



**UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON
THE RIGHTS OF PEASANTS**

INTRODUCTORY BOOKLET



"Education (and teaching) should be useful to our daily lives and it should liberate human beings - as a way to make people part of a united struggle."

*- Ki Hadjar Dewantara,
Indonesian icon of education*

1.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOKLET



The United Nations declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (hereinafter, UNDROP) is the result of 17 years of mobilization and negotiations led by La Via Campesina, the largest movement of peasant food producers in the world.



The definition of a peasant in UNDROP is intentionally broad, as it seeks to include in one social and political group all people who struggle against agri-business corporations, globalized agriculture, as well as against neoliberal food policies that are reflections of imperialism and patriarchy. The peasant movement is strong because it brings together so many voices and shared experiences from every corner of the world.

In this booklet, we dig further into UNDROP, exploring its main ideas, and showing how it can be used by peasants and rural communities in their daily lives and struggles for food sovereignty, agroecology, climate justice, agrarian reform, and human rights.

Because UNDROP is a universal declaration encapsulating the struggle of millions, you will be guided through this Booklet by peasants from around the world, who will help you to a better understanding of UNDROP and its uses. We will begin by discussing how UNDROP was first brought into this world...



II.

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A. WHAT IS A UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION? WHAT IS UNDROP?



UNDROP is a United Nations (UN) declaration on human rights. UN human rights declarations are international legal tools that are voted on by United Nations Member States and formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Even though a declaration is not in itself legally binding to states, its content is often a reflection of legally binding international human rights obligations. UNDROP for example, is based on the international legal principle of non-discrimination. It also outlines other recognized rights (cultural, social, and economic rights) that are enshrined in treaties which, under international law, are legally binding for signatory states.



UNDROP represents the first time in history that the specific realities and needs of peasants and rural communities were addressed in the forms of human rights and states' obligations. It is also the first time, aside from the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, that the international community recognizes that human rights are individual and collective.



Let us think of the UNDROP as a toolbox that we can use when we are faced with discrimination and oppression that harm or have the potential to harm our peasant livelihoods, our environment, our families, or our communities.



II.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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UNDROP is historic because for the first time, peasants are internationally recognized as political, rights-holding subjects, emphasizing the challenges they face and the special relationship they have with nature. Importantly, UNDROP explains the international community's commitment to protect, fulfill, and respect peasants' human rights, including the recognition of:

- The rights of peasant women and other women working in rural areas.
- The right to seek, receive, develop and impart information, among others, about processing, marketing and distribution of their peasants' products.
- The right to access to justice.
- The rights to land, seeds, biodiversity, water, and other natural resources.
- The right to food and the right to be free from hunger.
- The right to food sovereignty and the collective right to a healthy environment.
- The right to an adequate standard of living.
- The right to social security, the right to health and the right to housing.
- The right to education, and the right to adequate training suited to the specific agroecological, sociocultural and economic environments in which peasants' find themselves.
- The right to enjoy culture and pursue cultural development freely.



UNDROP also encourages the fulfillment of social rights—for example labor rights—and all fundamental freedoms recognized in international human rights instruments, such as freedom of expression, movement, and thought, as well as freedom of association, life, liberty, security, and freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest—these are especially important as movements around the world in defense of the rights of people working in rural areas continue to face different forms of criminalization.

II.

WHO ARE THE RIGHT-HOLDERS?

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In Article 1, UNDROP defines a peasant as someone who does small-scale agriculture by themselves or in community, for themselves or for market, and who relies on family or non-monetized labor and dependency and attachment to the land.



This includes artisanal or small scale agriculture, crop planting, livestock raising, pastoralism, fishing, forestry, hunting or gathering, and handicrafts related to agriculture or a related occupation in a rural area.

UNDROP recognizes peasants and the people dependent on them, as well as Indigenous peoples, transhumant, nomadic, and landless people, hired workers, migrant workers, and seasonal workers as rights-holders.



Even if you don't use the word 'peasant' in your language, using this term peasant to bring rural people together in a common political struggle is very powerful. This shared identity has united us, from India to Ecuador, Zimbabwe to Canada, and everywhere in between. The struggle against corporatization, globalization, and patriarchal structures unites us and directs us towards food sovereignty. It is under this common struggle that we gather under the roof of UNDROP. The struggles of our communities will be reflected in policies and laws embodying the human rights obligations of States.

II.

WHAT ARE ITS ORIGINS?

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LVC started discussing peasants' rights several years before the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). In 2008 the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, Men and Women was adopted by LVC membership. The text became an important starting point in the road to the United Nations mechanisms. In 2010, the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee was mandated to develop a study on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. The study identified as causes of discrimination and vulnerability of peasants:

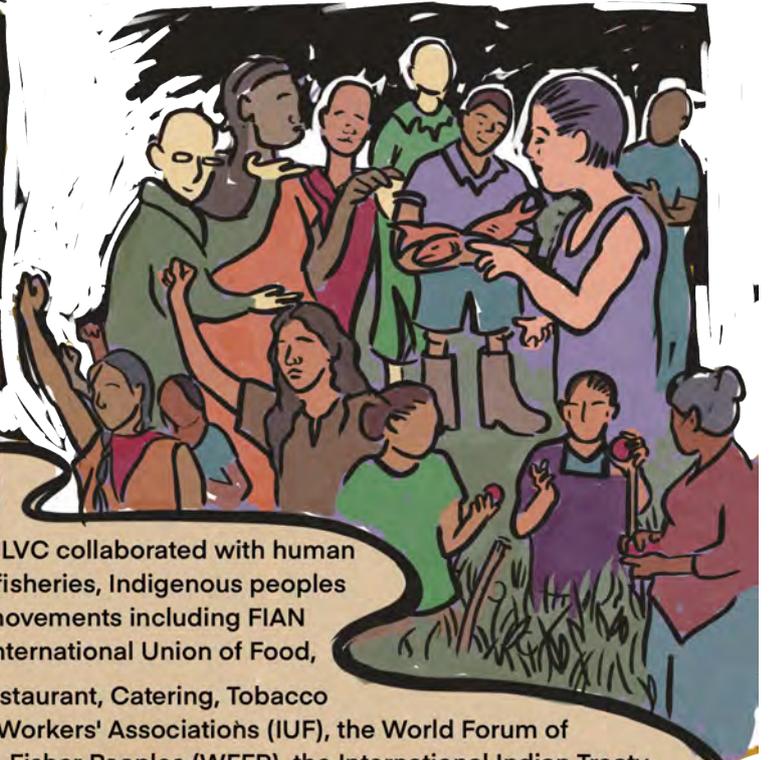


Based on the study, in 2012 the UNHRC established an intergovernmental group called the "United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (Working Group)" to negotiate, finalize and submit a draft declaration.

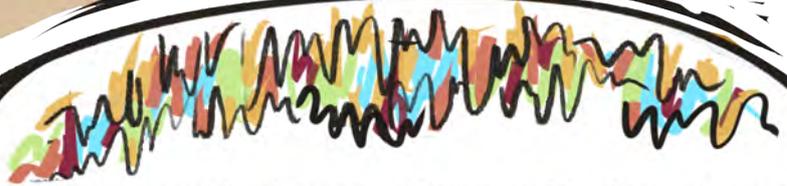
II.

WHAT ARE ITS ORIGINS?

2012



Over the next 5 years, LVC collaborated with human rights organizations, fisheries, Indigenous peoples and pastoralists movements including FIAN International, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUFA), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), the Network of West Africa Peasant and Agricultural Producers Organizations (ROPPA), the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous People (WAMIP), International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC), and Europe-Third World Center (CETIM).



UNDROP was finally approved in New York by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2018 after five sessions of negotiations at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). UNDROP was adopted with 121 states voting in favor, 8 against and 52 abstentions.



II.

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WHY SHOULD GOVERNMENTS ENFORCE UNDROP?

Historically, governments have discriminated against peasants by failing to uphold our rights in laws, policies, and trade agreements. Our governments have unjustly distributed land, natural resources, water, as well as educational services. We are facing ongoing land evictions, criminalization, patriarchal oppression. There is a shortage of opportunities for youth, a lack of access to markets, and we are subjected to severe restrictions on the way we save, use and produce seeds.

This is where UNDROP comes in. According to the declaration, states shall respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people in rural areas. As an international legal instrument, governments can use UNDROP to bring justice to all peasants and rural communities by protecting our interests and needs. Governments can use UNDROP as a toolbox:

- To recognize and protect the Individual and collective human dignity of peasants and rural communities.
 - To recognize the role of women and girls in small-scale food production.
- To address the underlying conditions that affect peasants and other people in the rural areas of the world including intersectional discrimination based on gender, class, caste, age group, migration status etc.
 - To protect traditional and cultural knowledge in rural areas from privatization, intellectual property policies and laws.
- To protect peasant seed (production and management) systems, biodiversity and agricultural biodiversity.
 - To encourage agroecology and counter the native impacts of climate change.

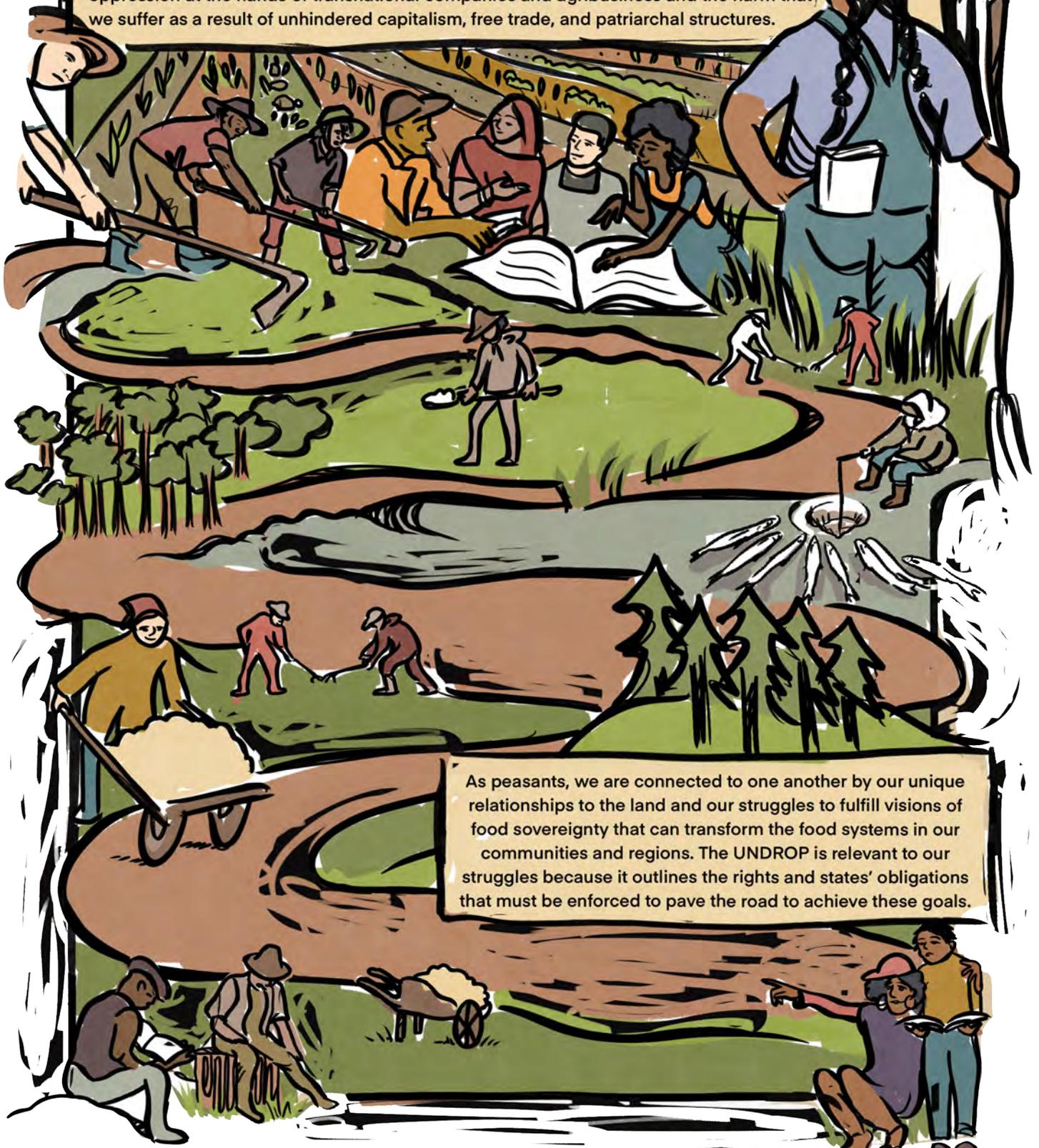
* Take a look at Article 1 of the Declaration and see how you are represented in the UNDROP.

III

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US? HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO US?

UNDROP was written by peasants, for peasants. It is based on our own realities and experiences on the ground. Despite changes to the original text due to negotiations with states, it is a Declaration like no other. It identifies and summarizes a set of uniquely peasant rights. It acknowledges our relationships with the land as well as our shared oppression at the hands of transnational companies and agribusiness and the harm that we suffer as a result of unhindered capitalism, free trade, and patriarchal structures.



As peasants, we are connected to one another by our unique relationships to the land and our struggles to fulfill visions of food sovereignty that can transform the food systems in our communities and regions. The UNDROP is relevant to our struggles because it outlines the rights and states' obligations that must be enforced to pave the road to achieve these goals.

III.

B

HOW IS OUR COMMUNITY PROTECTED BY UNDROP?

We can use UNDROP as a toolbox to face discrimination and oppression. It has the potential to protect us through national and regional policies, defend us in court, and inform us through popular education and to assist our communications with the media.

The more we share information about the UNDROP within our communities and organizations, the more it can protect us in legal and policy channels.

This is why information sharing and disseminating popular education are the important first steps of implementing the UNDROP.



IV. HOW CAN WE USE IT?

As we have already discussed, the UNDROP is a toolbox that has many uses. While education is key to making its 'tools' more effective, there are many ways we can apply UNDROP to our situations on the ground.



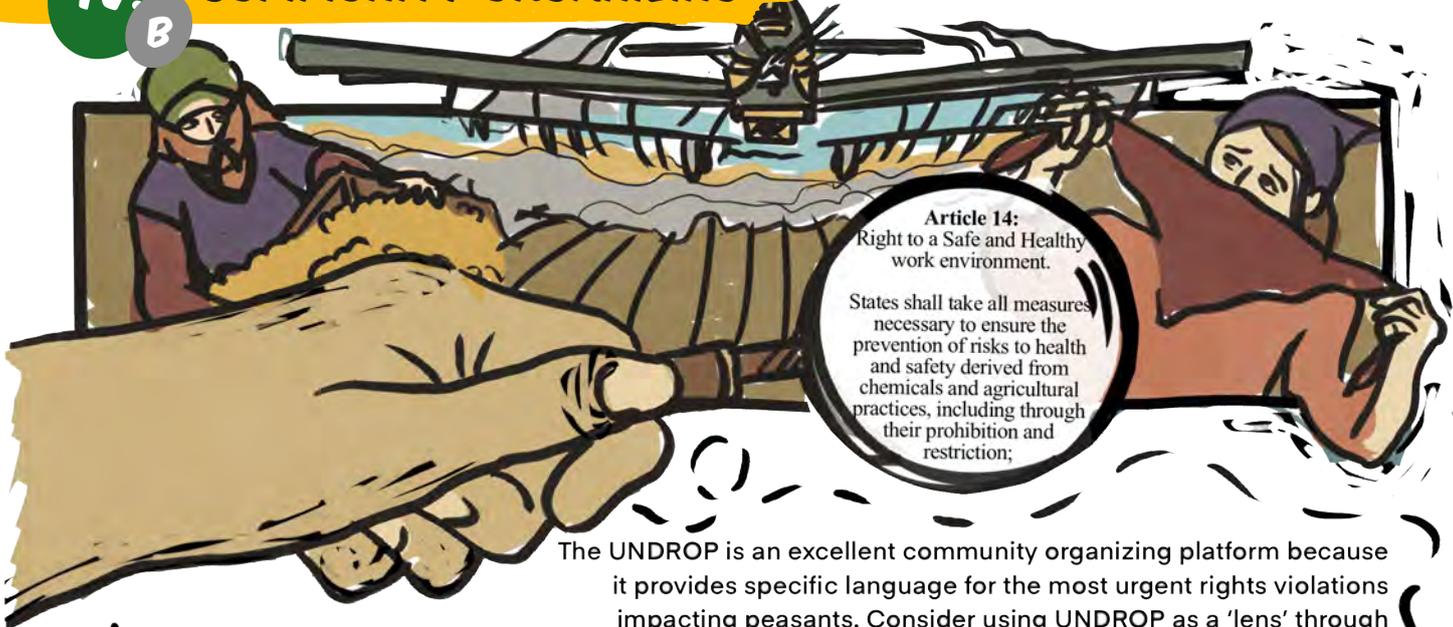
IV. A IN OUR DAILY LIFE

In our daily lives, we can use UNDROP to assess whether our rights have been recognized, protected, and respected. The most important actions we can take to use the UNDROP are to discuss it ourselves and then take a leadership role by sharing it with people in our communities: the more of us that know about UNDROP, the stronger its influence can become and the better we can defend our rights



Knowledge is power: talk about the UNDROP at community gatherings, share the document and the rights outlined in its pages. Discuss which articles apply to your local and regional context and which, although they do not apply, are important for our common struggle as a worldwide movement.

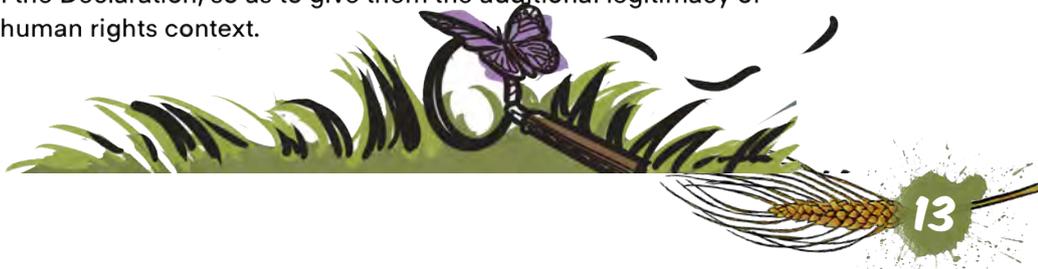
IV. B COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



Article 14:
Right to a Safe and Healthy work environment.
States shall take all measures necessary to ensure the prevention of risks to health and safety derived from chemicals and agricultural practices, including through their prohibition and restriction;

The UNDROP is an excellent community organizing platform because it provides specific language for the most urgent rights violations impacting peasants. Consider using UNDROP as a 'lens' through which to view and talk about your community's campaign.

This will allow you to use specific articles to best articulate your organizing initiatives using the language of specific articles in the Declaration, so as to give them the additional legitimacy of expression in an international human rights context.



IV.

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DOCUMENTING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Compiling written records of rights violations is the first step in making rights claims. Has an event, action, or series of events or actions taken place in the past that violated your rights as a peasant, whether individually or as a group in your community? Either in a group (if it is safe to do so), or on your own, make a list of rights claims and connect these claims with articles in the UNDROP.

This exercise is an important step of using the UNDROP.



IV.

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TO DRAFT LEGISLATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES

Try to visualize how your local food system would look different if components of UNDROP factored into your national, regional and local policies.

When advocating for UNDROP to local politicians and legislative institutions such as national parliaments, keep this vision in mind. The content adopted in UNDROP could one day be the framework for new legislation and public policies at the national and international level that have an impact on peasants and other rural communities



IV.

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FOR CLAIMING OUR RIGHTS BEFORE COURT

Although the UNDROP is not legally binding on states, it is a significant international instrument. The fact that it has been supported by a majority of UN member states gives it the possibility of indirectly influencing legal processes. UNDROP can help judges in different parts of the world apply national laws and decide a case in court in line with the rights of peasants and other rural peoples.

Even if your country of residence did not adopt and/ or signed the UNDROP, it can still be referenced in a court of law. Whether you are defending yourself or you have a lawyer, you can make reference to particular articles in the Declaration to support your struggles and strengthen a legal case for your rights as a peasant.



IV

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HOW ARE COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY USING UNDROP TO DEMAND THEIR RIGHTS BE RESPECTED?

Palestine: members of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) are carrying out campaigns around UNDROP articles related to the right to land, access to markets, and the right to seeds. Workshops, conferences, and mobilizations on the ground are taking place to educate community members about their rights and build a movement to demand the UNDROP be incorporated into national policy.



Canada: human rights lawyers used Article 23 in a court of law to demand the right to health and safety of migrant farmworkers be upheld when employers contested COVID-19 emergency public health legislation and were providing dangerous living conditions. The migrant farm workers and human rights lawyers won their case, forcing farm owners to protect the health and safety of workers by ensuring adequate space was provided in the previously crowded housing.



Indonesia: peasants here have been working hard to communicate UNDROP effectively across the country by translating it into local languages, facilitating trainings and political education events, and relating the Declaration to rights violations on the ground (such as relating Article 17 to the criminalization of a peasant for defending his land). Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) have been active in advocating UNDROP as a reference to national laws, such as the Protection and Empowerment of Peasants Law, and the Food Law.



European Union: LVC members are pressuring EU states and institutions to revise their seed laws to better protect peasants' right to seeds, based on Article 19 of UNDROP. A team of scholars has drafted a practical manual on the right to seeds in Europe outlining the right to seeds and states' obligations in UNDROP, the main challenges to the protection of the right to seeds in European Union law, and EU member states obligations for the implementation of UNDROP.



Nepal: peasants in this country have mobilized to advocate for new legislation that protects their rights. The 'Peasant Rights Act' is currently in the final stages of ratification at the national level, and it will be the first of its kind in the country.



Uganda: FIAN Uganda (an ally of LVC) is using the UNDROP to advocate for a better Fisheries Bill that should put the interests of the fisher folk above private interests. A position paper supported by various articles of the UNDROP has been submitted to parliament prior to the tabling of the fisheries Bill. In Uganda, LVC members have been working hard to communicate the contents of the Declaration, and have found radio to be an important tool to amplify UNDROP.



Colombia: organizations were able to get the implementation of UNDROP incorporated into the national strategy of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). From now on the OHCHR will need to support legislative initiatives advocated by peasants movements and their supporters, as well as document violations to the rights of peasants recognized in UNDROP. In Barrancabermeja, Colombia, women are using UNDROP as a guide to discuss, define and advance towards the implementation of strategies to overcome their concerns over food production, including problems arising from the impact of COVID and the lockdown measures.



In the following booklets in this series, we will break down the UNDROP into four themes and explore in depth the ways in which particular articles can offer protection to our communities.

1. Control over resources and means of production.

- ✓ Land
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Water

2. Peasant food production

- ✓ Labor/organization
- ✓ Agroecology
- ✓ Food sovereignty

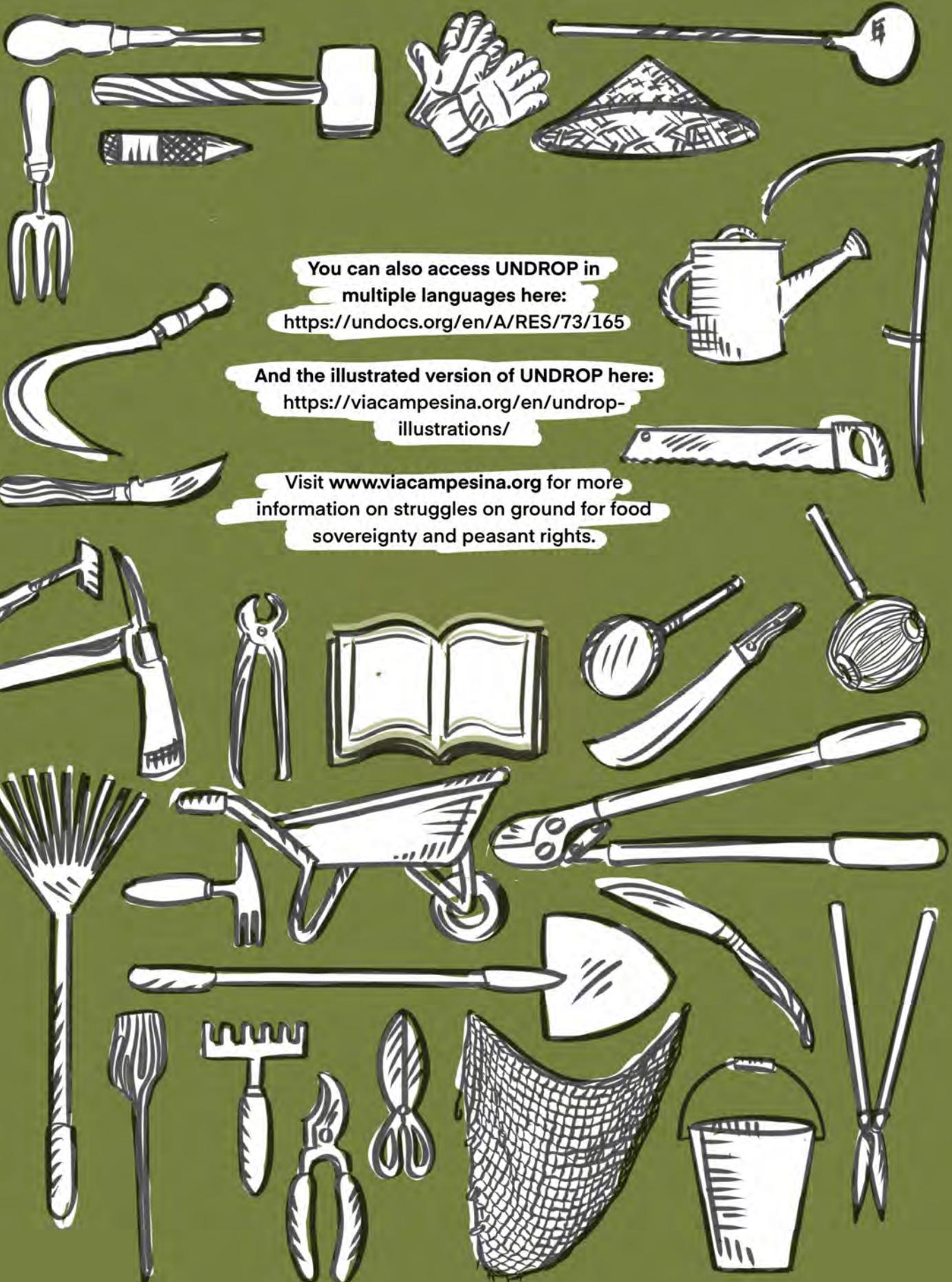
3. Dignified life

- ✓ Markets and decent income
- Health
- ✓ And other essential services

4. Peasants as political subjects

- ✓ Civil/political rights
- Gender
- Youth
- Migrants





You can also access UNDROP in
multiple languages here:
<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/165>

And the illustrated version of UNDROP here:
<https://viacampesina.org/en/undrop-illustrations/>

Visit www.viacampesina.org for more
information on struggles on ground for food
sovereignty and peasant rights.

La Via Campesina is an international grassroots movement that defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, women farmers, landless people, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers and youth from around the world.

It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are marginalizing people and destroying nature. The movement comprises 182 local and national organisations in 81 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

FIAN International is an international human rights organization. Since it was founded in 1986, FIAN International has been advocating for the right to food and nutrition. FIAN supports grassroots communities and movements in their struggles against right to food violations. Through its national sections and networks, FIAN works in over 50 countries around the world.

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