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Transforming agriculture: Agroecology and the right to land

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Transforming agriculture: Agroecology and the right to land

Women farmers from Vikalpani National Women's Federation in Sri Lanka showcase their agroecologically grown produce at a local market in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka as part of IGENUM, an exchange visit led by PANAP. (Photo: PANAP)

Introduction

Today, when the world capitalist system, especially in the era of neoliberal globalisation, is generating unprecedented multiple crises (i.e., economic and financial, social, energy, food and climate - further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic), agroecology presents a viable approach to agricultural production.

As an approach to food production, agroecology is a direct alternative to agricultural systems heavily reliant on hazardous and destructive technologies and commodities peddled by monopoly capitalists - from Green Revolution varieties to genetically modified (GM) seeds and chemical fertilisers and pesticides. These inputs are also so expensive that they contribute to the bankruptcy of small and poor farmers. It is an alternative to market-driven agricultural systems that are too narrowly focused on increasing production and yield even if they come at the expense of the environment and public health, including of the direct producers and end-consumers. (*See **Box 1** for the multidimensional benefits of agroecology*)

However, agroecological practices only thrive when direct food producers such as the peasants and indigenous people have direct ownership of and control over land. Agroecology is impossible without resolving the issue of ownership and control over the means of production. Thus, genuine agrarian reform and the assertion of people's food sovereignty should be the basis of any policy reform to promote agroecology.

Genuine agrarian reform must guide the transformation of agricultural production into agroecology and the realisation of food sovereignty for the people. While

Box 1

Multidimensional benefits of agroecology

1. How does agroecology contribute to environmental sustainability?

Agroecological methods of farming use the ecological principles of efficiency, recycling, synergy, sustainability, resilience, and diversity. ***Efficiency*** aims to reduce external inputs, increase outputs, and minimise losses. ***Recycling*** enhances nutrient cycling to reduce external inputs and promote sustainability. ***Synergy*** includes crop combinations, plant-soil cover, attractants and repellents, and nitrogen-fixing plants. ***Sustainability*** comprises measures that ensure soil fertility and productivity will not decline over time. ***Resilience*** pertains to the ability to bounce back to normal after adverse impacts of climate change and other natural disasters. ***Diversity*** involves varietal, species, and agroecosystem diversification in space and time.

2. How does agroecology protect the livelihood of small farmers?

Agroecology encourages, promotes, and supports local farmers' markets and other alternative marketing systems such as solidarity markets, consumer-supported agriculture (CSA) and the like to protect small farmers. Reversing neoliberal globalisation and promoting the relocalisation of markets can make fresh, affordable food locally available, ensure fair prices for farmers, and help enhance local food security. Money circulates in the locality and is reinvested in the local economy, stimulating other economic activities and contributing to national economic growth and inclusive rural development.

3. How does agroecology enhance socio-cultural practices?

The socio-cultural life of a community depends on local knowledge, practices, and biodiversity, which differs depending on the local context and environment. Agroecology recognises this and gives farmer-led solutions to local problems. Such solutions, which address the particularity of issues, create more impact and, in turn, contributes to increased resiliency of food systems. It also initiates the development of local knowledge and eventually the participation of farmers in developing food systems that are resilient, sustainable, and just.

4. How can agroecology support the farmers' and consumers' control of the agri-food systems?

As an approach to farming, agroecology is people-centred and thus necessitates the recognition of the political rights of farmers/peasants, indigenous people, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and other small food producers. The meaningful participation of food producers and consumers in decision making at various levels of governance is needed to ensure that policies and programmes are responsive to the people's needs, priorities and welfare.

agroecology is nonviable without peoples' access to and control over land and resources, such access and control without agroecology (i.e., using expensive and unsustainable technology of the corporate chemical agriculture model) will only likely contribute to economic failures and bankruptcies of farmers, thus perpetuating poverty, hunger and inequality, and ecological degradation.

This policy brief is PAN Asia Pacific's (PANAP) contribution to the ongoing discourse among civil society, people's movements, and policymakers on agroecology. It focuses on how agroecology must advance in the context of widespread landlessness and massive corporate land grabbing.

Neoliberalism and monopoly control over land and resources

Capitalist industrial production - and more so in the era of monopoly capitalism, which drastically expanded monocrop plantations and export-oriented agricultural production - has systematically alienated direct producers from the means of production through outright land and resource grabbing and effective control of production through a monopoly over farm inputs, technology, markets and prices. This situation is especially so in countries that were colonised for hundreds of years and remained neo-colonies of imperialism where the agricultural sector has undergone systemic restructuring and massive destruction of productive forces.

Under neoliberalism, corporate control of food and agriculture has intensified even further. Seeds are being privatised and controlled through technology and intellectual property rights in hybrid seeds and GM crops. Corporations use neoliberal instruments such as the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to assert ownership and control over seeds.

The monopoly control big corporations exert over agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, and seeds is also becoming more concentrated through mergers and acquisitions. There is a similar monopoly control in machinery and animal pharmaceuticals, livestock processes, commodity trading, food processing and food retail.

Two inter-related phenomena are hastening and deepening the greater concentration of control over food and agricultural production in the hands of monopoly corporations, further driving land and resource grabbing - financialisation and digitalisation.

Financialisation is corporate profit-making through trading financial assets and speculative activities rather than investment in production. Large financial firms buy and sell agricultural commodities based on their forecasted rise and fall in future prices. They are also investing in land based on their anticipated land values, and digitalisation plays a key role here.

Digitalisation is the use of information and communication technology in production, which centralises a massive amount of farm data with corporations. It thus tightens their grip on farming (e.g., determining which seed varieties to plant and pesticide to use based on soil and climate data). Centralised farm data create favourable conditions for greater speculative trading of farmlands in financial markets, resulting in more land grabbing. Financial players like investment

banks and fund managers rely on data mined from farms by drones or mobile apps to determine which lands are most profitable.

It is in this context that land grabbing is rising globally today. Land grabbing displaces the poor smallholder farmers and indigenous people and drives human rights violations and injustices in the rural areas. On a broader scale, land grabbing also threatens food security because the lands concentrated under corporate entities are devoted to producing for the world market or mega-infrastructure projects. Worse, some lands that are grabbed remain idle because these are just for parking investments while banks and fund managers wait for the price of land to increase.

Landlessness and land grabs

Underlying these recent trends that further erode farmers' right to land and resources worldwide are the historical and structural roots of landlessness, especially in poor countries. The concentration of farmlands among a handful of local elites (i.e., landlords, compradors, and bureaucrats) and the problematic land reform programmes provide a conducive environment for global corporate monopolies to consolidate and further their control over vast tracts of land for plunder and profit-making.

Historically, land used to be commons and remains communal property in many indigenous people contexts. Conquest and colonialism started land inequality when colonisers declared land and resources under the ownership and control of the state. The colonial masters also awarded their local supporters, friends, and allies vast lands. These groups constituted the traditional landlords. Concentrated land ownership and control conveys political power and feudal structure. The landed elites influenced and dominated government policies to maintain and accumulate more wealth while subverting policies and efforts to distribute land to the landless. This feudal system rendered many people landless, perpetuating poverty and injustice. Land inequality ultimately weakens democracy (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020).

Box 2

Overview of land reform programmes in Asia

In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, reforms were focused on dismantling colonial land tax collection system from tenants (Zamindari system), tenancy reforms, recognition of tillers as owners of the land, imposition of land ownership ceilings, and distribution of land to the landless (Quizon, 2013). Yet most reforms were weakly implemented or outright failures because the ruling elites, primarily the landowners, have subverted the processes of genuine land distribution. Countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan were even less successful due to the succession of military rulers that allied with the landed ruling class.

While land reform contributed to increased tenurial security in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Thailand, governments failed to substantially transform the agrarian structures as they excluded large landholdings in the land reforms. The supposed improvements in hunger and poverty were also not significant enough to alleviate the plight of the rural poor (Quizon, 2013).

Box 2 cont'd

Land reform in China and Vietnam were encompassed in their socialist reforms and implemented in two phases. First, the state expropriated the landlords and distributed lands to peasant collectives and communes. The second phase involved breaking up the collective lands and their redistribution to individual households to increase productivity. The second phase was implemented in 1978 in China and 1981 in Vietnam and was claimed to have successfully addressed famine and hunger in the two countries. (Quizon, 2013) Agrarian reform was considered most successful in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan under the scheme "from tenants to owners". Tenants received full ownership rights for the land they cultivated, while landowners received compensation in cash and bonds. The successful implementation of these countries required exceptional social and political upheavals (Anseeuw and Baldinelli, 2020).

Agrarian reforms were implemented in many countries after the formation of independent nation-states as part of nation-building and to address rural poverty and social exclusion, or as a direct response to social protests and revolts. But overall, these land reform programmes failed to change social relations that drive rural landlessness structurally. (*See **Box 2** for a brief overview of land reform programmes in Asia*) The state of landlessness at the household level in South Asia is 38% (India, 39%; Bangladesh, 40%; Pakistan, 36%). In China, landlessness is at 3%, while Vietnam is 12% and Cambodia is 21% (Quizon, 2013). In the Philippines, independent estimates claim that almost 9 out of every ten farmers are landless.

The failed land reform programs provided a conducive environment for a new wave of land concentration to emerge through large-scale land investments since the 1980s. These are more appropriately called land grabbing because the land acquisitions violate human rights and are carried out without the prior consent of indigenous land users and consideration of social or environmental impacts (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020). In addition to emphasising the lack of transparency and democratic decision-making in land deals, most land grabbing is also predominated by investors from foreign countries. In some instances, domestic elites are also involved. Using the Land Matrix online database, PANAP (2020) estimated 4,459 concluded large-scale land acquisition deals covering almost 156.4 million hectares worldwide.

The Gulf Arab countries, particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, underwent significant land acquisition contracts after the 2008 global financial crisis, energy increases and food crisis, mainly aimed to enhance their food security. Many other countries are acquiring more enormous tracts of land, notably the US, Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom, and China. Specifically, China, Japan and South Korea maintain official policies on overseas farming as part of their food security agenda.

Governments of host countries also play a crucial role in land grabbing by developing policies favouring foreign investment, usually upon recommendations or pressures from multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In other instances, governments directly enter into "public-private partnerships" that

facilitate farmland acquisitions and corporate investment in agriculture (PANAP, 2017).

According to data, the largest 1% of farms operate more than 70% of farmlands globally, with land concentration significantly rising in Asia and the Pacific while picking up again after previous declines in Africa and Latin America. Such a lack of access to and control over land creates gross inequalities within countries. Based on one study, the top 10% of rural populations in the 17 countries it sampled capture 60% of agricultural land value, while the bottom 50% of rural peoples, who are generally more dependent on agriculture, capture only 3% of land value (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020).

Resisting land grabs, promoting agroecology

Resistance against land grabs and assertion of the right to land has emerged from local communities and the organisations that support them. Ending land grabbing and land inequality of all kinds is necessary to ending hunger and poverty, and promoting decent livelihood, gender equality, peace, and social justice.

Agroecology is just one of the tools that farmers, indigenous peoples, and other small food producers can use to fight land grabbing and replace the industrial food system. This is a crucial point to make to clarify that agroecology is by and in itself not capable of altering exploitative production relations caused by rural landlessness and land grabbing. (*See **Box 3** for a brief explanation on agroecology in relation to genuine land reform and rural development*)

But while agroecology itself will not transform agriculture and the exploitative relations in the rural areas arising from landlessness and land concentration, it has the potential to be transformative when pursued in the context of genuine agrarian reform and with five key components (modified from Gliessman, 2016):

1. Organising and asserting people's rights. Farmers, consumers, and other stakeholders in the food systems must be organised as a potent force in actions and struggles. Farmers must assert their inalienable rights to land and struggle to attain it. Farmers and consumers must also be conscienticised of the various aspects of corporate control of food and agriculture to internalise their struggles and have a solid stand. With their concentrated capital and influence on public officials, vast corporate powers need to be challenged by organised people's movements and civil society.

2. Developing agroecosystem technologies. Alternative practices to industrial/ conventional inputs and methods are necessary as the tangible component of change. Changing the unsustainable, unhealthy, and unjust industrial food system requires alternative sustainable technologies. Although agroecological technologies are already ubiquitous, existing technologies in organic, permaculture, ecological, biodynamic, regenerative agriculture, and other methods must be put together as a menu to contribute to the core technologies in agroecology. Agroecology must be people-led, and farmers must be considered central human resources – not only users of technology but as developers. Technological development must be based on democratising science wherein farmers are empowered and are active participants in development rather than passive recipients as treated by corporate science.

Box 3

Agroecology, genuine land reform and rural development

Agroecology should not be misconstrued as equivalent to genuine agrarian reform and rural development. The main content and objective of agrarian reform is the dismantling of land monopolies by landlords and corporations to release the productive forces in the countryside and create the material condition for national industrialisation. Central to this is the free distribution of land, as a means of achieving social justice, to all tillers, farmers, farmworkers, agricultural workers, fishers, and all others willing and capable to till the land; and ensuring that all tillers or farmers, whether individually or collectively (through cooperatives, for instance), have effective control over the land and other agricultural resources.

If anything, practical approaches to agroecology such as organic farming, for instance, can co-exist with peasant landlessness amid export-oriented large-scale farm production as well as even corporate monocrop systems. To illustrate, certain US and Europe-based companies that cater to their environmentally conscious consumers source organically grown farm produce and raw materials from compradors in poor countries and their local network of landlords and traders. Organic farmers and farm workers still suffer the same feudal or semi-feudal exploitation arising from their lack of ownership and control over land. These organically produced commodities are also exported as semi-processed or raw components, with minimal or no links to domestic industries, thereby providing little or no contribution to value creation for rural development and industrialisation. The same is true in countries where some landlords have opted for organic agricultural practices while retaining the feudal and semi-feudal relations and creating fake cooperatives to cover these relations.

But agroecology, when implemented as part of agrarian reform and rural development, can contribute meaningfully to one of genuine agrarian reform's governing principles, namely the "adoption of sustainable community-based agricultural systems that use local resources, build on indigenous farming practices, are culturally acceptable, and are environmentally sound." While land is at the heart of agrarian reform, it is not simply about distributing land but developing it in an ecologically sustainable manner while attaining local food security.

Agroecology can be immediately implemented in areas where farmers have direct control of the land and have at some degree achieved democratic participation of the people and community. Examples of these are the collective land cultivation practices aiming for self-reliance and sustainability. These can be areas in which agroecology concepts and principles can be tested through practical approaches and regular planning and assessments by the community organisations to process lessons and learn from experiences. This process will further enrich the people's vision of genuinely sustainable rural development.

3. Redesigning the agroecosystem based on ecological processes. Production systems that promote monocropping and chemical farming need to be redesigned to protect biodiversity from unabated degradation. Farming systems must be designed to facilitate material, energy, and information flow at the ecosystems and landscape levels. Productivity should not be the only criteria in the design but also sustainability, diversity, resilience, and addressing broader societal objectives like food sovereignty and social equity

4. Building local economies. Establishing a direct connection between farmers and consumers, e.g., farmers/local markets, solidarity markets, community-supported agriculture, etc., is essential to ensure a market for the producers and fresh, safe, and locally available food for the consumers. A relocalised food system has positive attributes, ranging from solidarity to shorter food mileage as mitigation to climate change, strengthening local food security, building the local economy and promoting inclusive development.

5. Building movements. Bigger groups are more effective in asserting, lobbying, and fighting for social justice to replace the corporate-dominated global food system. Organisations need to build linkages through networking, transforming into coalitions, and mobilising as movements. Through movements, people are better organised and more empowered to take back agriculture and food systems from corporate control and ensure these remain in the hands of farmers and consumers.

Through agroecology, peasants can make productive the land they occupy. By making the land productive, they can feed their families even with minimal resources. This has a creative organising effect as it motivates peasants to participate in agroecology because it offers livelihood and develops stronger determination to fight for their rights to the land they cultivate.

As detailed in the next section, the case of Lupang Ramos in the Philippines illustrates how agroecology can effectively form part of the peasant struggle for their right to land.

Agroecology in action: The case of Lupang Ramos in the Philippines

A hand-drawn streamer greets attendees to a gathering marking the 4th anniversary of the Bungkalan in Lupang Ramos, Cavite, Philippines. (Photo: NNARA-Youth)

Lupang Ramos refers to the 372-hectare land in Dasmariñas City in Cavite province, about 50 kilometres south of the Philippine capital of Manila. Spanish friars formerly owned the parcel of land during Spanish colonisation. During the US colonial rule, the Land Registration Act of 1903 opened the land for the homestead system of acquiring ownership. But farmer-tillers in the area did not have resources and were not assisted by the government to process ownership documents.

In 1965, Emerito Ramos, a local landlord, claimed the 372 hectares of land, and the farmers tilling the area became caretaker-tenants in cultivating rice and corn. A government agrarian reform program was initiated in 1972, subjecting rice and corn lands for redistribution in response to the increasing unrest of landless peasants in the countryside. The Ramos family shifted to sugarcane production to evade agrarian reform.

Evicted farmer-tillers tenants settled in the riverbanks and became farmworkers in their original farmlands. The Ramos family's real estate company (EMRASON) implemented various schemes to avoid distributing land to the farmers. They sold portions of the land to different private corporations and government entities multiple times. They also employed drastic measures to drive away the farmers, such as bulldozing to flatten the farms in 1990, deploying guards at the entrances and exits, blocking the roads in 1991, and putting fences around some parts of the land in 1997. The farmers remained to fight for their right to land.

From 1990 to 1993, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) started to subject Lupang Ramos to agrarian reform. The Ramos estate company requested exemption at the Office of the President but was not approved. They filed a case at the Court of Appeals (CA) which was later elevated to the Supreme Court (SC). In 2011, the SC exempted Lupang

Ramos from agrarian reform based on an alleged City Ordinance No. 29-A dated Jul 9, 1972, describing the land in question as a residential subdivision. But the cited ordinance as the basis of the SC decision was non-existent. The date when it was supposedly enacted was a Sunday, raising questions on the legitimacy of the court decision.

The Lupang Ramos farmers organised themselves as BUKLOD in 1987 to fight for their right to land. But after the SC decision in 2011 that favoured the Ramos family, the organisation was split with most of the elders conceding but expecting to be compensated, while the younger members disagreed and wanted to continue the legal struggle. The latter formed the organisation KASAMA-LR to continue the struggle for their land. The division among the farmers was so severe that on Feb 5, 2019, about 70 original BUKLOD members threatened to take some of the lands held by the KASAMA-LR members residing on the farm. Suspected BUKLOD members used intimidation like gunshots and checkpoints against KASAMA-LR, but the farmers stood their ground.

In December 2020, the KASAMA-LR was given notice by the China-owned National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) and the state-owned National Power Corporation (NAPOCOR) to vacate the land with planned forced force eviction by Dec 22, 2020, if necessary. The farmers immediately sought a dialogue with the NGCP with DAR as a mediator before the deadline. Different sectors and organisations also staged protests in front of the NGCP and the city government of Dasmariñas. The farmers' protests revealed that NGCP did not go through the proper process for securing their project's Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC), resulting in the cancellation of the notice to vacate. The farmers won again.

Because of the continuing conflicts, KASAMA-LR divided themselves into seven groups and rotated to secure the community's entrance and watch on watchtowers constructed in the strategic locations of the estate. The organisation had also allocated a portion of the estate for their collective production (Umali, 2020).

Bungkalan: Agroecology and assertion of the right to land

In 2017, the farmers of Lupang Ramos started their *Bungkalan* (a Tagalog term for collective cultivation) to make the land productive and feed themselves. The KASAMA-LR farmers consulted with the non-government organisation (NGO) MASIPAG, a farmers-scientists network, to identify their issues and needs in farming. MASIPAG conducted a series of training on agroecology with KASAMA-LR farmers and how to apply it in their collective farms. They pushed for community-led food production based on agroecology's social, economic, environmental, and political dimensions.

MASIPAG provided 50 varieties of rice for their trial farm to select which one is most suitable in the area. The group also provided vegetable seeds to augment what they were initially planting. Other NGOs, peasant organisations, and church groups provided more seeds, equipment, carabaos, and training. With these productive activities as their livelihood, the farmers strengthened their resolve to defend the land they were occupying.

With a solid organisation, the farmers held meaningful dialogues with government ministries like the DAR and the Department of Agriculture (DA). Both ministries recognised the KASAMA-LR organisation, and as such, the farmers managed to secure some farm

equipment and funding as subsidies for their *Bungkalan* operations.

They practised composting to improve soil fertility and reduce production costs. The farmers did crop rotation to enhance nutrient cycling with legumes like string beans, mung beans and peanuts to replenish nitrogen in the soil. They also produced bananas, cassava, and corn when water was scarce and served as an alternative staple food. The farmers planted other crops like eggplant, okra, sweet potato, and many more to diversify their farms and food for nutrition and income. In their backyard, most households had free-range chicken.

Although primarily for home consumption, they also managed to have a surplus for selling, and they market it in adjacent communities and residential areas and the local market. Occasionally, some visitors pick and buy vegetables as a form of solidarity market.

Collective farming and the daily routines are also creative organising tools because of their mutual support and realisation of feeding themselves through collective action. Coupled with their experience in their struggle for their rights to the land they till, they understand that unity is their best weapon.

Lupang Ramos stands as an example of successful agroecology. After four years, the *Bungkalan* that started with 51 hectares has expanded to 104 hectares. The farmers noticed that their lives improved. Agroecology is a holistic approach to achieving food sovereignty side by side with their struggle for their right to land.

A farmer walks by a Bungkalan field in Lupang Ramos, Cavite, Philippines. (Photo: AMIHAN)

Pathways in the campaign for agroecology and farmers' rights to land

Women farmers from Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP) in Bulacan province participate in an Agroecology Fair hosted by Agroecology X, a community of organizations, associations, and sustainable agriculture practitioners and advocates. PANAP is a co-convenor of Agroecology X. (Photo: PANAP)

The complexity of the industrial agriculture and food system that we wanted to radically transform through agroecology also requires complex advocacy and practice at different levels - from local to global - and involves different actors. The movement of food sovereignty and agroecology advocates and practitioners aims to reclaim the democratic rights of people to productive, equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems. But the success of agroecology depends on farmers' rights to land through redistributive and genuine land reform and peasant struggles against land grabbing.

The following are focal pathways in advocacy and campaign for agroecology and the people's right to land and resources.

Advancing genuine agrarian reform and stopping land grabs

In the 21st century, business as usual is no longer an option and marginalisation of small-scale farmers is no longer tenable (IAASTD, 2007). Complete agrarian transformation through genuine agrarian reform, which includes land to the tillers to increase tenurial security, access and control, are urgent and necessary more than ever. Such reforms would not be complete without making the lands productive and developing rural institutions. Women's land rights should be given equal attention, and their contribution to production must be appropriately recognised. Indigenous peoples'

rights must also be respected and upheld by returning their ancestral domains to the rightful owners and protected from incursions by plantations, mining, alternative energy expansions, nature reservations, including supposed environmental programs like protected areas that displace indigenous communities.

Land grabbing should be opposed and stopped for the sake of food security and social justice. Likewise, the conversion of prime agricultural land into non-food related uses by governments and corporations must be stopped. Advocacy for a national land-use plan, which prioritises the utilisation of land for productive uses and meeting the people's basic needs such as food, in all countries is necessary to create a balance and place the importance of food security to other developmental objectives. Agrarian reform should encompass access, tenure, control, and the productive capacity of small-scale farmers.

Land tenure security in the production process is one foundation of farm conversion into agroecology, and agroecology is a tool to make agrarian reform more successful in making the distributed land more productive and sustainable. The state's role in addressing and protecting people's right to land and food should be mandatory. As part of genuine agrarian reform and rural development, policies and programs that include research and development supportive of peasants must be instituted. Furthermore, the state should exercise its duty to support the rights of people in the production process in the various stages of the value chain and protect domestic markets from import dumping.

Organising, mobilising and movement building for food sovereignty and agroecology

Agroecology is the methods and tools to redesign the mainstream corporate-controlled chemical agriculture and food systems towards food sovereignty. The realisation of farmers' rights to land through genuine agrarian reform is a foundation of agroecology. Protection of local products against the dumping of foreign products is also vital towards the realisation of food sovereignty. The interrelationships and the scope of these endeavours are broad and complex, necessitating the building of solid linkages and working relationships between farmers, consumers, health advocates, progressive scientists, policymakers, and other sectors.

There is strength in unity. Individual farmers can easily change track and be easily influenced by agribusiness promoters. But an organisation with members being aware of the reality and challenges of the dominant industrial food systems is a mechanism to support democratic processes and promote and defend common interests. Without a well-organised and robust peasant organisation, genuine land reform is an illusion. Strong organisations are at the heart of promoting agroecology. People's organisations need to link together to form active movements to upscale and mainstream agroecology and change the mainstream agriculture and food systems, i.e., global corporate industrial farming and food systems.

Part of movement building is establishing mechanisms for sharing innovations among agroecology practitioners and advocates. Collaboration in knowledge generation and exchange also acts as a diffusion mechanism of knowledge and technology. Information-

sharing also enables farmers to challenge policies that are inimical to their interests and develop alternatives.

Mobilising is needed in every opportunity to press demands (or highlight grievances) to advance food sovereignty using agroecology. Research, dialogues, including legal spaces and the media, and other open spaces for direct actions are venues to express peoples' rights.

Thus, it is necessary to look at the politics of knowledge in food and agriculture to articulate and communicate effectively and mobilise collective action for agroecology. As advocates of agroecology, we need to understand the power and representation that shape the agenda. Looking at ourselves, we also need to know how the culture of participation in policy and decision making can be most effective. In advocating for concrete alternatives, practical work often is the most effective.

Corporate control of agriculture and food is so powerful and is global in its scope. Thus, there is a need to build or strengthen food sovereignty and agroecology movements to match the scale of the system that we want to change. It is essential to organise and maintain a platform for coordination and mutual support of peoples' struggles locally and globally.

Upscaling and mainstreaming agroecology

Agroecology must be upscaled and mainstreamed to counter the powerful corporate control over food and agriculture. It is imperative to enhance its legitimacy as more credible and authoritative than the industrial food system, which can be done in three ways.

The first is to develop scientific legitimacy (Montenegro de Wit and Iles 2016) to debunk Malthusian thinking or the false idea that population growth is behind hunger and destitution. Research and documentation of results from agroecological production showing higher yield and more energy-efficient and more climate change resilient production must be systematically done. Reaching out and linking with sympathetic allies in the academe and scientific communities is needed.

The second is to enhance political legitimacy to gain policy support. Legislation with enabling funding support and programs from the governments would be a big boost to mainstreaming agroecology. For example, with full state support, Cuba has transformed more than one-third of all peasant families into agroecological integrated and diversified farming systems in less than ten years (Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

Movements and advocates should create, realise, or strengthen participatory governance through direct and meaningful participation of people and local communities in land use, agricultural technologies, and food systems. Producers and consumers, indigenous people, and marginalised sectors must be vigilant in asserting their rights at all levels of governance and policymaking, i.e., at the local, provincial/state, national, and regional levels, to make this possible.

The third is to enhance ethical legitimacy for consumers to avoid chemical-laden food, GMOs and junk food in favour of agroecologically produced food. This should expand towards respecting, protecting, conserving, and restoring the integrity of ecosystems and earth processes.

Campaigns against hazardous technologies must accompany the promotion of agroecology.

Pesticide-ladened food, genetically modified and gene-edited crops, livestock, fish, and food additives must be rejected and stopped. Agricultural practices that are unsustainable and contributing to climate change must be challenged and reversed. Additionally, for agroecology to advance, intellectual property regimes on public goods like seeds and all that is living should be opposed.

The practice of and support for agroecology should diffuse at local levels, primarily through farmer-to-farmer exchanges and through farmers' organisations, and wide-scaled up to the provincial, national and regional levels. Training, workshops, fora, symposia, and available mass and social media are essential for advocacies. Institutionalising academic courses on agroecology also helps in mainstreaming efforts.

Creating markets is also essential to upscale and mainstream agroecology and affirm its legitimacy. Local farmers' markets are effective ways to encourage agroecological products, enhance the livelihood of farmers, and increase income from their products. For example, under local farmers' markets, (a) the products remain in the locality, thus enhancing local food security, (b) farmers' markets are the additional livelihood of members of the family, (c) fair price because the farmers determine the price of their products, and (d) the income remains in the community thereby increasing money in circulation in the locality to spur other economic activities.

Other alternative marketing systems based on direct producer and consumer relationships such as solidarity markets and consumer-assisted agriculture should be developed, promoted, and supported. The key is local control, shorter food mileage, and relocalisation of food systems.

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COUNTERPOINT

PAN Asia Pacific Policy Perspectives

CounterPoint is PAN Asia Pacific's policy paper on global and regional issues related to people's food sovereignty and elimination of pesticide harms. The perspectives offered in this paper are based on PANAP's vision of social and gender justice, equitable distribution of productive resources, and environmental health and sustainability.

About PANAP

PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) is one of the five regional centres of Pesticide Action Network (PAN). PANAP works for the elimination of harm caused by pesticides on human health and the environment. PANAP also promotes agroecology, helps strengthen people's movements in their assertion of rights to land and livelihood, and advances food sovereignty and gender justice.

As a network, PANAP is currently comprised of more than 100 partner organisations from the Asia-Pacific region and has links with about 400 other regional and global civil society and grassroots organisations.

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