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Taking back power in a brutal food system: food sovereignty in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This research argues that food sovereignty offers a plausible alternative to the current unjust, unsafe and unsustainable food system in South Africa. In addition, it argues that food sovereignty provides important solutions to hunger and the brutalities of the food system which current policies and interventions fail to address. Food sovereignty is an ideal that originated amongst a peasant movement in the global South. This ideal and framework to address hunger has since evolved and spread to international movements, and is making great strides in advocating for change in the current broken food system. Food sovereignty has lately been adapted in South Africa as a grassroots led initiative promoted by the nascent South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC). This research uses the SAFSC as a case study to explore food sovereignty alternatives in South Africa. It does this by using in-depth interviews and participant observation in the campaign to draw out understandings of food sovereignty particular to South African activists. It further assesses tactics and strategies the SAFSC uses, and compares these to current state, business and civil society organisations' solutions to show how a more grassroots-led approach, using the food sovereignty framework, has the potential to address the roots of hunger. These roots of hunger are shown to be at the corporate food regime level, as has been indicated by the literature and confirmed in this research. As food sovereignty is pursued by various actors in South Africa it provides important examples of approaches by which power in the food system can be reclaimed to benefit the majority instead of a few elites, as is currently the case.