

# Food sovereignty comes of age

## Africa leads efforts to rethink our food system

### WORLDVIEW



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“Africa can feed itself” was a ringing cry at Nyéléni 2007 – Forum for food sovereignty, held earlier this year in Mali. But, the spokesperson for the African Region added, “three successive globalisations have obstructed us”. He then outlined the waves of colonial interventions that have successively undermined smallholder family farmers and local food provision in the continent: European empires, extractive international market-led growth policies and now Free Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements.

This new globalisation can be promoted because many people in industrialised countries still have the perception that African countries could not produce enough food to feed their people or that the land and waters are mostly unproductive. “But Mali is an eye opener,” commented a Thai journalist present at the forum, “the ecologically friendly agricultural practices have provided food sovereignty to the people”.<sup>1</sup> This theme was echoed by President Amadou Toumani Touré in his opening address to the forum. These were key reasons why Mali was selected to host the Forum for Food Sovereignty, named after the legendary Malian goddess of fertility, Nyéléni.

The National Coordination of Peasant Organisations of Mali (CNOP) welcomed to the forum more than 500 people representing organisations from over 80 countries: women, men, young, old from all sectors of food providers

– farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples – together with environmentalists and consumers, among others. They gathered in a purpose built centre in the Malian countryside some four hours’ bus ride from Bamako, the capital. For five days there were multilingual exchanges and debates between sectors and regions about how to achieve food sovereignty. Outcomes included the *Declaration of Nyéléni* and a *Synthesis report* within which the ‘Six pillars of food sovereignty’ are recorded (see box). These ‘pillars’ are inseparable principles of food sovereignty, all of which must be equally respected.

Importantly, the differences often asserted between North and South, when it comes to food sovereignty, were resolved. It was agreed that these principles of food sovereignty apply in all regions although the *contexts* are clearly different. Food sovereignty is a common struggle against corporate, industrialised food systems and a common determination to achieve socially, ecologically and economically benign models of production, processing and distribution in all societies. It is not a North-South battle.

In solidarity with other regions, European delegates resolved to incorporate food sovereignty principles into their existing campaigns and to work towards a Common Agricultural Policy based on food sovereignty that would promote community supported agriculture systems, strengthen local markets and break the armlock of supermarkets.

Nyéléni 2007 has set the agenda for the future of our food – a countervailing approach to the dominant globalising food system that defends, often violently, its monopoly privileges and controls over territory, technology, markets, livelihoods and private profits. Rooted in local realities, Nyéléni 2007 has provided all of us with the framework within which we can now re-assess food policies and practices in order to ensure that not only Africa but also the rest of the world will be able to feed itself in future generations. In the cradle of civilisation, food sovereignty has come of age.

#### Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty (see over)

**Focuses on Food for People**, putting the right to food at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; *and rejects* the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.

**Values Food Providers** and respects their rights; *and rejects* those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.

**Localises Food Systems**, bringing food providers and consumers closer together; *and rejects* governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

**Puts Control Locally** over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations; *and rejects* the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.

**Builds Knowledge and Skills** that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems; *and rejects* technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.

**Works with Nature** in diverse, agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise ecosystem functions and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; *and rejects* energy-intensive industrialised methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

<sup>1</sup>Supara Janchitfah (2007) ‘An unconventional gathering’ *Bangkok Post*, 18 March 2007. [www.nyeleni2007.org/spip.php?article318](http://www.nyeleni2007.org/spip.php?article318).

For all reports mentioned and the unabridged ‘six pillars’ see [www.nyeleni2007.org](http://www.nyeleni2007.org).

## Scope of the Food Sovereignty Policy Framework

### DEFINITION of FOOD SOVEREIGNTY – from Declaration of Nyéléni, 27 February 2007

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 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 and users. 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 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.

### SIX PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY from Synthesis Report of Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty

	Food Sovereignty:	is FOR	is AGAINST
1.	<b>Focuses on Food for People:</b>	Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies;	and <i>rejects</i> the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business
2.	<b>Values Food Providers:</b>	Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food;	and <i>rejects</i> those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3.	<b>Localises Food Systems:</b>	Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms;	and <i>rejects</i> governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
4.	<b>Puts Control Locally:</b>	Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities;	and <i>rejects</i> the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
5.	<b>Builds Knowledge and Skills:</b>	Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations;	and <i>rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6.	<b>Works with Nature:</b>	Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to " <i>heal the planet so that the planet may heal us</i> ";	and <i>rejects</i> methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

*These six principles are interlinked and inseparable: in implementing the food sovereignty policy framework all should be applied.*