

Small-Scale Livestock Farming and Food Sovereignty

- ▶ VSF uses Food Sovereignty as a guiding principle for its actions, and supports Small-Scale Livestock Farming as an effective way to promote sustainable, equitable, and highly productive food systems under the framework of Food Sovereignty.



- ▶ Effective support of small farms worldwide needs to be based on an understanding of the advantages of family farming, adapted to the specific conditions of each rural area and its local food producers.
- ▶ In a situation where small-scale family farmers around the world face tremendous pressures on their land, are dispossessed of water and genetic resources, and are the hardest hit by hunger, the inclusion of Food Sovereignty principles in international agricultural policy is increasingly urgently.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR VSF'S ACTIONS

Food Sovereignty (FS) is a complex concept that goes beyond food security to encompass not only guaranteed access to food, but also democratic control over the food system – from production and processing to distribution, marketing, and consumption. The FS concept has improved steadily over the last decades, leading to the current definition, adopted through the “Declaration of Nyéléni”: “Food Sovereignty 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”. Food Sovereignty encompasses therefore a vision of food production, food governance and food justice that recognizes the crucial role of small food producers including indigenous peoples, pastoral and mobile livestock keepers, farmers, fisher folks, rural youths and women. VSF fully adopts this vision and, through its long experience, recognizes Food Sovereignty as a guiding principle for its actions, both in the North and the South.

HOW SMALL-SCALE LIVESTOCK FARMING CONTRIBUTES TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The past half-century of highly intensive agricultural expansion has been a blow to the world’s peasantry, often dispossessing them of land, water, and genetic resources through processes of enclosures and displacement. This phenomenon threatens not only an equitable income distribution but also the natural equilibrium of the environment and biodiversity.

There are many highly productive, equitable, and sustainable alternatives to the present industrial practices and corporate monopolies that hold the world’s food hostage. One of them is Small-Scale Livestock Farming (SSLF), a production system that reflects the structural link between economic activity and family structure, and which is deeply connected with its surrounding environment and community.

There is a wide variety of SSLF systems, each suited to different contexts of assets, income and social habits. Examples of SSLF range from extensive pasture production systems (pastoralism), to backyard pig and poultry keeping, to rain-fed or irrigated mixed pro-



duction systems. However, these systems all share common features in that they manage livestock as part of an integrated and tightly-woven system. In SSLF systems animals have several functions, including food, income, traction, manure, social capital, financial assets, and a means of recycling crop wastes (FAO, 2011). There are strong links between FS and SSLF:

- Both concepts recognize the central role of food producers and value the work of men and women, farmers, pastoralists and fishermen, whether they are farm owners or workers.
- FS values and promotes the use of local knowledge, skills and tools and their integration into innovative research approaches. In the same way, the relationship between generation and the transmission of traditional knowledge is a cornerstone of SSLF.
- Agroecology is one of the most important factors in FS as its use can reduce negative environmental impacts and increase resilience to climate change. Along the same lines, SSLF is also more sustainable and resource-efficient than intensive livestock systems.

- SSLF entails a true food culture and a direct relationship between producers, transformers or processors, and consumers. As with FS, SSLF opposes the view of food as a commodity in the global market.
- FS and SSLF both consider local food systems as a key element to ensure access to food for everybody. Both require a full set of policies to fight against unsustainable international markets and other policies that promote the interests of big, weakly regulated corporations.
- Finally, FS envisages local mechanisms that assign control over resources (land, pasture, water, seeds, livestock, fishing resources, techniques of production and processing) to local producers. In doing so, it affirms and respects local communities' rights to live on, and use, their lands, and encourages interaction among producers from different regions as a tool to solve internal or national conflicts. In this context, some SSLF systems like pastoralism are strongly related to FS, in a way that puts local communities at the centre of planning and decision processes.

LIVESTOCK ENSURES MANY DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Revenue and Savings: chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits, small ruminants, pigs and similar backyard animals represent a way to recycle organic waste, save capital and to convert it into cash if needed. Moreover, larger size livestock can be the only means to invest and save capital in areas where bank services are weak or totally lacking. Often livestock and its derived products are the only possible source of monetary income, allowing access to any kind of economic exchange. And in many cultures, livestock is a determinant for family social status.

Adaptation strategy: selling animals in the dry season is a common adaptation strategy to the lack of pasture, and it gives the household cash for buying food and agricultural inputs.

Food: milk, eggs and meat represent an essential source of animal protein. These contribute to enriched diets in remote areas where other sources are unavailable, with invaluable benefits especially for the most exposed people such as children and pregnant women. Furthermore, for many pastoral communities, livestock-derived products are often the only goods to be exchanged with other communities, and particularly with agriculture-based groups practicing sedentary mixed farming. These exchanges allow pastoral peoples to integrate cereals and other crop foods into their diets.

Animal Power: Animals are used for traction, to plough the land and assure transport of the harvest. In arid areas of the Sahel, camels and donkeys are the only means to carry loads, making it possible for mobile peoples to continue their lifestyle.

Nutrient recycling: Animals are also crucial for fertilizing the soil, as their manure is used to enrich crops. This natural fertilization reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

REASONS FOR SUPPORTING SMALL-SCALE LIVESTOCK FARMING

Small-Scale Livestock Farming must be put on the agenda of international agricultural policies for many reasons. First of all, small scale farming provides a livelihood for around 2 billion people (IFAD, 2010). At the same time, very little public funding is directed to this type of farming, whether in Europe or in developing countries.

SSLF systems provide jobs while assuring a more equitable income distribution. They strengthen local economies, improve livelihoods and quality of life for poor rural households, and they have positive, sustainable effects on the environment, adopting a full range of adaptation strategies and guaranteeing conservation of biodiversity (including local animal breeds). Social aspects are also at the core of SSLF, which recognizes the central role of local farmer knowledge and the importance of inter-generational relationships for its transmission.

Globally, 75% of the people suffering from hunger are small farmers and inhabitants of rural areas. A large portion of these depend on a few courtyard animals for daily food provision. Therefore, no successful program against hunger can ignore the urgent need to support small household farming activities, as well as SSLF systems.

In this context, we must understand the challenges that hinder SSLF's contribution to food sovereignty, in order to better understand what governments should concentrate on to support these systems.

- **Livestock factors:** animal health and welfare, access to and management of pastures, feed, and water resources, the right to free movement, and public and private veterinary services (which are also responsible for animal and vector-borne diseases affecting humans).
- **Governance and policy factors:** includes national and international agreements, policies of the financial institutions and food-related UN agencies, trade and market regulations, land reform policies, and aid for development programmes.
- **Value chain factors:** management of the entire food value chain, to ensure respect for FS principles (including the strong role of SSLF and the importance of local producers) through the whole process from pro-



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duction, transformation, and distribution to the final consumer.

- **Financial factors:** namely access to credit for local farmers, including promotion of microcredit and other forms of collaborative and community investment and financial management, respectful of traditional social structures, authorities, and decision making systems.
- **Climate change factors:** preparation for extreme climatic events, promotion of adaptation strategies, and additional support at times of exceptional droughts, floods and other events; recognition of the importance of SSLF systems in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable management of large grassland areas.

It costs less to support smallholders than agribusiness, and not just financially. Family farms also cost much less in terms of negative externalities (unemployment and damage to the environment), and they create strong rural communities with job opportunities.

Therefore, effective support for small farms needs to be based on an understanding of the advantages of family farming worldwide, compared to the widespread industrial agri-food system that respond to the interests of a few big corporations rather than local communities. For these reasons, VSF advocates adopting a coherent and holistic approach to the challenges of local food systems based on Food Sovereignty, adapted to the specific conditions of each rural area and its local food producers.



CONCLUSION

VSF International will improve coordination between its partners in order to ensure that Food Sovereignty plays a key role in the design and implementation of its projects. This means:

- giving priority to small-scale livestock keepers, pastoralists, farmers, and communities who work mostly under the conditions described above;
- encouraging and participating in research projects addressing specific problems of marginalized livestock keepers and breeders;
- facilitating access to markets for smallholders through a wide range of actions (including processing of livestock-derived products, safety controls, construction of food chains, etc.);
- making sure that local markets and producers are taken into account when setting up priorities for capacity building actions, including training and technology transfer;
- ensuring that minorities are adequately taken into account for their work, with fair prices and a minimal number of intermediaries involved; special consideration should be given to livestock workers, rural communities, women and youths;
- raising awareness about SSLF rights and role in agricultural policies, addressing in particular European stakeholders at all levels from consumers to students of livestock-related careers, NGO operators, and decision-makers, among others;
- encouraging decision-makers from international organisations and governments in developed and developing countries to consider the role of SSLF and FS in policies and debates;
- making a concerted effort to address any action that may harm small-scale livestock producers, whether through our own initiatives or through support for activities promoted by other NGOs and CSOs. In this context, VSF International engages in monitoring EU policies such as Economic Partnership Agreements, but also policies, trade agreements and regulations, bi- and multi-lateral agreements and aid programmes put in place by various actors worldwide.



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