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Who controls the food system? by Judith Hitchman

Introduction

In a world of globalised industry, where many States' policy has increasingly been dictated by private sector interests and transnational corporations, it is worth examining how the Right to Food and the emergence of social movements that represent peoples' local food systems and food sovereignty are swaying the balance in their favour.

Food is a fundamental right. We all need to eat. So obviously controlling the food system has, in the last 50 years become one of the key areas where TNCs are attempting to control the system.

But before examining the various aspects of the power and interplay between corporate interests and those of our world's current 7 billion inhabitants, we need to ask a few key questions.

What is the history of our food systems? How are the corporations trying to control them? What strategies are they using? How is this affecting our social systems and food security? How are social movements responding? What impacts have they had so far? What are the next key stages in this struggle?

The story of globalisation of agribusiness

In both Europe and North America, our food systems started to shift from self-sufficiency and traditional local shops and markets to food chains after the second World War. An excellent article "*The Evolution of the Supermarket Industry From A&P to Wal-Mart*" by Paul B. Ellickson¹ outlines these changes. This shift has not been linear in all countries. In the South of Europe, street markets remain alive in most towns and villages. Allotments are still a strong part of the Northern European culture. In Africa and Asia, many families living in cities still get much of their food from those remaining on the land outside the cities. But the overwhelming trend of corporations has been to attempt to totally take over our food systems on all continents. With the market 'saturated' in marketing terms in developed countries, the corporations are now working hard to grab market share in Africa and Asia.

So how are the transnational corporations actually trying to control our food systems? We need to look at the entire food chain to gain a better understand of all that is indeed happening. It is far more pernicious than most people realise. It covers a whole range of issues, starting with land and inland waterways and supply systems and ocean grabbing, control of seeds, food processing, global food distribution chains, and marketing. It affects

peasants all over the world as well as well as nomadic pastoralists, fisher-folk, Indigenous Peoples and of course consumers at global level. And agricultural and plantation workers are also paying a terrible price: they are among the world's hungriest working poor.

Land-grabbing is not a new phenomenon. It is a fundamental aspect of colonialism, and as such goes back many hundreds of years. So what is new in the equation? For the most part, is no longer only States that are grabbing land: it is essentially corporations whose financial value is far greater than that of most States that are buying up huge areas of the most fertile land of our planet to provide food for those living in other more densely populated areas of the world. At a price. Because the victims are local peasant farmers, be it in Eastern Europe^{2,3} or in Africa. Industrial agriculture involves almost too many negatives to list: deprivation of local communities of their traditional food sources and peasant farming families of their livelihoods, destruction of naturally bio-diverse landscapes, soil depletion from intensive use of GMO crops and chemical inputs of all kinds, capture of essential water supplies for mass irrigation schemes, excessive methane emissions from factory farmed animals,...to the most recent announcement of GM mutant cows designed to produce engineered milk for babies⁴ ... the list is far from exhaustive. The industrial agriculture practices are further compounded by ocean grabbing, whereby huge factory ships are seriously depleting fish stocks at global level and depriving artisanal coastal fisheries of their historic livelihoods.

This combines with the attempt to further control the food system through obliging farmers to buy GM terminator seeds, thus ensuring total control of the market by destroying the historical possibility of farmers saving seed to resow the following year. And the contractualisation of sales to agribusiness corporations that process the food and sell it to the globalised chains of hypermarkets.

There are many implications here in terms of the livelihood of small-scale peasant producers and agricultural workers: it destroys the local food chain; it creates much bankruptcy for small-scale peasants who are unable to reimburse the loans they took out to buy seeds and chemical inputs (hence the very high rates of suicide in India and other countries); it creates hunger among those who are the primary food producers; agricultural workers wages are too low for them to be able to feed themselves and their families: many actually live in conditions of quasi bonded labour.

This is the global trend of industrialised corporations and TNCs that make up the global food industry, that include agrochemical companies, seed merchants, corporate landowners, food processors and global food outlet chains. It is a dismal picture of loss control of food systems, loss of biodiversity, loss of employment, low wages, and factors that contribute to climate change. Not a pretty picture. But it is the reality of the neoliberal capitalist system of the 21st century

Food sovereignty and solidarity economy: the counter power

But the balance of power is not a one-way system. There is another whole story to be told, that of the global food sovereignty movement. For the purposes of this article, I shall first outline the history of the food sovereignty and the solidarity economy movements, then analyse the current state of play of social movements in general, and finally demonstrate how the combined approaches of food sovereignty and solidarity economy are building alliances and increasingly impacting the global situation, building an increasingly powerful counter-power and change of paradigm to the neoliberal capitalist system.

To illustrate this we shall use the case study of Community Supported Agriculture.

The birth of the food sovereignty movement

*“La Via Campesina was formally constituted in April 1993 (during a conference held in Mons, Belgium) only months before the finalisation of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that for the first time included agriculture and food in its negotiations. The forty-six representatives (women and men) of organizations of peasants, small famers, indigenous peoples and farm workers from the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa who met at Mons clearly understood that the GATT Final Act, along with the creation of the World Trade Organization, represented a profound shift away from more controlled national economies to an almost exclusively market-driven global economy. They also clearly understood that the further entrenchment of neoliberalism would spur national governments to continue to dismantle the agrarian structures and programs that peasants and farmers had won after years of struggle – these very structures and programs that helped ensure the viability of small-scale farming, promote production for domestic consumption and contribute to national food security. The leaders who met in Mons were quick to identify the threat farming families in the North and South faced: their livelihoods, their way of life, indeed, their very mode of existence were all at stake”.*⁵

Teikei, the Japanese-born Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement was born in the 1970s⁶. It was the response of Japanese housewives desire to ensure that they could feed their families safe, healthy food, and avoid the terrible impacts of Minemata disease caused by industrial mercury poisoning. It was defined by the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association as follows: *“An idea to create an alternative distribution system, not depending on the conventional market. Though the forms of Teikei vary, it is basically a direct distribution system. To carry it out, the producer(s) and the consumer(s) have talks and contact to deepen their mutual understanding: both of them provide labour and capital to support their own delivery system.... Teikei is not only a practical idea but also a dynamic philosophy to make people think of a better way of life either as a producer or as a consumer through their interaction.”*⁷

It was perhaps one of the first manifestations of a counterpower to the industrial food system, and the global network that has resulted is a key actor in bridging the food sovereignty and solidarity economy movements. It spread to both the USA and Europe at the beginning of the 21st century, and Urgenci, the International Network of Community Supported Agriculture was founded in Aubagne, in France in 2004. According to the association's Bye-laws, Urgenci's mission is *“... to further at international level, local solidarity-based partnerships between producers and consumers. We define the solidarity-based partnership as an equitable commitment between farmers and consumers, where farmers receive fair remuneration, and consumers share the risks and rewards of sustainable agriculture”*. Today there are CSAs and networks in most countries, and on all continents, with Asia, Europe and North America as the strongest. The network represents well over one millions members of producers and consumers combined.

By definition, such a network has a dual affiliation, the primary being to the food sovereignty movement. Food sovereignty is a term coined by members of the Via Campesina (LVC) in 1996, and asserts the right of people to define their own food systems. The best definition is that of the global forum that was held in Nyéléni, in Mali in 2007: *“Food sovereignty is 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 puts those who produce, distribute and consume*

food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” Urgenci therefore considers itself as a social movement, and part of the Food Sovereignty “family”. It has been responsible for carrying forward the strand of the Nyeleni Europe process dedicated to Alternative Food Distribution Systems since the important European meeting that took place in Krems, in Austria in August 2011^{8,9}. Delegations from 35 different countries came together and worked on concepts and strategy for building policy and actions on all aspects of European food sovereignty. One of the outcomes of this first Nyeleni Europe meeting has been that Urgenci has carried the work on Alternative Food distribution Systems forward in over 20 European countries, both Eastern and Western Europe. There have since been two major European meetings of this Nyeleni Europe strand, (Milan 2012¹⁰ and Villarceaux, the beautiful agroecological farm and seminar centre owned by the Foundation for the Progress of Humankind (FPH)¹¹ near Paris, in March 2014¹².

The aim has been to develop European networking activities, build alliances and disseminate the CSA concept and share best practice. This work has seen the genesis of several successful joint European Union-funded projects over this period. The conclusions of the Milan meeting are available on the Urgenci website¹³.

In terms of power relationships, much of the 15% fall in sales in hypermarkets in Europe in recent years corresponds to the 15-20% rise in sales through CSAs and farmers markets.

The rise of solidarity economy as an overall alternative to international trade and neoliberalism

The second logical affiliation of local solidarity-based partnerships is to solidarity economy. The idea and practice of "solidarity economics" emerged in Latin America in the mid-1980s and blossomed in the mid to late 90s, as a convergence of at least three social trends. First, the economic exclusion experienced by growing segments of society, generated by deepening debt and the ensuing structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund, forced many communities to develop and strengthen creative, autonomous and locally-rooted ways of meeting basic needs. These included initiatives such as worker and producer cooperatives, neighbourhood and community associations, savings and credit associations, collective kitchens, and unemployed or landless worker mutual-aid organizations. Many of these, such as cooperatives have existed for over 100 years. However, in response to the economic crises, a whole set of new, transformative initiatives have emerged in most countries, transforming the balance of power, often through peaceful, below the radar approaches.

Second, growing dissatisfaction with the culture of the dominant market economy led groups of more economically privileged people to seek new ways of generating livelihoods and providing services. From largely a middle-class "counter-culture"-similar to that in the United States since the 1960's - emerged projects such as consumer cooperatives, cooperative childcare and people's health care initiatives that are complementary to existing national health systems currently becoming eroded by the crisis, housing cooperatives, intentional communities, and eco-villages. There were often significant class and cultural differences between these two groups. Nevertheless, the initiatives they generated all shared a common set of operative values: cooperation, autonomy from centralized authorities, and participatory self-management by their members.

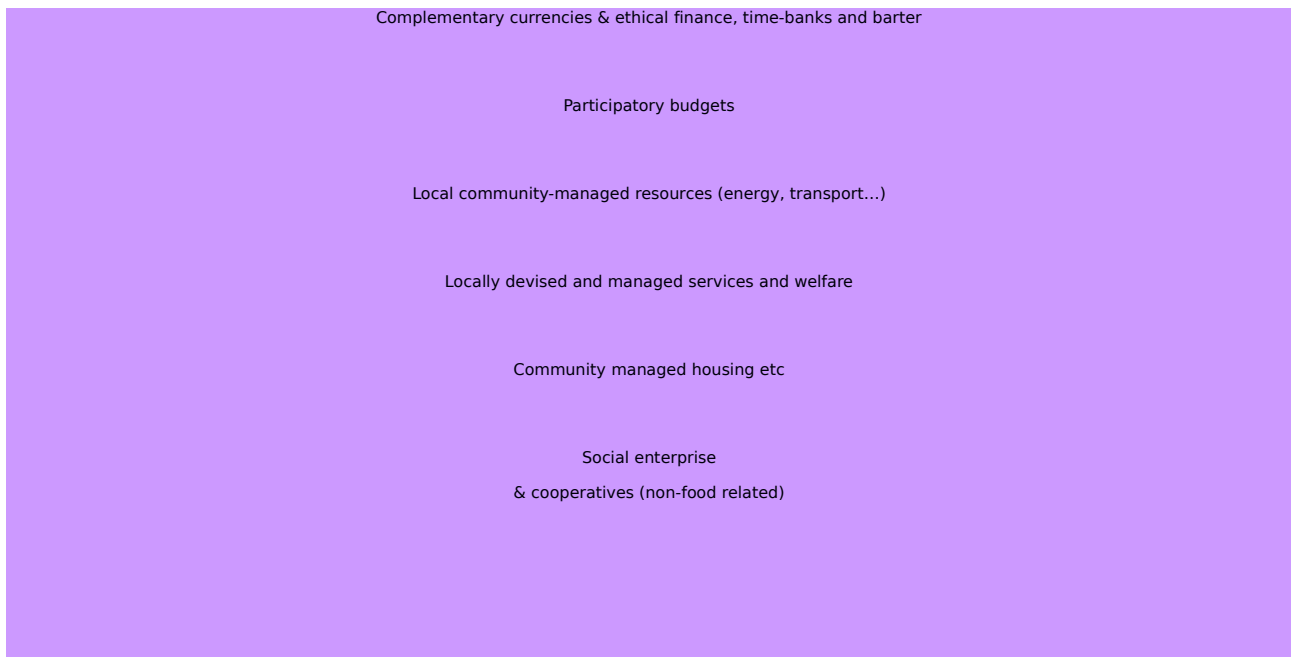
A third trend worked to link the two grassroots upsurges of economic solidarity to each other and to the larger socioeconomic context: emerging local and regional movements were beginning to forge global connections in opposition to the forces of neoliberal and neo-colonial globalization. Seeking a democratic alternative to both capitalist globalization and state socialism, these movements identified community-based economic projects as key elements of alternative social organization¹⁴. The FPH – Foundation for the Progress of

Humankind – supported the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World (also known as Alliance 21) in its research and development of these aspects.

The RIPESS – Réseau Intercontinental pour la Promotion de l'Économie Social Solidaire – Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy¹⁵ - was founded in Lima in Peru in 1997, and is today the leading global network of the solidarity economy movement, with United Nations (UN) recognition as such.

Community Supported Agriculture therefore clearly falls into the spheres of both the Food Sovereignty and the Solidarity Economy social movements. And while some aspects of the work of these social movements are separate, there are also significant overlaps (red zone in the middle of the diagram).

Solidarity Economy



The above diagram is from a background paper written by the author in 2012 to support the FAO Consultations with civil society in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2012. The full document can be found as an attachment at the address below.¹⁶

Although both Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Economy are social movements, the Food Sovereignty movement has a far more clearly historically delineated profile; it concentrates on a well-defined area, is highly organised, has had very clear communication strategies, and is therefore highly visible and coherent at global level. The Via Campesina (LVC), the global peasants union that is the core of this movement now estimates that it represents 300 million members worldwide, something that goes a long way to explaining this phenomenon, and results in a very high impact internationally. Urgenci is a close ally of the Via Campesina, and many Urgenci producers are members of the LVC.

The profile of solidarity economy or even the RIPESS network is somewhat more diffuse and heterogeneous, and the various strands have not always come together in a coherent national or international framework, with perhaps the exception of Latin America, Quebec and some southern European countries (essentially France, Spain and Italy).

The recent financial and economic crises have however considerably changed perceptions. Whereas solidarity economy was (wrongly) hitherto perceived as a marginal niche, it is increasingly now considered to have the potential to provide a range of truly transformative solutions to the current crises in terms of all three key pillars: economic, social and environmental. Ecuador and Bolivia have included Solidarity Economy and Food sovereignty in their constitutions. An excellent interview by Anne-Marie Thomazeau on this subject with Jean-Louis Laville, one of the leading figures in the French solidarity economy movement can be read at www.viva.presse.fr/La-Bolivie-et-l-Equatoeyont_16297.html. France and Brazil also now have framework laws on solidarity economy. This has helped RIPESS to raise their profile, and indeed to use the work resulting from a year-long global survey to be a lead discussant in the United Nations Assembly High Level Political Forum in New York on the post-2015 agenda¹⁷. This level of advocacy would have been unheard of 15 years ago, and perfectly illustrates how civil society movements have matured, and how the advocacy has become organised, allowing civil society to be recognised as legitimate and indeed essential actors in defining global policies for the future.

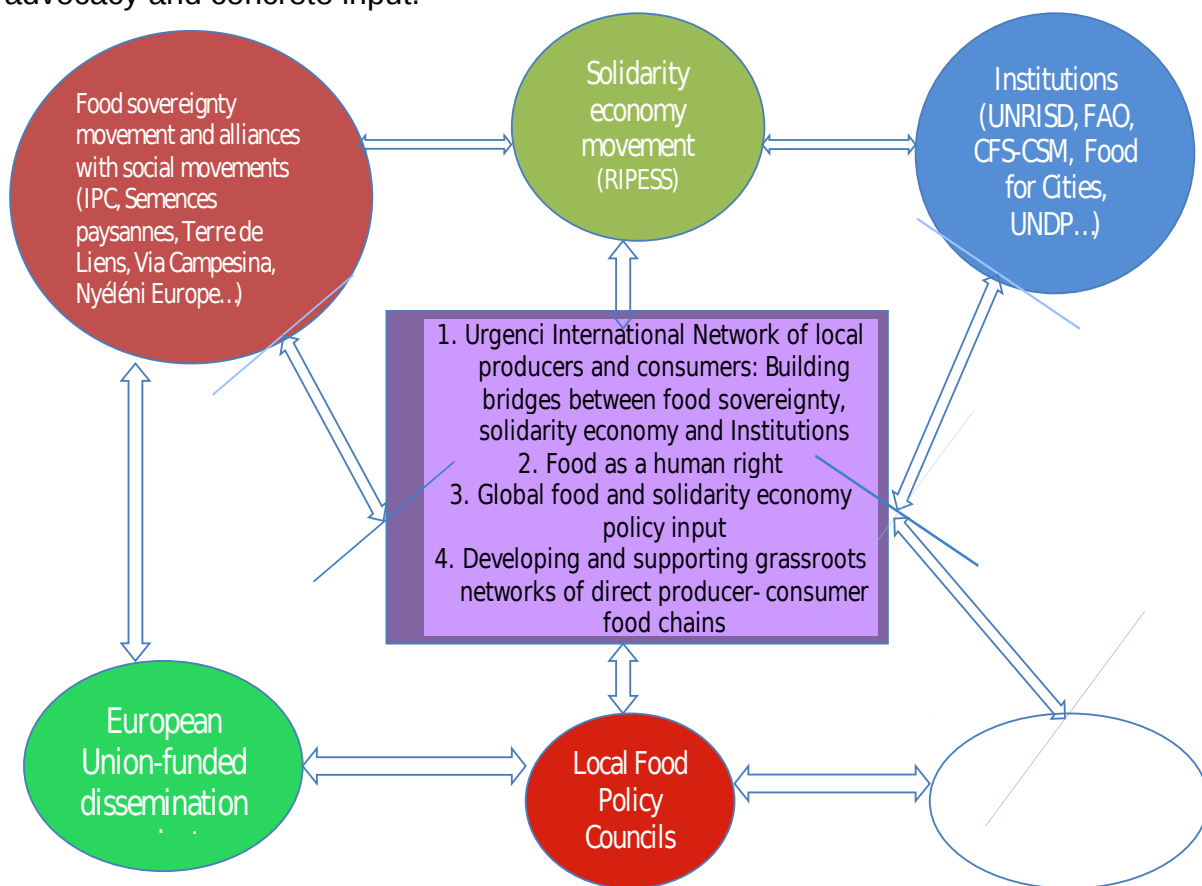
The development of local solidarity-based partnerships involves many different aspects. The initial 6-7 years following the creation of the network by Daniel Vuillon, a French farmer CSA farmer in the South of France with a dynamic and far-sighted vision, were spent working mainly on dissemination of Community Supported Agriculture and best practice, linking Europe, Japan and North America, and building the network. One of the most significant publications that is the fruit of the prolonged and sustained efforts in dissemination, is the recently published European Handbook on Community Supported Agriculture. It is available for free downloading on the Urgenci website¹⁸. It has been translated into Chinese by the Chinese CSA network.

Because the approach of local solidarity-based partnerships is based on organic agriculture, in the true spirit of Teikei, much important work has been and continues to be done together with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)¹⁹. This ranges from exchanging on small-scale peasant organic agriculture practice and agroecology to more formal training in PGS (Participatory Guarantee Systems) that allow public recognition of a participatory certification process. IFOAM have included a CSA track organised by Urgenci in their conferences for several years. PGS is

valued over third-party certification by bodies such as ECOCERT²⁰, as it not only participatory, therefore raising both producers' and consumers' awareness, but also because the costs are minimal compared with the heavier third party approach. Most consumers sign up to CSAs on the basis of trust: they know where their food is coming from, and how it is produced, so require little if any formal guarantee. This is less true for those producers who sell outside the CSA system, be it through farmers markets, collective farm shops or other outlets. The massive popular swing to PGS systems from the heavier formal certification is also related to empowerment of small-scale producers, and the general and progressive development of peoples' food systems.

Mapping a complex system of interrelated communication

In the last 5 years, the combined global impact of the global crisis and the resulting response and rise of social movements has opened up new vistas and recognition of the important role that organised civil society can play in a more participatory approach to sustainable governance of our planet. These evolutions have progressively taken Urgenci into the field of advocacy at various levels, especially within the United Nations, on both the Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Economy fronts, as explained below. And because systems are highly complex, the next section of this article will attempt to chart the complexities of how Urgenci has been contributing to global policy-making through our advocacy and concrete input.



Judith Hitchman 2014.

Nowhere have the societal evolutions mentioned previously in this article above been more strongly reflected than in the Committee for World Food Security and Nutrition, the United Nations agency that is based in Rome, housed in the FAO building, but that answers directly to the Secretary General of the United Nations through ECOSOC, the

Economic and Social Council of the United Nations²¹. The Via Campesina and IPC both have signed Letters of Agreement with the FAO, which again is a significant step in the swing from power of the multinational TNCs to the UN support of small-scale peasant agriculture, as the only way to feed the world in a sustainable manner. Many FAO documents now refer to the fact that only small-scale peasant agriculture and peasant agroecology can feed the world effectively and provide genuine food security.

“In 2009, the CFS underwent a major structural reform, based on the full inclusion of all major constituencies of civil society. “The vision of the reformed CFS is to be the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together in a coordinated way to ensure food security and nutrition for all. CFS was reformed to address short-term crises but also long term structural issues. The Committee reports annually to [Economic and Social Council of the United Nations \(ECOSOC\)](#). ”²²

Much of the behind-the-scenes (and also indeed public) impetus for this reform has been the result of the work carried out by the IPC, the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty²³, of which Urgenci is a member, representing the Consumer Constituency. This is the global food sovereignty platform that allows social movements to develop a coherent overall strategy to fight the TNCs and global policies of control of food systems as outlined earlier in this article.

Urgenci is also currently a member of the most unique aspect of the CFS: the Civil Society Mechanism. This mechanism, with a full matrix representation based on all 11 constituencies and geographical regions, *“(The CSM) is the largest international mechanism of civil society organisations (CSOs) seeking to influence agriculture, food security and nutrition policies and actions - nationally, regionally and globally.*

In the reform process the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2009, Member States recognised the right of CSOs to “autonomously establish a global mechanism for food security and nutrition which will function as a facilitating body for CSO/NGOs consultation and participation in the CFS”¹.

A proposal for the establishment of the CSM was endorsed by CSOs at the Civil Society Consultation held in Rome in October 2010² and acknowledged by CFS Member States during the 36th Session of the CFS in the same month³. The CSM proposal had three drafts, each of which went through a thorough consultation process, receiving contributions from a broad range of civil society actors. The results of those consultations and submitted contributions are available if you scroll down to the end of the page.

The CSM reaches out to hundreds of CSOs in all continents, sharing information with them on global policy debates and processes, promoting civil society consultations and dialogue, supporting national and regional advocacy and facilitating the participation of a diverse range of CSOs at the global level, in the context of the CFS”. ²⁴

The most significant work of the CSM to date has been that on the Global Strategic Framework (GSF) ²⁵. The purpose of the GSF is to improve coordination and guide synchronized action by a wide range of stakeholders in support of global, regional and country-led actions to prevent future food crises, eliminate hunger and ensure food security and nutrition for all human beings. The GSF offers guidelines and recommendations for coherent action at the global, regional and country levels by the full range of stakeholders, while emphasizing the central role of country ownership of programmes to combat food insecurity and malnutrition.

The principal users of the GSF are decision-makers and policymakers in countries responsible for the development and implementation of policies and programmes for delivering food security and nutrition and the progressive realization of the right of adequate food. The GSF is also intended to be a tool for policymakers and decision-makers in donor countries and development agencies responsible for development cooperation programmes.

The GSF is designed to be a dynamic document to be updated by the CFS Plenary on the basis of regular CFS processes and policy debates. It is available in Chinese on the FAO website²⁶. It can now be used by all civil society organisations at national and indeed local level to lobby for relevant implementation of any specific aspect contained in the growing body of legislation.

The other major document co-produced by CSM and CSF is that of the Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure, Fisheries and Forests that was endorsed in May 2012²⁷. This policy document is of great importance in the on-going discussion at all levels, from global to local, and can also provide help in the all-important aspects of protective land zoning for agricultural production in urban and peri-urban areas, something that is of essential value in the preservation of agricultural land for feeding cities through local short supply chains in general, and Community Supported Agriculture in particular. A Chinese version of the Voluntary Guidelines is available on the FAO website²⁸. Again, this document can and is used by social movements to fight their cause, particularly on issues of land-grabbing and zoning, to preserve traditional land used for agricultural purposes. This is a vital element in feeding cities, and bridging the urban-rural divide.

The concerted role of civil society in this framework has deeply impacted the power of neoliberal TNCs and the States that most support them (USA, Canada, Australia...). All policy documents in the CFS are the result of Civil Society's concerted efforts and participation in deep negotiations with States. It is no easy task. It can sometime be more than difficult, but the balances of power has undeniably shifted considerably. No policy can be imposed 'top-down' without civil society involvement.

In the field of solidarity economy, Urgenci has also been working deeply with the United Nations in recent years, mainly through the channel of RIPESS, the global solidarity economy network. In May 2012, Peter Utting, former Deputy Director of UNRISD, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, launched a major conference on Social and Solidarity Economy. This led to the creation of a United Nations Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE). RIPESS has been a key civil society observer with participatory status in this approach, and the subsequent publication of the recent paper authored by Peter Utting and others: "Social and Solidarity Economy: Is there a new economy in the making?"²⁹, to which RIPESS (and Urgenci through its active membership of RIPESS) has made many contributions, ensuring that such essential aspects as food sovereignty, and seed sovereignty are included. The UNTFSSSE is now under the joint auspices of UNRISD and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). One of the outcomes of this work bridging food sovereignty and solidarity economy will be the side event that is scheduled to be held at CFS41 in October 2014, where the clear connections between these two social movements will be presented.

The participatory, horizontal nature of the process of contributing to policy is complex, to say the least. It is important to try to bring the dialogue back to grass-roots level and get input for the various policies under discussion each year, and also to bring the issues considered most important at grassroots level up to the CFS for inclusion in policy. It involves much work by many people and interconnections between different silos or sectors of the social movements across the globe, and also reconciling cultural and

political differences in the greater interest of the common good of society and our planet. This is no easy task! A particular on-going challenge is how best to connect these grassroots and policy-making levels, so that there is both outreach and feedback in an on-going way and commitment to the process. Many local and national networks are so concerned and involved with their local and national issues (understandably) that they fail to see the relevance of working at meta-level. Yet the meta-level work can only be of true value if it is based on the genuine participatory outreach to, involvement with and feedback from the local level! This without a shadow of doubt is the single biggest challenge facing most social movements today, as they are all under-resourced and over committed. The publication of the UN Interagency Task Force position paper on solidarity economy is a huge resource for social movements in raising awareness of the overall global dynamics of solidarity economy. It is also one of a range of tools for countering TTIP and TPP, a subject that this article will address a little further on.

Bringing different actors that contribute to food policy together in Europe.

An important part of the overall dynamic and process of contributing to food policy that will ensure both food security and food sovereignty in the years to come, has been the Nyeleni Europe process, where Urgenci has been playing a very active role, as stated earlier in this article. The first Nyeleni Europe forum in Krems, in Austria in August 2011, brought together over 400 participants³⁰. The strand on Alternative Food Distribution Systems (AFDS) - short production/distribution chains - was, and continues to be moderated by Urgenci. The average age of the network members is about 30, which is in stark contrast with the general aging farming population in Europe (and in most parts of the world). It is the reflection of a return to the land and installation of young neo-rural farmers who want to get back to their roots, to the essential human-rights-based values of healthy food production and collective work. This trend appears to be echoed in the CSA farms we have visited in China, and indeed in most other countries around the world. It is a significant change in lifestyle and a move away from consumer-dominated society and neoliberal productivist industrial agriculture by a generation more motivated by the threats of climate change and reconnection with fundamental human values.

The activities of the Nyelenei Europe process in recent years have included advocacy and input on the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy reform, European Seed Law and much more.

The importance of the emerging field of the Commons

Native seeds are a particularly important and fundamental part of this complex inter-related picture. The age-old practice of farmers saving, exchanging and re-sowing seeds, as an aspect of commoning, is severely threatened by the corporate lobby input into the international Seed Treaty, ITPGRFA³¹. Participatory breeding methods of native seeds are threatened by synthetic biology and Genetically Modified Organisms, whose sale is under corporate control, as are the requisite chemical inputs that accompany the sales. The practice of community-controlled seed houses, libraries or seed banks is also constantly under threat in all corners of the world. This is a struggle that is at the heart of the food sovereignty movement, and that is supported by Urgenci, as many CSA producers use heirloom varieties of seeds. Many CSA producers are also seed guardians of these ancient varieties. This implies supporting seed networks such as Semences Paysannes. This is a further illustration of the area of shared territory between solidarity economy and food sovereignty and complex issues that have inter-related impacts. This is the power

counterpart to the TNCs control of GMO seeds and their dire impacts on the entire food chain.

Another area where the same holds true, is that of land ownership. In many countries, the key issue for young would-be CSA farmers is the difficulties that they face in terms of access to land. Solidarity economy provides two entry points in this field: that of Community Land Trusts (CLTs), such as in the United Kingdom³². CLTs ensure that land is made available at affordable prices for either social housing or in this case farming, Community Gardens, allotments etc.. It is perpetually designated as such (hence a link with the Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure). Terre de Liens in France takes the approach of social investment bonds to raise funding to support young would-be farmers. These practices are typical of how solidarity economy practice can support an inclusive approach to food production and indeed to short distribution chains, by intervening upstream in land zoning and ownership practice. None of this could occur without collective advocacy and lobbying of social movements and the progressive awareness of the fact that land historically has been and should also in any cases be part of the Commons... The Voluntary guidelines on Land Tenure, Forests and Fisheries of the CFS³³ provide an excellent illustration of how the social movements have influenced the policy document.

A key emerging aspect in many countries (especially North America and more recently Europe) has been the need to work more closely with Local Authorities on food and land-related issues. In most countries around the world today, devolution of power means that food policy decision-making falls largely under the scope of Local Authorities, as this is level of governance that enables a full range of local actors, including civil society to determine how best to feed local populations in an inclusive manner. The instrument that best supports inclusive governance of all food-related questions is that of Local Food Policy Councils. Effectively run, Local Food Policy Councils bring all actors in local food systems together to build policy that is inclusive and empowering, and that enables joined-up thinking on all food-related issues, from land zoning to farmers markets, CSA, public procurement that sources food from groups of local small-scale (organic) producers for hospitals and school canteens, provides space for shared hub facilities to optimise packaging and logistics for small-scale processing units and ensures that the socially excluded have adequate access to social groceries, fresh produce and food security... This virtuous circle encourages a 'buy local' ethos, and stimulates local economy. An example of one of the most effective of the most effective is in Ontario, in Canada³⁴. The issue of sustainable, safe and inclusive production and consumption of local food and support for short distribution circuits are also an essential component of fighting global climate change, and are therefore a key factor in ensuring the global right to food. Much documentation is available online on Local Food Policy Councils. Urgenci has recently been involved in a major EU human rights-funded project called Hungry for Rights³⁵ to implement Local Food Policy Councils in Several European countries (France, Italy, Scotland, Cyprus and Lithuania) as well as in Senegal. Rolling out this tool on a greater scale in more countries should greatly contribute to building sustainable, inclusive local food networks.

Very recently the food sovereignty movement and the solidarity economy movement came together in Spain, at the national solidarity economy conference, and collectively designed what will become a manual for Local Authorities to implement both food sovereignty and solidarity economy, changing the neoliberal paradigm, fighting climate change, creating jobs and sustainable local food systems. It is a concrete answer to changing the balance of power and breaking the stranglehold of neoliberalism.

Conclusions

Advocacy and communication are intricately connected in all these different level of successful social movements work. It is essential to build awareness both within the civil society social movements and duty bearers involved in these initiatives. This concept is part of Rights-based approach to development promoted by many development agencies (and NGOs) to achieve a positive transformation of power relations among the various development actors. This practice blurs the distinction between human rights and economic development. There are two stakeholder groups in rights-based development—the rights holders (who may not experience full rights) and the duty bearers (the institutions obligated to fulfil the holders' rights). Rights-based approaches aim at strengthening the capacity of duty bearers and empower the rights holders.

Building bridges between social movements and with Institutions at all levels is a complex function, particularly in such challenging times, and it is still too early to evaluate Urgenci's specific contribution, both in terms of advocacy or overall impacts on global, European or national policy. What is certain is that the dynamics of global organised civil society's contribution and the urgent need to build viable, sustainable short production and distribution chains is essential to feeding the cities of tomorrow, guarantee food sovereignty, build systems of governance at all levels, and effectively link urban and rural areas in ways that revitalise rural economies and secure safe, nutritious food for urban and rural populations alike in the years to come.

The case study of how one global network, contributing through two different but overlapping social movements has been working to contribute to international policy-making, clearly illustrates a new phase of maturity in social movements as a whole. The voice of civil society is now considered an essential element of global governance. And perhaps it can prove to be the voice that determines the ultimate sustainability of our presence on this planet, changing the power of corporations to the power of the people.

The other key dimension to successfully changing the balance of power is the clear need to jointly fight the current pending wave of trade treaties – TTIP, TPP and TISA. A failure to counter these treaties would result in corporate power control of our systems (and not just food). A Municipality could hypothetically be taken to court by a TNC for a failure to respect “free trade” if they implement specific clauses in local public procurement to favour small-scale local producers. These are hard, difficult battles, but the social movements have collectively strategized and developed a coherent resistance, supported by civil society as a whole. It is far from a given that these treaties will be signed or implemented as planned by those championing Free Trade and corporate profits.

How these issues will play out in the coming years will be critical to the future of humanity. The local food systems approach, with Local Food Policy Councils, public procurement and short distribution chains and access to land to grow sustainable local food are all means of tipping the system in favour of people-managed food systems rather than corporate control by TNCs. Social movements such as LVC, Urgenci and RIPESS have now started to come of age and interact. This is indeed to way forward to build a true paradigm change and finally overcome the stranglehold of neoliberalism on society.

Brief biography:

Judith Hitchman is Irish, of Austrian and Czech parentage, and is professionally based in France, where she has lived for many years. She has 40 years of international experience in interpersonal communication training and management. She is a long-standing facilitator in managing cultural differences in international teams and has worked as a consultant, coordinator and simultaneous interpreter & translator with international

networks of sustainable local development as well as the World Social Forum process. In recent years she has focused on work as a food sovereignty activist, and is currently advocacy officer for **Urgenci**, the global Community Supported Agriculture network, a social movement that today represents over 1 million people. As such, she currently holds the mandate as Consumer Constituency representative within the Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee for World Food Security and Nutrition. She is also one of the two Board Members for Europe in the intercontinental Social and Solidarity Economy network (**RIPESS**), where her contributions focus on promoting how solidarity economy can provide a genuine rights-based alternative to the existing economic paradigm. The core aspects of her recent work have been at UN level on global food policy, and building bridges between food sovereignty and solidarity economy, the two pillars of Urgenci's affiliation.

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- 2 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.nat-opinions.32593>
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- 5 The Via Campesina : an historical and political analysis, Annette Aurélie Desmarets and Paul Nicholson. La Via Campesina Open Book, Celebrating 20N years of Struggle and Hope.
- 6 <http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm>
- 7 Japan Organic Agriculture Association [In the beginning there was "teikei](#)
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