



The World Food Crisis: The Way Out

2017/10th Anniversary Issue of the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch

A review by Bee Farrell

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Launched as a response to the 2007-2008 food crisis characterized by food shortages and price volatility, the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch, a consortium of 26 civil society organisations and social movements, have spent ten years casting a critical eye on the causes, consequences and contradictions of food democracy. The 10th issue, published in 2017, is a global reflection on the past decade of challenges and solutions to achieving food sovereignty, addressing human rights issues and improving environmental stewardship. It is an engaging read, successfully combining academic theory and terminology with real-world case studies using intellectually accessible language in an attractive format.

Written by 40 contributors from academic and civil society organisations who work in 20 countries, autonomous regions and territories around the world, the publication seeks to project possible transformations to food sovereignty via holistic approaches based on reflective analysis. The themes of past issues of this organization have ranged from Land Grabbing and Nutrition—Challenges for Global Governance (2010) to Keeping Seeds in Peoples' Hands (2016) and collectively offer tools “for sharing and co-production of knowledge, experiences and strategies” to champion global solidarity on the right to food (Walter, 2017, p. 9).

The way out of a crisis relies on solidarity and conviction to animate solutions that will make changes. The divergence of principles held by transnational corporations and civil society organisations remain so enormous that a post-crisis tipping point has largely been stultified because of “a battle between the two food paradigms, food sovereignty versus highly capitalised investment model” (Folly et al., 2017, p. 31). The power and control of the elite—harboured by

transnational corporations—continue millennia of subordination through the ownership of labour, land, food and water that strip away independence, empowerment and equity. The opaqueness of practices that retain power means that the right to food movement is challenging structures of hidden control and that “food is a political and not a technical problem, which needs to be addressed from a human rights-based approach: the right to food and nutrition cannot be separated from everything else” (Álvarez, 2017, p. 44). This erudite tenth issue considers the contributory layers to crisis—both human and natural—as multifold deficits and extravagances of humanity not “facing the future, and of safeguarding the interests of coming generations” that have resulted in food, fuel, finance and climate breakdown (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 9). There are reoccurring threads of critique in the issue that scrutinise the narratives of the underlying and veiled inequities in the global systemic models of meeting our needs. These include the lack of transparency and ethics of transnational corporations, the financialization of commodities, unprincipled trade agreements, capital accumulation—such as the merger of agricultural companies—and the intellectual property ownership of seeds and farming traditions, which all conspire to retain power and control. This control creates and intensifies global divisiveness and injustice across all aspects of well-being, from obesity epidemics that obscure malnutrition (Patnaik, 2017), to the agrochemical contamination of soil, water, air, breast milk, fruits and vegetables (Mayet & Greenberg, 2017), to “xenophobia, nationalism and right wing populism” (Walter, 2017, p. 9).

The aggressive features of these narratives, such as gender inequity, the denigration of indigenous peoples as well as



their food and farming practices, and the commodification of food are key contestations to transformation. The article "From a Market Approach to the Centrality of Life: An Urgent Change for Women" explains that the root of food injustice is determined by gender and that the "fight for food sovereignty is anti-capitalist, but it must also be anti-patriarchal or it will never be just" (Rivera & Álvarez, 2017, p. 36).

This issue effectively interweaves the macro and micro complexities of a "political struggle between opposing world views" and the face of hunger and malnourishment (Walter, 2017, p. 9). The issue also addresses the myriad of actors and agencies caught up in seeking to redress the lack of humanity that accepts that "food, one of the three essentials for life, along with air and water, can be produced, distributed, appropriated and even destroyed on the basis of pure economic considerations" (Ferrando & Vivero-Pol, 2017, p. 51). There are 11 case study 'insights' that significantly elaborate on the premise of each of the ten persuasive essays, including "Lactalis, the Transnational Dairy Giant that Tramples on Peasants' Rights" (Pereira & Sperti, 2017) and "Collective Violation: Yemen and the Right to Food" (Mundy, 2017).

To find a way out of the deep-rooted inequities that surround the production, consumption and accessibility of plentiful and nutritious food, the enduring proposition is the need to strengthen human rights and 'commoning' relationships, and nurture agroecological food systems that respect the planet and people. The systemic part of this empowerment necessitates radical deconstruction of hegemonic practices, such as patriarchal control of land, the invisibility of women's work, and the multi-stakeholder possession of seeds, crops and water.

The publication cites powerful examples of brave and committed people who campaign against food and nutrition injustices by using buying power or local production solidarity, and the civil society organisations who are developing and supporting progressive policy initiatives that upend unfair legislation. The work of these campaigns and initiatives is key to ensuring that the "reproduction of life is what counts, not the market" (Rivera & Álvarez, 2017, p. 38).

Articles in this issue are;

- Alvarez, I. Building new agrifood systems: Struggles and challenges.
- Ferrando, T. & Vivero-Pol, J.L. Commons and 'commoning': A 'new' old narrative to enrich the food sovereignty and right to food claims.
- Folly, F.B., Nuila, A., Mattheisen, E., & Fyfe, D. Echoes from below: Peoples' social struggles as an antidote to a 'hu-

man rights crisis'.

- Mayet, M. & Greenberg, S. The three agribusiness mergers: Grim reapers of farmers' sovereignty.
- Mundy, M. Collective violation: Yemen and the right to food.
- Patnaik, B. Addressing structural inequity: Global trade rules and their impact on food and nutrition security.
- Pereira, V. & Sperti, F. Lactalis, the transnational dairy giant that tramples peasants' rights.
- Rivera, M. & Álvarez, I. From a market approach to the centrality of life: An urgent change for women.

Walter, B. Preface. World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future (Brundtland Report). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Sources:

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