

## **Section 5. Changing Agriculture: Food Sovereignty of the territories in response to the energy crisis and the new world revolution**

### **The European food sovereignty movement engagement**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The 2011 Nyeleni Europe Forum set up the conditions for the establishment of a wide European movement for food sovereignty that aims at a thorough redefinition of food and agriculture systems towards more sustainable and socially responsible policies and practices. Three pillars were identified as outcomes of the Forum, meant to 'resist', 'build' and 'transform' the current food system as follows:

- › Working towards an ecologically sustainable and socially just model of food production and consumption based on non-industrial smallholder farming, processing and alternative distribution
- › Decentralizing the food distribution system and shortening the chain between producers and consumers
- › Improving working and social conditions, particularly in the field of food and agriculture
- › Democratizing decision-making on the use of the Commons and heritage (land, water, air, traditional knowledge, seeds and livestock)
- › Ensuring that public policies at all levels guarantee the vitality of rural areas, fair prices for food producers and safe, GMO-free food for all.

#### **The Nyéléni Europe Forum for Food sovereignty**

Food sovereignty is increasingly gaining relevance as a policy framework to draw the public opinion and the decision makers' attention on the importance of agriculture and food systems to grant the general survival.

With in mind the principle of food sovereignty<sup>1</sup>, established in Rome in 2002 as expression

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<sup>1</sup> "With Food Sovereignty we mean the People's right to define their sustainable policies and strategies of production, distribution and consumption of foods granting the right to feeding for the entire population, respecting the single cultures and the diversity of the rural methods, and granting to every community the

of the first world civil society forum on food sovereignty, further elaborated in the occasion of the Global Nyéléni Forum held in Mali in 2007<sup>2</sup>, European organisations, movements and individuals met in Krems, Austria, in August 2011 to discuss and further elaborate this political dimension. They meant to identify a common ground among different constituencies and European regions in order to set up new and effective food and agriculture policies.

### Food sovereignty as common and unifying guiding principle

It is still frequently misconceived that food sovereignty is useful and achievable in southern contexts only. No substantial explanation is given to justify this restricted approach. When 400 people coming from 34 European countries, from Caucasus to Scandinavia, convened in Austria last year they not only countered this short sighted vision, but also explored concrete options for action. For the European organisations and movements that met during the Nyéléni Europe Forum, food sovereignty is a premise to define the agricultural and food policies of every single country and region. At the same time, it is also the strategy that recognises the urgent need to defeat food insecurity and vulnerability on the planet by means of a sustainable and just rural development.

Participants were raising the questions of land (that 'old' issue of agrarian reform), seeds, markets, supply chain relationships and commercial, fiscal and sanitary laws, all within the framework of food sovereignty. If '*Sovereignty belongs to the people*', as stated in Article 1 of the Italian Constitution, then food sovereignty belongs to producers and consumers – to the rural world, and also to the urban one. To the developed and to the developing world. Invoking food sovereignty means defending autonomy and the primacy of rights and basic needs against the assaults of the market.\* Latest years have once again confirmed that as financial, environmental and democratic crises become more and more severe, food and agricultural systems increasingly become a battleground for these struggles. This further explains the incipit of the Nyéléni Europe Forum declaration stating that Europe is for the first time ever experiencing the brutality of Structural Adjustment Programs, following three decades of their failure in the Global South. The rural world and the food system are the first victims of these systematic and organised failures.

The political and socioeconomic dimensions in which food production and consumption systems are embedded further legitimate food sovereignty that goes far beyond food

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access and control to those resources basic for production, such as the land, water, genetic heritage and credit". (Forum ONG/OSC for Food Sovereignty 2002).

<sup>2</sup> "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 the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies... 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 and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets ... Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage 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 and economic classes and generations". (DECLARATION OF NYÉLÉNI, 27 February 2007, Sélingué, Mali)

The 'market' should not be assumed here as the so-called global market, only, but also as an ideological concept: the market as the only basis of the economy, as the transformation of goods and knowledge into money, as the eradication of solidarity exchange, as the negation of the plurality of the markets, as the constraining of access to resources, and as the cardinal reference point of politics.

safety and security. The emphasis on food safety and security are individualised notions, where the citizen is the consumer who trusts the validity of the supply chain processes when acquiring food, assuming the product is safe and the process is guaranteed. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, is built on a social discourse involving democratic participation in the control of food and the resources necessary to produce it. It encompasses the social, environmental, economic and agricultural policies necessary to give substance to agrarian systems, enabling them to effectively guarantee the right to food. It values the diversity of territories and the specificity of their respective agricultural systems, and of restoring the responsibilities that the systems of political representation in those territories have ceded or which were expropriated to them.

The Nyéléni Europe Forum thus offered the opportunity to advance in the realization of food sovereignty. The collective ambitious goal of participants was to: TRANSFORM our food system in Europe, and reclaim community control; RESIST the expansion of the agro-industrial food system; and BUILD our movement for food sovereignty in Europe. A final Declaration (outlining common visions and common commitments) and a Plan of Action were developed accordingly, following the five thematic axes of work that represented the Forum articulation (Models of production; Markets and food chains; Working conditions and social aspects; Access to land and other resources; Public policies).

As a first step, the Forum was a catalyser to reinforce collective aims, providing a dynamic space for alliance building and for the common promotion of new forms and organizations of food systems. A wealth of testimonies and experiences was shared and the Forum allowed not only for European perspectives on food sovereignty to be strengthened, but also provided tools for all participants to build and strengthen food sovereignty movements in their countries or regions.

### **The food sovereignty movement building in Europe**

Since the beginning of the preparatory process it was clear that in order to give an impulse to a strong local, regional and European movement, there must be a process before and after the Forum itself. Therefore the initiators of the Forum encouraged groups and initiatives in all the European countries, from the Atlantic to the Ural, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean to engage in the building of a Nyéléni process in their areas. The idea was to build a shared dynamic and understanding of the issues related to food sovereignty for the different actors involved. The capillarity of the European food sovereignty movement remains a priority after the conclusion of the Forum and a Coordination Committee has the responsibility to provide dynamic conditions for its fulfilment. This consideration shouldn't be limited to regional or territorial aspects, only, but it extends to different forms of social contexts and organisations, too.

In order to ensure a balanced participation from all people active on food sovereignty, the Forum was organized with a system of quotas and constituencies and each country delegation was encouraged to take into account the following constituencies: food producers (farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, urban gardeners, community supported agriculture), workers (agricultural workers, migrants, trade unions); environmental, health and development NGOs; youth organizations; woman organizations; consumers (food coops, urban poor) and others (artists, teachers, researchers,...). One third of the delegates of a country had to be food producers, half of the delegates had to be women and one third of the delegates had to be youth. The outreach of food sovereignty in Europe will be also measured in this respect.

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In terms of global policies, the Nyéléni Europe Forum offered the occasion to reiterate that agricultural and food trade should be regulated -especially after the breakdown of the WTO Summits and the collapse of the global governance over food and agriculture- according to specific rules and criteria. This should be a must in order to safeguard producers, workers, consumers and local markets, or the connection between producers and territories (for example with instruments and devices to protect the peculiarity of local productions). Moreover, the Forum negatively considered the negotiated texts of reform of the EC Agricultural Policy, since they do not valorise the endogenous resources of the territory (local products and cultural traditions), the high-quality typical productions and organic agriculture; they don't take into any account the employees' rights social conditionality and do not foster agroecological food provision. Participants clearly wanted to have a voice in the CAP reform discussion, calling for a stop of the delegitimation process of the function of agriculture and in the defence of territory and rural communities. A policy that safeguards and enhances work, respects the agricultural and ecological equilibrium and biodiversity, the food security, the animal welfare and the international solidarity, using these concepts as principles for the success of the "Food Sovereignty" in Europe and worldwide, is consequently demanded.

Moreover, the exclusion of any invasive and ecologically-ignorant technology –such as the genetically modified organisms (GMOs)- from the agricultural and food production system, is seen as crucial to guarantee the sovereignty of internal choices, the environment defence, the respect and the will of both consumers and producers, further recognising the founding value of seeds. Needless to say, GMO resistance in Europe probably represents the most intuitive application of food sovereignty principles.

The Nyéléni Europe Forum follow up is divided in actions of information, sensitisation, mobilisation that will involve institutions, workers in the agricultural and food sector, producers, consumers and all the society. Since the Forum, the European Food Sovereignty Movement has been strengthened: more and more people are engaged in campaigning for a better food system and numerous local events and national and international conferences have been organised.