

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

Right to participation

(art. 10)

Training sheet No. 7



*"There is not one developed world and one underdeveloped world
just one maldeveloped world"*

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THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

The roots of the right to participation lie in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 21) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 22).

The right to participation has special importance for peasants and needed to be reaffirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Peasants are one of the most politically marginalized groups. These days, all political decisions are made in the capital and thus, by definition, a long way from rural areas.

Geographical remoteness is of course an important factor, but we must not forget that, in addition, politicians often deliberately exclude peasants from decision-making. Very few elected politicians are peasants, or even come from rural areas. The industrial and service sectors' focus on cities has left peasant agriculture right outside the sphere of political interests. Yet not only do peasants feed the cities, in many countries they still make up the majority of the population.

Article 10 of the Declaration seeks to restore them to their rightful place in decisions concerning their lives. It is no longer possible for political decisions affecting thousands of people in rural areas to be made in cities without their participation.

This article should be read in conjunction with article 9 (right of association) in particular, because in order to be able to take part in any participatory action, rural organizations must have the right to associate.

Right of association (art. 9.1)

Article 9 of the Declaration is directly related to article 10. States must comply with it, strictly, promptly and in all circumstances:

"Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to form and join organizations, trade unions, cooperatives or any other organization or association of their own choosing for the protection of their interests, and to bargain collectively. Such organizations shall be independent and voluntary in character, and remain free from all interference, coercion or repression."

The right to participate in political decision-making is invaluable, if those concerned embrace it. The Declaration, if implemented in practice, is a chance for peasants to have a fair say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Article 10 comprises two paragraphs, which deal with peasants' rights (art. 10.1) and the State's obligations (10.2).



FREE, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION (ART. 10.1)

Active and free participation (art. 10.1)

Paragraph 1 recognizes peasants' right to: "active and free participation, directly and/or through their representative organizations, in the preparation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods."



Participation means taking part in something, or acting together. A right to active participation is more than a right to look on silently and passively. Quite the opposite: peasants and rural workers must be able to attend debates, speak and put forward proposals.

This kind of participation can take many forms, and need not be constrained by the options proposed by the authorities. Nor should it be confined to negotiating rooms and to those invited to participate.

Similarly, what can be said in a meeting is limited only by the freedom of expression. Peasants are not obliged to stick to one line rather than another. Participation must be allowed to be active and free, as specified in paragraph 1 of this article.

To be able to participate freely and actively, peasants and rural workers must be informed. The right to information is recognized in the Declaration in article 11.

They have the right to seek, receive and share information. This means both being trained in and informed about every detail of their participation, and being able to freely share the information and knowledge they acquire.

Right to information (art. 11.2)

As well as establishing peasants' right to information (art. 11.1), the Declaration requires States to take "appropriate measures to ensure that peasants and other people working in rural areas have access to relevant, transparent, timely and adequate information in a language and form and through means adequate to their cultural methods so as to promote their empowerment and to ensure their effective participation in decision-making in matters that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods."



Direct or indirect

Peasants' participation can be either direct or indirect. Participation is direct when a peasant attends in person, rather than sending a representative. Obviously, direct participation is feasible only to a certain extent, but the organizers of a public debate must make every effort to make it happen.

Indirect participation is done through representative organizations. This kind of participation is recognized in article 10, paragraph 1. The nature of representative organizations is not specified. We may assume that they could be trade unions, associations or informal organizations. The key criterion is that they must be representative. Above all, they must never be empty shells manipulated by the authorities. If they are, they must be exposed and replaced by organizations with a genuine social base.

Participating in the implementation of decisions

Peasants should participate both in the development and in the implementation of a public decision. The development and implementation stages are of equal importance, and are interdependent. Peasants can of course participate at other times, as long as they are involved in development and implementation.

It is at these two stages that a decision takes shape, where its purpose, objectives, means and consequences are discussed and decided. So it is vital that those affected are present. Implementation, we should note, is not a purely technical stage, when no more decisions are needed. On the contrary, a public decision can be put into tangible effect fairly and correctly only with the involvement of those that it affects.

Between development and implementation, there may be a change in scale. For example, if a decision is made at the national level, its implementation at the local level will always have an impact on specific people. So due account must be taken of both these levels, since the persons and organizations involved are not the same.



PARTICIPATING IN DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR LIVES (ART. 10.2)

Art. 10.2

"States shall promote the participation, directly and/or through their representative organizations, of peasants and other people working in rural areas in decision-making processes that may affect their lives, land and livelihoods."

So there is a very wide range of decisions in which peasants and rural workers can participate.

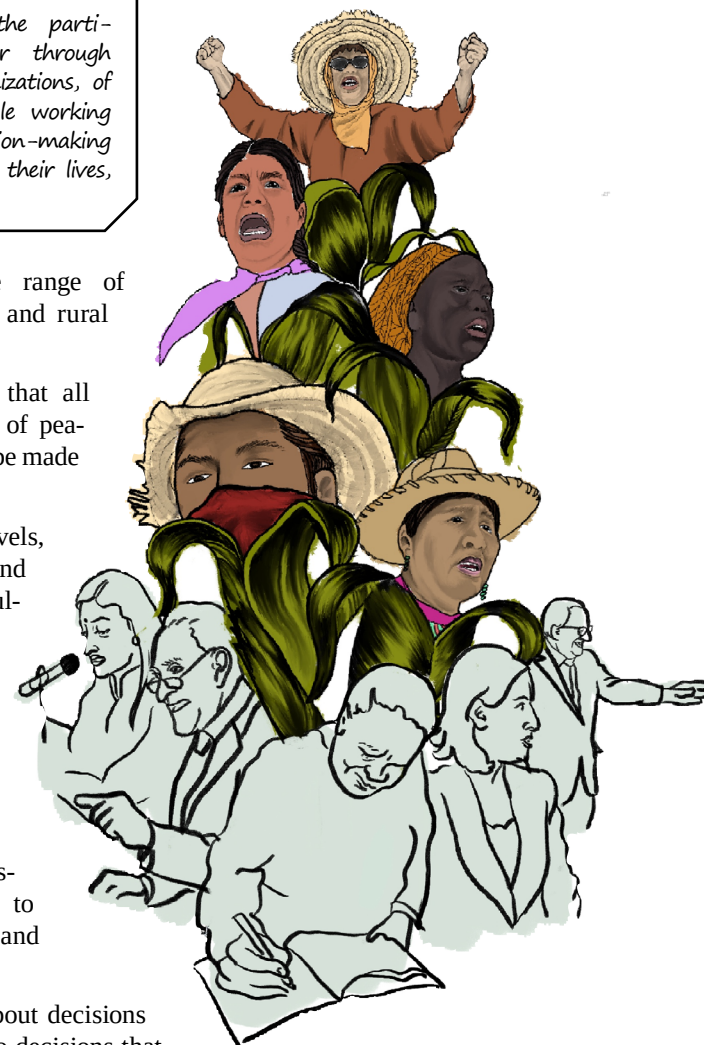
The overriding principle is that all decisions affecting the lives of peasants and rural workers must be made with their participation.

This means decisions at all levels, whether national or local, and ranging from general agricultural policy, through the most technical of regulatory changes, to the use of agricultural land for construction.

Most importantly, it is up to peasants and rural workers, not just the authorities responsible for the decisions, to decide what concerns them and what impacts their lives.

Moreover, this is not only about decisions that affect their lives, but also decisions that affect their rights.

Clearly, the rights contained in this Declaration can only materialize with the involvement of those concerned. Their observance, and above all their realization, cannot be achieved without that participation.



States' obligation to act

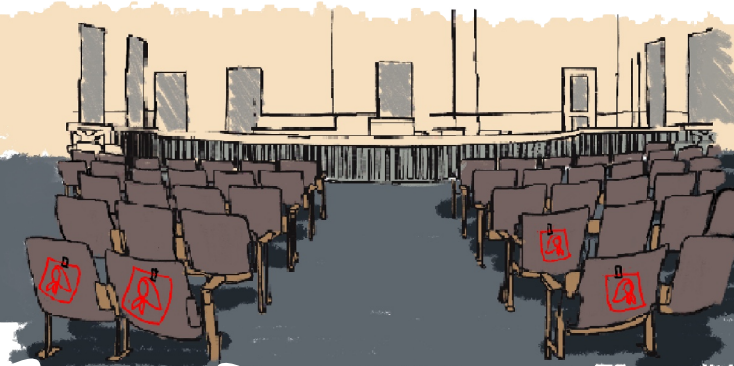
States have an obligation to be proactive with regard to the right to participation, and that obligation involves more than merely inviting people to participate.

The use of the verb *shall promote* requires States to take all possible measures to ensure the presence and active participation of peasants and rural workers.

First and foremost – obviously – States must not prevent them from participating. Then, as stipulated in article 11 of the Declaration (see [art. 11.2 page 3](#)), they must provide the participants with information – and of a quality that will allow them full and informed participation. Adequate, properly distributed information is crucial to achieving participation that is not a mere masquerade.

Everything must be done to ensure that peasants not only are able to participate, but also feel able to participate. In this regard, particular efforts must be made to reach those who experience most discrimination, notably women and migrants. The right to participation is of equal concern to them and is an opportunity to stop perpetuating, and to counter, the social discrimination that prevails throughout the world.

Lastly, as we know, participation in decision-making can also occur in non-formal settings. This means that the authorities must not exclude peasants and rural workers from informal negotiations; they must be involved in the various events surrounding and leading up to a decision. The authorities responsible for the decision must also take into account events that are organized at peasants' initiative.

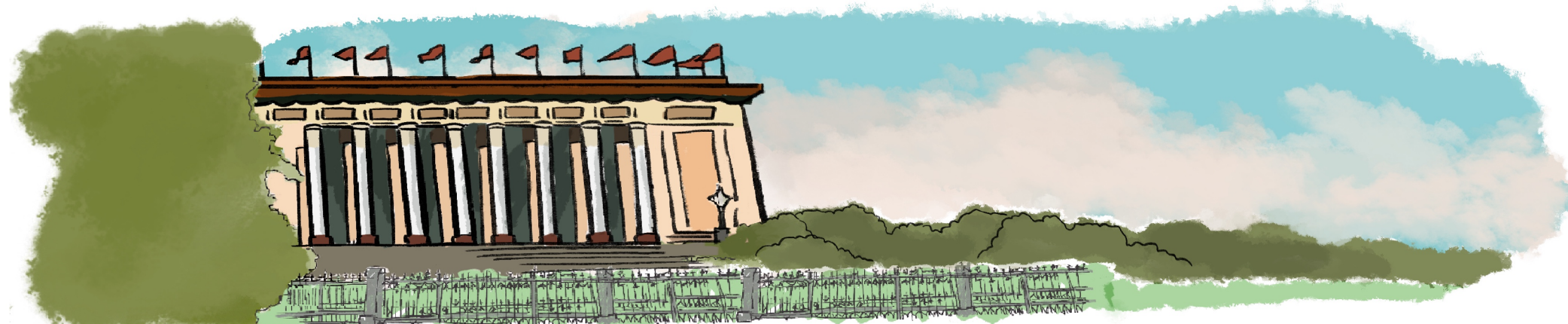


Respect for representative organizations

Article 10, paragraph 2, states that representative organizations must be respected as strong and independent bodies. The qualifiers "*strong and independent*" used in this article are not trivial. In order to effectively represent the interests of peasants and rural workers, these organizations must be completely independent of any institutional authority and any particular interests. As regards the strength of such organizations, we know that a union, for example, may be in a position to exert some form of pressure on the government. The government must in no way prevent peasants from getting organized.

This obligation on States to respect peasants' organizations cannot be disputed, either in the context of international law, which recognizes the freedom of association, or under the Declaration, which protects it. Thus States have an obligation to respect the establishment and growth of peasants' and rural workers' representative organizations.

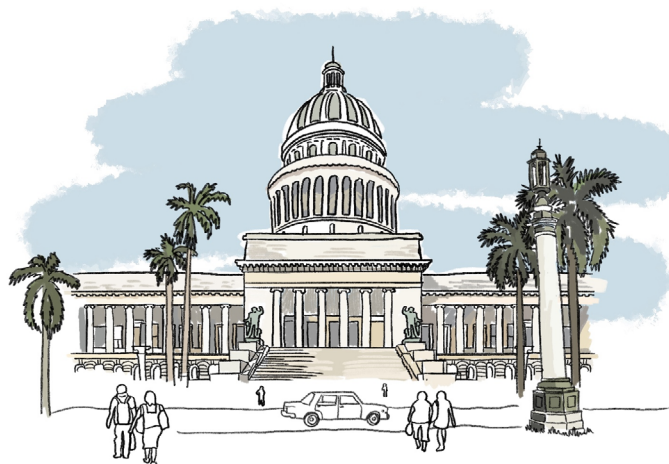
More than that, States must encourage the creation of such organizations, for without them they cannot meet their obligations with regard to peasants' right to participate in decision-making.



SUMMARY

Key points on article 10

- Peasants have the right to participate in the development and implementation of decisions concerning them:
 - actively and freely;
 - directly or through their representative organizations.
- States must make every effort to ensure peasants' participation, directly or indirectly (through their representative organizations), in the making and implementation of decisions.



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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