

A global perspective on right to food campaigns: some questions and answers

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Are we holding the governance of zero hunger accountable?

A reminder: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 says “End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. (See <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>)

How and where have right to food (RTF) campaigns evolved, how have they connected to each other, what have been their achievements?

Allow me to perhaps take a devil’s advocate position in my analysis on global perspectives on right to food campaigns with the specific intent to provoke a discussion. You can write letters to the editor to react.

Providing a global perspective on RTF campaigns is not easy; it would have to be interpreted in the various national contexts, particularly given that both South Asia and Africa are so different. There are not many functioning campaigns as such (and less so RTF movements proper). There are thus more emerging lessons learned than actual achievements or positive experiences to report on. There are not many tools used and to be shared in this endeavor as such either.

So, has it been two steps forward and 1 3/4 steps backwards?

The following is just an informal sample of campaigns involved in RTF activities for long periods of time. Details about them are provided below in an Appendix:

- From 1980s: Movimento sin Terra, Brasil, (https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimento_dos_Trabalhadores_Rurais_Sem_Terra)
- From 1984: UBINIG, Bangladesh (<https://www.ubinig.org>)
- From 1986: FIAN (<https://www.fian.org/en/fian-international>)
- From 2000: Roppa (Network of Farmers Organizations and Agricultural Producers of West Africa), (<https://roppa-afrique.org/>),
- From 2007: La Via Campesina’s Nyeleni Declaration (Mali) (<https://viacampesina.org/en/declaration-of-nyeli/>),
- From 2010: CSM (the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism --CSIPM) (<https://www.csm4cfs.org/what-is-the-csm/>),
- From 2013: Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (GNRtFN) (<https://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/>)
- From 2013: Red Calisas, Argentina (https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Autores/RED_CALISAS) and food sovereignty. More academic.

So, why are we not on track, then, to achieve zero hunger?

Despite the RTF being enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in 2015, the RTF was not even mentioned in the SDGs. (<http://gh.bmj.com/content/1/1/e000040>) Is this a failure of the various RTF campaigns?

What are challenges with regard to the above-mentioned points + others?

Covid and war have been an additional easy excuse for a lack of progress; moreover, most SDGs have been off track anyway. There are many other factors mentioned as excuses challenging the fulfilment of the RTF. Among them:

- the collapse of the global food system (with no mention of the resilience of the agroecological system);
- the negative influence of foreign trade agreements;
- the dependency on food imports;
- the global debt problem and structural adjustment;
- no integration of the RTF into social protection schemes;
- restricted access to land;
- absence of a food sovereignty focus;
- constant corporate interference;
- The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of FAO not helpful enough;
- voices from the ground not heard;
- crisis of multilateralism...

Each of these factors calls for actions by RTF activists. But tackling each in isolation by pushing governments to implement, one-by-one, many individual top-down measures/policies addressing each factor is a dead-end street. Why? Because all of them are the consequence of an economic and political system that is deaf to the food and nutrition needs of hundreds of millions of people the world over.

Given all the factors enumerated above, I further ask: Is it through the promotion of 'good policies' on the RTF that RTF campaigns will move nutrition ahead?

- Are there good practices in the promotion of RTF government policies available to share?
- Are the latter really pushed by organized RTF campaigns? I am skeptical.

On the one hand, there are good examples of dedicated groups monitoring the failure (or successes) of food and nutrition policies on the ground. But is this enough? Not without following this up with stern demands of accountability and of greater transparency.

What actions are needed in the monitoring domain?

I am not going to be prescriptive, but leave it for the discussion I hope to generate.

What are the lessons learned that can provide guidance for the future?

Good policies on the RTF are sparse and many are not the result of demands tabled by actual campaigns on the RTF, but the result of high level progressive political decisions (such as has happened in Brazil and Ethiopia). Networking is indeed a most important activity to more proactively embark on so as to make public interest CSOs and social movements converge in their actions towards the RTF. But what is this convergence to be on? On 'advocacy' on/for specific nutrition policies/interventions ...or addressing the social determination of malnutrition? The former clearly may be necessary, but surely not sufficient. So, what will this mean in practice? The difference between advocating and demanding is at the center of the HR framework -- not only in nutrition. Advocacy usually lacks a structural focus.

The experience of the CSIPM (see Appendix) actively participating on the FAO's Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition and beyond has included a rich participatory public interest CSO process that led to a key vision document that radically diverged from the official Guidelines. The negotiations were challenging and the outcome document crossed several red

lines the Civil Society and Indigenous People Mechanism of the CFS (CSIPM) had clearly set. The mobilization on this (March-July 2021) included hundreds of organizations and individuals setting a precedent for real people's power. This, then, has proven an important lesson learned for the future especially in relation to the follow up of the UN Food Systems Summit where the CSIPM is also very active.

Furthermore, a good beginning has just been completed by the CSIPM with regional consultations of nutrition activists in all continents focused on assessing the local problems faced by the ongoing 'food crisis,' as well as assessing what governments (and activists) have been doing in this realm. The results are being tabulated at this moment.

A promising approach to have voices from the ground heard and to really count?

An insufficiently explored/applied approach to the RTF is for campaigns on the RTF to take a central role in the monitoring of progress made by setting annual benchmarks for the progressive realization of government plans to fulfill the RTF, i.e. annual benchmarks of processes-set-in-motion (or not!) have to be agreed upon so that public interest civil society organizations (PICSOs) can assess progress, stagnation or retrogression on an annual basis with something akin to annual shadow reports. Networking on this approach can prove crucial. If shy on this, we will be discussing the same shortcomings by the end of the SDGs in 2030.

Other lessons learned:

- engage in political alliances,
- mobilize of the youth,
- globalize local issues,
- increase emotional vs rational messaging

Appendix

FIAN: Since it was founded in 1986, FIAN International has been advocating for the right to food and nutrition. We support grassroots communities and movements in their struggles against right to food violations. Through our national sections and networks, now working in over 50 countries around the world.

In a nutshell, FIAN:

- exposes the social injustice behind our food systems, from growing and harvesting to procurement. The issue is not only what you eat, but how it is produced.
- struggles for an egalitarian distribution of resources, so people can feed themselves.
- fights for fair access to food and do not promote the increase of food production: There is already enough food to feed the entire world.
- works with a wide network of social movements and civil society actors around the world.
- brings the voices of communities to policy spaces.
- sees food as something more than to keep us alive. FIAN sees food as part of our own identity and cultural legacy.
- encourages the mobilization and organization of people who want to change the world.

The **Nyeleni** Declaration launched the food sovereignty paradigm as 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 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. 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. Food sovereignty also acts as a kind of insurance that strengthens local recovery efforts and mitigates negative impacts in case of disasters.

Nyeleni stood for people being able to determine their own food producing systems and policies; respecting women's roles, rights and representation in food production; people being able to live with dignity and earn a living wage; considering food sovereignty an inalienable human right; conserving the ecologically sustainable management of land, soils, water, seas, seeds and livestock; respecting people's diverse traditional knowledge, foods, language and culture, as well the way they organize; an agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights on all productive ecosystems; ensuring community survival, social and economic justice and ecological sustainability, as well as respect for local autonomy and governance; and the right of peoples to defend their territories from the actions of transnational corporations. The Nyéléni Declaration committed to building a collective movement for food sovereignty through forging alliances, supporting each others' struggles and extending solidarity. In this sense, Nyeleni can be considered the cradle of operationalizing the RTF.

Roppa: ROPPA is an initiative specific to farmers' organizations and agricultural producers in West Africa. It brings together 13 members national farmer organizations (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo) and associated member farmer organizations (Cap- Green, Nigeria). Since its creation in June 2000, in Cotonou, ROPPA has positioned itself as a tool for the defense and promotion of family farms which constitute the main production system in West Africa. Roppa supports peasant organizations and agricultural producers and their members in the recognition of their identity, their sovereignty and their rights. Roppa's Convention is its sovereign body. It is made up by 9 delegates per national delegation platform including at least two women and meeting every 2 years. A Board of Directors is its political body for conducting its affairs. It has an executive secretariat in charge of technical, coordination and operational matters.

The **CSIPM** was created in 2010 in response to the fundamental decision of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to give a particular voice and space to those most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, who are at the same time the most important contributors to food security and nutrition worldwide. CSIPM is an autonomous and essential part of the reformed CFS and our role is to facilitate civil society, social movements and Indigenous Peoples' engagement and participation in the policy work of the CFS.

The Mechanism is a space where organizations of smallholder and peasant farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, agricultural and food workers, consumers, landless, urban food insecure and NGOs gather to interface with governments, UN agencies and other relevant actors of the food system to promote policies for the

elimination of hunger and malnutrition and for the progressive realization of the right to food. We are the largest international space of civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organizations working to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition. The organizations participating in the CSIPM have more than 380 million affiliated members. It is the largest international space of civil society organizations (CSOs) working to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition. All participating organizations in the CSM belong to one of the following 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless, women, youth, consumers, urban food insecure and NGOs. Participation of civil society organizations is articulated through global and sub-regional units. The global units (constituencies) bring together the global and continental organizations and networks of each sector. The CSM 17 sub-regions are the following: North America, Central America and Caribbean, Andean Region, Southern Cone, West Europe, East Europe, North Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, Australasia and Pacific. The Coordination Committee (CC) is the governing body of the CSM; this means that all relevant political decisions within the CSM, on internal and external issues, are taken by the CC by consensus. The CC consists of 35 members (as of March 2022) from the 11 constituencies and 17 sub-regions.

Red Calisas: Red de Cátedras Libres de Soberanía Alimentaria y Colectivos Afines (Red Calisas, Argentina) brings together 67 spaces throughout the country that promote public debate on the dominant agroindustrial model and the defense of agroecology, food sovereignty and social and popular economy. The first Calisa was born at the National University of La Plata in 2003. It has subsequently been working in a network since 2013. The vast majority of the spaces in the network are Free Chairs of Food Sovereignty in national public universities are part of research teams that address food sovereignty and collectives that address food sovereignty. The network interacts with social organizations that work food sovereignty not necessarily inserted in universities. The Network develops and carries out teaching, extension, research, communication and public policy advocacy activities but, fundamentally, it weaves with organizations in the territories in which they are inserted. They are organized by regions (Cuyo, NOA, NEA, Centro, Caba-Amba, Patagonia) and are currently preparing the First Report on Food Sovereignty in Argentina (which will be updated every year thereafter) through surveys and regional fora open to the community. There are otherwise many actors that assume the defense of food sovereignty as a political banner in Argentina (political parties, governments of the three levels - federal, provincial and municipal -, organizations of family, peasant and indigenous agriculture, universities, social movements, trade unions and cooperatives.

UBINIG: (Policy Research for Development Alternatives)

Ubinig is an NGO based in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Founded in 1984, the organization has established nine learning places in the country. Its stated goals include equality and justice, diversity, and the promotion of social rights and responsibilities. It seeks to train communities in environmental concerns, trade policies and labor rights particularly as they apply to women. It has conducted research on the nutritional values of regional food supplies and made major contributions to the formulation of policies protecting biodiversity in the region. The organization opposes the use of hybrid seed varieties in the region as requiring burdensome purchase costs along with additional needs for fertilizers, pesticides, and water.

MST: (Movimento dos sem terra, Brasil)

The Landless People's Movement is organized in 24 states in the five regions of the country. In total, there are about 450,000 families that conquered the land through the struggle and organization of rural workers. Even after being settled, these families remain organized in the MST, as the conquest of the land is only the first step towards the realization of Agrarian Reform. The settled families organize and carry out new struggles to conquer their inalienable rights. With a national reach, the families organize themselves in a participatory and democratic structure to make decisions. In the settlements and encampments, families organize themselves into groups that discuss the needs of each area. In these nuclei, the coordinators of the settlement or encampment are chosen. The same structure is repeated at regional, state and national levels. An important aspect is that decision-making bodies are oriented to guarantee the participation of women, always with two coordinators, a man and a woman. And in the assemblies of camps and settlements, everyone has the right to vote: adults, youth, men and women. The MST's largest decision-making space is the National Congresses that take place, on average, every five years. In addition to the Congresses, every two years the MST holds its national meeting, where the definitions deliberated in the Congress are evaluated and updated. In order to carry out specific tasks, families are also organized by sectors, which are organized from the local to the national level, according to the need and demand of each settlement, camp or state. With an internationalist outlook (Palestine, Haiti, Venezuela and Zambia), the MST is active in RTH, agribusiness and agroecology issues.

GNRTFN: The Global Network on RTF and Nutrition was established in 2013. It is a network without a rigid organizational structure (having only the Coordinating Committee and Secretariat (currently served by FIAN International), as of today, there are around 60 organizations from across regions as well as regional/international organizations ([click here](#) for the list of organizations). The Network is a space for dialogue + mobilization to hold states accountable for their human rights obligations for the RTFN; it supports each others' struggles against violations of the RTFN and protection of human rights defenders against repression, violence and criminalization, and promotes a holistic interpretation of the RTFN, including the full realization of women's human rights, within the food sovereignty framework. The Coordinating Committee has regular meetings (to guide and monitor the implementation and follow-up of the GNRTFN work plan, discuss the promotion and strengthening of the GNRTFN. As such, it is a space for the members of the Network to collaborate at local-national-international level where members call for it, in particular in areas such as standards setting, monitoring, work with UN Special Procedures, solidarity support (release of statements) and capacity building. The RTFN WATCH is the network's annual flagship publication. The GNRTFN has agreed to work on: 1) Strengthening the GNRTFN (communication, expanding membership, enhancing exchanges among members, providing new capacities to movements, feminist analysis, networking with others). 2) Monitoring the RTFN nationally, regionally and globally (also supporting members' national struggles; linking national with international). And 3) working on Food Systems Transformation (critiquing the UNFSS and its follow-up and searching for people's solutions around agroecology).

[Note: a concrete example of convergence is how the People's Health Movement interacts with the GNRTFN: PHM takes up and follows the RTFN approach through its F+N thematic circle].