



Section V

Food sovereignty

*Special Issue: Mapping the Global Food Landscape***From protest to policy: The challenges of institutionalizing food sovereignty**

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In response to the failure of current approaches to alleviate the linked challenges of global food insecurity and environmental degradation—many of which involve voluntary measures to improve agricultural efficiency and increase yield—grassroots actors have called for the re-regulation and state-based institutionalization of principles derived from the food sovereignty framework (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2014; Wittman, 2011). As articulated by international agrarian movements in the mid 1990s, these principles include ecological sustainability; distributive justice, ensuring a socially just allocation of resources (Agyeman & Alkon, 2011); and procedural justice, which involves “fair and transparent decision making processes that are adaptable to specific local conditions” (Loos et al., 2014, p. 357).

Strategically, food sovereignty movements pursue grassroots mobilization to demand that the state play an active role in developing policies that ensure the right of small-scale farmers, fishers, and indigenous peoples to exist as food providers and guardians of the global socio-ecological resource base. For most advocates, food sovereignty is about supporting both individual and community food security and a sustainable local and national agricultural sector through specific policy reforms. This mobilization has led to calls for the institutionalization of the right to food and food sovereignty at the international level, and in a growing number of instances, into national legislative public policy frameworks (Knuth & Vidar, 2011) (see Box 1).

These policy initiatives are diverse and include redistributive policies—such as agrarian reform and food security and social safety net programs; market interventions including the re-emergence of grain reserves; public procurement; government price floor programs; and

environmental regulation of harmful agricultural production practices. Many such mechanisms fall under the umbrella of food system localization, aiming to reduce distancing and increase accountability by reconnecting producers and consumers through participatory policy structures, democratically informed regulatory frameworks, and production models adapted to local socio-ecological conditions.

The food localization approach is challenged, however, by questions about the role of both local and globalized food trade and markets, and at what scale—or scales—food sovereignty can or should occur (Bernstein, 2014; Burnett & Murphy, 2014; Clapp, 2014a). The food sovereignty literature and most proposals by grassroots actors do not emphasize self-sufficiency as the primary pathway to food sovereignty, instead focusing on a broader range of supports to agricultural production systems to improve both environmental and food security outcomes, and advocating the democratization of decisions about agricultural policy and market integration. However, the idea that most food could or should be produced and consumed within a designated geographic scale—usually a community, region, or nation—is based on the expected positive social and ecological results associated with localization, including stability in the face of food price volatility. As a result, food self-sufficiency has emerged as a principle in most of the existing food sovereignty legislation, for example as is the case in Indonesia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that localization alone does not immediately translate into food autonomy, self-sufficiency, or food sovereignty; food insecurity occurs even in locations of food abundance (Clapp, 2014b; Sen, 1981). As well, cross-border trade for consumption needs and desires from bananas to coffee, as well as basic commodities like rice and soybean and maize, are unlikely to abate. As such, the institutionalization of food sovereignty requires “get[ting] beyond the binary” (Clapp, 2014b) of food security/food sovereignty or localization/globalization, by identifying adaptive and place-specific mechanisms for implementing the principles of food sovereignty and sustainability while considering practical contradictions and limits (Bernstein, 2014; Claeys, 2012; Hospes, 2013; Patel, 2009). In what follows, I briefly examine the institutionalization of food sovereignty principles in Ecuador, as part of its 2008 constitutional reform and the *Sumak Kowsay* or “Good Living” initiative, and Brazil, where food sovereignty emerges as part of the larger national Zero Hunger initiative.

Legislating food sovereignty at the national level

Ecuador

Ecuador’s 2008 constitution was one of the first to explicitly recognize the goal of food sovereignty in a national legislative forum that emerged in the larger context of the broad participation of civil society in the constituent assembly process. As part of widespread

grassroots opposition to the neoliberal era in Ecuador, civil society and grassroots actors called for the “return of the developmental state” using the discourse of national sovereignty (Clark, 2013). A *Mesa Agraria* was formed during the constituent assembly by a coalition of campesino and indigenous organizations, which contributed proposals for rural development, food security, environmental regulation, and agricultural policy couched in the language of national food sovereignty and support for domestic agricultural markets and distribution models.

Article 281 of the Constitution mirrors many of the items in the International Convention on Peasants Rights articulated by La Vía Campesina and in debate at the United Nations General Assembly (Edelman & Carwil, 2011; La Vía Campesina, 2009)—declaring that “Food sovereignty is a strategic objective and an obligation of the State in order to ensure that persons, communities, peoples and nations achieve self-sufficiency with respect to healthy and culturally appropriate food on a permanent basis.” In 2009, the Law of Food Sovereignty was passed to support a national rural development strategy that includes improving public infrastructure for storing basic food supplies and reserves, and targeting smallholder farmers to market to the public sector through institutional food programs. A subsequent Law of Popular and Solidarity Economy stipulated that 5% of the national budget for public procurement should be sourced from small-scale producer associations and cooperatives, and specifically targets schools and public daycares in a home-grown-school feeding model.

However, consistent tension exists between government support for oil and gas extraction initiatives—which provide revenues of up to half of the federal budget—and the principles of food sovereignty, which that support directly challenges. Oil and gas revenues, although couched in the language of economic sovereignty, are not invested in sustainable agriculture or domestic food security initiatives and are mainly utilized in public works, paying down the external debt and strengthening the export sector. Although local food procurement programs have been proposed at a pilot scale in some communities, almost no implementation has occurred between 2009–2014, mainly due to a lack of funding and infrastructure. Agrarian social movement leaders suggest that the focus on increasing agricultural exports, and the targeting of technical assistance and agricultural credit to export-oriented agricultural sectors such as aquaculture, banana, cacao, and palm, has detracted from the ability of the domestic agriculture sector to service national food security, with 35% of grains and almost 100% of wheat imported (Novoa, 2013). In response, agrarian cooperatives are working on consumer education campaigns to promote “healthy eating” and establish farmers’ markets in traditional agro-export centres. However, campesino leaders note that consumers are not willing to pay the higher costs of foods produced using agroecological production models, and some farmers who have experimented with organic production are returning to the conventional model. In addition, while legislation for food sovereignty exists in theory at the national level, municipal and state governments are the ones responsible for implementation, and as such initiatives to strengthen the position of small-scale farmers and more sustainable production models are uneven across the country. Overall, significant challenges contribute to a “distribution bottleneck” for domestic food self-

sufficiency resulting from the lack of coordination between government ministries and a lack of infrastructure in the small-scale farming sector to supply the domestic market (Clark, 2013).

Brazil

Brazil, a country most known as an agricultural export powerhouse, has also enacted some of the most advanced national frameworks for food security and food sovereignty through its Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) program. While Brazil's 1988 constitution doesn't explicitly mention food sovereignty, it does highlight the protection of economic, social and cultural rights, and in 2010 a significant amendment included the right to food. The federal Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (MDS) formally launched the Fome Zero program in 2003. It includes a series of food security programs that involve public procurement of agricultural production from agrarian reform settlements for distribution to schools, hospitals, and other national food security initiatives (Rocha, 2009; Wittman and Blesh, 2015). Programs for agrarian reform, and agricultural credit targeted towards women, family farmers, and technical agroecological production are also included under the Fome Zero umbrella. With the expansion of the Fome Zero program under the Lula government (2003-2011), the right to food movement became more explicitly connected with rural movements for agrarian reform and food sovereignty. A 2006 Law on Food Security acknowledges that "the realization of the human right to adequate food and to food and nutritional security requires respect for sovereignty, that confer on countries the primacy of their decisions around the production and consumption of food." Finally, a 2009 Education law also stipulated that 30% of school meal programs must be sourced from the local family farm sector, with price premiums offered for products grown using organic and agroecological methods (Wittman, 2013).

Brazil's agrarian reform and public food procurement programs are perhaps the most well-developed examples of legislated food sovereignty mechanisms that link the challenges of rural development and land access with the needs of urban consumers and national food security. These programs have had some positive results in terms of supporting the marginalized family farm sector to transition to sustainable agriculture and access to secure local markets. Yet, almost a decade after implementation, uptake is still relatively small: less than 3% of family farmers in Brazil participate in the PAA public procurement program at the national level, and participant evaluations express concern about institutional complexity, patronage relations, and a failed distribution infrastructure, as well as the inability of the small-scale farming sector to meet food safety regulations and compete with larger scale producers to sell globally and nationally traded commodity items like beans and rice (Wittman & Blesh, 2015). Principally funded by the Ministry of Social Development, public food procurement programs can be viewed as compensatory social policy that aims to partially address the concerns of an aging family farm

sector, while large-scale agricultural investments are made in the agro-export sector.¹ Land inequity has not improved in Brazil despite 40 years of redistributive land reform, suggesting parallel processes of redistribution and re-concentration. And while poverty and food insecurity levels have dropped, these are primarily related to the dual strategy of an increase in social safety nets—i.e. Bolsa Familia—and increased employment due to economic growth, rather than from strategic investment in the family farm sector. Public procurement programs funded and implemented at this level do not require structural re-organization of the food system, they simply mediate market relations to meet social/ecological objectives at very small/localized scales, and thus are limited in their ability to achieve food sovereignty principles at a national scale.

Challenges to institutionalizing food sovereignty

Much evaluation is still needed on how these national-level policies and programs are implemented in their respective contexts, and to what extent they are addressing the principles and goals of the food sovereignty framework—that is, food security, equity, democracy, locally adaptive agricultural policies, and ecological sustainability. However, several challenges to the institutionalization of food sovereignty are immediately apparent. These include how to scale the implementation of food sovereignty principles up and out without losing connection to the principles of democratic engagement and connection to place, and how to confront an international trade regime that is systematically trying to remove support for domestic food and agriculture programs.

Public procurement programs supporting domestic social and ecological priorities have been targeted at the level of international trade negotiations. The WTO's Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) aims to “mutually open government procurement markets among its parties” (WTO, n.d.)—a market that is worth US \$1.7 trillion—directly challenging many food sovereignty-inspired initiatives to procure food from small-scale and local producers. Two approaches may allow discrimination in their favour while sidestepping the fears of trade disputes: attaching qualitative criteria such as ethical, sustainable, ecological, or denomination of origin to procured products, therefore making them “not like” imported products; and structuring procurement programs to conform with allowed public policy objectives, including specific environmental outcomes. Similarly, while provisions in GATT disqualified procurement to create public stocks that might be sold back into the market at a later date, these same provisions allowed for government procurement of products for government purposes without resale—

¹ Compare the Ministry of Agriculture's 2013–2014 budget of R136 billion (62 billion USD) which supports low interest loans, grants, and capital investment projects for agribusiness with the Ministry of Agrarian Development budget for family farm sector support of R39 billion for the 2013–2014 season for operating loans, crop insurance, agricultural extension, home-grown school feeding, and other public nutrition programs.

including school lunch programs and meal programs at public institutions. These programs may be allowed under current trade rules, but under conditions that are still contested and uncertain (MacRae, 2014).

What's next: Multi-scalar approaches?

Food sovereignty is ultimately about changing and decentralizing power in the food system—reducing the influence of the global and corporatized food regime and providing a foundation for diverse, sustainable, and democratic food provision systems across the globe. Mechanisms for institutionalizing food sovereignty include *autonomous and localized* initiatives – such as farmers’ markets and Community Supported Agriculture, buying clubs, local food policy councils, land occupations, seed sharing and seed banks, agroecology schools, and farmer-to-farmer training networks. These autonomous initiatives are supported—and in some cases challenged—by *state actions* including legislative reform and state support for the development of public procurement programs targeting small-scale and sustainable agriculture. Finally, the conversation on institutionalizing food sovereignty is taking place in the *global policy arena*, including at the UN Committee on World Food Security and in international trade dialogues. These fora provide for the greater participation and access of global civil society to global governance discussions, and result in the expansion of dialogue on the distribution of rights and responsibilities for sustainability in the global food system—both “up” to the WTO and other global governance fora, and “down” into regional and national legislative frameworks. However, the globalization of agricultural standards and regulatory regimes has done much to dispossess the rights of local communities, who are rightly suspect of attempts to ‘globalize’ a regulatory framework—even one based on food sovereignty principles. The internationalization of progressive standards such as organic, fair trade, and environmental certifications, has offered some ability to target and support localized transformations in production systems (c.f. Higgins, Dibden & Cocklin, 2008a), but so far has had little effect in redistributing power and resources in the global food system—which is after all the ultimate goal of the food sovereignty framework.

Ultimately, the final responsibility for moving from international dialogue to structural shifts in the distribution of power in the food system remains at the national and local levels, where ‘sovereignty’ can be territorialized and enacted. As such, policies and programs designed to institutionalize food sovereignty principles will look very different in places like Indonesia and Venezuela—net food importers seeking to increase food self-sufficiency—as compared to Ecuador and Brazil, net food exporters seeking to strengthen the family farm sector while improving domestic food security outcomes. Future research on the institutionalization of food sovereignty will need to navigate the multiple definitions of and pathways towards food sovereignty, and assess the extent to which particular initiatives or programs enable power shifts in the agricultural sector.

Box 1: Legislating Food Sovereignty

Country	Year	
Peru	2002	Decree No. 118-2002 PCM, establishing the Multi-sectoral Commission on Food Security, 2002
Argentina	2003	Law 25.724 on the National Programme for Food and Nutrition Security, 2003
Guatemala	2005 2006	Decree No. 32-2005: National Food and Nutrition Security System. Agreement No 75/06, Regulation to the Law on National System on Food and Nutritional Security
Ecuador	2006 2008	Law on Food and Nutritional Security, No. 41, 2006; Law on Food Sovereignty, Official Registry No. 583, 5 May 2009 <i>Constitution: Article 13</i> “Persons and community groups have the right to safe and permanent access to healthy, sufficient and nutritional food, preferably produced locally and in keeping with their various identities and cultural traditions. The Ecuadorian State shall promote food sovereignty.”
Brazil	2006 2010	Law 11.346: the realization of the human right to adequate food and to food and nutritional security requires respect for sovereignty, that confer on countries the primacy of their decisions around the production and consumption of food Decree: promoting sustainable agroecological systems for producing and distributing food, that respect biodiversity and strengthen family agriculture, indigenous peoples, and traditional communities that ensure the consumption and access to adequate and healthy food, respecting the diversity of national food cultures . . . incorporating into State policy respect for food sovereignty and the human right to adequate food.
Nepal	2008	<i>Constitution: Article 18.3</i> “individual right to food sovereignty”
Venezuela	2008	Law: Organic Law of Agro-food Security and Sovereignty
El Salvador	2009	Decree 63 establishes the National Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONASAN).
Bolivia	2009	<i>Constitution: Article 16:</i> All people have the right to water and food, and that the state has the obligation to guarantee food security (Article 16), but that the negotiation and ratification of international treaties shall be subject to the principles of food security and sovereignty for the population (Article 255). In specific reference to the principle of subsidiarity – the right of decisions to be made at the appropriate level of community –, and in explicit response to the contradictions of a resource/energy extraction led model of development, Articles 300/302 indicate the “Exclusive competence of regional and municipal governments to govern alternative and renewable energy projects to preserve food sovereignty”. Finally, Article 407 indicates that state development policy will prioritize the production and consumption of food produced in Bolivian territory to guarantee food sovereignty and security
Nicaragua	2009	Law No. 163: Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security
Indonesia	2012	Food Law 18/2012: “Food Security in Indonesia has to be based on local food availability and food sovereignty; self-sufficiency has been defined as at least 90% self-sufficient

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