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## Analysing agricultural investment from the realities of small-scale food providers: grounding the debates

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### ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, agricultural investment has been presented as a catchall solution to a converging set of global crises, often with poor rural communities as the proclaimed beneficiaries. Yet the promises of such investment, such as poverty alleviation and improved food access, are routinely at odds with realities on the ground. This article offers frameworks for analysis of agricultural investment that are grounded in the realities of small-scale food providers, drawing from two studies. The first study employs a right to food framework to identify the main channels through which food for consumption is procured by small-scale food providers and the factors impacting these channels. It draws on empirical data from within the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT), an investment model promised to lift rural communities out of poverty, which reflects a regional trend. Based on the shortcomings of the large-scale investments examined, the second study employs a food sovereignty framework to explore alternative forms of investment envisioned and/or already being put into practice by small-scale food providers in the SAGCOT area and elsewhere in Tanzania. While two different frameworks formed the basis of two different studies, both the studies and their frameworks are interrelated. The final section of this article makes the case for why both the right to food and food sovereignty are essential lenses for understanding agricultural investment vis-à-vis small-scale food providers and the ways in which they can serve as complementary tools for effective analysis.

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## Introduction

Across global policy spaces, agricultural investment, presented as a catchall solution to a converging set of crises, has been the subject of intense debate, with questions of who benefits/loses and who gets to determine what it looks like. Small-scale food providers,<sup>1</sup> who produce much of the world's food while paradoxically comprising the majority of the world's hungry and poor, are increasingly finding themselves in the spotlight of investment after decades of being rendered 'residual and insignificant'.<sup>2</sup> Yet while there is broad

agreement that agricultural investment is critical and that small-scale food providers should be a key part of it, there are widely diverging positions as to the nature of their inclusion, the character of investment and the role of the state within this process. Within today's prevailing investment paradigm are capital-intensive, private sector-driven, top-down forms of investment that routinely involve large-scale land transfers.<sup>3</sup> While small-scale food providers are the said beneficiaries of many such interventions, promises of poverty alleviation and food security are often at odds with realities on the ground, amidst a rising number of land grabbing and dispossession reports.<sup>4</sup> This is leading some to question the paradox of 'how manifestos for private sector agricultural capitalism have become policy vehicles for ending hunger'<sup>5</sup> and to question whether proposed 'solutions' are indeed that.

This study goes beyond polemic debates to look at what is actually happening on the ground. To stress the importance of understanding the perspective of small-scale food providers when considering 'solutions' for their benefit, two complementary frameworks are offered for analysing and evaluating agricultural investment. Using a *right to food framework*, we look at the impacts of large-scale agricultural investments on the ability of resource-limited food providers in surrounding rural communities to access food through the two primary channels of food production/harvesting and purchase. Then, using a *food sovereignty framework*, we examine alternative forms of investment being carried out by communities themselves, and stress the importance of hearing directly from food providers to understand their needs and visions. We thus combine a framework that evaluates agricultural investments vis-à-vis the outcomes they produce on the ground with another framework that emphasises the necessity of food providers to shape their food systems. Such analysis allows for a critical reconsideration of how investment is conceived of and carried out, and the role of the state and other actors in supporting meaningful food access for rural working people.

As an illustrative case, we turn our gaze to Tanzania, which finds itself at the core of an unprecedented wave of agricultural investments, as an internal drive for economic transformation via agrarian change is met with continent-wide trends of large-scale investment in agriculture. This internal push involves schemes that 'integrate the peasantry in value chains propelled by large-scale private investments in agricultural production and processing, as exemplified in the policy documents on *Kilimo Kwanza* (Agriculture First) and, more recently, 'Big Results Now', the latter of which is purportedly based on the 'Malaysian development model'.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, among the controversial embodiments of regional investment trends is the G7's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa. Currently in its fifth year and including 10 African countries, the New Alliance is a public-private partnership primarily drafted by private actors, with the aim of rapidly consolidating and accelerating private agricultural investment across the continent in the name of poverty alleviation and food security. The New Alliance is criticised for replicating previous models of 'private sector agricultural capitalism' by detracting from the structural inequities that construct hunger.<sup>7</sup>

Representing the marriage of Tanzania's latest drive for agrarian transformation and region-wide initiatives such as the New Alliance is the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT), initiated in 2010. Covering a third of mainland Tanzania, the stated objective of SAGCOT, listed on its website as of April 2017, is to 'foster inclusive, commercially successful agribusinesses that will benefit the region's small-scale farmers, and in so doing, improve food security, reduce rural poverty and ensure environmental sustainability'. A main approach for doing so is to connect small-scale food providers to larger commercial operations through mechanisms such as contract farming and direct employment. In addition to

claims of efficiency and poverty alleviation, SAGCOT is couched in language of ‘the green economy’, while it continues to promote large-scale, capital-intensive models of production based on Green Revolution-style technology.<sup>8</sup> While SAGCOT can be understood as the latest in a long line of agricultural commercialization and modernization efforts extending from the period of colonisation onward, it is particularly important to examine at a moment in which Tanzania finds itself as ‘one of the main recipients of LSAs [large-scale agriculture investments] in Sub-Saharan Africa’,<sup>9</sup> with major implications for the upwards of 75% of its population engaged in small-scale agriculture.<sup>10</sup> SAGCOT is also important for its implications for agricultural investment trends beyond Tanzania, as one of a growing number of growth corridors in the region and as what is being promoted as a model of agricultural investment for further replication.

What follows is not a study of SAGCOT, although it is informed by a growing number of SAGCOT-related works, but a study of predominant trends of agricultural investment and possible alternatives to these, drawing from the case of Tanzania under the policy climate of SAGCOT. Our interest in Tanzania is that, while it has its own unique and highly context-based historical and socio-political conditions, as have been well-documented elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> the investment trends being played out there are demonstrative of broader regional and global trends in agricultural investment today. Along the same lines, the analytical lenses that we offer in the following pages are intended to be of relevance to studies of agricultural investment in other contexts.

The empirical material informing this article is based on two short-term studies conducted by the authors in Tanzania in 2014.<sup>12</sup> The first was an investigation of large-scale investments and their implications for the right to food of small-scale farmers, looking at four agricultural investment projects within the SAGCOT corridor. In each case, a large-scale land deal had transpired, covering 2000–20,000 hectares. Three of the deals took place in 2011 and one in 2006. Two were directly associated with SAGCOT partners. In each instance violations to the right to food were uncovered. The following study picked up where the first had left off: if the dominant agricultural investment model, as promoted under SAGCOT, undermined the right to food, then how else could that right be realised? That study pinpointed concrete alternatives from the perspective of Tanzanian peasants, fishers and pastoralists in three distinct geographic zones (Southern Highlands, Coastal Zone and Zanzibar) using a food sovereignty lens. In each of these studies, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with small-scale food providers, complemented by interviews with key informants, including representatives of grassroots-oriented NGOs who worked closely with food providers as well as researchers and local officials. Between the two studies, a total of 17 focus groups (10–30 participants each) and nine individual interviews with food providers and were carried out in 24 sites of food production, while an additional 18 interviews were conducted with key informants.

It bears highlighting, regarding the selection of sites and participants for the two studies, that Tanzanian agrarian structure is highly complex and differentiated, and that food providers are thus impacted by agricultural investment in a differentiated matter. Cliffe, for instance, has examined the varied ways in which pre-existing social formations have interacted with capitalist modes of production, from colonisation into the period of villagization post-independence. Mbilinyi has focused on the differentiated impacts of liberalisation policies of the 1980s on rural populations, particularly as related to gender.<sup>13</sup> Most recently, a number of studies of the current situation in Tanzania have found differentiated impacts of

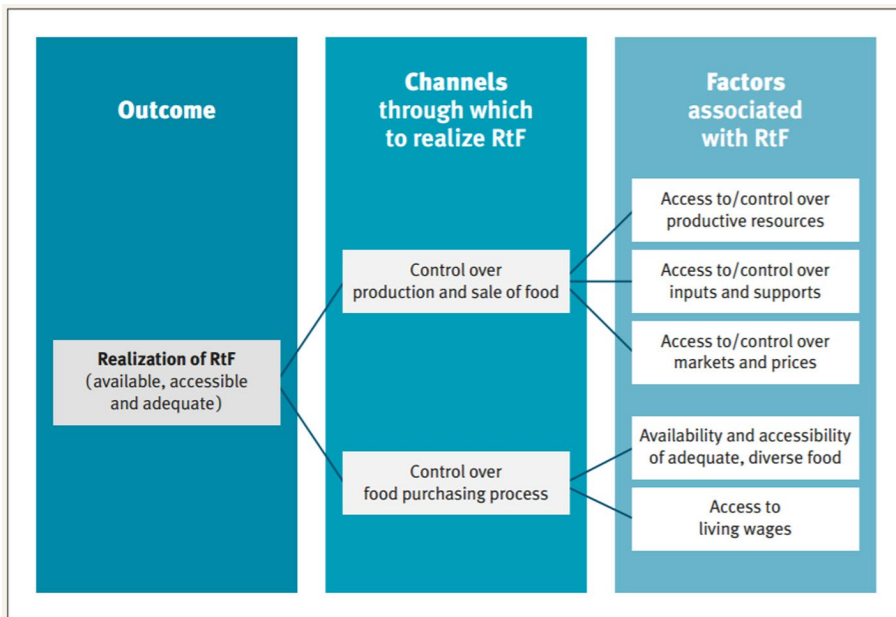
mechanisms such as ‘outgrower schemes’ (a form of contract farming promoted under SAGCOT) on farming populations.<sup>14</sup> Almost across the board in these recent studies, those who started off with greater access to land and other resources have benefitted disproportionately from those with less, and such schemes are increasingly being shown to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. This is unsurprising when, as emphasised by former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier De Schutter, private enterprises have little incentive to work with the most resource-poor and marginalised producers, who are the very ones that should be priority targets of the state in a rights-based approach.<sup>15</sup> Following a rights-based approach, as will be elaborated upon in the following section, the studies herein intentionally focused on the most resource-poor and marginalised food providers, those living at or below the poverty level, with extremely limited access to capital and, in the case of farming communities, those who are landless or with very small amounts of land (what Mbilinyi characterises as ‘poor worker-peasants’).<sup>16</sup> When we refer to ‘small-scale food providers’ in this piece, it is to this particular group targeted by the two studies that we specifically refer, recognising that ‘small-scale food providers’ in Tanzania are far from homogenous.

The following section draws from the first study to demonstrate a right to food framework for understanding agricultural investment, while the third section draws from the second study to demonstrate a food sovereignty framework. In the fourth section, we bring the two lenses of the right to food and food sovereignty together, showing their complementary functions as legal and political tools through which to ground investigations of agricultural investment in the perspectives of marginalised food providers. In summary, we draw from the case of Tanzania to address wide-ranging debates on agricultural investment using the complementary legal and political lenses of the right to food and food sovereignty.

### **Rights-based mechanisms as legal tools: confronting agricultural investment through a right to food lens**

The right to food – defined as *when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement* – is an internationally-recognised, legally binding framework.<sup>17</sup> Under this legal framework, food must be *available*, *accessible* and *adequate*.<sup>18</sup> *Availability* refers to there being sufficient food that can be obtained through one’s own production/harvesting or through purchasing it. *Accessibility* refers to both physical and economic access to food, the latter reinforcing that physical availability of food (e.g. in nearby markets) is not enough if people lack necessary money or other means of acquiring it. *Adequacy* refers to food being sufficiently nutritious for a healthy diet as well as culturally appropriate. As primary duty bearers of the right to food, states are bound by both negative and positive obligations to *respect*, *protect* and *fulfil* it.<sup>19</sup> *Respecting* the right to food means that in no way should state policies and practices impinge upon it. *Protecting* the right to food means that states must ensure that no entities or individuals violate the right to food of others. *Fulfilling* the right to food means that, beyond these first two basic duties, states are required to proactively and progressively work towards the realisation of the right to food.

A main strength of a right to food approach is that it goes beyond aggregate measures that often obscure inequalities to determine whether existing policies and practices are actually benefiting the most vulnerable and food insecure.<sup>20</sup> Such an approach can thus be helpful for assessing the impacts of agricultural investment on small-scale food providers,



**Figure 1.** Channels and Corresponding Factors Shaping the Right to Food (RtF). Source: Twomey et al.

particularly those most resource-poor and most susceptible to food insecurity. In this way, the right to food can be used as a tool to understand how (i.e. through which forms of investment) and to what extent – or not – the state chooses to deliver on its right to food obligations and with what impacts on small-scale food providers. The first study employed a right to food lens to understand the impacts of agricultural investment, drawing from cases in the area encompassed by SAGCOT. The study was guided by the analytical framework Channels and Corresponding Factors Shaping the Right to Food (RtF), presented in Figure 1.

This framework builds upon the basic premise that except for emergency situations, in which the state is required to provide food directly to those who cannot otherwise access it, the right to food is essentially *the right to feed oneself*.<sup>21</sup> Feeding oneself can be achieved through two main channels: growing and harvesting one's own food and/or purchasing it. These channels are not mutually exclusive, meaning that both channels can be – and often are – used to feed oneself, particularly in the case of small-scale food providers. The state's responsibility of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to food thus involves facilitating both of these channels. The Channels and Corresponding Factors Shaping the Right to Food (RtF) framework places at its centre the two main channels through which the right to food is realised and elaborates upon them, looking at how (a) *control over food production and sale* and (b) *control over the food purchasing process* influence the way people feed themselves. These channels of control are in turn dependent on channels of access and availability. It is important to note that access and control are inseparable here; as depicted in Figure 1, realising the right to food is about control and access is requisite to that. While not encompassing all possible factors influencing food access, examining this set of key factors of control in a given community can help to identify the ways in which that particular community's food access is being facilitated and/or blocked.

### **Control over production and sale**

In the case of small-scale food providers whose subsistence largely depends upon producing or harvesting their own food (through farming, fishing, pastoralism, foraging, etc.), *control over the production and sale* of what they grow/harvest is essential to the right to food. The fundamental starting point here is *access to/control over productive resources* where 'the minimum social conditions of farming include access to land, labour, tools and seeds'.<sup>22</sup> For small-scale food providers who rely on their own production/harvesting as the main source of food, the relationship between the right to food and access to such productive resources is closely intertwined.<sup>23</sup> The study found that in the current Tanzanian investment climate, access to and control over essential productive resources has been constrained, with land control and access in particular limited by the presence of large-scale land investments. In the cases examined, these conditions have reduced the capacity of food producers in the region to grow food for both consumption and sale, thereby adversely impacting food access in their communities. Of particular concern is the strategy, central to SAGCOT, of clustering multiple investment projects in close proximity to one another, as the authors found this to have negative impacts on access to water sources and communal grazing and foraging areas. In two of the four cases, such clustering severely limited prospects for small-scale farmers to be able to grow their operations and for the next generation to access land, jeopardising the right to food both at present and in the future. The clustering of multiple investment sites was also found to have blocked off access to communally shared productive resources critical to the right to food such as grazing areas, water sources and foraging areas, with a disproportionately negative impact on women.

Access to/control over productive resources also includes the ability of small-scale farmers to freely save and exchange seeds. This was a key issue raised by advocates working with farmers interviewed in both studies, who expressed concerns over rapid changes to Tanzania's legal architecture around seeds, prompted by Tanzania's involvement in the New Alliance and SAGCOT. The prevailing trend, particularly since 2012, has been a prioritisation of plant breeders' (i.e. agribusiness) rights over the rights of farmers to have control over their seed supply, sparking concerns over the potential criminalisation of farmers engaging in traditional seed saving and exchange practices.<sup>24</sup> Advocates see it as no coincidence that SAGCOT's members include some of the world's largest seed and input companies, such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Yara. In addition to productive resources, control over production and sale is also influenced by *access to/control over inputs and supports for production*. These may include credit, training, technical assistance, fertilisers, technical knowledge and accompanying technologies. Farmer advocates also expressed serious concern that SAGCOT promotes a technological package that is neither suited to small-scale farmers' needs, nor economically viable for them.

Producing food in and of itself, of course, does not automatically translate into adequate consumption, or adequately diverse and healthy food sources. Many small-scale farmers must supplement their diets and meet other needs through the sale of what they produce. Therefore, *access to/control over markets and prices* is a vital factor shaping access to adequate food sources. This includes infrastructure associated with selling one's crops, such as roads, storage facilities, training centres and community market spaces. This also includes the issue of pricing, which is essential because farmers and other food providers, particularly those selling outside of local markets, are generally price-takers as opposed to price-setters,

restraining their ability to receive fair prices for their production.<sup>25</sup> The issue of fair pricing was a concern expressed by many of the farmers interviewed that does not appear to be addressed by SAGCOT. SAGCOT's emphasis on increasing yields as a way to boost farmer incomes, for example, does not attend to the reality that transnational corporations set global prices, while small-scale farmers continue to have little or no power over the market.<sup>26</sup> This threatens their ability to earn adequate income to purchase food as needed, the second access channel.

### ***Control over the purchasing process***

As indicated above, the right to food is also realised through the purchase of food. Therefore, *control over the purchasing process*, and its associated factors, is critical for food producers to access food. A first key factor is *availability and accessibility of adequate, diverse/healthy food for sale*. This means that there must not only be a sufficient stock of food physically present, but also that there are stores, stalls, markets and other types of outlets available through which food can be purchased locally. Furthermore, the available food must be affordable for purchase in sufficient quantities. A variety of measures are necessary to facilitate this, such as support for local markets and other local infrastructure (including processing facilities), as well as support for farmers to grow diverse and healthy foods for local consumption. Furthermore, creating direct links between farmers and consumers and reducing the role of intermediaries can facilitate prices that are both affordable for those purchasing goods and fair for those selling them.<sup>27</sup> A second critical factor in shaping control over the purchasing process is *access to living wages* for those whose incomes are derived from wage labour, meaning that 'workers and their families should be able to afford a basic, but decent, life style that is considered acceptable by society at its current level of economic development' and 'should be able to live above the poverty level, and be able to participate in social and cultural life.'<sup>28</sup>

In focus group discussions with farming communities adjacent to agricultural investment sites, the authors encountered a number of those who had transitioned from full-time family farming to working as plantation labourers, in the hope of improved livelihoods. For them, the importance of earning a living wage was the most critical factor in determining control over the purchasing process, thereby shaping how they accessed food through this channel. Yet the ability to earn a living wage through wage labour within the investment projects was limited by dangerously low wages with infrequent pay-out, poor conditions and overall lack of opportunity – leading to workers being treated as disposable. Wage-labourers from the village of Lipokela in Songea Rural District working on a plantation of SAGCOT partner Olam Aviv emphasised these difficulties, reporting poverty-level wages, extremely poor sanitation and health conditions, a lack of employment contracts and long working hours with a limited number of breaks.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, some of the workers expressed that they had abandoned or drastically reduced the amount of work they did on their family plots in order to work on the plantation, only to find that the wages they earned were not sufficient to meet their families' food and nutritional needs.

While some of the conditions described on the plantations may cross over more into labour rights violations than right to food violations per se, from the perspective of those who obtain food partly or entirely through their income, labour and food rights are inseparable. There is thus a need to assess in greater depth the 420,000 employment opportunities



that SAGCOT purportedly aims to create,<sup>30</sup> with respect to the nature of these jobs; the monitoring frameworks in place to protect workers; and impacts on household food production.

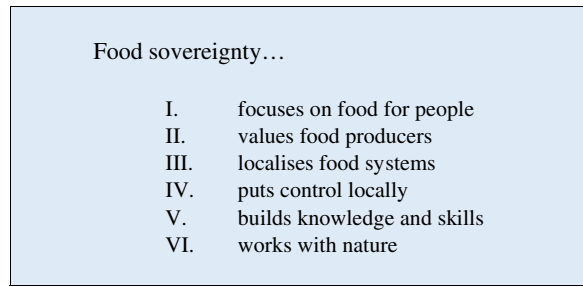
In summary, by focusing on these channels and accompanying factors through which small-scale food providers access food, Twomey et al. found numerous violations of the right to food in the four investment areas investigated, raising broader concerns over the current investment climate in Tanzania and beyond. Among their findings were that necessary regulatory frameworks and accompanying mechanisms are not currently in place to protect, respect and fulfil the right to food. Furthermore, a common theme in the interviews and community focus group discussions was issues of representation and participation. Farmers and their advocates felt they had little to no voice in shaping the policies that were directly impacting them. The authors concluded that 'if SAGCOT were to be carried out in such a way that supported the right to food, it would need to come from a very different starting point ... grounded in the realities and needs of the small-scale farmers it is purported to support'.<sup>31</sup>

### Shaping policy and shifting power dynamics: exploring alternative investment through a food sovereignty lens

A second study picked up where the first study had left off, in examining alternatives to the prevailing investment model represented by SAGCOT.<sup>32</sup> Doing so entailed taking a broader and more holistic understanding of 'investment' than mainstream conceptions suggest, recognising small-scale food providers as investors in their own right, and as key protagonists in realising the right to food. Grounded in this context, the study explored the question of what forms of investment support the right to food of the most marginalised small-scale food providers in Tanzania, both by looking at efforts already underway in the field and hearing from food providers as to what their needs and visions are.

This second study integrated a right to food approach, as described above, with an approach based on *food sovereignty*. Food sovereignty is most commonly defined as *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*.<sup>33</sup> A food sovereignty approach can be helpful toward defining and implementing agricultural investment that supports the active realisation of the right to food (and associated rights) by placing those most impacted by hunger and food insecurity at the centre of decision-making. Or, put differently, Schiavoni et al. argued that 'employing a food sovereignty framework can help to address how the right to food can be fulfilled in a given context and thus can serve as an important tool for envisioning – or reenvisioning – agricultural investment'.<sup>34</sup> The framework guiding this study built upon the 'six pillars of food sovereignty', which had been developed collectively by transnational social movements at the Nyéléni 2007 Global Forum for Food Sovereignty in Sélingué, Mali. Designed to translate food sovereignty from a broad vision for food system transformation into concrete, actionable proposals, the six pillars are reflected in Figure 2.

The following analysis, guided by the pillars constructed at Nyéléni, demonstrates in brief how a food sovereignty framework may be employed for uncovering alternative forms of agricultural investment.



**Figure 2.** Six pillars of food sovereignty. Source: Nyéléni Synthesis Report.

### **Food for people**

A major challenge in producing ‘food for people’ faced by many of the small-scale food providers consulted by Schiavoni et al. was a policy environment that largely limited them to producing raw commodities that flow out of their communities and that are subject to the price swings of national and global markets. Farmers expressed, for instance, a policy bias toward the production of maize, in terms of available credit and support. This leads to boom and bust cycles of commodity production, without sufficient infrastructure to manage surpluses, leaving both food providers and local food supplies in a vulnerable position.<sup>35</sup> The farmers interviewed wished to store, process and distribute at least a portion of their maize within their own communities, both for purposes of food security and to be able to obtain more value from what they produce. This would require adequate storage, supply management (including fair pricing) and distribution capacities of the state, in partnership with communities.

At the same time, food providers expressed a desire to diversify their production. Farmers in several villages of Songea Rural District in the Southern Highlands have come up with an alternative to dependency on maize by experimenting with production of cassava and, with support from the national farmers’ movement MVIWATA<sup>36</sup> and a partnering NGO, building their own cassava processing plants. These plants are controlled and operated by the farmers themselves and are used for both household needs and income generation. Products include cassava flour, crisps and biscuits. Through selling these products as opposed to raw cassava, farmers are able to nearly double their profits and keep more money circulating within their communities. They said that they see this as a potential model for investment and would welcome further partnerships (in a way that respects their autonomy, they emphasised) for the processing of other foods, such as tomatoes into sauce and mangoes into juice. Furthermore, while crops like maize and cassava are of vital importance to food security, equally vital are other foods such as fresh produce, animal products, marine products and forest products. These were the focus of a number of other initiatives investigated, where a recurring theme was the importance of investment responding to the particular needs of a given community rather than an entire area’s perceived profit potential.

### **Valuing food providers**

A common theme in discussions with Tanzanian food providers, whether peasants, pastoralists, fishers or others, was the need for their socioeconomic contributions to be recognised

and valued as a precondition for effective investment. Pastoralists in New Ilolo in the Southern Highlands, explained, for instance, how 'one cow creates at least 18 different jobs', enumerating the many types of income generation related to pastoralism.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, pastoralism and agro-pastoralism are significant contributors to both the Tanzanian economy and to food security, supplying the majority of beef and much of the milk consumed nationally, among other important food and non-food products.<sup>38</sup> The pastoralists elaborated how basic forms of investment, such as support for water troughs, dip tanks, riverbed protection and slaughter facilities, could go a long way toward bolstering such activities. In contrast, they expressed concern that much of the grazing land used by Tanzanian pastoralists is being categorised by the government as 'unoccupied' and leased to investors.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, small-scale fisheries account for an estimated 95% of the fish catches nationally and are an important source of livelihoods for Tanzania's coastal communities, and source of protein for Tanzanians.<sup>40</sup> Not only had the fishing communities visited by Schiavoni et al. received little to no investment in recent years, but they had also been largely overlooked by the state in terms of public service provisioning. Faced with old equipment and extremely poor infrastructure, the fishers expressed that they were not looking for large-scale investment, but small infusions of capital to help with equipment, transportation, refrigeration and other basic infrastructure and public services. Across all sectors examined, women played an unequivocal role in food provisioning, while facing additional layers of marginalisation. One way in which this is being addressed is through the formation of women-run cooperatives. While many of these have seen important advances in the empowerment of the women involved, they nevertheless face an uphill battle against aforementioned broader structural barriers, such as low prices for what they produce, in addition to issues of gender oppression.

### ***Localises food systems and puts control locally***

Communities throughout Tanzania are working to build up their local food systems, with little to no external support. In the village of Mbinga Mhalule in the Southern Highlands, villagers have greatly improved their food security and nutrition through household and community gardens complemented by small-scale animal husbandry. Even while economic and political complexities remain, the villagers express that they are largely self-sufficient in vegetables, with surplus available to trade for other food items. The animals are not only a source of protein, but also a source of fertiliser for the gardens. The villagers of Ikongosi in the Southern Highlands describe themselves as self-sufficient in food, with surplus to sell, through collective efforts in crop farming and livestock keeping organised by farmers' groups. Efforts such as these keep wealth from leaking out of communities and have important multiplier effects.<sup>41</sup> A similar phenomenon can be seen in traditional pastoralist-based systems, as indicated by the pastoralists quoted above. Regarding fisheries, a United Nations report found that 'for one million dollars invested, large-scale fisheries generate between 3 and 30 jobs, and small-scale fisheries between 200 and 10,000.'<sup>42</sup> Such multiplier effects could be seen in the fishing village of Kerege in the Coastal Region, where community-based fishing not only provided livelihoods for those who fished, but also for many others, especially women, who prepared, cooked and vended the fish locally. In each of these cases and others, interviewees expressed that modest forms of support, such as small amounts of credit and

basic infrastructure for local storage and processing, could go a long way toward expanding their efforts and generating further multiplier effects.

Additionally, as Franco et al. remind us, it is critical 'not to separate the question of democratic land control from the broader idea of an alternative (food) system.'<sup>43</sup> This is where the third and fourth pillars of food sovereignty interconnect, and why they are treated together here. Indeed, a foundational basis to local food systems is local control over productive resources such as land, seeds and water – an arena of struggle in which many communities are engaged – as witnessed in both studies.

### ***Builds knowledge and skills***

Central to thriving local food systems are mechanisms for the sharing of knowledge and skills across a variety of disciplines. One such mechanism witnessed by Schiavoni et al. is horizontal learning exchanges that take place among peers and across generations. The farmers group in Ikongosi explained that such exchanges have been crucial to the village's achievement of food self-sufficiency. As one member explained, 'By coming together, we are able to share our knowledge. Someone might know how to deal with a particular pest, and someone else might know how to make fertiliser from manure.'<sup>44</sup> The focal point for much of this exchange is a demonstration plot that members manage collectively, also collaborating with a local university and extension officers on the sharing of best practices.

Many similar initiatives are underway throughout Zanzibar, where the local chapter of the MVIWATA farmers' movement has established a network of community-based trainers and training sites. One of these sites has expanded into a farmer-run field school. In addition to growing techniques, farmers exchange with one another on appropriate technology adapted to local conditions, such as biogas generation, production of ecological inputs and low-cost greenhouse technology. A larger-scale example of building knowledge and skills can be seen in the village of Subira in the Southern Highlands on the mainland, where villagers developed a proposal for the construction of an irrigation scheme to be used for a rice-growing cooperative, based on a community needs assessment they conducted. At the time of investigation, the villagers were working in cooperation with the national government and an international development assistance agency to implement the scheme, providing a portion of the labour and building up a local base of expertise in irrigation technology. These efforts demonstrate how tailor-fit investment projects from the state or networks of food providers themselves provide feasible alternatives to large-scale one-size-fits-all investment projects – especially in the transfer of knowledge and skills.

### ***Works with nature***

The learning exchanges described above are particularly important for 'knowledge-intensive' practices of agroecology that involve working with nature.<sup>45</sup> Building up the soil as the base for fertility is particularly key for those who work the land. For some, this is entailing a transition away from synthetic chemical-based fertilisers to use of organic inputs such as manure, compost and nitrogen-fixing crops. While the use of fertiliser overall is relatively low in Tanzania, some of the small-scale farmers interviewed expressed that even the small amounts they use have proven both economically and environmentally costly to them. The current

transition away from fertiliser, according to those interviewed, is being driven by a variety of factors. One is economic necessity, due to government-subsidised fertilisers being phased out while few can afford to purchase sufficient quantities of fertiliser at official market rates or do so at the risk of indebtedness. Another motivating factor is problems of soil acidification caused by commonly used ammonium sulphate-based fertilisers, which kills off microbiota that are critical for fertility in Tanzania's tropical soils.

In fostering alternatives to fertiliser dependency, a recurring theme was the critical role of livestock. While large-scale industrial livestock operations have a host of associated environmental problems, in smaller-scale agroecological systems, livestock can help to build up soil organic matter, which boosts fertility, stores carbon and helps to retain moisture and prevent erosion.<sup>46</sup> In recognition of such benefits, pastoralists and crop farmers in the village of New Ilolo cooperate to let pastoralists' herds enter farmers' fields after harvest to eat crop remnants while fertilising the soil for the next growing cycle. Despite generations of conflict between mobile pastoralists and sedentary crop growers, shared struggles in the face of encroachment by investors had brought them together to pursue such alternatives. The theme of integrating crops and livestock connects to another recurring theme in the interviews, which is the importance of diversity in general when it comes to food production. Agroecology strives to work with the diversity of nature, for instance through mixed cropping systems, integration of crops and livestock, agroforestry practices and sustainable small-scale fisheries management. Such diversity in crops, animals and production techniques forms an important basis for nutritionally diverse diets as well as for climate change resiliency.

### The right to food and food sovereignty as complementary lenses into agricultural investment

While two distinct frameworks formed the basis of the two studies presented above, these frameworks are interrelated and complementary as legal and political tools. To explore the intersections between the studies and their respective frameworks, it is helpful to highlight that 'there are two interrelated rights: the *right to have rights* and the *right to make rights real, in other words, to make them exist and to benefit from them in reality and not just on paper*'.<sup>47</sup> Actualising rights depends upon the threefold duty of the state to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. Of these, the 'fulfil' component is essential, yet human rights assessments have a tendency to focus on whether or not existing rights are being violated (i.e. whether or not they are being respected and protected), while overlooking the third, and critical, question of the degree to which rights are being actively *fulfilled* as a positive obligation. That is, states are not only obligated under international law to protect and uphold existing rights (on paper), but to proactively take steps toward the (further) realisation of rights – hence the term 'the progressive realisation of the right to food'.<sup>48</sup> This third component of the right to food, however, is less straightforward than the first two components as it requires the rights on paper to be translated into transformative action. What does the fulfilment, or the progressive realisation, of the right to food actually look like in a given context?

Part of what complicates the 'fulfil' requirement of the right to food is that the state, while the primary duty bearer, cannot do this on its own. Rather, 'every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in and contribution to decision-making processes that affect them'.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, not only are vulnerable populations at the centre of analysis in a right to food approach, but they are also considered key protagonists in the

development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes. This is where the lens of food sovereignty can be helpful: in conceptualising the ‘fulfil’ component of the right to food. When relating food sovereignty to the right to food, food sovereignty can be understood as an embodiment of the attempt of fulfilling the right to food, in that it involves marginalised groups of food providers (increasingly joined by others, such as poor urban consumers) striving to shape their own food systems and the policies defining them. These efforts are inherently context-specific and warrant specified political interventions – not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Food sovereignty contributes to actualising the ‘fulfil’ requirement of the right to food in two key ways, thus highlighting how these two frameworks may reinforce each other. First, while the right to food emphasises *outcome*, food sovereignty focuses on the *process* by which that outcome is reached. The food sovereignty framework highlights the importance of being able to influence *how* decisions are made and implemented and by whom – therefore leaving space for the marginalised to identify their needs and connect to political processes. This leads us to the second element – that of power. Influencing processes is inherently tied to power, and the nature of power within the food sovereignty framework extends beyond the ability to access food to the ability to influence policy and to determine what food access should look like and be composed of. Securing food access without a shift in power that enables people to have greater control over both resources and decision-making processes or that fails to recognise and build upon local knowledge systems is unlikely to result in sustainable systemic change. This implies that actions taken by the state to ‘fulfil’ the right to food ought to be carried out in a way that supports efforts and proposals from below – such as those witnessed in Tanzania described above.

The food sovereignty framework therefore provides a political vision that can be used to evaluate states and hold them accountable for fulfilling the right to food. Thus, food sovereignty helps us to interpret the meaning of the ‘fulfil’ component of the right to food in a political way that prioritises and returns control to food producers themselves, while the right to food provides important legal mechanisms for placing demands upon the state to facilitate the conditions necessary for this. Combining these two approaches, the state’s role is about facilitating the conditions for people to not only access food, but to also influence how that food is accessed and to participate in transforming the food system, in what some have called ‘new generation’ rights.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, the legal tool of the right to food and the political vision of food sovereignty are mutually reinforcing.

## Conclusion

In order to move away from what Patel et al. describe as a system that ‘emphasises food quantity over all other qualities, regardless of concerns about how food is produced, by whom, and who has access to that food’,<sup>51</sup> there must be a fundamental shift that not only includes the perspectives and needs of small-scale food providers but creates space for them to be at the helm of shaping food policy. Together, the right to food and food sovereignty frameworks offer valuable contributions to understanding the way in which food is accessed by the most marginalised and the transformations to the food system necessary to facilitate both access and empowerment. By drawing from several cases within Tanzania, we have illustrated that food access is shaped by a number of factors, of which the state can play either a promoting or inhibiting role. Understanding the perspectives of the most marginalised, including their

food and production needs, can help to further tease out what beneficial forms of investment may look like. We argue that the right to food and food sovereignty serve as complementary frameworks for achieving this. This is not to gloss over the tensions between food sovereignty and the right to food as concepts, which have been covered elsewhere,<sup>52</sup> but to demonstrate the utility of combining the tools that they offer together.

With regard to the state's responsibilities, while the right to food serves as a legal protection mechanism outlining positive and negative obligations for the state and other actors to follow, there is a lack of clarity as to what its 'fulfil' requirement actually means and looks like in practice. The food sovereignty framework proposes a political vision that helps to define and actualise this 'fulfil' component in practice, placing particular importance upon the process, the power dynamics involved and the state's role as a vehicle for implementing demands from below along with other key actors. Its strength lies in the fact that it is designed by those most impacted by hunger – an element deemed essential to the fulfilment of the right to food. Taken together, these frameworks support alternative investment for the active realisation of the right to food, placing food providers as drivers – not just targets – of agricultural investment.

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## Notes

1. The use of the term 'food provider' in this article reflects an intentional move by food sovereignty advocates to recognise the diverse groups in addition to farmers that produce, harvest or otherwise provide food.



2. McMichael, "The Land Question," 436.
3. McMichael, "The Land Question"; Kay, *Reclaiming Agricultural Investment*.
4. De Schutter, "The Green Rush"; Borras et al., "Towards a Better Understanding."
5. Patel et al., "Cook, Eat, Man, Woman," 22.
6. Wuyts and Kilama, "Planning for Agricultural Change," 322.
7. Patel et al., "Cook, Eat, Man, Woman," 22.
8. Bergius, Benjaminsen, and Widgren, "Green Economy." See also Havnevik, "A Historical Framework" and Skarstein, "Smallholder Agriculture in Tanzania."
9. Herrmann, "Large-Scale Agricultural Investments," 305.
10. Wuyts and Kilama point out, however, that the 75% figure can be misleading because 'in terms of labour time, employment in agriculture is not as high as the data on employment by main activity suggests, due to the fact that the peasantry combines agriculture with off-farm activities to make a living'; Wuyts and Kilama, "Planning for Agricultural Change," 338.
11. Cliffe, "Rural Class Formation"; Cliffe and Saul, "Socialism in Tanzania"; Havnevik and Isinka, *Tanzania in Transition*.
12. For more detailed information on the methodology underlying the two studies informing this article, see Twomey et al., *Impacts of Large-Scale Agricultural Investments*; Schiavoni et al., *Alternative Agricultural Investment*.
13. Cliffe, "Rural Class Formation"; Mbilinyi "Agribusiness and Women."
14. Martiniello, "Don't Stop the Mill"; Herrmann, "Large-Scale Agricultural Investments"; Sulle, "Social Differentiation"; Smalley, Sulle, and Malale, "The Role of the State."
15. Olivier De Schutter, personal communication, 28 February 2014. See also De Schutter, "Towards More Equitable Value Chains."
16. Mbilinyi, "Agribusiness and Women," 570.
17. CESCR, "General Comment 12." The right to food is legally binding for the countries that have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the total number of which is 165 (including Tanzania), according to the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as of April 2017.
18. De Schutter, "Right to Food."
19. Cotula, Djiré, and Tenga, *The Right to Food*; De Schutter, "Right to Food."
20. De Schutter and Cordes, "Accounting for Hunger."
21. De Schutter, "Right to Food."
22. Bernstein, *Class Dynamics*, 63.
23. Cotula, Djiré, and Tenga, *The Right to Food*.
24. La Vía Campesina and GRAIN, *Seed Laws that Criminalise*.
25. Cordes, "The Impact of Agribusiness."
26. De Schutter, "Right to Food."
27. De Schutter, "Towards More Equitable Value Chains."
28. Anker, *Estimating a Living Wage*, 5.
29. Twomey et al., *Impacts of Large-Scale Agricultural Investments*.
30. SAGCOT, *The Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor*.
31. Twomey et al., *Impacts of Large-Scale Agricultural Investments*.
32. See Schiavoni et al., *Alternative Agricultural Investment*.
33. "Declaration of Nyéléni."
34. Schiavoni et al., *Alternative Agricultural Investment*.
35. Kilima et al., "Impacts of Market Reform"; Sulle and Hall, "Reframing the New Alliance Agenda."
36. MVIWATA, which stands for Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (the National Network of Farmers' Groups in Tanzania), is a member of the transnational agrarian movement La Vía Campesina. It is important to note that MVIWATA, like the Tanzanian farming sector, is not homogenous, with members engaged in a variety of activities across the political spectrum.
37. Schiavoni et al., *Alternative Agricultural Investment*.
38. Molle and Porokwa, "Pastoralists, Land Rights"; IFAD and IWGIA, *Country Technical Note*; Lund, Odgaard, and Sjaastad, *Land Rights and Land Conflicts*.
39. Molle and Porokwa, "Pastoralists, Land Rights," have documented such forms of exclusion.

40. Benjaminsen and Bryceson, "Conservation, Green/Blue Grabbing."
41. Halweil, *Eat Here*.
42. High Level Panel of Experts, *Sustainable Fisheries*, 58.
43. Franco, Monsalve, and Borras, "Democratic Land Control."
44. Schiavoni et al., *Alternative Agricultural Investment*.
45. Food First, *Issue Primer: Agroecology*.
46. Lin et al., "Effects of Industrial Agriculture."
47. Franco, Monsalve, and Borras, "Democratic Land Control" (emphasis authors' own).
48. FAO, *Voluntary Guidelines*.
49. De Schutter, *From Charity to Entitlement*, 6.
50. Edelman and James, "Peasants' Rights."
51. Patel et al., "Cook, Eat, Man, Woman," 29
52. See Claeys, *Human Rights* and Windfuhr and Jonsén, *Food Sovereignty*.

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