

Food Crisis and Sovereignty in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The linkages between the food and financial crises

- The interconnections between the food crisis and financial crisis are multifaceted:
- The food price hikes began in the futures market first. Financial speculation in commodity futures – both in oil and food products – following the US subprime crisis and the crash at Wall Street, have pushed hedge funds and other institutional speculators to enter the commodity markets. This has boosted demand and, consequently the prices. Between June 2005 and June 2007 the face value of commodity derivatives increased by 160 per cent although real production did not increase.
- Oil price is strategic, as it is included in the price of other agricultural products. Experts estimate, that approximately 25 per cent of the oil price is determined by speculation. Thus, speculation in oil works as an indirect factor for the increase in prices of agricultural commodities.
- Because most of international trade is billed in dollars, the depreciation of the dollar has led the producing countries to increase the food prices in order to compensate the exchange rate losses.

The politics of the food crisis

- Why is it named as a crisis? By who ?
- The food crisis is a dramatic testimony to the critical flaws in the global institutions that govern the food system, as well as in the market-based agricultural policies that have been imposed on African countries during the last two decades
- The food crisis did not happen in a vacuum, but in a food system which involves power relations among many actors with different interests and varying political and economic power – from smallholder farms and families; to Governments and global corporations, etc. -, as well as rules and institutions.
- The food price hikes and shortages are a reminder about the serious flaws in the current food system that globally leaves more than 850 million people undernourished and over 1 billion overweight (300 million of them obese).
- The current food system prioritizes the interests of TNCs and powerful players over the rights of small scale producers
- Eg: Madagascar land deal
- The long-term and structural reasons for the food crisis are linked to the nature of the prevailing agricultural policies in Africa, which have tended to overemphasize the promotion of primary commodity exports and large scale farming at the expense of food production and smallholder farming. This is despite the fact that most African countries are characterized by the predominance of smallholders' farms (80% of SSA farms are smaller than two hectares^[1]) within which the household is a key institution in the production system.
^[1] IAASDT 2008.

Women's rights and food sovereignty

- The current food crisis is clearly linked to the lack of food sovereignty, i.e. the sovereign right of African countries and their peoples to define their agricultural and food policies, and to protect their production from any dumping from third countries.
- The food crisis is linked to a history of continued gender discrimination in access to productive assets and decision-making. This crucial issue can be addressed through the Food Sovereignty framework, which is based on the respect for the rights of women farmers, and the recognition of their major role in agricultural and food production
- Overall, the recommendations from economists and experts on both the food and financial crises boil down to necessary cuts in public expenditure and the crucial need to maintain macroeconomic stability.
- African countries are being pushed to undertake land reforms and titling and to increase their agricultural productivity through the purchase of imported agrochemicals as part of the so-called African Green Revolution.

Women's rights and food sovereignty

- However, the changing official discourse on agriculture and food security provides a window of opportunity for change.
- As a result of the food crisis, “the paradigm of “food security” has suddenly shifted back to the traditional concept of greater self-sufficiency, instead of prioritizing the option of relying on cheaper imports” (Khor M., 2008) and that the long-term solution must include increased local food production in developing countries.
- As some people say, it is then possible to turn the food crisis into an opportunity for advancing gender justice, people-centered and sustainable development, and women's rights.