

Corporate capture of agricultural policy in South Africa

Agroecology in the Twenty-First Century
Cape Town, 28-30 January 2019

David Fig

UCT/Biowatch
davidfig@iafrica.com



The social justice case for agroecology

- ◆ 25% of South Africans go to bed hungry
- ◆ Many commodified foods are unaffordable to most
- ◆ Land under monocrops is poisoned, polluted, drought-stricken
- ◆ Industrial agriculture uses & abuses over 60% of fresh water
- ◆ Legacy of land hunger, patterns of migrancy and histories of alienation from the land
- ◆ Food safety breaking down: outbreaks of listeriosis

Emancipatory justice

- ◆ Democracy is not enough. We share the urgency of wanting to emancipate ourselves by securing and enhancing our rights and unleashing our energies through a just reconnection with the land.

We share the goal of Food Sovereignty

- ◆ Sovereignty = power, self-control
- ◆ Emphasis on the exercise of people's power
- ◆ We seek ***popular power over the food and agricultural system***
- ◆ Who are “we”? The alliance of small farmers, networks, NGOs, researchers, students, food and land justice activists, progressive educators and policy makers attending this conference
- ◆ We seek the common goal of food sovereignty to combat the failures of industrial agriculture and the ‘green’ revolution
- ◆ We see monopoly capital as a problem and refuse to become its junior partners

In South Africa there are currently two important public debates

- ◆ Land expropriation
- ◆ Corruption of the state by corporations

The importance of the land debate

- ◆ Failure of land reform 1994 to date
- ◆ Calls for appropriation of land, revision of the Constitution
- ◆ Debate not linked to what needs to be done with the land
- ◆ Need for agrarian reform, adopting new policies on the land sympathetic to the values of agroecology & food sovereignty

The debate on corruption of state institutions

- ◆ Seen as “state capture”
- ◆ Families like Shaikhs, Guptas, Watsons have been acting in narrow self interest and subverting state officials
- ◆ Their behaviour is seen as criminal corruption
- ◆ But what about the overbearing, undue and unaccountable daily excessive influence of large corporations over policy making, especially in the sphere of food & agriculture?

Two research obligations

💧 MAKING THE CASE

Watertight scientific mustering of the diverse evidence that our vision of agroecology and food sovereignty is credible, convincing, and demonstrates it is preferable as a system worthy of policy support

Needs to be convincing on the question of scaling up

Raised by SKI Objective 3

💧 CONTESTING INJUSTICES

...arising from corporate capture of food and agriculture policy

Exposure of the injustices through clear objective research

Direct challenges --- through broad public education, mobilisation of our networks, media interventions, promotion of public debates, placing pressure on decision makers, litigation where necessary, etc.

Evidence of corporate capture in SA before 1994

- ◆ Agriculture linked to export (wheat, wine, fruit, wool, hides)
- ◆ Agriculture as an adjunct to mining (feed workers sufficient to ensure their reproduction as units of labour power)
- ◆ Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 confiscated lands of black farmers, forcing them onto 13% of the land.
- ◆ Subsidies, tariffs, price fixing, settlement schemes, irrigation, extension services for c.60 000 white farmers
- ◆ Millions of small farmers left unsupported, squeezed out of the supply chains, isolated in unviable reserves

Since the 1990s

1

- ◆ Deregulation of commodity prices
- ◆ Shrinking of the state's provision of extension services
- ◆ Land reform fails to satisfy land hunger, projects fail through lack of or inappropriate state support
- ◆ “Green” revolution mostly unsuitable for small farmers, promoted by philanthropic foundations in alliance with GMO corporations

Since the 1990s

2

- ◆ Committee of pro-GMO interests (SAGENE) sets itself up as the prototype of a regulatory instrument
- ◆ The GMO Act has the fingerprints of the GMO corporations all over it.
- ◆ Monsanto sets up the Makhathini GMO cotton crop for small producers aiming to be the new exemplar of GMOs being adopted by small farmers. The project fails.

Since the 1990s

3

- ◆ In the E Cape, the province distributes GMO seed packages under the Massive Food Production Process, a scheme which also fails, mainly because of progressive amounts of debt being contracted.
- ◆ The state permits the monopolisation of the control of seed in South Africa by a few global corporations (Monsanto-Bayer, Syngenta, DuPont-Dow)
- ◆ The seed bills acknowledge the rights of plant breeders (accession to UPOV1991) at the expense of the rights of small farmers.
- ◆ Small farmer support initiatives mainly aimed at drawing farmers into becoming junior partners of big capital and thereby part of industrial agriculture (through mentoring, outgrower schemes, formal extension ideology, etc.)

Research Strategy

- ◆ Initial op ed appeared on 28 May 2018 in The Conversation Africa at:

<https://theconversation.com/south-africa-needs-to-reverse-corporate-capture-of-agricultural-policy-96661>

- ◆ Peer-reviewed academic paper for a book linked to the conference
- ◆ More popular output to be published by Biowatch

What is to be done?

- ◆ The need for broad national, regional, continental and global alliances across diverse food/agriculture activisms
- ◆ Linkages with climate energy and land activism
- ◆ Direct lobbying armed with appropriate information
- ◆ Interventions in spaces for media and public debates
- ◆ Elevation of the voices of small farmers and other affected groups
- ◆ Strong use of the next decade to increase space for challenging the industrial agriculture model and instating the concepts of agroecology and food sovereignty on a mainstream basis