poverty. Men are positioned as inefficient in development and irresponsible with household resources, and they must be “sensitized” and “trained” through

gendered development strategies (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007, 7). The Foundation then places itself in the paternalistic role summed up by Gayatri Spivak (1988) where “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (296).

The Gates Foundation instrumentalizes gender as a set of quantifiable, technical indicators of project effectiveness that Program Officers can use as a mechanism for disciplining and managing gender integration. For instance, empowerment is measured by “‘women’s control of agricultural decision-making’ and ‘women’s participation in leadership positions in farmer organizations’” (GISAD, 2008, 4). Through a Gender Checklist, the Program Officer and potential grantees can “establish expectations and considerations with regard to gender” (GISAD, 2008, 7). The potential grantee must have “specific milestones, processes, or actions” (GISAD, 2008, 5) that effectively involve women, and the Gates Foundation also offers its own techniques for measuring “gender effectiveness through Monitoring and Evaluation” (GISAD, 2008, 5). These guidelines are necessary because, as the Foundation states, their partners and grantees “may initially lack the ability or capacity to meaningfully address gender” (GISAD, 2008, 6). The checklist therefore acts as a disciplinary tool to bring men in the Global South in line with a universalized and bureaucratized conception of gender. As a result, states the Gender Impact Strategy, “We see increased understanding of the importance of gender dynamics in the communities where we work, among our partners, and within our programs” (GISAD, 2008, 2).

According to the Strategy, women face a number of social and economic limitations in accessing opportunities to maximize and profit from their contributions (GISAD, 2008, 3). The dilemma faced by small farmers is understood, in Bill Gates’ words, as follows: “Three-quarters of the world’s poorest people – most of them in Africa and South Asia – get their food and income from farming small plots of land. These farming families don’t have quality tools, good seeds, reliable markets, or money to get the most from their farms. So they work hard, but they get no traction, and they usually

stay hungry and poor” (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011). In the Foundation’s analysis, African farmers have failed to keep up with farmers in Asia, the US, and Europe because they—especially women—lack access to improved seeds, techniques, and markets (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011) The Strategy asserts that “these limitations constrain both female farmers’ ability to improve their lives and that of their families. These limitations also constrain the transformative power of agriculture to alleviate poverty and hunger” (GISAD, 2008, 3). This transformative power does not lie in agriculture as currently practiced by women; it is linked to the ability of agriculture to absorb capital in the form of technological improvements, mechanization, “improved” seed varieties, and the commercialization of staple food crops.

For the Gates Foundation, hunger and poverty are caused by lacks that are ahistorical and intrinsic rather than produced; by exclusively natural forces rather than by a combination of natural and political ones; and by a misuse and over-use of existing resources. The solutions prescribed for these problems include more market participation, increased productivity, and infrastructural development. Central to this effort is the development of agricultural technologies and seeds that are compatible with women’s labor, lives, and bodies. The Strategy states that consultations with women will ensure that new crop varieties will be adopted on the ground: “Women are also generally the food preparers, which needs to be taken into account when developing varieties of subsistence crops by taking into account taste preferences, and relative ease of preparation or impact on labor. Close consultation with the ultimate beneficiary will help prevent the development of a variety that is not adopted due to lack of consultation and consideration of the users [sic] needs” (GISAD, 2008, 12).

Women’s involvement is based on several assumptions: first, that women will benefit from the reductions in labor time that are offered by technological advancement; second, that women’s tastes must be included at preliminary stages of

research to ensure that new seed varieties can be effectively marketed and consumed; and third, that women are apolitical agents/beneficiaries who are willing to put their faith in Gates’ and others’ trusteeship over seeds and agricultural resources and who accept the theory that global poverty and hunger are motivated primarily by under-production of crops. The Gates Foundation’s analysis of gender acknowledges women’s work, but women are understood as requiring intervention and inputs in order to become fully successful. Fundamentally, this denies long histories of women’s success in seed selection, domestication, and marketing, not only in the development of agriculture on the African continent but also in the transmission of agricultural knowledge systems to other regions, as occurred with rice through the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Carney, 2001).

The Gender Impact Strategy frames its objectives as “opportunities for women to participate in income-generating activities, learning and decision-making processes continue to increase,” and “the quantity and quality of food available to women continues to increase; leading to improved health and nutrition in families because of the unique role of women in the household” (GISAD, 2008, 2). Women in the Gender Impact Strategy and the Gates Foundation’s broader agricultural development policies are wrested from historical geographies of power and inequality, and produced as doubly neoliberal subjects: first, as empowered capitalist agents and entrepreneurs, and second, as the caretakers of the community who must step in where the state and the market will not. Mercedes González de la Rocha (2007) has contested this neoliberal “myth of survival,” built off of the findings of specific studies in Latin America in the 1980s that discovered “resources of poverty.” The social networks, households, and relationships of solidarity theorized by progressive scholars were generalized into an idea that women and the poor have an infinite capacity to absorb hardship, which was highly compatible with the neoliberal policies promoted by the World Bank and development agencies. These policies posited a temporary phase of “adjustment” and devolved responsibilities away from heavy state

interventions; the ability of communities to withstand adjustment thus relied on individuals' and especially women's use of social networks and often unpaid labor (for instance, the informal economy grew enormously in many parts of the world in this period, as people sought to make ends meet). However, the capacities of social networks and women to absorb additional labor can and do run out (González de la Rocha, 2007), and faith in the ability of gender equality to automatically increase productivity and solve poverty has often not been borne out on the ground (O'Laughlin, 2007).

### **Gender and Food Sovereignty: An Alternative Approach?**

The GISAD's emphasis on women and families shows responsiveness to criticisms of previous agricultural development approaches (such as the Green Revolution in Asia and Latin America) that privileged men. In rhetoric and to some extent in funding it highlights the importance of gender through women's involvement and recognition. But participation does not necessarily equal empowerment, and some of the Foundation's statements suggest that people are waiting around to be included in the Gates Foundation's and its grantees' agendas. For instance, the GISAD (2008) notes that "in order for women to contribute meaningfully in their communities and in agriculture, they need opportunities to engage in financially viable labor so they can have the ability to improve their well-being and that of their families" (9). This effaces what women already do in their communities, and it puts much of the burden of supporting the family on women's abilities to generate income. The idea of food sovereignty, which was originally promoted by the international organization *La Via Campesina* and is gaining traction within activist and certain policy circles, offers an alternative way of examining issues of gender issues in agriculture. The Declaration of Nyéléni, held in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali, stated, "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through

ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." Since then, food sovereignty has become a unifying but decentralized framework for organizational mobilization, transnational networking, and policy demands around the rights of farmers and communities to articulate their own visions of their food systems. The name "Nyéléni" was mobilized to pay homage to a legendary Malian woman who farmed to feed her people, and the Declaration concluded with hopes that food sovereignty would spread, such that "the spirit of Nyéléni permeates across the world and becomes a powerful force to make food sovereignty a reality for peoples all over the world." In this formulation, African women, represented by Nyéléni, are not the recipients of external gender assistance, training, or "involvement"—rather, it is they who offer instructive lessons about food and farming to the rest of the world.

The food sovereignty movement has forcefully tackled gender issues, through a number of *La Via Campesina* declarations addressing women's rights (e.g. *Via Campesina*, 2012). The focus on women's contributions highlights the structural conditions that block women's equal access to land and rights; but unlike the Gates Foundation, the food sovereignty framework locates problematic conditions both locally and globally, in the infringements of corporations and top-down development programs. Raj Patel (2012) has explained that women's participation and rights are central to food sovereignty, because of vast gendered inequalities in rates of hunger and access to food. Women, though continuing to produce much of the world's food, have borne the brunt of the negative social and economic consequences of liberalization, particularly in agricultural and care work. For instance, a study on Latin America noted a "feminization of agriculture," in which women have become the primary workers on household farms as men have migrated to the cities (Deere, 2005). Additionally, a number of African feminist scholars and organizations have furthered discussions of these links between land, livelihood, neoliberalism, and gender issues. The contributors



to the 2009 issue of *Feminist Africa*, for instance, have generated multi-layered analyses of what patriarchy, agribusiness, land rights, and labor have meant for women's rights and lives (Tsikata, 2009).

Some women's organizations have also adopted the language of food sovereignty to frame their work. Navdanya, the organization founded by Indian environmental activist and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, explains its Mahila Anna Swaraj women's food sovereignty program: "It is based on celebrating and rejuvenating women's knowledge and skills in biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and food production and in artisanal organic food processing" (Navdanya, 2009). This underscores the knowledge and practices that women are already using; the website continues by noting the danger of corporate interventions undermining women's control over seed selection. Nevertheless, there remain opportunities to strengthen gender analyses within food sovereignty frameworks. The 2008 Maputo Declaration of *La Via Campesina* essentializes women as having a "special relationship" with nature, and in other statements by *La Via Campesina*, gender is largely defined as involving women rather than involving power relationships that shift depending on social, political and economic contexts. (For example, microcredit schemes' focus on entrepreneurial women can exacerbate gendered tensions, particularly when men experience high rates of unemployment.) Gendered roles and sources of power within agricultural systems are diverse—some women have complete control over certain crops, whereas others are responsible for seed selection and harvesting but do not ultimately make their own profit from the crop, and still others work for low wages in agribusiness.

*La Via Campesina* (2012) refers to such structures as "the patriarchal capitalist system that is more oppressive to women, regardless of their place in society all over the world." This understanding of women as globally oppressed, in spite of their particular social positions or assets, fosters a vision of emancipation that follows a linear development trajectory and entails a vast generalization of women's experiences. *La Via Campesina's* critique

of the patriarchal capitalist system also denies the importance of place, in contrast to food sovereignty's general emphasis on scale, place, and locally-defined food systems. Discussing women's history as advancing from one of oppression to one of future emancipation ignores the particularities of women's experiences, the unevenness of gender and power relations across space and time, and the sources of economic and social power that women may already have.

The idea of food sovereignty has mobilized global networks and has amplified unifying conceptions of struggle and hope in the food system, but the crucial connections it draws between the locally defined and the globally relevant could be matched by an equally dialectical approach to gender. Women's roles as successful food traders and entrepreneurs in parts of West Africa, for instance, may offer a counterpoint to instances of women's marginalization and oppression. Incorporating an understanding of existing spheres of women's power into a more nuanced "global" would thus open up the concept of gender, revealing both its possibilities and its constraints.

In spite of these critiques, food sovereignty does offer a plurality and flexibility that can resist a streamlined and instrumentalized conception of gender. The Nyéléni Newsletter (2011) highlights the many different forms of action women are taking at the grassroots level; organizations have appropriated the language of food sovereignty in order to participate in growing transnational networks and to articulate concerns about the corporate takeover of agriculture. Partly because it is a loosely knit organizational and ideological framework rather than a large funding apparatus like the Gates Foundation, food sovereignty provides opportunities for diverse organizations to network and learn from each other, and it accommodates multiple contexts for women's empowerment and gender equality. The paradigm of food sovereignty could incorporate something like Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism," built on what she calls Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWA). Stiwanism suggests that diverse indigenous African feminisms must be understood

within their social contexts (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, 229-230)—an idea that resonates with food sovereignty’s emphasis on communities’ agricultural self-determination. Similarly, the broad-based struggle for food sovereignty resonates with the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)’s “transformative feminism,” which offers a conceptualization of solidarity and social justice that stresses the role of gender alongside class struggle, corporatism, and varied social, political, and economic positions (Mbilinyi and Shechambo, 2009). Food sovereignty could also incorporate numerous other feminist theories, examples of hope, and critiques of gender inequalities because, unlike the paradigm of global development, it does not seek a generalizable object in need of a large-scale intervention. Instead, it promotes the ability of communities to draw on their own resources and their own sources of strength.

## Conclusion

The Gates Foundation’s philanthropic approach sees gender as a means of realizing and improving development. As the Gates Foundation’s Gender Impact Strategy states, “Agricultural Development must address gender in order to achieve significant impact in the reduction of hunger and poverty” (2008, p. 2). Gender is “targeted” as a point of intervention, not because of the inherent value in gender equity but because it is “proven” to increase output and growth (O’Laughlin, 2007, p. 24). The Gates Foundation’s conception of gender does material work in the world, and it may indeed offer women improved opportunities. However, it does so in a social, political, and economic context wherein other, more locally accountable sources of opportunities have disintegrated. By rendering this context invisible in its work, the Gates Foundation presents Third World women and their societies as eternally waiting for rescue from poverty, hunger, and disease. They are stripped of socio-political agency in order to be cast as beneficiaries and re-made as entrepreneurial agents within the Foundation’s development agenda. In contrast, food

sovereignty offers a framework of re-politicizing and reclaiming both “development” and “feminism.” We conclude, then, with some words from the 2008 Declaration of Maputo: “All of us together . . . make a responsible commitment to build new and better human relationships among us, as a necessary part of the construction of the new societies to which we aspire.”

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## Water Grows Food: Dry Season Farming, Food Sovereignty, and Integrated Water Resource Management in Burkina Faso

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"Now is the time for Food Sovereignty."  
--Nyéléni Declaration, 2007, Selingue, Mali

"I wish there was enough [river] water so that I can produce vegetables and sell them."  
--Farmer, Jan 2012, Sitiena, Cascades Province, Burkina Faso.

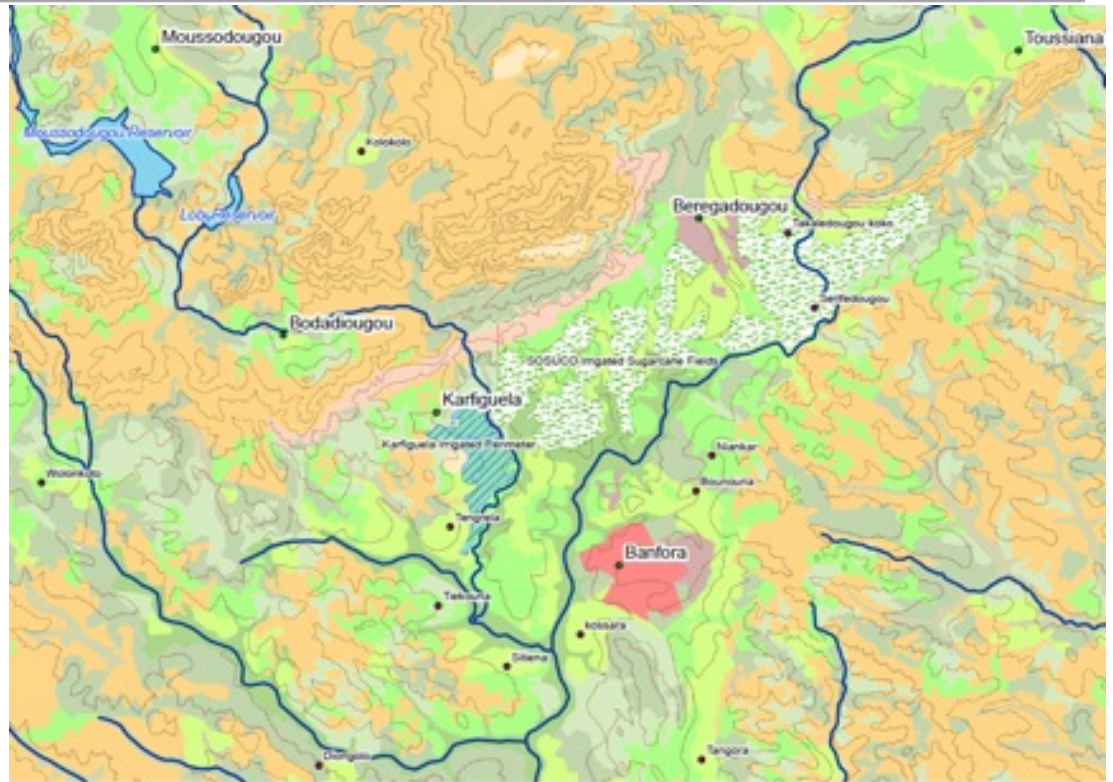
### A food production revolution

Karim could be confused with one of millions of African smallholder farmers who tend small plots of land for their subsistence. He grows three hectares of maize and one hectare of vegetables in a small village in southwestern Burkina Faso. He and his family plow their field with a pair of oxen, and weed it with hand-held hoes. When asked where the water comes from for his crops, Karim answers, "God."

But there is a lot more to Karim's story than this succinct anecdote can convey. Karim cultivates the three hectares of maize and one hectare of vegetables during the *dry* season, in addition to the crops he grows during the wet season. These dry season crops are not primarily destined for the household, but are sold in local markets, and some are even exported to Ivory Coast. He uses a diesel powered pump and a series of PVC pipes to direct water from a nearby river to irrigate his fields. He grows two improved varieties of maize and applies herbicides before planting. He purchases improved vegetable seeds from a private distributor who gets them shipped directly from Europe. Pest pressure is high, so he applies multiple applications of different, crop-specific pesticides to his vegetable and maize crops. He also makes multiple applications of mineral fertilizers. Much of these investments are done with very little support from government or non-governmental organizations.

Karim, and many farmers like him, are at the center of shifting agricultural trajectories in sub-Saharan Africa. The adoption of new technologies, including water pumps, tractors, transgenics, improved seeds,

and agro-chemicals is changing the face of agricultural production on the continent. These changes are occurring at a rapid pace and present new challenges for governments, particularly as they relate to extension and natural resource management. This essay uses the case of Karim and other dry season farmers like him along the riverbanks of the Comoé river to explore (1) some of the tensions that arise from this rapid technological change in agricultural production as it relates to the food sovereignty movement and, (2) the role of integrated water resource management (IWRM) in facilitating food sovereignty.



**Figure 1:** The Comoé River Basin in southwestern Burkina Faso

### Setting the scene: The Upper Comoé basin and small-scale motorized irrigation

The Upper Comoé river basin is one of few permanent rivers in Burkina Faso, West Africa. The river originates in southwestern Burkina Faso, crossing the border with Cote d'Ivoire to flow into the Gulf of Guinea. The Burkina Faso portion of the basin includes the Upper Comoé and its main tributary, the Yannon. Water from the two rivers is captured into three reservoirs, the Lobi and Moussoudougou on the Comoé, and the Toussiana on the Yannon (see Figure 1). These reservoirs provide water for (1) a sugar company, *La Nouvelle Société Sucrière de la Comoé*, (SN-SOSUCO); (2) a water company that supplies the urban center of Banfora, *L'Office nationale de l'eau et de l'assainissement* (ONEA), (3) a 350 hectare irrigated perimeter near the village of Karfiguela,

and (4) dry-season riparian farmers like Karim along both the Comoé and the Yannon. Other users include local fishermen, cattle herders, and downstream communities (Roncoli et al. 2009).

As in most of Sudano-Sahelian Africa, food production in the Upper Comoé basin is inextricably linked to water. The Upper Comoé basin is located in one of the more moist areas of the Burkina Faso; the largest town in the region, Banfora, receives an average of 1100mm of rain annually (Roncoli et al. 2009). This relatively abundant rainfall has afforded the southwestern part of the country a status as a breadbasket for the country. Until recently most food production was rainfed – the main exception being the Karfiguela irrigated perimeter mentioned above. But that has changed since the introduction of diesel-powered water pumps.

In the context of the Sudano-Sahelian region, the Upper Comoé basin is a relative latecomer to mechanized water pumps and dry season agriculture. Since the 1970s, the adoption of mechanized water pumps has revolutionized dry season agriculture throughout the region. As early as the late 1980s, World Bank-funded agricultural development projects (ADP) heavily subsidized the purchase of diesel-powered water pumps in Nigeria. Between 1983 and 1989, the Kano State ADP distributed over 40,000 water pumps at subsidized prices to producers (Kimmage 1991). In neighboring Niger, small-scale dry season agriculture with water pumps did not significantly advance until the mid 1990's when the World Bank financed the *Project Pilote de Promotion d'Irrigation Privée* (PIIP). By 2008 the project facilitated the adoption of over 10,000 mechanized water pumps (Ehrnrooth et al. 2011).

In Burkina Faso, significant mechanized water pump adoption did not occur until the mid-2000s. An African Development Bank funded project, *Projet d'Appui au Développement Local dans la Comoé, Léraba, et Kenedougou* (PADL– CLK) began subsidizing the purchase of water pumps in the Upper Comoé basin and neighboring areas in 2004. Pumps were offered to producers for purchase at 10-15% of their total value; their final cost was roughly \$280 USD.<sup>1</sup> This subsidized price made the purchase of these pumps a possibility for many local producers; by 2011, approximately 200 pumps had been sold in the basin. The revenue generated from these subsidized pumps has allowed producers to purchase new water pumps from private sellers from around \$600 USD. These pumps, and their PADL– CLK counterparts, have sufficient capacity to irrigate up to 5 hectares.

According to interviews with over 50 farmers in the Upper Comoé basin, in 2003, total cultivated area for dry season farming along the riverbanks was less than 30 hectares. Producers irrigated almost exclusively with hand-held aluminum watering

cans. In contrast, our survey of dry season riparian agriculture, conducted in July 2012, found that farmers now cultivate over 600 hectares, distributed in individual plots ranging from 0.1 to 5 hectares in size. Almost all of these plots are irrigated with diesel powered water pumps. Dry season farmers primarily grow vegetable crops, including cabbage, eggplant, onions, hot pepper, tomatoes, and okra, which are destined for consumption throughout Burkina Faso and neighboring Cote d'Ivoire. Every morning dozens of bicycles and motorbikes make



**Figure 2.** A man transports eggplant by motorcycle to a vegetable market in Banfora, Burkina Faso. In the foreground, a woman transports cabbage by bike.

the 10–20km ride from the fields to the regional capital of Banfora, where the produce is sold in a thriving vegetable market (see Figure 2). Residents of local villagers say that dry season farming has become profitable enough for youth to remain in their villages rather than migrating to Cote d'Ivoire or larger towns in Burkina Faso for work.

Another wave of support for dry season farming in the region came in 2011, with Operation Bondofa, a highly publicized campaign to promote dry season maize production in order to supply other areas of

<sup>1</sup> Using an exchange rate on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004 of 539 FCFA = \$1 USD.

the country that were experiencing food insecurity due to drought during the previous rainfall season. Operation Bondofa (which means “filling the granaries” in Dioula, the regional *lingua franca*) provides farmers with subsidies for fertilizer, improved seed, and tractor services, and a guaranteed purchasing price of 150 FCFA/kg. Propelled by significant political backing during an election year, Operation Bondofa established target quotas for planted areas, including 1,500 hectares for the Comoé and neighboring Léraba province. The Minister of Agriculture visited Banfora to encourage farmers to plant Bondofa maize during the dry season. During the event, farmers expressed their concerns about water availability, stressing that there was not enough water in the river to meet targeted quotas. However, many of them did shift from vegetable to maize production to take advantage of the subsidies and price guarantees.

### **Food production and food sovereignty in the Upper Comoé basin**

There is little doubt that the adoption of mechanized water pump technologies has promoted greater food production in the Upper Comoé basin and improved the livelihoods of local residents. But the adoption of these technologies simultaneously draws attention to questions of sustainability. As producers continuously farm the same agricultural fields, will they be viable in the near future? Will water resources be efficiently, equitably and sustainably managed? Does a reliance of technologies and agricultural inputs based on fossil fuels mean that farmers in the Upper Comoé basin are simply replicating the unsustainable agricultural practices that are considered antithetical to a food sovereign future?

This section compares the food production in the Upper Comoé with the vision outlined in the Nyéléni Declaration – a flagship document of the food sovereignty movement. The comparison highlights tensions in the food sovereignty movement regarding the roles of technology,

markets, and the state at facilitating sovereign food production. It also shows how framing the vision outlined in the declaration as a goal to aim at rather than a prescription to abide by can perhaps move the multiple factions of the food sovereignty movement towards improving current food production strategies.

As described elsewhere, food sovereignty signifies many things to many different people – and in this regard resembles a “big tent” where multiple and potentially contradictory trajectories are present (Patel 2009). Nonetheless, it is often conventionally thought of as a rights-based framework. This can be seen in the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report’s definition of food sovereignty simply as, “the rights of people and sovereign states to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies” (IAASTD 2009, pg. 10).

In 2007, and about 500 kilometers to the west of the Upper Comoé basin, Via Campesina, a worldwide coalition of organizations supporting small sustainable family farmers, gathered 500 activists from over 80 countries to set out a broad vision for the food sovereignty movement. They created what is known as the Nyéléni Declaration outlining their conception of a food sovereign future (Via Campesina 2007). This document goes into greater detail than the rights-based approach referred to in the IAASTD report.

A clear tension in the document is how and whether technologies can contribute to food sovereignty. The only explicit references to technology in the Nyéléni Declaration are negative. The Declaration states that food sovereignty organizations are fighting against “technologies and practices that undercut our future food producing capacities damage the environment and put our health at risk. Those include the so-called ‘old’ and ‘new’ Green Revolutions.” But the Declaration does not explore how the adoption of certain technologies may facilitate some of its livelihood and rights goals. To

use the case of the Upper Comoé basin, the adoption of diesel powered water pumps has increased the ability of local producers to achieve key goals articulated in the Declaration, including to “earn a living wage,” and to remain in their homes.” Moreover, the Declaration states that producers, like those in the Upper Comoé basin, should be able to “determin[e] their own food producing systems.” Comoé producers have exercised this right to determine their food production systems via the adoption and use of water pumps and agricultural inputs.

This ambiguity extends to the role of markets at facilitating sovereign food production. The document uses the term “markets” only twice, and in the same paragraph. But its use bears the tension over whether markets can be viewed as a vehicle for or an impediment to sovereignty. The Declaration states that food sovereignty “puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.” It goes on to state that food sovereignty “priorities local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability.” The document seems to be prioritizing regional and local food production, but wants to underscore that larger “market demands” should not dictate the direction of food production.

These ambiguous stances, where technologies and markets can both serve as vehicles for and impediments to food sovereignty, reveal the difficulty in outlining the means to move towards food sovereignty. Just as not all food production is “sovereign,” not all technological use or market activities contribute to food sovereignty. For this reason food sovereignty is perhaps best viewed as a continuum, where certain production strategies, technological uses and levels of market integration lead to more or less sovereign food production. These configurations of social, economic and agricultural elements will vary considerably

depending on the particular context of food production and consumption. When viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, greater food sovereignty becomes a goal to strive towards. It turns the discussion to the ways in which each of these elements can improve the sovereignty of food production.

This next section explores whether one intervention in particular, the adoption of integrated water resource management, pushes food production in the Upper Comoé basin towards greater sovereignty. In so doing it exposes the complex ways in which technological adoption and market integration articulate with food production. It also reveals how both technology and markets have the potential to move food production in the Upper Comoé towards principles congruent with the food sovereignty movement.

### **Dry season farming and water conflict in the Upper Comoé basin**

The key to Karim’s success has been his ability to access water. This ability has been made possible by technical and institutional innovations, namely diesel-power pumps and improved water resource governance. But the introduction of diesel-powered motor pumps has also exacerbated tensions over the use of scarce water resources, while the country’s efforts to reform water sector policies and institutions has yet to translate into equitable and sustainable water use in the Upper Comoé basin.

In the last decade, there has been a global shift in water policy towards integrated water resource management, or IWRM. The Global Water Partnership (GWP) defines IWRM as “a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems” (GWP 2012). The concept of IWRM emerged from a series of international water expert conferences where participants agreed that



integrated approaches were needed to deal with the multiple dimensions of water resource management. In short, IWRM is a vehicle to achieve efficient, equitable and sustainable water use. It is now “the hegemonic paradigm for discussing, legitimizing and implementing policies regarding the management of the world’s water resources” (Orlove and Caton 2010, pg 408).

But, like many overarching narratives, IWRM is thin on specifics of the policies and institutions that can help achieve its goals of more equitable, efficient and environmentally sustainable water use. Moreover, as Orlove and Caton (2010) assert: “IWRM does not venture into...the complex political question over how its principles will be struggled over and fought out in concrete settings” (pg. 410). As IWRM becomes more prominent, it is imperative that researchers analyze how these policies are developed and identify the individuals and groups who win and lose, and assess their contribution towards greater efficiency, equity and sustainability of water use. It is also important to assess their contribution to building systems of food production that are congruent with food sovereignty principles.

Burkina Faso is considered an early global adopter of IWRM and one of only five sub-Saharan African nations judged by the Global Water Partnership to have “strategies in places, or plans well underway, that incorporate the main elements of an IWRM approach” (GWP 2006, pg. 4). The implementation of IWRM hinges on the establishment of decentralized water governance bodies that empower users to manage local water resources. These local water user committees – known by their French acronym CLEs (*Comités Locaux d’Eau*) – are based on the French model for governing water resources. Many observers consider Burkina Faso’s CLEs a model for other nations in the region (Petit and Baron 2009).

Recognizing that full implementation of IWRM in Burkina Faso would take time, policy-makers fast-tracked the creation of pilot CLEs in a few areas in

the country that suffered from a high level of tension and conflict surrounding water resources. The Upper Comoé basin was among the first IWRM implementation sites because of a high level of conflict over water resources. Much of the water conflict in the Upper Comoé revolves around the historic use of water by SOSUCO, the local sugar cane company.

SOSUCO was established before independence by French capital and further developed during the post-colonial era of state-directed development. As a parastatal, it appropriated about 10,000 hectares of land in the Upper Comoé basin, resulting in the dispossession and displacement of local communities. Resulting tensions were further exacerbated in the harnessing of local water resources into the three reservoirs, built by the state between the 1970s and 1980s, a period marked by severe droughts, during which the state invested heavily in reservoir construction as a way of addressing food insecurity and water shortage. Following the government’s embrace of neoliberal policies in the 1990s, SOSUCO was privatized and acquired by an investment firm controlled by the Aga Khan, a Pakistani millionaire, who is also the spiritual leader of the Isma’ili Muslims. Renamed SN-SOSUCO, it retained high level of trade and fiscal protection, with its entire sugar production being destined to the domestic market. Management reforms ushered in by privatization gave rise to periodic waves of labor struggles that further fueled animosity over the past expropriation of local lands and appropriation of water resources. A peak of labor unrest occurred in June 2011, but has since then subsided. At the same time, tensions surrounding water use have continued to surface periodically.

Historically SN-SOSUCO has controlled water in the three reservoirs – whose infrastructure it maintains, by a formal agreement with the state – using it almost exclusively for its own irrigation and sugar processing needs. But the adoption of small-scale irrigation pumps increased tensions around dry-season use of river water. Local water users

have increasingly demanded access to river water as their use of that water has risen. In March-April 2007 the river downstream of the Karfiguela irrigated perimeter ran dry for the first time in local memory, despite above average rainfall during the previous rainy season (1.300mm). Irrate farmers from downstream villages marched on government offices in Banfora in protest, accusing SN-SOSUCO of willfully “starving” (“*affaïmer*”) them. The central government dispatched the Minister of Commerce whose ministry has authority over SN-SOSUCO and who was also originally from one of the protesting villages, to mediate the conflict.

This conflict – covered by national media – led officials to prioritize the Upper Comoé basin as a site for intervention, propelling the formation of the CLE Upper Comoé (CLE-HC) in 2008. The CLE-HC was designed as a mechanism to mitigate water conflicts and improve management of water resources, and is composed of all relevant stakeholders, including user representatives, elected officials, ministries, government officials, customary and religious leaders, and civil society organizations (Sally et al. 2011). The main focus of negotiations that occur within the CLE-HC is the development of a consensual plan for water releases from the reservoirs and water diversions into the network of canals and pipelines that serve different users. This plan, which is developed at the onset of each dry season when users prepare to irrigate their fields, evaluates the water needs of local user groups and allocates a portion of water to be released from the reservoirs to meet those needs.

The adoption of IWRM and the creation of the CLE-HC by the Burkinabè state may be seen as consistent with the goals of greater food sovereignty as outlined in the Nyéléni Declaration. A key theme in the Declaration is greater control of local natural resources by food producers. The Declaration states that, “Food sovereignty...ensures that...the rights to use and manage our...waters...are in the hands of those of us who produce food.” Before the establishment of the CLE-HC, water use was essentially controlled by the sugar cane company.

But the introduction of diesel-powered pumps created a new category of users who were able to appropriate river water for food production. At the same time, the new IWMI policies and creation of the CLE-HC democratized water resource management, broadening decision making concerning water allocation in the Upper Comoé basin. In so doing, Burkina Faso’s movement towards IWRM aids in the pursuit of a future of greater food sovereignty and demonstrates how national policies can contribute to creating a favorable institutional context for smallholder-driven food production.

However, a closer examination of the 2012 conflict surrounding water resources in the Upper Comoé basin shows the persistence of serious challenges to achieving this goal. Years of poor infrastructural maintenance by SN-SOSUCO led to serious problems with the Moussoudougou dam, the largest in the system, which meant that the reservoir could only be partially filled. Lower reservoir capacity coincided with relatively low rainfall during the 2011 season (900 mm) to result in perhaps the largest water shortage in recent history in the basin, and the first such water shortage since the CLE-HC was created in 2008. SN-SOSUCO argued that greater water releases were not possible, as enough water had to be stocked in the reservoirs to ensure that its sugar cane fields could be irrigated for the entire dry season, particularly during the hot period before the new onset of the rains. At the same time, downstream farmers agitated for increased releases of water to service their own parched fields. Attempts by the CLE-HC to produce a consensual plan to distribute the water deficit among users failed.

Hundreds of riparian farmers along the riverbanks between the Karfiguela perimeter and the confluence of the Comoé and Yannon went without water for up to three weeks. The river completely dried up, causing fish to die off and crops to dry out. A month-long conflict ensued. After weeks of failed attempts to secure additional water releases, in March 2012 farmers threatened to march on

government offices in Banfora. This threat made local government officials very nervous, as such public action would inevitably attract national media attention, casting doubts on the Ministry of Agriculture's strategy for relieving famine in the drought-stricken areas through Operation Bondofa. Officials scrambled to address the situation locally by meeting with the farmers to explain that the water scarcity was caused by the infrastructural problems of the Moussoudougou dam as well as by the poor rainfall during the previous rainy season. At the same time, however, the political and humanitarian objectives of Operation Bondofa made it imperative that food production targets for the province be met. The situation eventually became so worrisome that the Minister of Agriculture himself intervened to pressure SN-SOSUCO to release enough water from the reservoirs to enable downstream farmers to irrigate their fields. This contributed to easing tensions as also did an unexpected early rain that replenished the river.

The episode also illustrates the opportunities and challenges that characterize the relationship between water resource management and food production. Established as a way to manage water conflicts in the basin, the CLE-HC can serve as a way to assure and even increase water access to support greater local food production and security. It could help shift water resources away from large-scale and chemical intensive sugar cane production to smallholder-based grain and vegetable production. But key impediments to realizing this potential remain. Even though more inclusive, decentralized forms of water management have been established, and embraced by central government and local stakeholders, SN-SOSUCO retains control over key aspects of the water resource infrastructure and information, including the keys to open the sluice gates and the data on reservoir levels and rates of flow. Furthermore, when tensions heat up, the processes of expressing and negotiating different claims continue to unfold outside the new institutional framework for water governance, in traditional spaces of citizen protest

and state intervention. Established as the primary mechanism for resolving water conflict, the CLE-HC was largely bypassed during the March 2012 events. Instead, it was state officials who intervened, as they had done for years, to serve as the key intermediaries between SN-SOSUCO and the downstream farmers.

### **Towards embracing technologies and markets for greater food sovereignty**

As agricultural production and resource use patterns change across Africa, the Upper Comoé basin illustrates the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Technological introductions can, as in the case of diesel powered water pumps, require relatively little involvement of agricultural extension or other time and resource-heavy interventions to improve agricultural productivity. Water pumps dramatically increase the use of water resources expanding food production in an area where water is a limiting factor. The benefits of this production boom are shared relatively equitably as smallholders continue to dominate production. But these advances have come via the use of green revolution technologies with potentially serious environmental and public health implications.

The food sovereignty movement reminds us that not all increases in smallholder food production moves communities toward greater food sovereignty. But the contradictory impulses present in the movement's flagship document – the Nyéléni Declaration – bear the tensions of the movement, unclear in the role that technology and markets can play in food sovereignty. When viewed as a goal to be attained, rather than a prescription to be followed by, the ambiguity in the Nyéléni Declaration can be viewed as an opportunity to clarify how different interventions – be they the adoption of new technologies, or greater integration into local, regional, or national markets – can drive outcomes that look more like the food sovereign vision. This suggests the value of research and analysis that

would assess the ability of different interventions to promote food sovereignty.

The food production revolution in the Upper Comoé basin is not a perfect illustration of food sovereign principles. Green revolution technologies, including herbicides, pesticides, chemical fertilizers and diesel powered pumps promote increases in food production. The majority of food produced goes to local and regional markets, not into the bowls of local residents. In the case of the Operation Bondofa, support for maize production was motivated by political objectives as well as by the government's goal of reducing national dependency on external food aid. At the same time, institutional innovations for water governance have devolved more power to local residents to secure access to water resources. Their increased economic strength has translated to increased political clout, as the resolution of the recent 2012 water shortage demonstrates. Nonetheless these advances in water governance remain marginal at best, and significant room remains to further devolved authority over local water resources to local user groups.

But the Upper Comoé basin shows how technology adoption can drive real gains in food production and significant increases in food production. A food sovereignty movement that embraces these intermediate producers can help move their production systems towards greater sustainability. By intermediate we refer to the adoption of more mechanized and chemical-dependent growing practices with deeper integration to local and regional markets. Interventions to promote greater sustainability could include civil society, donor and state interventions that aid farmer knowledge, such as efforts to promote integrated pest management and farmer field schools. Food production will inevitably evolve as technologies and other interventions changes the production landscape. A vibrant food sovereignty movement can pull these interventions in the direction of greater sustainability, and in so doing, clarify its role in shaping food sovereign futures.

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## Food Security and Safety Nets: NGOs in Northern Mozambique

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Like most humanitarian organizations, Save the Children is committed to offering the most effective programming to improve living conditions of people in developing countries, especially focusing on the welfare of children. This paper describes work in northern Mozambique that Save the Children has been managing since 1997, with the financial support of USAID and other donors. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the programming, and to achieve the target goal of improving food security and child nutritional status, staff of Save the Children have conducted several rounds of data collection about the communities served to ensure that programs are as culturally sensitive and feasible as possible. The authors of this paper have all worked with Save the Children in some capacity, J. Richard Dixon as the program

manager for more than a decade, Agy Herminio as one of the field staff and now nutrition project manager, and Miriam Chaiken as an independent consultant who has worked with the project several times over the past decade to collect data and help shape program design.

Over the past decade programming has changed in response to what we have learned, and in response to changing priorities from the donor community. But the consistent goal of this project has been to improve people's access to high quality food, increase food sovereignty, and ultimately, to facilitate an improvement in the welfare of children living in this area. The project area, Nampula Province in northern Mozambique, has had a long history of challenges that have made food access and control problematic, beginning with the long war for independence (1962-1975) followed by the long civil war (1975-1992). These conflicts caused the destruction of what little infrastructure had existed, displaced people from their homes and productive lands, and resulted in the abandonment of many important practices that helped people create and manage resources. The signing of peace accords began a new era where Mozambicans could begin to rebuild their nation, and more importantly rebuild the civil society that permits people to prosper and live in peace. More than three decades of conflict resulted in an adult population where very few had ever attended formal education, virtually non-existent health care and public education systems, and very low agricultural productivity in areas once considered the bread basket of the nation. It is in this context of challenges and possibilities that Save the Children began working in Nampula with a variety of programmatic approaches aimed at improving food access, food sovereignty, and livelihoods. We have been conducting formative research that is intended to improve the efficacy of Save the Children programming since 2004. In the course of our research efforts we have examined land tenure, household composition and resource allocation, food usage and preference patterns, social safety nets, gender, and labor availability, among other

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank all of the staff of Save the Children in Nampula for their assistance and support, for the community members throughout the province who willingly gave of their time, and Tina Lloren, Lisa Parrott, Greta-Stina Engelbrecht, and Heather Danton for their important contributions to the work. Authors can be contacted through [mchaiken@nmsu.edu](mailto:mchaiken@nmsu.edu)

topics. One of the clear challenges to the people of Nampula Province has been accessing sufficient quality and quantity of reliable food sources, as evidenced by the high frequency of child stunting (>40%), which is a marker of long-term food insufficiency.

Nampula is one area that has experienced some of the emerging challenges to ensuring food access, but has remained relatively unaffected by some of the processes of globalization that have eroded food security elsewhere. In other regions of the country, and increasingly throughout Africa, multinational organizations have undermined food sovereignty. Challenges to food sovereignty include the co-opting of land and resources through neocolonial processes of resource extraction and land appropriation, which have negative impacts on the abilities of rural people to feed themselves and have secure livelihoods (Rosset 2011). This process is now clearly emerging in Nampula Province as Chinese interests have begun building a rail line and upgrading the port at Nacala Porto for eventual transshipment of goods overseas, and Chinese logging and cement manufacturing industries have been established in the past few years. Additionally the road from the port city to the inland capital city of Nampula, and then beyond to the Malawi border, has been upgraded with funds from the World Food Program. The intention was to permit easier transshipment of food commodities to the landlocked interior, but this also provides a corridor to hasten the impact of forces of globalization. While these multinational forces may soon exert pressure on the viability of the traditional subsistence production systems, they could also potentially provide a means to improve livelihoods, if local farmers could penetrate the market system, either through production of goods for export, or through value chain contributions. But for the smallholders of Nampula, the opportunities to achieve this economic advantage appear to be minimal. Local farmers engage in subsistence production, but have minimal market participation except through occasional marketing of cashews, and productivity is insufficient to meet needs. In

examining the reasons for low agricultural productivity we concluded that land access did not appear to be the primary constraint to production. The severe disruption caused by decades of war has rendered much of the land in Nampula in legal limbo, and it appears that usufruct land rights are the norm when it comes to smallholders. When we asked in interviews about how particular parcels of cultivated land were acquired, we expected to hear that these were handed down matrilineally, as the local Makhua people are traditionally matrilineal. Instead we also heard about people receiving lines through patrilineal relatives, through “borrowing”, and through in essence squatting on lands that were unoccupied. When we examined the most significant constraints to local food production it appears that labor, rather than land, is the more pressing challenge. The annual shortfalls in food production result in an annual hunger season (Longhurst Chambers and Swift, 1986), sometimes prolonged by crop failures resulting from drought. As a consequence of the food insufficiencies that last from 3 to 6 months, many smallholders find it imperative to take on odd jobs and wage labor to get by during this season – precisely at the time of the year when investing labor in land clearing and cultivation is most critical. This creates a vicious circle, as shortages in one year result in labor being siphoned away from agriculture, ensuring a subsequent shortfall in the following growing season.

In order to address this, and other pressing problems, our research in 2007 examined the nature of existing social safety nets in Nampula, in part to see whether traditional self-help patterns were helping to mitigate against this annual stress. Our goal was to understand the current conditions in order to use the existing social fabric as the foundation for new programs that Save the Children would be introducing. Efforts were already underway to engage local people in new collaborative ventures for self-help and mutual assistance. In the nutrition and health sphere, Save the Children had already established programs to train local women as community volunteers, or

*animadoras* to serve as peer health-educators in their respective communities, and farmer's groups that were trying to introduce improved agricultural practices. We reasoned that having a comprehensive understanding of the nature of existing patterns of social support would allow us to build on these networks, and help foster new forms of collaboration. Ultimately we hoped to improve people's welfare, and secure their livelihoods through new collective action.

We conducted literature reviews about the nature of social institutions that might be operative in the local communities. According to our research, we could expect to find types of rotating cooperative labor groups in which neighbors help each other in turn, to manage the most difficult tasks in the farming system. In addition, we expected the mosques and the local religious traditions would reinforce community cohesiveness and facilitate cooperation (Bonate 2006; Pitcher 1998). Elsewhere, in nearby regions outside of Mozambique, there are also rotating credit groups and other types of cooperative farmers' groups, and we anticipated finding similar such institutions in Nampula. But upon examination, through conducting a dozen focus groups that gathered 250 local residents, we found no indication of the traditional institutions providing material, financial, or moral support to the local residents, despite the documentation of these traditions in earlier eras. This was powerful evidence of the deeply disruptive influence that the wars had engendered in this region (Chaiken, Dixon, and Herminio 2012; Chaiken et al. 2009).

Somewhat to our surprise, our focus group interviews in the Nampula villages revealed that although none of the traditional social systems were still operational, people had quickly come to rely on the social networks that had been created by Save the Children's interventions. As noted above, the two initial interventions were aimed at improving agriculture and health, and ultimately food security/food sovereignty in this region, where nearly half the children have chronic malnutrition as measured by stunting. This imperative was easily

recognized and embraced by the local population – they were keenly aware of the suffering they had experienced in the decades of war, and eager to embrace plans to improve their livelihoods and the welfare of their children. This was not a development goal imposed on locals by a well-meaning international NGO. Indeed, this reflected local people's very real goals for themselves, which may explain why the actions of Save the Children have been so effective.

In the first years of program activities in Nampula, Save the Children trained local staff to be extensionists and health educators, and they in turn recruited local volunteers to participate in groups. Two types of peer groups were formed. The first focused on agricultural productivity. In addition to the other problems of infrastructure and civil society that had affected Nampula, the late 1990s saw the arrival of the Cassava Brown Streak disease (CBSD), a disease that affected the staple crop, cassava. As is found in many regions of east and southern Africa, droughts are also appearing more regularly and with greater severity. These greatly affect the other critical crop in the region, maize, so the reliance on cassava has been intensifying, as it is generally more drought-tolerant than maize or other grain crops. The agricultural staff had the goal of establishing a network of farmer groups that could train local farmers on improved agricultural techniques, and replicate improved, disease-resistant planting stock of cassava, so that members of the group would be able to plant varieties that had shown resistance to the CBSD.

Each extensionist formed several groups and worked with volunteer farmers to cooperatively tend a demonstration plot where they could learn first-hand about the improved cultivars. They planted the Nihkwaya variety of cassava that had demonstrated resistance to the CBSD. Cassava is a root crop that has the virtue of being quite drought tolerant – it can remain in the ground and continue to grow indefinitely if it is not harvested, rather than having an obligatory annual harvest season as is typical of grains and pulses. Additionally the leaves

of the plant that grow above ground are a nutritious vegetable and are frequently harvested in small quantities while the tuber develops below ground. Cassava thus can provide continuous food access throughout its growing cycle. When affected by CBSD the leaves show signs of yellow spots and they die and drop off the plant, and when the tuber is inspected it has pulpy, inedible qualities – improving the cassava quality and health was central to Save the Children’s goals of improving food security.

The farmer groups received stalks of cassava for replication. Unlike other plants, cassava is not propagated by seed, but vegetatively by cutting the stalks that grow above ground into 4-5 pieces and transplanting each stalk piece and allowing it to take root. Thus at the point of harvest when the farmer typically cuts the stalk off of the tuber and keeps the tuber to eat, he or she is able to then divide the stalk into several pieces and each plant can produce 4-5 new plants in the successive growing season. The farmers’ groups received samples of the improved cassava and were soon able to grow enough of the improved variety that each of the members could take part of the harvest home for planting in their own, individual fields.

By 2011 more than 45,000 farmers had participated in these groups, demonstrating the remarkable success of the farmers’ groups. Each participant received planting stocks to use on their own farm. In addition, surveys have indicated that each participant has typically shared improved planting stock with several relatives or neighbors, so the real numbers of farmers who have been helped through these groups far exceeds the count of those who formally participated in a farmer group. Another important variable is the participation of women farmers, as here, as well as many other areas of Africa, the production of food and management of food resources is largely done by women. The farmer groups included both men and women, some groups including both sexes and some were single sex groups, but overall the project estimated that

40% of participants in these farmer’s groups were women.

The training of women to serve as village peer health educators, termed *animadoras*, [earlier, this is merely defined as “community volunteers” ; so perhaps add this in brackets and vice versa, or explain? ] was the other major activity that intended to improve health and welfare. Like the proliferation of farmer’s groups, the growth of the numbers of participants demonstrates the success of this program. To date nearly 2,000 women have volunteered and undergone training as an *animadora*, they have established nearly 4,000 groups, and nearly 60,000 women have participated in one of these groups as a member.

The women who volunteered, and were sometimes nominated by their communities, all agreed to participate in several days of training in one of the larger towns or village centers, as well as in periodic refresher courses. They received no salary for the work they did. They were truly volunteers whose only compensation was a colorful cloth wrapper, commonly worn by African women (*capulana* in Portuguese), and the meals and accommodations they received in the course of their training. Each woman volunteer agreed, upon return to her home village, to establish two women’s groups, each with 10-15 women participants. These groups were to meet weekly and the *animadora* used her training to prepare a weekly lesson on topics of public health, child feeding practices, or hygiene for the participants to discuss. At the end of the year, each *animadora* could pronounce her original group as complete in their training, and then establish two new groups with another dozen women.

In retrospect, given the rapid growth of the Save the Children programs in terms of the volunteer participants, it is not surprising that participants in our focus group interviews indicated that the only social safety nets they were able to rely upon were those that had been introduced by Save the Children through the Farmers and *animadora* groups.



The active participation in the Save the Children programs, and active volunteering likely reflects several related variables that fostered this success. In large measure the professionalism of the Save the Children staff and the transparency in their operations are partly to account for the overwhelming buy-in by local people. The success of these programs is also attributable to the emergency response that Save the Children implemented in 2004. At this time our research documented a localized, but critical crop failure that resulted in severe hunger in the coastal districts of Nampula Province. This information allowed Save the Children to partner with the World Food Programme and provide supplemental food rations to 50,000 children and pregnant women to see them through to the next harvest, and to mitigate against what would have been a very prolonged and difficult hunger season. Local people report this is the *only* help they had received at a critical time, and that virtually everyone wished to participate in this food distribution. There were no longer any traditional means of support to mitigate against this crisis. In some respects, this short-term crisis which Save the Children helped mitigate effectively may have helped increase the trust and reliance in the organization by local people, who could see that there were means to improve their welfare through collective action.

As a consequence of what we have learned in Nampula, other new microcredit and labor mobilization programs have been initiated that build on these now well established networks within communities. The *Ajuda Mutua* (Mutual Aid; hereafter AM) program brings together farmers to work in rotation on each others' fields, so the work is less taxing and the heavy jobs can be tackled in an economy of scale. This type of labor rotation was formerly practiced in the area, but no one in the population that we interviewed had actually engaged in this practice themselves. They recognized that rotating labor groups had been past practice, but this was abandoned as a consequence of the social disruption of the war, and due to negative attitudes towards the compulsory

collective actions that the Frelimo-Party government had tried to impose on rural people immediately following Independence. A second type of collaboration is the Village Savings and Loan Program (VSL) in which members of the savings group each contribute an agreed upon amount to a central "bank" that is kept by members. The savings group meets weekly and each participant pays in his or her agreed upon share, and with great transparency it is deposited into their lock box that can only be opened with two separate keys kept by two group members. At the end of a savings cycle, often a year, the members each receive back the funds they have saved. While the sums they save are small by many standards, in a community where there are always emergencies and urgent things requiring money, this helps people save their own funds out of temptations' way for investment in larger items that require capital outlay. The VSL groups, like those of the farmers and *animadoras*, requires high degrees of local participation and are predicated upon high transparency in operations. This has helped local people re-establish relationships of trust and collaboration after a long history of mistrust, suffering, and violence.

The impact of the AM and VSL groups is currently being examined, as Save the Children created four experimental treatments to see which type of economic change is most effective in realizing improved welfare for children. The four experimental conditions are communities with VSL only, AM only, both VSL and AM, and those where no such interventions were introduced. The next step of data collection is to ascertain which of these treatments is the most effective, what impact these have had on the children's welfare, and what strategies might permit the scaling up of these approaches in other regions served by Save the Children's programs. We are hopeful that the previous success in rebuilding social safety nets will be borne out in this case as well, and that measureable improvements in child welfare and food security will be the outcome.

Overall, if we examine the essential conditions that have helped ensure the success of these programs, it is the acknowledgment of the agency of the local people and the importance of their full participation in both establishing priorities and in seeing the project through. These success stories provide us with both cautionary tales for future such enterprises, and a strong understanding of the power of collective action, the value of transparency in development programs, and the importance of shared goals in community development.

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## Famine Myths: Five Misunderstandings Related to the 2011 Hunger Crisis in the Horn of Africa

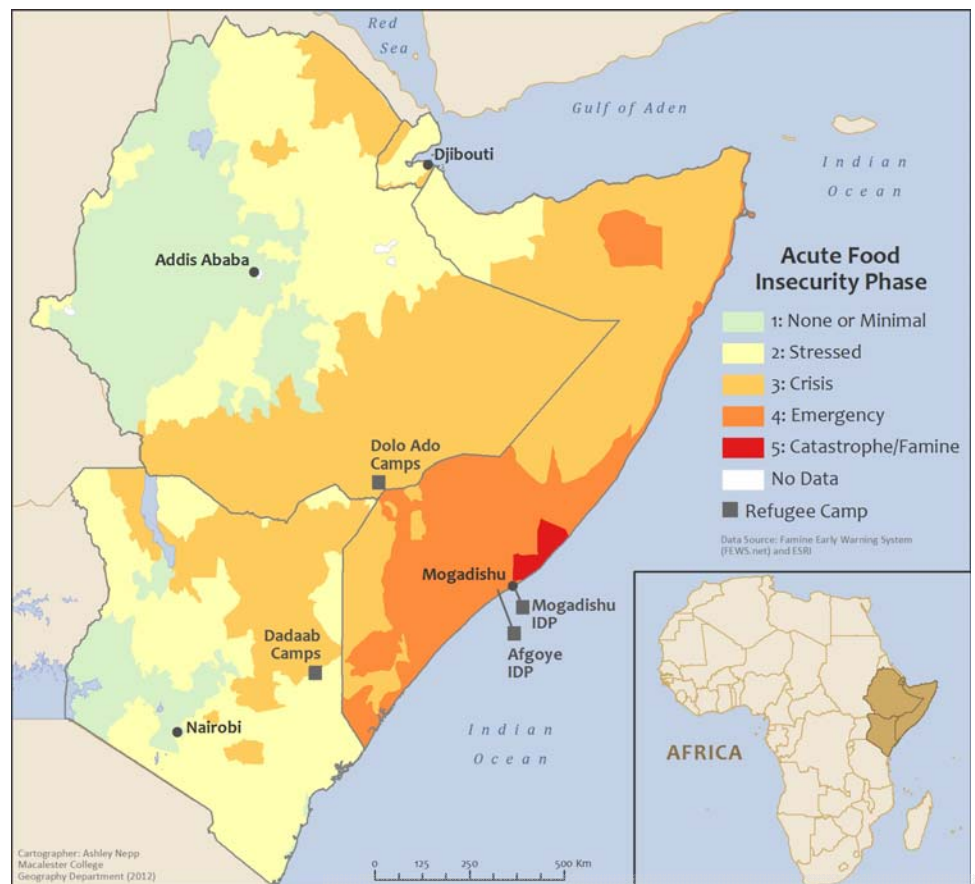
By William G. Moseley<sup>1</sup>

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The 2011 famine in the Horn of Africa was one of the worst in recent decades in terms of loss of life and human suffering. While the UN has yet to release an official death toll, the British government estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 people died, most of them children, between April and September of 2011. Although Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti were all badly affected, the famine hit hardest in certain (mainly southern) areas of Somalia. This was the worst humanitarian disaster to strike the country since 1991-1992, with roughly a third of the Somali population displaced for some period of time.

Despite the scholarly and policy community's tremendous advances in understanding famine over the past 40 years (Sen 1981; Watts and Bohle 1993; de Wall 2005), and increasingly sophisticated famine

early warning systems (Moseley and Logan 2005), much of this knowledge and information was seemingly ignored or forgotten in 2011. While the famine had been forecasted nearly nine months in advance, the global community failed to prepare for, and react in a timely manner to, this event. The famine was officially declared in early July of 2011 by the United Nations and stated to be over on February 3, 2012. Despite the official end of the famine, 31% of the population (or 2.3 million people) in southern Somalia remains in crisis. Across the region, 9.5 million people continue to need assistance. Millions of Somalis remain in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. The famine reached its height in the period from July to September 2011, with approximately 13



**Figure 1: Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa Region, November-December 2011. Based on data and assessment by FEWS-Net (a USAID sponsored program). Cartography by Ashley Nepp, Macalester College.**

<sup>1</sup> This article is a lightly edited version of the same article first published in *Dollars & Sense*, March/April, 2012, reprinted here with the kind permission of the publisher.

million people at risk of starvation. While this was a regional problem, it was most acute in southern Somalia because aid to this region was much delayed. Figure 1 provides a picture of food insecurity in the region in the November-December 2011 period (a few months after the peak of the crisis).

The 2011 famine received relatively little attention in the U.S. media and much of the coverage that did occur was biased, ahistorical, or perpetuated long standing misunderstandings about the nature and causes of famine. This article addresses these “famine myths” and is organized around five key misunderstandings related to the famine in the Horn of Africa. These myths are: 1) drought was the cause of the famine; 2) overpopulation was the cause of the famine; 3) increasing food production through advanced techniques will resolve the food insecurity over the long run; 4) U.S. foreign policy in the Horn of Africa was unrelated to the crisis; and 5) an austere response may be best in the long run. It is important to interrogate these misunderstandings, especially as another famine in the West African Sahel is unfolding as this article goes to press. The links between food security and food sovereignty are also significant. While famine is sometimes viewed as a phenomenon driven by endogenous factors (e.g., drought and population growth), this article draws strong connections between such crises and broader political economic factors – an approach which jibes well with a number of food sovereignty concerns.

## Myth #1: Drought was the cause of the famine

While drought certainly contributed to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, there were more fundamental causes at play. Drought is not a new environmental condition for much of Africa, but a recurring one. The Horn of Africa has long experienced erratic rainfall. While climate change may be exacerbating rainfall variability, traditional livelihoods in the region are adapted to deal with situations where rainfall is not dependable (Moseley 2011a).

The dominant livelihood in the Horn of Africa has long been herding, which is well adapted to the semi-arid conditions of the region (see Figure 2). Herders traditionally ranged widely across the landscape in search of better pasture, focusing on



*Two young Somali women herd their goats to the Juba River in Dollow, Somalia (February 2, 2012). Credit: ©FAO/SIMON MAINA*

different areas depending on meteorological conditions. The approach worked because, unlike

fenced in pastures in America, it was incredibly flexible and well adapted to variable rainfall conditions. As farming expanded, including large-scale commercial farms in some instances, the routes of herders became more concentrated, more

vulnerable to drought, and more detrimental to the landscape.

Agricultural livelihoods also evolved in problematic ways. In anticipation of poor rainfall years, farming households and communities historically stored surplus crop production in granaries. Sadly this traditional strategy for mitigating the risk of drought was undermined from the colonial period moving forward as households were encouraged (if not coerced by taxation) to grow cash crops for the market and store less excess grain for bad years. This increasing market orientation was also encouraged by development banks, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and African Development Bank.

The moral of the story is that famine is not a natural consequence of drought (just as death from exposure is not the inherent result of a cold winter), but it is the structure of human society which often determines who is affected and to what degree.

## **Myth #2: Overpopulation was the cause of the famine**

With nearly 13 million people at risk of starvation last fall in a region whose population doubled in the previous 24 years, one might assume that these two factors were causally related in the Horn of Africa. Ever since the British political economist Thomas Malthus wrote “An Essay on the Principle of Population” in 1798, we have been concerned that human population growth will outstrip available food supply. While the crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya appeared to be perfect proof of the Malthusian scenario, we must be careful not to make overly simplistic assumptions (Moseley 2011b).

For starters, the semi-arid zones in the Horn of Africa are relatively lightly populated compared to other regions of the world. For example, the population density of Somalia is about 13 persons per sq. kilometer, whereas that of the U.S. state of

Oklahoma is 21.1. The western half of Oklahoma is also semi-arid, suffered from a serious drought in 2011, and was the poster child for the 1930s Dust Bowl. Furthermore, if we take into account differing levels of consumption, with the average American consuming at least 28 times as much as the average Somali in a normal year, then Oklahoma’s population density of 21.1 persons per sq. kilometer equates to that of 591 Somalis.

Despite the fact that Oklahoma’s per capita impact on the landscape is over 45 times that of Somalia (when accounting for population density and consumption levels), we don’t talk about overpopulation in Oklahoma. This is because, in spite of the drought and the collapse of agriculture, there was no famine in Oklahoma. In contrast, the presence of famine in the Horn of Africa led many to assume that too many people was a key part of the problem.

Why is it that many assume that population growth is the driver of famine? For starters, perhaps we assume that reducing the birthrate, and thereby reducing the number of mouths to feed, is one of the easiest ways to prevent hunger. This is actually a difficult calculation for most families in rural Africa. It’s true that many families desire access to modern contraceptives, and filling this unmet need is important. However, for many others, children are crucial sources of farm labor or important wage earners who help sustain the family. Children also act as the old-age social security system for their parents. For these families, having fewer children is not an easy decision. Families in this region will have fewer children when it makes economic sense to do so. As we have seen over time and throughout the world, the average family size shrinks when economies develop and expectations for offspring change.

Second, many tend to focus on the additional resources required to nourish each new person, and often forget the productive capacity of these individuals. Throughout Africa, some of the most productive farmland is in those regions with the

highest population densities. In Machakos, Kenya, for example, agricultural production and environmental conservation improved as population densities increased (Mortimore and Tiffen 1995). Furthermore, we have seen agricultural production collapse in some areas where population declined (often due to outmigration) because there was insufficient labor to maintain intensive agricultural production.

Third, we must not forget that much of the region's agricultural production is not consumed locally. From the colonial era moving forward, farmers and herders have been encouraged to become more commercially oriented, producing crops and livestock for the market rather than home consumption. This might have been a reasonable strategy if the prices for exports from the Horn of Africa were high (which they rarely have been) and the cost of food imports low. Also, large land leases (or "land grabs") to foreign governments and corporations in Ethiopia (and to a lesser extent in Kenya and Somalia) have further exacerbated this problem. These farms, designed solely for export production, effectively subsidize the food security of other regions of the world (most notably the Middle East and Asia) at the expense of populations in the Horn of Africa.

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### ***Land Grabs***

*Long term leases of African land for export-oriented food production, or "land grabs," have been on the rise in the past decade. Rather than simply buying food and commodity crops from African farmers, foreign entities increasingly take control of ownership and management of farms on African soil. This trend stems from at least two factors. First, increasingly high global food prices are a problem for many Asian and Middle Eastern countries which depend on food imports. As such, foreign governments and sovereign wealth funds may engage in long-term leases of African land in order to supply their own populations with affordable food. Secondly, high global food prices*

*are also seen as an opportunity for some Western investors who lease African land to produce crops and commodities for profitable global markets.*

*In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia (which has historically been one of the world's largest recipients of humanitarian food aid) has made a series of long term land leases to foreign entities. The World Bank estimates that at least 35 million hectares of land have been leased to 36 different countries, including China, Pakistan, India and Saudi Arabia. Supporters of these leases argue that they provide employment to local people and disseminate modern agricultural approaches. Critics counter that these leases undermine food sovereignty, or people's ability to feed themselves via environmentally sustainable technologies which they control.*

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### **Myth #3: Increasing food production through advanced techniques will resolve food insecurity over the long run**

As Sub-Saharan Africa has grappled with high food prices in some regions and famine in others, many experts argue that increasing food production through a program of hybrid seeds and chemical inputs (a so-called "New Green Revolution") is the way to go.

While outsiders benefit from this New Green Revolution strategy (by selling inputs or purchasing surplus crops), it is not clear if the same is true for small farmers and poor households in Sub-Saharan Africa. For most food insecure households on the continent, there are at least two problems with this strategy. First, such an approach to farming is energy intensive because most fertilizers and pesticides are petroleum based. Inducing poor farmers to adopt energy-intensive farming methods is short sighted, if not unethical, when experts know that global energy prices are likely to rise. Second, irrespective of energy prices, the New Green Revolution approach requires farmers to purchase

seeds and inputs, which means that it will be inaccessible to the poorest of the poor, i.e., those who are the most likely to suffer from periods of hunger.

If not the New Green Revolution approach, then what? Many forms of bio-intensive agriculture are, in fact, highly productive and much more efficient than those of industrial agriculture. For example, crops grown in intelligent combinations allow one plant to fix nitrogen for another rather than relying solely on increasingly expensive, fossil fuel-based inorganic fertilizers for these plant nutrients. Mixed cropping strategies are also less vulnerable to insect damage and require little to no pesticide use for a reasonable harvest. These techniques have existed for centuries in the African context and could be greatly enhanced by supporting collaboration among local people, African research institutes, and foreign scientists. Developing food production strategies that local people control has also been referred to as food sovereignty.

#### **Myth #4: U.S. foreign policy in the Horn of Africa is unrelated to the crisis**

Many Americans assume that U.S. foreign policy bears no blame for the food crisis in the Horn and, more specifically, Somalia. This is simply untrue. The weakness of the Somali state was and is related to U.S. policy, which interfered in Somali affairs based on Cold War politics (the case in the 1970s and 80s) or the War on Terror (the case in the 2000s).

During the Cold War, Somalia was a pawn in a U.S.-Soviet chess match in the geopolitically significant Horn of Africa region. In 1974, the U.S. ally Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was deposed in a revolution. He was eventually replaced by Mengistu Haile Mariam, a socialist. In response, the leader of Ethiopia's bitter rival Somalia, Siad Barre, switched from being pro-Soviet to pro-western. Somalia was the only country in Africa to switch Cold War allegiances under the same government. The U.S. supported Siad Barre until

1989 (shortly before his demise in 1991). By doing this, the United States played a key role in supporting a long-running dictator and undermined democratic governance.

More recently, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) came to power in 2006. The UIC defeated the warlords, restored peace to Mogadishu for the first time in 15 years, and brought most of southern Somalia under its orbit. The United States and its Ethiopian ally claimed that these Islamists were terrorists and a threat to the region. In contrast, the vast majority of Somalis supported the UIC and pleaded with the international community to engage them peacefully. Unfortunately, this peace did not last. The U.S.-supported Ethiopian invasion of Somalia begun in December 2006 and displaced more than a million people and killed close to 15,000 civilians. Those displaced then became a part of last summer and fall's famine victims (Samatar 2011).

The power vacuum created by the displacement of the more moderate UIC also led to the rise of its more radical military wing, al-Shabab. Al-Shabab emerged to engage the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was put in place by the international community and composed of the most moderate elements of the UIC (which were more favorable to the United States). The TFG was weak, corrupt, and ineffective, controlling little more than the capital Mogadishu, if that. A low-grade civil war emerged between these two groups in southern Somalia. Indeed, as we repeatedly heard in the media last year, it was al-Shabab that restricted access to southern Somalia for several months leading up to the crisis and greatly exacerbated the situation in this sub-region. Unfortunately, the history of factors which gave rise to al-Shabab was never adequately explained to the U.S. public. Until July 2011, the U.S. government forbade American charities from operating in areas controlled by al-Shabab—which delayed relief efforts in these areas.

## **Myth #5: An austere response may be best in the long run**

Efforts to raise funds to address the famine in the Horn of Africa were well below those for previous (and recent) humanitarian crises. Why was this? Part of it likely had to do with the economic malaise in the U.S. and Europe. Many Americans suggested that we could not afford to help in this crisis because we had to pay off our own debt. This stinginess may, in part, be related to a general misunderstanding about how much of the U.S. budget goes to foreign assistance. A lot of Americans assume we spend over 25% of our budget on such assistance when it is actually less than one percent.

Furthermore, contemporary public discourse in America has become more inward-looking and isolationist than in the past. As a result, many Americans have difficulty relating to people beyond their borders. Sadly, it is now much easier to separate ourselves from them, to discount our common humanity, and to essentially suppose that it's okay if they starve. This last point brings us back to Thomas Malthus, who was writing against the poor laws in England in the late 18th century. The poor laws were somewhat analogous to contemporary welfare programs and Malthus argued (rather problematically) that they encouraged the poor to have more children. His essential argument was that starvation is acceptable because it is a natural check to over-population. In other words, support for the poor will only exacerbate the situation. We see this in the way that some conservative commentators reacted to last year's famine.

The reality was that a delayed response to the famine only made the situation worse. Of course, the worst-case scenario is death, but short of death, many households were forced to sell off all of their assets (cattle, farming implements, etc.) in order to survive. This sets up a very difficult recovery scenario because livelihoods are so severely

compromised. We know from best practices among famine researchers and relief agencies that you not only need to detect a potential famine early, but also intervene before livelihoods are devastated. This means that households will recover more quickly and be more resilient in the face of future perturbations.

## **Conclusion**

While the official famine in the Horn of Africa region is over, 9.5 million people continue to need assistance and millions of Somalis remain in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Although this region of the world will always be drought prone, it needn't be famine prone. The solution lies in rebuilding the Somali state and fostering more robust rural livelihoods in Somalia, western Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The former will likely mean giving the Somali people the space they need to rebuild their own democratic institutions (and not making them needless pawns in the War on Terror). The latter will entail a new approach to agriculture that emphasizes food sovereignty, or locally appropriate food production technologies that are accessible to the poorest of the poor, as well as systems of grain storage at the local level that anticipate bad rainfall years. Finally, the international community should discourage wealthy, yet food insufficient, countries from preying on poorer countries in Sub Saharan African countries through the practice of land grabs.



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# The Global Politics of Local Food: Community Resistance and Resilience in Durban, South Africa

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“For many people, eating particular foods serves not only as a fulfilling experience, but also as a liberating one—an added way of making some kind of declaration. Consumption, then, is at the same time a form of self-declaration and of communication” (Mintz 1996, 13).

## Introduction: An Emergent Double Movement

The dramatic expansion of neoliberalism since the late 1970s has generated considerable resistance. In Polanyi’s (1944 [2001], 130) description, “The dynamics of modern society [were] governed by a double movement: the market expanded continuously but this movement was met by a countermovement checking to expansion in definite directions. Vital though such a countermovement was for the production of society, in the last analysis it was incompatible with the self-regulation of the market, and this with the market system itself.” For Polanyi, the double movement was the necessary result of the contradictory forces of economic liberalism, which places the self-regulating market at the center of social reproduction, and demands for social protections against the worst excesses of the market system

itself. The interplay between these two demands, expressed by competing class interests in society, results in a continuous give-and-take between regulation and deregulation.

Neoliberalism’s expansive reach marked the end of the twentieth century as the pinnacle of market society. However neoliberalism’s subjugation of the most basic elements of social reproduction to market forces provoked a sharp response from individuals seeking to insulate social relationships from the worst excesses of the market. Around the world, the double movement took different forms. In some countries, students mobilized around the right to education and the need to keep schools and universities affordable. In others, demands for “living wages” or shorter working hours were expressed. More recently, calls to re-regulate the banking sector in the United States and Europe in response to the global financial crisis can be seen as part of this movement.

In South Africa, the double movement took several forms. As the post-apartheid South African government increasingly adopted market-based approaches to development, subjecting greater and greater portions of social reproduction to the market system, civil society responded. Disparate responses were unified in their opposition to the linked processes of financialization, privatization, and commodification at the heart of the neoliberal project. From the Anti-Eviction Campaign in the Cape Flats to the Soweto Electricity Crisis Commission, anti-privatization struggles erupted across South Africa in the early 2000s (cf., Bond, Desai, and Ngwane 2012, Bond 2010, Bond and McInnes 2006, Bond 2005, McKinley 2005, Ngwane 2003). These struggles, organized around the collective identity of “the poors” (Desai 2002) served as a new form of social mobilization, supplementing the racial and gendered dynamics of exclusion that characterized both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

The unification of the poors around access to the most basic elements of social reproduction—housing, water, electricity, and so on—mobilized the anti-apartheid movement’s legacy in support of

a continued struggle against economic inequality. Thus, as Richard Mokolo, the leader of the Crisis Water Committee in Orange Farm outside Johannesburg, put it, “Privatization is the new kind of apartheid. Apartheid separated whites from blacks. Privatization separates the rich from the poor” (Smith, 2008). In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, such a framing made sense. Since the end of apartheid and the transition to nonracial democracy in 1994, economic inequality in South Africa has increased dramatically. While the racialized system of political rule has been dismantled, the country’s current economic system has brought with it sharp increases in inequality. In 1994, South Africa’s Gini index stood at 59.3. By 2005, it had increased to 65.0, making South Africa one of the most unequal societies in the world—far more unequal (at least economically) than it was under apartheid. While a new group of black elites had emerged, the vast majority of South Africa’s black and Asian population continues to slide deeper into poverty. Beginning in the anti-eviction struggles in Chatsworth, “Identities were being rethought in the context of struggle and the bearers of these identities were no respecters of authority. The particular kind of identity congealing in this moment had no grand ideological preconditions and so could not be co-opted by government sloganeering. It was organized around the primary realization that resistance had to be offered against the hostilities being visited on the poor” (Desai 2002, 44). From Chatsworth to Soweto, from Khayelitsha to Talfelsig, from Orange Farm to Kennedy Road, the poors mobilized to resist the commodification of social reproduction under neoliberalism. Opposition to privatization became the focus of struggle in South Africa, with new movements drawing on the rich tradition of anti-apartheid activism, perhaps most directly in the form of the rent strikes of the 1980s, when striking South Africans refused to pay rents, fees, and fines imposed by the apartheid state.

In the context of post-apartheid inequality, the poors mobilized around an effort to “recommon the commons.” In 2002, a R10 (Ten Rand) campaign was launched in Durban. Protestors marched on

municipal offices, demanding to pay back rent on matchbox houses owned by the city government. From their perspective, R10 was a “fair price” to pay for monthly services. They also demanded that the R10 payment settle all arrears claimed by the government. Similar marches were soon mobilized in other South African cities. This campaign echoed historical demands for “just prices” by British peasants during the transition to capitalism in an effort to establish a “moral economy” of provision, where protestors would break into bakeries, take the bread they needed for subsistence, and leave what they felt was a fair or “just price” for the goods they took (Thompson 1966).

The South African government has attempted to portray popular resistance by the poors as emblematic of a longstanding “culture of nonpayment.” Under apartheid, black South Africans often mobilized nonpayment campaigns, in which they would refuse to pay for state services both to protest unequal provision of state services and to weaken the apartheid state. However, while nonpayment certainly was (and I would argue continues to be) a symbolic statement of resistance associated originally with the anti-apartheid movement and later with the anti-privatization movement, the decision not to pay for services today is not always a voluntary one. As Desai concludes, “Contrary to government accusations, there was no ‘culture of nonpayment.’ There was simply no income in these areas. What had taken root was an economics of nonpayment” (Desai 2002, 17).

More importantly, though, efforts by the post-apartheid government to reframe the question of nonpayment are linked to a redeployment of the concept of citizenship. In both the energy and water sectors, the South African government attempted to frame nonpayment as a violation of an implied social contract between the state and the people. In doing so, it reframed citizenship in neoliberal terms. In the context of the imposition of prepaid meters for water and electricity, von Schnitzler (2008, 907) notes that, “Central to this process [of deploying the new meter technologies] was the constitution of citizens as fiscal subjects overlaying the dominant

rights-based discourse of the anti-apartheid movement, allied to a quest to ‘normalise’ the fiscal relationship between the state and its citizens in the aftermath of apartheid. The act of payment, and thus of recognizing one’s obligation to the state, came to be seen as a prerequisite for inclusion within the new political community.” Rights, in other words, belonged to individuals insofar as they paid the requisite fees; citizenship became conflated with consumerism.

### **Food Sovereignty in eThekweni**

Beyond the collective identity expressed by the poor in the context of struggles to assert the right to housing, electricity, and water, a nascent parallel movement can be seen in the area of food sovereignty. These calls, articulated in South Africa by various groups, have been received unevenly by local governments. While various metro governments, including the Durban Metro Council and the Johannesburg Metro Council, have expressed rhetorical support for urban agriculture in South Africa, there has been little real, material support. Globally, an estimated 800 million people are engaged in urban food production.

Approximately one-quarter of these people are commercial producers growing for market, and approximately 150 million are full-time farmers (Sawio and Spies 1999, 3). Yet in eThekweni<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere, urban farmers generally operate on the periphery of the formal sector, rarely benefitting from whatever marginal state support may be available, and (more often) being subject to harassment for their informal activities.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, a wide variety of urban food systems are in play. In Dar es Salaam, urban agriculture receives the rhetorical support of government without the material commitment necessary to support it (Jacobi, Amend and Kiango

<sup>1</sup> eThekweni was created in 2000 when Durban and seven local councils were amalgamated into a single metropolitan area. Home to approximately 3.5 million people and covering an area of 2,300 km<sup>2</sup>, eThekweni includes the city of Durban and surrounding towns, the largest of which (by population) are Umlazi, Chatsworth, Kwa-Mashu, Phoenix, Inanda, Ntuzuma, Pinetown, and Mpumalanga.

2000). In Accra and Cairo urban agriculture is limited in scope and receives little attention from the state (Greenberg 2006, 12). In Nairobi, official government policy prohibits urban food production but regulations are rarely enforced and urban agriculture is common (Foeken and Mwangi 2000). In Zimbabwe, historical support for urban agriculture in the 1980s gave way to prohibition in the 1990s as Zimbabwe African National Union-Popular Front sought to undermine urban-based support for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (Greenberg 2006).

To date, few studies of urban agriculture in South Africa have been undertaken, and the scale and scope of the phenomenon remains contested. The scale of urban food production in the eThekweni metropolitan area is likely larger than elsewhere in South Africa, given the city’s large peri-urban area and its favorable growing climate. A study conducted in the early 1990s estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of the households in peri-urban areas were engaged in some cultivation (Rogerson 1996, 9), though the degree to which this contributed to household nutrition and subsistence was not estimated. Rhetorically, the post-apartheid City Government has expressed its enthusiastic support for urban agriculture. Community Councilors and City Parks officials repeatedly emphasize that urban agriculture is an important avenue for sustainable development and expanded livelihood opportunities for Durban’s poor. However, competing demands for both land and government policy focus have often resulted in the marginalization of local food production. In particular, the tradeoff between expanding land for the development of housing and maintaining vacant land for food production poses great difficulty in a city where an estimated 800,000 people reside in tenuous informal settlements.

The South African case also complicates the food security discourse. While South Africa has sufficient resources to satisfy food demand through a combination of trade and domestic production, access to sufficient food resources remains difficult in many households. Echoing Sen’s entitlement theory, Greenberg (2006) notes,

Although South Africa can be said to be food secure at a national level through a combination of domestic production and trade, this does not hold at the local level in marginal parts of the country. These ‘marginal’ parts coincide with the ghettos (rural and urban) created by the segregationist system of apartheid and continue to undermine the economic and social, if not the political structure of the country. What is more, there is further differentiation at a household level and even within households, so that those without effective command over resources may be food insecure even in areas where there is local level security.

A food sovereignty framework addresses this shortcoming by asserting the right of communities to “healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali, 27 February 2007). The food sovereignty framework centers primarily on the right of local, smallholder producers. Indeed, the Mali Declaration continues, “Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability.”

But such a definition prioritizes rural communities and producers and leaves unresolved the role of urban producers in a wider food sovereignty movement. In the context of post-apartheid eThekweni, for example, alternative networks of food production have developed around three key frameworks: formal community gardens, informal ‘guerilla’ gardens, and various initiatives by the Durban Botanical Gardens in support of both formal and informal urban food production. The degree to which they might fit into a food sovereignty framework is unclear.

Formal community gardens encompass those activities which seek to use urban spaces for the production of food consistent with the wishes of those who own or control the land. This includes various initiatives, from the increasingly popular mixed-use of private gardens by the privileged upper middle class, for whom growing their own food is often viewed as a legitimization of progressive politics, to the formal allocation of unused urban lots by the city government to poor communities for local food production. It also includes initiatives by the city government to expand local food production in spaces owned by the city itself, such as the City Hall Food Garden program, which retasked the gardens in front of City Hall from growing flowers and ornamental plants to the production of vegetables for free cultivation by the city’s homeless population and the Tata Old Age Home located nearby.

Informal, or guerilla, gardening is distinguished from more formal community garden initiatives by the way in which the land itself is acquired. Unlike community gardens, which are used with the permission of the land’s owners, guerilla gardeners illegally grow food on vacant property without legal authority. Interviews with guerilla gardeners suggest a wide variety of motivations, ranging from anarcho-syndicalist political views encompassing the wholesale rejection of notions of ownership and private property, to more basic and limited claims of social justice and necessity. In either case, the production of food in informal gardens is, by definition, less secure and more tenuous.

Finally, the Durban Botanical Gardens has a variety of programs intended to support formal and informal food production within the urban and peri-urban area of the city. It has, for example, initiated a Food Garden Network program which helps neighborhood communities secure land for small-scale sustainable gardens, with the Botanical Garden providing technical support and education for gardeners. The Durban Botanical Garden programs might thus be seen as an effort to mediate the formal and informal approaches to urban food production embodied in the other two frameworks.

While there appears to be a growing local food movement in eThekweni, interviews with participants in the local food movement itself highlight several important limits to the movement. The South African Constitution provides an expansive set of rights to all South African citizens. Clause 27(1)(b) of the South African Bill of Rights provides for a basic right for all South Africans to health care, social security, and sufficient food and water. However, unlike in the area of water, electricity, and housing, discussed above, there has been surprisingly little mobilization around access to food. Consequently, questions of food production and of lack of access to food have failed to become politicized in the same way that lack of access to other basic factors of social reproduction have. Progressive leadership in Durban appears to have been directed towards other struggles, and food remains an issue considered separately from land, at least in the urban sphere. There is, in short, no well-mobilized constituency expressing demand for food.

Land, of course, remains a central area of struggle, particularly in rural South Africa. Yet even there, the land question is operationalized as a question of redressing the legacies—particularly the economic legacies—of apartheid. Frustration has mounted as a consequence of the slow pace of reform, largely a consequence of the neoliberal approach to land reform (Moyo 2008). However, even in the rural areas, the question of land access has not generally been articulated in the terms of food sovereignty (See, for example, Wesso 2011).

With the exception of the staff of the Durban Botanical Gardens, demands for access to food in eThekweni have generally been framed in the most conservative manner possible, using a food security rather than a food sovereignty framework. Due to this conservative framing, the question of access to food remains largely disconnected from broader struggles around access to the commons, including—importantly—questions of land tenure and security and access to water, seed, and other inputs. Rather than asserting rights to land and food under the progressive framework of food sovereignty, as has been the case in countries like

Brazil and India, food access has not been made an area of political struggle in urban South Africa.

## Conclusion

This paper represents an initial attempt to draw out preliminary findings from research conducted in the summer of 2011 in Durban/eThekweni, South Africa. Based on extensive interviews, I found that mobilization around the idea of food sovereignty was not particularly well developed. This was surprising, given the strong level of community mobilization by the poor around other anti-privatization initiatives, including water and electricity service delivery as well as housing. Apart from the staff of the Durban Botanical Garden, urban food producers operating in both the formal and informal sector continued to frame their message in terms of “food security” and a “constitutional right to food.” The broader framing encouraged by a food sovereignty lens was never clearly articulated.

Equally surprising given the high level of social mobilization and the widespread interest in local food was the fact that the question of access to food had not become a salient factor in political mobilization in eThekweni. In the United States, by contrast, emergent discussions under the rubric of food justice have focused on linking consideration of school food, community gardens and farms, and other local food movements to broader considerations of climate change, globalization, and the U.S. Farm Bill, to name a few. This does not appear to be the case in Durban, where community mobilization is perhaps more squarely focused on other concerns. Nevertheless, the history of community activism and mobilization around other areas unified by a common opposition to the expansion of neoliberalism suggests a possible path forward for food sovereignty in eThekweni.

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## Open Letter: Post-Olympic 'Long-term Solutions' to Hunger very Short-Sighted

**Carol Thompson**

**Carol Thompson**, Professor, Northern Arizona University, regularly spends time in Southern Africa to learn from smallholder farmers and works with AGRA-Watch (Seattle) to change US agricultural policies.

Those at the top (world-famous athletes, diplomats and prime ministers) remain myopic about the causes of African hunger, for they continue to listen to those who seek corporate profit, rather than hearing the organized, creative smallholder farmers. The last day of the 2012 Summer Olympics, just before the closing ceremony, Prime Minister David Cameron held a 'hunger summit' at #10 Downing Street, co-hosted by Brazil's (the next summer Olympic venue) Vice President, Michel Temer. Their goal was to shine the Olympic spotlight on the 20 million malnourished children around the world, many residing in countries of Olympic champions, such as Mo Farah (5,000 and 10,000 m UK gold medalist), originally from Somalia, who attended the summit. The session was also to announce Cameron's intention to focus on world hunger during his 2013 presidency of the G-8.

This noble goal, especially recognizing the gross inequality gap between many world class athletes and their own people, was obscured, however, by the fact that the corporations (behind the G-8 and financing the Olympics) seeming to promote cures to world hunger are the cause of it. A BBC announcement of the hunger summit linked it to a 'sustained green revolution', and the Cameron initiative pledges to work with the Gates

Foundation in promoting 'drought resistant and vitamin enriched crops'. This government initiative will also partner with the UK firms, Unilever, Syngenta and GSK. (DFID, 2012: 1)

The current 'green revolution' for Africa (promoted by the Gates Foundation's Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa-AGRA) will enrich the corporate food cartels, for they seek to link African food production and consumption to the global market, or as they say, to the global 'food value chain'. The increased yields will come from 'monoculture within monoculture' (only 1-2 varieties of 1-2 grains) grown with the seeds, pesticides and fertilizers provided by the cartels. Only 4-5 corporations control the global market for each of the three inputs. African farmers will provide their land, water and labor, while they lose control over vital inputs.

During the summer Olympics, for example, Pioneer Seed (DuPont) won a South African legal case to buy out Pannar Seed, the largest local seed company in all Southern Africa. The organized farmers continue to appeal in the courts, for if allowed, South Africa will only control about 5 percent of its own seed; the genetic wealth farmers bred over centuries, now in Pannar seed banks, will become the private property of a single American corporation. And seed prices will rise.

Not content to chain African food producers to the global market, a related goal is to link African urban consumers, those with a bit of discretionary cash, to the global food retail market. Tyson Foods is trying to take over the southern African poultry market, via South Africa. WalMart is making its entry into South Africa, in spite of much civic opposition. Fast food chicken and chips, dripping with fat-salt, are the urban teenagers' top choice. And obesity of young people has become an African health issue.

These two global agendas, chaining African food production and consumption to the global market, will destroy African smallholders who source most of their inputs locally and deliver food to local

markets. Those of us in the North need to ask questions: why are we organizing to source food from local farmers, buying locally, while such markets in Africa are called 'subsistence'? Why is our approach 'upscale' and 'environmentally friendly', while the very same approach in Africa is labeled 'backward'? How about the global cartels financing African farmers to visit USA farmers and show us how to do it better?

This Olympic summit resonates because African food production does need assistance. The smallholders can produce more, but they need fair credit schemes, decent roads, warehouses, and agricultural extension that honor the wealth of their diverse ecological zones, rather than trying to plough it under into monoculture. Africans are organizing to pursue these goals. Outsiders could help.

What those of us in the North could do is to change our own country's agricultural policies:

- a) Expose and reduce the systematic removal of capital from the African continent, via theft of minerals, of germplasm (seed), and other illicit removals. More than US\$700 billion left Africa 1970-2008: "In other words, the rest of the world owes more to these African countries than they owe to the rest of the world." (Ndikumana and Boyce, 2011: ii; see Kar and Freita, 2011);
- b) Disband European and American public subsidies of monoculture by agribusiness;
- c) End the fossil-fuel addiction of industrial agriculture, which accounts for 35-40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions;
- d) Break up seed cartels, using anti-trust laws, for the monopolies they are; just a few control the biodiversity of our future food.

Let's end African hunger by listening to African farmers, not broadcasting the tune of global corporations who control the global 'food value chain'.

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## Association of Concerned Africa Scholars: Statement on Food Sovereignty

### *Statement by the ACAS Food Sovereignty Taskforce*

ACAS members are highly concerned about policies from the U.S. government, corporations and philanthropies, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum (Davos) that foster high tech as the answer to African food deficits during climate change. These powerful agencies are advancing three strategic interventions in African food systems: expansion through research and marketing of seed technologies; opening up of African food markets and integrating the most prosperous smallholders into the singular global market; and coordination of food policies within regions of Africa.

Each one of these interventions attempts to link African food production and consumption into the global food chain, controlled by a cartel of very few corporations. Only three grain traders/processors (Cargill, ADM, Bunge) handle over 50 percent of grain moving internationally, while four corporations control 58 percent of the global seed market (Monsanto, DuPont/Pioneer Seed, Syngenta, Groupe Limagrain). To gain profits via biotech seed breeding, corporations access unique African seed varieties, freely shared in public seed banks, without recognition nor benefit-sharing back to farmers who bred the parent genetic materials for centuries.

The U.S. government (*Feed the Future*), Gates Foundation (*Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – AGRA*), World Bank (*Global Agriculture and Food Security Program – GAFSP*), and World Economic Forum (*New Vision for Agriculture*) all speak of food security, rather than the goal of food sovereignty, promoted by smallholder farmers across the world. Originating from *Via campesina* in 1996, food sovereignty refers to “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food

produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (Nyéléni 2007, Forum for Food Sovereignty).

A major path toward food sovereignty is via farmers’ rights, enshrined in the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, but not recognized by any of the powerful in their programs above. Farmers’ rights recognize the right of farmers to exchange, save, plant, and breed any seed, honoring their historic role as breeders providing current food biodiversity. Instead, all of the above promote the privatization of genetic wealth via patenting (plant breeders’ rights).

Food sovereignty allows farmers and communities to choose their seeds and their food production systems. Collaborating with the food movement in the U.S. as well as with farmers’ organizations in Africa, ACAS scholars work to expose attempts to destroy food sovereignty, under the guise of high tech ‘solutions’ for food production and as important, we work to share the lessons from African farmers about alternatives to fossil-fuel addicted monoculture.

### Reference

Declaration of Nyéléni (2007). Forum for Food Sovereignty. Available online at: <http://www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>