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## Editorial

### South Africa's Deepening Food Crisis

*Dr. Vishwas Satgar, Chairperson, COPAC Board*



Food is essential to the human condition and, given its importance, food politics has shaped world history in dramatic ways. It was central to the shift from nomadic to settled societies 10 000 years ago, in the making of plantation slavery, 'voyages of discovery' for spices in the East, in remaking an antagonistic relationship with nature through industrial farming and in influencing revolutions from the French, Russian and to the more recent Arab Spring. We imperil society if we ignore food crises and politics.

Are service delivery protests 'food riots' in essence? Is the recent spate of unjustifiable xenophobic attacks a reflection of desperation by the hungry? In a country with 14 million people going to bed hungry, with 45.6% of the population 'food insecure' and with a poor household spending 80% of its income on food, in a context of increasing food prices, hunger cannot be ignored in understanding these violent outbursts. The scale of hunger in South Africa makes us a dehumanized, deeply divided and conflict-prone society. It also exposes deep income inequalities and a cardinal failure of the mainly white controlled, export-led industrial food system. Yet these contradictions have been rendered non-antagonistic by our narratives of the 'rainbow nation', while hunger is certainly caused and is a precipitating factor of social conflict. Hunger may not be determining in every instance, but it certainly contributes. It has to be brought into our analyses of what's going on in the growing number of flash points engulfing our society.

The current drought devastating South Africa's maize production, while commonly understood as part of South Africa's routine drought cycle, can no longer be understood outside of climate change shifts taking place through global warming. Extreme weather occurrences, a result of climate change, are already manifesting on the African continent with massive flooding taking place across a number of countries in 2012, and displacing 6 million in Nigeria alone. With Africa very likely to experience the worst impacts of climate change, arid and semi-arid land is expected to increase in coming years from 5-8% and water stress is predicted to impact on 75-250 million people by 2020. In Southern Africa there is very likely to be a loss of vast amounts of arable land as climate scientists expect an increase of temperatures at twice the global rate. Basically, there is a correlation of extreme weather patterns and worsening farming output that has to be more seriously studied, as part of adapting South Africa's agricultural system to climate change. For many a techno-fix like genetically modified organisms (GMOs) will deal with climate change. In 2014, 86% of maize under cultivation was GMO, yet this did not stop the current drought from having devastating impacts. The science of industrial farming is about simplifying what are complex natural processes to control nature. At the same time, industrial agriculture is one of the largest consumers of South Africa's limited water supply. Climate change brings both complexity and resource challenges that globalized industrial agriculture will have difficulties



dealing with. Hence the imperative for a new ecological approach to agricultural production that is more easily adaptable and grounded in values to sustain life.

Most of us take the food on our plates for granted. While we stuff ourselves we don't consider that 1 in 3 children under the age of 5 are malnourished. We don't ask deeper questions about the nutritional value of the food we consume, who produced it and where it comes from. Yet the food most of us are consuming is directly related to many pathologies in our society from growing obesity and other food related illnesses such as sugar diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes and heart disease. This is a result of nutritionally deficient diets. Cheap food has been marketed as 'fast, good and glamorous'. For many in our society, with low incomes, this choice is out of necessity. This makes the poor in our society victims of 'food poisoning' by design. For instance the Wits School of Public Health has evidence that a chicken drumstick sold by a leading fast food retailer has twice the amount of salt and calories and 3 times the amount of fat than the same drumstick in the United States.

This past week a set of scenarios dealing with the future of the South African food system were launched at WITS, by the Southern African Food Lab. These scenarios confirm the existence of a broken food system and the need for new ways forward. While timely, these scenarios cannot avert a confrontation with South Africa's corporate-controlled food system. In the context of the unhinging political consensus that has shaped the transition to the post-apartheid order and the growing existential threat of climate change, the food crisis can potentially destroy South Africa or it can assist in redefining a new way forward. The food crisis married to authoritarian populist gestures like 'land grabs', called for by the EFF, will lead us head long into a race war. Moreover, it would not be any different from the ANC's government's failed land reform, which has raised expectations but has been thin on building sustainability.

An alternative approach to the food crisis is grounded in a transformative politics from below. This is being advanced at the grassroots in South Africa and is inspired by rising global movements championing food sovereignty. Food Sovereignty seeks to harness the potential of our democracy and is central in ensuring we create the conditions to survive climate change through a deep just transition. It is an alternative to the narrow notion of food security, which is inadequate to deal with the depth of the food crisis emanating from the corporate controlled food system and which makes greedy corporations the enablers of the right to food. With South Africa one of 20 countries in the

world with a justiciable right to food in its constitution, this requires the enactment of a Food Sovereignty Act to realize the transformative potential of the constitution. This is a crucial demand of the newly formed South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) and alliance.

At its recent founding meeting the SAFSC has committed to focus, this year, on increasing food prices and land as part of agrarian transformation. South Africa has been experiencing escalating food prices and food inflation. Between 2006-2008, and 2010-2012 this was a global trend leading to food riots in different parts of the world. Given the globalized nature of corporate agriculture, including in South Africa, food prices are driven by multiple causal factors according to many food analysts, including the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). They suggest speculation on US commodities markets, climate change and oil prices are amongst these factors. The recent decline in oil prices raised the expectation of a downward adjustment in food prices, particularly staples like bread, but this has not happened. Despite the sophistication of these analytical models they are still merely symptomatic in understanding food pricing challenges and assume a globalized market-driven approach to prices as unquestionable, despite the volatility and instability inducing consequences of such markets.

If we reduce the food price challenge to its essentials, it is about the greed of food corporations and the absence of a regulatory role for the state to protect our common societal interest. South Africa's escalating food price challenge can be curtailed if the state is brought back in to regulate food prices. The degree and mechanisms underpinning this intervention need to be debated in South Africa. At the same time, there are grassroots alternatives that are transparent and grounded in ethical values such as trust, transparency, environmental justice, democracy and community need. Buying cooperatives, community markets, cooperative bakeries and some farm stalls are all transformative alternatives dealing with pricing differently. These food sovereignty institutions have to be connected and replicated as part of the emerging solidarity economy in South Africa to ensure producers and consumers can control pricing.

Land in South Africa is imbued with various meanings but most salient is its place in history as a sign of dispossession of the majority. The frontier wars of dispossession, the infamous 1913 Land Act and subsequent laws are crucial markers in this painful history. The ANC state has failed dismally to address this historic injustice. From the standpoint of food

sovereignty, land is central to how we understand life, food and culture. Hence, a peoples tribunal on land reform to expose the shortcomings of the ANC state and people's land audits will be utilized to bring idle, unused and common spaces under cultivation through agro-ecology, a farming practice that places sustaining life and ecological systems at the center of farming practices. Communities, but mainly women, protecting indigenous varieties of edible plants, managing seed banks for generations and defending healthy food cultures from going extinct will be celebrated as part of advancing food sovereignty.

In short, the mainly white corporate controlled food system in South Africa, from farm to plate, is maintaining a food system for the few, is in many ways toxic and is also in crisis. Food sovereignty is another way forward for South Africa as a critique of globalised industrial agriculture, as a rights based discourse and as an ecological alternative. The transformative just transition to survive climate change and bring out the best of our humanity has begun in South Africa, from below.

***Dr. Vishwas Satgar is a Wits academic and an activist. He was recently elected to the national coordinating committee of the newly formed SAFSC, which is an alliance of over 50 grassroots organisations and networks.***



## National News

### Strengthening the SEM: Building Today To Claim the Future

#### Concept Document

#### Self Managed Network or Formalising the SEM through a Cooperative Fund?

##### Introduction

This document is informed by 8 years (since 2007) of experimenting with solidarity economy movement building, debates in the SEM on how to consolidate the SEM and concerns to ensure the SEM is financially self sustaining. In practice the SEM has been a network in formation. As a network it has brought together community grassroots forces and various movements. In this context it has also started to develop a tradition and practice of SEM Assemblies, strategic plans, activist schools, grassroots linking, social media communication and now campaigning. Based on practice and our common experience this document proposes as a first option for consideration, building on what we are becoming, that is a SEM but as a more self managed and values based network. This will entail joint resourcing, sharing responsibility for building, creative leveraging of funding, collective leadership, democratic decision-making and bottom up building but through a set of commonly agreed guidelines for the SEM to be a self managed network.

Since 2010 with the development of the solidarity economy activist guide the idea of a Solidarity Economy Fund has been at the center of our conversations. Recent attempts to pilot such a fund has proven to be difficult particularly as a loans based mechanism. Various laws, including the Credit Act, Cooperative banks act etc. all complicate such an approach. After researching this and realizing it wont work, COPAC in engagement with the SEM Convening Committee has opted to propose another way forward for the fund, as both fundraising instrument and source of capital, but also for SEM consolidation. In other words we treat the SEM Fund and SEM as part of one structure. This is a more elaborate proposal and assumes we are a more developed movement. It is a bit of a leap and may not be a realizable option in the short to medium term until we are more grounded and tightly networked as a movement.

In addition the document sets out a set of steps to ensure this process ensures grassroots input on the best option suitable at this phase of development of the SEM.

Finally the document ends with a set of questions to guide deliberation. Please use these questions to

engage with this document but also feel free to raise other issues.

*Note this document was deliberated on at the May and June SEM Convening Committee meetings.*

### Option 1: SEM as a Self Managed Network

Strengthening and consolidating the SEM as a Self Managed Network, is the preferred option of this document. In practice the SEM is a very loose network and all this proposal entails is tightening the network based on a set of agreed guidelines, which should be developed out of engagements with this concept document and adopted at the next SEM Assembly. The network will operate based on the objectives of the SEM, the values and principles of the SEM, core activities of the network, roles of component parts of the SEM, commitments from SEM forces to take forward its activities, joint responsibility to realize its agreed strategic priorities and clear guidelines on how funding should be organized for core activity of the SEM. In this sense the SEM is self managed and every component part makes a contribution in an open, solidarity driven and trust based relationship to build the SEM collectively. These conceptual elements are unpacked in this document:

- Objectives of the SEM;
- Values and principles;
- Core activities of the network;
- Roles of component parts of the SEM;
- Commitments of SEM forces;
- Joint responsibility to take forward strategic priorities;



## Objectives of the SEM

The SEM as a self-managed network will advance the following broad objectives:

- Support grassroots driven solidarity economy building processes that promote new patterns of production, financing, consumption and living in accordance with the values and principles of the solidarity economy.
- Tighten links of mutual support, learning and trust between component parts such as solidarity economy enterprises, community organisations, social movements, support organisations and individuals in the SEM;
- Enable sharing, pooling and leveraging of resources for SEM building through organizing, campaigns, research and political education.
- Deepen democratic practice, debate and coordination;
- Strengthen activist capacity through political education and capacity building;
- Harness social media to enable capacity building, vibrant internal communication and external engagements about the SEM;
- Guidelines for organizing funding.

## Values and principles

The SEM self managed network will advance and practice our values and principles. These values and principles will be adapted and institutionalized and will shape the internal life and external engagements of the SEM.



## The values of the SEM are:

The main ethical values of the cooperative are ***caring, sharing, self-reliance, honesty, democracy, equality, learning, environmental consciousness, social justice and openness.***

## The principles of the SEM are:

- **Solidarity:** provides the social basis for the solidarity economy. It informs the cooperation between members inside a solidarity economy enterprise, between such enterprises and with the community more broadly.
- **Collective ownership:** ensures the assets and resources of the solidarity economy enterprise brings benefits to all within the enterprise, to the community and future generations. It ensures control and power are shared.
- **Self-management:** gives members (women and men) and worker owners the rights to impact on decision-making. Such a principle ensures one-person-one-vote institutionalises accountability and responsibility. Ongoing education and training is crucial for viable self management.
- **Control of capital:** is a crucial practice to secure benefits for the individual enterprises, the wider solidarity economy and the community. It requires developing mechanisms to build up capital from below and subordinating it to democratic control so that the vision, values and principles of the solidarity economy informs lending practices. Such criteria will also inform the behaviour of the borrower or recipient.
- **Eco-centric practice:** places an emphasis on a non-destructive relationship with nature through inputs, production processes, services rendered, consumption and household practices.
- **Community benefit:** encourages a broader social awareness as an integral part of how the solidarity economy works. Such community benefit to be accounted for through transparent financial reporting.
- **Participatory democracy:** provides an institutional space for the decentralised power of citizens and solidarity economy actors for and with the solidarity economy process. Such an institutional space to bring together and unite such social forces to ensure effective coordination and development of the solidarity economy.

## Core activities of the network

The main activities of the SEM as a self managed network shall include the following:

- **Organizing the SEM** – through supporting movements, grassroots communities and other social forces interested in supporting the SEM. This will also include organizing related to worker cooperative building, solidarity economy education and communication cooperative building and assemblies;
- **Education and training** – will include research, developing education and training materials, establishing activist schools and managing all training resources.
- **Learning exchanges** – between grassroots sites and movements to build the solidarity economy.
- **Strategic Planning** – every three years the SEM shall adopt a strategy to advance its interests, guide its members and strengthen itself. Such a strategy to be developed through bottom up input and to be finalized at the annual SEM Assembly. In a strategic plan cycle SEM Assemblies will be used to assess progress annually, address problems and ensure effective implementation.
- **Campaigning** – all campaigns will be resourced, coordinated and organized. This will done in accordance with the SEM strategy
- **Communication** – all social media, cellphone contacts, newsletters and engagements with the media will be handled through the SEM. This will also be guided by the SEM strategy.

## Roles of component parts of the SEM

The SEM is made up of the following component parts and each has a specific role:

**Solidarity economy enterprises:** are cooperatives involved in the SEM. Such enterprises will lead SEM building processes in communities and through links with local community organisations and supporting movements. Their key role is to implement SEM values and practices inside their enterprises, build local solidarity economy networks, support SEM activities such as campaigns, political education, learning exchanges, assemblies, social media and provide financial support.

**Community organisations:** they will work with the SEM to support and initiate SE building processes in communities. They will also support solidarity economy enterprises, local solidarity economy

networks, support SEM activities such as campaigns, political education, learning exchanges, assemblies, social media and provide financial support.

**Social movements:** they will work with the SEM to support and initiate SE building processes in communities. They will also support solidarity economy enterprises, local solidarity economy networks, support SEM activities such as campaigns, political education, learning exchanges, assemblies, social media and provide financial support.

**Support organisations:** they will work with the SEM to support and initiate SE building processes in communities. They will also support solidarity economy enterprises, local solidarity economy networks, support SEM activities such as campaigns, political education, learning exchanges, assemblies, social media and provide financial support.

**Individuals/Volunteers:** will provide resources, skills and volunteer time to build the SEM in communities, through linking with SEM participating organisations and the network.

**Activist Schools:** will be convened annually and will focus on issues agreed to in the SEM Assembly and that are part of the SEM Strategy.

**Annual Festival and Assembly:** will be convened to celebrate SEM achievements and engage the public. It will serve both as a public platform and as closed space for the SEM. The closed assembly will provide an opportunity to assess SEM building progress at all levels of the network, problem solve, assess SEM strategy and renew strategic commitments. Every three years the Assembly will adopt a new strategy.

**National Convening Committee:** the SEM convening committee will be elected for a three year period to coordinate the implementation of the SEM strategy. It will receive its mandate from the SEM Assembly related to priority focus activities particularly: activist schools, the annual assembly, campaigns, learning exchanges, social media and public communication. The committee should be made up of two representatives from the following: SE enterprises, community organisations, social movements and support organisations. The committee will meet at least 4 times a year and will provide annual reports to the SEM Assembly. All representatives on the committee shall ensure their organisations contribute to financing their activities on the committees. Moreover, the committee shall be funded through decisions made at the annual SEM Assembly.

## Joint Commitments of SEM forces

There are four key commitments:

- Build the SEM from below: all component parts of the SEM have to play a role in initiating, supporting and building the SEM from below.
- Shape the development of SEM three year strategy, including campaigns: through the social media platform, written submission and verbal input into the SEM Assembly.
- Implement SEM strategy: including campaigns, social media, activist schools, learning exchanges, annual festival and assembly
- Funding and sharing resources: every component part of the SEM to come to the annual assembly and make financial and resource commitments on how they would contribute to: SEM CC (4 per year), campaigns, social media, activist schools, learning exchanges, annual festival and assembly

## Guidelines for organising funds and sharing resources

There are two sources of external funds:

- **Direct donor support:** the SEM approaches a donor that then pays directly for SEM network activities like the activist schools, annual assembly or social media platform like newsletters or learning exchanges. These commitments to be brought the annual SEM Assembly.
- **Indirect donor support:** a SEM component organisation raises donor support for its own activities for SE building and then uses this to support SEM network activities. These commitments to be brought to the annual SEM assembly.

There is one internal/external source of funding:

- **Rotating Annual Fund/SEM Stokvel:** this will be hosted by a prospective organisation if it is a registered organization, with an active board, has annual audits, involved in the SEM for more than 5 years, willing to provide monthly financial statements and willing to participate in the SEM CC to ensure oversight and control of the account. Such a rotating fund will be housed

by a SEM organization, with the approval of the Assembly, for one year, to invite public donations and internal contributions from SEM participating organisations and individuals. The amounts invited externally and internally will be determined by the SEM Assembly. For example all SE enterprises to contribute R300 a month or all individuals R100 a month. The organization and its dedicated bank account for the rotating fund would be presented to and approved by the SEM assembly subject to the criteria mentioned. All funds in this account will be used to advance the SEM strategy and its agreed activities for that year such as activist schools, learning exchanges, assembly, CC meetings etc. These funds will be monitored and controlled by the SEM CC. The hosting organization of the rotating fund will make payments out of the account under instruction of the SEM CC and will account for every payment made. At the end of the year financial statements and an audit report on the account to be presented to the SEM Assembly.

There is one internal source of funding:

- **Organisational financial contributions to events:** every SEM component and participating organization to make commitments to SEM building at the SEM Assembly either as lump sum, monthly contribution or activity support for the SEM from their own internal resources. This to be recorded in funding register for the year at the SEM Assembly and to be managed by the elected SEM CC. A report on these commitments in the register to be presented to the annual SEM Assembly before new commitments are made and recorded for the following year. Organisations not keeping to their commitments will be named and shamed.

## Resource register

Every organization to annually fill in the resource register at the SEM in which they commit to share physical, human and network resources. Such resources to include: cars, computers, office space, photocopiers, organisers (maybe 1 day a week for SEM building), volunteers, telephones, links to community organisations etc...these resources are then used by the SEM CC and the relevant organization to advance SEM building.



## Option 2: SEM Fund Cooperative

The document proposes as option 2, or the least best option under the circumstances, that the SEM be institutionalized as a cooperative with a Solidarity Economy Fund at the centre of its structure. The Fund will draw resources from internal SEM members and from outside donor sources. In essence the fund will have two parts: a SEM funding pool and a productive capital pool. This document sets out the conceptual elements of the SEM solidarity economy fund and for institutionalizing the SEM as a member based cooperative:

- **Objectives of the SEM Fund Cooperative;**
- **Values and Principles of the Cooperative;**
- **Name of the cooperative;**
- **Main activities;**
- **Membership Structure;**
- **Leadership and Composition of Board;**
- **Committee of Patrons;**
- **Decisionmaking and Policies**
- **Personnel**

### Objectives of the SEM Fund Cooperative:

The Solidarity Economy Fund Cooperative will have four main broad objectives:

- It will serve as the institutional basis for the solidarity economy movement such that all members of the movement will be members of the fund.
- Contribute to building resources for SEM building such as organizing, campaigns, research and education.
- Contribute to structural transformation such that new patterns of production, financing, consumption and living takes root in accordance with the values and principles of the solidarity economy.
- Control and subordination of capital to the needs of solidarity economy enterprises and their surrounding communities

It will do this by:

1. Providing for a SEM funding pool through external donor support and internal member contributions.
2. Providing productive capital to solidarity economy enterprises and actors through grants, as opposed to loans for consumption.

**Specifically:**

- To assist with building up assets in solidarity economy enterprises and actors;
- To provide working capital;
- To provide capital for expansion and the consolidation of solidarity economy enterprises.

### Values and Principles of the Cooperative

Same as above.

### Name of Cooperative

The Cooperative shall be registered as the Solidarity Economy Movement Cooperative under the 2005 Cooperatives Act. In the movement it shall be referred to as the 'SEM' or Solidarity Economy Movement.

### Main activities

The main activities of the SEM cooperative shall include the following:

- **Organizing the SEM** – through supporting movements, grassroots communities and other social forces interested in supporting the SEM. This will also include organizing related to worker cooperative building, solidarity economy education and communication cooperative building and assemblies;
- **Education and training** – will include research, developing education and training materials, establishing activist schools and managing all training resources.
- **Manage Membership** – all SEM membership will be managed through a database and properly controlled membership system.
- **Strategic Planning** – every three years the SEM shall adopt a strategy to advance its interests, guide its members and strengthen itself. Such a strategy to be developed through bottom up input and to be finalized at the annual SEM Assembly. In a strategic plan cycle SEM Assemblies will be used to assess progress, address problems and ensure effective implementation.
- **Campaigning** – all campaigns will be resourced, coordinated and organized. This will done in accordance with the SEM strategy
- **Communication** – all social media, cellphone contacts, newsletters and engagements with the media will be handled through the SEM. This will also be guided by the SEM strategy.
- **Managing the SE Fund** – the SE Fund will have two components, one for SEM funding pool and the other a productive capital pool, but its funding will be guided by the SEM strategy and annual business plan. Moreover, the Fund will be managed in accordance with SEM guidelines.

## Membership Structure

The structure shall comprise of 4 types of members, whose roles and responsibilities shall be set out in a membership policy and such policies to be subject to review by SEM Assemblies:

1. **Solidarity economy enterprises such as worker cooperatives and solidarity economy education and communication cooperatives;**
2. **Social movements;**
3. **Finance members that are individuals and who want to contribute monthly to the cooperative;**
4. **Worker owners who are employed by the cooperative.**

## Leadership and Composition of Board

The SEM will always be guided by leadership from below, from SE enterprises, sites and movements. It does not seek to have an institutionalized top down leadership approach. Its assemblies, activist schools and social media shall ensure constant input from below to drive things forward. Moreover, the three year strategic plan, agreed to at the SEM Assembly, the policies and the constitution of the SEM cooperative will guide any elected leadership. Such a leadership to be an accountable leadership and a collective leadership. The board of the SEM will be made up of the following, 50% of which have to be women:

- 4 representatives from SE enterprises;
- 4 representatives from the different movements in the SEM;
- 4 representatives from support organisations.
- Patrons shall sit in, when they can, with full rights.

The board shall be elected for three years and shall be responsible for:

- Implementing the 3 year strategic plan of the SEM with all forces in the SEM;
- Ensuring all worker owners take forward their responsibilities in accordance with policies and the strategic plan of the SEM;
- Communication with the public.
- The board shall ensure proper financial management and oversight with regard to the SE Fund.
- The board shall ensure an annual strategy report, movement report, financial report and audit report are placed before the annual SEM

Assemblies.

- In the years in which a new strategy has to be presented the board shall work with the grassroots to develop such and table it before the assembly.

## Committee of Patrons

Shall be made up of 6 persons with high profiles and who can assist the SEM advance its interests. Patrons shall have full rights to participate in any structure of the SEM. The patrons shall also provide a report to the annual SEM Assembly highlighting issues they think are important for SEM building, assessing strategy implementation and making recommendations.

Patrons shall be elected every 6 years.

## Decision-making and Policies

All SEM decision-making to be member driven. This means processes and mechanisms have to be utilized to ensure grassroots voices impact on:

- Membership policies;
- Worker owner policies;
- The SEM strategy (including campaigns, education etc) and evaluation;
- Annual Business plans;
- Reporting.

The annual assembly shall bring together SEM membership. A quorum formula, to be developed out of this engagement, for each membership category will ensure the Assembly can sit and formally make decisions.

## Personnel

There shall be 5 persons employed as worker owners in the SEM, subject to policies of the SEM and under the monitoring eye of the board:

- 2 national organisers/educators;
- 1 research officer and communication persons;
- 1 fund manager;
- 1 finance officer and membership officer.

**Critical Questions to be Asked:**

**Steps to finalise**

The following steps to be followed to finalize this document for the SEM Assembly in October 2015:

- Consultation and grassroots input from all sites and movements to finalise this document;
- Publish this document in SE news and all social media platforms of the SEM and invite comment;
- Grassroots input, SE news invited comment, activist school input and google group comment to be finalized by the end of July.
- Another draft to be put together based on the option supported by organisations.
- This document to be circulated for grassroots deliberation during August and September.
- All organisations to bring their final input for the SEM Assembly in mid October 2015.



**Feasibility Assessment**

The following questions to be asked after reading this document:

1. What are the gaps with each option?
2. What is not clear with each option?
3. What are the challenges with each option?
4. What could go wrong with each option?
5. What are the challenges and risks with each option?
6. Which option is most realistic to assist in strengthening and consolidating the SEM over the next three years?
7. Why do you say this?
8. What is your organization willing to do to advance a particular option that you choose collectively?



## Improving the livelihoods of poor female informal traders through the formation of women's co-operatives

*Ibrahim Steyn*

Street trade, small scale informal cross-border trade and home-based work (textile and garment production, and operating retail shops) are generally survival strategies of the poor and unemployed. In most African countries, like elsewhere, the poor and unemployed, who are gaining their livelihoods through various types of survivalist economic activities, receive very little support from government.

These activities are being undertaken predominantly by women. However, while women are dominating the informal trading sector, their earnings are generally lower than that of male informal traders. The share of poverty of female informal traders is thus higher than that of male informal traders. In this context, ESSET initiated a project on co-operatives in 2013, which was made possible by a generous grant from NORAD.

The goal of the project was to improve the livelihood potential of poor and unemployed women, who rely on informal trade for survival, through the promotion and formation of women's co-operatives.

The project was expected to achieve the following three results:

1. Female informal traders are empowered to promote and form women's co-operatives through information about the legal framework for informal trade, co-operative legislation and the registration process, and international examples of successful women's co-operatives.
2. Female informal traders have information about the Solidarity Economy, and they conduct their economic activities in accordance with its values, including self-management, participatory democracy, co-operation instead of competition, people over profits, social justice, protection of the environment, etc.
3. Female informal traders promote and form women's co-operatives.

A total of 180 female informal traders from South Africa (Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town), Lesotho, and Swaziland participated in the project. They included street traders, market traders and home-based workers.

The project participants were drawn from different informal trader organizations, including the Gauteng Informal Trader Development Alliance, the South African Self-Employed Women's Association, the Western Cape Informal Traders Coalition, the Coalition of Informal Economic Associations of Swaziland, and Khatang Tema Baitasukuli.

The project implementation process was divided into the following two phases:

- **Phase A:** Empowerment through information dissemination.
- The activities under this phase included five local legal literacy workshops, five local workshops on cooperatives, and a regional seminar on the Solidarity Economy.
- **Phase B:** The promotion and formation of women's co-operatives.

The activities under this phase included five local brainstorming meetings on the newly formed women's cooperatives, and a regional impact assessment meeting.



In terms of the methods used for implementing the project, an introduction meeting was held on the 6th of August 2013 to solicit inputs from the participants on the scope of the project and on the implementation process. Five local coordinators were identified to serve as conduits between ESSET and the project participants. Translators were used in order to ensure maximum participation in the project activities. An implementation plan was developed to ensure that all the project activities were organized efficiently and that the expected results were achieved. Finally, a questionnaire was developed to solicit opinions and comments on the outcomes, impact and activities of

the project from the project participants. It was also used to collect information from which the priorities for future support to the women's co-operatives were developed.

The project has created the conditions for improving the livelihoods of poor female informal traders in the mid-to-long-term. As one participant, Thakiera Kamaar, a young market trader in Cape Town, said:

*"I learned a lot and I still want to learn more and more, and I believe that this co-operative (the Zenande Agricultural and Multipurpose co-operative) is going to be a benefit, maybe not now, but in the near future. This co-operative has had a great impact on my life, and although it will take time for it to grow I know that it will all be worth it at the end."*

Overall, the project is situated in the idea of the solidarity economy. The participants drew inspiration from different solidarity-based economic practices, such as solidarity economy enterprises (co-operatives and other social enterprises), community banks, alternative currencies and microfinance, in Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina.

Moreover, the project participants gained valuable insights from the experiences of an agricultural worker co-operative and an education and communication co-operative that were formed with assistance from Co-operative and Policy Alternative Center (COPAC). Both of these co-operatives are operating in accordance with the values of the Solidarity Economy.

Given that co-operatives are generally dogged by sustainability problems, due in part to insufficient government support or over-dependence on government, undermining their poverty reduction potential, ESSET will be providing capacity-building support to the newly formed co-operatives and the business association in 2015.

ESSET's support to the cooperatives is aimed at building sustainability and self-reliance in the women's co-operatives and the women's business association.

## The key objectives are:

1.1 Members and leaders of the women's co-operatives that were formed and registered during the previous project are familiar with the legal framework for co-operatives, and, together with the women's business association, they are practicing internal democracy.

1.2 Members and leaders of the women's co-operatives and the women's business association that were formed and registered during the previous project are operating successful collective enterprises.

1.3 Members and leaders of the women's co-operatives that were formed and registered during the previous project and the women's business association are imbued with political consciousness of patriarchy and gender inequality, and they are operating their collective enterprises in accordance with the values of the Solidarity Economy.

To this end, the co-operatives and the business association will be inducted, and they will receive skills training in business planning, costing and pricing, marketing, financial management, livestock production and farming and soil testing. Moreover, their knowledge and understanding of the solidarity economy will be enhanced so that they will be able to operate their collective enterprises in accordance with its values.

***Ibrahim Steyn has been working with ESSET to support the process of establishing the women's cooperatives. He can be contacted at: [ibrahimstn@gmail.com](mailto:ibrahimstn@gmail.com).***

## **Draft Discussion Document: Towards a South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) and Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM) Perspective on the NUMSA-led United Front**

### **1. Introduction**

The SAFSC and the SEM have engaged in an open discussion with the NUMSA-led United Front (UF) leaders on their political perspectives, particularly, its adopted platform emanating from its preparatory meeting of December 2014. In addition, the UF and NUMSA have provided support and solidarity to the SAFSC campaign including its initiation assembly and active involvement in its Hunger Tribunal. NUMSA has also sent shop stewards to SEM activist schools and SEM activists have participated in the NUMSA Resistance Expo and its march against the youth wage subsidy in 2014. An important relationship has been developing through solidarity and mutual respect. However, with the looming UF launch it is important for both the SAFSC and SEM to consolidate its current perspective and approach to the NUMSA-led United Front.

Moreover, there are various discussion documents that have been released by the UF recently, rather late and which has not been circulated widely enough, but which requires serious engagement. This includes:

- *A draft platform document and constitution;*
- *The Freedom Charter: Rallying Cry of the United Front?*
- *To Be Socialist or Not?*
- *Problems, options and prospects for the United Front in the 2016 Municipal Elections*
- *Building a Popular Movement for Transformation from below – Towards A United Front Strategy and Program of Action*
- *United Front Program of Action*

This document seeks to achieve three things: (1) consolidate the discussions inside the SAFSC and SEM on the UF; (2) ensure the SAFSC and SEM perspective is informed by the debates and issues being raised in the UF documents (3) elaborate a set of positions, emerging from inside the SAFSC and SEM, to guide engagements with the current level of development of the UF and in the context of the current conditions prevailing. Such positions will be reviewed as conditions change and internal deliberation continues on the UF question.

To facilitate discussion and easy access to its perspectives this document is structured around key questions.

### **2. Key Questions**

#### **(1) What is the context in which the UF is emerging?**

The UF emerges in the context of the Marikana massacre of August 16, 2012. It is a response to ANC state violence against the working class and represents a rupture in the ANC-led national liberation bloc. Moreover, the UF is a peoples and working class response to the crisis of South African capitalism. Twenty years of pro-business, pro-globalisation and ultimately neoliberal policies have caused high and stubborn unemployment, hunger, inequality, poverty and environmental destruction including increasing carbon emissions that are causing climate change. The working class, the poor and landless workers are struggling to survive and are in need of transformative alternatives that change the system in their interests. Finally, the UF is emerging in the context of growing international struggle and a deepening cycle of resistance from below which includes the more recent Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and the rise of left governments in Latin America and parts of Western Europe. Moreover, South Africa's struggles are also being renewed particularly since 2007 with increasing protest activity and the emergence of movements championing transformative systemic alternatives such as food sovereignty, solidarity economy, transformative constitutionalism, diversity in the media and access to information, equality in the education system, democratic rights in rural areas, socially owned renewables and energy sovereignty, climate jobs and so on.

#### **(2) Why is the UF important for class and popular struggles and what can it offer our struggles?**

Emerging out of NUMSA the UF represents the first serious attempt by workers to build an alternative mass politics outside the ANC-led Alliance, in post-apartheid South Africa. Such a politics is extremely important to achieve the following:

- The **unity** of popular and working class struggles against the capitalist system and the neoliberal class project. It affords us the opportunity for mass power to emerge to build autonomous and collective capacities;
- Enable popular and working class forces to **regain**



**lost ground** to advance strategic solutions to address the legacies of apartheid capitalism and advance transformative systemic alternatives from below to address the current crisis of a globalized capitalist South Africa. It provides an opportunity to open up a new way forward from a South Africa that does not work for the majority.

- More specifically for the SAFSC and the SEM it ensures we can build **powerful allies in working class led civil society** to confront the powerful class and social forces that uphold the broken and destructive food system, as well as, an economy that benefits the few. By ourselves we will not advance our struggle but also without our autonomy we will not own the solutions we want to advance. Together with the UF we can do much more.

### (3) What has the UF achieved over the past 6 months since its preparatory meeting?

The UF is young, it is only six months in the making and has a long way to go. However, its important for us to observe what it has done so far based on reading its documents. In brief:

- It has actively sort to encourage **convergences** amongst left groups, grassroots community protests and to a limited extent anti-systemic movements;
- Its Resistance Expo, International Conference and Preparatory Meeting have all drawn interest and have served as a **'pole of attraction'** for progressive, left and anti-capitalist forces.
- Its campaigning against the Youth Wage subsidy and for participatory peoples budgeting has been important. It has also provided **solidarity** to various struggles. It still in a process of learning how to extend solidarity and learn from solidarity.
- It has started experimenting with and building **local UF structures** and is attempting to use this process to bring together workers and communities.

### (4) What are the challenges facing the UF and how should we approach these challenges?

While embracing the importance and achievements of the UF, it is also important to be critical and honest about how it is evolving and the dangers and threats it poses to a collective and autonomous mass driven politics. These are some of the issues we have to openly talk about and in a manner that does not divide:

- **Top down** – the UF is being built top down and hence this also creates its own problems, in

particular, it is starting to display a tendency to define the role of mass forces. This is evident in various documents that attempt to define the role of movements, including the document calling for a 'popular movement', and in some of its practice. Instead the UF has to also be open to negotiating its role with potential allies and with grassroots driven forces. Its draft constitution fails to accept as a principle the need for grassroots, people and member- driven struggle.

- **Unshackling from NUMSA** – has been something proclaimed by the UF itself. However, this is an issue that needs to be unpacked. For some 'unshackling means' NUMSA is displaced and hence the UF can now be led and taken over. For others, it merely means rhetoric but still tight control and skewing of mass forces. We need to be clear that the UF is a product of the working class and must be led by the working class and through collective leadership. This has to be affirmed in the constitution and through a practice that expresses this principle. All converging forces in the UF and alongside the UF, either linked to the working class, poor, landless and progressive sections of the middle class or expressive of it, have something to offer and provide in terms of leadership and playing a role in a democratically agreed division of labour to advance the struggle. Moreover, all forces committed to building a renewed mass politics in South Africa must mobilise and provide resources from their constituencies and political bases.

- **Vanguardism** – some elements in NUMSA are married to a conception of politics that is about an ideologically pure group leading mass forces and society, this is not all of NUMSA, which is a worker controlled union; they call themselves Marxist-Leninists or Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyists. Their politics failed in the twentieth century and produced tyrannical regimes, more oppression, 'big men politics' and betrayals of the working class. South Africa with its vanguard ANC and SACP are good examples, including Soviet, Chinese and other communist parties that emerged in Africa. The working class in South Africa fought for democracy; more democracy not less. Moreover, vanguards believe they have all the answers, a monopoly on the truth and the solutions for society. This has proven to be false and moreover today with various social movements championing transformative systemic alternatives from below, vanguardism is irrelevant. In the world today no vanguard party or political organization has the monopoly on how we should struggle and what the answers are for transformation. While at the same time various movements and campaigns

like SAFSC and SEM have answers such as food sovereignty, the commons, solidarity economy, worker cooperatives and the just transition to take us beyond the systemic crises of capitalism and which are being developed out of struggle. We are not vanguards but expressions of popular and working class resistance.

- **Ensuring the unity of NUMSA** – Related to this issue is the need to ensure that NUMSA remains united and the entire process of left and mass realignment around the NUMSA moment is grounded in a respect for plurality, a respect for the ideas and contributions of various social forces and a commitment to democratically defining a common way forward led by the working class. The SEM and SAFSC, whether inside or alongside the UF, has to consistently maintain the need for political differences to be approached and managed in a way that does not divide or undermine this convergence. This also means in genuinely democratic engagement minority views must be respected and listened to but also must be subordinate to the majority, however, this does not mean the minority is the enemy. The minority must be allowed to constructively engage even when the collective moves forward in unity of action and purpose. However, those who actively seek to use their positions to build factions and divide should not be permitted to do so. This is why guidelines suggested in the draft constitution for how tendencies operate is important.
- **Guided by an international perspective of left realignment and resistance** – while the UF and NUMSA moment are an expression of the global cycle of resistance, the level of discussion on international experiences, the global and Africa wide balance of forces and the new social movement left are not seriously engaged with. There is no discussion paper in the UF process that deals with these issues. The UF has to appreciate how social movements in South Africa are also shaped by global left and anti-capitalist politics and how this is translated in the South African context. While the SEM and SAFSC are reaching out to La Via Campesina, MST in Brazil, farmer movements in Africa, worker cooperative movements and solidarity economy experiences in other parts of the world, many of which participate in the World Social Forum, it would be important to ensure the UF is alive to these experiences. From this standpoint it might be important for the SEM and SAFSC to call on the UF to consider jointly hosting the World Social Forum in South Africa to assist with shifting the balance of forces and ensuring the transnational social movement left also learn from our experiences. This could be

a joint project, whether we are inside or alongside, the UF. Moreover, it should be jointly considered to initiate a Africa Resistance Forum made of movements and campaigns like the Africa Food Sovereignty Alliance, communities fighting against mining, African climate justice forces and so on.

- **Ending the fragmentation of COSATU and organized labour** – none of the UF documents has a serious perspective on this question. COSATU has been a powerful bulwark against the neoliberal capitalist onslaught in South Africa and a democratizing force. The crises of COSATU and its increasing destruction by ANC aligned forces is a major setback. There are various possibilities for the way forward for the left and progressive forces in COSATU. An engagement led by the 9 plus unions, including NUMSA, with the UF and those converging in this process around the challenges faced by labour is crucial. This is a time for solidarity and support to rebuild an independent labour movement.

#### **(5) What principles, objectives and democratic mechanisms should the UF uphold?**

The draft constitution put out by the UF is an important document and needs to be seriously engaged with, even if the SAFSC and SEM decide to remain alongside the UF in this period. The draft constitution needs to be strengthened by taking on board the following suggestions.

5.1 On principles the UF constitution needs to take on board:

- **Working class and collective leadership** – the constitution needs to specify that the UF will seek to advance working class leadership in and outside the UF, while ensuring that such leadership is practiced in a collective manner and does not centre on individuals. This does not take away from the role of individual leaders but affirms the need for each leader to appreciate they are defined by, informed by and part of the collective.
- **Ecological justice** – needs to be specified in the constitution to address the deepening ecological crisis, including the climate crisis, we are facing in South Africa and the world. In this regard the constitution needs to specify that the UF stands for ecological or environmental justice to ensure we struggle to end the destruction capitalism is unleashing on our natural environment through endless production, commodification of food systems, mass consumerism, extractivism and pollution. All of this having negative and deeper impacts on the lives of workers, the poor and the



landless. A stand for ecological justice affirms the need for a just transition and a politics committed to sustaining human and non-human forms of life.

- **Grass-roots, people and member driven struggle** – to address the concerns raised earlier about some of the weaknesses of the UF as it is being built it is important to affirm in the constitution a commitment to grass-roots, people and member driven struggle. Such a provision should state clearly the UF is not about substituting or taking over the struggle of grassroots forces but is committed to building solidarity, capacity and scale with grassroots, people and member driven struggles. At the same time the UF and its leadership is committed to listening, learning and being part of such bottom up struggles to advance transformation.

## 5.2 On the objectives:

The constitution needs to specify a commitment to not just build an anti-capitalist but also a **transformative movement**.

It needs to commit to **developing a program democratically** through bottom up input and which will also embrace the struggle for ecological justice as well as feminism.

It needs to commit to **defending and deepening all forms of democracy** to ensure the invisible, the voiceless and the marginal shape the future of South African society and the world.

## 5.3 Participatory mechanisms for program development and campaigns

There should be a clear commitment in the constitution to **provide for a program and campaigns commission as a permanent mechanism of the UF** to receive submissions from grassroots forces and movement, inside and outside the UF, on its program. Such a commission to ensure deep and thoroughgoing debate on proposals put forward to the proposed commission. In this regard the commission must utilize social media platforms and other technologies to gauge support for proposals and ideas, both in the UF and outside. For example online voting, referenda, cellphone voting etc can be used to create a buzz in society and shift conversations. All recommendations of the commission to be decided on by the national conference. Moreover, all levels of the UF should be empowered to establish participatory mechanisms to deepen the connection the UF has with grassroots forces. Such a provision should be enshrined in the constitution.

## (6) How should the SEM relate to the UF?

While the UF is moving in a direction to formalize relationships through a constitution it is still **early for both the SAFSC and SEM to join as formal members**. There is still a need for greater deliberation and clarification inside the SAFSC and SEM on whether membership is the way forward. Also the UF has to further define itself. The SEM and SAFSC will play a role in this process by continuing to engage the UF and build a relationship of mutual solidarity and trust. This means we will not abstain from engaging the UF process nor passively tie ourselves to it. We will seek to shape it as much it seeks to influence us in mutually beneficial ways.

Moreover, organisations and individuals involved in the SAFSC and SEM should also feel free to make up their own minds on affiliating as members to the UF.

Moreover, recognizing that the UF cannot fight the struggle on every front and it should not be a centralizing force, it is important for the SAFSC and SEM to engage the UF to secure its support for the Food Sovereignty Campaign and the Worker Cooperative Campaign of the SEM. This is already evolving in practice but should be a proposal we take to the UF launch. **This would mean that the SAFSC and SEM leads on its campaigns but the UF supports and builds solidarity**. This should be located within the overall 'South Africa We Want Campaign' of the UF.

## (7) How do we defend the independence of the SAFSC and SEM in our relationship with the UF?

However, in practice whether the SAFSC and SEM are members of the UF, there will be an overlap in membership. Whoever is in the UF from the SAFSC and SEM has to respect the internal democratic processes and decision-making inside the SEM and SAFSC, as well as, the UF. We are back to wearing several hats! This means the following is crucial:

- We openly and democratically engage the UF to ensure the constitutional recommendations being put forward are enshrined in the UF constitution including the **principle of grass-roots, people and member driven struggle**;
- We must **reject any form of 'vanguardism'** inside or outside the UF, which means we will not be told how to fight and what to fight for by a self appointed elite and in a top down manner. The UF or any other organization will have to engage, listen and learn from the various transformative movements emerging, such as the SAFSC and



SEM, about how these movements advance their interests and struggles. We will also constantly build a solidarity in which there is respect for each others independence while we might share common commitments;

- Advance our movement and campaign agendas **independently** through internal processes but in solidarity;
- Whether the SEM and SAFSC affiliate or exists alongside the UF clear and **proper mandates** must be given to those representing us in these engagements and proper reportbacks must be provided as part of refreshing mandates. No representative from the SEM and SAFSC can make decisions on our behalf in or with the UF unless the leadership collective is consulted and a mandate is given for such a decision;
- At all times there has to be **respect for the independence** and internal democratic processes of the SAFSC and SEM but also for the UF.

**(8) what is our position on the UF, an independent trade union movement, and the idea of the political party? Are these the same thing or merely parts of the 'movement for socialism'?**

The most important and creative idea to emerge from the NUMSA 2013 conference is the idea of a **'movement for socialism'**. Its an idea that promises a mass driven, bottom up and social movement centred approach rather than a vanguardist one. It suggests every left and progressive social force has something to offer the struggle for socialism. For us championing food sovereignty, solidarity economy, worker cooperatives, the commons, multiple forms of democracy, the just transition, for example, makes this idea consistent with our politics.

However, it is crucial to **elaborate the 'movement for socialism' idea in the South African context and under current conditions**. For us at minimum it should mean three things: First, that there is no blue print for socialism or historical model we just have to follow. Instead the movement for socialism suggests we have to learn critical lessons from the past failed attempts at socialism (Soviet, social democratic and revolutionary nationalist), learn from the present movements in South Africa championing systemic transformative alternatives and internationally and elaborate socialist solutions to the systemic crises of capitalism. **It means we have to evolve our conception of socialism in the 21st century through collective deliberation, debate and learning**. This will take time. Hence the movement for socialism means we are in process, clarifying and raising consciousness about our socialism

as we struggle. This is why the UF has to have a participatory mechanism dedicated to thorough going democratic deliberation on the program and campaigns. Second, the movement for socialism has to mean different forms of transformative resistance and agency from below and in contestation with the state, in order to reclaim the state for the people. It has to be about **reclaiming sovereignty and transforming the state**, not just through electoral contestation, but primarily through deepening, inventing and strengthening democracy from below. Building food sovereignty in our communities and the solidarity economy achieves such and moves in this direction. Third, the **institutional basis of the movement for socialism is evolving** and should be about 4 potential elements:

*(i) the UF as a grass-roots, people and member driven force for transformative change from below;*

*(ii) an independent and worker controlled trade union movement;*

*(iii) a 'left party' that will contest elections and;*

*(iv) international solidarity platforms such as an Africa resistance forum.*

It is important that the UF does not collapse and centralize everything into one, either for opportunistic or expedient reasons like contesting elections. If it does it will merely become another electoralist force that would undermine social movements and end up being coopted by capital in the globalized state.

Moreover, all these elements and their roles have to be debated and evolved in practice such that there is a **democratic division of labour** in the movement for socialism. More importantly, it has to be the movement for socialism as a whole that leads all components, particularly a political party, if it were to emerge as an element of the movement for socialism. We cannot make the mistake of the ANC-led Alliance in which the party led the movement!

**(9) Should the UF be socialist or should it have a broad mass appeal guided by general principles and such that it includes socialists and non-socialists? Should the UF adopt the Freedom Charter?**

If our starting point is grass-roots, people and member driven struggles and a 'movement for socialism' perspective then the **UF does not have to be socialist**. Instead the movement for socialism is the whole, made up of the various institutional

parts that are evolving in the NUMSA moment and convergence taking place. Thus the UF has to see itself as a crucial component part of the movement for socialism but have a broad mass and programmatic appeal, while being led by the working class. As part of the 'movement for socialism' the UF would be evolving, learning and be shaped from below towards a conception of South African socialism, suitable to our times and conditions. It does not have to declare itself socialist and by implication assert that it has a ready made socialism. This would be a disastrous short cut and will narrow the mass appeal of the UF.

This also means the **Freedom Charter is important as a programmatic starting point** for the UF for various reasons: affirming non-racialism, non-sexism, people's power and the need for state intervention to meet the needs of the people. However, at the same time the Freedom Charter is wholly inadequate to address the current crises and contradictions of globalizing capitalism. **This means the programmatic orientation of the UF has to be open to evolution and development through struggle.** This again affirms the need for a formalized committee in the UF to focus on the political program and campaigns of the UF on a consistent basis and to receive submissions, perspectives and ideas through a democratic process and practice that stimulates debate and constructs an imagination for a new and transformed South Africa. Over time the programmatic orientation of the UF should be open such that it can evolve beyond the Freedom Charter. The document on socialism put forward by the UF is far from this perspective. It assumes small left groups have the monopoly of what socialism means and by implication this is the way forward for the UF. It is vanguardist and a deeply problematic document that does not appreciate the impulses from below that are emerging to define transformative systemic alternatives to capitalism such as food sovereignty and the solidarity economy.

***(10) What is our position on the question of elections in South Africa: do we participate or not? What would we want from organisations standing for elections, whoever that is? Should the UF stand for elections or should it merely support organisations standing for elections?***

The SAFSC and SEM are not about elections. However, as a campaign and movement it is important for us to evolve a strategic perspective on this question so that we can influence the UF and others considering contesting local government elections in 2016.

While the disaffection from the ANC and crisis of

local government does require an electoral challenge from below and the left, this is a question that has to be thought through carefully so that the UF does not make a strategic mistake that could undermine its future and neither should the SAFSC and SEM be undermined. Consistent with the struggles from below and 'movement for socialism perspective' advanced in this document it is crucial the **UF does not be opportunistic or expedient about the elections issue.** While its document on local government elections seeks to pose questions and learn lessons from various left experiences, the UF is coming under pressure to either stand for elections or support grassroots community organisations wanting to contest the elections. In this context it is crucial to appreciate the historical task for the UF right now which is to shift the balance of forces by amassing allies and mass forces through grassroots struggles, building capacities, solidarities and evolving a democratic programmatic orientation.

Thus its support for electoral forces should be guided by the following:

- The need to democratize local government and deepen political accountability;
- Advance transformative and grassroots alternatives to transform the local state and communities.
- Strengthen the worker and community alliance as part of the movement for socialism.

From this standpoint the UF should willingly establish local platforms to achieve these goals and build alliances, with forces wanting to contest elections and willing to submit to conditions of such platforms. This would open space for campaigns like the SAFSC, SEM and others to come forward to endorse community elected candidates on these platforms provided they support food sovereignty, solidarity economy, participatory budgeting, worker cooperatives and other systemic transformative alternatives we are championing. This means the UF will not be contesting elections directly and neither will the SAFSC and SEM also. But instead the UF-SAFSC-SEM will be creating the conditions to strengthen grassroots contestations of ANC and opposition controlled local governments to open space for our transformative alternatives to come to the fore. This also poses the challenge of developing a 'left party' to contest elections as part of the movement for socialism. This is a question that has to be answered out of practice and through further debate.

## Conclusion

This document has evolved out of deliberations in the SAFSC and the SEM with the UF process. It seeks to consolidate a SAFSC and SEM perspectives on the key questions facing the UF relationship with the SAFSC and SEM. This is not the final word on the matter but a guide to deliberation inside the SAFSC and SEM and in our engagements with the UF. Such perspectives are also guided by the positions emerging from inside the UF and which are also up for debate.





## International News

### Global Survey Shows Rising Women's Participation in Cooperatives



An online survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Cooperative Alliance shows 75% of survey respondents feel that women's participation in cooperatives has increased over the past 20 years.

Key findings indicate that cooperatives are having an increasingly positive impact on women – 80 per cent of survey respondents felt that cooperatives are better than other types of private or public sector business in advancing gender equality.

*“Cooperatives have a history of contributing to equality as well as to economic and social empowerment,” said Simel Esim, Chief of the ILO Cooperatives Unit (COOP). “Considering that 2015 marks 20 years since the adoption of the United Nations’ Beijing Declaration on gender equality and women’s empowerment, these survey results reflect a positive trend for women’s involvement and advancement through the cooperative movement,” she added.*

The poll of nearly 600 respondents included cooperative practitioners, civil society organizations, academics, and government workers. Fifty per cent of respondents were from Europe and 15 % from both Asia and North America, respectively. The remaining respondents were from sub-Saharan Africa, South and Central America, and the Middle East and North Africa.

#### **Culture and legal framework are most significant barriers**

According to survey respondents, cultural issues are the most significant barrier to gender equality encountered by cooperatives. This was overwhelmingly

felt by 65 per cent of survey respondents.

Survey respondents also said further support of civil society and recognition by the state would continue to boost women's empowerment and gender equality through cooperatives.

The poll results show that access to employment is being indirectly facilitated by cooperatives in fields such as housing, healthcare, childcare, and eldercare, which provide women with affordable and accessible services that enable them to work.

#### **Women's opportunity to participate in governance highly important**

About two thirds of survey respondents felt that women's opportunity to participate in governance and management is a highly important feature of cooperatives. While 50 % of respondents felt that member education and training were vital for cooperatives, about the same number indicated that in the co-operatives they were most familiar with, there are never training sessions relevant to women's empowerment and gender equality.

Data gathered from the respondents revealed there seemed to be growing attention to gender issues, movement of women into leadership roles, and the increasing development of women owned cooperatives.

In Europe and North America this was noted to be the case within the financial and social co-operatives specifically, while progress in the agricultural sector was particularly observed within Africa, Latin America, and India.

Regarding the survey findings, president of the International Cooperative Alliance, Dame Pauline Green said, “The Alliance and ILO joint survey highlights the unique effectiveness of the cooperative model in providing women with a dignified way out of poverty, often away from violence and abuse. I am also thrilled with the survey's indicators towards a high number of women in leadership positions, particularly in our finance and insurance cooperatives,” she added.

#### **Article Source:**

<http://www.cicopa.coop/Global-survey-shows-rising-women-s.html>

# The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC)

## Verdict: People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Land



### Introduction

In the context of South Africa's deepening food crisis, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign hosted a three-day People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Landlessness at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. The Tribunal received testimony from 21 grassroots voices (women and men small scale farmers, cooperatives, mining affected communities, trade unions, waste pickers, retrenched workers, the unemployed, students, youth), from different parts of the country, and ten food and land experts including researchers, academics and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The Tribunal sought to confront the denialism, indifference and disregard for the food crisis in South Africa. Through this platform we confronted the brutal realities of hunger and affirmed the dignity, power and moral force of the hungry and landless in our country. This we believe is a turning point for food politics and agrarian transformation in South Africa: hunger challenges our humanity and therefore we are all the hungry, we are all the landless until we resolve the food crisis!

'Hunger' in our society is experienced differently and named differently. According to the hungry bearing testimony it exists as:

- 'genocide of the mind';
- 'the middle name of South Africa';
- 'the thief of our dignity';

- 'an empty stomach';
- 'what the politicians refuse to see';
- 'food crisis because of neoliberal policies';
- 'a special smell and is cruel in the household'.

### Verdict on food corporations

South Africa's food system is highly concentrated and controlled by powerful food corporations. For instance, 20% of commercial farms account for over 80% of food produced and four big retailers sell 55% of our food.

Based on testimony, we declare food corporations guilty of perpetuating hunger, a crime against humanity, through:

- **Contributing to income inequality in South Africa:** Income inequality is a cause of hunger for which food corporations and capitalism in general is responsible. Many working class and poor households spend up to 80% of their income on food, and food prices are increasing. On average male farm workers earn R667 per month and females R458 per month. The median wage rate in South Africa is R3033, well below the ILO's minimum living wage of R4500. Half of NUMSA workers earn less than or R4850 per month. Poverty wages mean no food choice and a struggle to survive as living costs increase, such as electricity and transport.



- **Treating food as a commodity:** Commodified food is inaccessible and unaffordable for the millions of unemployed in South Africa. Healthy food is completely out of reach if it has to be bought from food corporations. Moreover, retrenchments and job losses have constrained household incomes making it impossible to buy food, and hence hunger stalks many families.
- **Profiteering from food:** Staple food prices such as wheat and maize have been pushed up by corporations. In retail, market power is used by four corporations to keep prices high. In general staple food prices increased by 50% between 2013 and 2014. A basic food plate increased by 12.4% between 2013 and 2014. On average there has been a 6.5 % increase in food prices annually.
- **Price fixing:** Bread is a staple for most South Africans. SASKO bread made R825 million profit in 2013 alone. Price fixing is rife to make more profit from staples. Price fixes, such as the big four bread producers, were caught in 2007/2008, but they have been doing this for years. Bread prices have not come down despite oil prices coming down.
- **Using waste to make profits:** One-third of food is wasted across the food value chain. This amounts to 9 million tons. In addition, 30% of agricultural produce goes to waste. Instead of feeding human beings corporations condemn them by dumping 'wasted' food. This ensures profit rates are managed as supply is controlled through 'waste'.
- **Using crisis to make profits:** A globalised food system, under corporate control, will be susceptible to shocks from climate change, biofuels production, speculation and oil prices. Corporations have and will use such shocks to increase prices making food expensive and increasing hunger.
- **Passing on suffering to women:** More women go hungry than men in South Africa. Women are carrying the burden of feeding their families such that they are skipping meals, eating expired food, borrowing from loan sharks and sacrificing their food portion to feed the family in poor households. Women and workers earning poverty wages eat unhealthy food because there is no choice and this imposes sickness. All of this brings intense desperation, trauma and health problems into hungry families.
- **Stealing the future of our children:** There is a high prevalence of stunted growth and malnutrition amongst children in poor households (nearly 1 in every 3 young children under the age of five is physically and mentally stunted and underweight). Children are not given nutritious food and cannot learn in schools. Children steal food out of desperation, sometimes ending up in jail; they stop schooling and skip critical medication due to a lack of food. The corporate-controlled food system is stealing their future.
- **Controlling seeds and farming resources:** Seeds and genetic resources are now commodities for profit making. This makes the price of seeds and farming inputs very expensive for small scale farmers, communities and households.
- **Using the media:** Billions of Rands are spent on marketing fast food and industrial food diets. The media is hired by food corporations to ensure these foods are mainstreamed. At the same time, fast food is killing our food cultures, increasing obesity and destroying genuine social relationships.
- **Expanding into our communities:** Retail chains and shopping malls are expanding into our communities to promote unhealthy and expensive food. These businesses extract wealth from communities such that local resources are not circulating for development, employment creation and community building.
- **Commodifying food at universities:** Many students at universities are hungry, which constrains their ability to study and improve academic performance. Dining halls throw away food and students do not receive their loan funding on time, which contributes to hunger.





## We demand from corporations:

- An end to fat cat salaries of food corporation managers and a living wage for all workers in the food system.
- An end to profiteering from food, including price fixing of staples.
- A halt to the invasion and conquest by 'supermarkets' of our communities.
- We demand universities put in place feeding schemes for poor students.
- End profiteering from seeds and farming inputs required by small scale farmers.
- Greater responsibility from the commercial media for their role in promoting unhealthy fast food and industrial food diets.

## Verdict on the State

Based on testimony we declare the state responsible and complicit in perpetuating hunger, a crime against humanity, through the following actions:

- **Neoliberal economic policies:** The economic policies of the ANC state have increased inequality between the rich and poor, which has expressed itself in race, gender and class terms. Together with the lack of basic services like water, health, housing and electricity, the struggle for food is a serious survival challenge for many.
- **Undermining water resources:** Water is essential for food production yet the state is compromising our water resources through promoting mining, mismanaging water resources and only ensuring a rich minority benefit from water.
- **Promoting and supporting mining:** Mining is leading to dispossession, another version of the 1913 experience. Mining companies are grabbing fertile land and water resources such that communities lose land for livestock grazing and cultivation. Mining is also poisoning land, water and polluting the air around communities. Some of the most fertile land in the country, in Mpumalanga, is threatened by mining. Government policies and corruption is feeding into this new dispossession.
- **Lacking a commitment to adapt and mitigate our food system to climate change and shocks:** Despite the state developing long-term mitigation scenarios it is not doing enough to deal with the future impacts of serious droughts expected in the south and west, as well as extreme rainfall in the east. It is allowing industrial agriculture to continue deepening ecological crises including climate change.
- **Promoting export-led agriculture:** Allowing export of food while 14 million South Africans go to be bed hungry and while food locally is not affordable. At the same time, the poor have to contend with monotonous and unhealthy diets, while grants are not substantial enough to deal with increasing living costs including higher food prices.
- **Failing land and food policies:** Only 7% of land has been transferred under the land reform program since 1994. The support for small scale farmers is inadequate while support programs impose GMO seeds and chemical fertilisers. The state is ignorant about the value and importance of agro-ecology for small scale farmers and it does not give farmers a choice to advance agro-ecology. In addition, corruption is widespread in land reform and fishing programs. Fishers in this country are not recognized and their interests are ignored. Food garden programs are also inadequately resourced, including community works programs such that there is insufficient support for cooperatives grown out of these programs. There is no sustainable support in communities for hungry households and children (1 in 10 children are hungry in some communities), while nobody is being held responsible for fetal alcohol syndrome. There is also no common nutrition standard. Instead the state has fragmented, piecemeal and ineffective food policies currently numbering 17 policies, despite the fact that 46% of the population is food insecure.
- **Promoting Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) seeds and crops:** GMO seeds and the deadly chemicals they require are expensive. Only the rich can choose not to eat GMO maize. Almost all maize crops are GMO in South Africa. GMO maize which is a staple makes us the only country in the world that is eating these crops without informing consumers and citizens. This takes away food choice and is a serious threat to the health of the people and this will increase health costs. At the same time, there is no recognition of cheaper and safer alternatives from grassroots communities such as agro-ecological seedbanks and no attempt to listen to the hungry.
- **Failing top down farming and cooperative development:** Over 100 000 cooperatives exist in South Africa but with an extremely high failure rate despite the over one billion rand that has been spent over the past few years. Many farming cooperatives are not receiving adequate

cooperative education, farming training and finance. Local governments are corrupt and unresponsive to the needs of small scale farmers, cooperatives and household food producers.

## **We demand from the state:**

- Support for water harvesting, quality access to services (water infrastructure and supply) and water use rights for food production;
- Provision of support for local community markets and production based on food sovereignty.
- An end to state imposed chemical and GMO seeds on small scale farmers.
- A Food Sovereignty Act to ensure we affirm the right to food, diversify the food system, promote agro-ecology and the solidarity economy.
- Jail sentences for food corporation executives that collude on price fixing and we want 'food profiteering' to be declared a crime under South African law.
- A national nutrition standard and investigation into the nutrition content of food. In schools we demand a higher protein content in school feeding schemes to end stunting.
- Food waste in the corporate controlled food system be monitored and exposed.
- An end to the alliance with capital including ending land dispossession through mining, GMO promotion, unsustainable export agriculture, fracking and the ocean grab.
- Land must be given immediately to the people for agroecological production.
- Food aid has to be introduced for children and poor households linked to promoting food sovereignty in communities and households.
- Full disclosure on the science of GMOs and an immediate ban based on the precautionary principle.
- Recognition of waste pickers and the role they play in limiting the waste of resources in our society.
- Support and respect for street traders.
- A commitment from government to address the needs and interests of fishers and to restrict the monopoly power of corporations in the fishing industry.
- An end to corruption in land reform and greater responsiveness from the state to the needs of small scale farmers for extension support, for organic seeds and inputs, agroecological training for farmers and cooperatives and financial support.

As the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign we declare on the way forward:

We will continue the hunger tribunal process as a mobilizing tool of the hungry and landless. It will serve as a platform for raising popular awareness and educating citizens about the food crisis and food sovereignty alternatives.

We will affirm our own voice and power as we struggle against those responsible to be accountable.

We will consider boycotts of retailers who profit from essential foods, GMO products and media, including newspapers like Sunday Times, who are indifferent to the cause of the hungry and landless.

We will continue to advance food sovereignty as an alternative to the corporate-centered notion of food security and as a means to diversify the South African food system.

We will struggle against trade and industrial policies that perpetuate the globalised food regime.

We will continue to deepen and build alliances to advance the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign including linking informal traders with small scale farmers and cooperatives as part of the solidarity economy. At the same time, we will consciously organize and mobilise youth and women; while raising awareness amongst children about these issues.

We will champion a deep just transition, in the context of climate change and increasing energy costs, to ensure we shift the energy system towards renewable energy. In this regard, we support the United Front Civil Society Conference on the electricity crisis.

We will encourage local and nutritious food production from local food sources to feed families and communities. At the same time, we will support local food cultures that are more appropriate and nutritious. All of this part of our effort to end dependence and control by the corporate controlled food system.

We will struggle to ensure land reform for food production and consumption such that we advance the rights of women, food sovereignty and the solidarity economy. In this struggle we will affirm agro-ecology as a science, which draws on farmer knowledge and traditional food production practices.

We will assist small scale farmers with agroecological training, to build seed banks, develop organic compost, sustainable water management systems and establish member-driven worker cooperatives for farming, bakeries, consumer stores, people's

restaurants and local community markets.

We will celebrate and learn from self-sustaining communities and the successes of small scale farmers, local farming networks, cooperatives and community markets as examples of alternatives to commercial industrial agriculture and corporate controlled retail. We will celebrate the transparency, ethics and commitment to community need of these alternatives.

We will claim our right to food contained in the Constitution and other international human rights instruments.

We will continue to ensure popular education around the food crisis and struggle for food sovereignty alternatives as part of our communities.

We will create our own media to advance mother tongue, people's culture, share experiences of hunger and raise awareness about food sovereignty alternatives including traditions of bartering and solidarity markets.

We will struggle for a transformative and just transition to a democratic eco-socialist society. The struggle for food sovereignty will be a key wedge to move us in this direction as we build people's power from below.

In the light of the above we call on religious organisations, civic organisations, trade unions, youth, student, children and other progressive sections of society to join the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign.

**Food Sovereignty is a Right!**  
**No to Hunger!**  
**Yes to Dignity!**





## **Ban GMOs: SAFSC and March Against Monsanto in Port Elizabeth**

Zim Keye



**March Against Monsanto is a global call to action aimed at informing the public and calling into question the long-term health risks of genetically modified foods.**

It shows how we have lost control over our food and it highlights the corruption of patenting seeds, which is essentially patenting life. Patenting seeds means they are owned by a few companies rather than in common by the people, which in some countries has even resulted in criminal action against people who infringe the patent laws around genetically modified seed. Promoting genetically modified seed also impacts the environment negatively because they require the use of chemical herbicides like Roundup.

The power of GMOs companies like Monsanto in the South African food system is an important issue: we are the only country in the world where the staple diet of the majority of its citizens is genetically modified, in the form of maize meal that most poor people eat every day. And they don't even know that the food they are eating is genetically modified!

So I represented the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) at the March Against Monsanto event in Port Elizabeth on 23 May 2015. Why did we gather? We wanted to:

- Inform the public about the greed and corruption of the few corporate players that control our food system
- Encourage people to support local farmers and markets
- Raise awareness about protecting our environment in food production and acknowledge all citizens' right to food in South Africa

- Promote agroecology solutions to food production
- Expose the cronyism between big business and the government in our food system

We gathered to protest against the forcing of genetically modified organisms on South African consumers and small farmers, and to demand the democratisation of South Africa's food system. The action was united against US agro-chemical Company Monsanto and GMOs in general, and in favour of Food Sovereignty Now!

The protest was aimed at raising awareness among South Africans about food sovereignty and about the risks and dangers posed by GMOs and its associated poisons, and the corporate control of our food systems.

Why do we need to the food sovereignty campaign? 26% of the South African population goes to bed hungry on a daily basis. This is at the same time that large companies make huge profits off basic foods. We therefore need to promote food sovereignty, to take control of food production and distribution.

As the SAFSC we made clear demands at the March Against Monsanto in Port Elizabeth, as follows:

1. We demand more access to food to each and every citizen of this country, as Section 27 of SA Constitution
2. We demand an end to the food fascism in this country, where people are being force fed genetically modified foods without their knowledge or consent.
3. We demand a food system that is just and equitable and that food is made accessible to all people.
4. We demand inclusive farming systems that recognize indigenous and local knowledge as well as age old traditions of seed saving and sharing.
5. We demand the democratisation of our food systems.
6. We demand training and support for farmers that are practicing agroecological farming in Port Elizabeth.

***Zim Keye is a community activist in Port Elizabeth and an activist in the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC). He also sits on the Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM) Convening Committee. He can be contacted at [asiphelamani@gmail.com](mailto:asiphelamani@gmail.com).***

## Worker Cooperative Campaign

### Guide for Establishing Worker Cooperatives Soon to be Published

A new activist guide has been worked on over the last few months, aimed at building capacity on how to set up a worker cooperatives as part of the solidarity economy.

It was tested at a SEM activist school on worker cooperatives at the end of last year and has been refined based on this experience. It is aimed at empowering existing and emerging worker cooperatives, movements and communities to understand worker cooperative theory and worker cooperatives as a vital part of building the solidarity economy within communities in South Africa.

The guide provides steps on how to set up a worker cooperative through various contexts known as the groundwork phase. It then moves onto a start up phase sharing tools for operational worker controlled management, and finally an expansion and consolidation phase to help consolidate the cooperative or work on strategies for expanding the worker cooperative.

We are excited to share this essential tool to help strengthen and build worker cooperatives as transformative alternatives in response to the deepening neoliberal crisis exacerbating unemployment, poverty and inequality!

### A Federal Law for the Solidarity Economy and Worker Cooperatives in Argentina: The Debate Begins

The Instituto de Promoción para la Economía Solidaria/IPES (Institute for the Promotion of a Solidarity Economy, in English) spent February putting the wheels in motion for a series of 35 forums taking place from March onwards. Bringing together the region's cooperatives and unions they will provide an opportunity to make headway on a definitive federal law for a solidarity economy. "We'd like to get a lot of different people involved: grassroots members, federations and confederations; academics; and the general public", explained José Orbaiceta, president of IPES.

"There's a gap in legislation for worker cooperatives. Legislation only really happens when judges make rulings. The Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo



y Economía Social/INAES (National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy, in English) has provided some regulation but there's still no actual law in place to govern self-management. That's why it's so important for us to push ahead with it". He went on to say "I hope the discussions will help put together a strong legal framework, something to be voted in parliament involving all the political parties. We're looking at a state-wide policy".

"We want mainstream parties to see that a solidarity economy – cooperatives, mutuels, and all forms of associativism – are part of society. They need to take us into account when they're developing public policies. That will be the law of the movement", he added. Ariel Guarco, President of the Confederación Cooperativa de la República Argentina/Cooperar (Argentina's Cooperative Federation, in English), said: "It's an opportunity for us to meet up with our very foundations: the mutuels and cooperatives".

The President of Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo/CNCT (National Confederation of Worker Cooperatives, in English), Christian Miño, stressed "the law needs to be approved by the end of this year". Discussing the various modifications the confederation plans to propose, he outlined changes linked to tax, specifically in relation to self-employment, and to setting up a cooperative society - CNCT believes there shouldn't be any obstacles in place.

All cooperative representatives agreed this was a "historic opportunity": to re-examine and draft regulations together at the forums, and, hopefully, to take it to parliament.

## Where do we stand now?

In Argentina, December 2014, a draft was put forward to replace regulation No. 20,321 for mutual associations, and No 20,337 for cooperatives: both of which have been in place since the 1970s. Dr Patricio Griffin, director of INAES, supported the move, saying “the feeling is that the law should be debated by society, by the Argentinian people, more than a parliamentary majority. We want the Argentinian people themselves to approve the law”.

Almost 10% of Argentina’s GDP comes from the solidarity economy, with 14 million associations, 9000 cooperatives, and more than 1.3 million job posts across the country.

**Article Source:** <http://www.cicopa.coop/A-federal-law-for-the-solidarity.html>





## Activist Resources for Advancing the Solidarity Economy From Below

### New Resource for Films on Cooperatives: [festcoop.org](http://festcoop.org)



FestCoop, the International Cooperative Film Festival, started out as a way of bringing together people's experiences working for cooperatives in the solidarity economy online, through audiovisual media. Colombia will be the first country to host the event in 2016. In June a dedicated channel will be launched online, along with further information about participating.

The festival will bring together artists from all over the world, offering an open online space ([www.festcoop.org](http://www.festcoop.org)) for people to share audiovisual content. The festival aims "to spread and circulate a message of cooperation, promote a solidarity economy, and showcase the work of organisations like worker and production cooperatives".

The International Association for Cooperative Communication, a Spanish organisation with offices in Chile, is leading the initiative. There are currently 14 people working on the project, all professionals working in the cooperative and solidarity economy movement. The goal of the Association for Cooperative Communication is ultimately to promote cooperativism and the solidarity economy, and help cooperatives and solidarity enterprises become more competitive with improved internal and external communications – above all by using innovative 21st century audiovisual media and IT communications technologies.

The event, on from the 19th to the 26th February 2016 in San Gil (Colombia) is being sponsored locally by Fundación Coomuldesa, Resander and Unisangil.

A number of different organisations from Chile, Argentina, Spain, Uruguay, and Costa Rica will be entering into a spirit of cooperation to organise and support the festival.

#### Article Source:

<http://www.cicopa.coop/Spreading-the-cooperative-word.html>

The films can be viewed on the festival's website, [www.festcoop.org](http://www.festcoop.org)

### Loomio: A Cooperative Website For Collective Decision-Making



Loomio is an online tool for collaborative decision-making, built by a team of technologists, activists and social entrepreneurs in New Zealand. Loomio emerged from the need for a scalable way to make inclusive group decisions during the Occupy movement in 2011.

The website's creators experienced the transformative potential of collaborative decision-making, as well as its severe limitations: if people have to be in the same place at the same time to participate, it can never scale. So, they set out to build a solution to this problem: using the internet to give people an easy way to make good decisions together, wherever they are.

It's called Loomio, like a loom for weaving diverse perspectives together. Now more than 75,000 people have made more than 25,000 decisions on Loomio. Loomio is a mission-driven organisation with a social purpose at their core: it exists to make it easy for anyone, anywhere, to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Loomio measures its impact in the numbers of people and groups involved in decisions and the inspiring stories from people using it to do great things in their communities.

Go check out Loomio and get started at [www.loomio.org](http://www.loomio.org)

## contact us

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We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter by writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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