

Sustainable Agricultural Development for Food Security and Nutrition: What Roles for Livestock? A Report by the HLPE on Food Security and Nutrition, July 2016

Comments from The Food Sovereignty Alliance, India

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The Food Sovereignty Alliance (FSA) had placed on record strong concerns on the direction and approach taken by the earlier version of this report. The primary concern expressed by the FSA was, and continues to be, the complete absence of understanding that food security is impossible without food sovereignty. As other peoples' movements such as the La Via Campesina have articulated, the FSA is clear that Food Sovereignty is the only framework possible, to revision and strategise food security and nutrition. This is how communities will meet their food needs today and for future generations while protecting and defending the rights of mother earth. Within this, the role of livestock finds a place.

The FSA has reviewed the July 2016 version of the report and would like to place on record its comments. The focus of the comments will be on the premise of the report, the proposed framework and the suggested roadmap towards sustainable agricultural development focussing on livestock.

Premise of the Report

Food security without food sovereignty cannot be a reality. Therefore the goal of the effort has to be to enable food sovereignty. The first mention of the term food sovereignty is on page 34 where it is pitted as a counter narrative to “market orientation” to be discussed later in Chapter 4.

Section 1.1 Page 34: “Despite wide acceptance of the imperative of achieving food security and better nutrition for all, the multiplicity of possible entry points, perspectives and objectives has led to a coexistence of many narratives and conflicting evaluations about the state of agricultural development and, most importantly, disagreement on the directions and policy instruments that could best improve sustainability. Particularly important among these are the market orientation and food sovereignty narratives...”

Food Sovereignty is the foundation on which indigenous peoples and peasants in Latin America, Asia and Africa are building a sustainable food system. By not placing food sovereignty as the basis of the framework and not using it to develop the roadmap for a sustainable food system, yet another opportunity to transform the food system into a socially and ecologically just and sustainable system has been lost.

The concept of Food Sovereignty has also been distorted in its expression in the Report. The first few sentences of La Via Campesina's original declaration have been quoted “*Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems*”. However what is not explicitly presented is that this idea (i) challenges the entire framework of industrial agriculture,

food system driven by agribusiness and corporate control over resources, and (ii) it is about a transformative process of people taking back control of their food systems:

It puts those who produce, distribute and consume the food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interest and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasants and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisan fishing, pastoralist-led grazing and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all people and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, water, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

Via Campesina

While setting the context and defining the need for Sustainable Agriculture Development (SAD) the report describes the “triple burden” of malnutrition. It is well established that it is agribusiness that is responsible for this situation: hidden calories in the form of sugars in processed foods, biased, food and nutrition industry funded research that is pushing an animal protein dominated diet are driving overnutrition; destruction of land, water, forests and the dependent livelihoods and food systems by a capitalist mode of food production are the fundamental causes of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and acute hunger. The IAASTD reports and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food have strongly advocated the need to transform the current food system. The expectation from this report was the use of this incontrovertible information to set the stage and context for a food sovereignty driven framework and approach.

The premise of the entire HLPE report, is no different from the premise of the Global Livestock Dialogue and their central argument of demand for animal protein globally, “with the majority of this demand coming from the low-income and emerging economies (such as India and China).” This demand, they argued is largely driven by increasing urbanization, increasing incomes and increasing populations. The FSA reiterates the critique made in its document ‘Dialoguing on the Future of Livestock’: available at the blogsite <http://lvcsouthasia.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/dialoguing-on-future-of-livestock-by-dr.html>.

There is a myth that is constantly perpetuated about the current and projected demands of animal protein in the global south. This forms the basis of the argument of an urgent need to augment production of milk and meat industrially, need to be questioned. This 'myth' is best dispelled by the scenario in India. Over the past twenty years of neo-liberal economic reforms the 'growth' has triggered massive and rising inequality within the country. A nearly “300 million” strong rich and wealthy India is consuming more and more meat and milk, with a large part of rest of India being permanently under-nourished; where the consumption of milk and meat is minimal.

The current consumption levels of the rich Indian cannot be used as a parameter to project national demands. Nor can one use the increasingly medically recognised unhealthy meat and milk consumption patterns of the global north to project future demands. In fact today there is an urgent need for a reduction in consumption by the global rich and wealthy (including in India) of these meat and dairy products from both a health and environmental stand point. Similarly peasant, pastoralist, indigenous and working class India, have the right to enjoy milk and meat (including beef) consumption according to their cultural and traditional customs and norms. In India, the existing milk produced in the country is more than sufficient to meet the national milk average per-capita intake. The issue is not of production, but of access and distribution.

Another nutritional dimension that the FSA contests is the suggestion, through data, that the current nutritional deficiencies (particularly protein deficiencies) of people residing in the chronically nutritionally deficient regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, parts of South-east Asia, and parts of Latin America can only be addressed by increasing supply and availability of animal protein. The FSA views this and the suggestion that the diet of close to 2 billion people primarily derived from crops, are deficient in essential nutrients, as cultural insensitivity and a denigration of centuries of experiential knowledge.

The role of livestock, according to the report, appears to be merely providers of protein. This completely ignores the larger role livestock in agro-ecological food farming systems.

Protein needs of populations can be met in diverse ways, including meat and milk. In India the huge protein deficiencies we witness today amongst an overwhelming number of citizens, has been directly attributed to declining cultivation and availability of staple pulses (dals), which have always been our primary source of protein. Culturally daily consumption of milk/ milk products/ meat, varies from community to community and there is no standard monoculture consumption practice. The FAO (and now HLPE) projections assume a monoculture food consumption menu.

Further the issues of urbanization which are projected as an evolutionary inevitable are in fact State engineered and financed processes: pushing communities from rural to urban areas by appropriating rural resources to further the neo-liberal agenda.

Framework for the SAD

The framework presented in this report recognises availability, access, stability and utilisation of food as the core elements to ensure food security and nutrition. However the pathways outlined in the framework are built on a set of postulates that (i) undermine principles of ecological and social justice by relegating food sovereignty to a fringe argument and (ii) maintain that SAD can be achieved by a few adjustments to the *status quo* of industrial agribusiness driven food system.

The FSA's firm belief is that the process should begin with a Food Sovereignty framework livestock's role should be repositioned within this framework to meet food demands of 2050, using agro-ecological practices.

Roadmap for the SAD

The FSA strongly contests the proposed path towards SAD as one where different “production systems” co-exist. The report does not recognise that the large agribusiness driven intensive farming systems are threatening the existence of the smallholder mixed farming and pastoral ways of living. The latter two are both ecologically and socially resilient. Instead it recommends “tweaking” of unsustainable intensive farming systems. The roadmap in its approach is self-defeating and contradictory.

Today global capital and corporate agriculture including livestock is fully supported by Governments, and has impacted and cannibalized upon all other systems of people's livestock rearing: pastoralism, indigenous peoples livestock rearing, or small peasant mixed-crop-livestock food farming systems. The entire value chain from production to plate is monopolised by this industrial corporate system. Rapid changes to national and international regulations and secret negotiations in trade agreements (e.g., TTIP, RCEP) are facilitating the transfer of control of land, water, air, genetic material, disease and health care, labour, knowledge, markets as well as consumers to corporations.

The small holder is completely impacted by the TNC: either because their land and resources have been snatched away, or their genetic material has been insidiously replaced by “high producing” genetic material pushed aggressively by the corporations via state development programs. Governments have encouraged the growth of industrial poultry production, and in turn created a demand for animal feed. This is forcing small farmers to cultivate monocrop maize as animal feed on their fields.

In addition, small farmers get contracted in by local integrators, and their labour, land, and other resources are used to rear the genetics supplied by the corporations. The farmers then lose their independence becomes merely a source of labour.

The proposed co-existence of the different livestock farming systems identified in the report (smallholder mixed farming, pastoral, commercial grazing and intensive livestock systems) is therefore an impossibility.

The report states that “The debate between market-oriented and food sovereignty advocates reveals starkly different perspectives on pathways to sustainable development (and is just one illustration of the differences that exist). This report acknowledges the importance of these differences, and the many “shades of grey” that exist among the narratives as well. It seeks to describe pathways for actors in food systems that acknowledge that decisions about public policies, technologies, private investment and regulation are embedded in assumptions about how food systems work and how they are evolving in the face of different pressures, including ecological, cultural and economic developments. There are rarely perfect solutions but actors in the food systems should make decisions based on an enhanced understanding of the demands of SAD and the obligation to realize FSN for all”. (Section 4.1)

As discussed earlier, not just communities but even academics, researchers and other practitioners who were part of the IAASTD and the UN Special Rapporteur on the

right to food have clearly indicated that the market-oriented pathway is unsustainable. They have categorically pointed towards an agroecological and food sovereignty based approach to meet the world's food and nutrition needs.

The report suggests that resilience of food systems on the path towards SAD can be strengthened through use of agroecological practices: “Agro-ecological practices can contribute to strengthened resilience. Though variously defined, agro-ecological approaches are gaining traction among parts of the scientific community, as well as in some developing and developed countries, and in some international agencies, including FAO and UNEP. FAO hosted a series of regional conferences on agro-ecology following a two-day international symposium in Rome in September 2014. A recent report produced by IPES-Food (2016) calls for a necessary shift from “industrial agriculture” to “diversified agro-ecological systems”. The worldwide association of peasant organizations, *La Via Campesina (LVC)*, has made agro-ecology a cornerstone of its advocacy and educational work.” (Section 4.2.2).

The FSA sees this as a fragmented, piece-meal approach akin to picking items from a menu of options to manufacture an approach. Agroecological practices cannot be randomly assembled in a vacuum to ensure food security and nutrition. It requires that food sovereignty be the foundation on which FSN is built.

The entire focus of the report and particularly the roadmap for SAD fails to provide any political recommendations on the fundamental structural questions of distribution. It is well-established and acknowledged in this report that there is no shortage of food, but there is a major question of who controls food production, distribution and therefore access to food.

India's experience is telling in this regard: from mid 1960s onwards to early 1990s, the green revolution attempted to enhance productivity and yields in crops. The state began to push a technology and approach to farming that laid the base for farmers losing control of their seeds, knowledge systems and diverse food farming, and wherein began the process of animal power being replaced by mechanized machinery. Upto the 1990s India was self sufficient in pulses, oilseeds. Livestock played an extremely important multifunctional role in agriculture and people's livelihoods. It also directly and/ or indirectly played a vital role in providing nutrition for people. Pulses have always been the primary source of protein for a vast majority of Indians. With neo-liberal capitalist economic reforms forced upon the people of India, in the early 1990s, by IMF and World Bank and India's entry to the WTO, there was large scale reduction in public support for agriculture. This made it unviable for farmers to grow diverse food crops, including pulses. They were forced to switch to commercial cash crops. All of this has resulted in a situation today where there is an acute shortage of pulses in India leading to the need for large scale import of pulses. This trend is seen in the oilseeds sector as well. India was self-sufficient in nutritious and diverse oil production upto 1990s but today it is importing the unhealthy palmoil.

The traditional role of livestock in such mixed cereal-pulses- oilseed-vegetable- fruit systems, has been as providers of (i) draught / work power (ii) milk and milk products (iii) manure (iv) meat (v) genetic stock for future generations and (vi) transportation.

Neo-liberal policies have destroyed this robust mixed farming system further alienating livestock from agriculture. It has pushed farmers to either intensify or perish. This is the reason for farmers suicides, exodus of youth from farming, growing undernutrition, malnutrition and chronic hunger amongst rural and urban poor, and farming families. To correct this wrong, the only way forward is through the framework of Food Sovereignty: a roadmap that small communities across the world have shown to be the only sustainable way forward.

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