



PEASANT RIGHTS AND FOOD PRODUCTION

THEMATIC BOOKLET

Peasant Rights and Food Production

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Peasant Rights and Food Production

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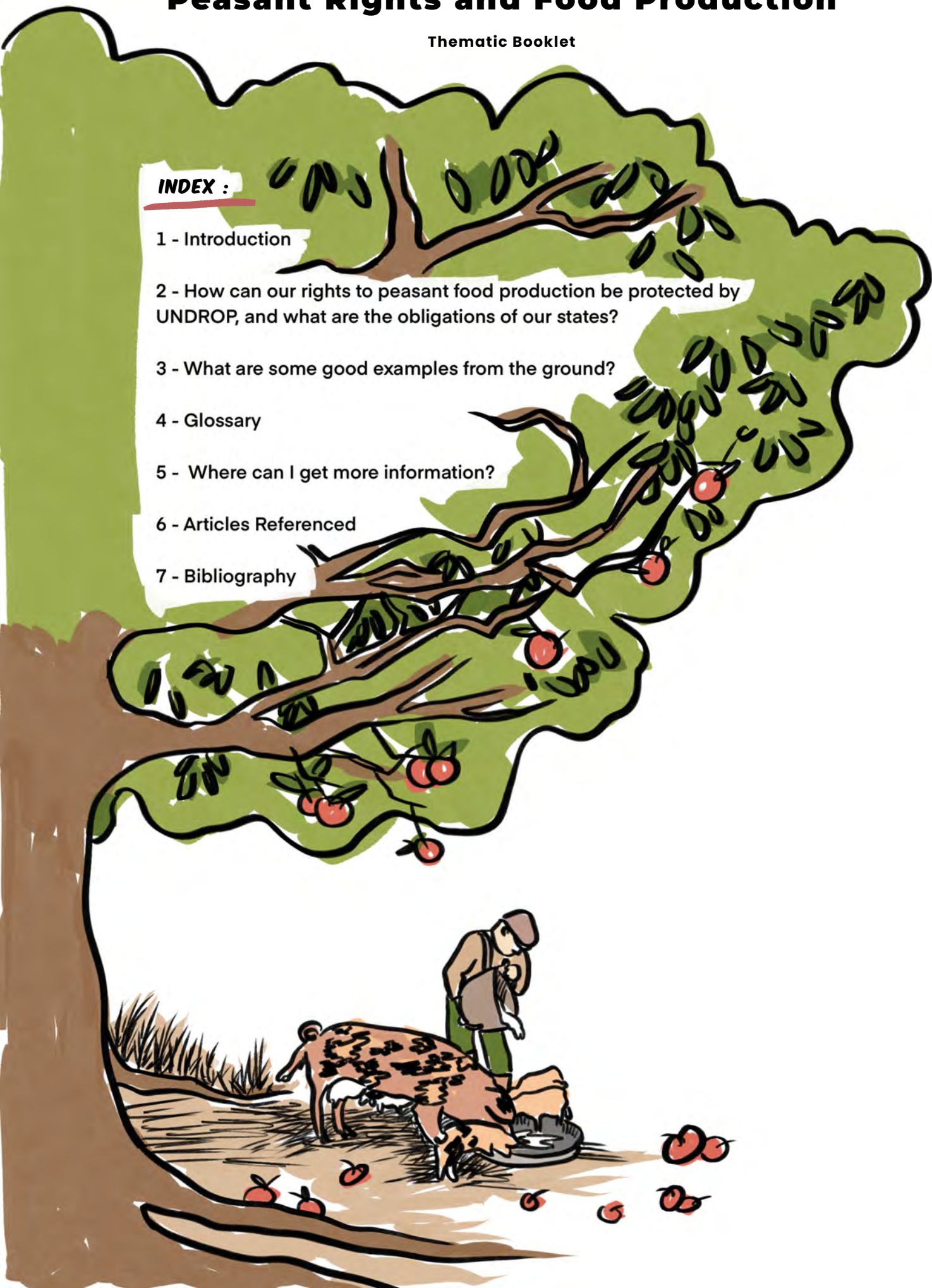
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1.

INTRODUCTION

The right of peasants to participate and define their own food production systems is an essential part of food sovereignty. In our struggle to affirm and protect this right, we can learn how to use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) in our own contexts. See the Introductory booklet in this series for background information.



Article 1 defines a peasant as someone who “produces food on a small-scale by themselves or in community, for themselves or for market, who relies on family or non-monetized labor, and has dependency and attachment to the land.” They could be involved in small-scale agriculture crop planting, livestock raising, pastoralism, fishing, forestry, hunting or gathering, handicrafts. They can be landless, nomadic, hired workers, migrant workers, seasonal workers, transhumants/pastoralists, indigenous peoples, smallholders, family farmers.

**PEASANT FOOD PRODUCTION**

The different ways peasants grow, gather, hunt, raise, and make food are together called peasant food production. Food production is the foundation of peasant food systems. Of course, equitable access to resources is vital for thriving peasant food systems: see the thematic booklet on access to resources for more information on this.

FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems can be seen as webs woven by different people, processes, and interactions engaged in gathering, fishing, growing, processing, distributing, preparing (cooking, feeding, caring), consuming and disposing of foods. (1) Peasant food systems are grounded in agroecology and food sovereignty. They are resilient, localized, and reciprocal. They are created by peasants who produce healthy, culturally appropriate food for their families and communities.



We can look at food systems through a holistic lens by understanding how these processes interact with one another how the ecological, social, political and economic context constantly shape and reshape food systems, the role of power, gender and generational relationships, the relations between food systems and other sectors (health, agriculture, environment, culture), the relations between food systems and other systems (ex. ecosystems, economic systems, social cultural systems, energy systems, health systems) (HLPE, 2020).

PEASANT FOOD SYSTEMS

Unfortunately, the industrial food system has been undermining peasant food systems for a very long time and especially during the last decades.

INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM



The industrial food system has been put into place by powerful forces that have grabbed from peasants and other people in rural areas for centuries through imperialism, colonization, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Profit-hungry agribusiness corporations are trying to destroy traditional ways of producing food. The industrial food system they work within is based on intensive, export-oriented agriculture production. Its objective is corporate profit, instead of community health and well-being.

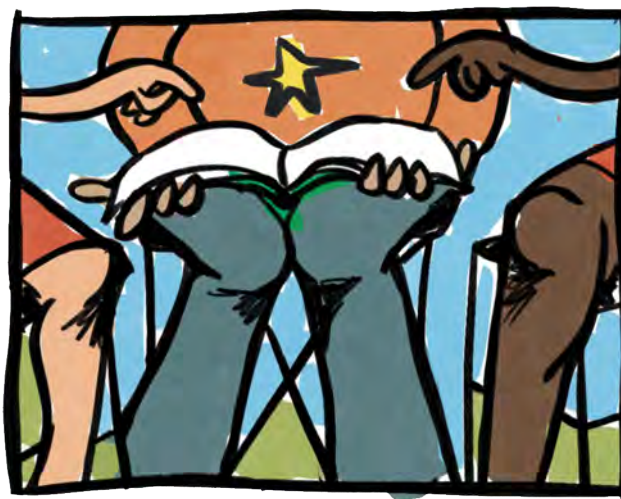
The agribusinesses involved in the industrial food system take control over huge areas of farmland by forcing peasants off their land. This system uses most of the world's agricultural land to grow high-input commodity crops and raise livestock in crowded and cruel conditions. It causes environmental destruction by relying on fossil fuels and on long supply chains - often international. It imposes expensive new technologies, spreads synthetic fertilizers, and peddles genetically-modified seeds that threaten native species. It spreads the use of toxic chemicals with little consideration for dangerous impacts on water, land, human and animal health.

In our communities and cities, we are often forced to consume high-input, low quality food that is pumped from corporate-owned factory and monoculture farms into supermarkets around the world. The industrial food system is broken, and harms all who produce and eat food.

WHAT CAN WE DO?



This booklet explores how UNDROP can be used to address and protect peasants' rights to produce food on our own terms challenge monopolies that control the land, tools, and technology transform food production and the industrial food system into one that is based on agroecology and food sovereignty fight for the protection of traditional knowledge systems and cultures that shape peasant food production understand state's responsibilities and empower ourselves to raise our voices share real experiences from the ground



The more we understand UNDROP, the better we can maintain our traditional knowledge systems, access and control land and water, develop our own use of technologies and contribute to agrarian reforms and achieve food sovereignty.

Of course, each community is different and faces unique challenges to producing food. UNDROP is a tool that can be used alongside the strategies that you are already using to demand justice, equity, and rights.

How can you use UNDROP in our struggles?



2.

HOW CAN OUR RIGHTS TO PEASANT FOOD PRODUCTION BE PROTECTED BY UNDROP, AND WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS OF OUR STATES?



The industrial food system threatens peasant food systems worldwide in different ways. Peasants often don't have access to market information or are excluded from or harmed by development and investment policies at the local and national level. Multiple reasons make the access to important resources for food production difficult.

UNDROP lists and describes the rights of peasants and the obligations of states regarding peasant food production, addressing discriminations faced by small-scale food producers. It reflects the interests and demands by peasant organizations around the world.

All the rights, principles and obligations in UNDROP are interconnected so as to protect the different aspects of peasant life, under the umbrella of the principle of non-discrimination. States must ensure that all rights recognized in UNDROP are fulfilled on the basis of equality between men and women. (2)

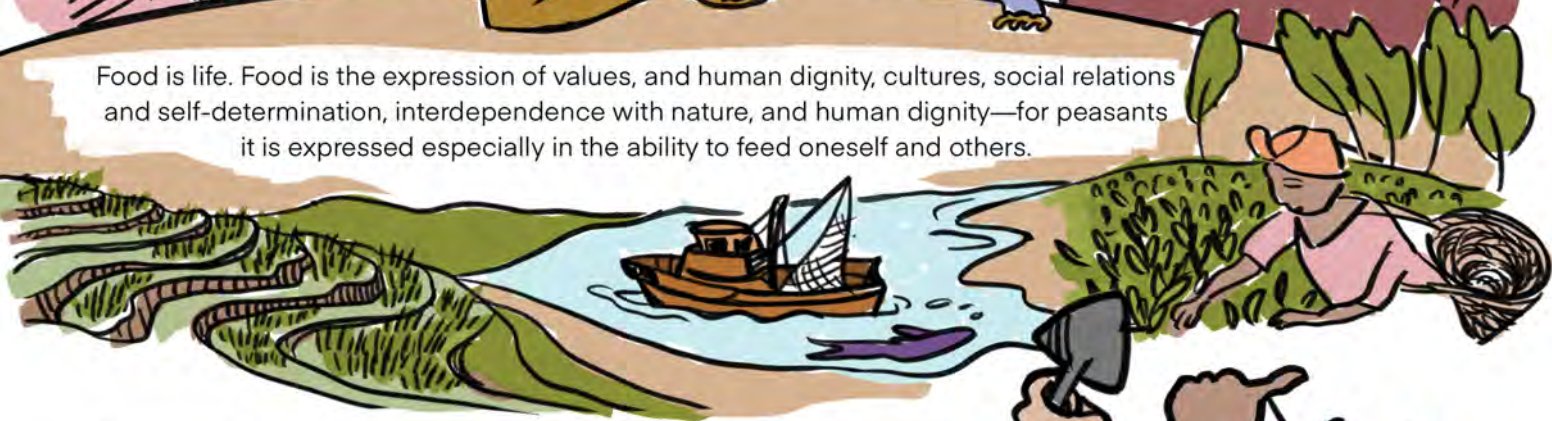
In this section we highlight some of these rights and obligations that are particularly relevant to peasant food production.



THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD AND NUTRITION REQUIRES THE RIGHT TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



Food is life. Food is the expression of values, and human dignity, cultures, social relations and self-determination, interdependence with nature, and human dignity—for peasants it is expressed especially in the ability to feed oneself and others.

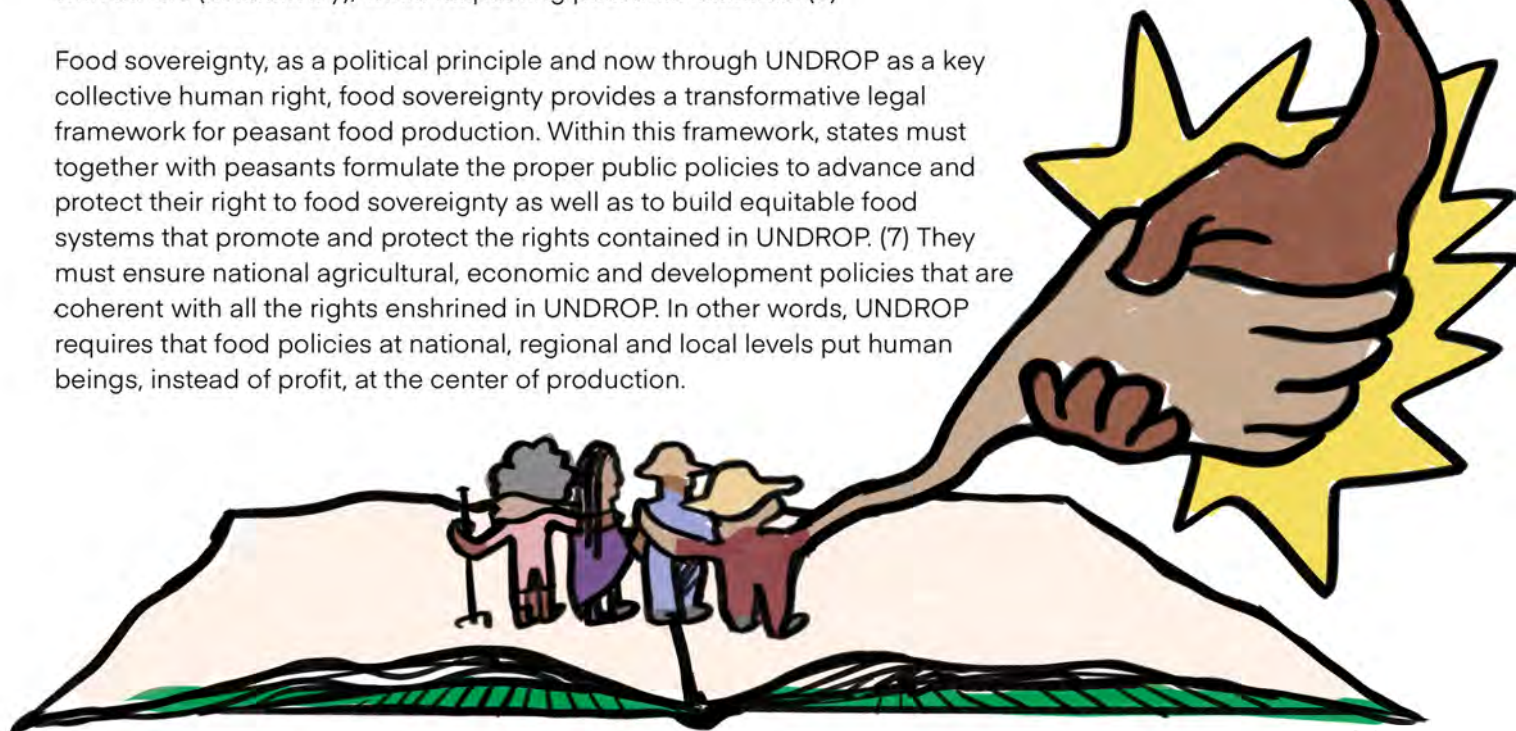


Peasants, just as all human beings on the planet, have the right to adequate food and nutrition, a right that is recognized in international treaties, many national constitutions and national legal frameworks around the globe. According to UNDROP, peasants also have the fundamental right to be free from hunger and have the right to produce adequate food. (3)

States must ensure physical and economic access to sustainable and equitable means of food production that respects local cultures.

Through UNDROP, states recognized peasants' right to food sovereignty as the right of peasants to determine their own food and agriculture system. (5) UNDROP respects peasant cultures affirming that the right to food sovereignty is a right that that we exercise by ourselves (individually), and also together with others (collectively), while respecting peasants' cultures. (6)

Food sovereignty, as a political principle and now through UNDROP as a key collective human right, food sovereignty provides a transformative legal framework for peasant food production. Within this framework, states must together with peasants formulate the proper public policies to advance and protect their right to food sovereignty as well as to build equitable food systems that promote and protect the rights contained in UNDROP. (7) They must ensure national agricultural, economic and development policies that are coherent with all the rights enshrined in UNDROP. In other words, UNDROP requires that food policies at national, regional and local levels put human beings, instead of profit, at the center of production.



WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCTION ACROSS REGIONS?



Distribution, ownership and access of land worldwide are unequal. Water is scarce, privatized, and restricted. Peasant seeds are increasingly grabbed by intellectual property schemes. To address these issues, UNDROP lays out key rights and states' obligations, including:



Sustainability: peasants have the right to access sustainable resources. Therefore, states must make sure that resource exploitation affecting peasants' land and livelihoods can only take place following an environmental impact assessment and meaningful consultation with the local affected communities. (8) The benefits of such exploitation must be mutually agreed upon and shared equitably. (9)



Land: Peasants, individually and/or collectively, have the right to access, sustainably use, and control land and water bodies, coastal seas, fisheries, pastures and forests. (10) Agrarian reform is essential for peasant food production. In the context of an agrarian reform, UNDROP states that landless peasants, young people, small scale fishers and other rural workers should be given priority in the distribution of public lands, fisheries and forests. (11) Redistribution of land is key to food sovereignty.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCTION ACROSS REGIONS?

Seeds: The protection of peasant seed systems and agricultural biodiversity are central to sustainable food production and resilience in the face of climate change. (12) UNDROP declares the right to access, maintain, control, protect and develop peasant seeds and traditional knowledge. (13) UNDROP declares that states must ensure this right by supporting peasant seed systems and promoting the use of peasant seeds and agrobiodiversity. (14)

Importantly, states shall ensure that seed policies, plant variety protection, intellectual property laws, and seed marketing laws respect the rights, needs, and realities of peasants. (15)



Biodiversity: States must ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity which is essential for peasant food production. To do this, states must promote and protect the traditional knowledge, and practices, and the capacity for innovation, which characterize peasants seed systems and collective land management. (16)



Water: UNDROP recognizes the human right to water for personal and domestic use, farming, fishing and livestock and other water-related livelihoods. States must help to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of water through management systems that are community based. They should promote appropriate and affordable technologies, such as irrigation technology, and protecting water-related ecosystems from overuse and contamination. (17)

HOW DO WE ENSURE OUR RIGHTS ARE FULFILLED?

1. PROTECT AND PROVIDE THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION



DEVELOP



CONTROL

UNDROP acknowledges that peasants need support for sustainable agricultural production, through rights, principles and state obligations. (18) UNDROP says that peasants have a right to develop, maintain, control and choose their own means and methods of production and technology, and to develop community-based marketing systems.



MAINTAIN



CHOOSE

The concept of means of production is broad. Means of production are not only tools, technical assistance, and labor power, but they also include: Financial means to obtain what is necessary, like credit and insurance. States must make sure that women, in particular, have equal access to financial services such as agricultural credit and loans (19), the right to seek and develop information, such as timely market information, and the right to adequate training to use that information (20), and appropriate and affordable (21) technologies.



Although we are already protecting and conserving our lands, waters, and territories through peasant agroecology, UNDROP provides us with a tool to demand that states commit to supporting our efforts. Developmental, agricultural, environmental, trade and investment policies and programmes need to align with transitions to the sustainable modes of agricultural production as shown through agroecology.



2. DEMAND LABOUR RIGHTS



In the previous sections we addressed our right to define our own food and agriculture systems. In this section, we explain another part of peasant food production enshrined in UNDROP: labour rights. UNDROP embraces international law on labour protection and decent work for all. Labour rights for women are particularly important, as peasant women around the world face greater injustices and discrimination at work.

1. Peasants have the right to work, which includes the right to choose the way we want to earn our living.



States are obliged to fulfill such rights in the following ways.

1. States should ensure the availability of work opportunities with enough pay for an adequate standard of living. This includes establishing and promoting sustainable food systems that are 'sufficiently labour-intensive to contribute to the creation of decent employment.' (24)

2. Peasants have the right to safe and healthy working conditions. This includes the right not to use or be exposed to hazardous substances or toxic chemicals such as agrochemicals or agricultural or industrial pollutants.' (22)



2. States should take measures to ensure safety in all areas of food production.

3. Peasants have the right to an adequate standard of living. Peasants must be able to work in production systems of their choosing and they must be fairly compensated for their work, whether individually or collectively. (23)



3. States should take measures to facilitate and ensure peasants' access to markets.

4. Peasants have the right to unionize and organize together.



4. States should support peasant-led organizations and labour unions.

UNDROP rejects any form of contemporary slavery, child labour and economic exploitation. Such abuses should never be part of peasant food production. (26)

3. DEFEND CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS!

We have the right to defend our food systems and to make our voices heard!

Firstly, all people have the human right to exercise our fundamental freedoms without any discrimination based on gender, social or economic standing, race, ethnicity, or otherwise. It is of the greatest importance that we, especially women in rural areas, are able to freely organize and participate in rural economic, social, political and cultural development. (27)



According to UNDROP we have the right to organize in cooperatives (29), trade unions or other forms of organizations to pursue our interests without any type of interference from the state or others. (30) According to UNDROP, states must support us and our positions when negotiating contracts for fair conditions and prices are being negotiated. The right to organize ourselves also includes the right to participate directly and through representatives in all policy-making, programmes and projects that affect us, that affect our land, lives, and food production overall. (32)

At the same time that we can participate in decision-making processes, we can also oppose government decisions. We have the freedom of movement and freedom of association, as well as the freedom of thought, opinion, expression and the right to peaceful gathering. (33) For example, either individually or collectively, we should be free to express our concerns about the issues that threaten our food production through peaceful protests and campaigns, whether in the media or in the streets. We should also be able to move and move our produce freely and to access appropriate markets. (34)

In the process of defending our food production systems, we also have the right to demand that states protect, respect and fulfill our rights to life, liberty, security and to mental and physical wellbeing, regardless of one's gender. (25) No one can be arrested illegally and no one can be subjected to torture, inhumane treatment, or slavery, when defending their rights. (36) And in situations of having to face a court case, UNDROP emphasizes our right to access fair judicial procedures, legal assistance, as well as reparations and compensation. (37)



3.

WHAT ARE SOME GOOD EXAMPLES FROM THE GROUND?

Honduras: In 2012 following an international trend of states adopting “Monsanto laws”, the Honduran government passed a bill in 2012 which forbade peasants from saving their seeds, giving them away and exchanging them. Subsequently, a local organization, the National Association for the Promotion of Ecological Agriculture (38), mobilized with other peasant organizations and challenged the bill before the country's Supreme Court. The legal challenge made references to the right to adequate food and the right to seeds and biodiversity as established in international treaties ratified by Honduras and enshrined in UNDROP. In 2021 the Constitutional Section of the Honduran Supreme Court declared the bill unconstitutional for violating Constitutional norms and international treaties ratified by Honduras and for specifically violating the right to adequate food. Even though Honduras did not vote in favour of UNDROP in the United Nations General Assembly, the Supreme Court was able to use UNDROP to interpret the meaning of peasants rights to seeds and biodiversity. As a result, the Supreme Court even stated for the first time in Honduras, that the bill passed by Congress violated UNDROP Article 19 on the right to seeds, and Article 20 on the right to biodiversity. (39)



Europe: The European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) is currently working on a proposal for a new European land regulation based on UNDROP's Article 5 and Article 17 on the right to land. ECVC's proposal aims to defend against land grabbing and land concentration, and to favour access to land, the preservation of commons and the implementation of agroecological land management practices. To make this work more visible in the public eye, ECVC's Land Working Group has organised a series of webinars in 2021 where rights holders presented relevant situations in their countries, the potential existing tools for regulation, and their connections to UNDROP. In 2022, ECVC co-organised a series of webinars together with the Struggles for Land Forum, showing how peasant mobilisations could change land policies, always through the lens of UNDROP.



Palestine: The Palestinian Land Day, celebrated on March 30 in commemoration of the uprising in 1976, has turned into a day of peasant resistance against occupation of land. Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) is a fundamental organization that promotes food sovereignty and the peasant food web. In 2021, the Israeli government designated UAWC as a “terrorist” organization, a way to unjustly criminalize and silence their work. UNDROP has been used to demand the right of UAWC to organize (Article 9.1 states that peasants have the right to form and join organizations for the protection of their interests), as well as Palestinian peasants' right to access and use natural resources, and Palestinian agricultural workers' rights.



Indonesia: UNDROP in the context of food production is being implemented through the development of ‘Food Sovereignty Areas’ (or KDP, acronym in Bahasa Indonesia). KDP is a designated area for people to practice food sovereignty through agroecology while having a positive economic impact. KDP is aligned with efforts to fulfill the rights in UNDROP, and emphasizes the importance of peasants themselves working to realize their rights. The process to develop a KDP begins with collaboration and training among SPI members for two months. Currently, eleven KDPs have been built in seven provinces all across Indonesia, namely Aceh, West Sumatra, Jambi, Lampung, West Java, East Java, and South Borneo. KDP continues to be promoted as an effort to fight for the fulfillment of peasants' rights.



4. GLOSSARY

Agrarian reform: redistribution of agricultural land to the peasants and landless peoples who work the land and provision of support services (post settlement support services) and policies, and alignment of institutions to meet the needs and functioning of the resultant agrarian structure .

Adequate: The word 'adequate' on its own means the minimum requirement of something to make it satisfactory. The concept of adequacy as in "adequate food supply" means more than the nutritious value of food, it is essentially related to a number of conditions such as 'social, economic, cultural, climatic,' (4) and ecological conditions. Similarly, "adequate living conditions" encompasses adequate housing, sanitation, electricity, water supply, transport and communications. (40)

Declaration: is a document under international law in which States declare certain aspirations without the intention of creating binding obligations. However, many of these aspirations are based on binding international legal principles and/or norms.

Grabbing: the act of depriving someone of land, property, and/ or productive resources.

Food sovereignty: the right of peoples to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Heteropatriarchy: A hierarchical system, society, or culture dominated by heterosexual men. The term emphasizes discrimination against women and LGBTIQ+ peoples who live within this type of power structure.

Human rights: are rights that belong to all human beings without distinction of class origin, ethnicity, religion, abilities, sex, gender, nationality and status. Human rights cannot be taken away nor can they be renounced. Most importantly, human rights cannot be separated, the fulfillment of one human right necessarily entails the fulfillment of the rest. For example, the human right to life cannot be fulfilled unless the human right to adequate food is ensured.

Imperialism: A country asserting its power and influence over other countries through force, diplomacy, and/or unequal trade.

Public International law: declarations, treaties and customary norms that govern relations between states.

Means of production (in agriculture): the social use and ownership of land, labour force, and capital needed to produce food.

State: a nation or territory considered as an organized political community under one government.

Traditional knowledge: in the context of UNDROP, traditional knowledge refers to different ways of knowing developed throughout different generations by peasants, local and indigenous communities on the management and use of productive resources and biodiversity. It also speaks of the practices and innovations of traditional knowledge, pointing to the important role that peasants play as innovators, clarifying that traditional knowledge continues to evolve.



5. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Below you can find a series of thematic booklets that specifically address some of the most important traits in UNDROP.

Access to resources and means of production.

Peasant food production.

Dignified life.

Peasants as political subjects.

The introductory booklet on UNDROP can be accessed here: https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/12/LVC-EN-Booklet-UNDROP-RGB_lowres.pdf

You can also access **UNDROP** here: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/165>

And the illustrated version of UNDROP here:

<https://viacampesina.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UNDROP-Book-of-Illustrations-I-EN-I-Web.pdf>

Visit **www.viacampesina.org** for more information on struggles on ground for food sovereignty and peasant rights.



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La Via Campesina is an international grassroots movement that defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, women farmers, landless people, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers and youth from around the world.






It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are marginalizing people and destroying nature. The movement comprises 182 local and national organisations in 81 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

FIAN International is an international human rights organization. Since it was founded in 1986, FIAN International has been advocating for the right to food and nutrition. FIAN supports grassroots communities and movements in their struggles against right to food violations. Through its national sections and networks, FIAN works in over 50 countries around the world.

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