

Bolivia's Food Sovereignty & Agrobiodiversity: Undermining the Local to Strengthen the State?¹

Jenny Cockburn²

KEYWORDS: Bolivia, Food Sovereignty, Ecological Agriculture, Organic Farming, State-NGO Relations, Agrobiodiversity, Post-Neoliberal, Quechua Farmers.

In Bolivia the notion of Food Sovereignty has been incorporated into the new Constitution. However, one complication relates to how food sovereignty is conceptualized -- and for what end -- by State and NGO actors in agricultural development. Bolivia is home to substantial biodiversity. Like elsewhere, modern agricultural practices, and the prioritizing of a limited variety of 'cash' crops over others to meet market demands, have had a deleterious effect. The arrival of the 'Green Revolution' to Bolivia, which transformed farming systems to necessitate the use of agro-chemicals and monocropping practices, resulted in the loss of agrobiodiversity. Local NGOs and the current government have been concerned with ameliorating agrobiodiversity. This orientation includes two anticipated ends: adaptation to climate changes and food sovereignty. The logic underpinning food sovereignty involves the right to produce, distribute and consume nutritious, culturally appropriate food in a way that is ecologically sustainable. Agrobiodiversity conservation is recognized as an important way to achieve this right. Both the NGO and the State have focused attention on organic agriculture and strengthening Bolivia's internal markets as key to food sovereignty. However they differ in focus. The State's need to maintain the stability and profitability of the current agribusiness for

¹ An early version of this article was presented at "Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue," International Conference, Yale University September 14-15, 2013.

² **Jenny Cockburn**, Ph.D. is a sociologist and part-time faculty member at Concordia University, teaching courses on human rights, as well as research methods. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology with a specialization in Social Justice from the University of Windsor in 2013. She continues to pursue research on gender, food sovereignty and the state. Address correspondence to: Jenny Cockburn, Concordia University; e-mail: jennyc.cockburn@gmail.com. **Acknowledgments:** The research for this article was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. Information on the Centre is available on the web at www.idrc.ca.