

PEASANTS GIVE LIFE TO BIODIVERSITY

We have shaped biodiversity for food and agriculture and it shapes us; food sovereignty and a healthy environment depend on it.

"Food sovereignty ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock, and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food."

Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007



WE HUMANS ARE PART OF BIODIVERSITY, THE DIVERSITY OF LIVING BEINGS

As peasants – the women and men cultivators, livestock keepers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, artisanal fishers, Indigenous Peoples and other rural and urban small-scale food providers – we consider ourselves to be an integral part of biodiversity.

According to many traditional worldviews all of nature and the environment is alive; human beings are part of the family of living beings, not outside of it. All living creatures are engaged in an age-old relationship of mutual interaction shaping each other's existence in a process of co-evolution. Peasant practices of developing biodiversity are not only shaped by material necessities, but also by spiritual beliefs, culture, and emotion.

Despite pressures associated with processes of modernisation, in many places biodiversity is still thriving where traditional worldviews and practises are still important. In some places where they have been lost, they are being recovered and biodiversity is being re-created in new ways.

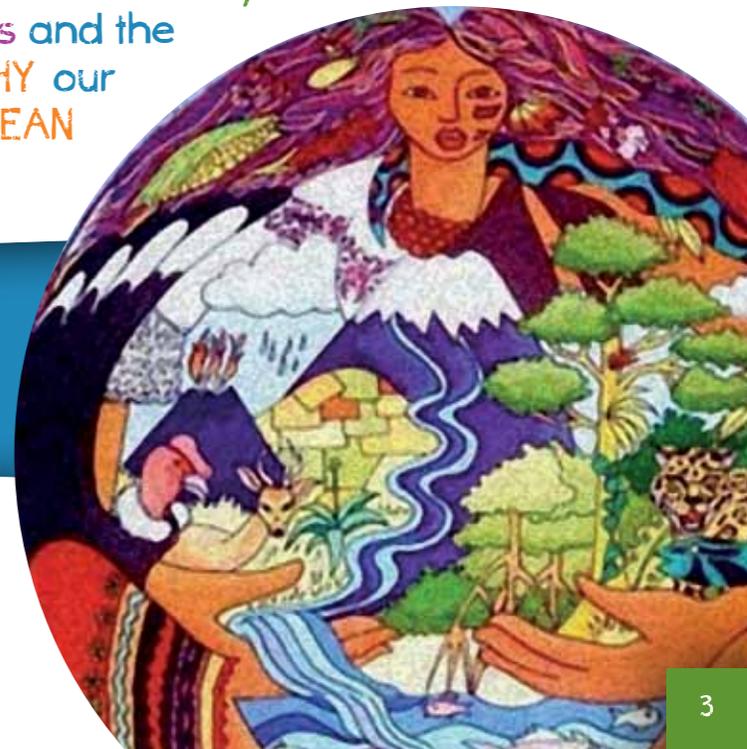
“Biodiversity has as a fundamental base the recognition of human diversity, the acceptance that we are different and that every people and each individual has the freedom to think and to be. Seen in this way, biodiversity is not only flora, fauna, earth, water and ecosystems; it is also cultures, systems of production, human and economic relations, forms of government; in essence it is freedom.” *Via Campesina III Int. Conference, 2000*



Since we are a part of nature, **HOW WE TREAT OUR FELLOW BEINGS** is a reflection of how we treat ourselves what we think it is to be human. If we take care of our fellow beings, with them we can create beauty, define our identities, give flavours and colours to our cultures. With these living beings we not only feed ourselves but also build shelter, provide clothing, keep warm, heal the sick and provide a healthy environment for bees, worms, microbes and the myriad living beings that keep **HEALTHY** our crops, animals and soils, and **KEEP CLEAN** our waters and air.

“I live off it. I feed myself from Pachamama. The water I drink and the air I breathe comes from Pachamama. This is my story. Here we still live with dignity, we don't just survive”.
*Member of the Women Defenders of Pachamama Front
(Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama)*

“Our Creation Story teaches us that the first Grandparents of our people were made from white and yellow corn. Maize is sacred to us because it connects us with our ancestors. It feeds our spirit as well as our bodies.”
Juana Batz Puac, K'iche' Maya, Day Keeper



WHAT BIODIVERSITY FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE MEANS FOR US

"We affirm that it is not possible to conserve animal diversity without protecting and strengthening the local communities that currently maintain and nurture this diversity....We defend a way of life that is linked deeply with our cultures and spirituality and not just aimed at production..."

Wilderswil Declaration on Livestock Diversity organised by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, 2007

It supports agroecological production

Biodiversity is an essential pillar of peasant strategies for survival and autonomy through reducing costs and risks. Peasant agroecological production systems have cultivated, sustained and developed millions of varieties of crops and trees, breeds of livestock, and diverse aquatic organisms over millennia and throughout the world. These nurture healthy populations of pollinators, pest-predators, soil and aquatic organisms above and below ground and in waters.

It is intertwined with our knowledge

Biodiversity is more than the diversity of genetic resources, species and ecosystems: it essentially includes the knowledge that led to its development and for its use. This knowledge is embedded in a dynamic web of relations between human beings and nature, continuously responding to new problems and finding new solutions.

It makes the environment more resilient

Environments rich in biodiversity are ecologically resilient to climate change and other threats, and also deliver other benefits to the environment and people, such as improved soil water retention, less soil erosion, increased soil biodiversity, improved pollination as well as clean air and water.



It improves the health of people and the planet

Biodiversity is essential to human survival and health: when biodiversity is diminished, disequilibrium results which threatens health – both of humans and of nature.

It is the product of our knowledge and collective rights

The successful enhancement of biodiversity – through exchanges within and between small-scale producers, countries and continents – depends on peasants' knowledge and collective rights of access to and control over territories, waters, seeds, biodiversity.

It requires freedom to choose supportive systems and cultures

Enhancement of biodiversity requires the freedom for peasants to choose the social system, the agrarian system and culture that value it in a holistic sense, in the face of economic 'values' imposed by a 'free' market which destroys peasants' seeds, biodiversity and associated cultural freedoms.

"Seeds are an essential part of life; they are the result of the collective work of thousands of generations of farmers, since ancient times. They created the vast rainbow of colours, shapes and flavours that came into our hands, so we can deliver them to future generations. For farmers, indigenous and afro-Colombian people, seeds have been the foundation of their culture and their production systems."

Manifesto of the Free Seeds Network Colombia, 2012





TODAY BIODIVERSITY IS IN PERIL

The industrial model of production and consumption is rapidly destroying rural societies that manage biodiversity for food and agriculture.

It uses genetically uniform monocultures of crops, livestock and fish, increasingly genetically modified, while **locking up diversity in gene banks.**

Land grabs and ocean/water grabs extend the area under this model of production. Likewise, the spread of agrofuel and cellulose plantations, mining, and large dams occupy our biodiverse territories.

Intensive use of **pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilisers** further reduce biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

Climate change, exacerbated by this model, is putting new pressures on the local diversity of crops and livestock as weather patterns change, and new pests and diseases proliferate.

Industrial research systems for this model, de-value and erode peasant and indigenous knowledge, local research capacities and the multitude of local innovation systems which foster biodiversity.

Monopolies control industrial seed, agrochemical and industrial commodity markets, which jeopardise freedom for peasants to access and use biodiversity.

Industrial Property Rights and other laws which protect monopolies **criminalise peasant producers** who challenge the industrial model of production and its effects.



Industrial commodity chains erode biodiversity

They use few crop varieties, few livestock breeds and few fish species

Their monocultures and agrochemicals destroy biodiversity and livelihoods

75% of crop diversity has been lost from industrial production: of 7,000 food crops used in peasant food webs, industrial commodity chains trade about 150 crops, of which Rice, Wheat, Maize and Potatoes provide 60% of calories in the industrial food system.

Livestock breeds are lost at the rate of one each month:

Of 40 livestock species domesticated by peasants, commercial livestock production is dominated by four livestock types – cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, and poultry.

Soil biodiversity, pollinators and pest-predator populations are in decline:

billions of tonnes of soil and trillions of pollinators are lost each year.

Peasant production, and the diversity it cultivates, is under threat:

in Europe 3 million farms have disappeared in the past 8 years.

Forests, wetlands and 'unmanaged' habitats are fast disappearing,

reducing the diversity of 'wild' foods and crop wild relatives.

Fisheries are collapsing: 80 per cent of the world's fish stocks are fully exploited or overexploited. From more than 35,200 marine species, industrial fisheries focus on just five types of species.



"[We] denounce the fashion in which our states encourage the spread of GMOs and derived products and the promotion of industrial agriculture, with all the harm it has caused and continues to cause to our environment, health and economies. In fact, it has put immense pressure on all our resources: water, land, energy and both animal and plant biodiversity"

4th West African Farmers' Seed Fair, Djimini, Sénégal, 2014

"Both privatization and government confiscation ("nationalisation") of common resources [have] dramatic effects on the overall viability of pastoral systems and on the environment.... These policies and changes exacerbate poverty of people and erosion of biological diversity, force people into migration and deprive our peoples of their subsistence base, cultural values, spirituality and dignity."

Segovia Declaration of Nomadic and Transhumant Pastoralists, 2007

"For peasants and other people working in rural areas, the relationship with Mother Earth, her territories and waters is the physical, cultural and spiritual basis for our existence. We are required to maintain this relationship with Mother Earth for the survival of our future generations. We gladly assume our role as her guardians."

Joint Statement: 2nd session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on a UN declaration on the rights of peasants, 2015



"We must crush the agricultural model imposed by agribusiness corporations, supported by international financial capital, and based on GM monocultures, the massive use of pesticides and the expulsion of peasants from the countryside; it is primarily responsible for the food, climate, energy and urbanisation crises."

Final Declaration at the 6th CLOC-Vía Campesina congress, 2015



PEASANT ORGANISATIONS ARE LINKING ACROSS THE WORLD

Peasant resistance in defence of biodiversity and agroecological production is a strategy for autonomy, livelihoods and health; it is at the heart of the struggle to realise food sovereignty

Collective actions in support of the use and regeneration of our ecological and biodiverse food systems, and rejecting the industrial commodity system and its protections, are articulated across our territories, and are increasingly coordinated across major regions and internationally.

Social Movements Support the Resistance and Collective Actions

Peasants, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, Indigenous Peoples, forest dwellers, urban gardeners and other small-scale food providers are organised in social movements all over the world. They enhance their sustainable and resilient food systems, under local, collective control, in the face of the spread of biodiversity-destroying monocultures under monopoly control.

Social movements, representing the food providers of the world in international forums and the international food sovereignty movement build their strength from actions locally, regionally and internationally. They are challenging industrial commodity production and promoting the peasant model of production and consumption which currently feeds most people in the world and sustains the environment.

HOW WE GIVE LIFE TO BIODIVERSITY

We live in a multitude of diverse societies in nearly every ecosystem on Earth. Using our own methods, tools and customary practices, in approaches embracing collective rights, our dynamic management of biodiversity, above and below ground and in waters, has developed production systems that have co-evolved with us over millennia.

Working with nature, in the framework of food sovereignty and our intertwined actions of production, innovation, resistance and protest, innovation, resistance and protest, **innovation, resistance and protest**, we continue to give life to biodiversity for food and agriculture. We are doing this by using our biodiverse and ecological model of production, producing and processing locally for local markets. By connecting those who grow with those who eat. We also are reclaiming our territories and ensuring we have access to our seeds, livestock breeds, fish seed and wider biodiversity. Our innovative research, co-creating knowledge with specialists, enhances biodiversity. And we are actively promoting our approach in policy forums. These efforts are summarised in the following pages



"Peasant systems for rediscovering, re-valuing, conserving and exchanging seeds, together with local adaptation due to the local selection and reproduction in farmers' fields, maintain and increase the genetic biodiversity that underlies our world food systems and gives us the required capacity and flexibility to address diverse environments, a changing climate and hunger in the world."

Bali Seed Declaration, 2011



"We uphold our human and fishing rights as fisherfolk of the world, protect our livelihoods, pursue social justice for fishing communities, preserve and promote the culture of fishing communities worldwide, affirm water as the source of all life and commit ourselves to sustain fisheries and all aquatic resources for present and future generations of the world"

Founding document of World Forum of Fisher Peoples, 1997

"The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales."

Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, 2015



"Carefully choosing your food is an act of resistance and a gesture of solidarity with the women and men farmers who renew peasant seeds."

Declaration of the international meeting "Sow your resistance: farmers' seeds to feed people", 2015

STIMULATING OUR INTERCONNECTED MODEL OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

We provide food for most people in the world, mainly locally. We continue to construct our interlinked models of biodiverse and healthy food production and consumption in rural and urban areas including peasant production, pastoralism, artisanal fishing, hunter gathering.

Our ecological and biodiverse model of production, primarily providing nutritious food locally and then for people and markets located further away, is what provides food for most people in the world.

Our model responds to people's needs rather than the demands of distant markets.

Our model is resilient and can adapt to external pressures such as climate change, compared with vulnerable industrial commodity production that is also a major cause of climate change.

Our model of production and consumption sustains people and the planet.



CONNECTING THOSE WHO GROW AND HARVEST DIRECTLY WITH THOSE WHO EAT

Peasants, especially women, provide fresh and processed foods for autonomous food systems and local food webs served by local, sometimes cross-border, markets. Likewise they provide other products of biodiversity such as animal feed, fibre, building materials, fuel. Local provision and processing strengthens local economies. When local markets support biodiversity it enables peasant producers to sell a wider range of cultivated and wild plants and animals conserved locally.

Colours of alpacas in the Andes

Indigenous Alpaca keepers recognise 11 colours of alpaca wool, some important for ceremonial reasons. The coloured alpaca are well adapted to local conditions yet the flocks are now dominated by white alpaca whose finer fibre earns higher prices in the market, dominated by large-scale manufacturing. But these animals are more vulnerable to disease. Reviving the more resilient locally-adapted coloured breeds means valuing local knowledge that is deeply embedded in culture and local values.

West African markets

COFERSA (Convergence of Rural Women for Food Sovereignty) is an organisation bringing together 36 cooperatives of rural women in six regions of Mali. COFERSA helps by linking them with local markets and processing of their products, including millets and semi-domesticated fruits etc. It supports their agroecological production and advocacy to promote food sovereignty. Since 2009, it is helping them organise to reclaim their biodiversity and expertise in enhancing farmers' seeds. COFERSA is a member of the West African Committee of peasant seeds (COASP).



"Promote and support knowledge-intensive and biodiverse ecological production and harvesting of food, primarily for local markets, in small-scale peasant and family farms, aquaculture farms, water bodies and pastoral grazing lands."

CSO proposals for Policies and Actions to Eradicate Hunger and Malnutrition, 2009



"Break the power of food corporations. Establish a constitutional right to food. Build food sovereignty from below, based on small scale farming and agroecology, not industrial agriculture... We believe that small-scale farmers, cooperatives, community markets, as part of the solidarity economy, can feed our people"

South African Food Sovereignty Campaign Declaration, 2015



"We believe that peoples' access to and control of land and water is essential to peace, to stopping climate change, as well as to fulfilling fundamental human rights and guaranteeing a dignified life for all. Equal distribution of land and water, and gender equality are central to our vision of food sovereignty, based on agroecology, local food systems, biodiversity, control of our seeds, and respect for natural water cycles."

Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, World Social Forum, Tunis, 2015

RECLAIMING ACCESS TO OUR TERRITORIES - LAND AND WATERS

We are realising secure access to our territories through direct actions, agrarian reform, exclusive fishing zones, secure migratory routes. Our ability to sustain biodiversity above and below ground and in waters depends on this.

Protecting sustainable small-scale fisheries...

"...by exclusively providing access [for] small-scale fishermen to the resources that they have the ability to fish in a sustainable manner; by reserving the coastal zone and the continental shelf for small-scale fishery activities, defining clearly the legislation, and protecting it effectively against the incursions of trawlers;"

From statement to governments by the African Confederation of Artisanal Fisheries Professional Organisations, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 2014

Keeping traditional migratory routes open

"The resistance of pastoralist organisations to land grabs often focuses on the importance of ensuring mobility across borders and traditional migration routes, in order to keep access to and use of lands and territories."

World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples



EXERTING COLLECTIVE CONTROL OVER OUR SEEDS AND OTHER BIODIVERSITY

Our diverse seeds, livestock, fish and wider biodiversity are the bedrock of food sovereignty. Access to these is an inalienable right of peasants. Peasant seeds are the common foundation of resistance.

Seed networks in Europe

In industrial countries the push for GMOs has created a movement for reviving Peasant seeds. Since 2003, the French Farmers' Seed Network (Réseau Semences Paysannes – RSP) brings together a great diversity of collectives and people who preserve farmers' seeds in fields, orchards, vineyards and gardens. RSP is a co-founder of the European Coordination for Let's Liberate Diversity! (EC-LLD) which discusses the positions of national networks and develops common actions with other organisations in Europe.

Community seed banks in Brazil

In Brazil, since the 1970s, banks of peasant seeds ensure peasant autonomy over seed supply in semi-arid regions. The Community Seed Bank Network from Paraíba State, Northeast Brazil, has 161 community seed banks involving 3,000 families. In 2015, the Brazilian Government supported the creation of 640 community seed banks in the region in partnership with Articulação no Semiárido Brasileiro (ASA), a national coalition that has thousands of grassroots organisations.

Peasants worldwide are developing 'Maisons des semences' and local seed banks, supporting peasant seed networks, seed fairs and maintaining diverse breeds of livestock.



"Seeds hold a special place in the struggle for food sovereignty. These small grains are the basis for the future. They shape, at each life cycle, the type of food people eat, how it is grown, and who grows it. Seeds are also a vessel that carries the past, the accumulated vision, and knowledge and practices of peasant and farming communities worldwide."

La Via Campesina, Our Seeds, Our Future (2013)

Seeds of Culture
SEEDS THAT LAST



“Agroecology is developed through our own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding.”

Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, 2015



ENGAGING IN RESEARCH THAT ENHANCES BIODIVERSITY

Our research and technology development respects collective rights and encourages the co-creation of diverse knowledges with supportive researchers. Peasant producers are regenerating productive environments, for example, community management of mangroves, agroforestry, and mobile pastoralism. We are developing local innovations and new ‘tools’ such as evolutionary and participatory plant breeding, Farmer Field Schools, local small-scale livestock diversification, and sustainable small-scale fishing gear.

West African rejection of GMOs

For over a decade, West African peasants have been constantly expressing their opposition to the introduction of GMOs in their fields and in their diet. In Mali, citizens’ juries, composed of women and men farmers, that were held on the future of agriculture in 2006 and the democratisation of research in 2010, have categorically rejected GMO technology for crops. In 2015 there were thousands joining Burkina Faso civil society in a march on Ouagadougou to defend food sovereignty from Monsanto’s GMOs, as did Food Sovereignty Ghana in Accra.

Evolutionary Plant Breeding in Iran

Participatory research in Iran has led to the wide-scale adoption of a strategy for rapidly increasing on-farm biodiversity: Evolutionary Plant Breeding. Farmers cultivate very diverse mixtures of hundreds, or even a thousand or more, of different varieties/populations and allow them to evolve and adapt to their local conditions. These evolutionary populations are living gene banks in the farmers’ own fields.

“We encourage researchers to focus their research on the promotion of local traditional seeds rather than GM varieties.”

Citizen Space for a democratic discussion on GMOs and the future of farming in Mali. Sikasso, Mali, 2006

INCLUDING PEASANTS IN POLICY MAKING

In democratic forums, we can challenge and start to redress imbalances in power that have served monopoly interests and which threaten biodiversity and peasant livelihoods. We participate in many international forums which deal with aspects of genetic resources and biodiversity governance but only as observers despite being those who give life to biodiversity. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is more democratic and provides a good example.

Committee on World Food Security

The CFS is a UN committee mandated to provide global governance on food security. Since its renewal in 2009, peasant organisations and social movements have equal voice with governments in the CFS. The Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS, dominated by social movements, contributes to agenda setting. A challenge for the CFS is to address biodiversity and agroecology issues and to assess the contributions to food security by UN and other forums concerned with the governance of genetic resources, biodiversity and related issues.

“We want local food producers to be at the heart of a participatory, inclusive decision-making process. We must defend collective rights; change laws and discriminatory policies, and develop new legal frameworks that respect and protect Farmers’ Rights to use, save, exchange and sell seeds and livestock breeds, putting the control of biodiversity and knowledge back in the hands of peasants. Policies need to value local knowledge, and give us the opportunity to share our knowledge.”

Report of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyéléni, 2015

“As long as you do not ban all bio-pirated patents, as long as farmers do not have a right to keep, use, exchange and sell seeds from their own harvests then we will not collaborate with research and gene banks that serve the multinational seed companies.”

Message, from 136 farmers’ organisations, seed networks, social movements and other Civil Society Organisations, to the International Seed Treaty (IT PGRFA), 2015



PEASANTS ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Respecting the collective rights of the women and men who use, maintain and enhance peasant biodiversity for food and agriculture, we will strive to:

Strengthen and promote our dynamic management of biodiversity, based on ecological principles and collective rights over knowledge, resources and territories.

Transform research so that it is reframed by peasants for the co-creation of diverse knowledges, which shall not be patented.

Realise actions that guarantee the collective rights of peasants and Indigenous Peoples to use, exchange, breed, select and sell their seeds, livestock breeds, fish seed.

Reinforce our interconnecting and collective rural-urban food webs and local markets in ways that sustain biodiversity in our territories and feed the majority.

This brochure is based on a report prepared by Bob Brac de la Perrière (BEDE), Angela Cordeiro, Patrick Mulvany and Maryam Rahmanian on behalf of the Agricultural Biodiversity Working Group of the IPC for Food Sovereignty. The authors thank the agrobiodiversity@knowledged programme and the Agricultural Biodiversity Community (abc) network, financed by Oxfam Novib and Hivos, for supporting the production of this brochure, but they remain responsible for its content.

Copies of this brochure in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, together with photo credits and the fully referenced paper in English, are available: www.foodsovereignty.org/biodiversity

This brochure is a contribution to raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity for food and agriculture and the process, led by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, to prepare the first report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture: www.fao.org/nr/cgrfa/biodiversity/sowbfa/en

