

UN Report Supports Food Sovereignty - calls for Democratic Food Systems

by Jacob Chamberlain via sal - CommonDreams *Wednesday, Mar 12 2014, 12:57am*

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Complete reversal, not reform, of global food system needed in favor of sustainable food sovereignty



The current global food system needs to be "radically" and "democratically" changed in order to alleviate global hunger and serve human rights over the profits of major agribusiness corporations, according to a [report](#) released Monday by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food.

"At the local, national and international levels, the policy environment must urgently accommodate alternative, democratically-mandated visions" which go beyond the goal of profit maximization and instead rebuild local and sustainable food models, said Rapporteur Olivier De Schutter, while presenting his final report ([pdf](#)) to the UN Human Rights Council, finalizing his six-year term.

"Food democracy must start from the bottom-up, at the level of villages, regions, cities, and municipalities," the rights expert said.

"Food security must be built around securing the ability of smallholder farmers to thrive," he emphasized. "Respect for their access to productive resources is key in this regard."

The current system, says De Schutter, has instead created a world monopolized by the big-agro "green revolution" of mono-cropping, industrialization and pesticide-heavy techniques, which has boosted agricultural production over the past 50 years but has "hardly reduced the number of hungry people," the report states.

This system of large-scale export-based agriculture is most often "based on the exploitation of a largely dis-empowered workforce," the report states, "operated at the expense of family farms producing food crops for local consumption" that cannot keep up with corporate competitors.

This has resulted in a "paradoxical situation in which many low-income countries, though they are typically agriculture-based, raw commodity-exporting economies, are highly dependent on food imports," the report states, "sometimes supplemented by food aid, because they have neglected to invest in local production and food processing to feed their own communities."

This industrialized system has also led to a major loss in biodiversity, soil erosion, mass pollution,

and a rise in man-made greenhouse gas emissions—"the most potentially devastating impacts of industrial modes of agricultural production," the report states.

Under these conditions, and particularly with the onset of climate change, agricultural productivity will only decrease sharply over time, De Schutter warns.

According to De Schutter, an "eradication of hunger and malnutrition" is an achievable goal only if we completely reverse the current logic of our food system to a system which depends on democratic decision-making led by the people—or as food justice campaigners put it: Food Sovereignty.

"National right to food strategies should be co-designed by relevant stakeholders, in particular the groups most affected by hunger and malnutrition, and they should be supported by independent monitoring," stated De Schutter.

De Schutter continued:

Objectives such as supplying diverse, culturally-acceptable foods to communities, supporting smallholders, sustaining soil and water resources, and raising food security within particularly vulnerable areas, must not be crowded out by the one-dimensional quest to produce more food. [...]

The greatest deficit in the food economy is the democratic one. By harnessing people's knowledge and building their needs and preferences into the design of ambitious food policies at every level, we would arrive at food systems that are built to endure.

The report offers as an alternative a system which enables local, autonomous food production alongside international trade that would incorporate "agroecological" modes of production. Agroecology includes techniques such as "intercropping, the recycling of manure and food scraps into fertilizers, and agroforestry...that reduce the use of external inputs and maximize resource efficiency."

The report explains:

Because agroecology reduces the cost of farming by minimizing the use of expensive inputs, it improves the livelihoods of farming households, particularly the poorest households. And it supports rural development: because it is knowledge-intensive and generally more labor-intensive, it creates employment opportunities in rural areas.

Though easier to implement on smaller-sized farms, agroecological techniques can be disseminated on a large scale and should also inspire reforms in how large production units operate.

Other objectives include reducing meat production in favor of crops grown for human consumption and a reduction in biofuel use—both of which have "represented a major source of price volatility on agricultural markets" over the years.

In response to the report, Martin Drago, Friends of the Earth Food Sovereignty Program Co-coordinator, [stated](#), "This report is the only recipe for the eradication of hunger. Its recommendations are bold and simple: our current food systems must be reversed, not just reformed."

"The report's recommendations clearly state that Food Sovereignty is needed to eradicate hunger as

well as to democratize our food systems," said Drago. "The report also recognizes Food Sovereignty as an essential condition to be fulfilled in order to fully realize the right to food."

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 [UN Report](#)

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