



Press Release: Statement from the National Coordinating Committee Meeting (5-6 November 2015)

10 November 2015

The first meeting since the mandate of the National Coordinating Committee of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) was renewed at the SAFSC Assembly, took place in Johannesburg on 5-6 November 2015. Aimed at planning the campaign programme for 2015, the meeting occurred at the end of a successful year of local and national campaigning, which included:

- Launching the campaign at an Assembly with over 50 organisations in February of 2015;
- Holding a People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Landlessness in which the state and food corporations were put on trial for their roles in producing the hunger crisis, through the voices of the hungry and landless themselves;
- Two activist schools in which capacities of activists to drive campaign building in and across their communities was enhanced;
- Raising of the profile of the hunger crisis and food sovereignty alternatives in the media;
- Localised campaign building through local training, initiation of agroecological production, exchange visits, education, forum building; and much more.

The NCC meeting occurred after a moment of intense struggle by the rising student movement. The NCC acknowledged the historical role of students in their crucial struggle for the right to education. The NCC hence confirmed the SAFSC's solidarity with the student movement and noted that this could be the beginning of a significant independent student movement, and even broader social movement, that rolls back the commercialisation of universities and builds broader solidarity amongst social struggles. Furthermore, it was noted that the student protests cannot be divorced from the overarching scourge of hunger experienced on university campuses and the widespread hunger that plagues the communities that many of these university students come from, which is underpinned by rising food prices. Thus the conditions of poverty that undermine student's access to education also links to hunger at universities and in communities. In this regard, the SAFSC sees the potential for

solidarity with students in fighting high food prices, high education costs and for insourcing of workers.

The urgency of the need for concrete alternatives in our food system and society, in the context of climate change, is only emphasised by the severe drought that has plagued many parts of South Africa and which will continue over the next few months. This drought is a window into the future, with extreme weather events set to increase as a result of climate change. 500 000 people in KwaZulu-Natal alone will be added to the ranks of the hungry due to the ongoing drought in that province. The South African government's response falls short, not only in terms of immediate relief, but also in terms of making the just transition to curb our contributions to climate change and to build a sustainable agricultural system through agrarian reform and support to small farmers.

Climate change is worsening and science demands drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, yet the SAFSC has little faith that governments will agree to the needed cuts at the upcoming COP21 in Paris, due largely to the power of the fossil fuel lobby and corporations that currently profit from climate change-causing activities. Industrial agriculture itself is a key contributor to climate change and simply will not be able to cope with the impacts of climate change. Currently large commercial farmers receive over 60% of water allocations, while small scale farmers are being hit hardest by the drought. We therefore believe in struggle by small farmers to ensure that their rights to water are secured. Furthermore, the SAFSC will intensify its focus on building capacity in, and spreading practices that, if implemented across the food system, would shift it towards ecologically sustainable production and enhance the ability of communities to cope with the now unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Campaigning Focus for 2016

The SAFSC Assembly held in October 2015 affirmed the potential power of the campaign and agreed on a number of issues to campaign on in 2016. Based on this, the NCC further fleshed out a programme of action on four key campaigning areas.

Firstly, we will campaign against the increasing diffusion of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in South Africa. GMOs increase the power of a few seed corporations over our food systems, and are grounded in an industrial model of agriculture that requires homogenisation and constant use of pesticides and herbicides. In the context of environmental degradation and climate change, this is simply not an option. Instead we need to focus on real solutions, like agroecology and strengthening of local seed systems. Together with GMOs, we will also be campaigning against the associated increasing use of the herbicide glyphosate, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently declared as carcinogenic to humans. We will build on the strength of a network of organisations in the SAFSC who will lead the fight in this regard. Our activism on this issue will commence with a national petition against the use of the poison glyphosate in our food system.

Secondly, we will mobilise directly around the issue of climate change and food, with a focus on building alternatives like sustainable water use, renewable energy, seed banking and agroecology that shift us towards sustainable production practices and build the power of small farmers and communities in the food system. In the context of the drought ravaging the country we call on small scale farmers to assist us to document the devastation and government failures. We are offering a phone-in hotline at the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre to report your situation. Call us on 011 447 1013. We will use your testimony on the impacts of the drought to challenge government to be more responsive to small scale farmers. We will also champion a process to develop a Food Sovereignty Act, through a democratic, bottom-up process that culminates at a People's Parliament in 2016.

Third, globally small scale farmers produce up to 70% of the world's food. In South Africa there are up to 2 million small scale farmers, mostly situated in the former homelands, who could be playing much greater roles in producing food for South Africa yet receive poor government support, despite policies and budgets destined for this. The government is working to set up AgriParks, but these are plagued by corruption, favour corporate entities, and are excluding many small scale farmers. We will therefore conduct research on the experiences of small scale farmers with regard to corruption and lack of support, and advance demands for broader agrarian reform and support to small scale farmers, as we also mobilise small scale farmers to demand government support during the drought.

Fourth, due to a number of factors, including the current drought, food prices in South Africa will continue to rise, beyond their existing high levels. This will continue to hit the poor hardest, while corporate retailers will continue to profit from rising prices; essentially, they will continue to profit from hunger. In this regard, we note and applaud the recent #BreadPricesMustFall activity of occupying a Shoprite store in Khayelitsha. We believe these sorts of non-violent, decentralised activities should multiply and continue in the struggle to highlight the profiteering by food processors and retailers, the hunger of millions of South Africans and the low wages of food retail and manufacturing workers, in contrast to the astronomical incomes of food corporation executives. We therefore will campaign on the basis that #FoodPricesMustFall, and call for occupations through human chains surrounding supermarkets, sit-ins, till jamming and the like, peaceful activities that will aim to challenge profiteering in the food system. The moment of occupying the corporate controlled food system has arrived. We have the collective power to ensure that #FoodPricesMustFall!

The NCC meeting further consolidated key aspects of campaign organising, including national and local organising, and social media. It was collectively affirmed that the SAFSC is a crucial campaign in South Africa, with growing interest and excitement, and that 2016 will see a year of explosive and expansive national organising as we intensify our campaigning and campaign building work. We invite all progressive organisations, movements and individuals to find out more about the campaign and to get involved in advancing the campaign!

ENDS

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