

PEASANTS AS POLITICAL SUBJECTS



UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF PEASANT RIGHTS

THEMATIC BOOKLET

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1.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the final booklet in the series - peasants as political subjects - brings us to the core purpose of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP): defining rights for peasants—a distinct social group of diverse and marginalized people. This marginalization by capitalist, colonial, imperialist, and heteropatriarchal forces and the constant threats to peasant lives and livelihoods will continue to provoke political responses and actions on the part of peasants, who, therefore, can be considered political subjects. There are many articles in the UNDROP that explain the specific rights that must be supported so that peasants are respected, our political voices are heard, and our demands are applied in the face of repression and exploitation. See the Introductory booklet in this series for background information on the UNDROP.



Article 1 of the UNDROP defines a peasant as a person who “produces food on a small-scale by themselves or in community, for themselves or for market, who relies on family or non-monetized labor, and has dependency and attachment to the land” (1).

They could be involved in small-scale agriculture, crop planting, livestock raising, pastoralism, fishing, forestry, hunting or gathering, handicrafts

They can be landless, nomadic, hired workers, migrant workers, seasonal workers, transhumants, pastoralists, Indigenous peoples, smallholders, family farmers



Around the world, peasant and rural women are essential food producers and community members, but they also face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence and are the majority of the world's hungry.



At the same time, peasant women have played a key role in feminist movements; speaking up for women's rights, highlighting the specific struggles of rural women whose work - both productive (such as labouring in the fields) and reproductive (such as raising children) - is often made invisible by patriarchal systems. Within the food sovereignty movement, women and girls play a dual role of

- (1) fighting against all forms of gender and sexual-based discriminations and violence while also
- (2) fighting for food systems transformation rooted in justice and equity.

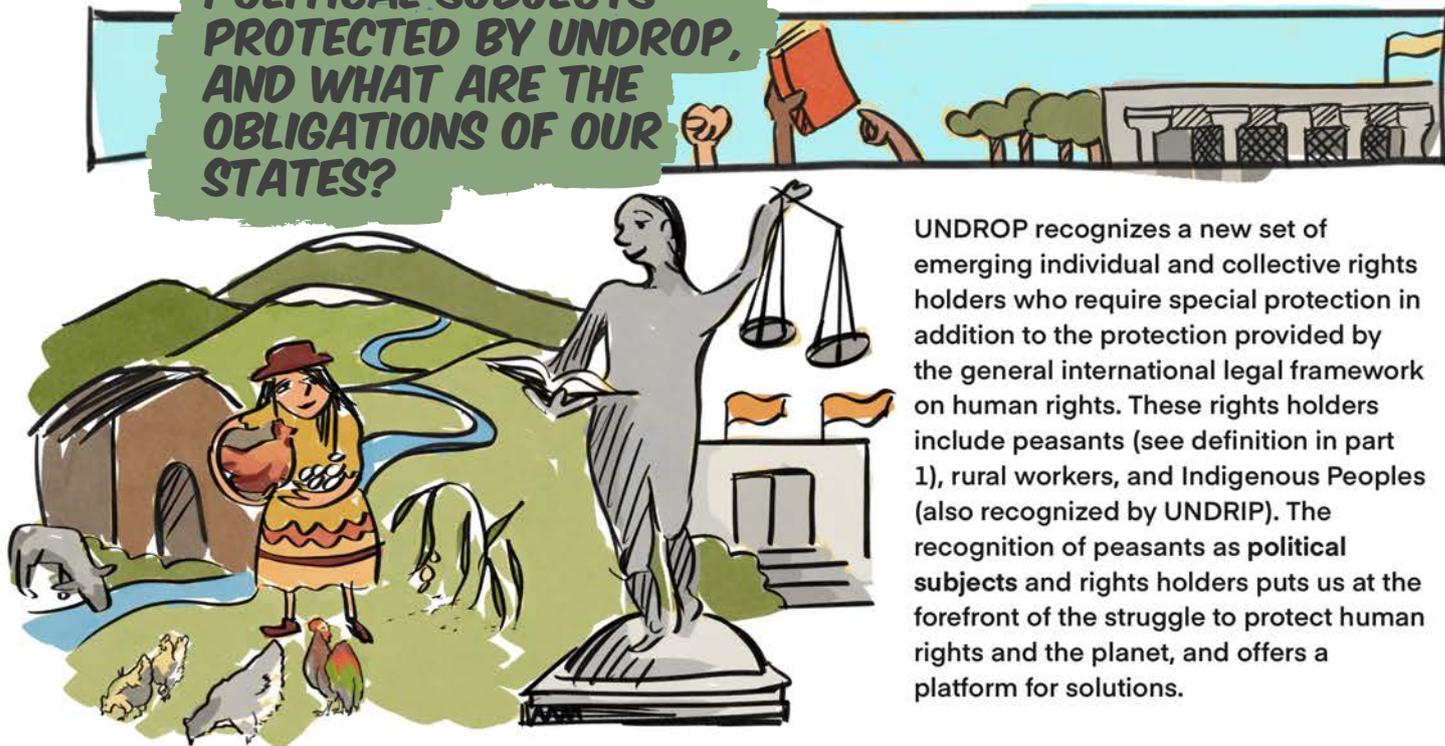


Articles in the UNDROP are an important tool to provide important new perspectives on the specific rights demands of peasants who face multiple different human rights violations because of their intersectional identities.

Keep reading to learn more about how peasant women and other groups are protected by UNDROP, not only through the obligations of nation states but also through the use of UNDROP as a legal and political tool.

2.

HOW ARE PEASANTS AS POLITICAL SUBJECTS PROTECTED BY UNDROP, AND WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS OF OUR STATES?



UNDROP recognizes a new set of emerging individual and collective rights holders who require special protection in addition to the protection provided by the general international legal framework on human rights. These rights holders include peasants (see definition in part 1), rural workers, and Indigenous Peoples (also recognized by UNDRIP). The recognition of peasants as political subjects and rights holders puts us at the forefront of the struggle to protect human rights and the planet, and offers a platform for solutions.

UNDROP recognizes that those emerging rights-holders also have a special dependence on and attachment to the land, water, and common goods. These are not only resources for livelihoods but are also sources of dignity and identity.



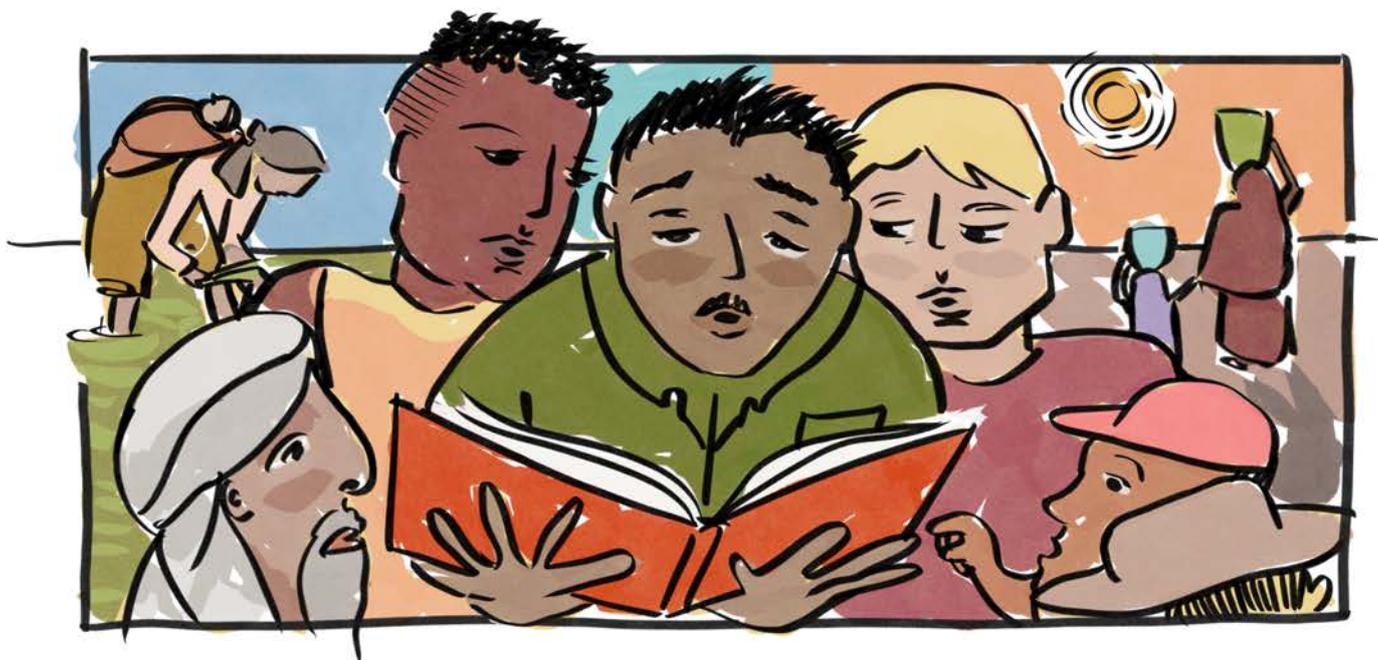
The terms “peasant” and “peasantry” and their cognates in other languages have long and complicated histories that reflects both peasants’ vast presence in most societies—even today—and their political and social subordination in those societies (2). In this sense, UNDROP recognizes that peasants have already been political subjects in their daily struggles to mobilize themselves against historic discrimination and marginalization.



The recognition of peasants as rights holders under international human rights law is also a tool to advocate for national legal and policy frameworks that take into account the social relationships of communities in rural areas and their interactions with the State. National public policies often make certain groups and the human rights violations that they suffer invisible.



Before adoption of the UNDROP, Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was the only provision in an international human rights instrument that was dedicated to women in rural areas (3). The UNDROP's preamble specifically addresses the rights of peasant women and other women working in rural areas, stressing their essential role in the economic survival of their families and to the rural and national economy (4). By including specific language criticizing violence against women and acknowledging their right to land, UNDROP aims to make visible the struggle of peasant and rural women.



The UNDROP is a declaration focused on economic rights and questions the existing economic system (namely, capitalism). It is an international instrument with great potential for political subjects in the rural world to continue finding ways to work together against collective threats including extractive industries, environmental exploitation, toxic pesticide and synthetic fertilizers use, industrial large-scale agriculture, genetic modification of original seeds, and consequently the climate crisis.



UNDROP can be used to support dialogue among different rights holders to determine pathways forward regarding juxtaposed rights and interests on the same territory, land, and/ or productive resources. UNDROP explains how we can enjoy the commons together beyond conventional ideas of private property.

UNDROP can also help support customary law beyond formal titling. When territorial conflicts are brought up to national or international court level, judicial bodies should try to harmonize the rights of different groups to work toward shared goals.



UNDROP's language about the rights of agricultural workers (5) to seeds (6) and biodiversity (7) acts as a legal tool to address human and labor rights violations from toxic pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. UNDROP supports transitions towards pesticide-free food systems, a more dignified way of life.



3.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THE WAY WE HAVE BEEN USING UNDROP ON THE GROUND?



Indonesia: In July 2022, five peasants who were members of Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI), in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia, were wrongly accused of violence and crimes in public spaces while protesting against a massive palm oil plantation firm. LVC and SPI referred to the rights guaranteed to peasants under UNDROP when calling on the Government of Indonesia to stop criminalization and intimidation of peasants and to ensure the release of their comrades. After campaigning for more than three months, four of the peasants were released in October 2022.



Argentina: In 2020, Indigenous communities united under the Lhaka Honhat Association in Argentina brought their ancestral land claims to the Interamerican Court of Human Rights. In the court's decision, Argentina was ordered to give communal property titles to Indigenous communities and referred to UNDROP to protect their right to land and other natural resources. The court also ruled that the state must not use Indigenous property without previous consultation, the state must create a fund for community development, and prepare a study for actions to be taken for water conservation.



Global: The creation of a feminist guide on the right to food and nutrition for women has been one good initiative to mobilize women peasants as political subjects. Diverse peasants, indigenous peoples, fisheries movements, human rights organizations, and feminist organizations met in Mexico City in 2019. Together, they assessed the way CEDAW and UNDROP relate to their daily struggles. After three days of productive discussions, the participants agreed to create a guide together for women in any rural area who want to plan around the right to food and nutrition (8).



4.

GLOSSARY

Food sovereignty: the right of peoples to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically fair and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Heteropatriarchy: a system where heterosexual males have power over women and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Intersectionality: multiple interconnected identities carried by an individual or a group, such as race, class, and gender. These overlapping characteristics can lead to multiple discriminations.

Marginalized: when a person or group of people have less access than others to basic services or opportunities, and are in positions of little influence or power.

Rights holders: individuals or social groups that have particular liberties or privileges as declared by states.

5.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Below you can find a series of thematic booklets that specifically address some of the most important traits in UNDROP.

1. Introductory Booklet
2. Peasants' Rights to Resources and Means of Production
3. Peasants' Rights and Food Production
4. Peasants' Dignified Lives and Livelihoods
5. Peasants as Political Subjects

Other useful resources can be found here:

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

And the illustrated version of UNDROP here:

<https://viacampesina.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UNDROP-Book-of-Illustrations-I-EN-I-Web.pdf>
Visit www.viacampesina.org for more information on struggles on ground for food sovereignty and peasant rights.

6.

REFERENCES

(1) UNDROP (2018), Article 1.

(2) What is a peasant? What are peasantries? A briefing paper on issues of definition, Marc Edelman, (2013).

(3) Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women, UN General Assembly, (1979).

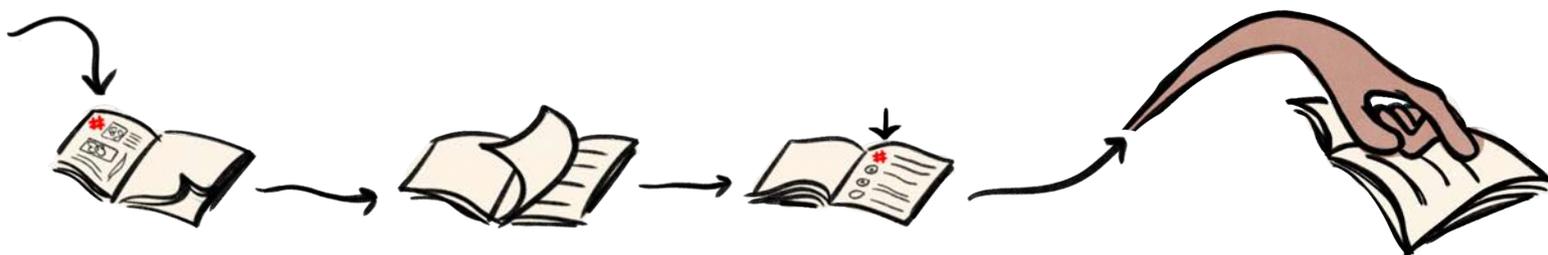
(4) UNDROP (2018), Article 4.

(5) UNDROP (2018), Article 14.

(6) UNDROP (2018), Article 19.

(7) UNDROP (2018), Article 20.

(8) Cooking up political agendas, FIAN, (2020).



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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