



**AN INPUT AND VISION PAPER OF THE
CSM WORKING GROUP OF WOMEN**

WITHOUT FEMINISM

THERE IS NO

AGROECOLOGY

**TOWARDS HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE
AND JUST FOOD SYSTEMS**

AUGUST 2019



WITHOUT FEMINISM THERE IS NO AGROECOLOGY TOWARDS HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FOOD SYSTEMS

This document intends to inform CSM positions towards the upcoming CFS Policy Process on Agroecology and other innovations. A shorter version of this vision is also included in the new edition 2019 of the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition. This text is the outcome of an incredible collective work. It wouldn't have been possible without the commitment and engagement of many special women. So special thanks to Zdravka Dimitrova for drafting this paper, to the CSM Coordinators of the Women Constituency Iridiani Seibert (LVC) and Azra Sayeed (IWA) for their drafting and strong inputs, to Nadia Lambek for her kind and valuable editing, to Nettie Wiebe (LVC), Isabel Álvarez Vispo (Urgenci), Alberta Guerra (ActionAid US), Ruchi Tripathi (Action Aid International), Marjo Busto and Sarojeni Rengam (PANAP) for their contributions to the text, to Alejandra Morena (FIAN and Watch editor) for the linkages and support, to Teresa Maisano (CSM Secretariat) for the coordination and overview and to the entire CSM Women's Constituency and Working Group for their inputs and especially for the precious daily work both on the ground and at global level.

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**CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' MECHANISM (CSM) FOR
RELATIONS WITH THE UN COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY (CFS)**

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GENERAL CONTEXT: WOMEN AND FOOD (IN)SECURITY

Our planet is on the brink of environmental collapse, and hunger is on the rise. According to the 2019 State of Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI) report, the number of people affected by malnourishment and chronic deprivation is climbing for the fourth consecutive year: 821 million persons suffered from undernourishment in 2018, an increase from 785 million in 2015. In the face of such realities, it is critical to give special attention to the role of women, who are disproportionately impacted by hunger and food insecurity, as well as climate change, despite being a crucial part of the solution to these issues. This vision document demonstrates the particular importance of women to advancing agroecology as a key pillar of food sovereignty and the right to food. It also explores the inextricable linkages between the struggles for feminism and for agroecology. It underscores the importance of feminist approaches to agroecology promotion and the realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition as the means for securing just and sustainable food systems for all.

Women represent around 43% of the agriculture labor force, despite lacking equal access to the productive resources necessary for farming. (SOFI 2019) Families operate approximately nine out of ten farms globally and 80% of the world food is produced on small-



scale family farms, where women play a key role in all stages of food production: from seed collection¹, land preparation, weeding, harvesting and storage, to food processing, livestock rearing and fisheries, including net weaving, fish catching, packaging and fish trading. Women in rural areas are also traditionally responsible for household and reproductive labor, spending up to 10 hours a day caring for the nutritional health and well-being of children, families and communities, cleaning and cooking, fetching water, fodder and fuel.

¹ For more information on the role of women as guardians of seeds, illustrated by the example from Africa, please see: Pschorn-Strauss, Elfrieda. "African Food Sovereignty: Valuing Women and the Seed They Keep", *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016):49-51. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/african-food-sovereignty

However, despite their key role in productive and reproductive spheres of life, women in rural areas face gender discrimination and a host of social, legal and cultural constraints.

First, they have more limited access than men to land, productive and financial resources, education, health care, rural extension, markets, climate adaptation initiatives and employment opportunities. Second, they are subject to social exclusion from decision-making and labor markets, as well as to sexual exploitation, domestic violence and reduced food intake (SOFI 2019). The recent increase of climate shocks, extreme weather events and climate-related disasters further worsen the status of women. Further still, as the main caregivers and providers of food, water and fuel, women must work even harder than men and are burdened with additional duties to feed and care for their families and communities.



Patriarchal, feudal (particularly in Asian context) and capitalist relations of power, along with the entrenched gendered divisions of labor and “gender blind” agricultural policies (that fail to support the intergenerational role of women in building resilient local food and nutrition systems and fostering healthy families and communities), are among the root causes of gender inequalities, discrimination and the marginalization of women, especially in the rural areas. The recognition, realization and protection of women's human rights, through the implementation of international legal instruments² is a key element in the deconstruction of these asymmetric power relations. Women are largely invisible in agriculture, and their work is seen merely as an aid to male work or as a ‘female obligation’. The traditional and indigenous knowledge of women is disregarded in commercial and industrial

agriculture. Women are among the most vulnerable groups impacted by land, ocean and

² One of the key instruments is General Recommendation 34 on the rights of rural women, adopted in 2016 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). Available at: tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/34&Lang=en. The newly adopted United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* also contains provisions on the rights of women in rural areas, particularly under article 4. Available at: undocs.org/en/A/C.3/73/L.30

resource grabbing at the hands of investors and private interests and by the use of pesticides and chemical agents. They are also all too often the subject of criminalization in their attempt to defend their communities, natural resources and bodies³. Together, these everyday and systemic experiences of discrimination and violence against women, intensify and deepen women's inequality and marginalization (Bellows and Jenderedjian 2016; Valente et al. 2016).

Women play a crucial role in addressing their own food security, as well as that of their families and their communities. Despite this, food provisioning by women receives little to no state support. Women often employ traditional knowledge, experience and skills to ensure the quantity and quality of their families' diets, and many do so while engaging in production practice that maintain biodiversity. Due to their disadvantages



stemming from the structural discrimination they face, including both a lack of state support and unequal access to productive resources (from seeds, land and water, to livestock and means of transportation) in comparison to men, women frequently do not generate financial resources through their production. Yet, women's production is fundamental for survival and reproduction. Policy frameworks must acknowledge this and focus on the redistribution, recognition and representation of women's productive and reproductive work and the realization of their human right.

To overcome the roots causes of food insecurity and malnutrition it is therefore critical to address the persistent dynamics of patriarchy, capitalism, feudalism, racism and trade liberalization on women. These factors, all of which are interlinked, and have fueled industrial agriculture, land grabbing of natural resources, the promotion of commodified nutritionism and extractives projects among others over expanded reliance on local, diversified, biodynamic agriculture that supports food sovereignty (Lemke and Bellows 2016, CSM Women vision).

Food sovereignty and agroecology offer powerful alternatives to the unequal and gendered power relations in rural and urban communities and are themselves tools and pathways to overcoming the oppressive structures in which women are embedded (involving race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity and (dis)ability). Indeed, the struggle against the oppression and exploitation of women is fundamental to the peasant struggle for food sovereignty,

³ For more information on the criminalization of women, and Honduras as an example, please see article "Migrating for Survival: A Conversation between Women from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico" in *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2019).

while, the struggle for food sovereignty is crucial to achieve women's autonomy, self-determination equality and human rights more broadly. (Cock 2016)

AGROECOLOGY: THE WAY FORWARD

Agroecology – a science, practice and social movement promoting agricultural practices that are environmentally sustainable and socially just – is of great interest for the analysis of the inequalities along food systems as well as for the implementation of alternative practices able to address the inequalities suffered by women throughout the food supply chain. Gender-based inequalities affect women producers in rural areas, urban and rural consumers, and workers (such as rural agricultural workers or those in processing industries). They even impact women at the household level, with women generally depriving themselves of food, when there is not enough for the whole family. Agroecology allows for a multidimensional perspective of the food system, looking at the technical and productive aspects, but also at the socio-economic and political ones. For resource-poor rural communities, agroecology is an important accessible and affordable grass-roots solution to challenges the power dynamics of the current exploitative and oppressive agri-food regime. Integrating social, biological and agricultural science with traditional, indigenous and farmers' knowledge and culture, agroecology is a context specific and locally adaptive set of practices developed through farmer's knowledge and participatory on-farm experimentation.



The agroecology movement is part of the struggle for the right to produce healthy food and to preserve natural resources: land, water, seeds, plants and all the teeming life that is biodiversity. At the center of this movement are peasant woman, who carry out agroecological practices, produce food that feeds and nourishes the world, and offer a fundamental and unique alternative to transform the current agri-food system (Khadse 2017).

The concept, vision and practice of agroecology, as promoted and defended by women, includes a recognition and appreciation for the practices and knowledge of women and their ancestors cultivated over centuries and passed from generation to generation (CLOC/LVC 2018). Peasant women have a long tradition of plant breeding and adapting local seed varieties, landraces and native germplasm to changing environment and cultures.

The industrial seed monopoly and the growing use of exclusive intellectual property rights for seeds, marginalizes traditional and indigenous seed systems and threaten farmers' rights to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds, all of which are at the core of agroecology.

The use and preservation of local seeds and crop varieties suited to local climates and associated with traditional peasant knowledge, on the contrary, give potential to empower women as the tradition keepers of seeds and the transitional knowledge between their care and resilience and the nutritional health and resilience of families and communities (Wijeratna 2018).

In order to improve the life of peasant women, efforts should be made to cut the dependence on external corporate inputs and neo-liberal market by ensuring solid, strong and coherent public policies and services and changes in producers and communities practices. Through agroecology, women can rely on their own saved seeds, diverse food production and low-input agroecological production methods and, therefore, they can live outside the vicious and unsustainable cycle of loans, expensive inputs, and damaged health from chemicals. In this sense, agroecology is a way to delink women and peasants from the corporate or external inputs and ensure self-reliance (Khadse 2017). Agroecology can create better opportunities for women on multiple levels (IFOAM 2007, Mpofu 2016 cited by Wijeratna 2018).



First, agroecology creates meaningful work by integrating diverse working tasks, specific knowledge and providing diversified role for women in the household economy while challenging patriarchal structures inside the family unit⁴.

Second, as farmer-to-farmer sharing experiences and learning are at the center of agroecological principles, the pursuit of agroecological methods requires the spaces and

⁴ Compared to the monocultural chemical farming, agroecology provides opportunity for the women to perform diversified tasks including participation in decision making and income generation in the household. As an outcome, agroecology has the potential to reduce the patriarchal dynamics in the family unit aiming at permanent change regarding the power inequalities and to improve household economy (putting an accent on the quality of work and the value of the money). Of course, the risk of getting more work for women by performing more and diversified tasks needs to be addressed as well as to be avoided that women don't get control and entitlement over their income and their work is not valued. The objective within the agroecological approach is accomplish permanent change in the patriarchal dynamics by shrinking the gender power gap and assure to women to pursue a livelihood of their choice where they are main decision makers for their own lives and choices.

opportunities for meetings while building social cohesion. This includes women-only spaces, which are of high importance for achieving gender equality, building solidarity and autonomy, and strengthening women's creative and collective work towards self-determination.

Third, agroecology fosters better economic opportunities for women. Characterized by low start-up and production costs, simple and effective production techniques, and yields that are stable over the time, agroecology is less risky and more affordable and accessible for women than industrial or input heavy agriculture.



Fourth, agroecology supports the health of both agriculture workers and consumers by eliminating the harmful synthetic chemicals which have a disproportionate negative impact on women's health⁵ especially in the context of feminization of agriculture⁶. Enriched diets assured by diversified crops, fruits and livestock improve the nutritional autonomy of families.

Here women are particularly affected as they usually put household nutrition before their own. Furthermore, better diets, thanks to the integration of agroecological practices like diversifying crops, fruits and livestock, have the potential to ensure better nutritional outcomes for women, in addition to supporting household self-sufficiency and reducing women's care work burden.

Fifth, agroecology supports biodiversity and traditional knowledge, affirming the crucial role for women as traditional keepers of seeds and indigenous knowledge.

Sixth, agroecology entails the production of food that nourishes the oikos, the home and place to live. Women have encouraged the care and cultivation of local food varieties as well as improving the nutritional health and well-being of households. Last, but not least, in its political dimension, agroecology seeks to achieve a more just food system, deconstructing and rendering all forms of injustice more visible, including the inequalities that women face and suffer. It is not enough to simply include women in the implementation of actions: if the

⁵ For more information, please visit: www.pan-uk.org/effects-pesticides-women-children/; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5484550/ www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/pesticides_usage_health_consequencesfor_women_0.pdf

⁶ Because of the agrarian crisis and the fact that the income from agriculture dropped, many men migrated from agriculture and therefore the farming remains predominately female activity. We should not mislead though that these trends give more rights or control in the hands of women. On the contrary – women take up the task formerly done by men (land preparation, cultivation of crops, spraying pesticides, harvesting and post-harvesting and marketing) but on lower wages, with fewer rights over productive resources and associated services (Wijeratna 2018).

process is to be truly inclusive, women need to be there from the outset, designing them. It is not about increasing women's options within the recognized economy, but rather about generating a new solidarity economy where productive and reproductive work is made visible and shared, and where the patriarchal family structure is de-constructed and re-built based on free and equal relations and shared responsibilities.

Agroecology in practice: case studies from around the world

The much-needed transition to locally-based, diverse, environmentally sustainable and climate resilient food systems can be realized through the implementation of agroecology.

Numerous case studies (Wijeratna 2018, Bezner Kerr 2019) demonstrate that the pursuit of agroecology empowers women living in rural areas, offering pathways to year-round access to healthy and more diverse diets, poverty reduction, income increases, new employment creation, opportunities for young people, climate resilience, mitigation of the risks of climate disasters, reduced dependence on chemical inputs, better valuing traditional, indigenous and peasant knowledge, and regenerating soils, biodiversity and the environment (Wijeratna 2018).



For example, the network of women producers in Pajeú in the semi-arid Pernambuco region, northeast Brazil has managed to deal with chronic water scarcity by adopting agroecological practices. The women engage in collective knowledge construction, farmer-to-farmer exchanges and participatory trainings. Through their experiences of working collaboratively through the network, the women, many of whom were socially isolated and were living under the threat of domestic violence, have been empowered and secured greater autonomy. The network activities resulted in cutting the dependence on external inputs and increased climate resilience while the acquired knowledge of agroecological methods and access to agroecological markets and fairs improved the position of the women in their household affecting family and community relationships.

In Cuba, a study conducted by La Via Campesina and the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) demonstrated that the conversion from monoculture agriculture to agroecology improved traditional gender roles and power relations inside peasant families. In conventional monoculture system, all production activities and the income generation were concentrated in the hands of men. The process of diversification of the farm naturally

introduced other members of the family to the everyday agricultural practices and providing opportunities for income generation for women but also for old people (grandparents) and adolescents, challenging the imposed patriarchal model in the peasant families. The applied agroecological methods (addition of animals, vermiculture, medicinal plants etc.) gave women new found control over decision-making on the farm and a role in income management.

In India, the Deccan Development Society has had positive experiences in agroecology. Through the use of agroecological practices, community-based women-only groups have collectively reclaimed fallow land and have revived around 80 traditional crop varieties (including millet, cereals, pulses, legumes and oilseeds). Working in partnership with a Dalit (low caste) women-run network of community gene banks in 60 villages, the groups have diversified and improved local diet and nutrition which is critical to withstand the onslaught of commodified nutritionism (Wijeratna 2018).

In Mali, female agroecological farmers and members of the COFERSA cooperative (Convergence of Rural Women for Food Sovereignty), have raised awareness about the nutritional benefits of local foods (for example fonio, millet and sorghum). In the process, they have encouraged consumers to switch from imported foods with low nutritional value, such as white bread, to their local products, both improving access to nutritious food for consumers while also improving their own access to markets. A “driving force” in their work, is “[p]ride in local biodiversity, based on traditional knowledge and culture and manifested in local cuisines”. (Bezner Kerr 2019)

A study by ActionAid in Africa and Asia further confirms that agroecology can provide holistic solutions for women living in rural communities. The study found that women in rural areas spend between 8 to 10 hours of unpaid care work each day in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan and at least 5 hours in Rwanda compared to only 1.5-hour men’s occupation with unpaid work. These time and energy consuming activities limit women’s engagement with productive agriculture. In Rwanda, the Abishyizehamwe women's smallholder farmers' cooperative established an agroecological initiative to help women to become more fully integrated in agricultural production and community life. The cooperative has engaged in a variety of activities, including: the establishment of community seed banks to store locally adapted indigenous seeds; the integration of animals on farms to provide milk and manure for organic compost; the planting of multi-purpose leguminous trees to feed domestic animals and enrich the soil; the integration of harvesting rainwater practices; and the establishment of an early childhood development center. Through these activities, the cooperative has saved women's time, prevented soil erosion, improved climate

resilience, and increased women's productivity and economic and decision-making capacities (Wijeratna 2018).

These cases and others highlight the potential of agroecology to realize women's rights in the agricultural sector, to enrich feminist perspectives, to strengthen further political will to reframe gender roles and responsibilities, and to improve family and community nutritional health and self-determination. In this sense, agroecology provides a strong foundation for alternative rural movements striving for social justice that includes gender equality and the full recognition and participation of women as political subjects and agents of change in the struggle. In addition, the creation of agroecological networks is making possible the establishment of new ties between the urban and rural environment.

These networks address the problems of the food system and the inequalities that affect women throughout the entire food chain. In many of these networks a feminist perspective



has been included and women from urban and rural areas share collective spaces where they can identify the common inequalities that affect them both collectively and separately. Together they can identify and initiate alternatives to the oppressing conventional agri-food regime, applying a multidimensional approach that combines agroecological and feminists' tools.

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM AS A POLITICAL STRUGGLE

Feminism as a political struggle, aims to overcome patriarchal structural and systematic discrimination and oppression due to unequal social, political and economic dynamics affecting the position of women within families, communities and society at large. In order to achieve this goal, feminism must stand on its own two feet, as well as be part of the larger struggle to eradicate race, caste, class and gender domination in all its forms. For example, it is necessary to understand that patriarchal domination shares its ideological foundation with racism, sexism and capitalism as well as other structural forms of oppression (Cock 2016). The strict delineation of gender roles, sexualities, and stereotypes reflects power-based dualisms: the strong versus the weak; the empowered versus the disempowered. Instead, we can reconsider gender identities and roles, including sexual orientation, along an inclusive continuum whose diversity strengthens people's sovereignty

over food, nutrition, land, and resources (Gioia 2019). Overcoming gender inequalities requires working together with people across the gender spectrum ⁷to challenge binary conceptions of femininity and masculinity where the goal is not sameness but rather autonomy and dignity with which to engage socially and politically with family and community. Intersectional feminism⁸ sheds light on how some people are impacted more than others and examines women through all their identities. For example, pesticides impact landless rural women workers more due to their multiple identities; a Dalit female-headed household might struggle to get access to land or extension support; and elderly women in the community might be greater repositories of indigenous knowledge around soils, seeds and farming practices, but often face multiple discrimination due to their gender, age and ethnicity. In this sense, the feminist perspective requires and incorporates the values of respect, sharing and solidarity.



Feminism in food crisis struggles finds its best representation in the agroecology and food sovereignty paradigm, applying the practices of solidarity by collective actions that challenge gender roles as well as paradigms of inequality, oppression and exploitation⁹. The right to food and nutrition, food security and nutrition and food sovereignty of women will be accomplished only by achieving full respect to attainment, protection and fulfillment of women's rights. The recognition by the international community, states, communities, society and women and men themselves of women's role as political subjects, citizens, organizers, facilitators and coordinators in different initiatives and movements, agents of their own change and development, and knowledge bearers will enable their self-determination, autonomy and decision-making power in all aspects of their life including in

⁷ For more information on food systems and the LGBTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender people, transvestites, cross dressers, intersex and gender queer) individuals, please see Gioia 2019 "Coming Out: Gender Diversity in the Food System" in Right to Food and Nutrition Watch, Iss.11

⁸ For more information on intersectionality of race, class and gender, illustrated with the position and organizing of Black women in United Kingdom, please see article Woods 2019 "*Invisible Women: Hunger, Poverty, Racism and Gender in the UK*" in Right to Food and Nutrition Watch, Iss. 11

⁹ For example, in Taiwan, the Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm promotes biodiversity through agroecology, while standing for a new understanding of the concept of family and bringing gender awareness into farming practices. For more information, please see article see Gioia 2019 "Coming Out: Gender Diversity in the Food System" in Right to Food and Nutrition Watch, Iss.11.

producing and consuming food (CSM Women vision)¹⁰. This multifaceted recognition is needed to pave the way for women to realize the importance of their work and their lives, confirm the power within themselves, pursue the fight for better living conditions, ensure that their opinions are respected, increase their self-esteem and act to change their own lives (Lopes and Jomalinis 2011).

The civil, political and social rights that women know and enjoy today were gained through intense women rights movements, but there is still much to advance across communities, countries, and regions the length and breadth of the globe. One of the most important contributions of the feminist struggle is the collective and wide spread recognition by multiple institutional and social actors of women as political subjects of social, political and economic transformation. Putting the invisibility of women's labor at the center of the political debate and recognizing their role as active subjects and protagonists in their own lives, families, communities, social movements and societies, is a step towards the fulfillment of the right to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all women, and all people.

AGROECOLOGY AND FEMINISM: PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ACHIEVING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



From a feminist perspective, agroecology is and must be a political proposal that recognizes and promotes the historical and social practices of women: from the domestication of agriculture and the production of healthy and quality food to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. It is urgent to recognize that women are building agroecology in their everyday practices:

resisting the predatory model of agrarian capitalism; preserving and multiplying native seeds; producing healthy, diversified food without agrochemicals; raising local and indigenous livestock breeds; promoting the preservation of local biodiversity; and carrying out artisanal fishing while protecting rivers, lakes and seas.

Women make important contributions to humanity by producing, keeping and increasing popular knowledge about domestication of plants and animals, genetic improvement, and

¹⁰ See “CFS Forum on Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition - Chair's Summary with Draft Outcomes”, XXXX. [Available at: www.csm4cfs.org/cfs-forum-womens-empowerment/](http://www.csm4cfs.org/cfs-forum-womens-empowerment/).

preservation of nature. This knowledge must be valued by the agroecology movement and integrated in the research and development along with education programs in agroecology. There must be a collective construction between the historical and ancestral knowledge of women and modern agricultural science.

Besides women producers, all women, in their role as caregivers rooted in the unequal sexual division of labor, are feeding the world. From breastfeeding¹¹ – perceived by many as the "first act of food sovereignty"¹² – to the preparation and cooking of food in daily life, women in many cultures are the custodians of healthy and culturally-based food practices that build on the productive wealth of local agriculture.

Women are the promoters of just food and nutrition systems and are the protectors of nutritional health of families and communities.

Agroecology, as a model that transforms established relations between human beings and between human beings and nature, explicitly relates to female autonomy and the construction of spaces of equal participation between men and women by incorporating respect, care, solidarity and shared responsibility. In this sense, feminist causes such as equal spaces and participation for men and women, equal income, shared power and an end to gender violence and sexism are of critical importance for the movement for agroecology (Lima and Brito de Jesus 2017).

At the intersection of agroecology and feminism, women construct a collective identity as subjects of rights historically denied to them. A long-lasting process of gender self-determination transforms the social relations of production and reproduction in the rural and urban¹³ world. Women, in particular, young women with their potential and visions, become active protagonists in this process: women exchange their experiences and

¹¹ According to organizations such as WABA (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action), also a member of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, "[w]omen who *wish* [emphasis added] to breastfeed [sic] their babies but cannot - because of inadequate support from family or health workers, constraints in the workplace, or misinformation from the infant food industry - are oppressed and exploited". Therefore, for many, "breastfeeding is an important women's issue, human rights issue, and feminist issue." www.waba.org/my/resources/activitysheet/acsh4.htm.

¹² See following document by civil society organizations, including several members of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition: Public interest civil society organizations' and social movements' forum declaration to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) Rome, 21 November 2014, www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/ICN2/documents/CS_Declaration_to_ICN2_-_English_-_21_Nov_14.pdf.

¹³ In the urban world, it is challenging to change consumption habits and to assure the right to food and nutrition due to the triple burdens and multiple roles women are holding engaged with productive, reproductive work and militancy if they are activists. The lack of time together with the lack of access to healthy food are the main factors for many women in the urban environment to realize their right to food and nutrition. In this sense, it is fundamental to build bridges and make visible the common inequalities that rural and urban women are facing. For more information, please see: "Agroecología y Soberanía Alimentaria Para La Salud y el Derecho a LA Alimentación en las Ciudades. www.ciudadesagroecologicas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/InformeSalud_Definitivo_Web.pdf

knowledge with others, they become responsible for the management of the financial resources generated from their productive work, and they acquire economic and political autonomy.

By introducing agroecology into social and family relations traditionally influenced by patriarchal dynamics, and by applying feminist perspective, a deep transformation is



undertaken where women's work can be valued and their participation in decisions about production can gain equal footing with that of other family members (Lopes and Jomalinis 2011). In this respect, it is simply necessary for women to create both feminist and non-mixed spaces for mutual cooperation, self-determination and to achieve autonomy. The struggle continues,

but is advanced only by influencing all actors involved to address the power inequities and sustain changes in women's position. Otherwise, we risk having the opposite effect by adding to our productive workload, allowing the reproductive inertia to remain unchanged.

Coming home with an extra income does not necessarily lead to a deconstruction of gender roles, and it can actually mean that we have less time for rest and self-care.

Agroecology holds the potential in specific and concrete contexts to overcome many of the dichotomies that today strengthen the sexual division of labour throughout the food system and that make women's work invisible. It shows us that there is no incoherence between caring for nature, seeds or medicinal herbs and achieving good food production. On the contrary, the caring models inherent in agroecology allow women to reinforce, recover, improve and finally guarantee vigorous and sustainable productive processes. Experiences show that through agroecological practices women can improve production at the same time that they reduce their quantity of work. As care work is vital for both human life and the planet, it must be shared as a responsibility of all: individuals (of all genders) and governments. The practice of agroecology will spread as soon as the shared responsibility of care work and the recognition of women's rights are consolidated. With this in mind, it is key that women self-organize and support each other in these transitions, in order to shed light on and counter their oppression.

The feminist and agroecological struggle are fundamental elements for the realization of the right to food and nutrition and the promotion of food and nutritional security and food sovereignty. General Recommendation 34 – an authoritative interpretation on the rights of women living in rural areas adopted in 2016 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) – recognizes food sovereignty as the paradigm under which women's rights can be ensured providing them the authority to manage and control their natural resources. Only transitions that are made from a systemic perspective, and which deconstruct an oppressive



model, are valid in such human rights-based perspective. In this sense, we need to distinguish the 'false solutions' to rights violations that either perpetuate old models built on inequality or co-optation¹⁴ of agroecology as a term, while promoting alternatives.

As human rights holders, women should have equal participation in the decision-making for their territories, their productions, their lives and their bodies. Only through the paradigm of food sovereignty and agroecology will women be able to achieve recognition and validation of their productive work and care; guarantee food for all; socialize the tasks of care; retake collective responsibilities without distinction of gender; and promote relations of respect and equality among all people regardless of gender. If the current model of neoliberalism in food and agriculture continues, peasants of all genders will continue to be commodified and exploited. In this oppressive paradigm, women's labor will be doubly exploited and the violence that women face will continue to be encouraged, tolerated and naturalized. Neoliberalism indeed seeks to commodify nutrition as has been recognized in the onslaught of baby formula, but which now attempts to invade traditional post-breastfeeding early childhood foods from local food systems and cultures. This interferes at the youngest age with developing connections to local agriculture and devalues women's and communities' autonomy to generate infant, young child, and inter-generational geo-cultural

¹⁴ "This is why food sovereignty activists are wary of terms such as 'climate smart agriculture' (CSA), which they see as intentionally vague, allowing policy makers and private corporations to borrow selectively from the repertoire of agroecology, while leaving the door open for conventional practices couched in green packaging. Where CSA fails, from the food sovereignty perspective, is in its failure to embrace the more transformative elements of agroecology and food sovereignty, such as justice, which are central to their framing." For more information, please see: *Spotlight Ten Years After the World Food Crisis: Taking up the Challenge of the Right to Food*. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_W_2017_ENG_1.pdf



attachment to local food systems (Lhotska et al. 2016).

It is necessary that the movement for agroecology embrace the feminist perspective in its totality. Being a social movement and set of practices that question social injustices (e.g. denials of women's land rights, land grabbing, looting

of territories, privatization of water and biodiversity), the inequalities to which women are subjected should acknowledge and be openly discussed by agroecology. Agroecological practices and policies without the participation of women as central protagonist is not an option. Agroecological movement should make a more concrete effort to involve and engage women activists, nurture autonomous and collective spaces of grassroots self-empowerment, especially as coordinators and leaders, and recognizing the transformational role and agency of women as political subjects. In this sense, it is critical that women have appropriate spaces to grow, lead, exchange, learn and earn in the framework of agroecology (Khadse 2017).

The relationship between agroecology and feminism is a dialectical construction that mutually feeds one another by manifesting in everyday practices. The fundamental task for all of us in our social organizations, local authorities, academic institution, NGOs and spaces of political convergence is to promote the human right to food and nutrition, food and nutritional security and food sovereignty ensuring the complete integration of the feminist perspective in agroecology.

Different case-studies around the world confirm the potential and the capacity of agroecology to be a vehicle for gender equality, self-determination and political participation for women. Successful stories from India as the establishment of Tamil Nadu Women's Collective and the Deccan Development Society, showcase women in rural areas as independent leaders and farmers providing women's collectives access to land and means to acquire food autonomy. The case of the Manipur's Rural Women's Upliftment Society shows

that even in societies living under military occupation and violence, agroecology can provide spaces for women to work in solidarity and gain livelihoods, income, support and confidence to engage in political work to challenge injustices.

The TamilNadu Women's Collective supports marginalized rural women, especially Dalit women in India to start new collective farms and seed banks, thus addressing their lack of access to productive resources. Gaining access to land and the means of food provisioning for their families is carried out through sharing farming practices in the community. Hence, through the agroecological practices, women learn to work collectively, to aggregate resources and gain access to their entitlements ensuring safety nets and ways out of absolute poverty.

The establishment of women-only spaces encourage women to freely express themselves and become local leaders and role models for the next generation of girls in the community (Khadse 2017).

Given the successful stories confirming agroecology's positive impacts on women's self-determination, it is fundamental that governments support further adoption and implementation of public policies promoting production and consumption of agroecological food in order to, on one hand, confront the situation of food and nutritional insecurity of millions of women in the world assuring their right to food, and on the other, to assure the recovery and preservation of nature, given the intensity of the climate crisis that the planet is facing. These policies must guarantee the inclusion and active participation of rural and urban women, small-scale food producers, artisanal fisherwomen, pastoralists, indigenous women, consumers, agricultural and food workers, peasants, landless and NGO activists.

The urgent need for public policies and objectives supporting agroecological production and consumption is also linked to the urgent need to achieve a de-patriarcalization of the state and public policies themselves. State actors should question the unit of reference of such policies, especially when related to access, control and entitlement of land, as these policies often perpetuate power asymmetries, oppression and violence against women. (Sempreviva Organização Feminista 2015).



The CSM working Group on Women propose the fulfilment of the following actions by the States in order to support women's struggle for their right to food, autonomy and complete integration in decision-making at all levels.

- **Recognize** women's equal rights in all areas of agroecology, including women's labor rights, direct access to markets, and income and control over income. Programmes and projects should fully involve women at all stages, from initial formulation to planning and implementation, ensuring their role in decision-making and a feminist perspective.
- **Ensure** and promote women's rights to access and control land, water, forests, commons, and especially women's collective rights to use, exchange, obtain, select and sell their own seeds.
- **Prioritize** the implementation of CEDAW General Recommendation 34 (2016) on the right of women living in rural areas, including the right to food and nutrition, right to participate and benefit from rural development, right to health care services, education, employment, economic, social and public life, protection from violence and rights to land and natural resources. The GR 34, which articulates the rights of rural women, should particularly guide the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on the issue of rural women's rights.
- **Adopt** laws, programs and policies that recognize and promote women's experiences in protecting biodiversity and genetic resources. Adopt gender-oriented or gender specific policies primarily directed to women's organizations, promoting self-empowerment, self-training and women's autonomy and ensure that these policies come with adequate budgets to guarantee their effective implementation. Put an emphasis on transdisciplinary approaches and the integration of women's traditional, tribal, indigenous and peasant knowledge.
- **Provide** institutional and political recognition at all levels for farmer-to-farmer knowledge networks that are led by peasant and rural women's movements.
- **Implement** the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security of the CFS, from a perspective that ensures access to these rights for women. Encourage agroecology by implementing redistributive land reforms in areas of highly unequal access to land for women and assure the right of women to have their name on land titles.

- **Engage** the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW, 1993) and CEDAW General Recommendations 12 and 19 on Violence Against Women to name and strategize against the systematic violence against women and the violation of women's right to food, nutrition and sovereignty.
- **Repeal** Intellectual property rights (IPR) regimes that prevent women and peasants' rights to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds. Strengthen farmer-led and government programs that enhance local seed diversity through community seed banks and seed networks and community rights over innovations in seeds, plants and biodiversity.
- **Promote** programs and schools for training, exchange and production/systematization of agroecological knowledge integrating the experiences of women's organizations. Ensure women and women's groups are involved in setting agricultural research priorities. Include agroecology on school curricula and support women and peasant-led agroecology schools, collectives, colleges and universities.
- **Ensure** technical assistance and gender responsive rural extension services for women working in the agroecological sector. Promote the exchange of women's knowledge in agroecological practices in order to value and validate the role and production work carried out by women. Set targets for female extension agents and agricultural scientists.
- **Provide** accessibility and foster the consumption of agroecological food through the development of territorial markets that ensure fairer relations between producers and consumers. Foster local markets and re-localize food systems in gender sensitive ways, including ensuring the leadership and participation of women producers according to CFS Political recommendation on Connecting Smallholders to Markets.
- **Ensure** women have equal access to credit, quality education, affordable childcare and day-care facilities.
- **Phase out** harmful public policies such as costly state subsidies for chemical inputs and hybrid seeds distribution schemes and instead relocate public support to organic fertilizer initiatives and decentralized women networks of community seed and grain banks, in order to promote local seed diversity and greater women and peasant autonomy and resilience.

- **Guarantee** that international bodies and governments recognize that agroecological practices are the key solution to confront and adapt to climate change through the crucial protagonist role of women.
- **Build** public and state tools to challenge all forms of violence against women, admitting that an advancement in agroecology won't be possible if the gender relations are not reconfigured.

*Without Feminism
There is no agroecology*



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