

Food sovereignty and right to food: the case of Uganda

“The shift to biofuels production has diverted land out of the food chain. Food prices, such as that of palm oil in Africa, are now set at fuel prices”... the Head of the World Food Programme (WFP), Josette Sheeran, warned in an extraordinary meeting of the Development Committee at the European Parliament on 6th of March 2008. She noted that food prices were also causing unrest, with reports coming in of food riots in Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Senegal.

The aggressive extension of agro-fuels and the related surface competition threatening food production are only one of several new alarming trends affecting rural development and access to food. Massive evictions due to “development” projects such as dams, mines, special economic zones or simply large plantations for cash crops leave thousands of indigenous and peasant communities without a livelihood. However, the mobilisation of civil society and the responses available to the international community are also worth a close look.

Nyéléni 2007 – The International Forum on Food Security

In February 2007, over 600 civil society representatives came together

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at the International Forum on Food Sovereignty, “Nyéléni 2007”, in Sélingué, a village in the Malian countryside. The debates between pastoralists, peasants, fishers, consumer protection groups and NGOs resulted in a strong declaration on the concept of food sovereignty and on the demands towards the international community linked to it (see Box).

The definition of food sovereignty proclaimed in Nyéléni closely resembles existing international human rights

standards. So it is not surprising that social movements and development NGOs should discover or rediscover the potential of human rights to offer important protective mechanisms against attacks on the accessibility, availability and quality of food.

Food sovereignty and the Universal Bill of Human Rights

In the current macroeconomic and geopolitical order, food sovereignty tackles an additional dimension of international and national policy-making governing access and control over food. It also addresses the common responsibility in realising human rights as a whole and the human right to adequate food in particular.

Food sovereignty clearly relates to the enjoyment of this right through its implications and potential strategies regarding food and nutrition policies in general and rural development, trade, food aid and consumer protection in particular. Furthermore, food sovereignty addresses territory sharing, agricultural production models, access to and control of resources, traditional techniques and knowledge, as well as migrants and conflicts.

In addressing all these matters of public policy making, food sover-

The Nyéléni Declaration on Food Sovereignty

“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.”

More information and documents from Nyéléni 2007 at <http://www.nyeleni2007.org/>



Photo: IFPRI

In Uganda almost 9 million people still live in extreme poverty, most of them in rural areas.

The faces of hunger and malnutrition in Uganda

Like many developing countries, Uganda is rich in natural resources. Thanks to the climatic conditions, a great variety of food can be grown. However, what is also characteristic of developing countries is that hunger and malnutrition still affect a large portion of Uganda's population. According to the country's 2007 Population Report, about 8,804,000 Ugandans (31 percent of the total population) still live in extreme poverty and hunger.

According to the Uganda Poverty Status Report of 2005, the most vulnerable people are women, children (many of them HIV/AIDS orphans), indigenous people and persons internally displaced due to armed conflict, cattle rustling and natural disasters. Until recently, about 1.8 million people were living in internally displaced camps. Unemployed urban poor are unable to access adequate food, too.

The Uganda Demographic and Household Survey 2000/2001 states that over 38 percent of the children under five years were stunted, 4 percent wasted and 22.5 percent underweight. The prevailing levels of childhood malnutrition account for 40 percent of child deaths before the age of five.

Overall access to adequate food in Uganda and the whole of Africa relies heavily on the work of women, who produce 80 percent of the food. Besides working in the fields and marketing the produce on the nearby markets, women have to take care of the household, their spouses, the orphans and their own children. Regardless of their hard work women are second rate in most Ugandan cultures because men have traditionally been the breadwinners. So while women are among the first victims of violations of the right to food, they are also the key to its realisation.

eighty articulates demands in key areas for the realisation of the right to adequate food.

Food as a universally recognised human right

"The right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement" (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 12 on the Right to Adequate Food).

The right to food is close to the concept of food security, which the development community is familiar with. But while rights can be claimed by an individual, and the state is obliged to observe them, food security is an objective of the international community and a moral commitment towards the populations.

As enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which belongs to the universally recognised United Nations Bill of Human Rights, the human right to adequate food is an individual and universal right which all human beings hold. With the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food in 2004, all 187 member states of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reiterated their commit-

ment and gave themselves practical guidance to realise this right.

The right to adequate food: tools and instruments

The right to adequate food as a human right not only offers protection mechanisms for victims but also provides governments and civil society with a framework, strategies and principles to orient public policies.

Fundamental human rights principles such as participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability are useful to guide the processes through which people access adequate food. Furthermore, from a human rights angle, the first steps of a strategy require the identification of who the hungry are and what causes hunger. Development strategies should always focus on the most vulnerable groups of the population.

Building upon this, recent developments in the field of human rights monitoring open up new perspectives for practitioners in different development sectors. Various initiatives have led to the development of indicators, budget analysis in a human rights perspective, as well as the elaboration of a monitoring tool for public policies based on the Voluntary Guidelines on the right to food. Uganda is an example of civil society and the government increasingly working with these Guidelines.

Working with the right to adequate food in Uganda

Discrepancies in Uganda suggest that a closer look at policies on access to food is worthwhile. Mobilising civil society on issues such as human rights, trade, food security, sustainability and community-based development has played a major role in the achievement of legislation and policies in favour of the right to adequate food. As a country receiving FAO support, Uganda is a pioneer in establishing a framework law on the right to food that will ensure policy coherence.

Based on these achievements in the national legal framework, a network of NGOs and CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) has started to apply the Voluntary Guidelines to monitor the Ugandan government's activities in fighting hunger and malnutrition and to hold the state accountable for violations of the right to food. And one of the most challenging aspects of human rights monitoring work is to fill identified policy gaps and enhance efficiency to obtain significant improvements towards the realisation of the right to adequate food.

One example is the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (the PMA) which was set up by the govern-

ment in 2000 with the key objective to increase productivity by transforming subsistence agriculture into commercial agriculture and encourage foreign investment in the rural sector. The Plan recognises the need to make agriculture more profitable by linking it with initiatives that can improve agricultural marketing. The PMA vision is "poverty eradication through a profitable, competitive, sustainable and dynamic agricultural and agro-industrial sector", while its mission is "eradicating poverty by transforming subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture". The Plan's policy has failed to adequately use human rights principles and tools to assess its impact, take into account the rights of rural poor and protect them against adverse effects.

This chronic disregard of standards established by the human right to food in implementing concrete measures in the agricultural sector is also dramatically illustrated by the case of the Kaweri Plantation in the Mubende district (read more: www.face-it-act-now.org). To make room for a foreign investor's coffee plantation, 360 peasant families have been evicted from their traditional land with violence and without prior consultation and compensation. This case shows that countries like Uganda will



Women produce 80 percent of the food but despite their hard work on the fields and in the households they are still considered second rate.

not be able to effectively fight hunger if large-scale forcible evictions continue to provoke more hunger and malnutrition. The massive violations of human rights faced by small-scale peasants have not only been identified and heavily criticised by civil society. The government has also announced corrective measures for the protection of small-scale farmers – a political and legal achievement of working with human rights.

Zusammenfassung

Wer sich mit Nahrungssicherheit und dem Menschenrecht auf angemessene Ernährung beschäftigt, sieht sich zahlreichen Herausforderungen gegenüber: die Ausweitung der Anbauflächen für Biosprit, Handelsabkommen mit verheerenden Folgen für die Kleinbauern, der bereits spürbare Klimawandel, die Zerstörung von Lebensraum und die Vertreibung von Millionen von Menschen aus den ländlichen Gegenden im Zuge von Bergbau- und anderen „Entwicklungsprojekten“, der unkontrollierte Einsatz von Pestiziden und die Angst vor gentechnisch veränderten Organismen (GVO). Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint die Diskussion über Nahrungsmittelsouveränität notwendig und legi-

tim. Uganda ist heute symptomatisch für die alten und neuen Bedrohungen der Nahrungssicherheit und Ernährung. Das Recht auf angemessene Ernährung und die Instrumente, die seine Durchsetzung bietet, werden von Regierungen und Zivilgesellschaft immer aufmerksamer betrachtet.

Resumen

Los actores interesados en la seguridad alimentaria y el derecho humano a una alimentación adecuada afrontan varios desafíos distintos: la expansión de los combustibles agrícolas; los convenios comerciales con consecuencias insostenibles para los agricultores de pequeña escala; cambios climáticos ya perceptibles; la minería y otros proyectos "de

desarrollo" que destruyen las bases del sustento y causan el desplazamiento forzado de millones de personas en las áreas rurales del sur del planeta; el uso descontrolado de plaguicidas y el temor compartido de consumidores y pequeños productores frente a organismos genéticamente modificados. A la luz de todos estos desafíos, el debate en torno a la soberanía alimentaria se presenta como una iniciativa necesaria y legítima. Hoy en día, Uganda es un caso sintomático de los retos persistentes y emergentes en la seguridad alimentaria y la nutrición. El derecho a una alimentación adecuada y las herramientas que éste ofrece están atrayendo una atención creciente por parte del gobierno y la sociedad civil.