



International Food Organizations, Global Summits, and People's Movements

VICENTE FABE

ABSTRACT. Poverty has a rural face. The world's poor and hungry are the small-scale women and men farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers, as well as the urban poor who have tried to escape poverty in the rural areas. In this paper, I analyze two spaces for policy dialogues at the international and regional levels, and how farmers' organizations and other civil society groups claim these spaces to promote food sovereignty.

KEYWORDS. small farmers · peasant movements · global food governance · international organizations

INTRODUCTION

Poverty has a rural face. There are 1.4 billion people in the world living on less than USD 1.25 per day, down from 1.8 billion in 1990. Some 70 percent or one billion people still live in the rural areas of developing countries. The world's poor and hungry are the constituents we work with: people residing in the rural areas, relying mostly on agriculture, fisheries, and forestry. They are the small-scale women and men farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers, as well as the urban poor who have tried to escape poverty in the rural areas.

Why are many of us still poor? First, many of us do not own the small lands we till. Thus, we cannot decide on what, how, and where to market our produce. We cannot plan long-term investments in land. Second, we lack access to credit, technology, extension, roads, infrastructure, and preharvest and postharvest facilities. Third, we lack access and control over our markets. It is the buyer who decides on the prices of our produce. We do not have good roads, and we do not know who gives the higher price. We do not know how to add value to our products. Fourth, we are not the decision makers. We are weak in terms of influencing our government's policies and programs

because we lack the numbers, the confidence to speak, and the sharpness of our arguments.

How then do we fight poverty? We fight poverty by taking steps and efforts to empower ourselves—politically, socially, economically—so that we can claim our rights as citizens of our country, our region, and our world; so that we can decide and do by ourselves what we think we should do to improve our conditions and get the necessary support from others. Politically, we increase the awareness of our members about our situation and our rights. We develop our capabilities to analyze these situations, to present confidently our policy and program proposals to our governments. We organize ourselves to pressure our government to listen, to engage in dialogue with us, and to make laws and policies that will benefit us. Economically, we exchange experience and expertise on various sustainable agricultural technologies. We form commodity clusters, and production and marketing cooperatives. We develop our capacities in making market researches, business plans, and feasibility studies. We facilitate links to markets, add value to our products, and develop direct farmer-consumer relationships.

In this paper, I analyze two spaces for policy dialogues at the international and regional levels, and how farmers' organizations and other civil society groups claim these spaces to promote food sovereignty. We will focus our discussion on two international food organizations—namely, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), both of which are based in Rome, Italy.

OUR ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM

We would like to share with you the analysis of civil society groups on the global food system, contained in a statement delivered to FAO during its Asia Pacific Regional Conference in late September 2010, which the Asian Farmers' Association (AFA) attended, along with seventy other organizations.

In the last five years, manifold crises afflicted the world. The financial crisis caused the closure of banks and many financial institutions. The food crisis resulted from the destruction of food systems through neoliberal reforms in poor countries. A climate crisis is upon us due to unsustainable industrial and agricultural policies.

These crises are fundamentally linked to neoliberal globalization triggered by oligopolistic capitalism. This is an intensification of cyclical forms of recession due to unsustainable development, chemical-

intensive agriculture, overproduction, and global speculative markets. The hardest hit and most vulnerable are developing countries that became net importers of food.

A climate crisis is upon us due to unsustainable industrial and agricultural policies. In Asia's rural areas, these policies and processes are destroying our food sovereignty; poisoning our land, common property, and natural resources; and driving small food producers to bankruptcy and loss of their land and livelihoods.

Realizing that international policies affect national policies, we engage in advocacy work at the international level, together with other key players in the farmers' movements and civil society groups.

ENGAGEMENT WITH FAO

FAO is a mandated United Nations agency that acts as a forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy and is a source of knowledge and information on agriculture. The FAO Conference of Nations is its highest governing body, which meets every two years. The FAO Council acts as the interim governing body in between the FAO conferences. It is composed of forty-nine member nations. The Philippines is a member of the FAO Council. Under the FAO Council are the committees on program, finance, constitutional and legal matters, agriculture, commodity problems, forestry, fisheries, and food security. For AFA's advocacy work, the last five committees are the most relevant. For many civil society groups, the committee on Food Security is an arena for engagement.

WHAT WILL BE THE ROLE OF THE NEW CFS?

According to the agreements, the reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS), as the foremost body of global food security governance, should have the authority to formulate and to approve a "Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition." Governments would commit themselves to translating this framework into national action plans with the participation of all stakeholders, and would be held accountable for the results. For the first time in the history of the UN system, representatives of small-scale food producers and other civil society organizations (CSOs), along with private sector associations and other stakeholders, will be full participants and not just observers of the intergovernmental process. Committees on Food Security at national and regional levels are foreseen.

Civil society will be a formal participant in the new CFS. Even in the annual global meeting, although voting rights will continue to be reserved for member governments, civil society and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and their networks will be “nonvoting participants.”¹

It is foreseen that CFS will conduct a series of activities that will take place between one session and another, linking national, regional, and global levels, in which CSOs will have an important role to play.

To play this part, the CSOs have established in early October 2010 a Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) to facilitate the participation of CSOs in the work of the CFS, including input to negotiation and decision making. The CSM will also provide a space for dialogue between a wide range of civil society actors where different positions can be expressed and debated. The CSM will present common positions to the CFS where they emerge and the range of different positions where there is no consensus.

The CSM could perform a series of functions including the following:

- i) broad and regular exchange of information, analysis and experience;
- ii) developing common positions as appropriate;
- iii) communicating to the CFS and, as appropriate, its Bureau through representatives designated by an internal self-selection process within each civil society category; [and]
- iv) convening a civil society forum as a preparatory event before CFS sessions if so decided by the civil society mechanism. (CFS2009/2Rev.2, para. 16)

The CSM will be an inclusive space open to all CSOs. It will involve the full range of constituencies concerned about and affected by hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition, including social movements and NGOs, particularly those from developing countries, those affected by hunger, and those committed to the realization of the right to food and food sovereignty.

It will respect pluralism, autonomy, and self-organization. It will ensure a balance of gender, regions and constituencies, and sectors. Participation within the CSM should aim to preserve unity and solidarity among CSOs, but should not imply a flattening of the

diversity that exists between civil society groups in terms of objectives, strategies, and content. However, decision-making mechanisms should be agreed upon by the CSM Coordination Committee in order to strengthen cooperation among all participants and allow common positions when possible.

Civil society groups constituting the CSM engaged the Committee on World Food Security in its 36th session in Rome, Italy, under its new chair, Ambassador Noel de Luna from the Philippines. Issues discussed include food security in protracted crisis; land tenure and international investments in agriculture; managing vulnerability and risk; development of a global strategic framework; and mapping food security actions at country level. The CSM participants exchanged analysis on these issues and identified common positions. Identified speakers from the CSM made interventions during the sessions. The AFA secretary general was in Rome for these meetings.

At the regional level, civil society groups, including AFA, are also active in engaging the FAO. FAO regional conferences are held once every two years and are generally attended by ministers of agriculture or their deputies and senior government officials. The meeting focuses on special problems in the region and priority areas that should be taken into account in preparing the FAO Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium as well as in relation to longer-term objectives. In addition to delegates of regional member countries, observers from other FAO-member countries and development partners—including civil society—attend the plenary sessions as well as side events.

On September 27–October 1, 2010, the FAO held its Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific in Gyeongju, South Korea. CSOs under the Ad Hoc Committee for FAO APRC, with AsiaDHRRA, a regional NGO as secretariat, held a parallel meeting and presented their statement during the official meetings, became panel presenters during an official side event on CFS, and intervened as observers during the discussions on land investments.

In March 2010, AFA also participated in a FAO meeting on biotechnology. Our delegate there, a staff and farmer from the Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA, National Movement of Farmers' Organizations), held a hunger strike to protest against genetically modified organisms.

ENGAGEMENT WITH IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized agency of the United Nations, was established as an international financial institution in 1977, one of the major outcomes of the 1974 World Food Conference. IFAD is dedicated to eradicating rural poverty in developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD works with governments to develop and to finance programs and projects that enable the rural poor to overcome poverty themselves.

The Governing Council is IFAD's highest decision-making authority, with 165 member states represented by a governor, an alternate governor, and any other designated advisers. The council meets annually. The Executive Board, responsible for overseeing the general operations of IFAD and approving loans and grants, is composed of eighteen members and eighteen alternate members. The president, who serves a four-year term, renewable once, is IFAD's chief executive officer and chair of the Executive Board.

In early 2000, IFAD conducted its own reform process and saw the necessity of involving farmers' organizations to make their country and regional programs more responsive and effective. Thus, it convened the Global Farmers' Forum (FaFo).

The FaFo is held every two years in conjunction with the annual IFAD Governing Council sessions. AFA attended the first FaFo in 2006 and the succeeding FaFos in 2008 and 2010.

The thematic issues to be discussed in every Global Farmers' Forum are determined by a Steering Committee composed of one representative each from the regional farmers' organizations (Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations of West Africa, Subregional Platform of Farmers' Organizations in Central Africa, Eastern Africa Farmers' Federation for Africa; Confederación de Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del MERCOSUR for Latin America; AFA for Asia), two representatives each from two international farmers' organizations (IFAD² and Via Campesina), and one representative each from the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP).

It is envisioned that the global FaFo will be replicated at the regional and national levels. Currently, a medium-term cooperation program for capacity building of farmers' organizations in Asia Pacific, piloted in six Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam),

three South Asian countries (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka), and China is being implemented. The purpose of the program is to enable small farmers' organizations in Asia and the Pacific region and their networks to influence policies affecting their members. At the regional level, the Steering Committee is composed of one representative from each participating country and one representative each from AFA, La Via Campesina, and IFAP. At the national level, the Steering Committee is composed of one representative each of the national members of AFA (PAKISAMA), La Via Campesina (KMP), and IFAP (FFF), plus other farmers' organizations independent of these international organizations. PAKISAMA is the implementing agency.

In closing, FAO and IFAD are very big intergovernmental institutions that have recognized the rights of civil society groups, especially farmers' organizations. As every space becomes open for us, we take this opportunity to articulate our perspectives and put forward proposals. We will constructively and critically engage them and work in solidarity with other CSOs in the pursuit of the food sovereignty agenda. ❀

NOTES

1. This means that they will have the right to intervene in plenary and breakout discussions, to contribute to the preparation of meeting documents and agendas, and to present documents and proposals. The opening up of this space should increase social participation in international policy making, contributing hopefully to more effective food security and nutrition strategies.
2. Unfortunately, IFAP was liquidated by the French court in November 2010. The members of ex-IFAP are trying to form a new international platform of farmers' organizations.

VICENTE FABE is the chairperson of PAKISAMA and treasurer of the Asian Farmers' Association. He is also a rice and coconut farmer from Camarines Norte. PAKISAMA is a national confederation of organizations of small-scale women and men farmers, fishers, and indigenous peoples with membership of about one hundred thousand in thirty-eight provinces of the country. AFA is an alliance of national farmers' organizations, currently with ten member-organizations in eight countries, with membership of around ten million small-scale women and men farmers, fishers, and indigenous peoples.