A stylized illustration of a woman with curly hair shouting into a megaphone. She is surrounded by various symbolic elements: a magnifying glass focusing on her face, a barbed-wire branch, a hand holding a key, and a hand holding a small plant. The background is a vibrant pink.

# RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION WATCH



## Women's Power in Food Struggles

SUPPLEMENT

# WOMEN, FOOD AND RESISTANCE

Gender relations shape food systems. They significantly influence how and what we produce, work and eat. Gender oppression has often had a negative effect on women and gender non-conforming people<sup>1</sup> across all stages of food systems, irrespective of their contributions. From growing and harvesting produce, to processing, transporting, and consuming food, women play a pivotal role in food systems and economies. However, sexist ideas and practices have kept their roles and specific needs hidden from the general public eye. Out of the 820 million affected by hunger, women are the worse off, and even more so if they live in oppressive societies under exploitation and violence.

Violent relations are central to how prevailing food systems are structured. The ways in which these forms of violence are reproduced are also gendered. Rising right-wing governments across the world are promoting restrictive abortion laws, and other policies that limit access to contraceptive methods and reproductive health care. Discrimination and racism have translated into less access to social care services, acute poverty, and higher rates of food insecurity for migrant women and women of color. At the same time, corporate power continues to expand by heavily relying on women's household and care labor, including caring for family and community members (the young, the old and the sick), cleaning and cooking, fetching water, fodder and fuel.

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<sup>1</sup> Gender identities and/or gender expressions that fall somewhere in between man and woman, or as wholly different from these terms.

Yet even in this meagre scenario, women's movements remain unabated, as they scale up their efforts to organize sustainable and socially just food systems. The first step towards overcoming the violent relations that shape food systems is to start in one's very home. Feminists, black women's and LGBTQI+ movements are enriching the food justice struggle by broadening our agendas to include different gender identities and experiences based on race, caste and class. This change requires that we constantly reinvent resistance, by encouraging recognition and belonging, instead of exclusion within movements.

The stories portrayed in this year's *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* highlight three crucial steps for transforming gender relations in the food systems. The first one is to **UNRAVEL THE VIOLENCES** that underlie our food systems. The second is to overcome violence by **CHANGING OUR MOVEMENTS** to be more inclusive of different experiences. And the third is to **RESHAPE REALITY** by building non-patriarchal societies, and new relations with food, nature, labor and politics.



# UNRAVELING VIOLENCES

What is the first thing that comes into your mind when you hear of VIOLENCE against women?

You might imagine scenes of domestic violence, sexual abuse and even some degree of economic violence. These depictions are not mistaken, nonetheless, they reflect an understanding of violence that is limited to the direct interactions of individuals.

The way in which relations in the food systems are configured are also heavily based on violence. When people are adversely affected by the influence of public actors like the state and its policies, or private ones – such as corporations – over a particular group or community, we are also referring to: VIOLENCE. This is also the case when people are left with no alternative but to grow food in exploitative labor conditions for the profits of global markets, and yet are ones most affected by hunger and poverty.

For women, gender socialization and gender roles play a central role in how they experience violence. This is generally exacerbated by caste, class and race. The following are some illustrative examples:

- when women have to exchange sex with police officers in order to bail out their husbands;
- when during and after a violent eviction, women are raped by private and public security forces;
- when, amid hunger, women are expected to be the last ones to eat;
- when in the case of migration, women are left with the responsibility of guaranteeing food for themselves and their families;

- when women have no access to land due to cultural and/or legal norms;
- when women are not recognized as fishers even if they actively participate in fishing activities off and in-shore;

Even though the negative impacts of industrial agriculture and food production affect women and men in the most marginalized sectors of societies, structural violence and politics also have the concrete effect of putting additional hardship on women. Eco-destruction, for example, has meant that in cases of drought and food shortages, women have to travel longer distances to find supplies for their families, while also performing daily unpaid care and household work.



# CHANGING OUR MOVEMENTS

If violence is central to current food systems, then building new relationships becomes a crucial step towards transformation. The work starts in our very homes.

The food justice movement is not exempt from reproducing sexist and exclusionary practices. For this reason, it becomes crucial to open up the discussion on the ways in which gender relations condition our struggle. Black and LGBTQI+ movements suggest that this starts at the production site: having been born ‘female’ or ‘male’ should not define the tasks people ought to undertake when growing food.

In order to overcome patriarchal relations, food movements should commit to fight against discrimination based on gender and sexuality, just as they struggle for access to land and fair prices for agricultural products. Our agendas should allocate efforts to point out the invisibility of women of color and ethnic minorities in public policy. And we should foster leadership skills that include calling out for these critical considerations.

Lastly, we need to join forces with other movements. Addressing just one area of the food justice struggle neglects the multiple forms of violence, poverty, marginalization, and discrimination that impact people and communities. Hence, in order to strategize for emancipatory food politics, according to each specific context, the right to food and food sovereignty movements should also expand the struggle by strengthening relations with black and minority women movements, consider the struggle for the right to food of non-binary people, and understand the different implications of caste and class dimensions.



# RESHAPING REALITY

Women are reshaping reality in different parts of the world so as to overcome violent relations that underlie our food systems. Despite having continuously to fight against the belief that politics is only for males, women undertake different actions to carve change. They are confronting authoritarianism, and self-organizing in the streets, their communities, and throughout the migration trails. The following are some examples.

## **1. ON THE STREETS: THE MARCH OF DAISIES**

In Brazil, the Marcha das Margaridas (March of Daisies) – held every August 14th since 2000 – is considered the most massive action of working women from the countryside against agribusiness violence. At a time of political adversity, instead of being demoralized by neoliberal and sexist agendas, women who had never participated in any organization before are now eager to fight the conservative backlash that's threatening their rights.

## **2. IN NATURE: AGROECOLOGY**

There are many positive experiences of women implementing agroecology to improve themselves and their communities. In India, women only groups, in collaboration with a Dalit women's network, managed to revive around 80 traditional crop varieties. The Dalit women's network runs a community gene bank in 60 villages, through which they can distribute seeds. From a feminist perspective, agroecology seeks to transform the relations between men and women, and of humans with nature. It achieves this by incorporating respect, care and solidarity into the whole system.

## **3. A VILLAGE BY WOMEN: JINWAR COMMUNITY**

In Kurdish, the word jinwar refers to a “women’s space” or “woman’s land”. It is also the name of a city built and run by Kurdish women. The objective of the Jinwar city is to create a way of life in which every woman can reach her full potential, free from the constraints of the oppressive power structures of patriarchy and capitalism. Throughout this process of transformation, women in Jinwar have built women-only cooperatives within their own food system. For them, rebuilding their homes as havens of peace is a significant act of resistance in the face of violence and war.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What does a feminist food struggle look like to you?
- Which are the multiple factors that condition your experience with regard to food?
- How are food systems transforming in your community due to migration?
- How are we valuing care work in our food systems?
- How do you think violence against women and food relate?
- When the oppressors resist change in the food system, how do we keep re-organizing ourselves and restructuring strategies?
- How are women in your community resisting an unjust food system and fighting back?
- How are women exercising their political agency in the household, community, and state, in order to achieve a change in the food system?
- How can we make the struggle for the right to food more inclusive?



This is a publication by  
the Global Network for the Right  
to Food and Nutrition

This publication has been produced with financial support from  
the European Commission (EC). The content of this publication are  
the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to  
reflect the views of the EC.

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*Germany*

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| **Editing and proofreading:** Katie Anne Whiddon

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 FIAN International  
*Germany*

## FINANCED BY

- European Commission (EC)
- FIAN International
- HEKS/EPER (Swiss Church Aid)
- MISEREOR
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

SEPTEMBER 2019

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## WOMEN'S POWER IN FOOD STRUGGLES

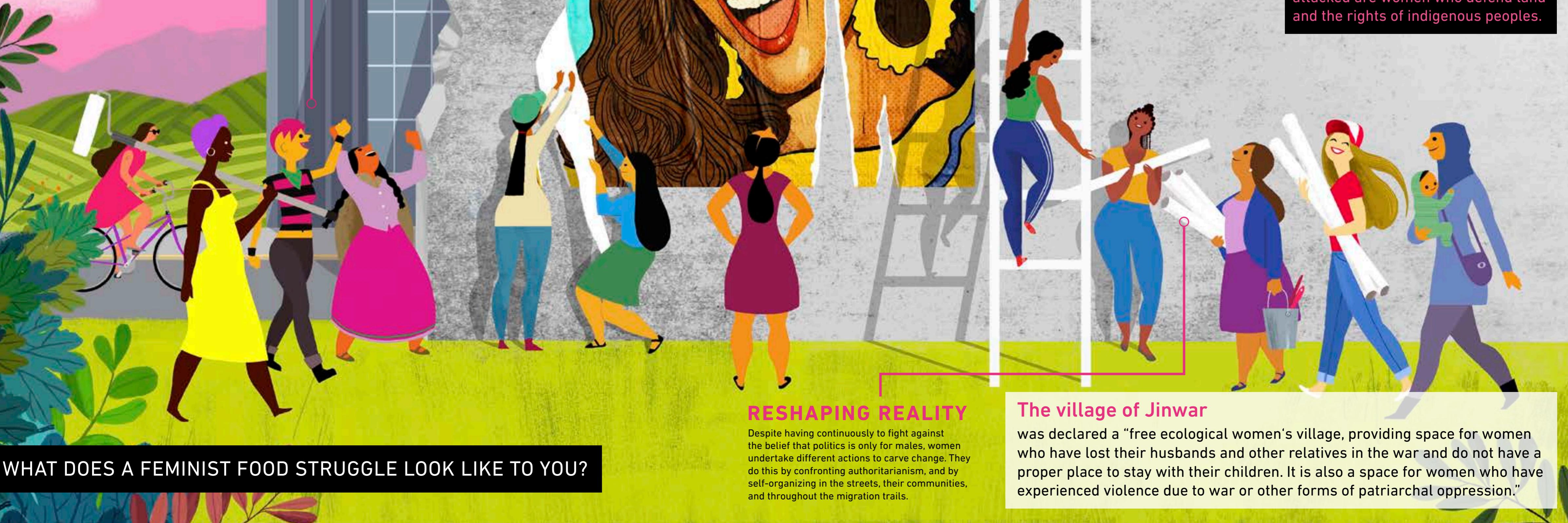
**55.9%**

of food bank users in the UK are women with the majority being Black and Asian women.

### CHANGING OUR MOVEMENTS

The food justice movement is not exempt from reproducing sexist and exclusionary practices. For this reason, it becomes crucial to open up the discussion on the ways in which gender relations condition our work and struggle. Black and LGBTQI+ movements suggest that this starts at the production site: having been born 'female' or 'male' should not define the tasks people ought to undertake when growing food.

Food movements' should commit to fight discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and caste, just as they struggle for land, seeds and water.



WHAT DOES A FEMINIST FOOD STRUGGLE LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

### RESHAPING REALITY

Despite having continuously to fight against the belief that politics is only for males, women undertake different actions to carve change. They do this by confronting authoritarianism, and by self-organizing in the streets, their communities, and throughout the migration trails.

### The village of Jinwar

was declared a "free ecological women's village, providing space for women who have lost their husbands and other relatives in the war and do not have a proper place to stay with their children. It is also a space for women who have experienced violence due to war or other forms of patriarchal oppression."

### HOW DO YOU THINK VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FOOD RELATE?

Even though the negative impacts of industrial agriculture and food production affect women and men in the most marginalized sectors of societies, structural violence and politics also have the concrete effect of putting additional hardship on women. This is generally exacerbated by caste, class and race.

- when women have no access to land due to cultural and/or legal norms;
- when women are not recognized as fishers even if they actively participate in fishing activities off and in-shore;
- when the global corporate food system relies on women's daily unpaid care and household work.

we are also referring to: **VIOLENCE**.

**2,137**

assaults against women defenders were reported between 2016 and 2017 in Honduras. The most attacked are women who defend land and the rights of indigenous peoples.