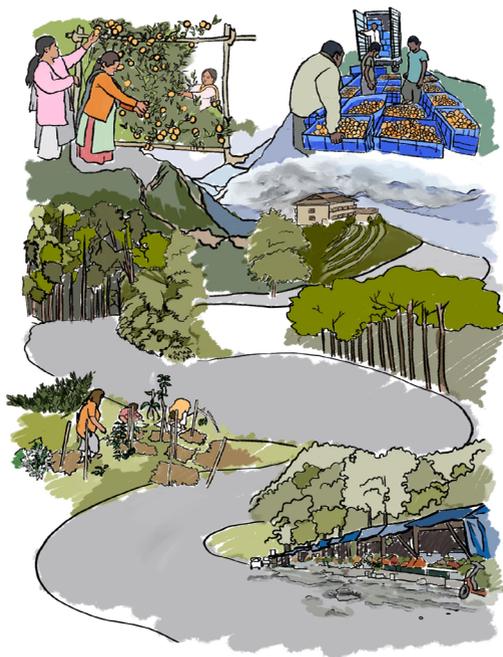


**UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION
ON THE RIGHTS OF PEASANTS
AND OTHER PEOPLE WORKING IN RURAL AREAS**

**Right to an adequate standard
of living, a decent livelihood and
the means of production**

(art. 16)

Training sheet No. 5



*“There is not one developed world and one underdeveloped world
just one maldeveloped world”*

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THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING, A DECENT LIVELIHOOD AND THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION

The right to an adequate standard of living is a universally recognized right. It derives from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11). This right includes, among other things, the right to food, health, clothing, housing and a continuously improving livelihood.

The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas reaffirms this right for peasants and rural workers, but applies it more explicitly to their situation by tying it in with the status of “peasant”. That is, the very fact of being a peasant should make it possible to attain a decent standard of living and earn a decent livelihood and, to that end, to enjoy the right to the necessary means of production.

To achieve an adequate standard of living, article 16 establishes peasants’ right not only to the means of production but also to freely choose their methods of production and to develop community-based marketing systems. The inclusion of these freedoms as new components of peasants’ rights is a big step forward in legal terms.



RIGHT TO THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION (ART. 16.1)

The most important thing to bear in mind in this provision is that the means of production peasants are entitled to use are any that will give them an adequate standard of living. It is up to peasants to decide what means of production they need. It is partly because they lack the means of production appropriate to their individual situations that peasants are unable to attain an adequate standard of living.

“Means of production” covers a very wide range of possibilities. Article 16, paragraph 1, gives various examples of means of production: “*production tools, technical assistance, credit, insurance and other financial services*”.

Thus the means of production are not only tools, but also the financial means to obtain those tools and use them. In other words, financial services are part of the means of production, and peasants are entitled to them as such, not just as a way to access other means of production.



Freedom to choose methods of production

In order to ensure that the right to an adequate standard of living can be effectively realized – and realized solely by means of peasants’ farming practices – it is backed up, in paragraph 1, by the right to freely choose to practise “*traditional methods of agriculture*”. Explicit recognition is given to this freedom of choice in order to ensure that policies on the means of production do not result in a standardization of practices, with a bias towards industrial methods, as is the case today.

It is not a matter of being able to obtain a tractor on credit, but of every peasant having the right to decide what kind of farming is appropriate for their land and best meets the objectives of agroecology and sustainable production. Peasants should be able to earn a decent livelihood from it and thereby to attain an adequate standard of living. These are also factors in the development of food sovereignty and peasants’ own autonomy.

Note that this right may be exercised individually and/or collectively. Some traditional agricultural methods can only be practised in groups. Moreover, the means of production will vary depending on whether practices are individual or collective. Taking the example mentioned above (purchasing a tractor on credit), in some cases there may be individual loans, in others joint loans, property may be privately owned or owned by an association, a right of use could be vested in an individual or in a collectivity.

Developing a communal marketing system

Article 16 returns several times to the question of peasants' access to markets. Having established their right to the means of production and the freedom to choose their methods of production, the sale of the resulting produce needs to be considered. Note that this article imposes obligations on States in terms of market access, but also creates a right for peasants to set up communal marketing systems. Markets exist already, and for the most part are outside peasants' control, so the aim here is to restore their power in marketing.



Greater control should enable peasants to resist the standardization of modes of marketing, which are increasingly geared towards the major retailers and export. What form their systems take is for peasants to decide and will therefore depend on circumstances and their own political choices. However, they must remain community-based, a notion that should be understood in its broad sense, meaning collective systems, and ones that are as close as possible to the beneficiaries. This might mean, for example, a system of direct selling to consumers, either at the farm or by advance purchase of “baskets” whose contents will vary depending on the crops; it could also

mean supplying school canteens. Given the right to develop their own marketing system, peasants can start to regain control of the production chain.

PEASANTS' CONTROL OF PRICES (ARTS. 16.2 AND 16.3)

The right we are discussing here – the right, as a peasant, to a decent standard of living – is often violated by low agricultural prices. Peasants are subjected to market prices set by either the food industry or the major retailers or their direct competitors, yet these prices are inadequate. To break out of this situation, peasants must have a free hand to sell their produce according to their needs, at a price that takes account of their labour and enables them to attain a decent standard of living.



While the overall aim of this article is to ensure an adequate standard of living for peasants, paragraphs 2 and 3 specify that this also involves proper pricing of agricultural products. To that end, States should ensure that peasants have “full and equitable participation” in local, national and regional markets.

Peasants can be considered to participate fully and equitably in markets when they decide prices, quantities and buyers. It is therefore the responsibility of States to ensure that these decisions can be taken by peasants.

To achieve this, article 16 requires States to:

- 1) Give peasants access to “the [necessary] means of transportation and and the processing, drying and storage facilities” (art. 16.2); and
- 2) Strengthen markets for the benefit of peasants (art. 16.3).

These two obligations on States can bring about profound transformations if they are implemented with the involvement of peasants and rural workers.

Note that the markets to which peasants should have access are local, national and regional. That said, it is up to them to choose which ones they wish to participate in, depending on capacity and needs at any given moment. To that extent, the imposition, for example, of a monoculture for export at the expense of food crops constitutes a direct violation of this right.

Certification of the quality of food products (art. 11.3)

Food quality certification has become a major commercial issue in terms of market access, which remains under the influence of the big agribusiness groups. Article 11, paragraph 3, is intended to give peasants the right to be involved in certifying the quality of food products: “States shall take appropriate measures to promote the access of peasants and other people working in rural areas to a fair, impartial and appropriate system of evaluation and certification of the quality of their products at the local, national and international levels, and to promote their participation in its formulation.”

CHANGE IN POLICY (ART. 16.4)

Article 16, paragraph 4, is clear: it is only by changing policies across the board that States will ensure peasants' right to an adequate standard of living. The direction that these policies should take in order to achieve this goal is also stated in paragraph 4: peasants' livelihood options must be enhanced by stimulating a transition to "sustainable modes of agricultural production."

States should therefore prioritize agroecology, organic farming and direct sales. What this paragraph describes is the exact opposite of the policies that have dominated the sector for – depending on the country – the last 30 to 70 years. Up to now, everything has been done to promote international markets and industrial farming. Thus paragraph 4 requires structural changes. In addition, it obliges States to review the policies of international organizations that deal with international agricultural trade, in particular the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

In short, the article requires nothing less than the separation of agriculture from international trade so that peasants can work first and foremost for their communities and make a living from that work.

Art. 16.4

States shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that their rural development, agricultural, environmental, trade and investment policies and programmes contribute effectively to protecting and strengthening local livelihood options and to the transition to sustainable modes of agricultural production. States shall stimulate sustainable production, including agroecological and organic production, whenever possible, and facilitate direct farmer-to-consumer sales.

PEASANTS' RESILIENCE (ART. 16.5)



Paragraph 5 obliges States to make peasants resilient to climate disasters and market failure.

Reference is made to climate crises and market failure because it is they that are often responsible for peasants losing income, in violation of their right to an adequate standard of living.

Unfortunately, climate disasters are likely to become a regular occurrence, given the present pattern of development, which causes large-scale degradation of the environment. It is possible to break out of this vicious circle if we jettison the dominant model of development, and the world's peasants, given all their potential, could make an enormous contribution to such an advance.

PAY EQUITY (ART. 16.6)

One of the obligations on States is to move towards wage equity, i.e., remuneration that makes it possible to attain an adequate standard of living, with no discrimination.

This obligation is intended to protect employees in the agricultural sector – for not all peasants own land: many are wage-earners or even simple sharecroppers. Agricultural employees are often poor workers with clearly inadequate pay.

Lastly, the section on "equal pay for equal work" concerns women in particular – who still suffer structural discrimination – but also migrants, who make up a large proportion of agricultural workers worldwide. In fact they are hired precisely because the law allows them to be paid less than the workers who come from the country concerned.



SUMMARY

Key points on article 16

The thrust of article 16 is that peasants should be able to live off their produce in decent conditions. As it is formulated in the Declaration, the right to an adequate standard of living includes:

- The right to a decent income and livelihood.
- The right to the means of production and the necessary tools, and the right to choose those tools.
- The right to have access to means of transport and facilities that make it possible to participate in markets (local, national regional).
- The right to develop communal systems to market their products.
- The right to set the price of their products.



For more information, go to
www.cetim.ch/factsheets-on-peasants-rights

See also the text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas on the UN website,
<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/165>



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas: 12 training sheets

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