

The Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade

SEACON



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FOOD SECURITY & FAIR TRADE

Every person has a right to food. Food that is safe and nutritious. Food that is adequate, accessible and affordable. Food that is culturally acceptable and produced in a sustainable manner.

Food security at the household and national level refers to self reliance and self sufficiency in food production using sustainable food production systems and approaches.

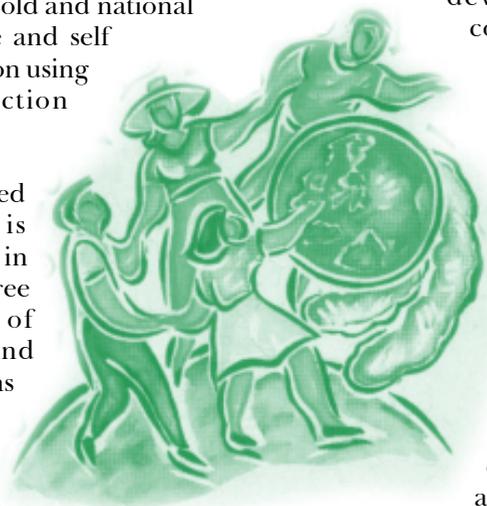
Today however, uncontrolled trade liberalisation is threatening food security in many parts of the world. Free market policies of governments, financial and multilateral trade institutions have changed the nature of how food is produced and distributed. The rural farmers and fisher folks in Southeast Asia who traditionally decided what they generated, consumed and exchanged now have to sell what they yield and buy what they eat. This situation is compounded by an emerging regional water crisis.

Driven by large agro-food corporations which prioritise profits over local self-sufficiency, agriculture is increasingly unsustainable. Trade is free but not fair. Fair trade centrally allows the food producer to earn a decent livelihood without resorting to unethical means or plundering the soil and at the same time is acceptable by the consumer, supported by an efficient marketing system that will ensure the environment and socio-economic concerns are adhered to.

The result? Degraded environments. Destruction of rural livelihoods and endangered food security.

WHO WE ARE

The Southeast Asian Council for Food Security and Fair Trade (SEACON) was created in 1996 to provide a coordinated approach to food security, agriculture and trade issues. We are the only body in this region that integrates local initiatives at agrarian reform and agricultural development with trade concerns. In each of our member countries, we support people centred national based food security councils that enable government, private sector and civil society representatives to meet and dialogue on agriculture and trade issues.



The establishment of the national food council is to ensure that whatever analysis / positions taken on at the regional level, would have the secure backing from the grassroots.

We believe that food sovereignty is the right of each nation, and that the key to food security lies in self-reliant food production. We are critical of trade liberalisation as far as it undermines efforts at sustainable agriculture, land reform and food security.

Our role is thus to:

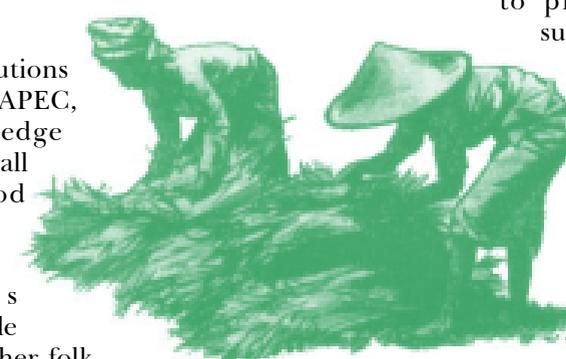
- Monitor and keep in check the adverse effects of free trade
- Monitor the development of relevant economic and social domestic policies in the region
- Offer alternative agro-trade strategies based on the principles of fair trade and food security
- Improve and lobby for policies related to food, agriculture and trade at regional and international levels

HOW WE BEGAN

Before the World Food Summit and NGO Forum in Rome, Italy in November 1996, a conference was held in Manila to discuss the impact of trade liberalisation and economic deregulation on food security and people's livelihoods. From this emerged the Balay Declaration, a document containing the collective aspirations and vision of NGOs for food security in this region. Our organisation is the mechanism to translate the spirit and objectives of this Declaration into reality.

The Balay Declaration calls on governments of South East Asia to respect, protect and fulfil the right of their citizens to food, and to make food security for all the cornerstone of their economic policy. It demands that:

- Governments provide adequate food supply through national and regional food self-sufficiency efforts
- International institutions such as the WTO, APEC, WB, IMF acknowledge the inherent right of all countries to food security
- Governments recognise the vital role of small farmers, fisher folk and women in ensuring food security, and see that these sectors have access to and control of resources.
- Governments guarantee long term food security through the adoption of sustainable agriculture, equitable access to resources, and improved governance



WHAT WE DO

Food security needs strong community and national responses. Towards this we focus on three areas of action: participating research, advocacy and networking.

Participatory Research

Through research we aim to build an understanding of how global politics impacts on food security and to strengthen capability building initiatives. So far, we have initiated three major research undertakings.

Rice trade in Southeast Asia

Rice is the main staple food in this region. Its production and distribution are central in ensuring freedom from hunger. These issues are explored in our present "Food Security and Markets in Southeast Asia: State and private sector interaction in rice trade". Our findings will form the basis of policies forwarded to national and regional bodies to promote the development of sustainable and dynamic producing sectors.

The food crisis in Indonesia

In 1999, we organised a fact-finding mission to Indonesia to investigate claims of a food emergency. The mission, comprising experts and activists in the field of food security, discovered that this was untrue. There was a crisis in Indonesia but this was due to the bad development policies of the government. A food crisis had been manufactured for political reasons. Instead of food aid, the country needed economic recovery so that its people had jobs and therefore, purchasing power to buy food produced by the rural farmers in Indonesia.

Women and food security

Women's role in ensuring food security is often ignored and undervalued. Our report, "No Shortcut to Food Security: From a woman's

perspective”, corrects this distortion. It shows how women are connected to the production and distribution of food. It also identifies the obstacles they face, including gender-biased policies. Based on secondary data from Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Laos, the recommendations of this study have been compiled into a regional policy working paper.

ADVOCACY

We carry out advocacy at many levels, from lobbying national governments and regional institutions, to working directly with civil society actors in food security and fair trade matters. Our past projects include the WTO-Agreement on Agriculture Campaign and a conference in 1999 titled “People’s Response to the Food Security Crisis in Southeast Asia” in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We have also held national meetings to popularise the Balay Declaration, and actively taken part in other gatherings where we have contributed to the debates on food security and fair trade.

The World Trade Organisation Agreement on Agriculture Campaign

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture aims to liberalise agricultural trade. However, it is heavily biased and unequally distributes benefits between the world’s players. Typically, rural and small farmers and local livelihoods in developing nations have been marginalised, thus jeopardising food security in these countries. Through education workshops with NGOs and government officials, we have started a campaign to highlight the negative effects of this treaty and have also encouraged governments in this region to take action against these negative impacts.

NETWORKING

We facilitate processes whereby non-governmental and people’s organisations can share and learn from one another. Through these processes, we encourage joint actions to influence national and regional policies impacting on food security. In this manner, we are supporting people centred development, i.e. the meaningful participation of people in development.

HOW WE FUNCTION

SEACON is governed by a Regional Council with partners currently from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. These are drawn from large networks of organisations working on food security and trade matters. By being selected through a national process, they are accountable not only to their own organisations but also to a wider network in their respective countries.

Additionally, there is a maximum of five regional and international organisations represented on the Council. At present three positions are filled by the following organisations:

- Isis International-Manila, Philippines
- Focus on the Global South, Thailand
- Pesticide Action Network - Asia Pacific, Malaysia

The national networks are:

Vietnam

Vietnam Partnership for The Development of Human Resources In Rural Areas (VIET DHRRA)

Represented by:

- Vietnam Gardening Association (VACVINA)
- Center of Agricultural Extension Volunteers (CAEV)

Philippines

Philippines NGO Liaison Committee for Food Security and Fair Trade (PNLFC)

Represented by:

- Management and Organizational Development for Empowerment, Inc. (MODE)
- Alternative Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM)

Indonesia

- Pesticide Action Network - Indonesia (PAN-I)
- Indonesia Forum for Environment (WALHI)

Malaysia

Malaysian Committee for Food Security & Fair Trade

Represented by:

- A-P Secretariat for Consumerism, Advocacy, Research and Education (APS-CARE)
- Education and Research Association for Consumers, Malaysia (ERA Consumer, Malaysia)

Laos

Sustainable Agriculture Forum (SAF)

Represented by:

- Norwegian Church Aid - Laos (NCA)
- Coordinator of SAF

Thailand

Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN)

Represented by:

- Rural Reconstruction Alumni and Friends Association (RRAFA)
- Coordinator of AAN

Cambodia

NGO Forum on Cambodia

Represented by:

- Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (PADEK)
- Cambodian NGO Alliance for Cooperation (CNAC)

Prof. Walden Bello of Focus on Global South, Thailand serves as the current Chair of the Council. The Vice-Chairs are Aurora Regalado of MODE (Management and Organizational Development for Empowerment, Inc.) of the Philippines and Marimuthu Nadason of ERA Consumer, Malaysia (Education and Research Association for Consumers, Malaysia).

The day-to-day activities are coordinated by an Executive Director in a rotating secretariat that is currently based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

What We Plan to Do

Research

- Investigate AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Agreement) and explore the social and economic impact of accelerated market integration of local communities on food security in agriculture in this region.

- Conduct a three country research on food security in armed conflict situations, with special attention to the position of women

- Survey and document sustainable agricultural practices in Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Thailand

- Monitor the World Bank’s activities in East Timor in relation to agriculture

- Monitor the practices of agro food corporations and its impact on small scale farmers in the region

- Monitor the development of biotechnology and its impact on food security in the region.

- Monitor the World Food Summit Plans of Action by developing household, national and regional indicators and identifying vulnerable groups in order to lobby for appropriate policies to enhance their livelihood in the region.

- Examine how the WTO Agreement on Agriculture affects small-scale farmers in ASEAN.

Advocacy

- Lobby governments in South East Asia to include food security in their development policies and in particular, countries that are in / and or emerging out of armed conflict situations.

- Promote alternative sustainable practices such as urban community farming in cities

of developing countries such as Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok.

- Continue the WTO Agreement on Agriculture Campaign, in particular, extend the capacity building and education programme to countries in Indo-China.

- Organise regional conferences on topical issues such as Sustainable Agriculture, Fair Trade Policies, Impacts of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights and Genetically Modified Organisms on food security.

- Produce a regional policy paper on water and food security to advocate the impact of commodification of water on the lives of rural communities in Southeast Asia.

Networking

- Provide assistance to on-going national processes

- Support the initiatives of local groups in ASEAN countries, particularly in the Indochina region.

- Coordinating our efforts and campaigns with other networks, regionally and internationally.

Publications

1. “No Shortcut to Food Security: From a woman’s perspective” – 1998
2. “Manufacturing a crisis – The Politics of Food Aid in Indonesia” – 1999
3. “Proceedings of the SEA Conference on the food security crisis in Southeast Asia” – 1999

Where to Find Us

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