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The Origins & Potential of Food Sovereignty

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The global food crisis of 2007–08, marked by skyrocketing food prices, urban food riots and the continued displacement of the rural poor, was a clear indication that the dominant model of agricultural development has not succeeded in eradicating poverty or world hunger. In desperation, in Haiti, Bangladesh, Egypt, West and Central Africa and countless other locations, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets demanding affordable food. Behind these highly visible events lurks the very real and ongoing human suffering caused by the lack of that key necessity for all human life — food. The stunted growth and high mortality rates of hungry children and the ill health and lost potential of malnourished adults are clear and tragic results of the chronic food shortages suffered by an increasing number of people. A growing number of households and communities fear for tomorrow's meals, even though there may be enough food for today. And even for those of us whose cupboards are well stocked and who have adequate incomes to pay our grocery bills, there are grounds for unease about the content, safety and origins of our food and the long-term sustainability of our food system. Hence, the security, cost, safety and nutrition of food and the future of food production itself are everyone's concern. While the sudden spike in prices sparked the headlines during the 2007–2008 food crisis, the problems in the global food system are complex and deep-seated. The food system's vulnerabilities, from climate change to loss of biodiversity to security of supplies, are becoming more apparent. The global food crisis is deepening. What are the possible solutions to this crisis?

Some proponents of neoliberal globalization would have us believe that the crisis is the result of shortages and market failures. They assure us that the best way to keep up with a growing population is to prevent national governments from intervening in the market, focus on scientific high-tech approaches, increase production with the adoption of genetically modified seeds (GMOs) and further liberalize agriculture and food. But despite having powerful advocates and enforcers, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) on side, these solutions reveal a spectacular failure when it comes to reducing poverty and eradicating hunger. The most recent figures from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations indicate that the ranks of the hungry are continuing to swell and now encompass more

than one billion people, an increase of over 25 percent in the number of people without enough food since the mid 1990s (FAO 1999, 2009), when the neoliberal development project was in a phase of full implementation.

As an alternative to the neoliberal model, peasants, small-scale farmers, farm workers and indigenous communities organized in the transnational agrarian movement *La Vía Campesina* (2008a) argue that the current, and linked, food, economic and environmental crises are in fact the direct result of decades of destructive economic policies based on the globalization of a neoliberal, industrial, capital-intensive and corporate-led model of agriculture. *La Vía Campesina*, formed in 1993 and now representing 148 organizations from sixty-nine countries, has become one of the strongest voices of radical opposition to the globalization of an industrial and neoliberal model of agriculture, claiming that “the time for food sovereignty has come.”

Peasant movements, urban-based social movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and indigenous peoples have been instrumental in putting food sovereignty on the agenda, and consequently, they have succeeded in shifting the terms of the debate around food, agriculture and rural development at the local, national and international levels. Because food sovereignty aims to transform dominant forces, including those related to politics, economics, gender, the environment and social organization, there will, no doubt, be a long and hard struggle to see food sovereignty become the standard model for food production and rural development. This book contributes to this struggle by engaging in a conversation that identifies and expands the meanings, understandings and implications of food sovereignty in an international context.

Initiating the Food Sovereignty Concept

Food sovereignty as a concept evolved from the experience of, and critical analysis by, farming peoples, those most immediately affected by changes in national and international agricultural policy introduced throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The results of the inclusion of agriculture in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, articulated in the WTO, brought into sharp relief communities’ widespread loss of control over food markets, environments, land and rural cultures. The term “food sovereignty” was coined to recognize the political and economic power dimension inherent in the food and agriculture debate and to take a pro-active stance by naming it. Food sovereignty, broadly defined as the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments, has emerged as a critical alternative to the dominant neoliberal model for agriculture and trade.

La Vía Campesina (1996a) first discussed food sovereignty at its Second International Conference, held on April 18–21, 1996, in Tlaxcala, Mexico. Peasant and farm leaders who gathered there no longer saw potential in the concept of “food security” to ensure local access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food. In

common usage, food security describes “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2001). This definition invites an interpretation towards food related policies that emphasizes maximizing food production and enhancing food access opportunities, without particular attention to how, where and by whom food is produced. This common definition also is uncritical of current patterns of food consumption and distribution.

Governments and agri-business corporations have pursued food security by promoting increased agricultural trade liberalization and the concentration of food production in the hands of fewer, and larger, agri-business corporations. Excess production is off-loaded through “dumping,” an international trade strategy that places food in targeted export markets at prices below the cost of production. This practice has had devastating effects on domestic agricultural systems, which cannot compete with the influx of subsidized commodities saturating local markets. International aid agencies that subscribe to the view that food insecurity is primarily the result of a lack of supply have also opted for variations of this “just produce and/or import more food from somewhere” strategy.

These contemporary policies aimed at food security offer no real possibility for changing the existing, inequitable, social, political and economic structures and policies that peasant movements believe are the very causes of the social and environmental destruction in the countryside in both the North and the South. To counter these structures and policies, La Vía Campesina (1996a) proposed a radical alternative, one “directly linked to democracy and justice,” that put the control of productive resources (land, water, seeds and natural resources) in the hands of those who produce food. The Tlaxcala Conference defined eleven principles of food sovereignty, all of which were then integrated into La Vía Campesina’s (1996b) Position on Food Sovereignty, presented at the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996 (see Appendix 1).

Subsequently, La Vía Campesina worked with other organizations and civil-society actors to further elaborate the food sovereignty framework. Here, two international civil-society events, among others, proved significant: the World Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Cuba (2001) and the NGO/CSO Forum on Food Sovereignty (2002) held in Rome in conjunction with the World Food Summit: Five Years Later. Perhaps most importantly, the international coalition Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) helped form an international food sovereignty network of social movements, research institutions and NGOs to collectively develop the People’s Food Sovereignty Statement (People’s Food Sovereignty Network 2001), which includes specific international mechanisms to ensure food sovereignty (see Appendix 2). This statement, along with La Vía Campesina’s 1996 World Food Summit document, is the most often cited international declaration of food sovereignty and was developed and signed by many of the same organizations that now

form part of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). These more recent documents reflect many aspects of La Vía Campesina's original position at the 1996 World Food Summit.

The Scope of Food Sovereignty

Can food sovereignty address the multiple crises affecting food and agriculture around the world? Can food sovereignty ensure sufficient, healthy food for everyone and provide livelihoods for peasant farmers while redressing decades of environmental degradation caused by industrial agriculture? What would change if the concept of food sovereignty were widely adopted?

The theory and practice of food sovereignty has the potential to foster dramatic and widespread change in agricultural, political and social systems related to food by posing a radical challenge to the agro-industry model of food production. The transformation envisioned entails a changing relationship to food resulting from an integrated, democratized, localized food production model. It also entails a fundamental shift in values expressed in changed social and political relations. At an international workshop on food sovereignty, Jim Handy (2007), a professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan, summarized the revolutionary implications of the seemingly simple idea of democratizing the food system:

I would like to express my sense of awe at the enormity of the change that is envisioned through the concept of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty challenges not just a particular development model, doesn't just challenge a particularly abhorrent form of neo-liberalism, doesn't just suggest a new set of rights. Rather, it envisions fundamental changes in the basis of modern society. Modern society was based on a set of exclusions and enclosures that were fundamental to the emergence and strengthening of capitalism. Those exclusions were felt primarily in the countryside and primarily in agriculture. Capitalism was dedicated to divorcing producers from any right over the goods they produced and encasing those goods in ever larger, ever more disconnected, ever more monopolized, and ever more destructive markets. Food sovereignty challenges all of that because it demands that we rethink what was at the very centre of this transition; it demands that we treat food not simply as a good, access to which and the production of which is determined by the market, it demands that we recognize the social connections inherent in producing food, consuming food, and sharing food. In the process it will change everything.

Certainly, ideas about food sovereignty force us to rethink our relationships with food, agriculture and the environment. But, perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of food sovereignty is that it forces us to rethink our relationships with one another. The magnitude of this transformation hit home in a powerful way

when, during its Fifth International Conference, La Via Campesina launched a campaign with the slogan, “Food sovereignty means stopping violence against women.”¹ Because women play a key role in food production and procurement, food preparation, family food security and food culture, the social and political transformation embedded in the food sovereignty concept specifically entails changed gender relations. Food sovereignty for communities and peoples cannot be achieved without ensuring equality, respect and freedom from violence for women. As the Declaration of Maputo stated: “If we do not eradicate violence towards women within our movement, we will not advance in our struggles, and if we do not create new gender relations, we will not be able to build a new society” (La Via Campesina 2008b).

The theoretical context of the food sovereignty struggle is framed by the changing relationship to food imposed by the industrialization of production and the globalization of agricultural trade. The globalized food system distances eaters from the people who produce food and from the places where food is produced — literally and conceptually. The more industrialized, processed and distant food is, the less connected to and knowledgeable about it the consumer becomes. This paucity of knowledge changes our relationship to our meals, stripping meaning, cultural significance and even appreciation from our daily food experiences. But it also undermines our capacity for making decisions about this key determinant of our lives and our economies. Hence the inextricable connection between food, culture and democracy.

As an alternative approach to rural development, the concept of food sovereignty is not limited to how, where and by whom food is produced but is integrally linked to other issues facing rural and global society. In this book, we discuss many of these issues, including the link between the right to food and other human rights; the exploration of alternative notions of citizenship to include participatory-democratic structures and practices related to rural and urban food production and distribution; and the relationship between food production, resource redistribution and environmental and social wellbeing.

Broadening the Struggle for Food Sovereignty

The idea of food sovereignty has gained significant momentum as numerous local, national and international social movements and NGOs have embraced it in efforts to shift agriculture and food policy (NOUMINREN 2006, International Workshop on the Review of the Agreement on Agriculture 2003, Nyéléni 2007). Some of these initiatives involve recognizing the specific implications of food sovereignty for specific local and regional populations, as in the case of the European Platform for Food Sovereignty, Task Force Food Sovereignty in the Philippines, the People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty and the People’s Caravan for Food Sovereignty, which involves a coalition of Asian agricultural and peasant movements. For instance, the movement for indigenous food sovereignty in Western

Canada, involving the rights of traditional populations to “hunt, gather, fish, grow, and eat” (Morrison 2008), must grapple with the competing demands of local agricultural populations to expand their own productive capacity. Similarly, urban food sovereignty networks seek ways to protect and link local food systems to urban consumers, who increasingly recognize and demand access to local food.

The food sovereignty movement also seeks to influence policy change at an international level through global coalition building. The People’s Food Sovereignty Network, mentioned earlier, is a powerful example of this. The International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) — a global network bringing together representatives of indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, farmers/peasants, youth, women and NGOs from many regions of the world — plays the key role of global coordination and communication. The IPC emerged in 2000 as a coalition of fifty-two civil-society organizations (CSOs), including La Vía Campesina, to plan a collective approach to the 2002 World Food Summit: Five Years Later. It works to develop common positions within the network, which are then presented to international institutions and key meetings.

This global network was instrumental in organizing the parallel NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty in the context of the World Food Summit: Five Years Later and is responsible for carrying out the action agenda adopted by this forum. In 2003, the IPC reached agreement with the director general of the FAO to act as the principal civil-society interlocutor for follow up to the 2002 summit and developed a work plan to advance a civil-society agenda in four priority areas: the right to food and food sovereignty; access to, management of and local control of resources; small-scale, family-based, agroecological food production; and trade and food sovereignty. Subsequently, the IPC facilitated the organization of civil-society consultations with the FAO and ensured representation of farmer and peasant organizations to several FAO technical committees, including fisheries, commodity products, agriculture and world food security.

The IPC also helps to organize regional and international gatherings around food sovereignty, including an especially important event, the Nyéléni International Forum on Food Sovereignty, held in February 2007 in Nyéléni, Mali. Just over a decade after introducing food sovereignty in the international arena, La Vía Campesina worked as a member of the Nyéléni Forum steering committee, which included the Network of Farmers’ and Producers’ Organizations of West Africa, World Women’s March, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fisherworkers, World Forum of Fisher Peoples, Friends of the Earth International and others involved in the IPC, to organize a global forum to deepen understandings of food sovereignty, enhance common actions and solidarity and develop strategies for implementing food sovereignty at the local and global levels. The event brought together five hundred representatives of social movements, peasant movements, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, fishers, migrant workers and NGOs from eighty countries based in the North and the Global South, who vowed to continue to

work together to build alliances at all levels and in so doing strengthen the global movement for food sovereignty (Nyéléni 2007).

By most accounts the Nyéléni forum was highly successful. First, it effectively moved food sovereignty beyond the producers' perspective and production, to include consumers' associations and consumption, something that La Vía Campesina was anxious to do. As Paul Nicholson (2007), leader with the Basque Country's peasant movement and former member of the International Coordinating Commission of La Vía Campesina, stated:

What is motivating people to take on board food sovereignty? It is food insecurity, heating up of the planet, ecological crisis, longer food miles and the need for food quality and local economies. These are citizens' preoccupations, peoples' preoccupations. La Vía Campesina does not own food sovereignty. Food sovereignty was not designed as a concept only for farmers, but for people — this is why we call it peoples' food sovereignty. We see the need for a bottom up process to define alternative practices — an international space or platform for food sovereignty. We're talking about identifying allies, developing alliances with many movements of fisher folk, women, environmentalists and consumer associations, finding cohesion, gaining legitimacy, being aware of co-optation processes, the need to strengthen the urban-rural dialogue, to generate alternative technical models. And above all there is the issue of solidarity.

Second, the forum reached consensus on a vision of food sovereignty that sees food as being integral to local cultures, closes the gap between production and consumption, is based on local knowledge and seeks to democratize the food system. Third, the gathering provided a space where national and international coalitions were solidified. Finally, after Nyéléni, there was no doubt that we were now talking about a global food sovereignty movement that clearly understood the challenges ahead. As the Nyéléni documents stated,

Food sovereignty is more than a right; in order to be able to apply policies that allow autonomy in food production it is necessary to have political conditions that exercise autonomy in all the territorial spaces: countries, regions, cities and rural communities. Food sovereignty is only possible if it takes place at the same time as political sovereignty of peoples. (Nyéléni 2007: 5)

The discourse of food sovereignty has thus entered the official international stage. In addition to the FAO's support for the IPC, reports submitted by the former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (now replaced by the Council on Human Rights) advocate food sovereignty as the path to ensure peoples' human right to food and food security (Ziegler 2003, 2004). And, although he did not use the language of food sover-

eignty, the statement by Olivier De Schutter (2009), the current Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, stressed the need to consider alternative sustainable models of agricultural development to ensure the full realization of the right to food. Key aspects of a sustainable model, he argued, are access to and secure tenure on land for the most vulnerable, regulation of transnational corporations and reorientation of national and international policies — all of which are components of food sovereignty.

All of this local, national and international grassroots activity and pressure for policy change has prompted a variety of responses from different levels of government and international bodies, some more pro-active than others. In recognizing the need for policies that support social, economic and environmental sustainability, numerous local mayors in several European nations have signed petitions endorsing a key element of food sovereignty: local production for local consumption. The Green Party in some European countries has held meetings on the subject to examine how it might help redefine European agricultural policy.

Several national governments have also integrated food sovereignty into their national constitutions and laws. For example, between 1999 and 2009, food sovereignty was included in national legislation promulgated by the governments of Venezuela, Mali, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nepal and Senegal. Certainly, there is the question of the extent to which these countries will succeed in further articulating laws and creating the necessary structures and mechanisms to implement the kind of genuine food sovereignty that will transform existing agriculture and food systems. For our purposes it is important to recognize that as a result of the strong mobilization and engagement of peasant organizations, NGOs and urban-based movements and the election of progressive political parties to power, these countries are in the process of creating, and in some cases already have opened, political spaces for debates within their borders about alternatives (Beauregard 2009).

Of course, social movements face some very real obstacles in their attempts to implement food sovereignty, as is clearly the case in Ecuador. With the election of the left-leaning President Rafael Correa in 2006, many social movements in the country saw potential for significant changes in agricultural policy. Consequently, three major rural movements — the Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Indígenas y Negras (National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black People's Organizations), the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agroindustriales, Campesinos e Indígenas Libres del Ecuador (National Federation of Agro-Industry Workers, Peasants and Indigenous Peoples) and the Confederación Nacional Campesina-Eloy Alfaro (National Confederation of Peasants, CNC-Eloy Alfaro) — formed a coalition called La Mesa Agrária (Agricultural Roundtable) to put food sovereignty on the national agenda.² The coalition and other organizations, such as the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), mobilized sufficient support for food sov-

reignty that they subsequently worked with Ecuador's Constituent Assembly on drafting the new national constitution. In late September 2008, Ecuador approved its constitution, sections of which speak directly to elements of food sovereignty (Peña 2008). For example, the constitution bans the use of genetically modified seeds (except in the interests of national security), provides extension services and support for ecological agriculture and, as Article 281 states, "Food sovereignty constitutes an objective and strategic obligation from the State" (Government of Ecuador 2008).

With the constitution in hand, Ecuador's National Assembly began work on developing legislation to implement food sovereignty. After public consultations on February 17, 2009, the National Assembly passed its progressive Organic Law on the Food Sovereignty Regime. However, in March 2009, President Correa delivered a partial veto of the new law, citing concerns about the ban on GMOs, consequences of changes in land ownership structures and issues related to the production of agrofuels.³ Newspapers reported that some social movements and government officials believe that the president acted under pressure from agri-business (El Universo 2009a). In a telling gesture, during the same month, the Government of Ecuador withdrew its support for Acción Ecológica (Environmental Action), a major environmental organization that had been working on food sovereignty (El Universo 2009b).

Moreover, although the new constitution contains groundbreaking articles supporting environmental sustainability, in January 2009, the National Assembly passed a new Mining Law to spur extraction in new areas by national and international companies. Many of Ecuador's social movements argue that this law undermines many of the constitution's guarantees, such as the rights to clean and safe water and a healthy environment — both important elements of food sovereignty. As Dosh and Kligerman (2009: 3) state, the new law jeopardizes those aspects of the constitution's articles that "ascribe to the environment itself the right to be respected, sustainably maintained, and regenerated." Without a doubt, we need to observe and analyze carefully what happens in Ecuador as those experiences hold important lessons for food sovereignty movements and national governments elsewhere.

Exploring Key Aspects of Food Sovereignty

The immediate and practical context that informs the discussion in this book is the literal displacement of millions of families from the land and their rural communities. Rural displacement and relocation is the other side of the large-scale, rapid urbanization evidenced by the exponential growth of cities over the last half century. Beginning in 2005, for the first time in history, less than half of the world population now lives and works in rural areas (UN 2007). Attendant on these massive movements of peoples is the social disruption and challenges of constructing human spaces in new places while coping with increased mobility

and greater economic and political uncertainties. Food insecurity is among the most contentious and disruptive of these uncertainties.

In the first section of this book, we explore the genesis of the alternative model for food systems expressed by the language of food sovereignty. Resistance to the cultural, economic, ecological and social dislocations and destruction perpetrated by the current neoliberal, industrialized, corporate-led food regimes is more than just a sporadic or strategic “fight back” — although that remains an important element. The voices of leaders of *La Vía Campesina* articulate the praxis/theory interplay in describing and reflecting on their practical experiences of engaging in both resistance and in building alternatives. But this interplay necessarily takes place within an ideological framework that is itself contested by the new language and concepts. The movement to reframe thinking and shift dominant paradigms of food production and food culture emerges in opposition to an ideological history expressed by current food regimes. The origins of the food sovereignty discourse and movement, the analysis of the conceptual framework and food regimes challenged by food sovereignty and the first-hand experiences and reflections of leaders of the food sovereignty movement are all key entry points into the food sovereignty debate.

The hard reality about food is that, although its true value may reside in its nutritional and cultural benefits, it is largely and increasingly a priced commodity, subject to market conditions. The industrialization and capitalization of food production and the commodification of food have radically altered our relationships to food, land and place. The powerful economic forces unleashed by capitalism are examined from several vantage points in our second section. Beginning with a critical historical perspective and analysis of the economic genesis and outcomes of the current crisis not only offers a deeper understanding of the virulent economic forces undermining healthy food systems, it also points to places of resistance and reorganization. Diverting food into other uses such as agrofuels continues the further commodification, capitalization and corporatization of agricultural production. Far from being a rural development opportunity, the agrofuels “solution” represents an intensification of the economic pressures threatening food security and rural communities. Food sovereignty is thus a counterforce to the economic pressures and corporate values that the agrofuels strategy highlights.

The economic, social and political tensions of the current food system are accompanied and augmented by increasingly obvious ecological stresses. Industrialized food production, characterized by intensification, chemical inputs, water and soil degradation, deforestation and unsustainable resource exploitation, is causing major ecological disruptions. We are all inescapably confronted by environmental problems that require fundamental changes of the food system. While much of the mainstream information about the food system focuses on the market components such as marketing, trade, packaging, nutrient and safety regulations and branding, building ecologically sustainable food systems requires fundamental

changes of values and relationships. Gaining an understanding of these changes means more than simply decrying the environmental destruction caused by current practices; importantly, it entails building what is best called a new “agrarian citizenship.” In section three, authors examine the ways in which contemporary peasant movements are revaluing the relationship between agriculture, land and the environment through campaigns on land reform, agroecology and food sovereignty.

Seeds are an essential component of the food system. Indeed, life literally begins with, and remains possible, because of seeds. However, seeds are also a kind of “poster child” for the current industrialized, corporate-driven food system. The increasingly concentrated seed industry, along with the patenting and genetic manipulation of seeds, demonstrates the power of capitalist economic strategies and policies working in lock-step with sophisticated science. This powerful nexus of problems is examined from two different perspectives in section four. Seeds have become one of the most contentious issues in contemporary struggles over food and agricultural production. The challenges of seed sovereignty range from the complex issues of patenting and genetic engineering to the even more complex cultural meanings and customs imbedded in seed exchanges and traditional seed selection and development systems. Access to and control over seeds is an essential building block of food sovereignty.

In the final section, we return to the orienting theme of the book: bridging the gap between the theory and practice of food sovereignty. It is not enough to understand the crisis of the current food system. Although such understanding is a necessary step towards building more sustainable, healthier alternatives, the way forward involves engaging in both resistance and reorientation on many fronts. Thoughtful analysis, a deeper understanding, a commitment to human rights and dignity and an engagement in practical movement politics are all part of the way forward.

The idea of food sovereignty was initially introduced by La Vía Campesina to express both the truth of power relations within the food domain and the hope for the democratic, widely dispersed, just distribution of those powers over food. The term itself opens the way for both critique and hope. This generous, provocative opening has been used to good effect — broadening, deepening, challenging and exploring some key issues evoked by the concept of, and struggles for, food sovereignty. The range and depth of discussions in this book demonstrate both the importance and complexity of food sovereignty.

It is fitting that the idea of food sovereignty was first seeded, metaphorically speaking, by those whose lives and livelihoods are on the frontlines of the battle for control over the land, resources and seeds necessary for food production. The ongoing experience of planting seeds, a long history of struggle for land, resources and social space and the critical, collective analysis of their immediate or imminent displacement have combined to lend peasants and small-scale farmers a particularly

urgent perspective on the current food situation. Hence the leadership role that the progressive agrarian movements, gathering as La Vía Campesina, have played in launching and living out the struggle for food sovereignty.

But just as most seeds require appropriate, living soils, water and good weather to flourish, the concept of food sovereignty has “come alive” in a historical moment where many others are recognizing that the current food system is not only part of, but actively perpetuating, destructive environmental, social and political dynamics. This awareness and critique is the living ground in which the struggle for food sovereignty is taking root. The solidarity of allies from all walks of life and many sectors of society around the world provides the needed tilth for food sovereignty initiatives. There is ample evidence that the food sovereignty concept is increasingly firmly rooted. The chapters in this book are illustrative of the vigorous debates it is generating in many quarters, engaging a wide spectrum of people on many levels. The roots are robust and growing, sometimes twisted and unpredictable in their reach, complexity and refinement — but definitely both alive and life-giving. Food sovereignty is a radical, provocative, transformative concept with multiple layers of meaning and application. As with the growing, harvesting and reseeded of grains, achieving food sovereignty is an ongoing, regenerative work in progress. This book is an open invitation to the reader to enter the discourse and engage in this vital work.

Notes

1. From its inception women within La Vía Campesina have engaged in an on-going struggle for gender equality and they have taken some exemplary steps to establish gender parity. The dynamics of this are discussed in depth in Desmarais (2007).
2. The following discussion of Ecuador is based largely on Beauregard (2009). All additional references were cited in Beauregard’s report. For a good discussion of this coalition’s work on food sovereignty see the documentary *Si a la Soberanía Alimentaria*, available at <dailymotion.com/video/x7arkj_si-a-la-soberania-alimentaria_news>.
3. Even before delivering his partial veto President Correa had introduced a new agricultural law that initially was designed to largely benefit agri-business interests (Denvir 2008, cited in Beauregard 2009).

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