

A REVIEW OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN ECUADOR

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Abstract:

This paper describes the arising of the food sovereignty right in Ecuador and the issues surrounding the implementation of it. In the past developing countries like Ecuador had been exploited by large corporations that use economic leverage to make enormous profits. Food sovereignty is a term used for a model which contrasts to the domination of the global food markets by corporate industries which is capable of devastating the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, destroying ecosystems using industrial agricultural methods, and creating food shortage in the developing countries. It was fought for by NGOs led by citizens who succeeded getting food sovereignty included in the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution as a right. This right however, was never fully realized in Ecuador because of the prohibition of participatory planning, and favor of economic growth by President Correa and the government he was leading at the time. Realizing that the government has not fulfilled its promises citizens and NGOs continue to spread the word and necessity of food sovereignty to try to gain the support needed to ensure government delivers on the right it promised in the constitution.

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Introduction:

In its 2008 constitution, Ecuador has implemented food sovereignty as a right. Unfortunately, after promising this right government created barriers to the proper implementation of the features of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a model of agricultural production which has been deemed necessary for countries like Ecuador which have been devastated by unjust and environmentally damage natural resource management. Organizations of citizens called NGOs (Non-governmental Organizations) rebelled against the authoritarian rule of Ecuador and later worked together to identify ideals that would result in a more sustainable and equitable country. The 2008 constitution was a result of these efforts and in it contains many of those same ideals. When it came time to put the policies of the constitution into action however, Ecuador's government led by President Correa acted to weaken the participatory process associated with the food sovereignty right and continued to allow industrial extractive agriculture to operate while its citizens struggled to make ends meet. The same NGOs that had acted in the past, led by native Ecuadorians, again are faced with the task of ensuring the wellbeing and rights of Ecuadorian citizens are not compromised by its leaders.

Problems in The Global Market

When something like food grown in a developing country like Ecuador becomes a commodity in a global free market, foreign demand dictates the price of that food. Because wealthy countries can pay more for food private corporations amass large quantities of land to grow food to sell it to those wealthy countries. This creates both ecological and societal problems within developing countries.

The companies exporting food almost exclusively use conventional industrial agriculture. This method involves monoculture crops, high energy input, and high chemical input. It is a very ecologically destructive way of producing food especially when compared to the ecologically sound subsistence farming that it usually replaces in developing nations.

The free market model creates several societal problems. The private companies producing food want to maximize profits by selling to the highest bidder. Residents of the country may experience food insecurity when they are unable to afford what the wealthy nations are willing to pay for food.¹ Because of this, it often happens that hunger exists in places where there are food surpluses.² Additionally, the industrialization of agriculture leads to the disappearance of small and medium scale food producers. With more than 570 million small farm holders in the world such a takeover has the potential to take away a massive population's livelihood.³

In Ecuador 65% of the food consumed in the country comes from small scale producers. This figure has been declining sharply.⁴ People seeking for answers on how to end these issues have established plans and led movements in many countries around the world. Ecuador is one of those countries where people would fight to progress beyond the unjust model.

A Grass Roots Movement

¹ *Unsustainable: a Primer for Global Environmental and Social Justice*, by Patrick Hossay, Zed Books, 2006.

² Jur Schuurman. (1995). La Via Campesina at the Crossroads. *Development in Practice*, 5(2), 149-154. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/4028934

³ "Industrial Agriculture and Small-Scale Farming." *Weltagrarbericht*, www.globalagriculture.org/report-topics/industrial-agriculture-and-small-scale-farming.html.

⁴ Frederick, Clayton. "The Practice of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador's Sierra Region." *Alexandria.ucsb.edu, University of California Santa Barbara*, 2015.

The right to food sovereignty was fought for by indigenous and peasant groups who formed social movements in rebellion to the unjust global food system beginning in the late 1990's.⁵ The movement intensified in 2004 with NGOs, such as Acción Ecológica, discussing issues related to the Free Trade Agreement and its effects on agriculture. A meeting in Quito later that year led to an agreement amongst organizations such as CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) which would lead to a resistance against the signing of the Free Trade Agreement. This resistance was the beginning of a movement away from the past model toward the idea of food sovereignty.⁶

Food Sovereignty and La Via Campesina

The food sovereignty model introduces organic and ecological technologies for sustainable agricultural production, policies to increase resources for farmers, protection from food import dependency, and prohibits genetically-modified seeds harmful to human and environmental health.⁷ The model emphasizes the protection of small and medium scale producers as well as focuses on ensuring that they have a place in national planning for development. The preservation of ancestral, cultural and local knowledge is deemed as an important action. La Via Campesina introduced the concept of food sovereignty in response to the food security problems associated with free market food production. La Via Campesina's

⁵ Peña, Karla. "Social Movements, the State, and the Making of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador." *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 221–237., doi:10.1177/0094582x15571278.

⁶ Flores, Alexandria. "Drafting a Law, Dissolving a Proposal: Food Sovereignty and the State of Ecuador." *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 2018. SAGE Publications

⁷ Peña, Karla. "Opening the Door to Food Sovereignty in Ecuador" *Institute for Food and Development Policy*, vol 30, no. 111, 2008

origin began in 1992 during the Second Congress of the Nicaraguan Farmers' Union calling for cooperation between farmers unions.

La Via Campesina seeks an alternative to neo-liberal policies.⁸ Neoliberalism can be defined as “a policy model—bridging politics, social studies, and economics—that seeks to transfer control of economic factors to the private sector from the public sector. It tends towards free-market capitalism and away from government spending, regulation, and public ownership.”⁹ Neoliberalism can be problematic is due to the inequities that it is capable of creating. Food sovereignty is not meant to close trade to foreign countries. However, it does focus on internal trade first. It argues that people should have the right to food. Export is still important for developing nations. As long as it doesn't create the problems that it has in the past.¹⁰

Food Sovereignty Becomes National Policy

With the 2007-2008 financial crisis causing problems around the world, hunger and food insecurity were things on the minds of those in poverty. The commodification of food had resulted in price vulnerabilities making it difficult for farmers in Ecuador to have enough money for the cost of production of food.¹¹ After years of activism however, efforts to solve problems

⁸ Jur Schuurman. (1995). La Via Campesina at the Crossroads. *Development in Practice*, 5(2), 149-154. Retrieved March 5, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/4028934

⁹ Kenton, Will. “Neoliberalism.” Investopedia, Investopedia, 29 Jan. 2020, www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp.

¹⁰ Flores, Alexandria. “Drafting a Law, Dissolving a Proposal: Food Sovereignty and the State of Ecuador.” *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 2018. SAGE Publications

¹¹ Peña, Karla. “Opening the Door to Food Sovereignty in Ecuador” *Institute for Food and Development Policy*, vol 30, no. 111, 2008

related to food production in Ecuador were beginning to pay and get support in the political realm.

Initially the introduction of food sovereignty fell short of the food-sovereignty proposal originally put forward by social movements. Politicians making policy misunderstood the meaning of food sovereignty to merely equate to another term used in the past constitution, food security. The difference between the two is significant.¹² Food security only refers to adequate caloric supply ensuring production of food is large enough to satisfy peoples food needs, without focusing details or if the food ever gets to the people who need it.¹³ Food sovereignty as mentioned previously means much more than this focusing on how food is produced, how it is distributed, and the effects of each on the country's residents.

In 2008 Ecuador established its new constitution. The constitution is centered around Sumak Kawsay (Buen Vivir in Spanish). Sumak Kawsay means "good living" in Quechua¹⁴, a major indigenous Ecuadorian language. This constitution was very successful in securing indigenous rights. With the new constitution food sovereignty became a right in Ecuador. The ideas and principles highlighted by La Campesina had successfully made it into the constitution as they were originally written.

This event would seem like a huge victory for the Ecuadorian people. However, LORSA the food sovereignty law that was adopted in 2009 to provide a legal framework for food

¹² Flores, Alexandria. "Drafting a Law, Dissolving a Proposal: Food Sovereignty and the State of Ecuador." *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 2018. SAGE Publications

¹³ Peña, Karla. "Opening the Door to Food Sovereignty in Ecuador" *Institute for Food and Development Policy*, vol 30, no. 111, 2008

¹⁴ Project, Joshua. "Quichua, Otavalo Highland in Ecuador." *Joshua Project*, joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14233/EC.

sovereignty,¹⁵ has been criticized as falling short from what Buen vivir envisions.¹⁶ LORSA “cover farmers’ access to water, land, technical assistance, and capital; food production and supply; consumption and nutrition; and perhaps most notably, social participation in the process of formulating public policy for food sovereignty.”¹⁷ During its writing the law which was supposed to support food sovereignty became policy centered on supporting industrial agriculture practices.¹⁸ The leader of the of the NGO FENOCIN stated that citizens were excluded in the writing process and that the process was rushed. One author argues that President Correa weakened, through various means, the implied participatory model which included citizens in the policy making process promised in the constitution and turned the process into that of a centralized planning model.

The Participatory Model of Planning is Compromised

In the food sovereignty law LORSA mandated the creation of a National Food Sovereignty Conference of eight state selected civil society members. COPISA, as it was called, was created to engage NGOs and citizens in the decision making on the implementation of food sovereignty. This state agency lacked authority in policy making and an adequate budget. For this reason some claim it exists only as a cover for the lack of a real participatory model which was promised in the constitution.

¹⁵ Alexandria, Peña. “Food Sovereignty: a Critical Dialogue.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, no. 51, 13 Sept. 2013.

¹⁶ Frederick, Clayton. “The Practice of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador’s Sierra Region.” *Alexandria.ucsb.edu, University of California Santa Barbara*, 2015.

¹⁷ Frederick, Clayton. “The Practice of Food Sovereignty in Ecuador’s Sierra Region.” *Alexandria.ucsb.edu, University of California Santa Barbara*, 2015.

¹⁸ Flores, Alexandria. “Drafting a Law, Dissolving a Proposal: Food Sovereignty and the State of Ecuador.” *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 2018. SAGE Publications

President Correa was known to be outwardly against citizen authority. In February of 2010 NGOs got together to announce that they would take the implementation of food sovereignty into their own hands by creating a political platform. This only strained relations between the NGOs and President Correa who was focused on keeping the implementation process centralized and top-down.

Without any leverage in planning things in the agricultural realm continued with business as usual. In 2015 80% of arable lands and 64% of irrigation water use in Ecuador was still controlled by large scale agriculture business focused on exportation. This left only 20% of land and 13% of water access to Ecuador's small-scale farmers who produce 60% of Ecuador's food and are 85% of the farming population. These large-scale produces are growing monoculture industrially grown crops. Bananas, rice, and cacao are heavily exported commodities that are replacing Ecuadorian staple crops grown for citizens. Land and water rights redistribution was part of the process involved in food sovereignty. President Correa openly warned citizens of the threat he perceived coming from such policies claiming that they would destroy efficiency and make everyone equal, but equally poor.

Hope Remains: COPISA Works to Make Food Sovereignty Reality

COPISA, although void of decision-making power still is working toward making real food sovereignty a reality. The participatory agency has been meeting with civil society

organizations and educating people about food sovereignty practices. It is looking to gain momentum from citizens to create a push for what was promised in the constitution.¹⁹

Discussion:

The 2008 Constitution was made using the ideas fought for by the NGOs who wanted to see Ecuador change for the better. Food sovereignty was an important part of the constitution which would benefit the country social, economically and environmentally. Agriculture in Ecuador is a major part of life and culture in the country. It is something that Ecuadorians are unlikely to turn their backs on.

When President Correa came to power, he presented himself as a man working to help Ecuador become the country that was promised in the 2008 constitution, but it appears, he is creating barriers to this vision. In the same way that citizens formed organizations to rebel against the past authoritarian models will they need to continue to gather to make sure the 2008 constitution's promises are realized. The country has come a long way and has made many victories in gaining rights and liberty. Ecuadorians have a vision of what they want their country to be and if they remain consistent in standing up for that vision it will likely be realized.

¹⁹ Fiorini, Erin. "COPIA in Ecuador Participation That Wasn't." DEPARTMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES, *University of Arizona*, 2015, resopistory.arizona.edu

Conclusion:

Ecuador has implemented food sovereignty as a right in its 2008 constitution. However, the implementation of it has been unsuccessful. Food sovereignty presents a model that creates equity, environmental protection, and social wealth in a way which rejects the past socio-economic structure of agricultural production which harmed the wellbeing of citizens in developing countries. Citizen movements which voiced the concerns of indigenous and rural farmers as well as all others who have seen the issues relate to extractive and inequitable use of natural resource fought to promote the idea of food sovereignty as a right.

Ecuador's government led by President Correa had not delivered on their promises and continued to allow industrial extractive agriculture to operate while its citizens struggled to make ends meet. NGOs continue to fight to make food sovereignty a reality, however. The organizations formed in Ecuador by citizens have made significant changes in the past for their country. Their efforts will be needed again for the sake of Ecuador's future.

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