

# Earth Jurisprudence

Reconnecting with the laws and lore of the Earth

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## Food Sovereignty - underpinned by Earth Jurisprudence

November 2016

Dear <<First Name>>,

The vast majority (an estimated 70%) of our planet's human population is fed and nourished by small farmers following ecological principles for food production. But these farmers are severely threatened and undermined by the industrial agrochemical industry promoting mono-crop production, which defies the laws of Nature.

We are now experiencing the consequences of pumping post World War Two chemicals into soils and crops and promoting large scale industrial agribusiness – soil toxicification, depletion and erosion, extinction of biodiversity, pollinators and crop diversity, drainage and pollution of water systems and growing poverty, displacement and suicides among small farmers. The global industrial food system contributes an estimated 44-57% of global greenhouse gas emissions, using fossil fuels both in agriculture and to store and transport food around the planet. Not only does it contribute to climate change but it undermines the capacity of ecosystems and food systems to adapt to climate change by stripping away diversity. This is the legacy of the industrial food system.

In response to this growing crisis, the global movement of small farmers, La Via Campesina, has been asserting its commitment to **food sovereignty** – a term that captures the multiple dimensions of a healthy, ethical and just food system that abides by ecological laws. It includes seed sovereignty, which recognises seed as the foundation of our food systems, diversified by small farmers since the dawn of agriculture. Seed sovereignty affirms the right of small farmers to continue their practice of saving, selecting and exchanging seed diversity.

**Food and seed sovereignty are underpinned by Earth Jurisprudence – recognising that Nature's law are primary and non-negotiable, and that these laws maintain the conditions for life on our planet, including human life.**

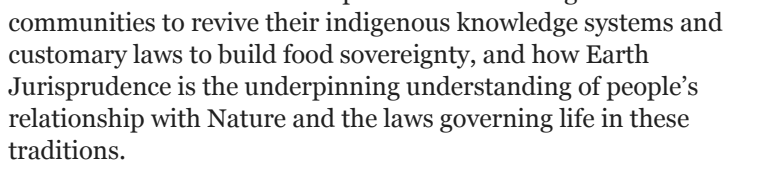
Healthy food systems depend on healthy ecosystems, which are able to ecologically regenerate. To maintain these healthy conditions farmers must be ecologically literate; able to read the signs and laws of Nature. This literacy comes through a close relationship with Nature, an understanding and respect for the web of life of which humans are a part. It is farmers' eco-literacy that has inspired them to cultivate the practice of enhancing their crop diversity generation after generation. Their legacy is the range of cultural foods we enjoy around our planet, nurtured in relationship with the ecosystems in which they are embedded.

This world view is in stark contrast to the human-centred world view which we see playing out at the international fora such as the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP 22) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Marrakech, Morocco, these last few weeks. "[Big Business in Marrakech](#)", by [GRAIN](#), reflects the abysmal gap between the reality of peasant communities in Africa and around the world and the delusion of the global corporates promising they can provide techno-fixes to outwit Nature.

We are seeing that within less than one century of the industrial growth economy and food system dominating the Earth - founded in the illusion that humans are superior to Nature and can override her laws – we face multiple planetary scale ecological and social crises.

While its hard to see how this system can change as quickly as it needs to, one thing we can each do is to grow what we can and buy food grown by small farmers who abide by the laws of Nature and thereby regenerate life from the soil to the plate.

See this short film from La Via Campesina and GRAIN for inspiration - [Together we can cool the planet](#).

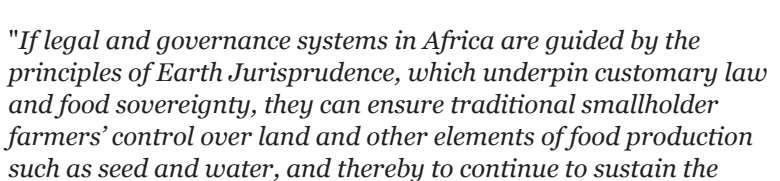


## SAFSC Festival and Peoples' Food Sovereignty Act

A vibrant Food Sovereignty Festival, assembly and regional meeting was held in Johannesburg earlier in November with grassroots activists from South Africa, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe participating. The aim was to cultivate a deeper understanding of the food crisis in Africa and to celebrate grassroots initiatives of the growing movement in South Africa and regionally.

Gaia was invited to discuss experiences in working with communities to revive their indigenous knowledge systems and customary laws to build food sovereignty, and how Earth Jurisprudence is the underpinning understanding of people's relationship with Nature and the laws governing life in these traditions.

SAFSC (South African Food Sovereignty Campaign) also launched the first draft of the 'Peoples' Food Sovereignty Act' at the Peoples' Parliament and invited comments and input from participants. The Act will be taken around the country to consult a wide constituency of the movement. Participants from other countries were inspired to develop a similar law and process back home. [Find out more here](#).

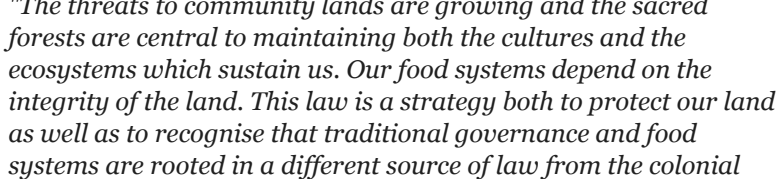


## Earth Jurisprudence and Food Sovereignty - keynote speech at African Conference

Also this month, a 3-day conference has been considering [Changing Food Systems in Africa: Agro-ecology, Food Sovereignty and their Roles in Nutrition and Health](#). Organisers, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative for Africa (EOA-I), AfrONet, and the International foundation for Organic Agriculture (IFOAM), aim to generate compelling narratives around agro-ecology, to support ecologically sane and socially just food systems which have stood the test of time. The dominating forces in Africa need to change in order to regenerate food systems that have sustained ecosystems and people over generations before the industrial food system was imposed, say conference organisers.

One of the keynote presentations was by Dr Mellese Damtie, Ethiopian lawyer, noted for completing the first PhD in Earth Jurisprudence in Africa. His paper, commissioned by The Gaia Foundation, looks at Food Sovereignty through an Earth Jurisprudence lens and with a focus on Ethiopia.

*"If legal and governance systems in Africa are guided by the principles of Earth Jurisprudence, which underpin customary law and food sovereignty, they can ensure traditional smallholder farmers' control over land and other elements of food production such as seed and water, and thereby to continue to sustain the ecosystems on which our food system depends",* says Mellese.



## Todjedi Women's Association: reviving traditional foods in Benin

A group of women from the village of Todjedi in Benin in West Africa have formed a vegetable co-operative to revive traditional crops and supply local markets. Working together they are producing a range of foods from potatoes to maize as well as traditional production of palm oil and other traditional crops, which they use to feed themselves and sell in the local markets. The money the women make is pooled and used to help towards the costs of sending their children to school, community ceremonies for birth or marriage, seasonal festivals or to general times of need.

The women pass their traditional agricultural knowledge on from one generation to the next. Their land, however, is under threat of being sold to foreign industrial agricultural interests, especially from China, for growing crops to export, such as sugarcane, manioc and ethanol for biofuels.

Appolinaire Oussou Lio, an up-and-coming Earth Jurisprudence practitioner from Benin, is working with the co-operative so that they can benefit from Benin's law to protect sacred forests that play a central role in traditional governance systems and community lands.

*"The threats to community lands are growing and the sacred forests are central to maintaining both the cultures and the ecosystems which sustain us. Our food systems depend on the integrity of the land. This law is a strategy both to protect our land as well as to recognise that traditional governance and food systems are rooted in a different source of law from the colonial legal system. Traditionally we recognise that our customary laws are guided by the laws of Nature. This understanding is what enabled our traditions to continue for generations. We have to restore our traditions and identity if our children and the children of other species are to have any future",* says Appolinaire.

***"...we fail to appreciate the planet that provides us with a world abundant in the volume and variety of food for our nourishment, a world exquisite in supplying beauty of form, sweetness of taste, delicate fragrances for our enjoyment.."***

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*)

## Events in November/December

12-15 November 2016, Johannesburg, South Africa

**Food Sovereignty Festival 2016**

South African Food Sovereignty Campaign's annual Food Sovereignty Festival. For more detail, [click here](#).

16 November 2016, Agora Space, Green Zone, COP22-Marrakech

**Traditional Knowledge: Ecology of Care.**

Panelists from the Global EcoVillage Network (GEN) will discuss how traditional knowledge has always kept in mind the nature of the relationship between self and the human body, the planet and food supplies within community life. For more detail, [click here](#).

24-26 November, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Changing Food Systems in Africa: Agro-ecology, Food Sovereignty and their Roles in Nutrition and Health'**

For more information, [click here](#).

12-16 December, United Nations, Geneva

**International Conference on the Rights of Nature.**

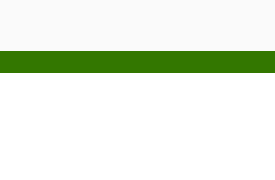
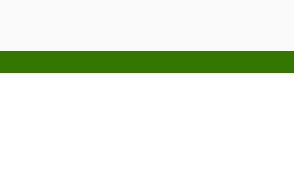
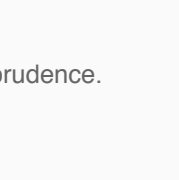
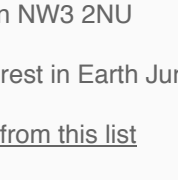
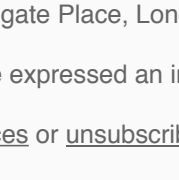
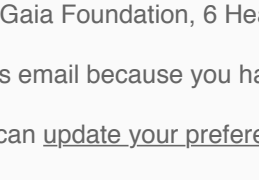
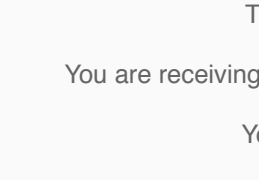
A half-day session on 15 December will build on the last UN Harmony with Nature dialogues. For detail on the programme or how to submit an abstract, [click here](#).

## News

- CIKOD and other civil society groups in Ghana criticise Plant Breeder's Bill and organisations purporting to represent small farmers. [Read more](#).
- The International Criminal Court's announces it will accept cases relating to the environment. [Read more](#).
- *Tainted Lands: Corruption in large-scale land deals*, a new report by Professor Olivier De Schutter, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, looks at the global land grabbing crisis and calls for protection of the rights of local communities.
- *Cooling the Planet: Frontline communities lead the struggle*. Voices from the Global Convergence of Water and Land Struggles, is a report that leads on from a landmark 'convergence' at the Paris COP21.
- A hopeful story from Finland, where the Sami are restoring the Naatamo River, even in the midst of an extractive 'tsunami'. [Read more](#).

## Recommended Reading & Viewing

- **Talk:** Thomas Berry, *Transitioning to an Ecozoic Future* (Faith Community Church, March 1997)
- **Art:** *Bill of Rights for Seeds* by artist Beth Grossman, inspired by the Rights of Nature movement.
- **Article:** *A Tale of Two Futures: Planetary Realism in the Time of Climate Change*, by Hannibal Rhoades, The Gaia Foundation.
- **Report:** *Mining and its Impacts on Water, Food Sovereignty and Sacred Natural Sites and Territories 2014*, by NAPE-Uganda and The Gaia Foundation.
- **Report:** *Celebrating African Rural Women: Custodians of Seed, Food and Traditional Knowledge for Climate Change Resilience*, by the African Biodiversity Network, African Women's Development Fund and The Gaia Foundation. [Download here](#).
- **Film:** *Seeds of Freedom, Seeds of Sovereignty & Seeds of Justice: in the hands of farmers*. [View all films](#) (English, French, Spanish)
- **Film:** *Planetary*, by Guy Reid and Bulldogfilm - a breathtaking and humbling reminder of the role we play in the stewardship of the natural world, and that it is time to shift our perspective. [Watch the trailer here](#).



Working together, to strengthen an African Earth Jurisprudence movement.

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