



editorial : forests, foraging and the commons

About 75 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas in developing countries. Most survive on subsistence farming, artisanal fisheries and/or nomadic herding and many are landless, working as seasonal labour on farms, plantations, in fisheries and industry. Their daily food needs are met primarily through local production, foraging, hunting and fishing -- often by women -- on small farms, common grazing lands and in woods, forests, streams, rivers and lakes. Reduced access to these ecosystems or decrease in the foods gathered in these environments can result in hunger and acute malnutrition.

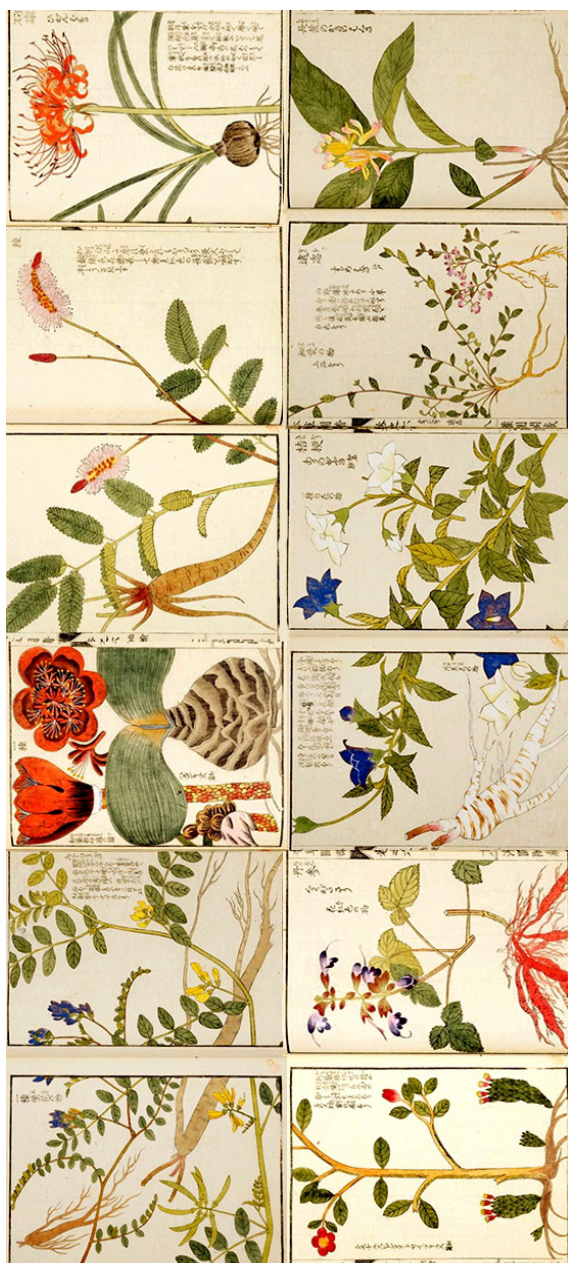
Forests, fields, hill/mountain slopes, wetlands and water bodies -- which include rivers, streams, ponds, lakes and seas--are integral to the lives, cultures and economies of rural communities all over the world. They are crucial repositories of biodiversity and literally sustain life. The food, water, fibre, fuel, medicinal plants and roots, wood, grasses, leaves, resin and other materials they provide are the only safety nets that rural populations have in times of hardship. But even in good times and among rural communities that are not poor, wild foods -- foods that are foraged, hunted and fished -- are significant components of local, traditional diets, and non-timber-forest products (NTFPs) and marine resources are important sources of supplemental income.

Many communities -- especially indigenous peoples -- have sacred or spirit forests, which house the sources of local rivers and streams. Forests and woods are important catchment areas: protecting forests thus also means protecting the communities' water sources. Forests are important spaces for local education and knowledge: children learn the value of plants, animals, poisons and medicines by accompanying their elders to forests. The demarcation between forest and agricultural lands is often blurred in swidden cultivation: fields that are not planted become forests, and vegetable gardens and orchards are often planted in forests to ensure hospitable growing conditions. Similarly, coastal and marine communities worship the sea as the source of all life and have elaborate social-economic rules to protect sensitive eco-systems. Here too, children learn the value of different types of fish and marine resources, and how to harvest them respectfully and sustainably. The cosmo-visions of indigenous peoples all over the world respect nature as parents who give and nurture life, and teach peoples and communities to live in harmony with nature.

These practices and the eco-systems that shape them are increasingly under threat from intensifying demands for farmlands, forests and water sources by investors, corporations, and speculators, as well as from changing weather and precipitation patterns because of climate change. The conversion of diverse natural landscapes to industrial agriculture and aquaculture, and energy intensive human settlements destroy crucial ecosystem functions such as recharging aquifers, retaining soil nutrients, sequestering carbon and balancing natural cycles, and accelerate climate change. They exacerbate inequality of access to land and natural resources among communities and between men and women. Local communities are squeezed onto smaller and less fertile parcels of land and compelled to rely on smaller resource bases for food and income. Fresh water reserves are monopolized by industry and the wealthy, creating and exacerbating water scarcity, sparking conflicts among local populations over water, forest products and the commons. Particularly affected are the rights of indigenous peoples to control, use, administer and preserve ancestral territories.

Protecting and regenerating diverse natural environments and ways of eating and living in harmony with these environments are essential elements of food sovereignty. Equally important, they are a direct form of resistance to the commodification and financialisation of nature, and to capitalist markets.

Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South



Iwasaki Kan'en, Herbal, 1830

**one does not sell
the earth
upon which
the people walk**

Tashunka Witko, 1840 -1877

Why are the commons important for food sovereignty?

The commons refer to forms of wealth, capacities, spaces and resources that are used, managed and governed collectively for the benefit of many. These can include farmlands, wetlands, forests, pastures, hill slopes, streams, rivers, lakes, seas, coastlines and associated resources.



Farming and grazing lands can be communally governed, although the rights of families to cultivate specific parcels of land are recognised and respected, as are grazing rights of pastoralists. Similarly, small-scale fisherfolk do not own coastal lands, fisheries or sea beds, but these commons are crucial for their livelihoods. Commons are often culturally determined, and many communities regard seeds, wild foods and herbs, fish, animals and traditional knowledge as commons.

In every part of the world, agricultural, forest, fishing, marine, pastoral, nomadic and indigenous communities have developed and practiced systems of sharing, collectively governing and regenerating their natural commons.

The commons are integral to food sovereignty. Commons include not only physical 'resources,' but equally important, social-political relations among different food producing communities and valuable knowledge about habitats, genetic resources, migratory routes (for fish and livestock), resilience to disasters and shocks, etc. As savers of seed and living libraries of knowledge about local biodiversity and food systems, women are often more closely connected to the commons than men.

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The importance of forests, wild plants and the commons to people's and communities' food sovereignty

Indigenous peoples have lived in harmony with Mother Earth for thousands of years – depending on her for our food, shelter and medicines – making us part of her and not her master. The earth is populated by trees of every type which give life and strength. The earth is root and source of our culture; it is our guardian mother who looks after all which exists. For this reason caring for woodlands, forests and wild plants through our traditional knowledge and as common goods are of huge importance to our peoples and communities.

Forests are pharmacies

The forest provides us with herbs and plants which cure our sicknesses – plants which since time immemorial have occupied an exceptional place in the lives of our peoples – we should remember that more than 25% of modern medicines come from plants from the the tropical forests.

Forests are habitats for plants and animals

Jungles and tropical forests have taken more than 60 and 100 million years to evolve and are believed to be the most complex and ancient ecosystems on earth, being home to more than 30 million species of plants and animals. This represents half of the fauna of the planet earth and at least two thirds of her vegetative species – on top of this they provide all that is required to maintain our world. The forests are vital ecosystems for life, considering their protective, regulating and productive functions for Food Sovereignty.

Forests regulate our climate

Jungles and tropical forests absorb water like a huge sponge. Trees in tropical forests extract water from the ground and free it into the atmosphere in the form of clouds and mist. It is well known that trees absorb carbon dioxide which we exhale, and provide the oxygen we need to breath. Deforestation is regarded as the second of the principle causes of climate change. Climate change is already having negative impacts on our lives and lands – for example through the loss of biodiversity or water shortages – provoking a forced displacement of our peoples towards other regions of our country and resulting loss of our rights.

As Indigenous Peoples and local communities we understand that nobody loves what they cannot learn to understand – so to protect our environmental space human beings must love it and to love it they must know it and understand it. We, our communities have all the liberty to use what mother earth has gifted to us, but never using more than what is necessary and never damaging her. In our oceans and seas we fish what is necessary, in our forests we cut just what is needed – and thus we know the value of our lands, territories and natural resources – our commons – because without them we are nobody and there is no Food Sovereignty for the world.

Mother Earth contains our memories and receives our ancestors - as such she requires that we honour and return with tenderness and respect the gifts she has offered us. For this reason it is important to transfer to our own future generations our Traditional Knowledge in caring for Mother Earth so our peoples can continue to benefit from her generosity.

Taina Hedman, International Indian Treaty Council

Māori food sovereignty

The role that the seas, fish, marine life and coasts play for Māori¹ of Aotearoa/ New Zealand is inter-related and essential to our culture, economy and identity, which cannot be separated. Like many Indigenous Peoples across the world Māori feel strong historical and contemporary connections to all our surroundings. Our histories have been handed down by our ancestors and maintained through an oral tradition of storytelling. Tangaroa is our god of the ocean who we acknowledge in our prayers before we undertake anything related to the seas. The gifts of the ocean provides us with many different things – fish provide sustenance, nutrition and an economic asset; shells provide materials for tools, musical instruments and adornment; marine life such as whales, stingray and dolphins have historically provided pathways for our ocean travellers and are our ocean guardians. Like other Indigenous Peoples we traded amongst ourselves and other visitors and absolute food sovereignty was ours to maintain.

Impacts on Māori food sovereignty

Since 1840 Māori food sovereignty was impacted through various laws and practices that came with British colonisation. Although the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004² no longer exists it impacted Māori food sovereignty by changing our rights to cultural practices such as shellfish harvesting. Māori had to prove we continually used a part of the foreshore or seabed since 1840. One challenge for us was that shellfish harvesting would only be for specific occasions like formal gatherings or bereavement and not a day to day thing. Māori sustainable practices also meant that shellfish were only taken at certain times of the year to allow for new stocks to grow. Shellfish harvesting would not be continuous and very hard to meet the criteria under the Foreshore and Seabed Act. Since 2011 this law has been taken over by the Marine and Coastal Area Act (Takutai Moana) 2011³. This law is supposed to balance the customary interests of Māori with the interests of all New Zealand citizens. Under this law Māori must apply to have our customary interests recognised and have until 2017 to lodge an application. The challenge will be how everyone's interests are balanced.

Local Māori markets: White baiting

Fisheries are an important part of the current Māori economy and form an integral part of how we connect to our environment. Currently, we are in white bait⁴ season and traditionally we know that when certain trees are in bloom the white bait are plentiful. As seasonal harvest, white bait is greatly sought after by the greater and provides a welcome resource to feed our families and boost local short term cash flow. However, growing tensions have arisen where some Māori take the view that this resource should only be used for the sustenance of our families, whereas others are taking more and more to sell in local markets. An impact here is that the white bait resources are quickly depleted. Māori food sovereignty therefore has a significant connection to the local Māori economy and when looked at from a national scale has potential to bring back part of the Māori food sovereignty we once enjoyed many years ago - but with it comes compromises that will need to be resolved if a seasonal resource like white bait is to be sustainably managed into the future.

Future Māori food sovereignty

Current Māori food sovereignty has developed from localised individuals or groups, who have maintained and developed traditional approaches to food sovereignty, through to large Māori owned companies⁵. In either example there is absolute connectedness of Māori traditions and values like kaitiakitanga (stewardship) and mauri (life force), which provides guidance and regulation to help sustain the natural resources. We are aware that we cannot rely solely on seasonal resources and have looked towards ways of harnessing larger scales of food production. We are becoming more innovative and look for opportunities to increase sustainable development. One opportunity is the Crown-Māori Economic Growth Partnership 'He Kai Kei Aku Ringa' (food at the end of my hands)⁶ between government and Māori businesses that can be used as a vehicle to strengthen Māori sustainable development in natural resources. This collaboration will involve all levels of society to inform the process and learn how to achieve our goals, from grass roots to national governments and international fora. One useful international forum could be the World Committee on Food Security⁷, which could be connected to local markets through the Civil Society Mechanism⁸.

...continued from page 2.

When commons are destroyed or privatised, local people lose access to important environments for foraging, gathering, grazing, hunting, fishing and regenerating biodiversity. Indigenous peoples either completely lose their ancestral domains, or have to follow severe restrictions in what they can harvest from forests, fields and waters.

The commons are continually threatened by mining, oil and gas extraction, industrial agriculture, dams and private property regimes (also called "enclosures"). Forests, pastures and wetlands are converted to industrial monocultures or luxury properties; water sources are diverted to feed tourism, energy and manufacturing industries; and trade-investment deals provide corporations access to biodiversity and knowledge, enabling biopiracy and undermining the autonomy of indigenous peoples, small scale food producers and women. Natural resources are commodified and privatised, long-standing local practices of community resource use and governance are dismantled, and local communities are denied access to the very ecosystems that they have nurtured and which sustain them.

Today, threats to the commons are greatly multiplied by the food, finance and climate crises, all of which are being used as opportunities by states, corporations and financial institutions to deepen their control over natural wealth. Most at risk are land, forests, water, genetic resources and knowledge, which have tremendous value for producing food, regenerating biodiversity, ensuring soil fertility and sustaining life. Defending the commons is a critical strategy for building food sovereignty.

1 - Māori consists of many different tribal groups with distinct identities.

2 - See <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2004/0093/latest/DLM319839.html>

3 - See <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2011/0003/latest/DLM3213131.html>

4 - See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitebait>

5 - <http://www.afl.maori.nz/>

6 - <http://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/a-matou-mohiotanga/business-and-economics/he-kai-kei-aku-ringa--the-crown-maori-economic-gro>

7 - <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en/>

8 - <http://www.csm4cfs.org/>

Voices from the field 1

Collection practices reflect the community's strategy of sustainable land use

Mr. Somneuk Buddworn, Ban-Thap-Heua-Parak-Moo Community, Nayok District, Trang Province, Thailand

Ban-Thap-Heua-Parak-Moo Community is located in Southern Thailand and majority of the local residents are small-scale family farmers. The practice of collecting local forest products is an important source of livelihood for food and supplemental income. Depending on the season, forest pakria (a type of bean), different types of mushrooms, honey and bamboo shoots are the more common products collected from the forest.

Collection practices reflect the community's strategy of sustainable land use and governance, and villagers have to respect and abide by rules and norms when gathering forest products. Land is governed through collective ownership in this community. Majority of the land is devoted to chemical-free, multi-crop farming primarily for local consumption and markets. Monoculture is unacceptable to local residents and large tracts of land are used to grow trees that can be used by villagers for houses and other needs, and to avoid illegal logging of local forests.

According to Somneuk, social and ecological sustainability in land and forest use are important, and local communities living in the area for several decades have proved that people can live in harmony with forests and nature. But they are worried about state officials' negative perceptions that local villagers cannot coexist with forests and nature.

Based on this prejudice, the government is attempting to separate local communities from nature, as is evident in the national forest master plan introduced by the military government shortly after the coup in 2014. The plan enables government authorities to confiscate local villagers' lands and evict villagers without due process. An urgent challenge for the people of Ban-Thap-Heua-Parak-Moo is to build knowledge and awareness among state officials to understand what local communities mean by sustainability and their ways of life that are harmonious with nature.

Voices from the field 2

"No means no"

Chief Joseph Chio Johnson, Senior Elder, Jogbah Clan, District No. 4, Grand Bassa County - Liberia

For the past three years, my people and I have met with the Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO) Company to discuss their plan to take over our land and turn it into an oil palm plantation. We have met with the company more than twenty-five times and every time we have said 'No' to their request for land. We met with Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2014 and begged her to tell the company to leave us alone.

The company has continued to meet with us and insist that we give up our land. On November 3, 2015 we said to them, we no longer want to meet with you: for us 'No means no'.

The company says it wants to help us 'develop'. But when I travel through their plantation, the people who live and work there are no better than us. I see their children washing their dirty clothes in the stream and I see their wives fetching water from the stream nearby to use for cooking. Most people in the camp live in thatch huts; few of them live in houses with metal roof.

I am glad we still have our land. We grow our own food. With our land, we will always have our freedom and dignity. I don't want their development that will leave my people and me landless.

Photos and more information (including a petition to help the Jogbah Clan to protect their territory) at <http://cargocollective.com/sdiliberia/The-Clan>

Voices from the field 3

The Montoro Act – a Death sentence for village life?

Daniel Boyano Sotillo, Garden of the Well Collective, Spain

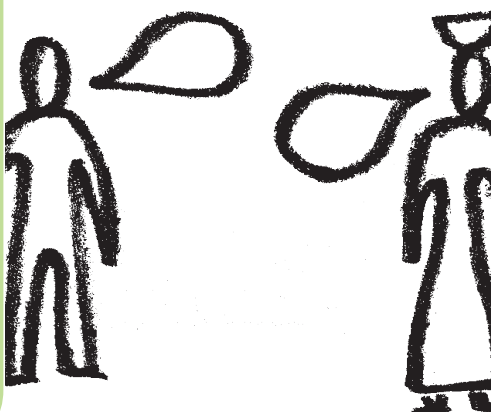
The "Rationalization and Sustainability of Local Government Act", known as the "Montoro Act" - which has been in force since January 1, 2014 without prior dialogue and consensus with the affected administrations - will have a devastating effect on rural populations and territories in Spain.

The current rural crisis will now deepen as this law encourages the covert looting and expropriation of Local Municipalities and smaller local authorities, as well as the Open Councils* and Neighbourhood Councils – true examples of real democracy. The Open Councils for example are forms of social organization developed to manage natural resources used by neighbours. These councils do not belong to the state or to markets but instead have managed and regulated local resource systems through community assemblies and direct participation for many many years.

According to this new law Provincial Councils and their "Management Consortiums" will be responsible for the administration of public forests, common lands and water, hunting, mycology and timber resources. These consortiums are already working with large construction and services companies that seek only to extract financial benefits. The government currently calculates it can make up to 21 million euros from around 4 million hectares of rural land at a national level. It is estimated that the same law will destroy the local economic fabric, as it will result in as many as 200,000 less jobs across rural Spain.

We owe it to our ancestors, society, nature, and our own moral values to fight against this authoritarianism as an organized civil society. We must ensure the continuity of smaller local authorities and their heritage, as well as Open councils, Neighbourhood councils, and voluntary Associations of services that guarantee the participation of society through direct democracy.

* More on Open Councils
<http://www.soberaniaalimentaria.info/publicados/numero-17/71-el-concejo-abierto>
- Sign against the Montoro Act here: <http://www.stopexpolio.com/pagina-de-firmas-contra-la-ley/>
- Campaign: This town is not for sale <http://www.estepueblo nose vende.es/2013/11/presentacion-campana-este-pueblo-no-se.html>



Voices from the field 4

When foraging all respect certain collective norms

Ms. Kusuma Kampin, Huaykontha Community, Lom Sak District, Phetchabun Province, Thailand

"We know what, when and how to collect from the forest. Normally we collect different types of mushrooms during rainy season, bamboo shoots in early rainy season and, bamboo worms and local vegetables in the summer" said Kusuma, when asked about the practice of gathering products from the local forest. Gathering forest products is still an important source of food and livelihood for villagers in Huaykontha community. It is primarily for food and small family income. There are no written "rules" for gathering practices, but all villagers are required to respect certain collective norms, for example: not taking all bamboo shoots and leaving at least one shoot to grow; making holes in the bamboo to get the worms, but never cutting down the bamboo.

Huaykontha is located in a disputed area where governmental officials have accused villagers of illegal encroachment and settlement in the forest, but where villagers claim they have been residing since long before the land was designated as a sanctuary. Since the military coup in May 2014, villagers have faced increased threats and intimidation from government officials, who have tried to limit land access and use by villagers, particularly in agricultural lands, and introduced harsh punishment for collecting forest products. However, because of strong community cohesion and cautionary measures (including regular monitoring of the movement of officials in the area), the villagers are able to continue their traditional practices.

The arrival of outsiders to gather local forest products is also a challenge worrying the Huaykontha community. Outsiders gather for commercial purposes and in destructive ways that degrade and deplete the forest, and give government officials justification to accuse community residents of destroying the forest and impose severe punishment. According to Kusuma "these people come and go but we live in the community, their practice creates lot of problem to us. The role of the state should be to protect and uphold the way of life and livelihood of local villagers but they never do that. They always see us as criminals. They never try to understand that our way of life is sustainable, this is the problem."

Voices from the field 5

I learnt to be the spokesman for the forest

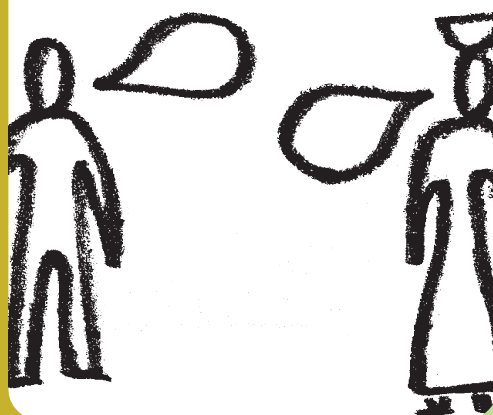
Jean François Mombia Atuku, RIAO General Coordinator, Democratic Republic of Congo

My early childhood was spent on the Congo river. I used to love taking my dugout and travelling the river from one end to the other. And just as the children of the forest knew all the trees and varieties of plants, I knew every little part of the river in the most intimate detail.

I love the river but I also love the forest, which is why I like to defend it against the threats posed by companies of all sorts that are working in the utmost impunity in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. I learnt to speak on behalf of the forest when I was working with the Pygmy communities in the village of Boteka.

In all the provinces of the Congo there is serious pressure on natural resources, and communities are facing serious threats to ensure their families have food on the table. Companies are destroying the forests and the fields and very nutritious species such as caterpillars are in the posses of becoming extinct. Yet these caterpillars are the basis of these communities food and play an important cultural role in their lives.

People in our villages live mainly from agriculture, but in recent years, it has become difficult to practice this agriculture as much land has been stolen from our communities to be given to multinationals such as Unilever and Feronia. We need to get this land back otherwise it will be even harder to feed our populations. The struggle of RIAO and its members is very important to stop the inequalities and put an end to colonialism in the fields of the DRC.



Voices from the field 6

Woodlands is not just planting and harvesting

Vincent Magnet, Nature sur un Plateau, Limousin, France

My name is Vincent, I am 40 years old and I work as a volunteer for a local association. Nature sur le Plateau works in the Millevaches Plateau, a medium-sized, hilly granite mountain. It has very few inhabitants and is located in central France. Our territory currently has a lot of forest (54%). Woodland has replaced the moors as a result of the rural exodus. This woodland takes two very different forms: deciduous trees have sprung up and masses of softwood trees (conifers) have been planted in monocultures. At present, massive woodland clearance is taking place in both.

There is a general lack of knowledge of woodlands and forests and how to manage them correctly. Our association proposed to our local officials that an area of four hectares of public softwood land be made available for the association for a long time. This would be done so that it could be managed in several ways and thus show the local population that woodlands do not simply boil down to planting and harvesting.

There are many arguments in favor of having continuous, mixed (deciduous and softwood) woodlands without systematic clear cutting:

- Ecologically speaking, by cutting down old trees here and there, we can keep the forest in place and maintain its biodiversity. The small forest aisle is quickly filled by saplings underneath. It has been proven that mixed and stratified perennial forests are much more resilient to different risks (storms, pests, drought, disease).
- Economically speaking, it is always better to cut down old and higher-quality trees. A tree's volume increases at a faster rate in the second half of its life and the material is better. Without clear cutting, forests do not have to grow from scratch every time, thus wood is continuously and permanently produced.
- Finally, from a social point of view, the collective stewardship of woodlands creates many jobs that are both well perceived and well paid. Job-creation in local wood-related industries can also quickly generate genuine local wealth whilst still preserving the quality and the diversity of the forest ecosystems.

Box 2

Forest Products in Cambodia

Rural communities in Pursat province, Cambodia have been organizing to protect their forests, farmlands, streams, ponds and common lands from industrial agriculture plantations, dams and timber extraction for the past 20 years. Protecting them is crucial to protecting the biodiversity on which their lives and livelihoods depend.

Although they grow rice and vegetables, and raise poultry and livestock, much of their food, medicinal herbs and plants, and household use items come from the local forests, water bodies and commons. The traditional rural diet is extremely seasonal and closely tied to cultural practices designed to protect the local environment and strengthen community solidarity. Seasonal flooding and environmental changes result in different types of fish, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, shoots and herbs becoming available throughout the year. Fishing, gathering wild fruits, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, herbs, and trapping edible insects and spiders remain common ways of meeting family food needs. Forest products are also important for household use and income, for example, bamboo, rattan, honey, resin and palm sugar.



In some areas, local residents identified 18 types of wild fruits, four types of resin, 13 types of mushrooms, 36 types of roots/herbs/vines, and 14 types of wild flowers/shoots/leaves. They further identified six varieties of high value hardwood trees and 13 varieties of ordinary trees that make up the forests in their areas. According to local people, all varieties of natural trees, plants and grasses (such as bamboo) are crucial to nourish the ecosystems that are critical to maintain and regenerate biodiversity.

now is time for
food sovereignty!

who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: Development Fund, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, TNI, VSF-Justicia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger.

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to read, listen, watch and share

- WRM, Bulletin 219: *Territories and food sovereignty: Where the struggles of peasants and forest communities converge*, October 2015 -<http://wrn.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/viewpoint/territories-and-food-sovereignty-where-the-struggles-of-peasants-and-forest-communities-converge/>
- GRAIN and WRM, *Redd Alert! How REDD+ projects undermine peasant farming and real solutions to climate change*, October 2015 <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5322-how-redd-projects-undermine-peasant-farming-and-real-solutions-to-climate-change>
- More on this theme in the news site <http://www.mongabay.com>
- More on this issue in the website <http://www.mekongcommons.org>

