

UNRAVEL



NEOLIBERAL TRADE

A FAILED SOLUTION TO
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Introduction

With the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, food and agriculture production systems faced a renewed intense onslaught of exploitation. The WTO, a multilateral institution that was formed mainly at the behest of monopoly capitalism, forced open the way for mega-agrochemical corporations to control land, labour, and raw materials in food systems, especially in the neo-colonial parts of the world. In response to the rising exploitation and oppression faced by peasants, the small and landless peasants, agricultural workers, of whom women comprise at least half, a clarion call for food sovereignty was made by peasant movements, a term coined by La Via Campesina (LVC).

Box 1. What is Food Sovereignty?



It was in the wake of implementing neoliberal policies as well as the formation of the WTO, that peasant movements escalated globally; a particular anti-imperialist call was based on Food Sovereignty. Many movements and people's organisations, including La via Campesina, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS), and Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) among others had built up mass movements against the WTO and at the same time, developed mass campaigns and communities for developing the context of and implementing food sovereignty.

The 2007 Nyeleni Forum defined food sovereignty as “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 agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”¹

The People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) further elaborates the need for changes in social relations, including in production, through people’s struggles when it described food sovereignty as the “power of people and communities to assert and realise the right to food and produce food and fight the power of corporations and other forces that destroy the people’s food production systems and deny them food and life. The culmination of our struggle for food sovereignty is the actual or full realisation of people’s democracy in all aspects of the food and agriculture systems including production and social relations, national policies, and programs.”²

During the Convening on Feminist Food Sovereignty conducted by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in 2022, participants highlighted that feminist food sovereignty not only recognises the role of women in the entire food production process but also recognises them as leaders in protecting and advancing traditional knowledge; in taking back land, other resources, and food production processes; and in promoting agroecology. Feminist food sovereignty aims to end patriarchal attitudes towards women as well as corporate power, both of which enable women’s oppression and control of agriculture among the elite.

The struggle for food sovereignty has faced immense opposition by imperialist forces, which can be best understood in the framework of Patriarchy-Globalisation-Fundamentalisms-Militarism (P-G-F-M). This analytical framework sets globalisation, fundamentalisms and militarism as integrated weapons of the global power structures to ensure perpetual control of wealth and resources, including food production systems. They all play a role in reinforcing and perpetuating patriarchy, the system or ideology that imbues the belief that men have the ascendancy and power over women’s lives.

Patriarchy is based on a system marked by male domination where women are kept in subordination in many forms, based on an “ideology that man is superior to woman, that women are and should be controlled by men and are part of a man’s property.” ³ Women, through the centuries have faced exploitation and oppression at the hands of feudalism and patriarchy, a situation which was highly

¹ “Declaration of Nyelényi.” February 27, 2007. Accessed from <https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>

² PCFS. “People’s Food Sovereignty.” Accessed from <https://foodsov.org/peoples-food-sovereignty/>

³ Bhasin, Kamla. “What is patriarchy?” Kali for Women, New Delhi, India, 1993, p.5.

exacerbated by colonisation. In South Asia, the land ownership of women is abysmal. For instance, in Pakistan, less than two percent women have land entitlements, while in India it is well understood that women remain largely excluded from land ownership.⁴ The situation is not much different across Asia and the Pacific.⁵ As market forces unleashed themselves, the working class, especially women who have been shackled by patriarchy for eons, have further faced added exploitation and oppression. These manifest through different means such as suppression of wages where women receive less than men, loss of access and control on land and other resources and increased violence, not only at the household and community level but also state repression which is a particularly lethal combination of fundamentalisms and patriarchy.

By the end of the 20th Century, the bipolar world had collapsed giving way to a fresh onslaught of imperialism. The 21st Century was a harbinger of intense conflict and wars of aggression, as the forces of globalisation, a euphemism for imperialism based on neoliberal policies, had gained a harsh intensity. **Neoliberal globalisation** is based on a set of policies that include deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation of trade and investments introduced through the Washington Consensus. These were implemented through the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) throughout the 1980s and the 1990s. The creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 strengthened these SAPs by creating the multilateral rules for liberalising trade, including trade in agriculture.

Deregulation and privatisation policies have had a massive impact on the working class and peasants. Government employment and job security were replaced with temporary, daily, contractual forms of employment with the concentration of women's labour in the informal sector was seen across the globe especially in neo-colonial countries. Government subsidies and support for industrial development, agricultural production and public services such as food, water, transport, health and education were made negligible and transferred under the control of corporate entities. The rising price of food and agricultural production inputs, dwindling government support and increasing control of food production and distribution systems by corporations resulted in massive debt and pauperisation of farming communities, with the bulk of the suffering and oppression felt by rural and indigenous women.

Militarism and fundamentalisms went hand-in-hand with neoliberal globalisation. Militarism has been used by governments and corporations to grab lands for investments and quell any dissent. The new century had a tumultuous beginning, with the advent of the 'War on Terror' as well as the economic and political reshaping of the former Soviet Union and China. For the people, the rise of a multipolar imperialist world has clearly shown the harsh realities of the capitalist mode of production. Extremist regressive religious education especially in the context of Islam was institutionalised with the purpose of cultivating and

⁴ Glenn, Harold et al. "Women's land title ownership and empowerment: evidence from India" ADB Economics Working Paper Series, No 559, September 2018. Accessed on October 19, 2022, from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/453696/ewp-559-women-land-title-ownership-empowerment.pdf>

⁵ https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Womens_Land_Rights_in_Asia_Land_Watch_Asia.pdf

breeding fundamentalisms serving the imperialist agenda of inciting wars of aggression in many regions of the world, especially in the context of so-called War on Terror. In the wake of the War on Terror, nation states continue to provide legal leeway to police, military and paramilitary forces, giving them a free hand in controlling social and mass movements, that in essence are a response to the crippling impacts of neoliberalism. There is a widespread tendency of labelling human rights defenders, land rights activists, peasants and workers as terrorists. In most instances all forms of people's resistance are dealt with on criminal grounds.

The P-G-F-M framework presents to us an understanding of how these forces interact and strengthen each other to transfer and maintain the control of food systems under corporations. It is important to point out the role of the ruling elite in neo-colonial countries; they are basically part of the bureaucratic-military state, working to aid and abet the imperialist states in paving the way for their mega-corporations to earn super-profits from the poorest of the poor, landless women, agricultural workers and the indigenous among others.

Trade and Investment Liberalisation in Asia and its Impacts on Food Sovereignty

Historically, agriculture was protected across the 20th century until the neoliberal era, as Western countries such as the US, France, Germany and others were protecting their agriculture sector, given that national food security was a critical political factor. However, protectionism took a downturn with the development of critical technologies and changing geo-political scenarios. This resulted in the US and other wealthy capitalist nations initiating policy measures that emphasised open markets, including neoliberal trade and investments agreements. The WTO was eventually launched in 1995 and with it came a whole array of agreements that resulted in opening of the agriculture and food sector. It is important to understand that the current unequal trade and investment agreements have their roots in colonial exploitation, and much of colonial relationships and patterns of trade have been preserved through neoliberal trade and investments.

The colonial roots of unequal and exploitative global agricultural trade patterns



The colonial history of all third world continents including Asia and the Pacific is a testimony to the bloody battles that have been fought for the purpose of controlling our land, water, seeds, a range of other natural resources, markets and of course labour. One of the biggest, long-lasting impacts of colonial control across the world was its transformation of local and indigenous food systems into sources of wealth for colonisers. Colonised countries were often divided into regions that specialised in cultivation of specific crops for export in plantations controlled by the colonisers themselves or the local elite. From the Pacific to Southeast Asia to South Asia, colonial powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British all used these regions to cultivate by force lucrative crops such as coffee, tea, indigo, oil palm, sugar and even opium⁶. It must be remembered that not only crops were exported but also peasants and workers, including women, for labour from Asia to all over the world. Use of slave labour for sugarcane cultivation is well documented.

The patterns of colonial trade were based on developing lucrative relationships between the elite of the colonised countries, local production through exploitation and oppression of the peasantry, and military strength over the plundered nation. In the 19th century for instance, in order to maintain control over the opium trade between China and Britain, the French and Britain resorted to war with China, ultimately being able to make it into a British colony with the occupation of Hong Kong as result of these wars.⁷

Colonisation strengthened feudal control over land, creating a landed elite that gained immense political and economic power in the so called post-colonial states. In the post-World War II period, many countries shackled by

⁶ Buelens, F., Frankema, E. Colonial adventures in tropical agriculture: new estimates of returns to investment in the Netherlands Indies, 1919–1938. *Cliometrica* 10, 197–224 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11698-015-0128-z>

⁷ Derks, Hans. "History of the Opium Problem: the Assault on the East, ca. 1600-1950." by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2012.

colonialism, saw themselves supposedly independent but in reality, it can be said that though there was a change in power, it was colonial rulers being replaced with representation from national elite in the neocolonial countries. These elite by and large were bred and trained by colonial rulers, and it was in their best socio-economic and political self-interest that they maintained their old colonial ties in all spheres of international relations, especially trade and investments.

The Green Revolution and the corporate take-over of agriculture



The Green Revolution (GR) paved the way for corporate control of agriculture by introducing industrial and mechanised agricultural production that is heavily dependent on chemical inputs and supported the monocultures that were put in place during the colonial period. For countries where it was executed, the GR was soon followed by the implementation of neoliberal policies of privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, including in the agricultural sector.

In the 1960s, the US became the new superpower, replacing the pre-war colonial countries, especially Britain. The US and its western allies remained highly dependent on raw material, labour and markets of their former colonies and created various neocolonial agreements to retain control. William S Gaud, administrator for United States Agency for International Development coined the term 'Green Revolution,' for a set of technologies that included high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds for maize, rice and wheat packaged with chemical fertilisers, irrigation systems, pesticides and

mechanisation of agricultural production. This became the US policy initiative for supposedly addressing the hunger and malnutrition in the newly 'independent' Third World countries.

Instead of a political intervention, the Green Revolution (GR) put emphasis on technical intervention. The underlying context was the formation of a communist government in China in 1949 and the fear that other Third World countries would follow suit. The term itself highlighted the ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism—green revolution instead of China's red revolution which had brought about a national agenda for land redistribution and cooperative farming.

In addition, it would be pertinent to understand the US position on food security. Senator Hubert Humphrey, who was a strong proponent of creating a food dependency of US food exports made the following remarks at a US senate committee in 1957:

"I have heard . . . that people may become dependent on us for food. I know that was not supposed to be good news. To me, that was good news, because before people can do anything they have got to eat. And if you are looking for a way to get people to lean on you and to be dependent on you, in terms of their cooperation with you, it seems to me that food dependence would be terrific."

The GR was a very convenient technology for a world outlook supporting food dependency as warfare, a terminology which as late as 1980 was also used by Regan's Secretary of Agriculture.

The application of GR initially resulted in a high degree of productivity. However, it failed to solve hunger and poverty among small farmers since only rich farmers with enough land and financial resources could optimise industrial farming and afford the mechanical and chemical inputs needed. It was much later that chemical inputs started to show their adverse impact on food and agriculture production, human health and biodiversity. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the 1970s was the first to raise the alarm bells on environmental degradation and vast destruction of biodiversity rising from chemical use in agriculture.

GR was part of the exploitative system that created a concrete mechanism of providing, on one hand rich profits to the feudal elite of the neo-colonial countries and on the other, mega-profits to agro-chemical corporations supplying the GR technology, a majority of whom were from the US. Imports of fertilisers, seeds and pesticides were heavily subsidised by the national governments through loan agreements signed with the World Bank and funding from the US Agency for International Development, that pressurized creation of environments favourable for investments, imports liberalisation, import liberalisation and removal of domestic control in agriculture⁸. This resulted in farmers being pushed away from a low-cost internal organic input

⁸ Shiva, Vandana. "The World Bank's assault on the environment." *Multinational Monitor*, April 1990 Volume II- Number 4. Accessed from <https://www.multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1990/04/shiva.html>

based traditional system to a chemical intensive, market-based agricultural system beneficial for corporations producing the inputs and trading agricultural goods especially after when the subsidies were pulled out.

The promotion of cash crops and the mechanisation of agriculture have weakened women's ability to look after their household food security.⁹ Cash crops are generally grown by very rich farmers with vast land holdings, and/or are part of corporate farms; this leads to, first, less and less land available for food crops, second as they are more for reaching high value markets domestically and or for international trade, it leads to women having very little access to them for their own household needs. For example, potatoes grown by PepsiCo for its brand Lay's potato chips cannot be carried home. Similarly, agriculture women workers are wary of carrying even a couple of onions home fearing reprimand from farm supervisors. Meanwhile, mechanisation decreases or wipes out women's labour hence creating a decline in their daily wages. Intensive agro-chemical production is very deleterious for not only women's health but also for breast-fed infants.¹⁰ Malnourishment is high among rural women enhancing the adverse effects of pesticides.

Liberalisation of agriculture through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

The 1970s was a harbinger of many changes: there was an oil crisis which resulted in a severe economic crisis, especially for third world countries. Rising fuel prices and interest rates imposed on loans increased their debt burden, leaving them highly dependent on taking loans from the IMF. The IMF and the World Bank were formed in 1944, in response to the economic upheaval of the Second World War. The two institutions, also known as the Bretton Woods Institutions have played a key role in creating rules of the game suitable for maintaining a global hegemony of US imperialism, especially during the oil crisis.

The IMF's original function had been to 'ensure monetary stability in an open world economy'. After the oil crisis of the 1970s and in face of the huge national debts, the IMF took on the management of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in first the neocolonial countries, and later in the Eastern European countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

SAPs are bilateral agreements between the IMF and a country that wants to access a loan from it. These loans are only granted on acceptance of conditionalities set by the IMF. These conditionalities include accepting economic reforms, enforcing deregulation, privatisation and opening national markets to foreign goods and investments, termed as trade liberalisation.

⁹ Lelea, Margaret Amy et al. "Gendering post-harvest loss research: responsibilities of women and men to manage maize after harvest in southwestern Ethiopia." *Food Sec.* 14, 951–963 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-022-01259-y>

¹⁰ Watts, Meriel. "Pesticides and breast cancer: a wake-up call." Pesticide Action Network, July, 2007.

“Part of the reason for the IMF’s continued presence in developing countries is that nearly all official development donors, bilateral as well as multilateral (including the World Bank), tie their aid and debt relief to the presence of an IMF lending programme. This gatekeeper role means the economic policy conditions the IMF attaches to its lending are hugely potent. If a poor country does not fulfil IMF conditions it risks losing both IMF finance and all other sources of aid and debt relief tied to the IMF programme.”¹¹

These conditionalities have created havoc in food and agriculture systems. The GR policy implementation in a large part of the third world means that the entire production is now based on high-yielding and hybrid seed varieties that are now controlled by only four agro-chemical corporations. Similarly, the rest of agricultural inputs are also monopolised by the international corporate sector. Small and landless farmers across the world have not been able to keep up with on one hand, with the escalating prices of agriculture inputs a direct result of deregulation and privatisation, and on the other hand, the dumping of cheap agricultural products in their local markets as a result of trade liberalisation. A particular aspect of SAPs is to decrease local demand and increase exports. In agriculture production, such a policy shifts focus on export crops, leaving landless peasants with no access to food crops.

In short, the Green Revolution policies coupled with SAPs intensified hunger, misery and pauperisation of rural communities, and fundamentally ruining a nation state’s right to development.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, SAPs became a very popular tool for weakening nation states; the more people-friendly policies that had been in place during the Cold War were steadily replaced by cut-throat market forces. Production-based economic subsidies in the agriculture and industrial sector, along with labour sector policies guaranteeing work security, bonuses and other benefits were phased out. In addition, public education and health, transport, and shelter amenities and subsidies were scaled down tremendously.

The rural population and urban poor (who more than often are part of rural society) suffered immensely, as they already had a very weak economic base under the double exploitation of feudalism and capitalism. For the rural women, especially from the landless families, it was extremely difficult to earn enough wage labour to provide for household food security. Neoliberal policies push peasant women into a deep abyss; deregulation and privatisation on one hand take away government control over prices, especially prices of productive inputs, and then market liberalisation allows influx of agricultural goods into local markets. Small farmers are unable to compete under these conditions and more than often unable to earn even

¹¹ Oxfam International. “Kicking the habit: how the World Bank and the IMF are still addicted to attaching economic policy conditions to aid.” OXFAM Briefing Paper 96, Oxfam, 2006. Accessed on October 23, 2022 from <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/114532/bp96-kicking-habit-011106-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

enough to pay back the debt that they have incurred for buying the agricultural inputs such as chemical fertilisers, seeds, diesel and others. Depleted incomes, and/or higher family debts impact household food security, and women as caregivers bear the brunt of trying to feed their families with little or no access to cash, relying on the meagre grains that they have stored from their production. A direct result of neoliberalism is with dwindling income from agricultural production, women seek more and more farm work, joining the vast army of agricultural workers which has another adverse impact as increased labour supply results in wage decrease. These conditions even worsened with the formation of the WTO.

The Formation of the World Trade Organisation

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), along with the formation of the World Bank and the IMF came into being at the end of the Second World War, with the purpose of upholstering the capitalist world and its mode of production. Apart from these two institutions, a third institution, the International Trade Organisation was also meant to be formed. However, the US did not agree to its formation, and hence only an agreement, the GATT, came into effect on January 1, 1958. The GATT was a set of multilateral trade agreements, and its main objectives were to provide universally agreed trade regulations among contracting parties with a focus on decreasing tariffs and abolishing non-tariff quotas.

Historically, there has been a high level of protectionism in agriculture, which lasted all through the GATT years, up until 1995. The US and EU were able to include in the GATT waivers that allowed protection to their agriculture sector. In general, agriculture trade remained unregulated despite the GATT principles.¹²

The fall of the Soviet Union marked an end to the bi-polar world, and in essence to the Cold War. It meant that the velvet gloves of capitalism were off, and the iron fist was now very much apparent. The post-war era, which was dominated by Keynesian welfare economics, and sprouted labour rights based on job security, human rights in response to socialism and communism in the Soviet Union and China was now put aside.

The 1970s till the end of the century were dominated by the SAPs. The formation of the WTO in 1995 heralded a new era, the era of Globalisation which meant intensification of neoliberalism. The WTO was the culmination of the almost 10 years of Uruguay Round of the (GATT). It contained some highly contentious areas that included trade in agriculture, trade in services as well as intellectual property rights. In essence, the US forced the inclusion of a

¹² Tangermann, Stefan. "Will agriculture always remain a problem in GATT?" *Intereconomics*, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 22, Iss. 4, 1987, pp. 163-167, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02932248>

whole new set of laws defining agriculture and food trade under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), Trade-related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) in the WTO regime. It is important to note that all countries who are signatory to the WTO must be in compliance with all of the WTO agreements and have to change their domestic legislation to adhere to the legal text of the agreements. Unlike GATT, the WTO has a very thorough dispute settlement mechanism. Countries must comply, or face fines and other forms of legal sanctions as ordained by this mechanism.

These agreements based on the foundation of neoliberal policies have crippled agriculture, food security and livelihood of the poorest, the most vulnerable and marginalised communities across the globe, especially in third world countries. The intent is, of course, to give monopoly control to the corporate sector of the imperialist countries.

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) has three basic clauses: (i) domestic subsidy, (ii) access to markets and (iii) export subsidy. A base-line year was set for first and third world countries to reduce domestic subsidies based on a complex system of determining country-specific reductions.¹³ Through these clauses, the agreement has stipulated that national governments must bring down the domestic production and export support they provide to their farmers, and at the same time, open their markets to accept imports from other countries.

However, given the very high rate of subsidies provided by the US and EU to their farmers, the impact of reduction of subsidies to them has been minimal. In addition, different loopholes in the agreement allow rich industrial countries such as France, Germany, UK and the US to maintain higher subsidies to their more protected crops. So, a combination of very high subsidies in the industrial countries and the very low subsidy provided by third world countries based on their economic strength has basically taken away all production support from small and landless farmers in the third world.

The access to market clause is similar to the domestic subsidy clause. First and third world countries had to reduce tariffs on agricultural products. However, the imbalance between the low tariffs in neocolonial countries and the high tariffs in first world countries have again made it far easier for the corporate sector to enter the third world markets. This has allowed agrochemical corporations like Nestle and Kellogg's to dump their products at much cheaper prices than local small producers in poor countries, driving small and landless farmers into a cycle of intense poverty. The high cost of production, very low access to markets, and low farm gate prices leave local

¹³ European Parliament (2020). WTO Agreement on Agriculture. Accessed on September 30, 2020 from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_3.2.7.pdf

small producers in a vicious cycle of indebtedness and poverty. Along with WTO agreements, SAP also plays its part in further liberalising the market.

The Trade-related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement of the WTO has huge implications for not only humanity but all living organisms on Earth. The TRIPs agreement was and continues to be a coercive legal tool used by monopoly capital to maintain market domination by guarding new technological innovations, especially for pharmaceuticals, information technology (IT) and agriculture.¹⁴

The TRIPs agreement provides intellectual property protection to so-called new inventions and innovations in the market. Hence inventions in all spheres of production, such as pharmaceuticals, IT, energy as well as hybrid and genetically engineered (GE) seeds among others are now property of corporations. In the context of seeds, this has created havoc in food and agriculture production. TRIPs wrenched the control of seeds from farming communities across the world, especially indigenous peoples, small and landless farmers including women and all small producers, leaving them dependent on agro-chemical and biotechnology transnational corporations. TRIPs forced countries to legislate domestic laws that prohibit farmers from growing and/or saving seeds. This has not only left farmers dependent on the market but it is also eroding indigenous knowledge of farming communities and indigenous peoples, especially in the context of seeds. In this regard, it is important to establish the linkages of US long-term capitalist design to the capture of genetic resources:¹⁵

“Global collection of plant germplasm was initiated by the U.S. Patent Office as early as 1839 The creation of the Green Revolution research centres (e.g., the International Rice Research Institute, the International Center for the Improvement of Maize and Wheat) was the product not only of an effort to introduce capitalism into the countryside but also the need to collect systematically the exotic germplasm required by the breeding programs of the developed nations. Western science . . . staffed an institutional network that has served as a conduit for the extraction of plant germplasm from the Third World.”

In conclusion, the TRIPs agreement remains the most contentious even after 25 years of implementation and is foremost in strangling farmers’ rights over germplasm of all living beings including plants.

Two other agreements, the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Mechanisms (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)¹⁶ are also important to understand. SPS is supposedly used to develop rigid homogenised food safety and hygiene

¹⁴ Sayeed, Azra Talat. “Impact of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on Pharmaceutical Development in the Third World. Ph. D. Thesis, 1995, University of Minnesota, USA.

¹⁵ Kloppenburg, Jack, Jr. *First the seed; the political economy of Plant Biotechnology*, Second Edition. University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁶ Roots for Equity. “The launching pad for neoliberal globalisation: the World Trade Organization.” Accessed from <http://rootsforequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Primer-1-5.pdf>

standards for plant and animal food products, applicable for international trade. These standards enable huge transnational corporations in food and agriculture to enter and control local food markets. National governments signatory to the WTO must make sure that their laws comply with the WTO agreements, including SPS.

Like the SPS, TBT agreement is meant to address regulations in the context of human and animal health, and environmental protection among others. In the context of food labelling and packaging for safety, TBT has rules for stipulating scientific information such as nutritional values in food packaging. Both SPS and TBT uphold the WTO principle of non-discrimination between national and international producers which supposedly eradicates barriers to trade. According to the WTO:¹⁷

“The SPS Agreement and TBT Agreement, within the separate areas of their legal coverage, both encourage the international harmonisation of food standards. Importantly, the SPS Agreement cites Codex’s food safety standards, guidelines and recommendations for facilitating international trade and protecting public health.”

SPS and TBT wreaked havoc in plant and animal-based food production, especially in the context of the dairy sector and livestock. As in most rural communities, women are the main caregivers for livestock and dairy. The homogenisation and standardisation of food products such as fresh milk and butter takes away women’s control over their meagre source of income, as well forces them to source these products from the market, at a much higher price which more than often is out of their reach. Hence, there is a loss of income as well as loss of healthier and more nutritious food for them and their families.

¹⁷ WTO. “The WTO and FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius.” Accessed from https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/coher_e/wto_codex_e.htm

Box 2: The Impact of the WTO Agreements on the Dairy and Livestock Sector, Pakistan



In essence, harmonisation of food standards is to give corporations fuller control over local markets, as small producers are unable to market based on the highly regimented standards.

Agreement on Agriculture, the Sanitary and Phytosanitary and Technical Barriers to Trade Agreements of the WTO collectively have had a huge impact on small and landless farmers in Pakistan, especially women. Across the country, it's women who are primary caretakers of livestock, and who consider livestock an invaluable asset. Livestock provides nutritional food products such as milk, butter and butter oil, lassi and yoghurt as well as manure which is used as an organic fertiliser and/or fuel for their energy needs. In addition, livestock breeds and hence women's flock increases providing them additional income. Rich industrial nations based on breeding of elite bovine genetics, have breeds that have a very high milk production. According to the FAO:¹⁸

¹⁸ FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. "The state of the World's animal genetic resources for food and agriculture - in brief." FAO, Rome, 2007. Accessed from <https://www.fao.org/3/a1260e/a1260e.pdf>

“Global production of meat, milk and eggs is increasingly based on a limited number of high-output breeds – those that under current management and market conditions are the most profitably utilised in industrialised production systems. The intensification process has been driven by rising demand for animal products and has been facilitated by the ease with which genetic material, production technologies and inputs can now be moved around the world.”

It is clear that India and Pakistan in particular are not only among the highest producers of fresh dairy products but also consumers.¹⁹ International mega-corporations such as FrieslandCampina and Nestle would like to control the dairy sector, which currently is dominated by small and landless farmers in Pakistan. A case in point is the Punjab Food Authority Act, 2011, and Punjab Pure Food Regulations 2018,²⁰ that have been changed to comply with the Codex Alimentarius Standards, in compliance with the WTO. These regulations stipulate milk pasteurisation and other rules and regulations that will certainly take away the control that small farmers have on the production and sale of fresh milk in the market. If the Punjab Pure Food Regulations 2018 are complied with, women farmers will certainly lose control over the fresh milk production, and even though the supply is through a whole network of small milk sellers (dhodhias) there is no doubt that it's women who are responsible for the entire production of not only the dairy products but also the welfare of livestock.

Though under Article 27.3(b) of the WTO's Agreement on TRIPs, countries are not obliged to grant patents on animals²¹, the impact of patents held by corporations on dairy and other livestock needs to be examined. Currently, it is big genetic resource corporations in the US, Europe and other industrialised countries that specialise in elite breeds. There is now semen being traded from the USA to Pakistan as well as live animals from many different countries. There are different international obligations based on which trade in animals is carried out such as the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) legislation and regulatory measures, among others.²²

¹⁹ OECD-FAO Agriculture Outlook 2020-29. Accessed on November 16, 2022 from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/aa3fa6a0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/aa3fa6a0-en>

²⁰ Government of Punjab. “The Punjab Food Authority Act, 2011. Accessed on December 30 from . Punjab Food Authority, Government of Punjab. “Punjab Pure Food Regulations 2018.” Accessed on December 30 from <https://foodscienceuniverse.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Punjab-Pure-Food-Regulations-2018.pdf>, and Government of Sindh. “Sindh Food Authority Regulations, 2018.” Accessed on December 30 from <http://sfa.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Sindh-Food-Authority-Regulations.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.eugena-erfp.net/en/>

²² Eugena, European Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources. “Annex 5: Guidelines for the development of material transfer agreement (MTA) for conservation and breeding.” Accessed from <https://www.eugena-erfp.net/en/download>

Agriculture and Digitalisation

All new technologies, especially in context to digital technologies that are being applied in agriculture are also impacting agricultural production and weakening space for small and landless farmers, particularly women. For instance, a lot of agriculture and food marketing is now based on online marketing. Information on agricultural production as well as external services provision is also based on digital technology that include computers, drones, artificial intelligence and big data;²³ women lag behind the most in case of such technologies.

There are now digital technologies which provide precision data on soil content, climate and weather conditions, sowing and harvest periods and patterns among others. Such technologies are used by corporate farms and/or big capitalist farmers which categorise small and landless farmers as being backward with low yield production, pushing them into further marginalisation. Women farmers are in essence the frontline, as they safeguard household food security are most impacted under such conditions.

This fact can be understood by an article at Purdue University, USA:

“Already, dairy farmers around the state and the country incorporate digital agriculture into management practices. Feed management software, dairy records software, milk meters, pedometers and rumination collars, used to monitor cud-chewing, are common on dairy farms. Boerman partners with an Indiana dairy farm that uses auto-feeders to study how early-life health influences growth, reproduction and milk production later in life.”

The dairy industry like many other sectors of agriculture are now managed as corporate entities turning live animals and human beings part of an assembly line, where profits and productivity reign supreme. Precision farming based on digital technology can also be seen in Asian economies. However, the presence of such corporate farms is at the expense of women farmers and women agriculture workers. The agriculture land division in much of Asia is highly skewed, with a vast majority having no land or less than 1-2 hectares, while corporate farms are large sprawling enterprises. It is also important to point out the vast differences in small farmers in industrialised countries and small farmers in third world countries”²⁴

“India’s farmers, having an average land holding of one hectare, . . . with US farmers whose average landholding is 176 hectares. There are 2.1 million farms across the US employing less than 2% of the population, with average annual on-farm income per farm household of \$18,637. Whereas more than half of India’s 1.3 billion that depend on agriculture

²³ Abdulai, Abdul Rahim. “Towards digitalization futures in small holder farming systems in Sub-Sahara Africa: A social practice proposal.” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 8 September, 2022. Accessed from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2022.866331/full>

²⁴ GRAIN, 2020. “Perils of the US-India Free Trade Agreement for Indian Farmers.” Accessed on December 17, 2020 from <https://grain.org/e/6472>

do so for their livelihoods, with the average annual income of per farm household (from all sources) at less than US\$1000.”

The Committee on World Food Security’s (CFS) High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) describes agriculture as:²⁵

“practiced by families (including one or more households) using only or mostly family labour and deriving from that work a large but variable share of their income, in kind or in cash. Agriculture includes crop-raising, animal husbandry, forestry and artisanal fisheries. The holdings are run by family groups, a large proportion of which are headed by women, and women play important roles in production, processing and marketing activities.”

So the contrast is quite vivid having a drastic impact on women’s lives and livelihood. Digital technology’s hold on agriculture production is still unfolding and in the coming years it will surely exacerbate the condition of small and landless farmers in general and women in particular. In India, entrepreneurs are moving ahead – Green Robot Machinery (GRoboMac) has developed a cotton picker with autonomous robotic arms, each arm capable of picking 50 kgs cotton per day.²⁶ The machine will be further developed to pick vegetable crops such as okra, tomatoes and egg plants. This is chilling news for women agriculture workers, who are the prime labour used across South Asia for cotton picking and for vegetables. According to the news item cited here, cotton is grown on 12 million hectares in India, with a yield of 469 kgs per hectare. Generally, the most efficient women pickers pick 30-40 kg cotton per day. So, keeping the figure at 30 kg per woman, at least 15 women engage in cotton picking on a hectare. So, for 12,000,000 hectares, nearly 800,000 women’s labour will be wiped out only for cotton picking in India.

Similarly, digital technology has also encroached on small-scale fishers’ livelihood. Big ocean fleets are using digital and electronic technology that provides accurate weather forecasts, ocean scanners and fish finders.²⁷ By contrast, most fisher folk have small boats that are incapable of going into deep seas, and are often at risk of being caught in storms, or crossing into foreign waters where they suffer being imprisoned for months if not years.

²⁵ HLPE. 2013. Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome, p. 10.

²⁶ Groeneveld, Rene “Indian start-up develops autonomous cotton picker.” Field Robots/News. 12, May 2022. Accessed from <https://www.futurefarming.com/tech-in-focus/field-robots/indian-start-up-develops-autonomous-cotton-picker/>

²⁷ HLPE. 2013. Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security, p.16.

The WTO Ministerial Conference (MC) 12: Furthering the Imperialist Agenda and related impacts on Food Sovereignty

The latest WTO Ministerial Conference, (MC12) held in Geneva on June 12-17, 2022 discussed some critical areas that included fisheries subsidies, agriculture and the TRIPs waiver on COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and diagnostics among others.

With respect to the fisheries sector, the WTO has taken drastic steps towards regulations that are extremely harmful and discriminatory towards small-scale and artisanal fisher folk. According to the WTO:²⁸

“The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) on 17 June 2022, marks a major step forward for ocean sustainability by prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies, which are a key factor in the widespread depletion of the world’s fish stocks.”

The WTO is calling this agreement historical, and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The WTO, along with the EU and OECD, have advocated for overriding fisheries subsidies to control illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF). However, from the perspective of small-scale fishers, the prohibition of subsidies is diabolical. The acute depletion of fish stock across the oceans is caused by industrial scale fishing which is monopolised by a handful of industrial countries. According to small scale fishers:²⁹

“Since the 1970s, overfishing has been foremost driven by a global market that kept on expanding, even in the face of depleting fish stocks of certain species. This expansionist market exacerbated overfishing even more when the WTO was established in 1995, bringing down market barriers to global fish trade. The denationalisation of fishing grounds that came with WTO drove fishing to unprecedented expansion, moving fleets from depleted areas to new or underfished fishing grounds.”

The biggest markets for seafood are countries such as China, Japan, South Korea and various European nations such as Germany, Italy and France among others. While big ocean fleets reap profits from high fish catches and supplying rich industrial nations, the most impacted are the small-scale fishers and their families. According to activists in the fisheries sector, women fishers are highly impacted by

²⁸ World Trade Organization. “Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.” WTO, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_e.htm

²⁹ APRN. “A Primer on IUUF and WTO elimination of subsidies.” October 24, 2022, p.4.

the falling catch that fisher folk bring back. Apart from the actual fishing, women are the main labour force that handles the catch, from cleaning to marketing. In addition, fish also is a main source of household food security which is depleting at a very fast pace.

Another key negotiation that took place at the MC12 was on the TRIPs waiver. Even since the inception of the WTO, activists have been demanding the removal of the TRIPs agreement based on its intense impact on society in all aspects of life, but especially in the context of agriculture and health. TRIPs forces fierce intellectual property right protection on pharmaceutical products that allow monopoly pharmaceutical corporations to set prices for medications at their will. TRIPs also does not allow any other entity except the patent holder of the medication to produce generic drugs, even for life saving medications. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a TRIPs waiver proposal was tabled by India and South Africa, demanding temporary suspension of TRIPs regulations; the context was to allow countries to produce and access required medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and other equipment needed to fight back against the pandemic as well to ensure timely vaccination of populations. This was supported by activists, researchers and many third world governments.

However, first the TRIPs waiver reached at MC12 was largely hollow as it only allows the import and export of the vaccine, an exemption which was also shackled by many technical and trade details (such as maintaining restriction on trade secrets critical for technology transfer).³⁰ These barriers restrict both import and manufacture of the vaccines. The WTO at the MC12 also postponed the decision on extending the agreement to diagnostics and therapeutics by another six months.

It does not need much deliberation to understand that the WTO was essentially guarding the monopoly control as well as profits of mega pharmaceutical corporations such as Moderna, Pfizer and BioNTech. It needs to be pointed out these negotiations were happening in a situation where one third of the world population had not received a single dose of the vaccination, including 83 percent of Africans, as stated by the head of the United Nations³¹. But in the end, the TRIPs waiver was basically not accepted, pandering to imperialist countries including the USA, UK and others.

Mega-regional trade and investment agreements are impacting food sovereignty

In the years after the formation of the WTO, there has also been a plethora of bilateral, regional and international free trade agreements. Some of the most critical include the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

³⁰ Baker, Brook. "Bad faith from Big Pharma, rich countries, and the WTO poison TRIPS Waiver negotiations." June 14, 2022, HEALTHGAP <https://healthgap.org/bad-faith-from-big-pharma-rich-countries-and-the-wto-poison-wto-trips-waiver-negotiations%E2%82%AC%91%BC/>

³¹ United Nations. UN News, Global perspectives human stories. March 30, 2022. Accessed from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1115142>

The CPTPP includes 11 countries, whereas RCEP includes 15 countries, with the latter being the biggest free trade agreement globally for now.³² It is important to note that all trade agreements outside the WTO must adhere to at least the WTO baseline in trade agreements; in other words, the agreements can have additional stricter regimens to those prescribed by the WTO but cannot be less. For instance, with respect to TRIPs conditionalities, they are often termed as TRIPs Plus agreements forcing Third World countries to enact even more restrictive patent laws than those in the TRIPs agreement.

With respect to CPTPP, members are required to sign on the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), 1991, that stipulates the rights of plant breeders. A critique of signing on the UPOV1991 is:

“The owners of new plant breeds are entitled to certain rights that include determining and when such new plants could be used. In practice, this restricts how farmers can use seeds of protected plant strains. Under the UPOV, farmers are no longer allowed to save seeds from prior harvests for commercial replanting without the breed owner’s permission. Critics of the conventions have argued that such an intellectual property protection regime favours large agrobusinesses that have sizeable R&D budgets as well as large-scale planters who are in a position to capitalise on the intellectual property arrangement. Small-scale farmers are seen as disproportionately disadvantaged.”

RCEP and CPTPP have similar objectives of lowering, removing tariff barriers on goods and services, creating homogenous standards for food, health and environmental safety, digital economy, investment, labour and financial services, among others. These agreements are propelled by imperialist powers like the US and China and other rich industrial countries that want to control raw materials, land, labour and markets.

The context of these agreements is no different from the WTO which is to pave the way for corporate interests while undermining the rights of farmers and their livelihoods. It is well understood that corporate farming is based on intensive use of chemicals and pesticides, while at the same time promoting hybrid and GE seeds. In addition, these trade agreements take away the support including export subsidy support provided to small farmers by their governments, while it is well documented that the rich countries maintain high subsidy support to their farmers, small and big alike. At the same time, these agreements go even further than WTO and force removal of tariffs on agricultural products. Rich industrial countries are clearly mapping out the advantages that CPTPP provides. For example, the Canadian government states the following:³³

“The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) Agreement will give Canadian agriculture and agri-

³² Schott, Jeffery. “Which countries are in the CPTPP and RCEP trade agreements and which want in?” Peterson Institute for International Economics, January 3, 2022. Accessed from <https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/which-countries-are-cptpp-and-rcep-trade-agreements-and-which-want>

³³ Government of Canada. “CPTPP and Canada’s agriculture and agri-food sector.” February 8, 2019. Accessed from <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cptpp-ptpgp/sectors-secteurs/agri.aspx?lang=eng>

food products preferential market access to all CPTPP countries. It will provide new market access opportunities for Canadian pork, beef, pulses, fruits and vegetables, malt, grains, cereals, animal feeds, maple syrup, wines and spirits, baked goods, processed grain and pulse products, sugar and chocolate confectionery, and processed foods and beverages.”

There is hardly any difference among these agreements, except that RCEP does not target state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as the agreement is spearheaded by China, a country with the world’s most and largest SOEs.

Women farmers, especially those who are small and landless farmers are particularly impacted by these multi and bilateral trade agreements. Influx of cheap imports on one hand reduces the price of their local produce, and on the other they find it harder to compete with imported food products, even on such a superficial count of imported products having a more standardised and ‘healthy’ shiny exterior. For instance, in Pakistan it has been noticed that imported tomatoes are more popular than desi (local) tomatoes which are not only smaller, greener and uneven in shape but also cheaper. With more and more market for imported products, the local production from local indigenous seeds is lost forcing even rural household to buy the imported products. At the same time, there is then extensive production of vegetables from corporate owned seeds where women agricultural workers are intensely employed in vegetable picking and hence exposed to pesticide spray as well work through contract farmers with high degree of control.

In Pakistan and India, PepsiCo has been growing potatoes using FL 20227 variety often referred to as FC5 for which it holds the certificate for registration. In India, it had sued farmers for over USD 150,000 for infringing the patent rights of farmers, which thankfully it lost. However, PepsiCo grows potatoes in many countries across the world including Thailand, which is also a member of CPTPP. In Thailand, it has a strict regimen for growing potatoes relying on very sophisticated technologies including digital technologies. According to PepsiCo, it sources crops from over 60 countries. Further it states:³⁴

“PepsiCo is compliant with laws and regulations in countries where ingredients are grown and where products are sold. . . . Glyphosate has been used by farmers around the world for more than 40 years because of its ability to control weeds and its safety profile, which has been vigorously tested and affirmed by numerous risk assessment authorities and independent expert panels.”

The agro-chemical corporate sector has had many lawsuits filed against it and has been losing many of them especially in context to glyphosate; in 2015 IARC had stated that probably glyphosate is carcinogenic to humans. But the above statements show the duplicity of the corporate sector. First, PepsiCo states that it is compliant with laws and regulations of countries in which it operates. In Third World countries,

³⁴ PEPSICO. “Pesticides and other agrochemicals: why it matters?” PEPSICO 2023. Accessed from <https://www.pepsico.com/our-impact/esg-topics-a-z/pesticides-and-other-agrochemicals>

there is a very lax system governing public health concerns and it is also easier to corrupt the law enforcement agencies with 'proper incentives.'

In order to understand the crippling effect of these agreements, an analysis of an agreement North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1992 between the USA, Canada and Mexico is helpful. (Please note that NAFTA was later substituted by United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA). Agreement that entered into force on July 1, 2020). NAFTA was a precursor to the WTO, and many of the agreements within NAFTA were extremely discriminatory to Mexican small farmers. A particular point of concern was trading in Corn, a staple food and the most critical food base of small farmers in Mexico. The US government provides heavy subsidies to corn farmers, the most abundant crop in the US. The subsidies for corn have outraced subsidies on all other crops, estimated to have been more than USD 116 billion since 1995.³⁵ NAFTA eliminated Mexican tariffs on corn and other commodities, and 'the price paid to Mexican farmers for the corn that they grew fell by 66 percent, forcing many to abandon farming.'³⁶ Farmers throughout Mexico were the hardest hit by job loss following NAFTA with about 20 per cent of agricultural jobs disappearing from 1991 to 2007.³⁷ According to the USDA, more than 900,000 farming jobs were lost in Mexico.³⁸

The result of influx of corn from the US into Mexico was thousands of small farmers being unable to continue farming. A direct result has been very high volume of migrants entering the USA looking for jobs. Pre-NAFTA, only 5,000 border patrol officers were patrolling the 1969-mile Mexican border; twenty years after NAFTA, 21,500 officers were guarding the borders. The gross human rights violations at the Mexican US borders are well known.³⁹ For women, especially associated with corn farmers, the affect has been devastating. More and more men are migrating legally, or illegally in search of a livelihood to overcome the loss of livelihood. In addition, there has been a drastic increase in staple food prices. For example, tortillas prices skyrocketed since NAFTA, increasing a 733 percent from 1993 to 2006.⁴⁰

It is estimated that a majority of corn (about 67%) is cultivated on small farms, mainly maintained by women, especially in the face of intense migration of male labour to the US and Canada. Apart from the increased work burden, there has been devastating impacts on soil fertility as hybrid corn is introduced. The work burden on these women farmers has intensified as they need to produce corn for household consumption.⁴¹ At the same time, corn has a particular cultural, religious significance- more than 40 different species of corn are grown in Mexico.

³⁵ O'Neill, Tara and Kerska, Katerina. "Primer: Agriculture Subsidies and their influence on the composition of U.S. Food supply and consumption." November 3, 2021. Accessed from <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/primer-agriculture-subsidies-and-their-influence-on-the-composition-of-u-s-food-supply-and-consumption/>

³⁶ NAFTA's legacy for Mexico: Economic displacement, lower wages for most, and increased migration." https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/migration/nafta_factsheet_mexico_legacy_march_2018_final.pdf

³⁷ Patten, Daniel. "Crimes against agriculture: NAFTA as state crime in Mexico." November 8, 2022. Accessed from <https://www.bilaterals.org/?crimes-against-agriculture-nafta>

³⁸ Darlington, Shasta and Gillespie, Patrick. "Mexican farmer's daughter: NAFTA destroyed us." February 9, 2017. Accessed from <https://money.cnn.com/2017/02/09/news/economy/nafta-farming-mexico-us-corn-jobs/index.html>

³⁹ Vereas, Monica. "Immigration trends after 20 years of NAFTA." Volume 9, Issue 2, July-December, pages 109-143. Accessed from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870355016300052>

⁴⁰ Patten, Daniel. "Crimes against agriculture: NAFTA as state crime in Mexico."

⁴¹ Appendini, Kristen. "Tracing the maize tortilla chain." United Nations Chronicle, United Nations. Accessed from <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/tracing-maize-tortilla-chain>

Under patriarchy, women often being the guardians of culture and religion hold the major responsibility of looking after the heirloom varieties of corn.

Finally, it's also critically important to point out the debilitating impact of aggressive agro-chemical production that is the hallmark of profit-seeking industrial agro-industry. NAFTA not only promoted corn imports in Mexico, but also tomatoes taking advantage of diverse growing seasons in the country. Many agri-businesses rented land in Autlan, Mexico:

"After several years of monoculture production with intensive agrochemical use, they left the region, when an insect plague struck that could not be controlled, forcing them to abandon the infected and depleted land. . . . The white mosquitoes that destroyed the crops had deserted the mountainside for the fields, due to deforestation caused by clear-cutting for constructing crates to pack tomatoes for export."⁴²

In Mexico, women are the predominant workforce in the tomato production sector, carrying out 90% of the work. So not only the environment was destroyed but no doubt, the intensive chemical applications have acute impact on women's health.⁴³

Box 3: Investor- State Dispute Settlement undermines people's food sovereignty

In 2009, Cargill, a huge privately held corporation in the United States and a producer of high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) challenged the Mexican government on taxing beverages sweetened with HFCS. The tax is to help safeguard the Mexican cane sugar industry, consisting of hundreds of thousands of jobs which were threatened post-NAFTA influx of U.S.-subsidised HFCS. Cargill asserted that Mexico's HFCS tax violated NAFTA's obligations concerning national treatment, most favoured nation treatment, expropriation, fair and equitable treatment and performance standards.

A tribunal ruled in favour of Cargill, awarding \$77.3 million, the largest award to date [2009] in an investor-state dispute brought under a U.S. FTA. The tribunal further declared that the tax amounted to a NAFTA-banned performance requirement and a violation of Cargill's right to fair and equitable treatment.

⁴² Barndt, Deborah. "Tangled routes: women, work, and globalization on the tomato trail." Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., USA, 2008, p. 221.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 229.

Conclusion



As has been mentioned at the beginning, the term food sovereignty was coined in the late 1990s, as a clarion call against imperialist trade policies in food and agriculture. Many of the earlier predictions on the impact of trade liberalisation have been realised and in actuality, are even more intense than what was predicted. Currently, there are at least 828 million people facing hunger, a majority of which are in the Asia Pacific region.

It is clear that trade liberalisation in agriculture takes away from local sustainable production of food, that takes away the capacity of small farmers especially women to produce and consume time-tested safe nourishing foods for themselves and their families. Further, there is also a synergistic effect of trade liberalisation that impacts the poorest two sectors of society, the peasants and farmers. Constant decline in wages and increasing cost of living have had a diabolical impact on women's lives as they are the main care givers in their households, not only in the Asia Pacific but globally.

Food Sovereignty is a rich intensely political framework that pushes for farmers' rights over decision-making in food and agriculture, in right to control and access over production, as well as the right to grow nutritious, locally produced, culturally appropriate foods using chemical free sustainable methods of production. This concept has been accepted and adopted by women rights groups and having added the context of patriarchy to food sovereignty have joined the battle cry.

However, under the deluge of imperialist attacks on peoples lives, women's lives, and with multiple crises impacted humanity including climate crisis, livelihood and food crisis, there has been a decrease in the intensity of the people's movements that have fought for food sovereignty.

There is an urgent need to challenge imperialism and call to arms against the many attacks that women are facing, whether it is through continued wars of aggression fought for control over resources by imperialism, or climate crisis which is getting worse and worse in face of climate imperialism, or ravaging disease and death such as the Covid19 epidemic.

There is an urgent need to organise and mobilise women movements, as well as other movements to come together to fight corporate control over our lives, livelihoods and resources. History tell us that no matter how powerful a mode of production may seem, it has been toppled by peoples power, by the will to change for better, and to attain freedom for the masses.



About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.

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