FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: AN ENHANCER TO WOMEN CONTRIBUTIONS TO FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract; Food security has become an issue of global concern in the recent time. Nigeria, with her huge endowed natural and human resources is not spared. The country also faces a looming food security crisis with a growing population that is increasingly dependent on imported foods. The once dominant subsistence-oriented farm economy is at risk of gradual marginalisation. Insecure land tenure, scarcity of funds and credit, labour scarcity despite overall high unemployment and stagnant technology have crippled its further development. Studies of food security and the right to food both offer important starting points in tackling the production, access and consumption of food; they do not provide routes for challenging and changing the gender-inequitable food systems. This study, therefore, examined Food sovereignty and how it could enhance the role of women in food security in Nigeria. The diffusion theory provides the conceptual framework for this study. The design is descriptive in nature and a secondary source was used to elicit information for the study.

Keywords: Food sovereignty, Food and food security, economic development, agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Food Security, at the individual, household, national, regional, and global levels (is achieved) when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active

life (FAO, 2001). Today the world has enough food to feed everyone, yet an estimated 854 million people worldwide are still undernourished (FAO, 2006). Poverty-not food availability-is the major driver of food insecurity. Improvements in agricultural productivity are necessary to increase rural household incomes and access to available food but are insufficient to ensure food security. Evidence indicates that poverty reduction and food security do not necessarily move in tandem. The main problem is lack of economic (social and physical) access to food at national and household levels and inadequate nutrition (or hidden hunger). Food security not only requires an adequate supply of food but also entails availability, access, and utilization by all-men and women of all ages, ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic levels. Gender based inequalities all along the food production chain "from farm to plate" impede the attainment of food and nutritional security. Maximizing the impact of agricultural development on food security entails enhancing women's roles as agricultural producers as well as the primary caretakers of their families. Food security is a primary goal of sustainable agricultural development and a cornerstone for economic and social development.

The issue of food security has been on the front burner for long and statements about several countries in Africa that are food insecure. We have been confronted with horrific photographs of starving children in countries lying on the Horn of Africa, countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, some parts of Kenya, among others. These frightening photographs depict an avoidable disaster. Africa's agricultural system is backward, and worsened by high global food prices. In Nigeria, food accounts for a large, and increasing, share of family budgets for poor and urban families. If prices of staple foods soar, poor people bear the brunt. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), an agency of the United Nations (UN), once raised alarm that Nigeria, Morocco and Bangladesh faced imminent food crisis. The report stated that the world food situation was in dire straits.

As clothing and shelter serves as the basic necessities of life, food remains the most vital because of its centrality to human existence. It is a known fact that the ruthless expedition for food has shaped human history, provoking wars, driving migration and underpinning the growth of nations. The recent escalation of food prices call for sober reflection, due to challenges facing the globe is worsening food crisis period unheard of in the last 30 years and the potential of leading to catastrophe. This vital issue has taken the centre-stage among world leaders, thereby increasing the concern for the world's ability to feed its 7.5 billion people, to avert world-wide unrest and political instability as reported in most countries (FAO, 2007).

Consequently, various international organizations and individual countries embarked on aggressive food security crusades to remedy the situation in order to make food affordable to all. The Food Security assessment in 2005 proves that 750 million people were food insecure in 70 low-income countries. Asia and Commonwealth of Independent States experienced a 30% drop in the number of hungry people. In Latin American and Caribbean countries has varied slightly over time, but there has been a discernible trend across the region as a whole. Despite the strong growth in food production, Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where hunger has risen in the last decade. The challenge today is that high food prices will cause increase in food security and widespread food crisis in many developing countries. Poor people in developing countries spend between 50-80% of their income on food and to meet consumers need. Any increase in food prices will reduce food consumption and increase hunger. In Nigeria the prices of rice, corn and wheat record high roof-tops (FAO, 2008). This global food crisis has been attributed to a number of factors including climate change, population growth, increased demand for bio-fuels, failure to improve crop yield, high oil prices, leading to increased input loss for producers and traders. The structural problems like under-investment in agriculture and dominance in supply chain of food and agricultural policies sky rocket prices of food. Rapid urban growth for instance, is

raising concerns about food supply (Eme, Onyishi, Uche, Okala & Uche, 2014). The concept of 'food sovereignty', which has become globally recognised over the past two decades, may offer alternative ways of thinking that can enhance current notions of food security without necessarily replacing them.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

The concept of food security came into being in the 1970s as a response to the global food crisis, and as a means to implement the right to food. The initial focus was on ensuring global availability of food and stable food prices. This understanding evolved with increasing recognition of food security as an issue affecting mainly vulnerable people, and of the need to balance supply and consumption by those in most need (Bridge report, 2014). Given women's crucial roles in and contributions to food security, any efforts to reduce food insecurity worldwide must take into consideration the factors and constraints affecting women's ability to carry out these roles and make these contributions, with a view to removing the constraints and enhancing women's capacities.

Despite an increasing supply of gender disaggregated data and studies of women's roles in agricultural production and food security, there is still a lack of sufficient data and information on these. Much of women's work remains "invisible", because it is not counted in surveys and censuses which still often count as work only that which is remunerated, or ask what the principal work of a person is. Thus, women, who may be involved in one day in working on the family plot, tending small livestock fishing, gathering fuel-wood, fetching water, transporting and marketing produce, processing food and preparing meals may not be able to answer what their principal work is. Based on the above assertions, this study, therefore, examined Food sovereignty and how it could enhance the role of women in food security in Nigeria.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Food Security

Food security is essentially built on three pillars: food availability, food access, and food utilization. An individual must have access to sufficient food of the right dietary mix (quality) at all times to be food secure. Those who never have sufficient quality food are chronically food insecure. Those whose access to an adequate diet is conditioned by seasonality are food insecure and are generally called seasonally food insecure. Individuals who normally have enough to eat but become food insecure in the face of disasters triggered by economic, climatic, and civil shocks (war and conflict) are transitorily food insecure. The "at all times" element of the food security definition makes risk and associated vulnerability an important element of the food security concept. The definition of food security is often applied at varying levels of aggregation, despite its articulation at the individual level. The importance of a pillar depends on the level of aggregation being addressed. At a global level, the important pillar is food availability. Does global agricultural activity produce sufficient food to feed all the world's inhabitants? The answer today is yes, but it may not be true in the future given the impact of a growing world population, emerging plant and animal pests and diseases, declining soil productivity and environmental quality, increasing use of land for fuel rather than food, and lack of attention to agricultural research and development, among other factors. When food security is analyzed at the national level, an understanding not only of national production is important, but also of the country's access to food from the global market, its foreign exchange earnings, and its citizens' consumer choices.

Food security analyzed at the household level is conditioned by a household's own food production and household members' ability to purchase food of the right quality and diversity in the market place. However, it is only at the individual level that the analysis can be truly accurate because only through understanding who consumes what can we appreciate the impact of socio-cultural and gender inequalities

on people's ability to meet their nutritional needs. The third pillar, food utilization, essentially translates the food available to a household into nutritional security for its members.

One aspect of utilization is analyzed in terms of distribution according to need. Nutritional standards exist for the actual nutritional needs of men, women, boys, and girls of different ages and life phases (that is, pregnant women), but these "needs" are often socially constructed based on culture. For example, in South Asia evidence shows that women eat after everyone else has eaten at a meal and are less likely than men in the same household to consume preferred foods such as meats and fish. Hidden hunger commonly results from poor food utilization: that is, a person's diet lacks the appropriate balance of macro-(calories) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). Individuals may look well nourished and consume sufficient calories but be deficient in key micronutrients such as vitamin A, iron, and iodine. People may live in unhealthy environments with inadequate hygiene and sanitation, which results in frequent illnesses and compromised nutritional outcomes despite sufficient food being available. Infants and very young children may have mothers who are so time constrained, particularly at peak times in the agricultural calendar, that they are unable to feed a child as often as necessary to provide good nutrition. Malnutrition is economically costly: it can cost individuals 10 percent of their lifetime earnings and nations 2 to 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the worst-affected countries (Alderman, 2005).

Achieving food security is even more challenging in the context of HIV and AIDS. HIV affects people's physical ability to produce and use food, reallocating household labour, increasing the work burden on women, and preventing widows and children from inheriting land and productive resources (Izumi, 2006). A study of rural households in Mozambique has shown that an adult death due to illness, which is likely to be AIDS related, reduces the amount of staple foods produced by these households by 20–30 percent, contributing to

household food insecurity (Donovan & Massingue, 2007). Policy responses differ according to the underlying determinants of the food insecurity. These responses range from legal reforms to economic incentives to infrastructure investment to the provision of insurance instruments.

Food availability

In many societies women supply most of the labour needed to produce food crops and often control the use or sale of food produce grown on plots they manage. However, the asymmetries in ownership of, access to and control of livelihood assets (such as land, water, energy, credit, knowledge, and labour) negatively affect women's food production. Women are less likely to own land and usually enjoy only use rights, mediated through a man relative. Studies cited in Deere and Doss (2006) indicate that women held land in only 10 percent of Ghanaian households while men held land in 16–23 percent in Ghana; women are 5 percent of registered landholders in Kenya, 22.4 percent in the Mexican ejidos (communal farming lands), and 15.5 percent in Nicaragua. On average, men's land holdings were almost three times the women's land holdings. This compromised land access leads women to make suboptimal decisions with regard to crop choices and to obtain lower yields than would otherwise be possible if household resources were allocated efficiently. Insecurity of tenure for women results in lower investment and potential environmental degradation; it compromises future production potential and increases food insecurity. In Ghana the primary investment in land, given the lack of availability of fertilizer, is fallowing.

However, longer fallows are likely to lead to loss of land when tenure is insecure, but shorter fallows reduce yields as soil fertility is compromised. Goldstein and Udry (2005) demonstrate that those with less political capital in a village have less tenure security and as a result leave their land fallow for shorter periods. Within households, profits per hectare of a maize-cassava intercrop from similar plots vary

according to individuals and length of fallow. Women have less tenure security and sacrifice profits per hectare with shorter fallows. The lower production reduces not only women's potential income, but also the availability of food for household consumption. Legal reforms need to take into account multiple-use rights to land, particularly women's rights, as well as the different means by which women gain access to land, including divorce and inheritance systems. The Lowlands Agricultural Development Projects in The Gambia provide a good example of how understanding the way that women obtain land rights affects the design of a successful project. The project resulted in previously landless women obtaining secure rights to land through a land reclamation program. Agricultural production depends on natural resources: land, soil, water, and plant genetic resources. Women often have unique perspectives on as well as understanding of local biodiversity and can be key partners for plant breeders as they work to develop adapted and improved varieties. In Rwanda women farmers have shown they can be more effective at selecting improved varieties for local cultivation than the men plant breeders (Sperling and Berkowitz, 1994).

Agricultural technology transfer capacity development is one of the prime policy levers to increase agricultural productivity. But often women are not targeted because it is assumed that their husbands or fathers will share the knowledge with them, and often they are supplied with technologies that do not meet their needs. For example, early dissemination of hybrid maize in Zambia failed to recognize that women use the crop for home consumption, which requires milling. The hybrid that was introduced required hammer mills, but only traditional mills were available locally. Poorer storage characteristics of the hybrid also compromised women's ability to conserve their agricultural produce, so women returned to growing traditional maize varieties. Involving young women and men in training opportunities from the start has proved to be a successful strategy in ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods for households.

However, adoption of new technology depends on many things, including the availability of required assets to implement the technology, how local women and men view the perceived benefits, the way information is shared, and local gender roles and other socio-cultural constraints. Even when women have access to land for food production and access to improved technologies, they face more constraints than men in accessing complementary resources for success. They have less access to credit and less access to inputs such as fertilizer, and they are less likely to benefit from agricultural extension services, and therefore they have less access to improved technologies.

Women tend to process their crops more on the farm than men do theirs, but little is invested in technology research into on-farm crop processing. These constraints are not only costly to food security but also to economic growth. If women farmers in Kenya had the same access to farm inputs, education, and experience as their men counterparts, their yields for maize, beans, and cowpeas could increase as much as 22 percent (Quisumbing, 1996). This would have resulted in a one-time doubling of Kenya's GDP growth rate in 2004 from 4.3 percent to 8.3 percent (World Bank 2007a). More important, household productivity in agriculture and food supplies could often be increased at no extra cost by reallocating existing resources inside the household toward women. Soil fertility is an important component of agricultural productivity. Legumes can be used to improve soil fertility to enhance crop productivity as well as human nutrition. Recognition and adaptation of this approach in Malawi demonstrated that women had a preference for a legume intercrop production system for their plots. This approach helped improve soil fertility and increased the productivity of their main crop as well as improved household food security by providing an additional source of nutritious food.

Food access

Access to food can be constrained physically-washed-out roads in a rainy season may cut off access to the nearby market town-or, more usually, economically. Ironically, food insecurity has a largely rural face. Despite the fact that the majority of food is grown in rural areas, most of the rural poor are net food buyers, not sellers, in many countries. Hence, economic access to markets or lack thereof, is a fundamental determinant of food insecurity. The role of agriculture in income generation for the poor, particularly women, is more important for food security than its role in food production (Sanchez, Swaminathan, & Nalan, 2005). During conflict and crises, food aid and agricultural assistance are both necessary components of effective interventions. The intertwining forces of food aid and agricultural support affect women's and men's food security, nutrition, health, and livelihoods. During times of crisis, women and girls are often forced to reduce their intake in favour of other household members, particularly men and boys, which results in increased incidence of malnutrition among women.

However, men are at greater risk during famines, and in many recorded famines, mortality rates are higher among men than women. Insecure conditions can also limit women's mobility and access to humanitarian aid or markets. When crises disrupt agricultural production and distribution, displace populations, and render land unusable, food aid is of critical importance, especially in the short term. The key to sustainability, however, is to ensure that the aid provided does not create dependency or harm the communities and stakeholders it hopes to assist. To plan emergency interventions properly requires substantial knowledge of the ways in which the agricultural sector works, as well as knowing what the socio-cultural reality is locally and how that dictates who does what, who has what, and who controls what. Because women (and children to some extent) are typically responsible for food production, preparation, storage, and marketing, it is crucial to include them in emergency-related food security planning and decision making as

potential change agents and decision makers, rather than as the "victims" they are often portrayed to be.

A key aspect of program design is to understand the differing roles, responsibilities, capacities, and constraints of women and men in the region in question. This includes understanding the traditional division of labour in the agricultural sphere, as well as any changes that may have resulted from a crisis. Lessons learned reveal that food security interventions and livelihoods-saving strategies within an emergency setting are more efficient, cost effective, and timely when gender-based differences and gender-differentiated impacts on the affected population have been properly understood and addressed (FAO 2005). The Household Food Security and Nutrition Project in Ethiopia illustrates that it is vital that beneficiaries have a strong sense of ownership of the project and that the ability of men and women to assess their own situation and their ability to improve their livelihoods are important steps in the empowerment process. Moreover, identifying gender differentiated opportunities and constraints for improving nutrition and food security during the design phase of a project often leads to better food security interventions.

Addressing poverty issues in and of themselves, while vital, does not necessarily mean that we are addressing food insecurity. India has been remarkably successful in using agricultural development to foster economic growth and poverty reduction. It has moved from food deficits to food surpluses on the national level. India has a higher gross national income (GNI) per capita at $730 than most of sub-Saharan Africa. However, its child stunting rates are high at 46 percent. Niger's GNI per capita is just $240, but its stunting rate is 40 percent. The Gambia demonstrates what can be achieved despite poverty, with a stunting rate of just 19 percent against a GNI per capita income of $290.5 Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal occupy four of the top five positions in the global ranking of underweight children. Bangladesh and India rank among the highest

incidences of low-birth-weight babies, an indicator of maternal malnutrition. Many would argue that the inferior status of women in South Asia is a key factor in the failure to translate agriculture-led poverty reduction into nutritional improvements. Welfare improvements at the household level are not just a function of increasing incomes for households; they are related to who accrues the income within the household. In Côte d'Ivoire, significantly more is spent on food and education and less on alcohol and cigarettes when a higher share of household cash income accrues to women. To achieve the same improvements in children's nutrition and health with a $10 increase in women's income would require a $110 increase in men's income (Hoddinott and Haddad 1995). Although men often control labour input and the sale of "cash crops," women often manage production of subsistence crops, albeit some of the same crops that are sold in local markets. Therefore, improving women's productivity in agriculture not only increases food availability for the household but also raises women's incomes and enhances food security due to women's spending patterns.

In a World Food Programme project to improve watershed management in Rajasthan, India, women were glad that the program paid food wages as opposed to cash wages because if the program paid cash, then their husbands would participate, and they would not see any additional resources dedicated to household food security. However, women often face constraints to market engagement. Cash crops are often collected at the farm gate, whereas food crops need to be transported by the grower to local markets. In Africa this is commonly done by women head-loading. Studies have found that women transport 26 metric ton kilometres per year compared to less than 7 for men. This leads some people to argue that women account for two-thirds of rural transport in sub-Saharan Africa (Blackden & Chitra, 1999). Hammer mills, which are needed to grind many maize hybrids, are often less common and are centralized at a greater distance from individual households. Given that women bear the

transport burden, they may be less likely to adopt hybrid varieties and continue to favour their traditional but lower yielding varieties.

Investment in transport and infrastructure is necessary to support women's market engagement. This is an important step toward integrating women into value chains. Changes in policy and regulatory frameworks are also needed to create an equal playing field for women and men in market participation. Greater access to information, organizations, and resources is important for poor women, who disproportionately lack access compared to their men counterparts. Finally, capacity building is needed for poor women in particular, as cultural and other gender-specific constraints have hindered them from greater engagement in markets.

Food utilization

Having access to food of sufficient quality does not automatically translate into good nutritional status for individuals. Women's role in food utilization for food security is perhaps the most critical and outweighs the importance of their role in food production and how they spend the income they earn. Sixty percent of the calories and proteins consumed by humans today come from just three plant species: maize, rice, and wheat. Seventy-five percent of our food supply comes from just 12 plants and five animal species (Lambrou & Regina, 2004), but yet dietary diversity is extremely important. Diets dominated by cereals lack an adequate array of micronutrients such as iron, vitamin A, B vitamins (niacin, thiamine), vitamin C, zinc, iodine, and folate. Deficiencies in micronutrients are costly in economic terms and in terms of people's well-being. Deficiencies in vitamin A, iron, and zinc all rank within the top 10 leading causes of death through disease in developing countries (WHO, 2002). In Sierra Leone iron deficiency among women agricultural workers cost the economy $100 million (Darnton-Hill, Patrick, Philip, Harvey, Hunt, Nita, Mickey, Madeleine, Martin, & Bruno de Benoist, 2005).

Women are typically responsible for food preparation and thus are crucial to the dietary diversity of their households. Women are generally responsible for selecting food purchased to complement staple foods and to balance the household's diet. Even in the Sahel where men control the granaries, women are responsible for supplying the "relishes" that go with the grains, and it is these that provide the bulk of the micronutrients. The prime sources for micronutrients are fruits, vegetables, and animal source foods, including fish. Animal source foods are particularly good; they are high density in terms of micronutrients, and those micronutrients are also more available to the human body. Agriculture is thus a key to dietary diversity, particularly in areas that have less access to markets given the perishable nature of fruits, vegetables, and animal source foods. An extensive review of the nutritional impacts of agricultural interventions, disaggregated into staple crops, fruits and vegetables, and animal source foods, found that the role of women was critical. Studies of the commercialization of staple food production determined that those people who increased the share of women's income were more likely to increase expenditures on food, although not necessarily improve nutritional outcomes. Interventions focused on fruits and vegetables were more likely to produce biochemical indicators of improved nutritional status when they included educational behaviour change designed to empower women.

Many of the reviewed livestock and aquaculture interventions resulted in gains in production, income, and food availability, and significantly greater nutritional improvements when the interventions were combined with capacity development training that promoted women's empowerment, education, and behaviour change. A good example of this type of intervention is that of the introduction of orange-fleshed sweet potatoes in Mozambique. These contain higher levels of provitamin A carotenoids and when introduced with nutrition education can lead to reductions in vitamin A deficiency. Fisheries also offer powerful opportunities for women; vegetables can be cultivated on the homestead because they

require very little land and do not displace other crops. Women do not need to leave the homestead, and so they do not need to violate local cultural restrictions, which would have lowered their participation rates in projects.

Theoretical framework

Diffusion theory of rural development has been adopted as it fits into the theoretical framework of this study. The theory was propounded in 1962 by a United States rural sociologist, Everett Rogers. The diffusion theory of rural development is an attempt to explain the existence of substantial productivity difference among farmers in the same economic and geographical regions (Omeje & Ogbu, 2015).

According to the theory, such differences arise because of differences in farmers' adoption of innovations such as new varieties of seeds, mechanical and chemical inputs. Within the same environment, some farmers would embrace modern techniques such as mechanical equipment, improved seeds, and chemical inputs and thus, guaranteeing food security, while others will remain opposed to the adoption of these modern techniques and as a result, continues to have poor harvest thereby causing food insecurity. According to the diffusion theory, to correct the structural impediments to improve agricultural productivity, the farmers need to embrace modern techniques of farming to guarantee food security. The diffusion of innovations to farmers required reorientation and rehabilitation, which is possible through communication and other support services. The needs and advantages of the modern techniques have to be explained to farmers in Nigeria for them to understand and apply the same and thus, reduce incidences of poverty and food insecurity. This theory has been graciously applied by many developing nations and had led to the popularization of agricultural extension services, demonstration farms or experimental farms also known as local innovation. Through these media, the rural farmers who are yet unaware of the modern innovations are brought face to face with the concepts, their application as well as their gains. The diffusion theory

has also gained considerable acceptance in Nigeria where it is emphasized as a solution to the problem of low productivity of the average rural farmers can lead to national food insecurity. The relevance of the theory to this study lies in the fact that it has made us to understand that farmers' especially rural farmers in Nigeria also have differences in productivity even when they are given the same incentives including: loans, fertilizers, rice, maize etc as a result of their different abilities to adapt to modern farming techniques and innovations. Most of them are too conservative and therefore, resist change no matter the gains. This may not be unconnected to why Nigeria is battling with food insecurity. So, the theory will enable us device a more practical approach to teaching the local farmers in the language they would understand thereby guaranteeing food security.

Food Sovereignty and Women Contributions to Food Security in Nigeria

Food security and the right to food both offer important starting points in tackling the production, access and consumption of food (Bridge report, 2014); they do not provide routes for challenging and changing the gender-inequitable food systems as experienced in Nigeria. The concept of 'food sovereignty', which has become globally recognised over the past two decades, may offer alternative ways of thinking that can enhance current notions of food security without necessarily replacing them. Born as a form of resistance to the model of globalisation that was institutionalised in the Uruguay Round of trade agreements and the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 (Burnett & Murphy 2014), food sovereignty challenges the unsustainable and inequitable systems of economic growth that have contributed to food and nutrition insecurity.

Developed by Via Campesina-the international peasants' movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world-food sovereignty

calls for radical changes in agricultural, political, economic and social systems (Park, White & Julia, 2013). These calls respond to the connections identified by Via Campesina between large-scale production-focused strategies, corporate food regimes, inequalities and environmental degradation.

The global food sovereignty movement has sought to provide an antidote to the reliance on inequitable, unsustainable global agricultural production and trade models. It offers an alternative vision that restructures food production and consumption at the local, national and global level, with the aims of creating localised systems for producing nourishing food in an affordable, sustainable and environmentally friendly manner, and of ensuring democratic processes for the control of food production and consumption (Windfuhr & Jonsen 2005). Via Campesina defines food security 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 those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations…Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, 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, 2007).

There is an appetite for this new thinking: in just 15 years, the food sovereignty movement has become a leading transnational agrarian movement, representing primarily marginalised rural people including

peasants and small-scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisher-folk, forest dwellers and indigenous peoples from over 150 social movements and 79 countries, including 12 African countries and several in South and East Asia. Additionally, a number of governments have integrated food sovereignty into their constitutions or laws, including Ecuador, Senegal, Mali and Nepal, with varying degrees of success (Burnett & Murphy, 2014).

Food sovereignty recognises the realisation of women's economic, social, political and cultural rights as an integral part of its democratic process, with the understanding that ensuring women's access to the necessary resources and services, as well as their control of their own lives, is the precondition for their meaningful democratic engagement. However, in practice it has been historically weak on gender equality issues. More recently the rural women and women farmers in Latin America participating in Via Campesina and in the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC) have advanced the gender equality agenda within the food sovereignty movement. Despite the benefits of the food sovereignty approach, there are clear challenges associated with scaling it up at a global level (Burnett and Murphy 2014), not least because of the already prevalent economic models that prioritise global trade in food rather than local self-sufficiency. However, much can be learned from the approach, and there is scope for integrating many of its principles into policy planning and implementation.

Food sovereignty provides many opportunities for gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, as well as acknowledging the 'historic role women have played since the invention of farming in gathering and sowing seeds', food sovereignty promotes more sustainable, diverse agricultural methods that are much better for the environment and which enable women's contributions to be enhanced and recognised (Sachs, 2013). Finally, food sovereignty is built on the right to food and on people's right to decide what to

produce, providing lessons for integrating rights into food and nutrition security.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper argues that the food security definition has progressed but still fails to articulate the specific gender inequalities that intensify and are intensified by the effects of food insecurity. The 'right to food' is more political in its understanding of food insecurity, emphasising that 'discrimination, lack of accountability and social inequalities' (FAO, 2011a) lie at the heart of hunger and malnutrition and recognising the need for more equitable global food systems. Yet it still remains divorced from pivotal women's rights frameworks. At both national and local levels the right to food struggles to make any real impression without strong political will and commitment, and can evaporate at the stage of implementation.

Food sovereignty is also becoming increasingly influential, offering what more mainstream food and nutrition security approaches lack- a chance for people to self-determine what they produce and eat through the creation of local, environmentally sustainable food systems. The food sovereignty movement has also made considerable progress in promoting a more gender-equitable approach, although little has been done to challenge inequitable intra-household distribution of food. At a theoretical level the right to food and food sovereignty approaches offer potential opportunities for strengthening the way food insecurity is understood and addressed. At the final analysis, food security policy through a critical gender equality lens, explores how the notions of food security, right to food and food sovereignty are being taken forward at the global, regional and national levels of policy thinking and implementation.

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