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## Editorial

### The Climate Crisis, Drought and the Food Sovereignty Pathway

*Dr Vishwas Satgar*

The year 2015 was the hottest year on record, since records have been kept. Extreme weather has also been experienced in different parts of the world. The Arctic ice sheet is melting rapidly releasing methane (the deadliest greenhouse gas), parts of the Antarctic are also going through a similar process, ocean acidification due to carbon concentrations are undermining our oceans capacity to serve as carbon sinks, deforestation of rain forests are also impacting on another precious carbon sink, while oil is being over-supplied into the global market.



The increase in planetary temperatures since the industrial revolution stands at close to 1 degree Celsius. Our planet is heating up and five UN-International Panel on Climate Change scientific reports confirm this. It is now beyond a doubt that human induced climate change is a causal factor. Both scientists and policy makers are also referring to the onset of the age of the Anthropocene, in which the human impact on the planet and the web of life is on a geological scale. We are shaping planetary conditions that sustain life. However, the idea of the Anthropocene is problematic for 3 reasons:

(i) it does not appreciate that 500 years of capitalism, beginning with mercantile capitalism, has been engaged in conquering nature and ultimately eco-cidal destruction. It is not just a 150 years of industrial capitalism;

(ii) it is not all humans that are responsible for the destruction of the Anthropocene. Capital is the real geological force shaping and determining the conditions that sustain life. Capital and its logic of endless accumulation is not just exploiting humans and nature, more broadly, but killing all life forms

(iii) there is a failure to recognize collective agency, class and popular struggle as the way to end capital's destruction of all life. Instead the Anthropocene has a tendency to venerate the age of humans, almost as though history is driven by an evolutionary process. We have arrived as an apex species.

James Hansen, the leading climate scientist in the world and working for NASA, raised the dangers of human induced climate change in 1988. Today, Hansen is convinced that all extreme weather cannot be separated from the causal impact of climate change. The UN process initiated in the early 1990s through Conference of the Parties has failed to provide genuine, systemic solutions to the climate crisis for over 20 years. While the UN Conference of the Parties (COP21) held in Paris, in December 2016, has committed the world's governments to a renewable energy transition this is not binding, ambitious and lacking in will. When all pledges made by countries is measured the world's governments come very short. We will achieve a 3-4 degree increase in planetary temperatures with present commitments. Moreover, these commitments can easily be reversed. Also the industrial countries have been let off the hook and they have extremely minimal commitments to contribute finance to poor and vulnerable countries, like African countries and island states. Also the horizons of systemic change are limited. There is no commitment to stop oil production and more market solutions are coming to the fore. This is eco-cidal.

The UN process has failed the world's people. Leadership has to come from below to bring down carbon emissions and champion a deep just transition to sustain life. The time for quick fixes, techno schemes and business as usual solutions are over. Corporate induced climate change can be stopped by collective human action. This will mean we build Red-Green Alliances to keep all the remaining oil in the ground, make a rapid transition to renewable energy systems and restructure production, consumption, trade, transport systems and how we live in communities, towns and cities. Central to this is developing a food sovereignty pathway within the food system to ensure we limit the impact of food production on the climate and we are able to adapt to extreme shifts in planetary and weather conditions.



Peoples action in communities, towns and cities is going to determine the human response to climate change and whether we can survive. In South Africa the drought, partially the result of El Nino (the heating of the oceans mainly in the Pacific but having global impacts on weather patterns), the climate shift and poor water management, is a window into South Africa's future. In October of 2015 South Africa experienced some of the highest recorded temperatures in the world at over 48 degrees. And then in December the heat wave created unbearable conditions for many people, with many people also dying from heat exposure, while some parts of the country experienced extreme rainfall. South Africa is a site of climate change. The impacts of the drought include: the failure of staple crops like GMO maize, the death of livestock, water stress for small scale and subsistence food production. Food prices are expected to increase by an additional 40-60% in coming months. Hunger has increased in this context.

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign will be championing a food sovereignty pathway in the food system in order to ensure we are able to provide a peoples response to the climate crisis. This will include the following actions:

- Providing a telephone hotline (011 4471013) and platform for small scale farmers and subsistence households to speak out on the drought: share their experiences, challenges and solutions for the drought

- Training small scale farmers, communities and movements in more sustainable farming and water management through agro-ecology;
- Developing the capacities of households, movements and communities to save indigenous seed varieties that are more easily adaptable to changing climate conditions;
- Developing a Food Sovereignty law, from below and then presenting this at a Peoples Parliament to all parties and civil society organisations.
- Raising awareness of the drought, climate change, hunger and food sovereignty through campaigning for #foodpricesmustfall , social media platforms and the second annual Food Sovereignty Festival on World Food Day in 2016.

We can survive climate change if we act now. It is time for system change from below! Forward to Food Sovereignty!

*Vishwas Satgar is a member of the National Coordinating Committee of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, Chairperson of the COPAC Board and a Wits academic.*





## **National News**

### **When Climate Change Comes Home to Roost**

*Elizabeth Vibert*



The people of Jomela village in eastern Limpopo Province feel like canaries in a coal mine. The local metaphor features a snail collecting ashes. When I last visited Jomela in April and May 2015, sixty-five-year-old vegetable farmer Daina Mahlaule told me that home food gardens in the village produced “nothing, nothing at all” in the recent growing season. The little rain had come too late for the maize and groundnuts that are staples of the local diet.

Now Mrs. Mahlaule and her neighbours find themselves living through the worst drought in thirty years. This year’s extreme El Niño event – which may mean a heavy winter here in Canada – has already delivered blistering heat and deepening drought to much of Southern Africa. Research indicates the enormity of this El Niño is linked to human-induced climate change. So what does climate change mean in people’s daily lives in places already affected? In Jomela it means borehole wells are starting to run dry. Mrs. Mahlaule can’t afford her own well, so her

household relies on the municipal water supply. Water is supposed to run through those pipes twice a week. Women, often spelled off by children or grandchildren, line up hopefully on the appointed days. Some have as many as fifteen or twenty plastic containers to fill (they use 20-30 litres per person per day: average daily use in wealthier countries, while declining, runs to ten times that). On a good day, when the water actually flows, it trickles so slowly that people can spend two hours filling their cans – after queuing. That is time that can’t be spent studying, playing, or working for pay.

There haven’t been many good days lately. Failed rains mean ground water supplies and dams are not replenished, and rural poverty and poor government planning exacerbate the effects of drought. Mrs. Mahlaule used to rely on her neighbour’s well for a back-up supply, but now there is barely enough for that family’s use. Household use includes cooking, drinking, and bathing; home gardens rely on rain.



Heat is the other challenge. From October to December of 2015, much of South Africa was in the grip of a heat wave. Last winter Mrs. Mahlaule and fellow farmers at a women's cooperative vegetable farm complained that "you can't even tell it's winter anymore": while much of the world worries about the dire effects of a two-degree rise in global temperature, inland regions of Southern Africa can expect a six-degree rise this century unless global greenhouse gas emissions are reduced dramatically. High temperatures are wreaking havoc already. Pumpkin leaves, a favourite local green, are shrivelled and unmarketable within an hour of watering. Pests that used to die off in cooler weather now flourish year round. Indigenous plants provide useful alternatives in dry years, but they too are susceptible to pests. People who can little afford it are forced to turn to less nutritious store-bought food.

Mrs. Mahlaule and her co-workers find solace at their farm. They founded the vegetable project in another legendary drought year, 1992. "The farm chased *kwashi* from our village," says farmer Mamayila Mkhawana, referring to *kwashiorkor* and other forms of malnutrition. For over two decades, using water-conserving drip irrigation, these farmers have been providing nutritious, reliable, and affordable food to people from Jomela and neighbouring villages. They grow "exotics" including tomatoes, onions, three varieties of spinach, sweet potatoes, green beans, and butternut squash following largely agro-ecological practices. Extension workers generally teach conventional growing methods, but the

women can't afford chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They work to rebuild the soil with organic material, nourish their crops with chicken manure tea, and avoid pest-prone plants like cabbage.

In the context of climate change, this kind of sustainable local initiative is crucial – not just for people's health, but for broader food security. Healthy local food systems can support community development, providing food and jobs where people live. A growing body of research shows that agro-ecological methods produce food systems more resilient to the effects of climate change than conventional agriculture.<sup>1</sup> For instance, soils rich in organic material are better able to retain moisture and less prone to wind erosion; decomposing organic matter feeds the soil much more sustainably than fossil fuel-based fertilisers; and encouraging growth of indigenous edibles among commercial crops protects biodiversity.

Access to water lies behind a growing number of political and environmental crises around the world. The political and the ecological become more closely intertwined as desperation deepens. It is past time to imagine what climate change will look like in our own lives. As people in Jomela say, "don't close the well after you drink": don't abuse the resource on which the future depends.

*Elizabeth Vibert teaches history at the University of Victoria, Canada. She is writing a book and making a film about the women's farm in Jomela. The name of the village has been changed to protect farmers' privacy.*



## **International News**

### **For a Power Shift: Activists Fight for a Renewable Energy Cooperative in Mauritius**

*Stefan Gua*



At time of independence in Mauritius in 1968, demand for electricity was around 98 gigawatt (GWh). The parastatal Central Electricity Board (CEB) was the main supplier of electricity in Mauritius since its establishment in 1952, but after industrialisation through the 1980s and 1990s, the state began buying additional energy from Independent Power Producers (IPPs). By 2000, these IPPs had become well established in Mauritius and controlled about 60% of electricity production.

However, it was around this period that the risk of a major power blackout in the country was evoked. The CEB had the capacity to produce more than the peak demand, but some of the CEB's power plants had become dormant since the introduction of IPPs. As a result, in 2001 the government produced a study which proposed that a new power plant be established on the western coast of Mauritius, a place called Pointe-aux-Caves, by the CEB itself. The power plant was to be powered by coal with a production capacity of 100 GWh. In 2003 the project was approved by a fast track committee set up by the government. However, some procedures had not been respected and so the final go ahead for the project was delayed.

At the same time, resistance to the project by a group of citizens from the area where the power plant was to be established grew. They opposed the project on the basis that it would generate significant pollution and would devalue land and houses in the vicinity. However, the movement did not get national support, as it was not seen as in the national interest. Upon approval of the final conditions for the project by the minister of energy in 2013, there was a series of protests and a hunger

strike by a wider coalition, who put forward the following 3 demands:

1. The cancellation of the contract between the State and CT Power (the company wanting to construct and run the power station)
2. That the government makes public all contracts signed with IPPs
3. The setting up of a National Audit Energy Commission

The pressure from the protest movement as well as public opinion opposing CT Power forced the government to negotiate and they conceded by making public all contracts with all IPPs and by setting up a National Energy Commission (NEC). The latter will scrutinise the energy question in Mauritius; assess existing model and needs; allow people to make proposals for the energy sector in Mauritius; and come up with proposals for the energy sector for Mauritius.

Meanwhile, the pressure group from the protest movement organised themselves in a coalition and called themselves the Koalision pou Lenerzi Renouvlab (KLR). They ensured the presence of civil society and public interest in the NEC and they kept on reflecting on the energy question in Mauritius. By the end of 2013, the concluding report of the NEC was made public and stated that the risk of blackout was unfounded and that the country did not need a new power plant. The report also advocated for a decentralised renewable power-producing unit that will be controlled by the people through a cooperative model. This proposal was especially important given that the 60% of electricity production in Mauritius is in the hands of 4 companies. They had tried to fool the public, in that they were supposed to produce electricity out of bagasse (a sugar cane by-product) and through only an insignificant percentage of coal (when in shortage of bagasse). But they ended up doing the contrary, with 70% of electricity produced by IPPs coming from coal.

The Koalision pou Lenerzi Renouvlab (KLR) is composed of energy experts, ecologists, left political activists, union delegates and small planters. Once the NEC report was out, the KLR decided to move a step ahead



and to propose production of electricity based on the commission's conclusion. The People's Cooperative for Renewable Energy Society (PCRES) was born. Carried by the campaign 'For a Powershift', the PCRES went out for a massive recruiting of members. The PCRES was a multi-sector alliance of the working class that aimed at challenging the existing energy production model which is totally undemocratic with unfair practices, fossil fuel based, and import-oriented. The PCRES proposed a model that allows each and every citizen of Mauritius and democratic organisations to hold a direct stake in electricity production through holding shares in the cooperative; production of energy from renewable energy sources; decentralized production with an alliance with small planters (important plots of land following reform in the sugar sector are being abandoned by small planters) to revalue abandoned land. The preferred model is that of a solar farm.



For the PCRES project to succeed there need to be 3 essential conditions:

- 1) The existence of people and organisations that will form part of the cooperative and who will finance the project
- 2) Available land for installation of the solar farm
- 3) The green light from the CEB since they will be the one purchasing the electricity and redistributing it on their grid.

The first two conditions, with the support of the 'For a Powershift' campaign is completely achievable by PCRES – land has already been made available and people are already mobilised. But the third condition faces a wall that the CEB, government and IPPs will not allow the PCRES to cross. The CEB, which sets conditions for power producers, is using all kind of subterfuge to prevent the PCRES from bidding as one of its suppliers. The government that was elected in

December 2014 promised in its manifesto an electricity production model based on KLR's proposal, which is a people's cooperative for energy production. With the lobbying of the private sector, they have reversed on this question and are putting in every effort to prevent this model from being developed.

The 'For a Powershift' campaign has a dual meaning: the word power can be equated with the word energy and/or politico/economical power. The PCRES model is indeed about power games. The bourgeoisie and its state will not allow such a challenging model to exist, this will undermine their hegemony. The present system will not allow this to, which is why the campaign will continue until the momentum is reached for a real power shift.

## **Inter-cooperation in North America: The Creation of the First Worker- Owned Bakery**



The Grain Exchange Worker-owned Co-op in Calgary (Canada) has used a crowdfunding campaign to help launch the first worker-owned bakery in the region. The Canadian Worker Cooperative Federation (CWCF) has for several years sought to replicate the Arizmendi Bakery / Pizzeria Co-ops of the San Francisco Bay Area (USA) in Canada, and it has identified a group in Calgary to do it, recently incorporated as the Grain Exchange Co-op. The cooperative hopes to open the bakery next year.  
31 July 2015

The approach behind the Arizmendi model is to start with a thriving worker cooperative, in this case an artisan bakery / pizzeria, and then replicate it, loosely based on franchising except that the goal is to increase growth of the worker cooperative movement. The significant advantage to their approach relative to other new start-ups is that the success rate is higher, and once there is a

foothold in a region with a first cooperative, there can be additional worker cooperatives replicated.

The Association of Arizmendi Co-operatives has been very helpful in sharing business plans, recipes, members' time, etc. - in exchange for commitments that the elements shared stay within the worker co-operative movement and that the Grain Exchange Co-op will support future replications.

Article Source: <http://www.cicopa.coop/Intercooperation-in-North-America.html>





## **The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign**

### **Developing a Charter for the SAFSC: Kicking Off the Discussion**

As the SAFSC develops and grows further, it is important for us to continue to construct a collective vision of what we mean by food sovereignty and specifically how we envision the actual manifestation of food sovereignty in South Africa. For this purpose, developing a Charter for Food Sovereignty in South Africa can lay out all the varied dimensions of the long term vision and practice that we are fighting for. This is something that we must take time to develop in a democratic and collective manner and culminate in the presentation of a draft Charter for Food Sovereignty in South Africa at the Food Sovereignty Festival in October 2016.

So as an attempt to kick the process off, here are a few questions that could be discussed in your organisations, movements and community spaces:

- Whats wrong with the existing food system? What don't we want?
- What is food sovereignty?
- What is required for food sovereignty pathways in our villages, towns, cities and the country?
- How would food be produced? Who would produce it?
- Under conditions of food sovereignty, who should own and access the land, what resources would people need to access, how should water be managed and distributed?
- What kind of food would we all consume and who would provide it?
- How do we get from where we are now to this vision of food sovereignty? What is the role of movement building in this regard and in what forms?
- What role should the state play in achieving food sovereignty?
- How do we advance food sovereignty in Africa?
- How do we build food sovereignty solidarity in the world?

These discussions should be recorded and sent to the SAFSC Google list ([sa-food-sovereignty-campaign@googlegroups.com](mailto:sa-food-sovereignty-campaign@googlegroups.com)).

## **Successful First Food Sovereignty Festival Held**

*Athish Kirun*

THE SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY CAMPAIGN PRESENTS: A NATIONAL



**Celebrating food sovereignty and peoples' alternatives to the unjust food system**

**World food day • Friday, 16 October 2015**

Place: The Greenhouse Project,  
Joubert Park, Junction of Klein and  
Wolmarans Streets, Johannesburg.  
Parking available at the  
Johannesburg Art Gallery  
Time: 8am-8pm (Join for a session  
or two, or for the whole day)

Get involved: To volunteer at the  
festival or book an exhibition stall,  
contact: [info@safsc.org.za](mailto:info@safsc.org.za) or  
011 447 1013. To perform music,  
dance, song or poetry at the evening  
concert contact: 079 835 5054 or  
[thammydlamini@gmail.com](mailto:thammydlamini@gmail.com).

**Documentary screenings • Food stalls • Evening entertainment**  
**Exhibitions • FARMER'S MARKET • Practical agroecology sessions**  
**Learning sessions on food sovereignty • Panel discussions**  
**Inner-city food garden tours ...and much more**

THE FESTIVAL IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, SO COME ALONG  
AND CELEBRATE LIFE THROUGH FOOD SOVEREIGNTY!  
[www.safsc.org.za/](http://www.safsc.org.za/) [www.facebook.com/safoodsovereignty](http://www.facebook.com/safoodsovereignty)

On World Food Day 2015, 16 October, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) hosted a Food Sovereignty Festival. The aim of the festival was to celebrate people's alternatives to the unjust food system. It brought together campaign partners and invited the general public to celebrate food sovereignty practice through workshops, panel discussions, film screenings, practical demonstrations, sharing of practical organising experiences, city tours and displays of produce, crafts and seeds. The interactive program for the day followed four parallel themes that gave an opportunity for participants to deepen their knowledge and decide on which topics interested them the most.

The themes were structured based on understanding the crisis within the food system, which was reflected through engaging panel discussions by experts under the theme of Food, Land and Hunger. Topics covered exposed how corporations whose sole priority is profit maximization at all costs control our food system. Other important issues raised were a workshop on GMOs and its negative impacts on the South African food system, as well as the growing climate crisis and its causes which is directly impacting our food system negatively.



The second theme looked at alternatives within the food system, from food struggles in Africa, food sovereignty and worker cooperative alternatives to practical training on agroecology, seed saving and seed banking. An exciting theme inspiring participants on how the alternative is being built globally and locally.

The third theme focused on sharing and learning from activism from the campaigners which involved reflections on community learning exchanges, local community forum building and interesting tours of inner city roof top gardens and a tour of the Green House Project, a hub of learning of eco-friendly principals and practice.

The fourth theme focused on creative campaigning, which included making and designing your own campaign media from banner making to stenciling, a healthy cooking class on whipping up a nutritious meal, and a fascinating history lesson on indigenous food, language and culture.

Many of the participants remarked on how well organised the various themes were and that in fact a major challenge of the festival was deciding on which parallel theme to attend as all of them sounded so interesting and worthwhile.



The day concluded with a joyous and deep open mic session, which saw activists sharing their musical and poetic talents, bringing smiles and laughter to our faces. The day was marked with an important emphasis that we need to unite as people and communities to build the just food system we deserve in celebrating our rich cultural, indigenous practice and knowledge. Through our collective activism we can inspire and champion the food sovereignty alternative! Based on the enormous success of this first festival, a 2016 festival will be held that aims to attract even more people and have an even larger programme. Phambile Food Sovereignty!





## Fighting Hunger on Our Campuses: The Wits Inala Food Sovereignty & Climate Justice Forum

*Felix Kwabena Donkor*



In South Africa **one in four people experience hunger on a regular basis with more than half of the populace** at risk of hunger. Universities are a microcosm of society. They provide a platform to quality education, social innovation, opportunities and advancement. However the full potential of the university to stimulate social progress and change is compromised when its students work on hungry stomachs. The challenges of broader society resonate on our campuses; hence the phenomenon of hunger is felt equally at universities. In a bid to stem the tide of hunger the Wits Food Bank was set up under the auspices of the WCCO (Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach) to assist hungry students with their nutritional needs. However, the need for food began to outstrip supply and the food bank has been struggling to solve the problem of student hunger on campus.

The Inala (Zulu for 'abundance') Wits Food Sovereignty & Climate Justice Forum consequently evolved as a platform where students concerned about fighting hunger could combine their individual efforts on campus. It currently embraces students who have a vision of food sovereignty and climate justice at Wits and envisions abundant vegetable gardens and indigenous fruit tree forests, zero hunger and zero waste on campus. They embody values of solidarity, community and harmony with nature and they endeavor to spread these values within the university and beyond.

The forum aims to work towards building a food

commons on campus, whereby the production of food is made available to all in the university community through various interventions. With the assistance of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC), WCCO and other student volunteers the forum has started a food garden on the West Campus of the University where several vegetables such as spinach, beetroot, cabbage, onions, herbs, spices, and carrots are being grown to supplement the food given to students. Students first underwent training on the rudiments of growing and maintaining a garden successfully. This garden is cared for and watered by students in their spare time amidst innovative ways of sourcing further assistance from organisations.

In a bid to expand its activities for a wider reach, the forum also sent a delegation to the University administration to discuss planting fruit trees on campus to complement its other activities at fighting hunger on campus. These fruit trees would provide healthy fresh food to all on campus, available to anyone who picks it!

The forum organised some sensitisation campaigns to educate the student community on the silent hunger crisis currently afflicting the student community, and the need for a rapid establishment of a food commons on campus. This culminated in developing a petition to be handed to the University authorities, which gathered over 800 signatories in only two days. The petition calls for the creation of an environmentally sustainable food forest on campus, the fruits of which should be directly channeled toward the substantive alleviation of student hunger.

This year the forum also hosted documentary screenings, such as *The Yes Men are Revolting*, hoping to learn from the creative activism tactics of the *Yes Men*. This was in collaboration with the Wits Sociology-Amandla Forum and the Tri Continental Film Festival.

But the forum has not limited its activities to the university alone and has been active in other related events. Hence on the occasion of the World Food Day (16 October) members volunteered at the Food Sovereignty Festival that was hosted by the SAFSC and partook in some panel discussions.

The activities of the Inala Wits Food Sovereignty & Climate Justice Forum demonstrate how grassroots measures and organising are essential to overcoming the crisis of hunger in South African society and on our campuses.

*Felix Kwabena Donkor is currently a student at Wits University, Johannesburg. He co-manages a food garden which is entirely for feeding hungry students under the Inala Wits Food Sovereignty & Climate Justice Forum and represents the forum at the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign. Felix can be contacted at [felixdonkor2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:felixdonkor2002@yahoo.co.uk).*

## **Can food buying Co-ops make environmentally and socially ethical food affordable for South Africans?**

*Florian Kroll*



*"That'll be 15 Dollars, sir. Are you a member?"*

I was at a checkout till at the Seward Co-operative, a buyer-owned food co-operative in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US. The place was slick, clean, and buzzing with activity as Minneapolis residents of all colours and creeds bustled through well-stocked aisles filled with an abundance of consumer products - almost all organic, locally-produced, and sourced from co-operatives.

This was a highlight of a recent two-week trip across the US on a multi-regional project for food security and US foreign policy hosted by the US Department of State International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP). My fellow delegates and I had travelled from around the globe, including Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Mexico, Barbados, Vietnam, Indonesia, Hungary and Germany. The journey took our team thousands of kilometres across the North American continent on a tight schedule which flowed without a hitch as we were whisked through as many as 4 different engagements each day. We met stakeholders representing diverse viewpoints and interests across the US food system, from government officials to farmers to academics to activists and change agents.

As our jet flew across the vast monocultures of the

midwest, I was reminded how grain and oilseed production in the US is dominated by highly capitalised operations cultivating monoculture GMO crops regularly doused with agrochemicals. The corporate agrochemical agenda exerts ruthless power, pirating indigenous seed, criminalising traditional practices of seed saving and trade, and co-opting legislation and extension services to promote heavy use of their products and technologies. There is enough evidence of dangerous health and ecosystems impacts that we ought to treat this system with great suspicion. Nevertheless, South Africans are already consuming a staple diet composed heavily of GM-maize, and this toxic cocktail is being promoted throughout Africa by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

The American supermarket retail model is gaining momentum across Africa, pushing small farmers out of markets, controlling entire value chains and promoting cheap, unhealthy food produced by a cluster of powerful local and transnational food manufacturing corporations. Poorly informed consumers with few alternatives and little money are the victims of this neo-liberal food regime. Without a coherent voice and apparently without power, they are price-takers, vulnerable to food insecurity through income losses and food price inflation which leaves them few options but to reduce dietary quality to make ends meet, with an occasional chicken lickin or KFC and Coke to lift the spirits. This system takes a heavy toll in human life and suffering with a rising tide of illness and death caused by diabetes, hypertension, obesity, heart disease and reduced immunity to infectious illnesses.

With this awareness of the global reach and power of agro-chemical, food processing and retail corporations and their influence over policy in the US and Africa, our visit to the Seward Co-Op offered a refreshing glimpse of an alternative food economy and a hint of a way consumers might reclaim their power, voice, land and health.





As Seward Education and Outreach Coordinator Abby Rogosheske explained over organic fair-trade cappuccino in the Co-op coffee shop, the “**Seward Co-op**” is owned by consumers who are leveraging their combined purchasing power to make healthy, environmentally and socially just food affordable and accessible while offering agro-ecological producers a direct retail outlet and marketing platform. The store has been in existence for 40 years, starting with a small selection of organic grains. But Seward has come a long way from its humble beginnings - when I walked through the aisles, I was amazed to find everything from organic vegetables to cheese, bread, sausage, cosmetics, herbal supplements, dog-food and even nappies. It accommodates poor and unemployed folk by supporting the SNAP and Women, Infants and Children food-stamps programmes. Seward also operates an innovative and ethical product sourcing and labelling strategy which enables consumers to choose products based not only on price and on local ecological production but to support products made by co-operatives.

Its business has grown so strongly that an expansion to two new store outlets is planned. Not least, members receive regular dividends of profit, which they can use as credit to buy more food or withdraw as cash. The co-op means that member consumers are the middle-men: retaining the profits and reaping the benefits of products promoting personal, social and eco-system health.

*“No, I’m not a member...just a visitor.”*

When the young cashier asked me whether I would like a membership, I had to refuse and regretted that we have no such stores on Joburg or Cape Town...I’d sign up in a flash if we did. Could such a model provide a platform for solidarity food economies that break the stranglehold of Big Food? Could it make good food affordable for the working class and empower consumers to set social and ecological standards for food production, processing and retail? Can food purchasing co-ops unlock peoples’ collective power to heal the land and people of South Africa?

## Activist Diary 1: Moeketsi Monaheng



Meet Moeketsi Monaheng from Ivory Park, Midrand in Gauteng. A member of Midrand Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative (MSEEC) and newly formed NGO called Africa Rise. We specialise in agroecological vegetable productions, workshops on electricity, climate change as well as other issues of social justice and community development.

I started being active as an activist some years back when I became involved in community research and public participation in Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). I started working with COPAC when they released a research report they had just done on Ivory Park. We subsequently formed the MSEEC, of which I became a board member, and established a solidarity economy forum in Ivory Park. I then joined steering committees of different campaigns including One Million Climate Jobs Campaign, Electricity Crisis Campaign, Civil Society Organisation and many other local forums. My passion for social justice has always pushed me as well as my education background of being a geographer enables me to engage on climate change issues with a clear understanding.

Key activities that I do include helping in running community forums on seed saving, agroecology, GMOs, as well as educating the community on the importance of producing locally for local consumption. Workshops that

we run on climate change as well as school debates help improve public understanding of the causes of excessive global warming and the anthropological causes of climate change.

The challenges that I'm faced with as an activist are many, but let me highlight the few; Activism alone doesn't pay the bills and doesn't put bread on the table. We always speak truth to different stakeholders and always fight for social justice. That amounts to backlashes such as being sanctioned by authorities, being excluded when certain job considerations are being made, being labelled 'instigator of protests' and etc. We also unfortunately get overlooked by other progressive organisations when it comes to vacancies available. This results in activists abandoning their posts to go work for neoliberal organisations and thereby becoming sell outs to the struggle. These happen during the period where government is pushing neoliberal policies which needs all activists' hands on board to advocate and inform other comrades.

The recent events that I have attended include running agroecology workshops in my area, securing a space when community gardening would be done which would act as a beacon of hope for urban farming. We are currently also in the process of registering a youth organisation that produce fresh vegetables locally. My message to other comrades is that no one person can do everything alone, but each one of us in our small corners can do something. We make a road by walking.... Amandla!!!!!!!!!!

## Activist Diary 2: Thomas William Fraser



My name is Thomas William Fraser. I hail from Johannesburg and am currently enrolled as a student at Wits University, where I and a number of comrades have sought to establish the Wits Inala Forum, a campus-based organisation dedicated toward the progressive advancement of food sovereignty and climate justice both within and around Wits. Were I asked to describe myself in three worlds, I would have to state the following: I am curious, impassioned and evolving.

### How did you become an activist?

I 'slipped' into activism by means of a chance encounter with Vishwas Satgar, a fierce comrade and inspiring teacher who, during an odd conversation in mid-2015, invited me to participate in the establishment of a food sovereignty and climate justice forum at Wits University. Needless to say, I was utterly enthralled by this prospect and jumped unhesitatingly at the opportunity, thereby leading to my current status as a 'student activist'. Moreover, the unprecedented eruption of #FMF presented an additional channel for student activism during this time, thus embroiling many of us in what may only be described as a veritable baptism of fire!

### What are the key activities you do to promote food sovereignty and SAFSC in your community?

Since its inception, the Wits Inala Forum has engaged in a variety of activities geared toward the progressive advancement of food sovereignty, chief amongst which





may be counted the establishment of an agroecological food garden on campus. Since its establishment, we have been able to distribute a number of yields to the Wits food bank, where students suffering from food insecurity are able to seek much-needed nutriment. Ultimately, however, we would like for such students to assume full control over the sustainable production, distribution and consumption of their own food, thereby eliminating what I am personally inclined to describe as the pathological culture of dependency currently prevailing at Wits. In addition to the preceding, we have also undertaken a number of initiatives geared toward general education and awareness-raising regarding food sovereignty and climate justice.

### **What motivates you to do what you do?**

My motivation centres upon the intersection of two interrelated dimensions, one 'subjective' and the other 'objective'. On the 'subjective' level, I am motivated by a curious mix of indignation and care, for it is the searing torch of indignation which ignites my inner fuse and compels me to seek alternatives to the rampant injustices of our time, whereas it is the healing thread of care which weaves me into intimate communality with others, thereby empowering me to honour my indignation in a constructive, affirmative and life enhancing manner - to transmute 'darkness' into 'light'. On the 'objective' level, our planet is currently beset by a complex battery of crises which, if not soon addressed and resolved, will likely plunge the entire web of life into a dismal epoch of inviolable catastrophe. This I solemnly refuse to accept. We cannot simply stand idle whilst the world itself burns. Transformative action is needed. Fidelity to the Good of the Earth is needed.

### **What are the biggest challenges you face as an activist?**

The biggest challenge I face as an activist is the permanent threat of lapsing into reactivity when faced with the sheer magnitude of our looming planetary crises. When engaging in transformative work, it is all too easy to succumb to the corrosive and debilitating force of cynicism, hatred, fear, despair and exhaustion. Such 'toxins' are easily capable of crushing the human soul, thereby rendering us brutish and servile. As a safeguard against such poisons, I often like to reflect upon Joanna Macy's epochal call for 'Active Hope', which involves "being an activist for what we hope for in the world." Alas, in Active Hope there is "no guarantee we will succeed in bringing about the changes we hope for, but the process of giving our full attention and effort

draws out our aliveness" (Macy and Johnstone, 2012). It is this very 'aliveness' which is paramount, for it is the burning heart of our humanity.

### **What are the greatest joys in your journey of being an activist?**

My greatest joys as an activist lie in the possibilities of crossing difference, of encountering the 'other', of having my heart blasted and eyes opened by the pressing vicissitudes of reality, of being forced to confront and transcend my limits, of shedding old skin and being born anew, of discovering my humanity in the humanity of others, of discovering my belonging to the world by working for its supreme betterment, and of committing myself to the Good that compels me.

### **What recent events have you attended or hosted for food sovereignty? Please give some details of what happened there, how it inspired you, how you inspired others etc.**

I recently attended an agroecological activist school held in Giyani, Limpopo. During this school, I and a number of comrades from around the country were fortunate enough to receive intensive training in the major principles and methodologies of agroecology, a sustainable and revolutionary form of agriculture informed by indigenous epistemes and the science of ecology. Whilst attending the school, I and my comrades were able to engage in stimulating discussions regarding our prevailing food system and the pressing need for its reinvention; we were able to receive lessons, both practical and theoretical, from rural farmers presently engaged in agroecology; we were able to view critical documentaries highlighting the perils and promises of our present world-historical conjuncture, particularly as these relate to food sovereignty, the solidarity economy movement and the just transition; we were able to bear direct witness to the devastation presently being wrought upon rural communities by the prevailing drought; and we were able to interact with locals and gain a taste, however shallow and fleeting, of their world. All in all, it was a highly enlightening and inspiring ordeal. Ultimately, the school has motivated me to advance the causes of food sovereignty and climate justice with greater vigour and attentiveness throughout 2016, as well as to share the knowledge and skills gained therefrom with members of my own community.

### **What message would you like to give to other food sovereignty activist out there?**

Resistance is fertile!

## **The Worker Cooperative Campaign**

### **Interview: Fingerprints Printing Cooperative**

*The following is an edited excerpt of a longer interview with the chairperson of Fingerprints Printing Cooperative, a worker cooperative based in Cape Town. The interview helps shed light on the important values and principles that guide worker cooperative development and other important lessons to take into account in establishing and building a worker cooperative.*



**Isi:** My name is Isi Engelbrecht, at the moment I am the chairperson of Fingerprint Cooperative, based in Elsies River in Cape Town. We were formed in 1989 by a few workers who were all union activists and political activists at the time.

**Interviewer:** How many of you were there?

**Isi:** There were three of us, and we were persecuted by police, we couldn't find jobs. I had to go to Mozambique. And we thought no, that's silly, lets come back and lets - a guy around the corner was also printing for the [anti-apartheid] struggle. Ali Parker, Ali's Press, and he gave us an old machine. Luckily I was trained as a printer's technician and I fixed the machine and that's how the cooperative started...

Then over the years we poured a lot of money, you know, trying to get some sort of organisation in Cape Town. We worked with various people. We also went to Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana to see how cooperatives work. We learned a lot. So when we came back we had a good insight, what to do and what not to do. But it was still a struggle for the next five years. Basically we were not business people. We were revolutionaries, trying to make something of a concept which we liked, and it is a way that we could survive...

**Interviewer:** Have you dealt with losses at all and how did you deal with that?

**Isi:** Yes, that was, we still had losses but we planned for it. Earlier we just had to suffer and took some of our monies and put it back so that we can get back on the road but now, we have a separate account just for emergencies so that if something goes wrong, we draw the money from there, we fix up what's wrong without hurting ourselves and we also plan how to, in stages, put that money back there.

**Interviewer:** So is that your reserves?

**Isi:** Yes, it is our reserves so we are well covered. Like now it was very bad at work for 3 months but we still got full pay for the three months. We catered for all of that.

**Interviewer:** And do you have a share-based model? So the five of you have a share in the cooperative?

**Isi:** We all got equal shares. A lot of people say we are stupid the way some of us is 20 years in the coop others is 2 years in the cooperative. But we just feel like we are very socialist inclined. We had a big debate about this. Some say 'I am stronger than you in the cooperative so I must have more say than you.' We don't want that sort of thing. This thing about being equal, we like that and when new people come in we try to encourage them. This has been working for us for the past seven years and it will still work for us.

**Interviewer:** What would your reflections be about lessons from your experience for other worker cooperatives that are starting? What are some of the things that they should take seriously?

**Isi:** First of all, for us it will be the relationships, we all want to get people into cooperatives but we cannot just get anybody. There has to be some sort of understanding, some common thing, you know, like you want to find someone who is more inclined to a certain way and find a fit for them in the cooperative... You know, some people are not at all inclined to be in that cooperative and it causes major problems. That's the first thing that we must guard against. We must have the right people in the right cooperative.



This thing about an entrepreneurial element in the cooperative is also very important. Even if there must pick somebody that has an inclination to go learn at a school, they must have that inner commitment to cooperative values. You know pick somebody or two persons who can take decisions on their feet... In a cooperative you must be fair, you must be objective especially if you are in a leadership position... We make that very clear in our code of conduct and you sign for that.

There are rules that govern the cooperative. There's got to be discipline but there's also got to be a platform for unhappy people to bring that unhappiness forth for the rest of the cooperative to listen to it and to do something about it...

The first thing we tell people, even with 10 persons starting up, our mission statement says to supply quality employment. Not a living wage, we want more, we want to give our people more than a living wage, I mean that is what we aim for. If you are going to start a cooperative with 15-20 people instead of 10 people but you don't have enough people or work to support them you are going to get conflict... Before you finalise your membership you must know exactly where your work is going to come from. I mean you cannot have a cooperative first for a year and no work, people just disappear.



## **Activist Resources to Build the Solidarity Economy From Below**

**New Video By La Via Campesina: “Together We Can Cool the Planet”**



For many years, La Vía Campesina and GRAIN have been telling the world about how the agro-industrial food system causes half of all greenhouse gas emissions. But the world's governments are refusing to face these problems head on, and the Paris Summit in December 2015 passed without any effective commitment to doing so on their part.

This new video by La Vía Campesina and GRAIN gives you the information you need to understand how the agro-industrial food system is impacting our climate, and at the same time what we can do to change course and start cooling the planet. And every single one of us is part of the solution!

In the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa, for many years, La Vía Campesina been criticising false solutions to climate change like GMOs, the “green” economy, and “climate-smart” agriculture. No two ways about it: the solution to the climate crisis is in the hands of small farmers, along with consumers who choose agroecological products from local markets. This is the message La Vía Campesina took to the Paris Climate Change Conference in December 2015.

You can freely watch, download and share the video on social media at: <http://tv.viacampesina.org/Together-we-can-cool-the-planet-801>

Also, to find out more about the relationship between industrial agriculture and climate change, and struggles for solutions, go to: <https://www.grain.org/article/categories/526-food-and-climate>.



## 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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**All back issues of the Solidarity Economy News are available on our website.**

