



Constitutionalization of the struggle for food sovereignty in Nepal: Success, prospects and challenges

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Challenges on every front

All Nepal Peasants' Federation (ANPFa), the largest peasant organization in Nepal, has been fighting for the genuine agrarian reform and peasants rights for last six decades since it was founded in 1951. ANPFa is the largest peasant federation in Nepal. It is an alliance of 23 national level peasants' and producers' organizations with a membership of almost one million. It had been very active in mobilizing for democratic freedom, peasant rights and land reform in the past and, more recently, fighting for food sovereignty, the right to food, and climate justice.

In Nepal, 67 per cent of people are primarily depend on farming for their living and agriculture contributes more than one third of national gross domestic product (GDP). Therefore, agriculture and peasantry are of major concern. There are still historical problems of land management regarding unequal distribution, control over and access to land and other natural resources. In the context of still-existing feudalism, landlessness, the attack of neo-liberalism, land grabbing, climate change, chemical pollution and desertification of land, deforestation and degradation, land encroachment and conversion due to industrialization and urbanization, population pressure and WTO prescriptions, the risks in land and agriculture are enormous.

At this juncture, ANPFa was looking for a new development model for agrarian and rural development as an alternative to the neo-liberal paradigm of development. Food sovereignty emerged as a way to reach socialism.

Building an international peasants' movement

La Via Campesina developed the concept of food sovereignty as an alternative peoples' paradigm to the neo-liberal model of development. Food sovereignty, focusing on genuine agrarian reform based on biodiversity and ecological agriculture, is a just and equitable model for small farmers around the world. It is a pro-people policy to address the challenges of neo liberal policies, where WTO trade rules allow transnational companies to exploit peasants' worldwide through their monopoly power, impoverishing small and medium-scale producers, and extracting high profits through intellectual property rights on seeds and genetically manipulated organisms (GMO). Therefore the Nepalese peasant movement joined the international peasant movement and food sovereignty became its banner.

ANPFa participated in various international forum and meetings and after a long experience of sharing and interaction with the international movement, it became the member of La Via Campesina in 2002. That was the starting point of the internationalization of the Nepalese peasant movement and building solidarity and alliances for the food sovereignty movement of Nepal.

ANPFa is fighting for just and pro-people principles on their way to socialism. The principle of food sovereignty is a perfect model of rural agrarian reform and ensuring peasants' rights. Everywhere, the peoples socialism is in crisis and the working class is being transformed, yet the growing world-wide peasant movement that is being built, confident of its own direction and strategies, is a source of hope. La Via Campesina has been able to change Marx's observation that peasants are "like a sack of potatoes" (existing side by side but still in isolation) and to renew the memory of the Chinese revolutionary peasants' struggle. We hope that the hallmark of the 21st century will be the rising waves of peasant movements across the world and its revolutionary strides will be incomparably higher than any other movements. This confidence is being built with the successful food sovereignty movements in Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador etc.

Struggle for food sovereignty

ANPFa organized various campaigns and programs to train the leaders and inform the general masses about the concept of food sovereignty. It also organized various sharing programs and meetings at national and international level. Most remarkable was the *Food Sovereignty Caravan Asia* that kicked off in Penang of Malaysia in 2004 and which culminated in Kathmandu with the active support of ANPFa (then ANPA). This Caravan helped greatly to arouse the peasant masses in our country and to make links with the international movement. During the Caravan, a one-day international conference on "Food Sovereignty and the Alternatives to Corporate Globalisation in Food and Agriculture" was held. The presence of members and allies from the national, regional and global level and a massive mobilization during the Caravan was highly successful in spreading the concept of food sovereignty and popularizing it

among various organizations. ANPFa also organized many national and international peasants' forums and held seminars on peasant and agrarian issues in collaboration with different national and international actors including UN agencies such as FAO and IFAD. Our close cooperation with La Via Campesina, as well as our relationships with other agencies, widens the space to think over the contemporary issues facing peasants and agriculture.

It was during the Peoples' Movement - II in 2006 that the message of the peasants' movement and the concept of food sovereignty reached down to the local level. Under the dynamic leadership of its Chair, Bamdev Gautam, ANPFa strongly protested on the streets, with food sovereignty in one hand and abolition of monarchy in the other. The role of friends in La Via Campesina and our international comrades was vital in both of these political struggles. Comrades like Jose Bove, Paul Nicolson and Henry Saragih were not only always there to inspire us, but also participated in various campaigns of the movement. Due to the active role of ANPFa in the Peoples' Movement - II during the formation of Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007), food sovereignty was incorporated as the mandate of movement.

Constitutional success

Food sovereignty entered as fundamental right of the people for the first time in the constitutional history of Nepal and was inducted in part three of the Interim Constitution, 2007 Article 18(3) which is a remarkable achievement for the peasants' movements worldwide and for the Nepalese people who struggled against feudalism and despotic monarchy. Nepalese peasants, at the call of the then seven-party alliance and CPM (Maoist) coalition, actively participated in the peoples' revolt of April, 2006 which successfully brought the peasants' power to the national political scenario. The Constituent Assembly (CA), for which Nepalese peoples movement fought hard for the last 60 years, was elected in 2008.

We are thankful to Com. Madhav Kumar Nepal of CPN (UML), Com. Prachanda of CPN (M) and the then Prime Minister Mr G. P Koirala in helping to enshrine these important issues in the Interim Constitution. We also recognize the historical contribution of ANPFa chairperson Com. Bamdev Dev Gautam who strongly lobbied the CPN (UML) and Prachanda's UCPN to resist the reformists and neo-liberalists who were in a constant conspiracy not to include food sovereignty in the constitution. But due to the stand taken by left forces until the last hour and the co-operation of G.P.Koirala, food sovereignty was incorporated in the interim constitution of Nepal.

ANPFa has been a part of various international movements and La Via Campesina is the leader of global peasant movement. An international conference on food sovereignty, agrarian reforms and peasant rights in the changing context of Nepal was held successfully on 29-31 August, 2007 in Kathmandu, where dozens of comrades

and friends from La Via Campesina participated. Our allies and partners were also present at the auspicious gathering. This was an historical event in many regards.

State of play and the way ahead

Though these historic achievements are worth mentioning there were practical problems in its operation in the absence of necessary legislative acts. The election of the Constituent Assembly and the drafting of a new constitution was supposed to be the basis for the implementation of food sovereignty. But the Constituent Assembly could not finish drafting a new federal republican constitution by the peoples' representatives, despite the extension of its deadline many times. Finally, the CA was dissolved on 28 May 2012. The historical Peoples' Movement - II that was able to abolish the 240-year-long monarchy and establish the Democratic Republic of Nepal, could not be institutionalized due to the failure of Constituent Assembly. Therefore, it was not possible to institutionalize the food sovereignty principle. The main reason for the failure of Constituent Assembly was the lack of consensus among the major political parties.

It may take some time but Nepal's political deadlock and constitutional crisis will be ended. Probably national consensus will be built for a fresh election to draft the new constitution of Nepal. That is why ANPFa is well prepared to launch massive political awareness and training to socialise the concept of food sovereignty among the people. To be prepared for the new election, we also have a plan to elect as many peasant candidates as possible in the next election. We hope that sooner or later we will constitutionalize and implement the food sovereignty in Nepal. For this, the All Nepal Peasants' Federation has been effectively mobilizing masses, conducting advocacy and campaign activities and actively engaged in lobbying and intervention in policy, planning and programs. It has been very active in the country and regionally as the focal point of the National Peasant Coalition and Food Sovereignty Network Nepal and the South Asia Peasants' Coalition and also of the South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication and the Food Sovereignty Network South Asia to raise the issues of food sovereignty and its implementation. We are hopeful that, with the support and solidarity from our national and international networks and allies, we will be successful in guaranteeing food sovereignty as a fundamental right of people in the new constitution of Nepal.

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