



PEASANTS' DIGNIFIED LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

THEMATIC BOOKLET

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Thematic Booklet

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Sophie Holin

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Calle Robespierre 104, 93170.
Bagnolet, France

viacampesina@viacampesina.org

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1.

INTRODUCTION



The right of all peoples to enjoy dignified lives and livelihoods is fundamental: it is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) elaborates upon this right in the diverse contexts of peasant struggles. See the Introductory booklet in this series for background information on UNDROP.

Article 1 of the UNDROP defines a peasant as a person who "produces food on a small-scale by themselves or in community, for themselves or for market, who relies on family or non-monetized labor, and has dependency and attachment to the land." (1)

They could be involved in:

- Small-scale agriculture
- Crop planting
- Livestock raising
- Pastoralism
- Fishing
- Forestry
- Hunting or gathering
- Handicrafts



They can be:

- Landless
- Nomadic
- Hired workers
- Migrant workers
- Seasonal workers
- Transhumants
- Pastoralists
- Indigenous Peoples
- Smallholders
- Family farmers





Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. (2) To live a dignified life means to be valued, respected, and treated ethically no matter your age, ethnicity, gender, physical and/ or mental ability, or socioeconomic status. To protect dignity and life is a fundamental organizing principle of food sovereignty, and was a key reason for developing the UNDROP.



We the peasants and other people working in rural areas continue the struggle against threats to our dignity from capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism. In today's globalized world, we fight together against corrupt, right-wing governments, capitalist agribusiness, and all oppressive heteropatriarchal systems that exploit land, resources, and labor to overpower peasants and control the globalized food system. These forces try to strip away our dignity for power and profit. Our organizations and communities continue to work towards food sovereignty in the face of these connected systems of discrimination and exploitation, and now we can use UNDROP as a tool to support our struggles.

The right to dignity is essential, but what does it mean in the context of our peasant lives and livelihoods?

It means:



- the ability to live and work in safe, healthy, supportive environments,
- living with food sovereignty which upholds democratic food systems that exist in harmony with nature,
- the right to choose and make decisions that are best for you, your family, and your community,
- living in nations where government policies implement peasants' rights fully and eliminate discrimination.



It is important to note that living with dignity is connected to the principle of non-discrimination whereby all people, no matter who they are, have an equal and fair chance to access all available opportunities in a society. Although many countries guarantee non-discrimination and equality in their constitutions, this does not always ensure human rights will be protected, especially for marginalized peoples.



UNDROP offers a human rights framework based on our real experiences that works to bring us closer to achieving dignified lives. This booklet outlines the UNDROP articles that are the most connected to dignified life through food sovereignty. These include the rights to:

- Development
- Adequate living conditions
- Water
- Social security
- Physical and mental health, and others.

Keep reading to learn more.



2.

HOW ARE DIGNIFIED LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS PROTECTED BY UNDROP, AND WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS OF OUR STATES?



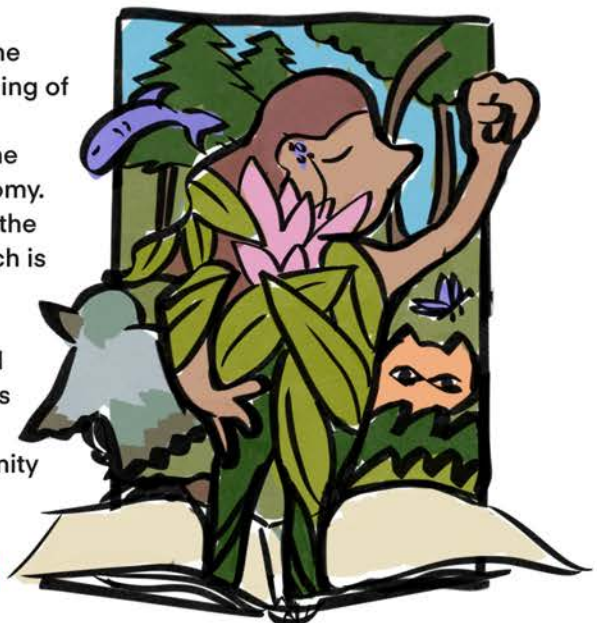
2.1 HUMAN DIGNITY



International law recognizes that individual's rights originate from human dignity since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. Dignity is also at the center of people's struggles against systems of oppression. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and UNDROP show that the understanding of human dignity must be reshaped by new perspectives, including those from people in rural areas for whom nature is the source of dignity. This reshaping will allow international human rights law to better address structural causes and patterns of human rights violations that unfairly affect the rural world.



Specific relationships to ecosystems and land shape the identities and self-understanding of us peasants and other rights-holders in rural areas, are at the core of our dignity and autonomy. Therefore, we need to rethink the current version of dignity which is only centered on the human person. This would enable an interpretation of UNDROP and other international instruments that incorporates different understandings of human dignity including one that integrates nature and humans via "pro persona-natura" principle. (3)



2.2 PRINCIPLE OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

Acknowledging the universality and interrelatedness of human rights, UNDROP defines both general obligations (progressive realization of the rights and non-discrimination) and specific obligations (obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill) of states. It acknowledges international obligations of nation states such as the right to: land, seeds, biodiversity, water for irrigation, access to natural resources and their sustainable use, conservation and protection of the environment, education adapted to the local agroecological environment, and the right to food sovereignty.

These rights were not acknowledged in human rights frameworks prior to the adoption of UNDROP.



States must also consider the principle of non-discrimination in defining their human rights obligations. Firstly, non-discrimination is at the core of adopting UNDROP to protect peasants against historical marginalization and systemic discrimination. Secondly, this principle should guide states in implementing their specific obligations. In fulfilling their human rights obligations, States should take into account discrimination suffered primarily by us peasants and other people working in rural areas so we cannot live a dignified life, such as:

- (1) expropriation of land, forced evictions and displacement;
- (2) gender discrimination;
- (3) absence of agrarian reform and rural development policies;
- (4) lack of minimum wage and social protection;
- (5) repression and criminalization of movements protecting our rights.



The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas studied these causes of discrimination and vulnerability of peasants and other people in their 2012 study. (4) The study recommended developing a new international human rights instrument on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. That instrument is UNDROP!



UNDROP reaffirms the rights established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), recognizing the conditions and challenges faced by rural women in Article 14 (5). UNDROP establishes state obligations regarding non-discrimination: states need to take all appropriate measures to eliminate formal and substantial discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas. In all their laws, policies and programs, states need to:



- Take into account the particular problems faced by peasant women and other women working in rural areas,
- Recognize their specific contribution to food and nutrition security,
- And adopt national laws promoting women's rights to land.

2.3 STATE OBLIGATIONS

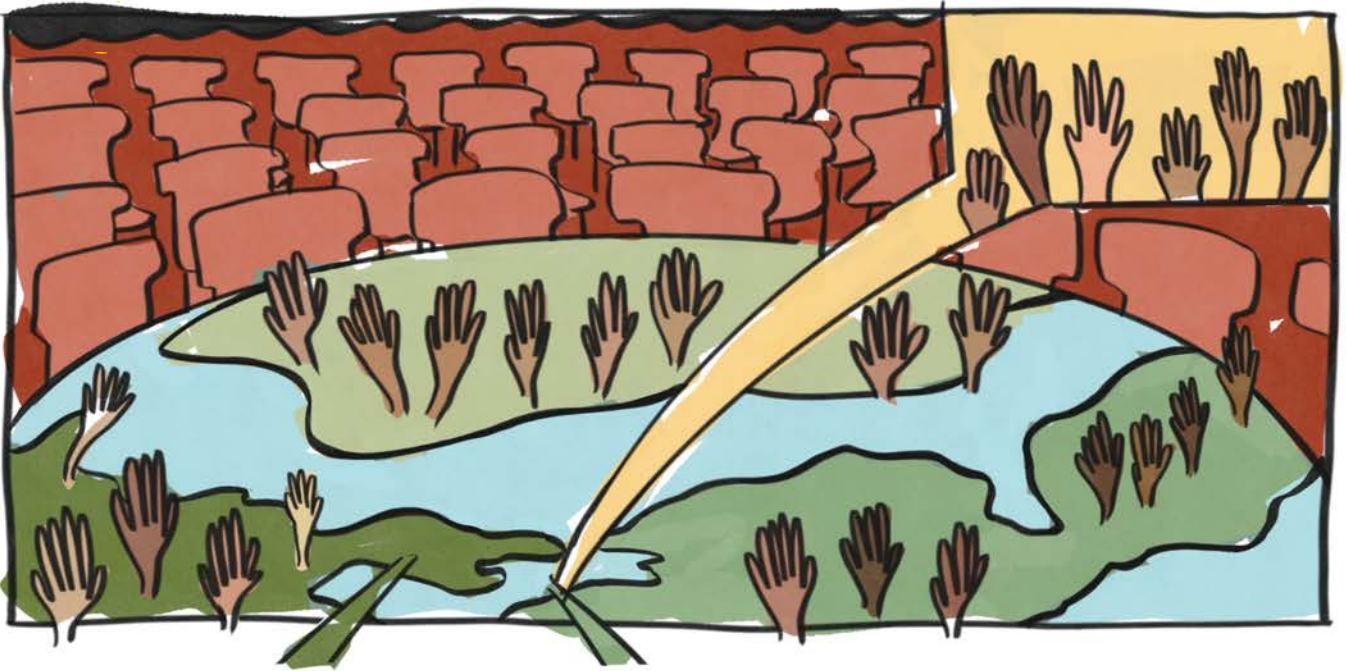


States are obligated to respect the rights in UNDROP and should not interfere with the enjoyment of those rights. For example, in the case of the right to seeds, states must recognize, respect, and never (legally or in effect) dispossess us of our customary and informal peasant and indigenous systems, knowledge, management, or access to seeds and agricultural biodiversity. This also applies to fishing, pastoral and agro-ecological systems, and related knowledges.



States' must protect against any threat to these rights. Threats could come from individuals, groups, corporations as well as agents acting under their authority. In the case of the right to water (Article 21), states must prevent corporations from cutting off rural users from water supply, polluting and contaminating water with harmful substances, or overusing water (6). In the case of the right to seeds (Article 19), states must make sure that there is control over access to or use of seeds and biological diversity that unfairly concentrates power and control over these systems (7).

States are obligated to take positive action to promote, provide, and facilitate the enjoyment of these rights.



States are obligated to adequately involve rural people in decision-making at the international or national level (Article 2) (8). This principle is linked to other rights in UNDROP, such as the freedom of thought, opinion and expression (Article 10) (9) or the right to participation and information (Article 11) (10).



Finally, states' extraterritorial obligations under UNDROP mean that they must respect, protect, and fulfill the enjoyment of rights beyond their borders. These require states to refrain from actions that interfere, directly or indirectly (including through policies such as trade, investment, energy, agricultural, development and climate change mitigation policies) with the enjoyment of human rights. Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs) are important because they make sure agreements, laws, policies and practices do not negatively affect human rights in other countries.





States must make sure that respect for human rights is prioritized in all international agreements (including in the area of trade, investment, and finance), when a corporation whose center of activity, registration, or main place of business or business activities is in that state. In particular, states must establish regulations that do not harm the right to land in other countries, and to hold transnational corporations and other non-state actors accountable for any harm.



States' extraterritorial obligations also require them to make sure that as members of international organizations, (including international financial institutions such as the World Bank and regional development banks) they do not impair the enjoyment of the rights in UNDRP.

3.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE GROUND?

Mali: The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions on Mali in early 2022, and these sanctions impaired the supply of basic necessities to Malian people. The sanctions have a stronger impact on peasant organizations and their members, who represent 80% of the working class but pay the highest price of insecurity through forced displacement to other territories, preventing them from peacefully dedicating themselves to their way of life. The sanctions, while intended to change the government's behavior, have devastated the citizens instead. In this situation, people -- especially peasants -- cannot live with dignity. La Via Campesina with its member CNOP (the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations of Mali) called on ECOWAS to lift the sanctions and allow the people of Mali to live a better life with dignity.



Paraguay: In 2019, the Human Rights Committee referred to the UNDROP in a case involving a Paraguayan peasant and his family. The family claimed that heavy use of agrochemicals in nearby plantations had poisoned them, leading to the death of Ruben Portillo Cáceres. The U.N. Human Rights Council said the state violated the Cáceres family's right to life because they did not enforce environmental regulations. The case's final decision cited UNDROP (11), noting the family's special attachment to and dependency on the land.



Europe: In 2022, Delegates from European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC) met with the secretariat of the U.N. Decade on Family Farming to advance and build the participation of small-scale food producers through global and regional public policies. They drew attention to governments' commitments to the UNDROP and urged them to use it as a guide for the development of better public policies and investments that uphold the dignity of family farmers.



Indonesia: On September 24th, 2022, thousands of peasants, students, and farmworkers marched with Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) to commemorate National Peasants' Day, highlight the agricultural struggle in the country, and demand peasants' rights. They raised concerns about the inadequate protection and empowerment of peasants, the lack of fair prices for their products, and the chaotic distribution of subsidized fertilizers. SPI insisted that the government can protect the rights of peasants by bringing UNDROP into national agriculture policies.



Colombia: Colombian peasants have faced human rights violations and repression for decades despite the peace process started in 2016. Since 2019, the country has seen an increase in killings of social movement leaders by paramilitary groups connected to conflict over the right to land and natural resources. The goal of this terror is to prevent peasant leaders from questioning agribusiness land grabbing policies for agribusiness interest. LVC, FIAN, and allied organizations submitted a report to the U.N. denouncing the violence and citing agrarian reforms that must take place in the country, highlighting the right to a dignified life outlined in UNDROP which was adopted by Colombia in 2018. LVC members and allies in Colombia have also been active in the country, sending solidarity missions to promote peace by empowering Colombians, especially peasants and rural communities to live a dignified life (12).



4.

GLOSSARY

Extraterritorial: outside of a country's territory.

Food sovereignty: the right of peoples to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically fair and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Human dignity: the right of a person to be treated ethically and with respect.

Heteropatriarchy: A hierarchical system, society, or culture dominated by heterosexual men. The term emphasizes discrimination against women and LGBTIQ+ peoples who live within this type of power structure.

Human rights: are rights that belong to all human beings without difference to class origin, ethnicity, sex, gender and nationality. Human rights cannot be taken away or given up. Most importantly, human rights cannot be separated— one human right cannot be fulfilled without the rest. For example, the human right to life cannot be ensured unless the human right to adequate food is ensured.

Imperialism: a country asserting its power and influence over another country through force, diplomacy, and/or unequal trade.

International law: rules established by custom or treaty and recognized by nations as binding in their relations with one another.

Non-discrimination principle: equal treatment of a person or group regardless of their particular characteristics.

5.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Below you can find a series of thematic booklets that specifically address some of the most important traits in UNDROP.

1. Introductory Booklet
2. Access to Resources and Means of Production
3. Peasant Rights and Food Production
4. Peasants' Dignified Lives and Livelihoods
5. Peasants as Political Subjects

Other useful resources can be found here:

You can access UNDROP here: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/165>

And the illustrated version of UNDROP here:

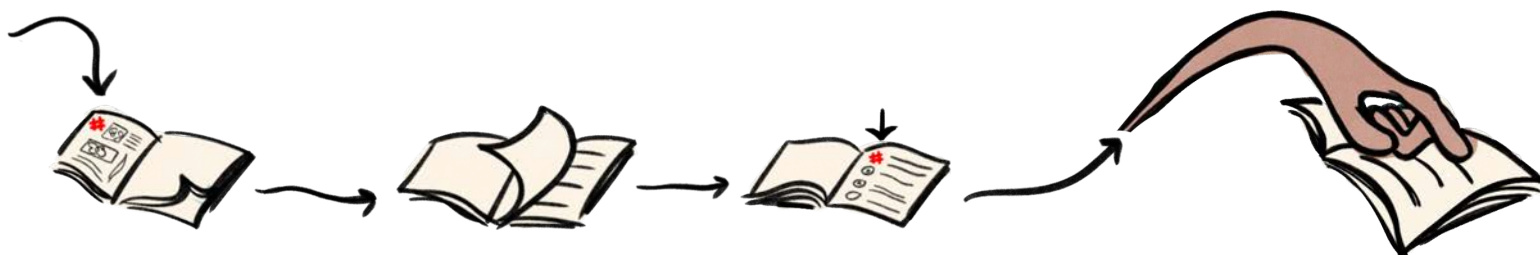
<https://viacampesina.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UNDROP-Book-of-Illustrations-I-EN-I-Web.pdf>

Visit www.viacampesina.org for more information on struggles on ground for food sovereignty and peasant rights.

6.

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- (1) UNDROP (2018), Article 1.
- (2) ", Article 1.
- (3) Final Study of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people in rural areas, Human Rights Council, (2012).
- (4) Filling the gaps in protecting the human rights of a diverse rural world, FIAN International, (2020).
- (5) UNDROP (2018), Article 14 and General recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women.
- (6) ", Article 21.
- (7) ", Article 19.
- (8) ", Article 2.
- (8) ", Article 10.
- (9) ", Article 11.
- (10) ", Article 1.
- (11) La Via Campesina reiterates its commitment for peace in Colombia, La Via Campesina, (2022).



La Via Campesina is an international grassroots movement that defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, women farmers, landless people, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers and youth from around the world.






It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are marginalizing people and destroying nature. The movement comprises 182 local and national organisations in 81 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

FIAN International is an international human rights organization. Since it was founded in 1986, FIAN International has been advocating for the right to food and nutrition. FIAN supports grassroots communities and movements in their struggles against right to food violations. Through its national sections and networks, FIAN works in over 50 countries around the world.

CONTACT INFO:

FIAN International
Willy-Brandt-Platz 5
69115 Heidelberg
phone: +49-6221 65300 30
fax: +49-6221 6530033
www.fian.org
[contact\(at\)fian.org](mailto:contact(at)fian.org)

SOCIAL MEDIA:

 TWITTER: @FIANista
 FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/FIAN.International
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