

**Memorandum
On National Food Security Bill-
Peoples' Alliance for Bio Regional Food Sovereignty**

Prof. K V Thomas

Minister of Consumer Affairs,
Food and Public Distribution
Govt. of India

Dear Sir,

We, the representatives of Peoples' Alliance for Bio-Regional Food Sovereignty, are pleased to submit the following memorandum for your consideration and appropriate action.

Preamble:

In this memorandum we present before you the views, concerns and apprehension on the newly tabled National Food Security Bill in the Lok-Sabha on December 12, 2012. It is a welcome move as the bill when it becomes an Act it will constitutionally empower the people with legal rights. It also gives the citizens an opportunity to debate and critical review of the clauses contained in the NFSB.

In this regard Peoples' Alliance for Bio Regional Food Sovereignty, a platform of Members consisting of peasants, agricultural labours, Dalit, nomadic tribes, indigenous peoples, artisans, coastal and inland fisher communities, women, displaced people from their lands and communities working on sustainable alternatives had organized three consultations on Food Security Bill – The first one was held in Hyderabad from 14th to 16th October, 2012 coinciding with the COP CBD held in Hyderabad. The second Consultation was in Lucknow, from 31st October to November 2nd with the participants from four North Indian states. The third consultation was held at Aurangabad from 24th -25th November, 2012 with participants from four West Indian States. These consultations were aimed at eliciting the general views and responses of the larger public on the Food Security Bill.

It is our shared concern that access to Food and Nutrition has become crucial issues of survival for the large number of rural and urban poor. It is quite ironical that we are faced with a contradictory situation where over Production of food grains and starvation co-exist as a result of weak policies of re-distribution to the needy. It is quiet astounding to note that India ranks 65th out 79 counties on the Global Hunger Index according to a new report by the Food Policy Research Institute. The report has sharply criticized India for not moving fast enough to reduce mal-nutrition/malnourishment. The grave ethical and practical implications of this abominable situation are obvious and it reflects the lack of responsibility of the state. Not least, because mass hunger is a man-made phenomenon. Historically, hunger and starvation have been caused not by shortfalls in food production but rather by distortions in commodity markets, deficiencies in distribution and political inaction. We also know the long-term efforts of chronic malnourishment on maternal and neonatal health and developmental outcomes among children.

The, the government of India is planning to enact the National Food Security Bill in winter session of Parliament. However, the ongoing official discussions are confined to the so-called Poverty Line approach which is highly contested in defining the kilograms of food grains to be distributed to the poor. Other basic issues like land, access to water, nutrition, regional diversity of food, living wages, access over natural resources, agrarian reform, gender-justice, etc are out of the policy framework. The global players and market forces are now looking for a gainful food market in India to the detriment of the livelihood of the marginalized communities.

Peoples' Alliance for Bio Regional Food Sovereignty wishes to supplement the already existing debates and the critical inputs provided by other organizations to improve and rectify the clause which goes against people's Food Security. Further, we wish to state that the present Food Security Bill is concerned with mainly the distribution of food grains(defined as cereals) with focus mainly on delivery of limited food items through PDS thereby making the people food dependent on the state reflects a very narrow vision. We feel that the farmers' food sovereignty rights should be protected. This implies the food security bill should address issues related to access to resources(land, forests and water), provide support for revival of agriculture, promotion of livelihoods, protection of food producers especially

small and marginal farmers, food sovereignty and preservation of local food systems.

This approach alone could safeguard the agency and sovereignty of the food producer. This calls for an Inter Ministerial holistic perspective to address the root cause of food crisis in the country. We therefore wish to submit before you some of the critical issues as well as the crucial factors that undermine the food security of the poor and vulnerable communities.

1. The present Food Security Bill has not sufficiently analyze the threat and crisis to Indian agriculture which continues to deepen under the onslaught of corporate globalization and the neo-liberal political project that tries to re-mold the countryside under the logic of industrial agriculture, undermining food security and survival of the rural poor. Within the existing market paradigm, the peasantry continues to face ruin and the specter of suicide continues haunts them, as globalization has reduced the land to the level of commodity for capital accumulation and profit over livelihood. The case for industrial agriculture and contract farming has emerged only because public institutions have failed in their responsibility to provide farmers with the essential protection and support required for viability on a sustained basis.
2. It is our reality that agriculture continues to be the back bone of our society. Life for the vast majority of the people is organized around agriculture and along with allied activities provides employment and livelihood for the vast majority of the people, especially women. The food security act must therefore address issues related to access to land (which is subjected to conflicting demands, land for food vis-a-vis land for non-agricultural use) provide support for the revival of agriculture, promotion of livelihoods, protection of food producers especially small and marginal farmers, food sovereignty and preservation of local food systems.
3. We believe that a transition to sustainable agriculture is an urgent need for food security, both at the local regional and national level. The perspective and method that governs sustainable agriculture should include the strategy to integrate the maximum productive potential of landless people and enhance maximum productivity by using eco-friendly appropriate technology to provide food for the urban sector.
4. The state should assume more responsibility to protect nature from the pillage of humanity's collective resources which is being plundered under the

- spell of the neo-liberal economic model, even those areas of life-forms once considered sacred, like the genetic codes, flora, fauna, seeds and even natural resources like water, once considered common heritage of humanity.
5. Appropriate climate mitigation programs need to be streamlined to arrest climate change which is also severely affecting food security as the availability of surface and ground water is rapidly declining, and any increase in dryness of soil will reduce crop yields adversely.
 6. We are today faced with huge challenges, as the symptoms of global warming have already began, with erratic rainfall and intensity of rainfall becoming much localized. Drought is now a constant phenomenon. Paddy crops which depend on optimum levels of water and sunlight will be badly hit. The impact will also be felt on vegetables and fruits that are seasonal crops. The composition of soil will also change and the agriculture research will have to focus on new variety climate resilient crops, taking into consideration the increasing atmospheric temperature.
 7. Though the persistence of hunger and malnutrition is acknowledged and addressed by Indian policymakers, conditions of absolute hunger are far less accepted or studied. Widespread but unacknowledged hunger, masking conditions of endemic hidden near-famine, co-exists with unprecedented wealth accumulation and spending by the new-rich and middle class, and with food grain rotting in government warehouses because the government refuses to distribute this grain to the poor.
 8. Laws proposed to be enacted which would force governments to reach much of this grain to people who live with hunger, continues to languish in Parliament, with little political support.
 9. Some of the provision in the Bill makes way for extremely centralized decision making and implementation structures, with little or no role for local governments and panchayat raj institutions. The PRIs and even state governments to a large extent have been sidelined from all decision making processes. This needs to be corrected with greater role being given to gram panchayats and gram sabhas (ward councils and ward sabhas in urban areas) in planning, implementation and monitoring.

Need for a paradigm shift.

The above mentioned critical issues and factors makes it imperative for a paradigm shift from global food dependency to “Bio regional food sovereignty” as the way

forward for future food security. The concept of bio regional food security is based on the understanding that each climate zone has its specific characteristics and produces staple and nutritious food for its people. India's National commission on Agriculture initiated a programme to delineate agro-climate regions at the national level and agro climatic zones at the regional level. Then new agricultural policy should take into account Bio regional and climate zone centered approach to food production. The productivist approach to growth through the Green Revolution strategies devastated the indigenous crops, the fertility of our soils and our traditional water management systems. The policy also has led to the standardization of agriculture focusing on wheat and paddy crops at particular sites at the cost of dry land farming and fisheries.

Before the onslaught of corporate agriculture, the Bio regional agriculture method was the dominant practice. The farmers through their experience realized that each Bio region has its specific characteristics and produces nutritious food for its people. The Bio regional practices were the source of food diversity based on the nature of land attributes, topography, geology, climate, soil, vegetation, ground water etc. But today due to industrial agriculture and standardized food habits dictated by the market has led to the obliteration of food diversity.

We believe that the perspective and method that governs bio regional and climate specific agriculture should include the strategy to integrate the maximum productive potential of landless people and enhance maximum productivity by using eco-friendly appropriate technology to provide food for the urban sector. The diversity which is the basis of bio centric agriculture and that which is being destroyed by monocultures is the key to food security at domestic and community level.

Bio regional food sovereignty recognizes that there are limits to natural resources extraction, which cannot exceed the regenerative and assimilative capacities of the bio-system. In short, it is a system of energy and resources flow that does not take out more than what can be regenerated or replenished. It was the age-old practices followed by farmers inter generationally which was based on the belief that the Mother earth provides food for all and for human well being not for human greed. Responsibility to protect nature was the basic principle that underly the traditional agriculture.

Creating sustainable bio regional food security requires a strategic, cohesive, and multidimensional approach. Translating this approach to regional sustainable development requires looking into the reality of each region in enough detail to appreciate local site differences and taking appropriate policies that would suit the local environment.

In order to pursue the objectives of Bio regional food sovereignty we recommend the following.

- We urge the government of India to devise policies for bio regional, eco friendly, pro poor agriculture policies to fight against poverty, hunger and malnutrition and thus assure fundamental rights of all citizens to food, energy, health and education including other economic, social and cultural rights.
- Uphold the principle of Bio region based food sovereignty and uphold the right and co responsibility of the people, communities and nations to determine our own systems of production, farming, fishing which are ecologically, socially and culturally appropriate to specific regional context. Women's access and control over productive resources such as land, seeds, water, finance etc must be respected and protected.
- Initiate policies to guarantee the sovereign right of the people to decide and protect biodiversity and develop policies based on people's knowledge, experiences and practice. Also enact polices to recover the traditionally existed agricultural practices of bio regional approach to food production which is sustainable and eco friendly.
- Frame appropriate policies to stop and annul the creation of special industrial zones which dispossess the farmers from their lands that they have nurtured for centuries, and which are now the tenets of corporate globalization.
- The targeted approach of food distribution is only concerned with the distribution of the food grains and is limiting factor in the newly introduced Bill. The Bill should be modified in a manner that ensures that everyone can have enough food, not just cereals, not just wheat and rice, but food-including pulses and oil.

- Furthermore food items such as food grains including millets, pulses and oilseeds should be procured for distribution under the schemes such as PDS, ICDS and MDMS. While these foods are crucial for ensuring nutrition, their production is currently inadequate. Boosting the production of the above mentioned food items can greatly help the dry land farming communities.
- We recommend that the creation of a grievance redressal mechanism with clear responsibilities of delivering of entitlements must be laid out. A statement of obligations/differentiated responsibilities of each public authority/office in terms of its duties, obligations and commitments towards citizens under the Food security Act should be developed which clearly defines the services to be provided.

We wish and hope that the Honorable Minister will give due consideration to our Memorandum when finalizing the National Food security Act.

Yours sincerely,

For People's Alliance for Bio-Regional Food Sovereignty

Bishop N.L. Karkare

Patron