

# RETHINKING CONSERVATION THROUGH THE LENS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

An Event at the IVth World Conservation Congress (Barcelona, Spain)

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Organized by the *International Institute for Environment and Development* (IIED) and the  
*IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy* (CEESP)

## OVERVIEW

At the centre of Food Sovereignty is the right to food, including rights of access to productive resources needed for food production and provisioning. Many initiatives to conserve natural resources and biodiversity rich ecosystems in which food systems are embedded increasingly rely on or advocate market based approaches, e.g., payments for ecosystem services; land, biodiversity and water markets; and partnerships between public and private sector. Such market-based approaches can conflict with rights-based approaches, including Food Sovereignty, by *inter alia*,

- exacerbating the negative pressures that land conservation can have on livelihoods (e.g., carbon offset forests and expanded private protected areas leading to increased physical, economic, or access-related displacement);
- creating new market incentives that ‘out compete’ food production systems (e.g., agrofuels);
- benefitting and expanding individual and private forms of ownership and tenure that can undermine collective rights and cultures; and
- creating a dominant discourse and policy direction about nature’s ‘value’ (as global services) and peoples’ roles (as service providers) that does not align with peoples’ own understandings and practices, and that can as a result displace local people and their systems of knowledge.

Market-based approaches, or at least components of them, can also be compatible with social/cultural justice and with rights-based approaches under the right conditions. This can include market systems embedded within inclusive, collective rights to food, land, biodiversity, and knowledge... though the conditions to ensure this synergy are not widely understood or supported.

IUCN, including its Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy (CEESP), has a mandate to promote and support development of Food Sovereignty approaches in natural resource and biodiversity conservation (see text box). In this event we revisited that resolution, and undertook an in-depth dialogue on rights and market based approaches to food, agriculture, land use, conservation and human well being, including by drawing on the Food Sovereignty paradigm. Audience members were encouraged to share their own views, experiences, and challenges regarding both market- and rights-based approaches, including Food Sovereignty.

The event created an important and fruitful space for raising key questions and concerns about the potential Food Sovereignty impacts of market-based conservation and capitalist development. However, as several panel and audience members pointed out, the challenge remains to develop and act on a stronger understanding of how we move from problem analysis to actions around just solutions. *How can we re-claim and reform the trends of globalization, capitalist development, and market-based conservation efforts to ensure their consistency with the Food Sovereignty paradigm?* Participants pointed to several concrete ideas – including:

- Carefully examine, document, and disseminate information about the impacts of market-based conservation schemes on people’s livelihoods, particularly in food production and broadly defined food rights.
- Engage with consumers, large market actors, and other large-scale resource exploiters about their impacts and their responsibilities.
- Recognize and support community solidarity, including collective action to resist and/or claim power over external market forces.
- Enhance security of collective land tenure and resource access rights, including by developing and promoting policy tools such as ‘rights-based approaches’.

- Encourage conservation organizations to engage more directly in discussion and action around the global food crises and local food rights.
- Focus on developing local gastronomic groups.
- Continue raising these issues in international fora, including by facilitating ways for local people to have their voices heard directly in such forums.

These and other participant suggestions provide promising components of the way forward, but the discussion also clearly reflected the sentiment that the threats are pressing and much work remains to be done. This event, and other events, discussions, and decisions arising from this World Conservation Congress can help set the stage and generate much needed action.

## EVENT OBJECTIVES and PROGRAMME POINTS

- Introduce the Food Sovereignty paradigm and its relevance for conservation and natural resource management
- Review the commitments of IUCN and its members under the IUCN Resolution on Food Sovereignty
- Examine the tensions between rights-based and market-based approaches, as they relate to Food Sovereignty, focusing on international markets for ‘ecosystems services’
- Explore examples of collective rights regimes to food, land, biodiversity, and knowledge and examine their practical implications for a way forward towards Food Sovereignty and justice
- Invite responses and reflections from the audience and together identify elements for the way forward...

## SUMMARY of DISCUSSION and OUTCOMES

### I. INTRODUCTION to FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

*Presented by Michel Pimbert (International Institute for Environment and Development/ Co- Chair of CEESP Theme on Sustainable Livelihoods Co-Chair)*

The Food Sovereignty paradigm includes:

- The right of peoples to define their own food, agriculture and land use policies
- Gender inclusive and equitable access and control over land, water, seeds, livestock breeds, territories
- Ecologically sustainable production, mainly agro-ecological production and artisanal fisheries based on high bio-cultural diversity
- Protection of domestic agricultural production and regulation of trade and markets (*e.g.*, restrict ‘dumping’ on local markets)

Understanding and addressing conservation, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods through the lens of Food Sovereignty includes several mutually supporting elements:

- Strengthening local organisations
- Empowering citizens in decision making
- Social inclusion and human right to food
- Agrarian reform and equitable property rights
- Agro-ecology, eco-literacy and resilience
- Re-governing trade and rethinking economics

Other important dimensions of Food Sovereignty include:

- Food Sovereignty is not the product of policy think tanks or scholars. The conceptual initiatives underpinning the FS paradigm have largely originated through the action, analysis, and proposals of small farmers, indigenous peoples, pastoralists, and others working inside their own systems, and outside of large academic or international policy systems. Food Sovereignty reflects a citizen-based view of the future.
- Food Sovereignty is not opposed to trade but advocates a system that stresses local production for local markets before export and encourages local research by local people.
- The ideas and actions promoted in the Food Sovereignty paradigm address increasingly pressing rights-violations and unmet needs, as people continue to be pushed off land and restricted from accessing or

utilizing local productive resources. New forms of enclosure that exacerbate these trends include the continued expansion of state and private protected areas, including within market-based conservation schemes, and monoculture and livestock farming, including for agrofuels production.

**IUCN Resolution 3.017 : *Promoting food sovereignty to conserve biodiversity and end hunger***  
Presented by Taghi Farvar (CENESTA, CEESP Chair, Theme on Sustainable Livelihoods Co-Chair)

**The World Conservation Congress at its 3rd Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17–25 November 2004:**

1. URGES all IUCN members, Commissions and the IUCN Director General to give due consideration to policies in support of food sovereignty as they relate to achieving the Mission and Vision of IUCN and to their application in all stages of biodiversity conservation, natural resource management and poverty eradication;
2. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General to:
  - a. take an active role in working with states and relevant international organizations and processes to advocate for a food sovereignty approach; and
  - b. develop an inter-programmatic initiative on ‘Biodiversity and an End to Hunger’ to enhance understanding of the relationship between hunger eradication and biodiversity conservation (including agricultural biodiversity) and cultural diversity, with the participation of IUCN Commissions and interested IUCN members; and
3. CALLS UPON the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, within the framework of its mandate, and the IUCN Secretariat, working with interested IUCN members and relevant partners, to spearhead initiatives on food sovereignty by:
  - a. enhancing and articulating the understanding of the relationship between food sovereignty and the IUCN Vision, and identifying key areas of relevant work;
  - b. enhancing understanding of the impacts of social and economic policies such as commodity dumping, privatization of natural heritage, and economic sanctions, including blockades on both poverty and the conservation of biological resources, including agricultural biodiversity;
  - c. enhancing understanding of conditions, methods and tools by which biodiversity conservation and an end to hunger can be pursued and achieved in a synergistic fashion, as envisioned under the concept of food sovereignty;
  - d. promoting and supporting the development of effective policies and practices on the basis of the above understandings; and
  - e. developing the relevant capacities of IUCN component programmes, members and partners.

## **II. MARKETS for BIODIVERSITY and ECOSYSTEMS: REFRAMING NATURE for CAPITALIST EXPANSION?**

### ***Part I Presented by Sian Sullivan (Birkbeck College at the University of London, UK)***

#### Concept and rationale of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)

- IUCN and UNEP state: ‘By offering economic incentives for maintaining ecosystems services, Payments for Ecosystems Services operates on the basis that *market forces* can offer an *efficient* and effective means of supporting *sustainable development* objectives’<sup>i</sup>
- PES relies on creating market mechanisms that attract investments from areas *requiring* ecosystem services – including maintenance of biodiversity – to areas *providing* these services, e.g., from urban to rural areas, and from the global ‘north’ to the global ‘south’.
- A key aim is ensuring financial benefits to people(s) living in the landscapes providing these newly priced ecosystem services, so that they have incentives to restructure their relationships with the land to maintain these global values.
- Related to this is the frequently stated implication that local people’s livelihoods often have negative environmental impacts, but that people would be readily willing and able to change livelihood strategies and engage in ‘conservation’ activities if they were able to ‘sell’ their ecosystem services. This conceptualization is seen in the recent FAO report ‘*Livestock’s Long Shadow*’, which appears to take as a

given that pastoralist livelihoods degrade the environment, and that their livelihood strategies result from 'poverty' and lack of alternatives.<sup>ii</sup>

- Finally, the growing global *scarcity* of environmental resources is seen as increasing the *demand* for these services, and both of these factors increase the market *value* of these services, in ways that *out-compete* other forms and practices of value for the landscapes providing them.

#### Potential social justice and human rights implications of PES

- PES may strongly impact food production systems, livelihoods and lifeworlds, especially in landscapes thought of as 'marginal' for food production, but as profitable in terms of ecosystem protection.
- **Where PES schemes thrive, what happens to food producers currently and historically using, managing and sustaining these landscapes?** Are they to become simply 'extras' to a global restructuring of values that frames them as poor, marginal, and environmentally problematic?
- Widespread PES implementation may pose a major new wave of capture and enclosure of Nature by capital – via the creation of new 'green' commodities that can be traded internationally.
- We know that past 'revolutions' in capital investment (e.g., agricultural and industrial revolutions) also had major implications, both in terms of structuring people as labour and service-providers for capital, and in terms of the shattering of peoples' relationships with landscapes.
- It is important to consider the possibility of similar implications of this new revolution of green market expansion, particularly in food production and alternative choices for self-sufficiency.
- By capturing the discourse on what Nature is, and by claiming a 'unifying language'<sup>iii</sup> for mediating relationships with the non-human world, **PES systems create abstract transactions that are lifted away from material, embodied and emplaced realities, but that have far-reaching impacts on these realities.**

#### *Part II Presented by James Igoe (Department of Anthropology at Dartmouth College, USA)*

*It is widely and increasingly accepted that Managerial & Market-Oriented Approaches to Conservation are possible and desirable for both the ecology of the planet and people in general. Yet this notion is, in fact, highly problematic and far from straightforwardly tenable. What are the processes and relationships that allow us to accept this problematic position, and to overlook its social justice and human rights implications?*

The acceptance of the rationality and desirability of managerial and market-based conservation requires us to accept several problematic assumptions and positions, including:

- Conflating the ways in which ecosystems work and which market systems work,<sup>iv</sup> when in fact these systems are far from synonymous
- Overlooking important complexities in the relationships between people(s), and between people and the environment<sup>v</sup>
- Taking several transformations for granted, especially the transformation of people from subsistence food producers to market-oriented producer-consumers, even as we are already seeing the limits of markets for producing and distributing food.
- Forgetting that we are, ultimately, living on a finite planet... eventually we will run out of land and places to offset consumption elsewhere.
- **... Accepting that it's possible for consumption and degradation to be resolved, or even to contribute to conservation efforts, through mitigation services and markets** (e.g. by buying 'eco-friendly' products, or buying small forestry off-sets).

These and other assumptions are growing to a generalized notion of *ecosystem services* (i.e., conservation of land in one place atones for the sins of environmental destruction in another). ... but what are some of the less examined social and rights implications of these increasingly accepted notion? How do these impacts differ at different scales, and between scales?

- Land used to plant trees for carbon offsets **displaces food production**
- The creation of protected areas for conservation often entails costs for resource users, but little attention has been paid to who has borne those costs (usually resource restrictions) and who has realized the (social, economic, or other) benefits.
- PES programmes often revolve around identifying communities. The creation of communities always involves **exclusion of people**. Little attention has been paid to who has been excluded and how

- PES programmes often demand the **creation of new forms of property so that people can enter into conservation-oriented business ventures as junior partners**. Little attention has been paid to the fact that these new forms of property are conveniently alienable and manipulable, such that there is a **high probability that people will lose access to land even when it is still legally their's, and some people will be deemed non-property owners and excluded outright**. History shows that farmers (not living at the centre of conservation initiatives) and landless people often bear the highest costs in terms of displacement and food loss.

In addition to these central challenges for PES to be carried out in line with social justice and human rights – including Food Sovereignty – additional difficult and open issues include the following:

- **Is food a right, and if so how do we guarantee it?** Even if everyone could move from being food producers to market-actors, where would food come from and how would we assure people could afford?
- Managerial forms of resource management are essentially undemocratic ... **are we willing to forego democracy and the social contract?**
- This not only displaces people and their livelihoods, but other ways of knowing, learning and being in the world. **Are we willing to sacrifice this diversity, and if we are... what do we do if these new systems fail and we've lost all these existing ones?**

### **III. COLLECTIVE RIGHTS TO FOOD, LAND, BIODIVERSITY and KNOWLEDGE: A PRACTICAL WAY FORWARD OR IRRESPONSIBLE UTOPIA?**

*Part I Presented by Lal Ji Desai (MARAG, State of Gujarat in India)*

Food Sovereignty, collective rights, and the challenges of market forces from a pastoralist perspective

- Now we begin looking at collective rights from the perspective of “dwellers of the land”
- When we talk about Food Sovereignty from the perspective of nomadic communities, we are ultimately talking about seeking recognition of:
  - Sovereignty in governance and livelihoods
  - Resource sustainability, including in recognition of inter-generational rights and obligations
  - Equity
  - Dignity
- We cannot achieve these four things within the capitalist development model. It's a new imperialism that goes against our principles and culture
- We pastoralists believe in sharing and giving – including giving back to nature.
- We don't believe in exploiting. We don't operate by capitalist systems that force grabbing of more land, water, and other resources.
- Within the global discussion on climate change, including mitigation, **we need more discussion with resource exploiters about their roles and responsibilities**

Pastoralist cultural, social, economic traditions for food production and management

- 10% of Indian population is nomadic pastoralists.
- **Our principles and cultures protect our livelihoods, including food, and the environment.**
  - Education (knowledge giving), food production systems, and nature are connected.
  - Resources are shared and distributed across thousands of kilometres.
  - Land and rights are collective, and resources access, use, and sale rules help ensure availability for community members.

Challenges to pastoralist livelihoods and collective rights

- These institutions are eroding as market forces push people to leave pastoralism for more sedentary and commercial livelihoods
- Creation of more protected areas also continues to threaten pastoralist livelihoods. As one example, pastoralists had been co-existing well with lions in a region from which they have now been displaced to make room for an ‘outsider’-managed lion reserve.

- Governments also continue to sell pastoralists lands to foreign investors.

**In sum, we don't want special economic zones (mega-malls). We want special pastoralist zones!**

*Part II Presented by Alejandro Argumedo (ANDES, Peru)*

*Our strong attachment to collective management and ownership of resources is part of what has allowed us to resist different types of colonization; our people and our culture remain very much together. In the last 20 – 30 years we've faced a "savage capitalism" that has radically changed the country. This includes oil and mining concessions, free trade agreements, and other legal changes that have undermined peoples food security, culture, collective agricultural practices and collective land ownership. At the same time, communities are responding in ways that show their capacity and power over such forces, through collective action and resistance.*

- *Example:* A new law threatens the continuation of collective land ownership by easing rules for sale of collective lands to private owners. Previously, such sales required agreement from more than 60% of community members. The new law requires less than 50% agreement, with few rules about who within the community must agree. This increases vulnerability to companies like Monsanto, which is opening offices throughout the country and communities are forced to respond...
- One positive response has been a strong community re-focus on collective rights over the last 5 years, including many examples of communities joining lands and resources to strengthen their rights claims.
- *Example:* The debate around GMO seeds and crop varieties demonstrates the ongoing struggle, and a way forward. Cusco region – a centre of potato diversity – banned GMO varieties with the support of the regional government, and this has remained a banner of ongoing struggle that demonstrates the **power of communities and civil society over market forces that threaten the nature of ownership of land and resources**, particularly seeds.
- *Example:* **Communities within Cusco have joined their land in a 'potato park'**, in part as a symbol of resistance and culture.
- The members grow a large variety of potato types in the region, and secured the repatriation of the stock, and associated intellectual property and knowledge rights to these potato varieties. Through collective action, we established a community restaurant managed by a local gastronomy collective shared by the 6 communities. Under principles of reciprocity and sharing, resources that have accrued to these communities are also now being shared with other nearby communities.
- All these activities were done without any participation from the government, because we knew that any association with state institutions would go against the communities' will and efforts in this initiative. The government was negotiating the free trade agreement and working with Monsanto. The communities were reconstituting the space based on solidarity and reciprocity that has resulted in strengthened solidarity.
- *Way forward:* **We need to further support community solidarity that brings together Food Sovereignty, resistance and democracy to the communities in the collaborative.**

#### **IV. QUESTIONS and DISCUSSION from PARTICIPANTS in the AUDIENCE**

*Herman Rosa (PRISMA)*

- An anthropologist looking at the dynamics of the World Conservation Congress has noted the following: **Issues of community and indigenous rights and knowledge are central, but the presence of market based approaches is much stronger than it was in the last congresses, so how will these two approaches clash, and what will the outcomes of the week be?**
- It is important to highlight the importance of human modified landscapes in PES - how will paying for services from these landscapes differ from other landscapes, including in terms of impacts on people?
- The MEA gives definitions on many PES related terms; we can take up some of these concepts and reclaim them and reframe them so that we can engage effectively in the debate.

*Marco Bassi (Centre for African Studies, Oxford)*

- The commoditization of nature isn't new... **What is striking is the degree and aggressiveness of this expansion.**
- Pastoralist people are increasingly caught between national and private parks, and agrofuel plots, which are expanding at rates sure to destroy community land
- So what are the options for addressing this?
- This expansion is based on conceptual tools that support the market mechanisms ... the language and discourse takes hold in certain institutions, like IUCN.
- **Counter discourses, like human rights, are one tool...But what are the other ways to counter this new force, particularly the expansion of agrofuels?**

*Edward (from Tanzania)*

- In local communities in Tanzania many community rights around food and agriculture are being denied.
- Food products are imported in large quantities from South Africa. Often imported foods are repackaged and sold as local. These import practices all deny rights of local food producers
- Agrofuels, and *Jatropha* particularly, are being introduced to local communities as a save all... **so maybe we will sell *Jatropha*, but will have no money to buy food.**

*Henk Hobblink (GRAIN, Spain)*

- Financial speculation in international markets has been a major factor in food price and hunger increases
- In response to the food crises, rather than just the usual "freer market" responses, people are "rediscovering" small and local food production... but even this poses new dangers. More "aid" is going to small local farmers to buy chemicals, hybrid seeds, and fertilizer, which may serve to further displace the smallest farmers.
- Those working on these issues haven't heard from the environmental movement and IUCN doesn't seem to be taking it as a serious issue
- **We need to ensure conservation organizations are more involved in the food crises.**

*Participant from the Philippines*

- We are highly sceptical about the conservation and sustainable development agendas; the CDM appears to be yet another mechanism through which global money will burn us, and has already contributed to the rice crises.
- We are also seeking responses to oil and other extractive industries....
- Our request is that these issues be raised in additional forums.

*Unknown speaker*

- It's important to return to the question of how we frame the discussion, including the need to be careful about market-based approaches
- **Climate change adaptation is also a key issue... should we talk about a rights based approach to adaption? Who are the most vulnerable and how do we address them as rights issues?** Discussions of mitigation through market based approaches are overshadowing of the adaptation issues

*Unknown speaker*

- I appreciate the speakers from Peru and India... but **what do we do in countries where people aren't as free to speak?**
- What about the Food Sovereignty of those in the West? We're being colonized and don't even know it .... We have to make the link between what we eat here and the landscapes of the world
- **How can we harness globalization to become a localized phenomenon?** Perhaps focusing on local eco-gastronomical groups (universities, neighbourhoods)?

*Doris Cellarius noted motion on Agrofuels and encourage participation*

*Participant from Guinea-Bissau NGO (name not known)*

We've become very sophisticated in terms of analyzing what's happening, and deconstructing trends, but we're not doing a very good job of taking action together and this allows the idea of sustainable development to become subsumed into economic growth...so how do we go forward now that we have all of this analysis?

*WISP Programme Officer (name not known)*

I worked on the "Livestock's Long Shadow" report and would like to respond to Sian Sullivan's comments. The report was developed in response to the global 'livestock revolution', which was looking exclusively at ways to expand livestock systems in response to increasing demand for animal products. We wanted to introduce environmental impacts into that discussion, rather than just focusing on market demand.

*Boku Tache Dida, NORAGRIC, Norway, and Ethiopia*

Food Sovereignty issues are particularly important for pastoralists. In the context of food crises, pastoralists are doubly challenged; as resource bases shrink, livelihood security declines, and this is exacerbated by market forces that work against pastoralist livelihoods.

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<sup>i</sup> UNEP/IUCN (n.d.) *Developing International Payments for Ecosystem Services: Towards a Greener World Economy*, online, p. 2

<sup>ii</sup> FAO 2007 *Livestock's Long Shadow*, Rome.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. UNEP/IUCN p. 2

<sup>iv</sup> Katja

<sup>v</sup> James Carrier