

# RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION WATCH



People's Ecological Alternatives to  
Corporate Greenwashing: True and False  
Solutions to the Food and Climate Crises

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## GLOBAL NETWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION



*The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* is the flagship publication of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, which comprises the following organizations and social movements:

	<u>African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)</u> <i>South Africa</i>		<u>Dejusticia</u> <i>Colombia</i>
	<u>Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)</u> <i>Malaysia</i>		<u>Ecocene Foundation</u> <i>Argentina</i>
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## ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
COP	Conference of Parties
CSIPM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DSI	Digital Sequence Information
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization's
GBFF	Global Biodiversity Framework Fund
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GFN	Global Food Banking Network
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
HIH	Hand in Hand Initiative
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFAN	Independent Food Aid Network
ISDS	Investor-State Dispute Settlement
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
IUF	International Union of Food Workers
KMGBF	Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LDF	Loss and Damage Fund
NTCPs	New Technologies Intended for Climate Protection
PACDR	Participatory Assessment on Climate and Disaster Risk
PPAs	Program Priority Areas
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SID	Society for International Development
SOFI	State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World
SSJW	Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work
UN	United Nations
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFSS	UN Food Systems Summit
WFF	World Food Forum
ZAAB	Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This edition of the Right to Food and Nutrition WATCH focuses on the causes, impacts and responses to the food, climate and ecological crises during 2023. It challenges false, for-profit solutions and presents alternatives anchored in the human right to adequate food and nutrition, ecosocial justice, agroecology and food sovereignty.

Industrial food systems have failed to meet the nutritional needs of our planet's population. Close to 800 million people face hunger today. Our food systems also produce about one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing massively to the climate crisis and exacerbating access to food and nutrition. The mass extinction of species, destruction of ecosystems and disruption of the natural cycles that sustain life on Earth further affect food systems.

Extractivism, commodification and financialization of nature have exacerbated exploitation, dispossession and violent evictions. The increasing control of natural resources by a small number of powerful corporations, individuals and states is also fuelling gender-based violence, intersecting forms of discrimination, and mounting inequality. This report proposes a different way forward – based on people's struggles against corporate capture, greenwashing and neocolonial practices – that promotes the right to food, enhances the human rights of peasants and other people in rural areas, and guarantees food sovereignty for all. It is divided into four sections that examine international developments, food and the triple ecological crises, green colonialism and decarbonization, and grassroots struggles and solutions to the climate and food crises.

Despite the worsening food crisis, there was little decisive international action during 2023 to address its causes. Instead, corporate capture of international fora continued amid moves to replace multilateralism with multi-stakeholderism at the United Nations. The food sovereignty movement sought to defend and democratize multilateralism, notably promoting the key role of the UN Committee on World Food Security, and celebrating the creation of a UN Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

The food and triple ecological crises of climate, biodiversity loss and pollution are inextricably linked. Similar technological solutions for each are proposed by states and corporations which fail to address the rights of small-scale food producers and other people living in rural areas. This was evident at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties. COP 28 climate talks were dominated by profit-seeking false

solutions from agribusiness and fossil fuels lobbyists, including “Nature-based Solutions” and carbon offsets. These perpetuate the climate crisis by failing to address root causes and further fuel abuses and violations of human rights. There is an urgent need for public oversight mechanisms to protect Indigenous Peoples’, peasants’ and other rural people’s rights in the context of carbon trading.

In recent years, decarbonization and related market-oriented approaches have been imposed as the main paradigm in addressing the ecological and climate crises. Yet many frontline communities, civil society organizations, critical scholars, and scientists argue that they aggravate rather than solve the crises. Instead of protecting the planet, this green colonialism simply perpetuates its destruction and the commodification of nature, deepening existing inequalities and accelerating the exploitation of natural resources.

A just ecosocial transformation of our food systems that would protect everyone’s right to food and nutrition requires global justice and the fostering of food sovereignty, harmony and balance between humanity and the environment. This report’s concluding section outlines working alternatives to false solutions, practised by members of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, which transform food systems on the ground and promote the right to food and nutrition.



## INTRODUCTION

The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch (henceforth the Watch) is a joint endeavor of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition (henceforth Global Network or GNRtFN), supported by its secretariat, FIAN International. First published in 2008, the WATCH is an annual publication that monitors policies, processes, and key issues related to the human right to adequate food and nutrition (henceforth right to food or RtFN) at global, regional, national, and local levels. Doing so gives visibility to people's struggles and their efforts on the ground. As a monitoring tool, its objective is to strengthen accountability and advance the realization of the right to adequate food and nutrition for all.

In this brand-new format, which merges the State of the Right to Food and Nutrition Report and the Watch, this year's edition focuses on the polycrises of our time and the need for transformative action. It complements [the United Nations \(UN\) Food and Agricultural Organization's \(FAO\) State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World \(SOFI\) report](#) and [the 2024 High-Level Political Forum review of Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 2, End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture](#). With this publication, we aim to provide a human rights perspective on the right to food that looks beyond the numbers and sheds light on the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition, as well as its link to other human-caused crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and overall dismantling of the human rights system. The publication covers the period from January to December 2023.

Food systems contribute to one-third of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.<sup>1</sup> How we produce, distribute, and consume food plays a crucial role in driving climate change,<sup>2</sup> particularly through practices like industrial agriculture, which relies on fossil fuel machinery, chemical pesticides, and synthetic and synthetic fertilizers.<sup>3</sup> Transforming our food systems has the potential to reduce GHG emissions by about 34%.<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously, unequal distribution and control over natural resources remain central to violations of the RtFN and perpetuate systemic discrimination, exclusion, inequality and violence within societies. Over recent decades, extractivism, commodification and financialization of Nature have exacerbated exploitation, dispossession and evictions. Collective and customary rights have been violated, while natural resources and our commons have increasingly fallen into the hands of a few powerful actors such as wealthy individuals, corporations, and states.

<sup>1</sup> IPES-Food. (2022). *From plate to planet*.

<sup>2</sup> Fakhri, M. (2021). *Food systems and human rights*. A/76/237, p.5. For more information on direct and indirect emissions please see: Elver, H. (2015) A/70/287, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). (2021). *Fossils, fertilizers, and false solutions*.

<sup>4</sup> IPES-Food. *Supra* note 1.

These forms of dispossession and mounting inequalities have disproportionately affected women, girls and gender/sexual diversities due to gender-based violence and intersecting forms of discrimination. Moreover, extractivism, commodification and financialization, including in the context of industrial agriculture, have triggered the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The mass extinction of living species, the degradation and destruction of ecosystems, and the disruption of the natural cycles that sustain life on Earth directly impact food systems and jeopardize the realization of the RtFN.

Thus, the question is not whether food systems require transformation, but rather how and in what direction. Throughout this publication, we propose a path based on people's struggles against corporate capture, greenwashing and (neo)colonial practices. We aim to promote grassroots initiatives that currently bolster the human rights of peasants and other people in rural areas, promoting agroecology and guaranteeing food sovereignty for all.

The Watch will explore the following themes in each section:

**SECTION 1, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**, shows the clash at the heart of the ongoing controversy among governments between perpetuating corporate-driven industrial food systems and the imperative for a transformation of human rights-based, agroecological food systems. On the governance front, primary contention lies between two contrasting approaches: efforts to further democratize multilateralism, exemplified by the reform of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), versus attempts to replace multilateralism by multi-stakeholderism within the UN framework.

**SECTION 2, FOOD AND THE TRIPLE CRISES**, provides an analysis of the interconnection between food and climate crises, including biodiversity loss and pollution. It critiques responses centered on technological advancements that neglect the rights of small-scale food producers and other peoples living in rural areas. Therefore, we call for the need to monitor and regulate the impact of technologies and digitalization from a human rights perspective.

**SECTION 3, UNMASKING GREEN COLONIALISM BEHIND THE DECARBONIZATION CONSENSUS**, elucidates the intertwining of green colonialism with decarbonization efforts and market-driven approaches aimed at addressing global warming and the climate crisis. However, instead of protecting the planet, this approach perpetuates its destruction

and the commodification of Nature, deepening existing inequalities and exacerbating the exploitation of natural resources.

SECTION 4, PEOPLE'S LOCAL STRUGGLES AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE CLIMATE & FOOD CRISES, showcases the efforts of GNRtFN members, partner organizations, and communities, providing real alternatives and solutions to the polycrises while advancing the right to food and nutrition through grassroots transformation of food systems.

#### ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The publication is part of the GNRtFN's broader monitoring initiatives: The Peoples' Monitoring Tool for the Right to Food and Nutrition and the feminist guide to Cooking up Political Agendas. Both aim mainly at supporting national-level monitoring efforts by providing a framework and relevant tools to carefully analyze whether and how states are complying with their obligations relative to the RtFN. As both are the result of a collective exercise by members of the Global Network, they should be considered living documents that 'grow' with the evolving understanding of the RtFN and lessons learned from using them on the ground.

This publication's content is based on inputs from members of the GNRtFN, complemented with information provided by other networks, as well as relevant surveys and reports, including those of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM). The publication does not claim to cover all countries or situations but is focused on the countries and issues that Global Network members work on.

1

# INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS



## 1.1. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

Throughout 2023, there has been a noticeable lack of decisive action in addressing the ongoing systemic food crises. While there is a growing recognition of the urgent need for food systems transformation, governments have yet to reach a consensus on how to proceed. At the heart of this ongoing controversy is the clash between perpetuating corporate-driven industrial food systems and the imperative for a shift towards human rights-based, agroecological food systems. Global and international institutions have tended to promote multi-stakeholderism and the corporate capture of food systems, which, coupled with an increase in conflicts, have led to a higher number of people facing hunger in the world.

The [State of Food Security and Nutrition](#) report, published by FAO in July 2023, estimated that between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022. This is 122 million more people than in 2019<sup>5</sup>, before the global pandemic. It is the equivalent of the whole population of Japan going hungry in three years. On the other hand, the [Global Report on Food Crises](#), published by the Food Security Information Network in May 2023, estimated that 258 million people faced acute levels of hunger in 2022, up by 33% from 193 million in 2021.<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to the report, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, averred that this “crisis demands fundamental, systemic change”.

The FIAN Report “[Food Systems Transformation – in which direction?](#)”, published in July 2023, found that the main stumbling block for taking action towards more resilient, diversified, localized and agroecological food systems is the economic interests of those who drive and benefit from corporate-driven industrial food systems. The scandalous profits made by large companies from the ongoing crises are illustrative examples of the cynicism embodied in the system.<sup>7</sup>

In his thematic report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri, attributed the rising of hunger to “systemic violence and structural inequality in food systems”. Moreover, Fakhri referred to this “systemic violence” as a “central feature of a global economy that is supported by relationships of dependence among individuals, countries, international financial institutions, and corporations.”<sup>8</sup>

On the governance dimension, the main controversy is between two different approaches: attempts to further democratize multilateralism, as exemplified by the reform of the UN CFS, versus attempts to replace multilateralism by multi-stakeholderism in many of the UN agencies,

<sup>5</sup> Considering the midrange of about 735 million people, from 613 million people in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> FSIN & Global Network Against Food Crises. (2023). [Global Report on Food Crises 2023](#). Rome.

<sup>7</sup> FIAN. (2023). [Food Systems Transformation – in which direction?](#). Heidelberg, p. 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Fakhri, M. (2023). Conflict and the right to food - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food. A/HRC/52/40. OHCHR.

summits, and events. This latter trend dislocates key policy decisions from the multilateral system into mixed mechanisms where the private sector rules, with the support of some states, international institutions, and big philanthropists.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2. CORPORATE CAPTURE VS. CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Civil society, Indigenous Peoples and academics have warned against the [corporate capture of food governance](#) through multi-stakeholderism and called for a UN-wide [corporate accountability framework](#). The rise of corporate power and market concentration in food systems has sparked opposition from local communities, social movements, and Indigenous Peoples against these concerning trends and policies. Meanwhile, [multi-stakeholderism](#) facilitates corporate takeover of global decision-making, blurring the lines between public interest and corporate profit.<sup>10</sup>

Overcoming the global crisis of hunger and malnutrition requires urgent and coordinated actions that respond to the needs, rights, and demands of those most affected. The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) not only overlooked these rights and demands, as well as the structural causes of the crises, but also disguised “business as usual”— meaning the consolidation of corporate, industrial food systems— as transformative action. According to the [People’s Autonomous Response](#), the UNFSS+2 Stocktaking Event, held in July 2023 in Rome, repeated the failures of the UN Food Systems Summit and further helped advance industrial, corporate-driven food systems.<sup>11</sup>

Regrettably, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is heading in the same direction. Despite geopolitical rivalry in other arenas, the FAO Secretary General from China and the USA government share a common agenda on corporate food systems. They have established an unprecedented open-door policy for the corporate sector through expanded collaboration with companies and their associations, in the absence of any serious corporate accountability framework.<sup>12</sup>

The World Food Forum (WFF) is primarily organized by FAO and [presented by FAO’s Director General](#) as “the world event on food and agrifood systems issues, with a strong focus on youth, private sector partnership and investment, and science and innovation.”<sup>13</sup> Many groups listed as WFF Cooperation Partners have close ties to corporations. A [joint report](#) by Corporate Accountability and FIAN International, released in October 2023, found that 40% of the WFF’s so-called Cooperation Partners have some form of corporate relationship: 18 of the 44 Cooperation Partners had at least one link to food, agrochemical, pharmaceutical, or technology industries; and

9

People’s Working Group on Multistakeholderism. (2021). [The Great Takeover: Mapping of Multistakeholderism in Global Governance](#). Amsterdam.

10

Liaison Group of the People’s Autonomous Response. (May 2023). [Multistakeholderism and the corporate capture of global food governance - what is at risk in 2023](#); IPES Food Report. (April 2023). [Tipping the Scales](#).

11

Food Systems 4 People. (2023). [Social Movements and Indigenous Peoples Oppose the UN Food Systems Summit and Call for True Food Systems Change](#).

12

Liaison Group of the People’s Autonomous Response. *Supra* Note 10, pp. 6-8.

13

FAO Director General. (April 2023). [172<sup>nd</sup> Session of the FAO Council Opening Statement](#).

16 Cooperation Partners (over a third) had multiple and overlapping relationships with corporate-backed organizations.<sup>14</sup>

With ongoing food price inflation and widening income disparities in many countries, there is a growing concern over the expansion of corporate-backed food charity models, particularly food banks. “We are witnessing the rise of a permanent state of food emergency around the world, one that is being addressed through the false promise of solidarity through corporatized food charity”, highlights a [joint policy brief](#) of the Global Solidarity Network, the Global Network on the Right to Food and Nutrition and FIAN International.<sup>15</sup> Initially framed as a temporary response to address an acute need born out of the roll-back of social protection programs in wealthy but unequal countries of the Global North, corporate-backed charitable food aid and in particular the North American food banking model is solving problems of surplus food, food waste, and food insecurity on a global scale.

In this way, corporations and governments are promoting and codifying a false link between food waste and food security. Corporate-backed charitable food aid and its food bank model are failed responses to ensure food security for all because human rights-based solutions require public policies that address and overcome structural barriers that people face to access food.

The policy brief also points to the fact that this dominant food banking paradigm, modeled on [Feeding America](#) and promoted via actors such as the Global Food Banking Network (GFN), has now been exported to 76 countries, including low and middle-income states from every continent. Funded by some of the most powerful food companies worldwide, the GFN [strategic plan](#) aims to further entrench corporate charity as a global strategy to feed the poor by repurposing waste from industrial food processes.

### 1.3. STEPS AHEAD ON THE CFS GLOBAL COORDINATION ROLE IN RESPONSE TO FOOD CRISES

After campaigning for more than three years, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM)— in cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and several committed countries— finally succeeded in getting the UN CFS to start working towards improving global policy coordination as a response to the food crisis. This marks a significant acknowledgement that “the CFS has a key role to play in strengthening coordinated global policy responses between relevant stakeholders to the multiple dimensions of food crises, based on a human rights framework.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Corporate Accountability & FIAN International. (October 2023). *A World Food Forum captured by corporate interests? Mapping corporate actors behind WFF partnerships and narratives.*

<sup>15</sup> GSA, GNRtFN, & FIAN International. (October 2023). *Rights, not Charity. A Human Rights perspective on Corporate food aid.*

<sup>16</sup> CFS. (2023). *Multi-Year Plan of Work 2024-2027*, p.10.

Another source of optimism is a resurging interest from several Member States to promote a renewed commitment to the human right to adequate food and nutrition and to facilitate the development of a new agenda. This momentum could be further strengthened within the context of the 20th anniversary of the Right to Food Guidelines, adopted by the FAO Council in 2004.<sup>17</sup>

Over the past two decades, social movements, Indigenous Peoples, and civil society organizations have been using the Right to Food Guidelines for their struggles and advocacy strategies at national, regional and global levels. They pioneered the national implementation of economic, social, and cultural human rights, and have inspired countless national policies and legal reforms.<sup>18</sup>

These guidelines have also sparked the development of a full body of human rights-based norms and policies adopted by the CFS, UN human rights bodies and the UN General Assembly, including the rights of [women](#), [peasants](#), [Indigenous Peoples](#), [fishers](#), and [other constituencies](#). This has helped advance land and water rights, agroecology, food sovereignty, gender and climate justice, local food systems, territorial markets, social and solidarity economy, and democratic governance. With these instruments, an enriched normative framework on the right to food and nutrition has been generated to guide food systems' transformation towards a new direction.

Following a three-year negotiation process, the CFS adopted in October 2023 the [Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(GEWE\) in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition](#), which are the first framework on gender equality and women's empowerment within the CFS. Unfortunately, several member States opposed the CSIPM Women and Gender Diversity working group's [demands](#) for a transformative policy document. Therefore, while the Guidelines mark a first step, discussions on gender are ongoing, aiming to deepen the understanding between the right to food, discrimination, and intersectionality.

#### 1.4. THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

The [triple environmental crises](#), climate change, pollution, and the destruction of biodiversity, were at the core of discussions at the Human Rights Council in 2023, which adopted a [resolution on Climate Change](#). Even though the resolution does not explicitly mention agroecology, it “urges States to develop and effectively implement policies that promote sustainable agriculture, forest management, fisheries, aquaculture practices and marine environment management in order to enhance the adaptive capacities and livelihood resilience of communities for the full

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FAO. (2004). Right to Food Guidelines. Rome: FAO.

18

As outlined in a [Project Syndicate Op-ed](#) by Michael Fakhri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Elisabetta Recine, the President of the Brazilian Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONSEA), and Sofia Monsalve, the Secretary General of FIAN International, in June 2023, the [Right to Food Guidelines](#) show how to address structural drivers of discrimination and inequalities in food systems.d.



and effective enjoyment of human rights”.

A significant development in the Human Rights Council of 2023 was the creation of the [Working Group](#) on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The working group will promote the implementation of [UNDROP](#), emphasizing inclusive environmental protection measures that make communities in rural areas pivotal in solutions to global warming, and highlighting the importance of UNDROP in supporting environmental and climate struggles.

Similarly, several Special Rapporteurs have delved into key aspects of how to tackle the triple planetary crisis. For instance, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food explained how ecological violence impacts the [right to food](#) in his [report on Conflict and the Right to Food](#). The report also details the adverse effects of industrial food production on crop diversity, releasing high amounts of greenhouse gases, and making rural communities and workers sick.

Additionally, The Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Marcos Orellana, wrote the report [“The toxic impacts of some proposed climate change solutions”](#), in which he highlighted that “some [climate technologies](#) proposed in recent years may aggravate the toxic burden on people and planet”. The report also offers some recommendations aimed at accelerating decarbonization and detoxification strategies based on human rights principles.

Finally, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, in the report [“Paying Polluters: the catastrophic consequences of investor-State dispute settlement for climate and environment action and human rights”](#), revealed that the secretive investor-State dispute settlement (ISDS) has become a major obstacle to the urgent actions needed to address the planetary environmental and human rights crises.

The process toward a Legally Binding Instrument on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises continued in October, marking a nine-year effort during the [session of the Intergovernmental Working Group](#). During state negotiations, tensions arose between Global South countries that support a strong treaty and the intentions of industrialized countries, including the USA, Europe, and China, to back corporate interests. In this 9<sup>th</sup> session, many countries from the Global South engaged in dynamic discussions around the treaty’s key topics even after the Chair of the Working Group (Ecuador) presented a rather controversial [updated draft](#), which sidelined elements for a strong treaty. At the end of the session, the Chair proposed a new resolution that would have dismantled the work done over the last nine years, but fortunately,

most countries opposed it. The text negotiations will continue, aiming to provide a stronger framework for corporate accountability potentially useful in the context of climate action.

Additionally, the [Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations](#), launched in 2023, also played a crucial role in shaping discussions within civil society in preparation for the Summit of the Future in 2024. The principles contributed to developments on climate change within international courts and tribunals and the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

2

# FOOD AND THE TRIPLE CRISES



Food systems are responsible for one-third of GHG emissions.<sup>19</sup> The way we produce, distribute, and consume food play a critical role in driving climate change,<sup>20</sup> especially with the use of fossil fuels machinery, the application of chemical pesticides and synthetic and mined fertilizers.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, transforming our food systems could potentially slash approximately 34% of GHG emissions.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, for years, governments have failed to avert the climate crisis and hold corporations and States accountable, solidifying a system that wreaks havoc on our planet. This was glaringly evident at the latest Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP) 28 in Dubai. While food was more present than ever in the conversations,<sup>23</sup> the final declaration continues to omit agriculture emissions and overlooks food systems transformation as a key climate change mitigation strategy.<sup>24</sup>

The only formal UNFCCC workstream to address agriculture and food systems— the Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work (SSJW) in 2021 on the implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security— concluded informally<sup>25</sup> and failed to establish a roadmap.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF), established at COP 27,<sup>27</sup> aims to provide remedies for those countries that are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Often located in the Global South,<sup>28</sup> these countries have contributed far less to climate crisis<sup>29</sup> and are heavily indebted.<sup>30</sup> While the fund was welcome by a wide range of actors, the measures to operationalize the fund agreed upon during COP 28 ignored many of civil society demands. For instance, governments’ pledges of contributions to the fund only reached USD \$725 million out of the approximately \$400 billion needed per year.<sup>31</sup> Concerns also linger regarding the World Bank’s role in hosting the fund.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the voices of small-scale food producers and communities in rural areas, who bear a disproportionate brunt of the climate crisis, were largely absent at COP 28 climate talks.<sup>33</sup> Instead of placing them at the forefront of climate action, COP 28 has focused once again on profit-seeking “false solutions” promoted by agribusiness and fossil fuel lobbyists.<sup>34</sup>

False solutions include ‘new technologies intended for climate protection’ (NTCPs),<sup>35</sup> the promotion of ‘climate-smart,’ ‘precision’ and ‘regenerative’ agriculture that involves the use of agrotoxics, proprietary gene-edited or genetically modified seeds, and ultra-processed and laboratory-made food and feed, among others. Such approaches, along with so-called ‘nature-based solutions’, other renewable energy projects, carbon

**19**  
IPES-Food. *Supra* note 1.

**20**  
Fakhri, M. (2020). *Food systems and human rights*. A/76/237, p.5. For more information on direct and indirect emissions please see: Elver, H. (2015) A/70/287, p.11.

**21**  
Center for International Environmental Law. (2021). *Fossils, fertilizers, and false solutions*.

**22**  
IPES-Food. *Supra* note 1.

**23**  
FAO. (2023). COP28: Global agrifood systems are the climate solution, FAO Director-General tells world leaders. Rome: FAO.

**24**  
Bauck, W. (2023). Food is finally on the table: COP28 addressed agriculture in a real way. *The Guardian*.

**25**  
UNFCCC. (2023). COP28 key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Dubai.

**26**  
Carbon Brief. (2023). COP28: Key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Dubai.

**27**  
ESCR-Net. (2022). COP27 delivers progress on loss and damage but fails on fossil fuels.

**28**  
UNFCCC. (2022). COP27 reaches breakthrough agreement on new loss and damage fund for vulnerable countries.

**29**  
PBS NewsHour. (2022). Many of the world’s poorest countries are the least polluting but the most climate-vulnerable. Here’s what they want at COP27.

**30**  
ActionAid. (2022). *The vicious cycle*.

**31**  
UNFCCC. (n.d.). Pledges to the Loss and Damage Fund.

**32**  
Center for International Environmental Law. (2022). Only two days left to get it right: A loss and damage fund that promotes human rights.

**33**  
FIAN International. (2023). No climate solutions without small-scale food producers.

**34**  
COP 28. UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action.

**35**  
Human Rights Council Advisory Committee. (2021). *Possible impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights. Report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, Forty-seventh session, 21 June–9 July 2021*. Agenda item 5: Human rights bodies and mechanisms.

markets and green bonds perpetuate the climate crisis by sidestepping its root causes. Moreover, they trigger abuses and violations of the RtFN and related rights by perpetuating exploitation, dispossession, and evictions.

## 2.1. FAO'S PUSH FOR DIGITAL AGRICULTURE

Digitalization is being implemented in all sectors of the economy, purportedly aimed at addressing the global polycrises by making societies more productive, efficient and sustainable. The agricultural sector is no exception, and we are witnessing a surge in the adoption of data-based tools and technologies across [food systems](#), ranging from digital land registries,<sup>36</sup> gene sequencing and editing, robotized agricultural machinery, satellite-supported allocation of fishing rights, and automated food trade and distribution, among others.

In line with this trend, the FAO has established “[Digital Agriculture](#)” as one of the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) under its Strategic Framework 2022-2031. It has since launched a [Geospatial Platform](#) and, more recently, an [AgroInformatics Platform](#). Both initiatives intend to boost “digitalization and digital transformation of world agrifood systems”, by providing open-access data and tools such as Artificial Intelligence. They are tied to the FAO’s Hand in Hand Initiative (HIH), where the organization acts as a mediator between governments and businesses, thus promoting multi-stakeholderism. Moreover, the FAO is implementing the [50x2030](#) initiative that aims to support 50 low and lower middle-income countries to improve their agricultural digital data systems, in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank, with plans to invest USD \$500 million over ten years.

FAO’s push for digital agriculture coincides with a wave of mergers between agribusiness and Big Tech companies. For instance, [FieldView](#), Bayer’s platform for digital agriculture reportedly covers over 80 million hectares (ha) in 23 countries around the world. The rapid deployment of digital technologies in food and agriculture unfolds in a landscape of high concentration of technological and financial power within a few actors of the digital economy.<sup>37</sup> Coupled with weak global regulation and accountability mechanisms, this entails serious risks of further discriminating against and marginalizing [small-scale food producers](#) and communities.

While global initiatives such as the [Global Digital Compact](#) and the [Summit of the Future](#) address data and technology, specific policy guidance concerning their use in the context of food and agriculture is still largely absent. However, in 2023, the UN Human Rights Council

### 36

In India, [massive farmers' protests](#) challenged new agricultural laws adopted by parliament in September 2020, which opened up the country's agricultural sector to corporations. The new laws coincided with the launch of [Agri Stack](#), reinforcing farmers' fears of a new wave of data-driven land grabs. The Indian government announced in 2021 that newly digitized land records would be included in Agri Stack, a government-backed data exchange that enables the integration of land data with farmer profiles and other non-human sourced agricultural data (weather, soil health, hydrology, etc.). The stated goal is to create a pool of aggregated data to create customized products and services for farmers.

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According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Digital Economy Report 2021, more than half of the world's hyperscale data centers are located in the USA and China. These two countries also account for 90% of the market capitalization of the world's largest digital platforms.

adopted a [resolution](#) which recognizes the risks that emerging digital technologies may pose to human rights, including the economic, social, and cultural rights of marginalized groups such as Indigenous Peoples and people living in rural areas. The resolution urges states to establish governance frameworks to prevent, mitigate, and remedy the adverse effects of digital technologies on human rights, including regulating the activities of technological companies.

Moreover, at its 51<sup>st</sup> meeting in October 2023, the CFS also adopted policy [recommendations on the collection and use of data](#) in connection to food security and nutrition. This is the first time that a UN body has explicitly addressed the impact of the growing use of data and the technologies based on the right to food. Despite [several shortcomings](#), the recognition of Indigenous Peoples and small-scale food producers as rights holders over their data, with the right to an equitable share of benefits, is significant.

## 2.2. BIODIVERSITY AND PEASANTS' AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SEEDS SYSTEMS

Peasants, Indigenous Peoples, rural women, and other rural people play a critical role in protecting biodiversity, chiefly through their collective knowledge and seed systems. Alongside their daily efforts to nurture diversity in their fields, they are fighting against further commodification of seeds and for the protection of their rights in different UN spaces.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) is a comprehensive international agreement adopted by 150 Member States and the EU aimed at contributing to guaranteeing food security and the conservation of biodiversity through the conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's seed crop diversity. The Treaty recognizes peasants' and Indigenous Peoples' right to save, use, exchange and sell their seeds, which are referred to as "farmers' rights" in Article 9. Despite the call by peasant and Indigenous Peoples' organizations as well as some Southern governments for the development and adoption of [national legal and policy frameworks](#) protecting farmers' seed management systems, the ITPGRFA's [Governing Body](#) reached no agreement in 2023 on developing Voluntary Guidelines on the implementation of farmers' rights due to the opposition of North American and European governments. The ITPGRFA further refrained from affirming that its provisions apply to so-called "digital sequence information (DSI)", although it was acknowledged that a report, planned for 2025, needs to analyze the implications of genetic sequencing for the realization of farmers' rights. Patents on genetic sequences (physical and digital) risk becoming a major tool for biopiracy and seed grabbing

because their scope applies to all organisms containing them, including those derived from peasants' seeds and breeds.

Under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) was adopted in December 2022 by governments to guide efforts to protect biodiversity for the years to come. Although it contains references to a human rights-based approach in its implementation, its provisions are ambiguous regarding the RtFN as well as the rights of peasants and Indigenous Peoples. After its adoption in 2022, under the CBD, an [ad-hoc technical expert group](#) is working to finalize the accompanying monitoring framework and indicators to assess its implementation. In August 2023, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the UN's main environmental fund, established the [Global Biodiversity Framework Fund](#) (GBFF). Canada and the UK committed to initial contributions amounting to USD \$200 million and GBP £10 million respectively. Following a proposal from Brazil and Colombia, the GBFF has a provision that 20% of its funds should be allocated directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

There are concerns that the KMGBF's provisions on financing biodiversity protection could facilitate the further financialization of biodiversity and ecosystems with new initiatives such as [biodiversity credits](#) and associated markets, which might open the door for [large-scale private financing](#). Organizations of Indigenous Peoples, small-scale food producers and civil society warn that the [financialization of biodiversity and ecosystems](#) may result in the dispossession of people and communities as well as neocolonial exploitation of biodiversity-rich countries in the Global South.

Global North countries such as the UK and France have been leading initiatives for the financialization of biodiversity through biodiversity credits. They launched a "Global Roadmap to Harness Biodiversity Credits for the Benefit of People and Planet" in June 2023 and established an [International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits](#) to lead this process. Furthermore, in November 2023, the French government also introduced in its [biodiversity strategy](#) a new bio-asset called "crédits de renaturation". These biodiversity credits can be traded on financial markets and are comparable to offsetting schemes and carbon credits that have been promoted as a tool to address climate change for several years as tradable biodiversity offset credits. Similarly, several countries have promoted the so-called Debt-for-Nature swaps, i.e., schemes through which developing countries can reduce their debt burden in exchange for commitments for conservation efforts. In 2023, [Ecuador](#) struck the biggest deal of its kind so far, joining countries like Belize,

Barbados and [Gabon](#). However, concerns persist regarding the potential implications of these initiatives on communities and ecosystems in the Global South.

### 2.3. THE DECEPTION OF CARBON MARKETS AND CARBON OFFSETTING PROJECTS

Carbon capture and storage feature prominently in contemporary climate change mitigation efforts, often forming part of States' and corporations' so-called "net zero" pledges. Article 6 of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change establishes carbon markets as a means for countries to transfer carbon credits earned from the reduction of GHG to help other countries meet their climate targets, and establishes a mechanism for such trading under the UNFCCC COP.<sup>38</sup> The Paris Agreement thus creates incentives for states and corporations to offset or compensate their emissions through market-based mechanisms and carbon sequestration projects.

Carbon markets are an example of offsetting schemes, where GHG emissions in one location are compensated by carbon capture or storage elsewhere, often marketed as "Nature-based solutions". This concept has a nice ring to it but is dangerously ill-defined<sup>39</sup> and lumps together genuine solutions to climate change, such as agroecology and community forest management, with dubious and destructive practices of carbon sequestration, linking them to opaque market-driven schemes.<sup>40</sup>

While the focus has traditionally been on carbon sequestration through forest conservation and afforestation, the potential of carbon sequestration in agricultural soils has received increasing attention over the past years. For instance, peasants and other small-scale food producers in Colombia are encouraged to transition to agroforestry by offering their sequestered carbon as carbon removal units to responsible corporations in the global carbon market.<sup>41</sup> However, this example underscores that so-called "Nature-based solutions" risk creating new dependencies among peasants and instrumentalizing them to serve corporate needs. Guaranteeing Indigenous Peoples', peasants' and other rural people's rights in the context of carbon trading through adequate governance frameworks is therefore urgent. Special attention needs to be paid to respecting, protecting and fulfilling their right to land in the context of offsetting projects and to the establishment of public oversight mechanisms for carbon trading schemes. Such measures should take into account the huge power imbalances between rural people and corporate and financial actors involved in carbon markets.

**38**

UNFCCC. (n.d.). [Paris Agreement](#). Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change reads: "A mechanism to contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development is hereby established under the authority and guidance of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement for use by Parties on a voluntary basis. It shall be supervised by a body designated by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement, and shall aim:

- a. To promote the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions while fostering sustainable development;
- b. To incentivize and facilitate participation in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions by public and private entities authorized by a Party;
- c. To contribute to the reduction of emission levels in the host Party, which will benefit from mitigation activities resulting in emission reductions that can also be used by another Party to fulfil its nationally determined contribution; and
- d. To deliver an overall mitigation in global emissions."

**39**

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). (n.d.). [Nature-based solutions](#). According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), "Nature-based Solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits."

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Proponents like the IUCN claim that Nature-based Solutions could help mitigate up to 37% of climate-changing emissions by 2030. ([www.iucn.org/theme/nature-based-solutions](http://www.iucn.org/theme/nature-based-solutions)). However, this figure is based on questionable assumptions. Friends of the Earth International conclude: "which on closer inspection appear to be technically problematic, highly undesirable, implausible, politically unrealistic—or all of the above." Friends of the Earth International. (2021). [Nature Based Solutions: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing](#), p. 6.

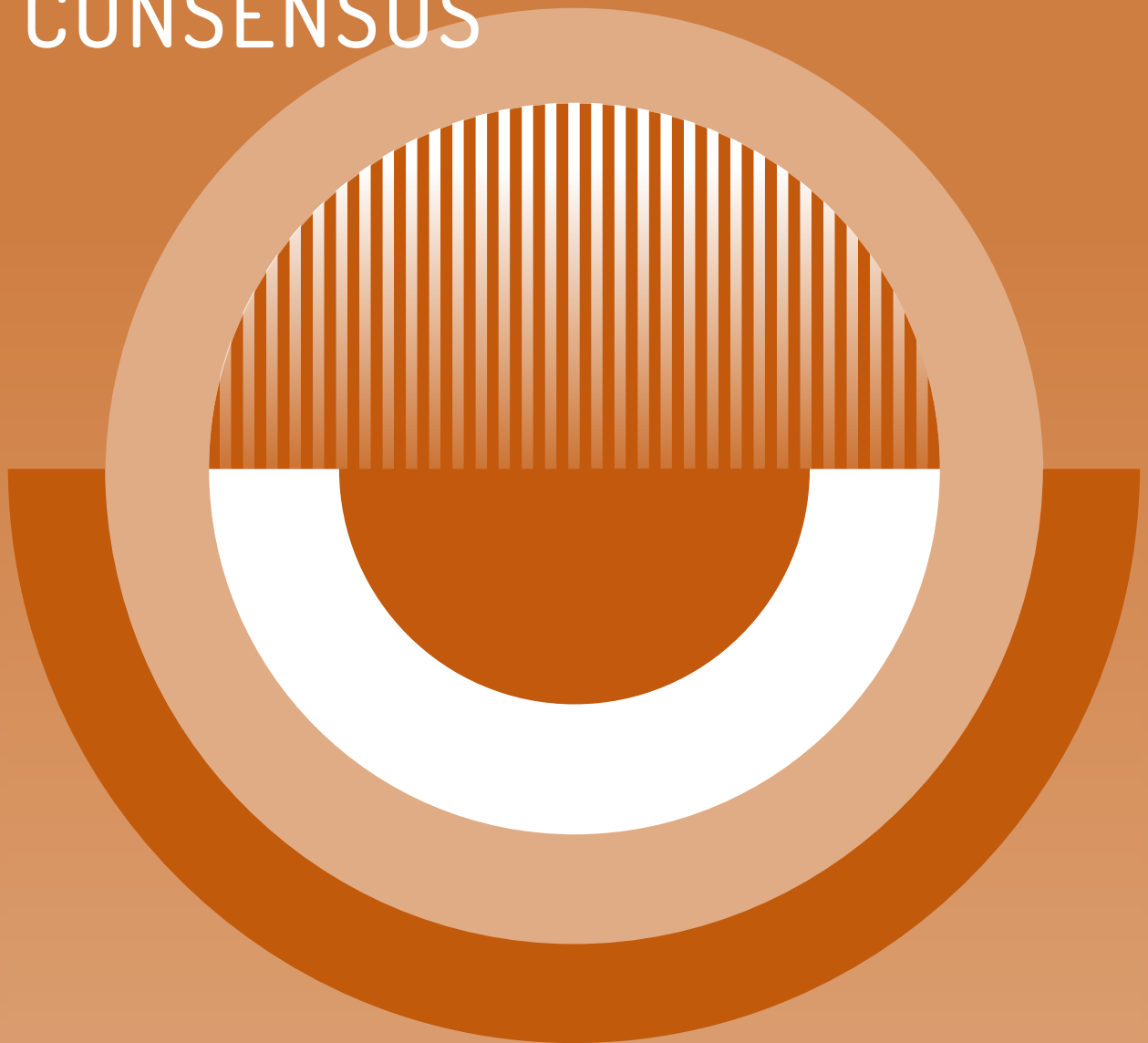
**41**

Dejusticia. (n.d.). [Audiencia CIDH: Bonos de carbono afectan comunidades en Amazonia](#).



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UNMASKING GREEN  
COLONIALISM BEHIND  
THE 'DECARBONIZATION  
CONSENSUS'



## UNMASKING GREEN COLONIALISM BEHIND THE 'DECARBONIZATION CONSENSUS'

By Mary Ann Manahan, Breno Bringel, and Miriam Lang<sup>42</sup>

In recent years, decarbonization and related market-oriented approaches have been imposed as the main paradigm within which to address the ecological and climate crises. During the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference, a plethora of tools, mechanisms, and initiatives were presented as 'solutions' to the escalating climate and ecological crises, backed by both public and predominantly private actors. These include climate-smart agriculture, carbon offsetting, carbon markets, nature-based solutions, and initiatives such as Reducing Emissions from Forest Degradation and Deforestation (REDD+).

However, despite their promotion as 'solutions', various frontline communities, civil society organizations, critical scholars, and scientists have denounced these market-based approaches, arguing that they aggravate the polycrises of our times.<sup>43</sup> Despite the rhetoric of decarbonization to achieve "net zero emissions," these approaches perpetuate the model of unlimited economic growth, exacerbate vulnerabilities and inequalities, and accelerate the destruction of territories, ecosystems, and life itself. This hegemonic decarbonization fur-

ther reinforces center-periphery or orth-South asymmetries<sup>44</sup> and has given rise to what recent studies term as new forms of carbon colonialism,<sup>45</sup> energy colonialism,<sup>46</sup> climate colonialism,<sup>47</sup> or climate coloniality,<sup>48</sup> and what we call green colonialism.

### GREEN COLONIALISM AS A HISTORICAL PATTERN OF EXTRACTIVIST CAPITALISM

Green colonialism is not new. Green colonialism is deeply intertwined with the expansion of colonial power and capitalist interests, rooted in the extractivist logic that has pervaded since the onset of European colonial expansion in 1492.<sup>49</sup> In his brilliant book, Argentinian activist and scholar Horacio Machado Araóz<sup>50</sup> shows how Potosí in Bolivia marked the starting point of a new geological and civilizational era in which modern-colonial mining triggered the capitalocene.<sup>51</sup> Although the extractivist logic and colonial violence against bodies, territories, and ecosystems have persisted, it has become more complex with the emergence of new material conditions and mechanisms of justification.

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The authors originally submitted a more extended piece, which is a short and adapted version of the authors' introductory chapter, "Lucrative Transitions, Green Colonialism and Pathways to Transformative Ecosocial Justice. An Introduction" in the book, *Geopolitics of Green Colonialism: Global Justice and Ecosocial Transitions*, published by Pluto Press, March 2004. The piece is available on the GNRTFN site. Later, they submitted a second version that was reviewed by Ayushi Kalyan, Christina Sathyamala, Donna Andrews, Jana Nakhai, Joshua Lohnes, Philip Seufert, and Sofia Monsalve Suarez. The second version was shortened and adapted for the WATCH by Clara Roig Medina and Angélica Castañeda Flores

43

Polycrises, as expounded by critical scholars, encapsulate the interconnected and mutually reinforcing crises across political, economic, social, and ecological dimensions. The term, which literally means 'multiple crises', stresses the complex and systemic nature of contemporary challenges such as for example the climate and crises and the rise of the extreme right. It therefore requires an interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional and intersectional approaches as well as cross-dialogues between and among social movements to address the different entangled crises.

44

The authors interrogate the Global North and Global South categories not as geographical, but as dynamic geopolitical and epistemic constructions situated in both historical and contemporary configurations of power. They reflect a geopolitical struggle over resources, exploitation and power configurations, which the dominant green transition and decarbonisation is again reproducing.

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Lyons, K. & Westoby, P. (2014). Carbon colonialism and the new land grab: plantation forestry in Uganda and its livelihood impacts. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 36, 13–21.

46

Sánchez Contreras, J., & Matarán Ruiz, A. (2023). *Colonialismo energético: Territorios de sacrificio para la transición energética corporativa en España, México, Noruega y el Sáhara Occidental*. Barcelona: Icaria.

47

Bhambra, G., & Newell, P. (2022). More than a metaphor: climate colonialism in perspective. *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 1–9.

48

Sultana, F. (2022). The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality. *Political Geography*, 99, 102638.

49

Grove, R. (1995). *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism: 1600–1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

50

Machado Araóz, H. (2018). *Potosí, el origen: Genealogía de la minería contemporánea*. Quito: Abya Yala.

51

'Capitalocene', a term coined by environmental historian and historical geographer Jason Moore, refers to the epoch in Earth's history where the capitalist system and its pursuit of endless accumulation of capital are seen as the primary drivers of environmental changes and crises. It is a counter-narrative to the idea of the Anthropocene, a now recognized geological period marked by human impacts on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. In other words, 'capitalocene' stresses the role of capitalism in shaping our current epoch.

Colonialism and the capitalocene entailed a new geopolitical and environmental imaginary about “Nature”<sup>52</sup> and the non-Western “other” to justify land grabbing, the destruction of traditional knowledges, and the subjugation of entire populations and ecosystems. Paradoxically, the ecological destruction caused by colonialism allowed, from the mid-17th century onwards, the emergence of a concern for environmental conservation. Since then, the colonial powers have made their imperial strategy more complex: they continue to destroy Nature and extract as much wealth as they can, while constructing conservationist policies and discourses. These dual strategies have alienated and displaced Indigenous Peoples from their histories, territories and resources. This historical pattern is evident in Africa and Asia. For example, in South India, forests were initially destroyed by the British colonizers and later subjected to state control under the pretext of maintaining climate and irrigation systems.<sup>53</sup>

Green colonialism was historically forged with capitalism and the commodification of Nature, combining material expansion and people’s control, which is expressed in the “coloniality of Nature”.<sup>54</sup> For global hegemonic thinking and dominant elites, this coloniality of Nature presents the global South as a subaltern space that can be exploited, destroyed, and reconfigured

according to the needs of capital accumulation.<sup>55</sup> This affects the biodiversity of ecosystems and those who live in them (animals, insects, plants, and people), the organization of territories (including socio-cultural dynamics), but also people’s minds (coloniality of mind and knowledge).<sup>56</sup>

### GREEN COLONIALISM IN THE ERA OF THE DECARBONIZATION CONSENSUS AND PROFITABLE TRANSITIONS

The persistence of green colonialism beyond formal colonization is evident at present in the era of the “Decarbonization Consensus”.<sup>57</sup> This is a global capitalist agreement that is committed to changing the energy matrix from one based on fossil fuels to one with reduced carbon emissions based on “renewable” energies. The core proposition is that global warming and the climate crisis can be addressed by promoting an energy transition driven by electrically-powered digital technologies. However, instead of protecting the planet, this consensus contributes to its destruction, deepening existing inequalities, exacerbating the exploitation of natural resources, and perpetuating the commodification of Nature.

On the one hand, this consensus suggests that everything can continue as before if we replace fossil fuels with so-called renewable sources of energy. On the other,

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Capitalizing N in nature signifies that it is not a neutral or objective concept but laden with social, cultural and political meanings. Nature, with a capital N, highlights the idea that our understanding of and relationship with nature are socially constructed and influenced by power dynamics.

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Kumar, R. V. M. (2010). Green colonialism and Forest Policies in South India, 1800-1900. *Global Environment*, 3(5), 101-125.

54

Coloniality of nature explores how colonialism has shaped our understanding of nature, often leading to exploitative and extractive use and control of natural resources and contributing to environmental injustices. Coronil, F. (2000). Naturaleza del poscolonialismo: del eurocentrismo al globocentrismo. In E. Lander (Ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

55

Alimonda, H. (2011). La colonialidad de la Naturaleza: una aproximación a la ecología política latinoamericana. In H. Alimonda (Ed.), *La naturaleza colonizada*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, pp. 21-60. Héctor Alimonda, “La colonialidad de la Naturaleza: una aproximación a la ecología política latinoamericana”, in Héctor Alimonda, (ed.), *La naturaleza colonizada*. CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2011, pp. 21-60.

56

This refers to how colonial histories have shaped the way we think and understand the world today. The most poignant evidence and examples include the dominance of Western-centric narratives in global climate and food policies, the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge, which contribute to persisting colonial mindsets in different societies.

57

Bringel, B., & Svampa, M. (2023). From the Commodities Consensus to the Decarbonization Consensus. *Nueva Sociedad*, (306), 51-70.

it maintains the centrality of economic growth, now dressed in a “green” guise, for the organization of our economies and societies.

Furthermore, this Decarbonization Consensus limits the fight against climate change with the “carbon metric”.<sup>58</sup> The use of environmental metrics to easily quantify carbon emissions provides an international bargaining chip and creates the illusion that something is being done about environmental degradation.

The protection of our habitat has thus become the object of lucrative ecological transitions and speculative pacts that end up financializing Nature. Carbon and biodiversity credits, for example, create new markets in which natural processes such as natural carbon storage in plants and soils are commoditized as “ecosystem services” and become speculative assets for financial and corporate investors. Transnational oil and gas companies are simultaneously planning to expand their fossil fuel operations while exploring new technologies, for example, hydrogen. The major world powers (the European Union, the USA, and China) concerned about their energy security, are committed to reducing carbon emissions and reorienting their economies towards low-carbon and low-carbon modes of production while at the same time targeting new opportunities for “green” economic growth. Similarly, some countries in the glob-

al South are also beginning to announce their „green transition” plans.

Within the framework of the Decarbonization Consensus, contemporary green colonialism manifests as green extractivism despite all the rhetoric around “sustainability” and “nature-based solutions”. Examples abound: China’s demand for balsa wood for wind turbine construction drives deforestation in the Ecuadorian rainforest. In South Africa, the huge infrastructure of hydrogen plants to export “clean” energy threatens communities that base their livelihoods on small-scale fishing or agriculture. In the Maghreb, shepherds are losing their land and water to the vast solar parks being built to supply “green energy” to Europe, and several Mediterranean countries have become graveyards for Europe’s nuclear and toxic waste,<sup>59</sup> a practice referred to as “waste colonialism”.<sup>60</sup>

In South America’s lithium triangle, communities are fighting for scarce water sources that are increasingly being grabbed by lithium mining to equip electric cars. In the rural communities of Indonesia, peasants and Indigenous Peoples are displaced from their territories as the Indonesian state extracts critical raw materials needed for the development of its own industry for electric vehicle batteries. Similarly, North Africa and West Asia continue to be key nodes in the scramble

58

Moreno, C., Chassé, D. S., & Fuhr, L. (2016). *A métrica do carbono: abstrações globais e epistemicídio ecológico*. Rio de Janeiro: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

59

Daily Star. (March 2015). *Toxic waste scandal rekindles 20-year-old memories*.

60

Waste colonialism refers to industrialized countries’ disposal of considerable amount of waste to poorer countries with disastrous consequences. D+C Development and Cooperation. (n.d.). *Industrialised countries are disposing large volumes of their waste in poorer countries*.

for green energy by the world's major economies.<sup>61</sup> This perpetuates neocolonial practices and environmental orientalism,<sup>62</sup> in other words, biased attitudes and perceptions against non-Western societies (e.g. they are environmentally irresponsible) that disproportionately harm communities.

### CONTEMPORARY GREEN COLONIALISM AND NORTH/SOUTH RELATIONS

Today's green colonialism unfolds in at least four dimensions within the geopolitical dynamics between the 'North' and 'South', reshaped and updated in the context of the Decarbonization Consensus. Firstly, the pursuit of unlimited raw materials in the new global energy security race adds a "green" layer to existing extractivist pressures. In Bringel and Svampa's words, the Decarbonization Consensus does not replace the Commodity Consensus but overlaps with elements of continuity and rupture. Secondly, as discussed above, green colonialism manifests in the imposition of specific conservation initiatives on the territories of the South within carbon offsetting schemes, enabling major polluters in the North to evade urgent structural changes in their production processes. The third dimension is the use of sites in the Global South as dumping grounds for toxic and electronic waste resulting from renew-

able energies and digitization. Finally, the fourth dimension involves projecting the South as a new market for the latest climate-proof technologies.

At the same time, the racialized and subaltern populations of the global South have no say in debates about energy transition, efficiency, and security. Many discussions still happen in the global North, where the geographies in which this appropriation takes place are imagined or represented as if there were no people and no conflict. The classic elements of colonialism are thus reproduced: landscapes, knowledges, bodies, and entire populations of the global South are treated as disposable to enable capital accumulation in the global North,<sup>63</sup> and this imperial way of life is normalized.

### CONTEMPORARY GREEN COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION

Green colonialism undermines various rights, but in the context of the human right to adequate food and nutrition, it perversely prioritizes the "green" over the food sovereignty, well-being, welfare, and livelihoods of those communities living in areas rich in critical raw materials. Demands to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energies have led to the large-scale cultivation of bioenergy crops such as corn or

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Hamouchene, H., & Sandwell, K. (2023). *Disrupting Green Colonialism: Energy and Climate Justice in the Arab Region*. London: Pluto Press.

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Environmental orientalism, which builds on the works of Edward Said, stresses how Western perspectives have historically depicted 'Eastern' or oriental societies and cultures as exotic, primitive or environmentally irresponsible. Such representations contribute to stereotypes and misunderstandings that impact policies and actions that affect these regions' environmental and cultural well-being. For example, upland Indigenous peoples cause deforestation due to their swidden agriculture practices, and therefore, should be 'trained' by Western conservationists and external actors on sustainable agriculture and alternative livelihoods.

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Machado Araújo, H. (2015). Ecología política de los regímenes extractivistas: De reconfiguraciones imperiales y re-existencias decoloniales en nuestra América. *Bajo el Volcán*, 15(23), 11-51.

sugarcane for biofuels, displacing agricultural lands previously dedicated to food production.<sup>64</sup> This shift, together with an increasing reliance on the global trade of food commodities, has contributed to food price volatility and, in some instances, food shortages, directly undermining the population's right to food.<sup>65</sup>

Another feature of land grabbing enabled by green colonialism is what has been called as green grabbing, i.e. amassing lands under the pretext of environmental goals.<sup>66</sup> Small-scale farming communities, rural women and Indigenous Peoples' well-being and social fabric are sacrificed in the name of the green transition, depriving them of their ability to forage, cultivate and harvest food. For instance, the construction of renewable energy infrastructure such as wind farms or solar installations requires huge tracts of land, which displaces local peoples, disrupts ecosystems, appropriates foraging and grazing fields, and threatens biodiversity. Similarly, the extraction of critical raw materials such as lithium for batteries and rare earth metals for solar panels has massive environmental consequences, such as soil degradation, water pollution, and habitat destruction. Ultimately, this hampers ecosystems and the communities that rely on them for sustenance. As a result, the right to food is compromised, and communities lose their ability to feed themselves, disrupting their food sovereignty.

## BEYOND GREEN COLONIALISM

Recognizing green colonialism and its current manifestation as green extractivism as an adversary, it becomes imperative to understand its dynamics and strategize how to self-organize against it. The authors of this text—which is based on a collectively curated book, *Beyond Green Colonialism: Global Justice and the Geopolitics of Ecosocial Transitions*, with the participation of activists and intellectuals from all continents—champion two interrelated premises.

One premise is that genuine ecosocial transformation necessitates global justice. Our planet is a highly complex ecosystem where human beings are just one component. We must transcend individualistic and hyper-localist approaches to embrace justice in all its dimensions: social, racial, gender, ecological, interethnic, and interspecies. A second premise is that ecosocial transformation requires planned degrowth, i.e., an urgent reduction of energy and material consumption, especially in the global North, together with structural reforms toward a fair distribution of resources both within and between countries.

A transformative ecosocial approach also becomes imperative, calling for global justice and planned degrowth to rectify social, racial, and ecological disparities inherent in the current glob-

64

Transnational Institute. (n.d.). *Flex crops: A primer*.

65

van Huellen, S., & Ferrando, T. (2023). *Who is profiting from the food crisis? Speculation, rent-seeking and rent-extraction in our food sector*.

66

Fairhead, J., Leach, M., & Scoones, I. (2012). Green grabbing: A new appropriation of nature? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(2), 237–261.

al food system. This approach advocates for fostering food sovereignty as well as harmony and balance between humanity and the environment to safeguard the right to food for all.

True global justice can only be achieved through collaborative efforts where critical voices from the North and the Global South navigate a shared path, despite their differences. Moreover, green colonialism is not solely imposed from above or from the North on the South. It also often involves “internal green colonialism”, which enables green extractivism based on colonial alliances between national elites in the South and global elites. Moreover, the idea of transition— and

even “just” transition— has been co-opted by capitalism and various institutional actors as a synonym for a market-oriented energy transition, so that the systemic features of colonialism are maintained.

Therefore, we need to build more bridges between the struggles of the North and the South, and reclaim the meanings and horizons for an ecological transition that includes a broader transformation of culture, economy, politics, society, and our relationship with Nature. Transitions are already taking place in many communities and territories, in the rural and the urban, as well as in people’s struggles against green colonialism.

# PEOPLE'S LOCAL STRUGGLES AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE CLIMATE & FOOD CRISES





Local struggles from grassroots organizations, small-scale producers, women and Indigenous Peoples are on the frontline of providing real alternatives and solutions to the polycrises, while promoting the human right to adequate food and nutrition by transforming food systems on the ground. In this section, we highlight the work of the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition’s members (GNRTFN) plus that of other organizations and communities related to the food sovereignty movement and committed to advancing the right to food across the world.

#### 4.1. SUPPORT OF LOCAL STRUGGLES

[KATARUNGAN](#), a Philippine Movement for Agrarian Reform and Social Justice, continues to struggle for agrarian reform and to strengthen community-controlled enterprises. It conducts community-based mass assemblies, promoting dialogue with government agencies to demand the respect of land rights and access to basic support services, and providing legal support to communities in land conflict cases. KATARUNGAN also actively campaigns against the criminalization of peasants through legal assistance –including special communication with the U.N Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders for the conflict against the Riverforest Corporation–, and through governmental requests.

In Mali, peasants are facing increased land grabbing, speculation, and evictions. The [Malian Convergence Against Land Grabbing](#) (CMAT in its French acronym) has been fighting alongside local communities for a decade. In June 2023, CMAT celebrated its 10th anniversary. This was an opportunity to assess its achievements and challenges, and rethink strategies to implement “peasant agroecology” as the know-how and expertise of communities for a credible alternative to climate change. CMAT, together with other CSOs, organized for another consecutive year the West Africa Caravan and the largest alternative Conference of the Parties (COP) of communities. The caravan campaigned with communities and authorities across Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal and Gambia, demanding the revision of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement to protect community lands against multinationals and their allies.

In 2023, the [International Union of Food Workers](#) (IUF) advocated for the RtFN and working conditions of melon workers in Honduras. Fyffes, a Japanese-owned multibillion-dollar fruit company, recently fired all permanent workers who are members of the independent farmworker union [STAS](#), an IUF affiliate. This termination seemed to be a direct response to workers’ union involvement, following their [petition](#) for an international labor rights agreement. IUF strongly condemns the firings and pledges ongoing support for the workers’ demand for reinstatement. In India, one of the most significant demands of the [Right to Food](#)

[Campaign India](#) (RTFC) has been the inclusion of eggs in children's meals to combat the staggering levels of food insecurity and nutritional deficiency. The RTFC, along with several other organizations, organized the #AndaDo (Give Eggs) campaign, which achieved an agreement with the governments in Maharashtra and Karnataka to supply eggs in children's meals. The campaign, however, has encountered significant resistance from national and other state governments due to religious groups that argue that eggs are considered non-vegetarian, thus contradicting the majoritarian Hindu religious ideology that dominates India's socio-political landscape.

#### THE US CORPORATIZED FOOD BANKS: WHO DO THEY REALLY BENEFIT?

In the USA, governmental policies to address hunger and food waste largely support food banks and local food charities, [offering liability protections, tax incentives and other benefits](#) to food donors and recovery organizations. [Research](#) shows, however, that while food banks are sold as a solution to [food waste](#) and hunger, they sustain the agro-industrial system, which relies on overproduction to generate profit at the expense of people and the environment. In response, some civil society groups in the USA are working for concrete people and planet-centered policies and strategies, thus strengthening the movement for the right to food in the country and proposing amendments of states' constitutions to include the right to food to develop anti-hunger strategies. This is the example of [WhyHunger](#), a member of [Closing the Hunger Gap](#), which organized the [Next Shift](#) campaign aimed to challenge the prevailing narratives on the causes of hunger. It also highlighted low wages, poor working conditions, and structural racism as the root causes of food insecurity, and emphasized the importance of economic justice as a critical step toward ending the persistent need for food banks.

In October 2023, The [Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity](#) (ZAAB) submitted a [report](#) to the CSIPM, detailing how corporate lobby agents such as the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the FAO usurp policy spaces to lock-in extractive industrial commodity value chains and false solutions to the food and climate crisis. ZAAB has worked since 2010 to defend Zambia's hard-fought GMO-Free status, farmers' rights, and ecological integrity, which are increasingly undermined by the systematic capture of public policy. AGRA was founded in 2006 to fight hunger in Africa with a corporate-driven "Green

Revolution” approach. It promised to increase the agricultural yields and incomes of small-scale food producers. However, the report indicates that AGRA is a highly contested agency due to its well-known support for pushing pro-GMO markets in Africa, inappropriate harmonized seed regimes, and other controversial programs.

In Italy, [Crocevia](#) supports grassroots movements advocating food sovereignty at the national level. Noteworthy activities for 2023 include [farmer-to-farmer](#) meetings, seminars, and the annual film festival [Festival delle Terre](#). At the European level, Crocevia collaborated with members of La Via Campesina, and engaged in [advocacy efforts at both the national and EU levels](#) to support peasants’ rights to seeds and resist the expansion of intellectual property rights and new GMOs.

## COAL POWER ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

A recent study by FIAN International and local partners delved into the devastating impact of the life cycle of coal (mining, combustion, and waste disposal) on the lives and livelihoods of communities in rural areas in the Western Balkans<sup>67</sup>, an area with some of Europe’s highest levels of air pollution.

It also investigates the impacts of coal mining and related activities throughout the coal cycle on people’s right to adequate food and nutrition and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and other interconnected rights. Coal-related impacts such as polluted and disrupted groundwater supplies, water shortages, diminished agricultural yields and floods severely threaten the ecological basis of food production. Moreover, continued air pollution and changes to wind patterns from large scale excavation have led to plant diseases and increased instances of respiratory illness, allergies, and other severe health implications.

All this has significant consequences for biodiversity and natural resources, which are essential for realizing the RtFN, and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

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The report by FIAN International and local civil society groups, CEKOR, CZZS, and Aarhus Center, focuses on the impact of coal power in Tuzla, Ugljevik, and Kostolac on the human right to adequate food and nutrition and related human rights. FIAN International. (2023). [Coal Power Ecological Destruction in the Western Balkans](#).

In the UK, the [Independent Food Aid Network \(IFAN\)](#) has fought for the incorporation of the right to food into UK law. IFAN claims that a legal framework would enable individuals to challenge violations of their right to food and nutrition, shifting responsibility from charitable organizations to that of the state's obligation. IFAN also advocates for a “cash first” approach following the example of Scotland.

The [URGENCI](#) global network has been working on access to healthy food for vulnerable people. In Spain, its member [Coordinación Baladre](#) has conducted research on food aid channels and resisted a new law on food waste. The coming law considers the most vulnerable people as recipients of food waste without taking into account people's nutritional needs.

In the Gulf of Fonseca, Honduras, climate change, the salinization of coastal land, and other signs of environmental degradation are severely destroying fisheries and small-scale agriculture, thus threatening communities' primary food sources. [Women](#) are leading their communities to demand climate justice and a human rights-based loss and damage mechanism that includes their participation in national policies on resettling people who have lost their livelihoods.

#### 4.2. PROVIDING PEOPLE'S ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Besides fighting for communities' RtFN and related rights, members of the network are also implementing people's alternative solutions to the destructive industrial agricultural system fueling climate change.

To face the climate crisis in Manipur, India, the [Center for Social Development](#) initiated a [Participatory Assessment on Climate and Disaster Risk \(PACDR\)](#). This tool enables communities to identify climate change impacts, leading to the development of micro-plans for mitigation and adaptation. CSD is also promoting food security to face the climate crisis by advocating for organic fertilizers such as vermicompost as climate-adaptive and climate-friendly, based on a pilot study.

[KHANI Bangladesh](#) organized the National Drought Convention on July 22, addressing the escalating drought situation in the drought-prone Varendra area, which has caused two suicides and one suicide attempt among indigenous farmers. With over 250 participants from government, CSOs and academia, the Convention sought to generate innovative solutions for a more resilient future in the face of climate change, particularly in regions like Rajshahi.

## PALESTINE: RESISTING THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION, STARVATION & TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF FOOD SYSTEMS

In Palestine, the Israeli occupation is, and continues to be, the [main driver](#) of violations of the right to food and related rights. This pre-existing situation, paired with the ongoing brutal destruction of homes, land, natural resources, and killings, has led to catastrophic levels of hunger, food insecurity, and public health concerns.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the humanitarian catastrophe and mass starvation of Palestinians in Gaza, especially since October 7<sup>th</sup>, has been unparalleled. The intentional destruction of food systems, blockades on essential and life-saving resources, and deliberate starvation of Palestinians by Israel flagrantly violates the fundamental right to adequate food, among other human rights, and constitute war crimes. Due to these war crimes and clear violations of basic human rights, Israel is currently being tried at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for crimes of Genocide.<sup>69</sup>

Before the war, the [Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform \(GUPAP\)](#) had been working tirelessly to build resilient urban and peri-urban food systems, with [women playing a key role](#). The war has damaged GUPAP's office as well as many women-led small and micro-family farming facilities. At present, GUPAP, in collaboration with other partners, is working with two community-led kitchens, providing fresh and hot meals to 600 people. GUPAP's emergency response strategy, once ceasefire is achieved, will focus on restoring women's damaged enterprises<sup>70</sup> and supporting [Solidarity Marketing in Crisis](#).

[The African Center for Biodiversity](#), in collaboration with South African civil society organizations like Biowatch, organized the [National Policy Dialogue on Just Transition and Adaptation](#) in the South African Food System. It aimed to gain support from a diversity of actors to cultivate a shared agenda and cohesive policy approach for a just transition in South Africa's food systems. The annual [Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair](#) featured a campaign promoting millet and sorghum cultivation, encouraging farmers to embrace these climate-resilient ancient grains.

In Ecuador, peasant communities are fighting to preserve the ecosystem of [Las Garzas](#) from a banana company draining the wetland, creating food reserves and protection areas. The local government and the Ministry of Environment proposed allowing the company to continue with its operations within a limited wetland area, which affects the entire ecosystem.

**68**

For a detailed analysis please see: FIAN International & Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC). (n.d.). [Israeli Occupation is using starvation as a weapon of genocide against Palestinians](#).

**69**

*Ibid.*

**70**

According to GUPAP, there are some 3000 family farming small enterprises managed by women in Gaza. At least 60 enterprises have been totally or partially damaged in the recent war.

#### 4.3. KNOWLEDGE-SHARING TOOLS ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION

- In this part, we highlight initiatives, materials, and tools for knowledge-sharing developed in 2023 on the RtFN by members of the GNTRFN as well as allies and partners of the food sovereignty movement.
- [The Development Journal](#): the Ocean Economy issue released in March 2024 features ideas shared by the food sovereignty network. The publication, a flagship journal of the [Society for International Development \(SID\)](#), opens a dialogue between activists and academics committed to a more just and sustainable world.
- The study „[Droits humains et transition vers des systèmes alimentaires durables: l'importance fondamentale des semences paysannes](#)” (“Human Rights and Transition Towards Sustainable Food Systems: The Fundamental Importance of Peasant Seeds”),<sup>71</sup> conducted by [SOS Farm](#), the Belgian member of the GNRtFN, examines the legal and regulatory structures governing seeds in both the international and European markets, the impact on farmers’ rights, and suggests alternative regulatory frameworks.
- [Stories of Resilience Built Through Agroecology](#), a book produced by Biowatch, showcases farmers’ experiences in how agroecology can address the climate, biodiversity, water, and food crises.
- “[El derecho humano a la alimentación adecuada: Del reconocimiento internacional a las políticas públicas nacionales.](#)” (“The Human Right to Adequate Food: From International Recognition to National Public Policies”), a digital book by Enraíza Derechos,<sup>72</sup> deals with the human right to food at the international and national levels.
- The schoolyard farming program [School Grown](#) by [Food Share Toronto](#) in Canada consists of growing vegetables and fruits on school rooftops and lawns. The aim of School Grown is not only to create student employment, but to also close the loop on food literacy on how young people eat, grow, and learn.

**71**  
Only available in French.

**72**  
Only available in Spanish.

#### SOWERS OF LIFE, SOWERS OF RESISTANCE

The Peoples’ Alliance for Food Sovereignty of Latin America and the Caribbean held its first rural feminist school in June 2023, “Sowers of Life, Sowers of Resistance.” The school’s vision is to build a collective political training process on rural feminism and its radical transformation potential towards food sovereignty, the full realization of the right to food and nutrition, and a life free from violence for all.

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