3rd International Conference

on Public Policy (ICPP3)

June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore

Panel T03P04 Session 1

Uncovering Politics in Public Policies for Agriculture and Food

Food Sovereignty as a Coalition Magnet

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Authors

Puspa Sharma, PhD Candidate, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
puspa.sharma@anu.edu.au

Carsten Daugbjerg, Professor, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

carsten.daugbjerg@anu.edu.au

Date of presentation

29 June 2017

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS A COALITION MAGNET

Puspa Sharma[1], Carsten Daugbjerg[2]

Abstract

A common understanding about food sovereignty is that it is an idea that ensures the rights of small-scale food producers. The food sovereignty movement, at the transnational level, arose as a challenge to neoliberal models of agriculture and food, and the corporatisation of agriculture, which is claimed to have undermined peasant agriculture and sustainability. However, as the literature suggest, food sovereignty is an idea with lots of ambiguities. Yet, a few countries are institutionalising it. This raises the question of what purpose the idea of food sovereignty may serve in the food policy process. In this paper we argue that rather than serving as a policy prescription, food sovereignty has the potential to be used as a coalition magnet bringing together policy actors supporting agricultural reform, but having varying interests or preferences, in a loose coalition. Doing so provides political legitimacy to advance agricultural reform, although policy actors would not necessarily agree on the specific reform measures. We test this argument in a case study of Nepal that has recently instituted food sovereignty as a fundamental right in its Constitution.

Key words: food sovereignty, coalition magnet, ideas, actors.

[1] PhD candidate, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University
[2] Professor, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University

Introduction

The concept of food sovereignty was developed by La Vía Campesina, and was launched at the World Food Summit in 1996.[3] It is claimed to be an alternative to the expansion of capitalist agricultural production and the neoliberal globalization of agricultural markets (Burnett & Murphy 2014; Daugbjerg, Farsund & Langhelle 2015), which are supposed to have promoted chemical-intensive industrial agriculture, the rise of multinational seed corporations, and the displacement of farmers from their lands, among other things (Edelman et al. 2014). But, as the literature suggests, food sovereignty is an idea with many ambiguities (Edelman et al. 2014; Hospes 2014; Patel 2009).

Nevertheless, a common understanding among advocates of food sovereignty is that food sovereignty is "the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments" (Wittman, Desmarais & Wiebe 2011, p. 2). This broad common understanding of food sovereignty has brought together various social movements around the globe in promoting the idea. But because the idea of food sovereignty lacks a single and consistent definition, and consequently a clear and distinct set of implementation mechanisms, it has not been accepted by many governments and in inter-governmental forums (Haugen 2009; Hospes 2014). Of the countries that have institutionalised food sovereignty, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Egypt and Nepal have included it as a right in their constitutions, and Mali, Nicaragua and Senegal have included it in other legislation (Beuchelt & Virchow 2012; FAO N.d.). Focusing on Nepal, this paper asks why countries institutionalise food sovereignty despite its ambiguity, and what and whose purpose the idea of food sovereignty might serve in the food policy process.

[3] La Vía Campesina is an international movement comprising of millions of peasants, small and medium farmers, landless people, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world, https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisation-mainmenu-44, viewed 16 January 2017

There are few studies that have endeavoured to seek answers to this question. For instance, McKay, Nehring and Walsh-Dilley (2014, p. 1178) find that in some Latin American countries, food sovereignty has been a political project in that the concept is used by state actors in particular ways to "support their own strategies and goals". It is argued that food sovereignty was institutionalised due to strong social movements and the rise of leftist leaders in those countries (McKay, Nehring & Walsh-Dilley 2014; Peña 2013). Rather than being a result of a common understanding and consensus on food sovereignty, the study on Ecuador by Peña (2013) suggests that the institutionalisation of food sovereignty was a compromise between social and state actors. When food sovereignty is an ambiguous and contested idea, how was it possible to compromise on its institutionalisation? The studies do not delve deeper into this important question on the process of institutionalising food sovereignty.

In this paper we intend to fill this gap. The introduction of food sovereignty at the transnational level was a result of a revolt against neoliberal globalisation and corporatisation of agriculture, but its institutionalisation at the national level was not an automatic response in the same way. As we will argue subsequently, the institutionalisation of food sovereignty is due to the potential it possesses as a 'coalition magnet'—a phrase coined by Béland and Cox (2016).

Béland and Cox (2016) define coalition magnets as ideas having a political appeal that attract a diversity of individuals and groups. Such ideas are used strategically by policy entrepreneurs to frame their interests, mobilise supporters and build coalitions. We contend that food sovereignty possesses these attributes and has the potential to be used as a coalition magnet bringing together policy actors supporting agricultural reform—but having a diversity of interests or preferences—to form a coalition. Actors having different political perspectives promote food sovereignty based on their own understandings. This can move food sovereignty from the confines of social movements to being an institutionalised policy objective in a country.

Ideas and coalition magnets

According to Béland and Cox (2016), ideas are causal beliefs about economic, social and political phenomena. They state, "[a]s beliefs, they are interpretations of the material world, shaped as much by the material world as by our emotions and values. As causal beliefs, ideas posit relationships between things and events" (p. 430). Ideas help to construct the problems and issues that enter the policy agenda (Béland 2009). They help us think about ways to address problems and challenges, and thus provide guides for action (Béland & Cox 2011).

The importance of ideas for institutional construction and change has also been elaborated by Blyth (2002). He argues that ideas "allow agents to reduce uncertainty, propose a particular solution to a moment of crisis, and empower agents to resolve that crisis by constructing new institutions in line with [the] new ideas" (p. 11).

In recent years, ideational approaches have become more familiar across the social sciences as ideas are increasingly recognised as major factors in politics due to their important role as a primary source of political behaviour (Béland & Cox 2011). The focus of the ideational research agenda in policy studies has been to understand how ideas influence public policies (Daugbjerg, Farsund & Langhelle 2015). In fact, according to Béland and Cox (2011), ideational explanations are richer than other explanations of change.

Ideas influence policy outcomes through building coalitions (Blyth 2002; Parsons 2016). But how do ideas help build coalitions? According to Béland and Cox (2016), one of the major ways in which some ideas shape political power relations is through their role as a 'coalition magnet', which is "the capacity of an idea to appeal to a diversity of individuals and groups, and to be used strategically by policy entrepreneurs (i.e., individual or collective actors who promote certain policy solutions) to frame interests, mobilize supporters and build coalitions" (p. 429). These coalitions

could be tightly or loosely organised. Also, they could be formal or informal, and national or transnational.

As Béland and Cox (2016) argue, ideas that are often novel constructions—thus unfamiliar to actors in a policy debate, or those being used in a new or unfamiliar way—can become coalition magnets. For an idea to become a coalition magnet, three things are essential: 1) effective manipulation of the idea by policy entrepreneurs, 2) embracing or promotion of the idea by key actors in the policy process, and 3) coming together of actors who were at odds with each other previously, or awakening of a policy preference in the minds of actors who were not previously engaged with the particular issue. That is, somewhat counterintuitively, it is the ambiguity of the idea that attracts individuals and groups having divergent interests or preferences in building a coalition. The reason for this is that ambiguous ideas can be manipulative and perceived according to one's own understanding.

An idea's intrinsic qualities, especially its valence and its potential for ambiguity or polysemy (Béland & Cox 2016) or multi-vocality[4] (Parsons 2016), partly determine its success in coalition building. Ideas having positive valence but varied interpretations are attractive to many as they can promote such ideas according to their interest or preference, possibly changing with time or according to the circumstance. Therefore, Parsons (2016) suggests that to understand the role of ideas as coalition magnets, it is important to carefully track the actor(s) and the issues they championed with respect to policies, how their agenda related to perceived problems, and how both changed over time. His views align with Béland and Cox (2016), who argue that the direct role of the individual and collective actors who must mobilise politically to impose particular ideas is essential in building coalitions.

[4] Multi-vocality is an idea's capacity to be understood in multiple ways, combining shared and unshared interpretations (Parsons 2016).

Food sovereignty's pathway from social movement to institutionalisation

La Vía Campesina spearheaded the idea of food sovereignty as a countermovement to the commodification of agriculture and food and subjecting them to global trade rules. The idea of food sovereignty is based on the conviction that small farmers, including peasant fisher-folk, pastoralists and indigenous people, are capable of producing food for their communities and feeding the world in a sustainable and healthy way.[5]

The development of the concept of food sovereignty at the transnational level is a backlash against the globalisation of agricultural markets, but this alone might not explain its institutionalisation at the national level. There is a need to "dig a little deeper into the world of ideas of the food sovereignty movement" (Hospes 2014, p. 122), and examine the attributes of food sovereignty that could potentially make it a coalition magnet.

Food sovereignty has been defined and redefined over the years. It has remained an "ill-defined and inconsistent idea" (Daugbjerg, Farsund & Langhelle 2015) and lacks conceptual clarity and a common framework (Hospes 2014; Patel 2009). Initially, it was defined as "the *right of each nation* to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity" (La Vía Campesina 1996) (emphasis added). But over the years, the definition has changed, along with increasing the levels of inconsistency in the understanding of food sovereignty (Patel 2009). The latest definition of food sovereignty, as spelled out in the Nyeleni Declaration of 2007, is that "[It] is the *right of peoples* to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (The Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007) (emphasis added).

[5] https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisation-mainmenu-44, viewed 16 January 2017

Food sovereignty has been made a 'big tent' to include disparate groups that find something in the idea with which to recognise themselves, but its core has not been explicitly defined (Patel 2009). Also, despite the food sovereignty movement being a revolt against the commodification of food and agriculture, it has not been explicit enough in its position regarding food and agriculture trade (Burnett & Murphy 2014). Similarly, there are varied understandings about the relationship between food sovereignty, food security and the right to food (see, for example, Beuchelt & Virchow 2012; Jarosz 2014).

Nevertheless, a few countries have institutionalised food sovereignty by including it in their national legislation. In the case of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, the emergence of new social movements, the election of leftist leaders, an anti-imperialist discourse, and increased transnational ties between agrarian movements have been considered the reasons for instituting food sovereignty as a constitutional right (McKay, Nehring & Walsh-Dilley 2014; Peña 2013). But there were contentions in the institutionalisation process. The idea was rigorously debated, and some compromises were made. For instance, Article 401 of Ecuador's constitution has declared the country free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which aligns with the food sovereignty movement as it vehemently opposes GMOs. But an exception has also been built in Article 401, which allows the Ecuadorian President to introduce GMOs with the approval of the National Assembly (Peña 2013). Why was such a contradictory provision—providing people the right to food sovereignty but also giving the authority to the President to introduce GMOs—included in Ecuador's constitution? While observing this contradiction, Peña (2013) does not explain the process that led to the institutionalisation of food sovereignty.

We argue that food sovereignty has been an idea that has been manipulated by food sovereignty entrepreneurs to garner support from individuals and organisations who do not necessarily share a common understanding about its meaning and policy prescriptions. These entrepreneurs have effectively transferred the idea of food sovereignty from the transnational level to national levels,

but it has been interpreted in many different ways. Thus, the idea of food sovereignty has brought together actors, even those who seem to be at odds with each other, in forming a coalition. In the context of food being perceived as a political weapon in local, national and global politics, the idea of achieving sovereignty in food is highly appealing. Having positive valence and a multi-vocal character potentially makes food sovereignty a coalition magnet.

Our analysis is mainly based on interview data we collected from Nepal. Between July and September 2016, we conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with thirty stakeholders in Kathmandu who are closely associated with the food sovereignty movement and debate in Nepal. The interviewees included leaders of farmer organisations (both affiliated and as well as not affiliated with political parties), politicians and their representatives, government officials, development thinkers and planners, civil society actors, policy analysts, activists, and legal experts.

Institutionalising food sovereignty in Nepal

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) had waged an armed struggle in Nepal since 1995 with various socio-economic-political demands and was fighting underground. One of the major objectives of the struggle was to abolish the monarchy. After King Gyanendra dismissed a democratically elected government and assumed direct control in 2005, the mainstream political parties came together to oppose the king's move. Subsequently, they signed a 12-point understanding with the CPN (Maoist) to garner its support in the movement they would call for an end to monarchy.

To make the movement successful, the political parties asked all their affiliated organisations to form coalitions and mobilise their respective masses in the political struggle. Accordingly, peasant organisations affiliated with the political parties came together. The three major peasant organisations in this endeavour were the All Nepal Peasants' Federation (ANPFa), affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist and Leninist), which is commonly referred to as

CPN (UML); the Nepal Peasants' Association (NPA), affiliated with the Nepali Congress; and the All Nepal Peasants' Federation Revolutionary (ANPFa-R)[6], affiliated with the CPN (Maoist). They formed a loose coalition and named it the National Peasants' Coalition.

The success of the political movement of 2005/06 did not only abolish the monarchy, but it also ushered in various social, economic and political rights. There were calls to ensure the rights of the minority and the marginalised, calls for social inclusion and calls for democratic participation, among other things. The National Peasants' Coalition also realised that after their success in jointly mobilising the peasants for political regime change, it was imperative that they continue to work together to advocate for agrarian reforms and peasants' rights in the new political context. In due course, about 10 other associations also joined the Coalition.[7]

The success of the political movement resulted in the reinstatement of the parliament that had been dissolved by the king. The parliament constituted an interim constitution drafting committee. The committee collected suggestions from various quarters and prepared the first draft of the interim constitution. It was then intensively discussed and negotiated among the political parties, including the CPN (Maoist), and the finalised version was tabled for approval at the interim legislature parliament. The interim parliament approved the interim constitution unanimously.[8]

In the interim constitution, food sovereignty was included as a fundamental right of every Nepali citizen.[9] Additionally, establishing the rights of citizens to food sovereignty alongside rights to education, health, housing and employment was mentioned as the state's responsibilities. Similarly, "promoting the interests of marginalized communities, peasants and labourers living below the

[6] ANPFa-R provided only moral support in the beginning because it was underground along with its parent party until the political movement concluded. It joined the coalition after the conclusion of the movement.
[7] http://anpfa.org.np/index.php/about-anpfa/membership-and-networking, viewed 5 November 2016
[8] http://un.org.np/node/10500, viewed 5 November 2016
[9] A new constitution was written later by the Constituent Assembly and it replaced the interim constitution on 20 September 2015. The new constitution is 186 pages long, and is divided into 35 parts, 308 articles and nine schedules. It is criticised by some as a plan document for its length and details. The new constitution has also stipulated food sovereignty as a fundamental right of every Nepali citizen.

poverty line by making reservation for a certain period of time with regard to education, health, housing, food sovereignty and employment" was stipulated as a state policy (*Interim Constitution of Nepal* 2007).

Food sovereignty as such was not on the agenda of the political movement of the time. The main agenda of the movement was to overthrow the monarchy as autocratic monarchy was considered the main barrier to the Nepali people's aspiration of democracy, peace, prosperity, social advancement and an independent, sovereign Nepal.[10] After the success of the movement, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the Government of Nepal and CPN (Maoist) on 21 November 2006. The preamble of the Agreement stated the necessity to carry out a forward-looking restructuring of the state by resolving the prevailing problems related to class, ethnicity, and regional and gender differences. Among other things, it stipulated the formulation of policies to implement a scientific land reform programme by doing away with feudal land ownership practices, and establishing the rights of all citizens to education, health, shelter, employment and food security. Regarding the right to food security, the Agreement stipulated that the political parties are committed to respecting and guaranteeing such rights of all the people, and assuring that there shall be no interference in the use, transportation and distribution of food items, food products and food grains.[11]

Food sovereignty was never mentioned in the agreements between the political parties. The agreement among them to ensure food security was replaced by the term 'food sovereignty' in the interim constitution and left undefined. The interim constitution did not elaborate on what the right to food sovereignty alongside right to education, health, housing, etc. entailed, and what it meant to

[10] Twelve-point understanding reached between the seven political parties and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, Government of Nepal, http://www.peace.gov.np/uploads/files/1_GoV.pdf, viewed 20 December 2016

[11] Comprehensive Peace Agreement concluded between the Government of Nepal and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, Government of Nepal, http://www.peace.gov.np/uploads/files/14_Gov.pdf, viewed 20 December 2016

'provide reservation on food sovereignty'. This was because, according to some civil society actors and agriculture experts, food sovereignty was not a well-thought-out and rigorously debated idea. Its institutionalisation was first of all a symbolic political act that did not reflect a specific policy agenda. As we argue below, it was appealing broadly to various groups because of its polysemy or multi-vocality, and because it might have the attributes of a coalition magnet.

To establish whether food sovereignty was a coalition magnet, we analyse 1) whether there were policy entrepreneurs who manipulated and promoted the idea of food sovereignty, 2) whether key actors in the constitution- and policy-making and implementing processes embraced the idea of food sovereignty, and 3) whether the idea of food sovereignty brought together actors who seemed to be at odds with each other previously.

Attribute 1: Policy entrepreneurs and idea's manipulation

The All Nepal Peasants' Association (ANPA), which later became ANPFa, took the lead in making the call for food sovereignty in Nepal.[12] Its leaders were the main policy entrepreneurs who propagated the idea of food sovereignty and convinced the others in accepting and promoting it. They were successful in doing so by manipulating the idea of food sovereignty as the idea itself is ambiguous at the transnational level.

ANPA became affiliated with La Vía Campesina in 1994. But, as stated by its former General Secretary, it was not actively engaged in the global peasants' movement from the outset. After a few years' membership, ANPA started becoming an active member and has remained so to this day. ANPFa is also an active member of the Asian Peasant Coalition, and co-ordinator of the South

[12] In the early 2000s, ANPA was restructured into ANPFa by bringing together 23 commodity-specific producer organisations under its umbrella. It claims to be an umbrella organisation of entire Nepali peasants fighting against feudalism, imperialism and neo-liberalism since its inception six decades ago. It has also been active in mobilising the masses, especially peasants, in democratic movements time and again, http://anpfa.org.np/index.php/about-anpfa/who-we-are, viewed 12 January 2017

Asian Peasant Coalition (SAPC).[13] Active engagements of ANPFa at the global and regional levels with organisations that are advocates of food sovereignty enabled ANPFa to take the lead in the call for food sovereignty in Nepal. As ANPFa's General Secretary stated during the interview, "We are in the policy formulation team on food sovereignty at the international level. We participated in the parallel people's summit in Rome in 2002. We were also for the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty. Thus, we are much aware about food sovereignty issues". ANPFa's entrepreneurship in promoting food sovereignty in Nepal is also evident from the NPA Chairman's statement, "We were not much aware about food sovereignty. [ANPFa's then General Secretary] explained to us about it. He was pursuing his PhD also on the same subject, and so we got to learn from him about food sovereignty".

A vice-president of CPN (UML), who is a former Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal, is the president of ANPFa. Similarly, one of ANPFa's members was appointed Minister of Agriculture, and ANPFa's former General Secretary was politically appointed as one of the members of the country's National Planning Commission. Because of its huge peasant base, ANPFa enjoys strong support from its parent party, which is one of the most influential parties in Nepal.

Likewise, the idea of food sovereignty was promoted by ANPFa-R. A senior leader of ANPFa-R, who became an advisor to the Minister of Agriculture, also had been affiliated with La Vía Campesina. He too had been vigorously pursuing the right to food sovereignty in Nepal. Thus, the actors who promoted food sovereignty in Nepal enjoyed considerable political clout and had influential roles in decision making.

These actors promoted the idea of food sovereignty in Nepal by defining it in politically appealing but ambiguous ways. In 2006, ANPA published a booklet in Nepali with information about food sovereignty. Titled *About People's Food Sovereignty*, its preface states that the objective of

[13] http://www.anpfa.org.np/index.php/about-anpfa/membership-and-networking, viewed 12 January 2017

publishing the booklet is to inform the people about what the WTO is, what the effects of WTO policies on agricultural countries such as Nepal are, and what the state should do to counteract those effects (ANPA 2006). The entire preface of the booklet is in line with La Vía Campesina's call for food sovereignty as a fight against the WTO and neoliberal ideas in the food and agriculture sector propagated by organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF. But the content of the booklet does not focus and elaborate on these issues. In the section on the WTO, it only briefly discusses the possible negative effects of the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) on agriculture. Moreover, the discussion is at a general level, and not specific to Nepal. There is no discussion of how Nepal's WTO membership could be considered detrimental to the country's agriculture sector. This could be because Nepal's WTO membership has not had any major impact on Nepal's agriculture. In fact, Nepal's accession to the WTO is lauded as a well-balanced outcome in terms of Nepal's commitments to economic reforms and opening of its economy to the outside world, and the preservation of policy space to meet its development objectives, including those relating to agriculture (Pandey, Adhikari & Waglé 2014; Rajkarnikar 2005).

But lead advocates of food sovereignty in Nepal oppose the WTO without any specific reason, especially in the context of its alleged ill-effects on Nepal's agriculture (see Dangal 2013). General claims by farmer leaders of major political parties that the WTO has given monopoly right to multinational seed companies and that multinational companies prioritise food security illustrate why they oppose multinational companies and the free market economy. But they do not clearly explain their aversion towards a free market economy and multinational companies in the Nepali context. They consider internal problems in Nepal's agriculture sector to be more important than external ones. A statement by one of the farmer leaders illustrates this when he states, "Thirty-five to forty percent of our land in the hills is fallow. That is not because of the WTO, nor because of the conditions of international financial institutions".

Ambiguity in the propagation of food sovereignty in Nepal is evident in the different ways it has been understood. First and foremost, such ambiguity is evident in the interpretation of food sovereignty as a broad framework versus a specific programme. An advocate who favours food sovereignty, and who was an advisor to the Natural Resources Committee of the Parliament, explains food sovereignty as a framework. He argues, "food sovereignty should not have been included as a fundamental right in the constitution. It should have been kept in policy documents. Food sovereignty is a process to achieve the right to food". Civil society leaders who have long been advocating for food sovereignty also share somewhat similar views as they state, "food sovereignty is an overarching framework…food security and right to food will operationalise the concepts". ANPFa-R also holds the view that food sovereignty can encompass both food security and the right to food. These actors who understand food sovereignty as being a broad framework argue that food sovereignty encompasses several elements such as land rights, indigenous production systems, the right to access over resources, choice of inputs, governance, policy, and so on. But for ANPFa, food sovereignty is an implementable programme and can be realised as a right. It is considered an alternative to food security because, in the words of the General Secretary of ANPFa, "While food security is about giving fish to the hungry, food sovereignty is about teaching how to fish". He sees food sovereignty as being implementable because it is about providing farmers land and access to resources as the country cannot be food secure unless farmers have access to land and water.

The polysemy or multi-vocal character of food sovereignty is evident in the understandings regarding its approach to agriculture and food trade. Most advocates of food sovereignty do not oppose agriculture and food trade per se. They say they promote self-sufficiency in food but are not against 'all forms of trade'. They argue for 'free and fair trade'. On the contrary, some agriculture and food experts, who promote food sovereignty, find such an explanation rather vague as they argue that even the WTO states it promotes fair trade. Their contention is that food sovereignty and

trade are contradictory as trade is more capitalistic in its essence. Trade talks about global markets whereas food sovereignty is a localised concept.

There are also opposing views on whether agriculture commercialisation and food sovereignty could co-exist. Every major political party in Nepal pitches for agriculture commercialisation.[14] The Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS), which has been prepared to guide Nepal's agriculture development for a 20-year period (2015-2025), also aims to achieve its vision of "a self-reliant, sustainable, competitive, and inclusive agricultural sector that drives economic growth and contributes to improved livelihoods and food and nutrition security leading to food sovereignty" through four strategic components, one of which is profitable commercialisation (MoAD 2015, pp. 3-4). For some adherents of food sovereignty, such as an agriculture expert and a leader of a non-political farmer organisation, achieving food sovereignty through commercialisation is contradictory. In the views of the chairperson of the non-political farmer organisation, agriculture commercialisation in Nepal is not possible because "The country has 150,000 pieces of land and given [the country's] geography, integration of its fragmented land is not possible". But the ANPFa-R's Secretary argues that commercialisation in Nepal should not be understood in the general sense and synonymously with corporatisation. It should be understood as progressing from a low-return agriculture system to a high-return agriculture system, adopting agriculture methods that give high productivity and production, and producing not only for self-consumption but also to create surplus to sell in the market. His contention is that, in subsistence agriculture, farming is related only to remaining alive, but in the sense of commercialisation, it relates to livelihood. It is possible to commercialise agriculture by adopting local, traditional agricultural practices.

[14] See their election manifestos, http://www.nepalicongress.org/index.php?linkId=171, http://www.cpnuml.org/assets/upload/files/CAmanifesto_2070(1).pdf, http://www.ucpnmaoist.org/UserFiles/cpn/cpnmanifesto.pdf, viewed 14 December 2016

Similarly, divergent views exist in the understanding of food sovereignty in relation to land reforms. Farmer leaders, some agriculture policy analysts and activists support the same old agenda of land distribution to provide land ownership to the tillers. This provision is included in the new constitution too. But in the views of a civil society activist who has been working on land rights issues for many years in Nepal, given the lack of enough agricultural land and its increasing fragmentation it would be more beneficial to consolidate small pieces of land and provide it to the tillers for longer terms of 30-50 years. A more radical view held by some strong food sovereignty advocates is that the state should take back control of all private land and provide it on lease to the tillers.

There are also conflicting views in terms of whether food sovereignty argues for self-reliance or self-sufficiency in food. Food self-reliance and food self-sufficiency are not the same concept as the former is about domestic availability of food, for which imports can be a source, whereas the latter is about complete food supply through domestic production (see, for example, Panagariya 2002; Pingali & Rosegrant 1995). ADS envisions a self-reliant agriculture sector, and explains self-reliance as the ability to rely on one's own resources, and as being resilient to economic, social and environmental shocks and changes. ADS's explanation does not mean self-reliance to be understood as self-sufficiency, but it has used the two terms interchangeably throughout the document (see MoAD 2015). This is because, as stated by a former member of the National Planning Commission who contributed to the ADS as regards its trade aspects, people who participated in the preparation of the ADS had differences regarding whether to envision a policy of food self-sufficiency or of self-reliance.

Another area where ambiguity exists in the understanding of food sovereignty is regarding the level where such sovereignty could be exercised—whether at the individual, household, community, or national level. The constitution has provided the right to food sovereignty to every Nepali citizen, i.e., at the individual level. But a civil society actor does not see the possibility of exercising food

sovereignty at the individual level; rather, it is to be exercised at the national level. Similarly, a senior agriculture economist opines that a country could achieve food sovereignty if it could produce enough of its own food and not depend on food imports. On the contrary, in the views of a right-to-food advocate, "Food sovereignty has to be decentralised at the local level, which means being self-sufficient at the local level, designing programmes to ensure rights of farmers at the local level, farmers' self-determination on how to achieve their own food security, and so on".

Thus, a few policy entrepreneurs promoted the idea of food sovereignty in Nepal, but there are varied understandings of what it means and how it could be implemented. Food sovereignty as an idea is not opposed by many actors, but they have accepted it based on their own interpretation.

Attribute 2: Embracing or promotion of the idea by key actors

Food sovereignty brought together leaders of farmer organisations affiliated with various political parties, leaders of an independent farmer organisation and civil society actors on a common platform. There were ambiguities in the understanding of food sovereignty, but none rejected the idea outright. Nevertheless, institutionalisation of food sovereignty might not have been possible had the senior political leaders, policymakers and planners not embraced the idea. As we discuss below, besides the senior-most leaders of all major political parties, all the three key institutions of the state—the legislative, the executive and the judiciary—have also embraced the idea of food sovereignty in Nepal.

Members of the National Peasants' Coalition affiliated with the political parties advocated for and persuaded their leaders in accepting food sovereignty explaining it in their own ways. In one of the political parties, despite some "contrary views by certain leaders", the party did not oppose food sovereignty and the senior-most leaders embraced the idea because it was understood as being akin to political sovereignty. Moreover, as a senior leader of one of the three largest political parties of the country, ANPFa's president had an influential role in the political movement of 2005/06 and

developments thereafter. According to ANPFa officials, during negotiations among senior leaders of the political parties on the country's social, economic and political course after the regime change, ANPFa's president constantly pushed for food sovereignty and was successful in persuading his seniors (the main negotiators) to agree on the interim constitution only if it contained a fundamental right to food sovereignty. Leaders of peasant organisations were also successful in persuading parliamentarians of their respective parties to embrace food sovereignty. ANPFa's president being in the coalition as well as being an influential parliamentarian helped in such persuasions.

Since the ensuring of the right to food sovereignty in the interim constitution, food sovereignty has been included in almost every plan or policy document related to agriculture. The country's National Planning Commission stated in its *Three Year Interim Plan (2007/08-2009/10)* that the country's long-term vision for food security is to "ensure food sovereignty rights of every individual by strengthening in a coordinated way all aspects of food and nutritional security", and had its objective "to make the life of the targeted people healthy and productive by improving national food sovereignty and the food and nutrition situation" (NPC 2007, p. 88). It is not clear what purpose the inclusion of 'individual food sovereignty' in the vision and 'national food sovereignty' in the objective might serve. As a former vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission stated, "Food sovereignty is a political term. It is not an economic term. We would have mentioned only food security, but since [the political leaders] kept the term food sovereignty in the constitution, we also had to keep it". Thus, despite their unwillingness, food sovereignty was embraced by the country's planners.

During preparations of the ADS, representatives of the National Peasants' Coalition, who were also in the Steering Committee, pushed for the inclusion of food sovereignty in the ADS. There was some debate and discussion on the issue, and finally it was included, but without sufficient clarity. This is visible in the ADS, which contains explanations of different terms and phrases used

throughout the text, but not of food sovereignty despite it being a new and rarely heard-of concept (see MoAD 2015, p. xiii). According to a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture who was in the ADS preparation team, the ADS drafting team also could not include indicators to measure food sovereignty.

When the first draft of the ADS was complete, it was sent to the Agriculture and Water Resources Committee of the Parliament for feedback. The Committee was chaired by an extremely popular and influential youth leader.[15] The Committee embraced the idea of food sovereignty, as is evident in its suggestions on the draft ADS. In its analysis of the draft, it stated that agriculture development is not only the backbone of the country's development but also the foundation of food sovereignty and the right to food (see MoAD 2015, Appendix 6). It suggested including food sovereignty as a 'vision' in the ADS, and to clearly define food security, the right to food and food sovereignty. It also asked to clearly state which of these three would provide the theoretical underpinning of the ADS. Additionally, it suggested including some additional aims, plans and programmes from a food sovereignty perspective, but did not provide any specifics as to what those aims, plans and programmes would look like. Thus, the Committee itself seemed to have lacked clarity on the issue, and yet it favoured the inclusion of food sovereignty in the document.

Nepal's Supreme Court also embraced the idea of food sovereignty, but interpreting it in line with the interpretations of the right to food and food security. In 2008, public interest litigation was filed at Nepal's Supreme Court accusing the government of Nepal of not fully honouring the fundamental rights of its citizens to live with dignity (due to the lack of adequate food), and their right to food sovereignty. The court decided in favour of the petitioners and issued an order to the government to provide food by any means, including imports if necessary. It referred to Article 18(3) of the interim constitution on the fundamental right to food sovereignty and interpreted it in conjunction with two

[15] He later became the Health Minister although his desire was to get the portfolio of the Agriculture Ministry or the Energy Ministry (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U0VqrAJRKo, viewed 10 December 2016)

other rights 18(1) and 18(2): the right to employment and to social security. The decision ruled that it is not sufficient only to ensure availability of food, but accessibility is necessary too, and stated that "to realise the right to food through Articles 18(1) and 18(2), the right to food sovereignty has been granted in Article 18(3)" (authors' translation).[16]

Thus, despite its ambiguity, the idea of food sovereignty was not challenged by major actors in Nepal. Rather, they embraced the idea, and some promoted it, but in a variety of ways reflecting their different understandings.

Attribute 3: Coming together of actors who were at odds with each other previously

Obviously, given their ideological differences, the political parties were at odds with each other. Accordingly, their farmer organisations also had differences. The cause for political regime change initially united the political parties and their affiliated farmer organisations. Later, food sovereignty became an important element that continued to bind the farmer organisations together. Their joint promotion of food sovereignty made it more convincing to political party leaders to accept the idea.

The differences the political parties had on agricultural issues is evident from the policies they adopted and the support they enjoyed from the different class of people. As Hachhethu (2007) observes, the Nepali Congress Party adopted a policy of a mixed but open economy, and focused on overall economic growth with its agriculture policy also as being growth-oriented. He states that after 1991, the Party abandoned its earlier goal of providing protection to the tillers. The Party was considered to have its electoral base in the urban middle and upper class (Ishiyama & Batta 2011), and amongst well-off farmers. The Communist parties, on the other hand, represented the proletariat and the working class (Hachhethu 2007). The CPN (UML)'s emphasis on agriculture after the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990 was on land reforms aimed at ending the feudal and

[16] See the Decision of the Supreme Court of Nepal in the case Prakash Mani Sharma and others on behalf of Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public) v. Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and others, Writ Petition No. 0149/065, Decision of 19 May 2010.

dual land ownerships, and ensuring tillers' rights. The CPN (Maoist) had started the People's War opposing the policies, including those related to agriculture, of the government of the time.

After the success of the political movement of 2005/06, differences between the political parties and their associated farmer organisations resurfaced. That delayed the formation of the National Peasants' Coalition. As the Secretary of ANPFa-R said, "When we were at war, Nepali Congress was in government for most of the time. So for us, Nepali Congress was the main opposition. Also, during the war, farmers had seized land from many elites, and many of them were close to the Nepali Congress. Land seizures had not taken place at the behest of any political party. People were exploited by landowners and so they had rebelled. But due to such instances, NPA did not find it comfortable to sit together with us in the coalition."

The political parties advanced some agricultural reforms as per their stated policies when in government, and called for pursuing their recommended policies when in opposition. Today, compared to the past, Nepal's agriculture has seen improvements on several fronts, but they have been "too little and changes have been too slow" (MoAD 2015, p. 2). Despite devoting the country's most cultivated area to cereals, there is growing food trade deficit and high malnutrition. Wily, Chapagain and Sharma (2009) note that initiatives for land reforms were taken as back as the 1950s, and there were some successes over the years, such as removal of land authority from local overlords and land allocations to some ultra-poor. But the fundamental task of classical land reform, which is to ensure secure, sufficient and equitable access to land to the tillers, has not been achieved in the past six decades. There are land ceilings which specifies the amount of land a person can own, and yet land distribution is not significantly less skewed than in 1950, and at least half of the rural population either have no land or do not have enough to feed themselves. Thus, in the words of a senior Agricultural Policy Analyst and Activist, "the political leaders' promises have turned into rhetoric, and they are under pressure to fulfil their promises". He argues that food sovereignty has

brought them together, and has provided them with an alternative to continue with their promises, claiming what they could not achieve in the past could now be achieved by adopting this new idea.

According to experts, with rising food imports, ever-increasing trade deficit of agriculture and food products has been an area of concern for almost every individual in Nepal irrespective of the person's political/economic orientation. But there are differences among them in the approaches that need to be taken to address this challenge. One of the approaches is advocated as embracing the idea of food sovereignty with the understanding that it will push for food self-sufficiency. The alternative approach is to accept food sovereignty in the sense of food self-reliance. More importantly, the general acceptability of food sovereignty by those who were at odds with each other previously has been the political appeal of the idea. As the Chairman of the NPA stated, "I am a democrat and I am always for all kinds of sovereignty. I am inspired by the understanding that we should be sovereign on food matters too".

Thus, food sovereignty enabled convergence of actors claiming to have been fighting for agricultural reforms and farmers' rights for decades in Nepal. It provided the peasant organisations and political parties an alternative to continue with their promises of land reforms, farmers' access to resources, protection of their traditional skills and knowledge, etc. in an even more appealing way.

Conclusion

The idea of food sovereignty was developed as a counter-reaction to neo-liberal policies adopted in the food and agriculture sector. Trade liberalisation and corporatisation of food and agriculture have been considered to have undermined small-scale agriculture and peasants' livelihoods, mostly in developing countries. Therefore, food sovereignty was born out of a social movement with the objective of localising and democratising agriculture and food systems. But what does the localisation and democratisation of agriculture and food systems mean? How can localisation and

democratisation be achieved? There are no clear answers. There is no single, consistent and coherent definition of food sovereignty. Hence, it has been called an ambiguous idea lacking operational mechanisms. Nevertheless, food sovereignty is a highly appealing idea, and therefore, many social movements all over the world have embraced it.

But because it is ambiguous and lacks operational mechanisms unlike other established concepts such as food security and the right to food, it has not been accepted by many governments and in intergovernmental forums. Only a few countries in the world have institutionalised food sovereignty. As the case from Nepal shows, despite the lack of clarity as to what food sovereignty entails and what its operational mechanisms are, it was incorporated in the Constitution. We have demonstrated that the concept of food sovereignty possessed the attributes of a coalition magnet that enabled the formation of a majority coalition.

Learning from policy entrepreneurs at the transnational level, a few policy entrepreneurs at the national level promoted the idea of food sovereignty in an appealing way, manipulating its meaning and scope. Consequently, major political and policy actors embraced the idea of food sovereignty in line with their own understanding and interpretation of the concept. The idea brought together actors who were at odds with each other previously, and developed a strong collective voice leading to the institutionalisation of food sovereignty.

Nonetheless, because food sovereignty has been institutionalised without a common understanding of how it can be realised, there could be problems in its implementation. When political and policy actors start pulling it in different directions as per their understanding, implementing it effectively might become a major challenge. Alternatively, existing programmes of food security and right to food might be repackaged and termed ‘food sovereignty’. In either case, institutionalisation of food sovereignty might remain only a cosmetic measure.

Bibliography

ANPA 2006, *About people's food sovereignty*, All Nepal Peasants' Association, Kathmandu.

Béland, D 2009, 'Ideas, institutions, and policy change', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 701-18.

Béland, D & Cox, RH 2011, 'Introduction: Ideas and politics', in D Béland & RH Cox (eds), *Ideas and politics in social science research*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 3-20.

---- 2016, 'Ideas as coalition magnets: coalition building, policy entrepreneurs, and power relations', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 428-45.

Beuchelt, TD & Virchow, D 2012, 'Food sovereignty or the human right to adequate food: which concept serves better as international development policy for global hunger and poverty reduction?', *Agriculture and human values*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 259-73.

Blyth, M 2002, *Great transformations: economic ideas and institutional change in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Burnett, K & Murphy, S 2014, 'What place for international trade in food sovereignty?', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1065-84.

Dangal, PP 2013, 'Agriculture policy and food sovereignty: a case of Nepal', PhD Dissertation thesis, Tribhuvan University.

Daugbjerg, C, Farsund, AA & Langhelle, O 2015, 'Challenging agricultural normalism in the global food security debate?', paper presented to ICPP Conference, Milan, 1-4 July.

Edelman, M, Weis, T, Baviskar, A, Borras Jr, SM, Holt-Giménez, E, Kandiyoti, D & Wolford, W 2014, 'Introduction: critical perspectives on food sovereignty', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 911-31.

FAO N.d., *The right to food around the globe: Egypt*, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, viewed 25 February 2017, <http://www.fao.org/right-to-food-around-the-globe/countries/egy/en/>.

Hachhethu, K 2007, 'Nepali politics: people-parties interface', in DN Gellner (ed.), *Resistance and the state: Nepalese experiences*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, pp. 133-76.

Haugen, HM 2009, 'Food sovereignty – an appropriate approach to ensure the right to food?', *Nordic Journal of International Law*, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 263-92.

Hospes, O 2014, 'Food sovereignty: the debate, the deadlock, and a suggested detour', *Agriculture and human values*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 119-30.

Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007, <http://un.org.np/sites/default/files/report/tid_188/170106_Interim_Constitution_Eng_Nep_Merged.pdf>.

Ishiyama, J & Batta, A 2011, 'Swords into plowshares: the organizational transformation of rebel groups into political parties', *Communist and post-communist studies*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 369-79.

Jarosz, L 2014, 'Comparing food security and food sovereignty discourses', *Dialogues in Human Geography*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 168-81.

La Vía Campesina 1996, 'The right to produce and access to land', viewed 22 December 2016, <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/decfoodsov1996.pdf>.

McKay, B, Nehring, R & Walsh-Dilley, M 2014, 'The 'state'of food sovereignty in Latin America: political projects and alternative pathways in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1175-200.

MoAD 2015, *Agriculture devlopment strategy 2015 to 2035: Part I*, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Agricultural Development, Kathmandu.

NPC 2007, *Three year interim plan*, Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission, Kathmandu.

Panagariya, A 2002, 'Trade and food security: conceptualizing the linkages', paper presented to Conference on Trade, Agricultural Development, and Food Security: The Impact of Recent Economic and Trade Policy Reform, Food and Agricultural Organization, Rome, July.

Pandey, PR, Adhikari, R & Waglé, S 2014, *Nepal's accession to the World Trade Organization: case study of issues relevant to least developed countries*, United Nations, Department of Economic & Social Affairs, New York.

Parsons, C 2016, 'Ideas and power: four intersections and how to show them', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 446-63.

Patel, R 2009, 'Food sovereignty', *The Journal of peasant studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 663-706.

Peña, K 2013, 'Institutionalizing food sovereignty in Ecuador', paper presented to International Conference, Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, New Haven, 14-15 September.

Pingali, PL & Rosegrant, MW 1995, 'Agricultural commercialization and diversification: processes and policies', *Food Policy*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 171-85.

Rajkarnikar, PR 2005, 'The role of an NGO in support of accession', in P Gallagher, P Low & AL Stoler (eds), *Managing the challenges of WTO participation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 420-9.

The Nyéléni International Steering Committee 2007, *Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty*, viewed 13 January 2016, <www.nyeleni.org>.

Wily, LA, Chapagain, D & Sharma, S 2009, *Land reform in Nepal: where is it coming from and where is it going?*, Authors, Kathmandu.

Wittman, H, Desmarais, A & Wiebe, N 2011, 'The origins and potential of food sovereignty', in A Desmarais, N Wiebe & H Wittman (eds), *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature and community*, Pambazuka Press, Oxford, pp. 1-14.