food sovereignty, nutritional and agrarian crisis
voices of communities from BRICS

FIAN India, Joshi-Adhikari
Institute of Social Studies and
Land and Livelihood Knowledge & Activists Hub
A right to food is a basic human right, as has been advocated by International human rights law, Indian Constitution and Supreme Court of India. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

However, among multiple crisis BRICS countries are facing due to varied systemic and structural causes—corporatizing agriculture, industrialised monoculture, monopoly by big Industrial houses, adverse climate changes, deprioritising strengthening local markets, deteriorating biodiversity that eroding food sovereignty. These are perpetuating silent nutritional and agrarian crisis which is looming large. For generations, rural peasants in general and Indian farmers in particular have enjoyed the sovereignty but now they are facing a lot of challenges to realise food sovereignty.

At this critical juncture, people are demanding how BRICS can do progressive and rational allocation of resources among BRICS nations, evolving common framework that stick to their extraterritorial obligations to ensure nutrition and food sovereignty, building solidarities among communities to organise nutrition in a self-reliant way by strengthening local markets and while signing treaties, placing people's priorities first than trade priorities which focuses economic interests alone, negating social concerns. not by default but by design.

**morally and legally binding obligations**

- The right to food is a human right enshrined in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.
- It is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) as part of the right to an adequate standard of living.
- Convention on the Rights of Children also affirming that good nutrition should be regarded as a fundamental human right.
- The right to livelihood, land, water and food—CEDAW Article 14

The Right to Food and Nutrition within the framework of food sovereignty and the full realisation of human rights allows for a much more holistic understanding of the indivisibility and interconnectedness of all human rights, especially between the human right to food and nutrition and the human rights to health, education, natural resources (land, seeds), work, water and sanitation, culture and housing, among others.

The full realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition implies more than being free from hunger and ingesting a healthy nutritious diet. It is achieved when human beings are able to transform this diet into the highest possible level of nutritional wellbeing—into an active and participatory life, an enhanced immune system, physical and cognitive growth and development.

India’s National Food Security Act, 2013 legally binds national and state governments to extend far-reaching social protection to the country’s entire population and it is a testimony that policies and programmes at local, national and global levels could reduce and ultimately end hunger and malnourishment. It is not just that ensuring food security as it focuses merely more on access to food/purchasing food not on Right to Food and Nutrition—RtF and Food sovereignty. Thus adequate quantity, nutritional quality and fulfilling nutritional needs are far more vital.

**Current Status—Nation of undernourished people and malnourished children:**

Despite a number of food entitlement programmes, food subsidy schemes, direct feeding interventions, livelihood and social security measures and the required available grains, India tops world hunger list with 194.6 million undernourished people, the highest in the world which translates into over 15 per cent of India’s population. India also has the world’s highest number of malnourished and hungry children; 44% of children under 5 are underweight and malnourished and have a higher risk of death from common childhood illness such as diarrhoea and pneumonia. Fifty-nine percent of women are anaemic. India is also amongst the most undernourished in peer group nations. India has improved its ranking 80 out of 104 in Global Hunger Index in 2015, but fighting hunger remains a challenge as undernourishment and mortality among children and women remain alarmingly high.

Agricultural sector is extremely important for all BRICS nations and they accord a top priority to the sector albeit investment priority has not been given as it is intended and demanded. Investment in agriculture remains critical to sustainable long-term food security. Safety nets targeted at the most vulnerable people are crucial for alleviating food insecurity, as right to adequate food and nutrition and feed oneself in dignity are fundamental overarching goals of all social protection policies/schemes.

**Extraterritorial Obligations of BRICS States**

As far as right to food and nutrition in BRICS nations is concerned, States have, apart from mandated
constitutional, charter-based and treaty-based obligations, extraterritorial obligations relating to the acts and omissions of a State, within or beyond its territory, that have effects on the enjoyments of human rights outside of that State’s territory and obligations of a global character that are set out in the Charter of the United Nations and human instruments to take action, separately, and jointly through international cooperation, to realize human rights universally.

In this backdrop, eventually, the expectations of the communities across BRICS nations, is that what and how BRICS do constructively engage with closer regional cooperation and concurrent actions to ensure right to food & nutrition of people by respecting and promoting international conventions and extraterritorial obligations and national laws / constitutional provisions. BRICS can also proactively engage in regulating the product-based technical interventions on malnutrition vs. enabling people-centred approaches based on local food systems - like SUN programme in South Africa. What alternatives are there to companies providing food to people targeting food and nutrition insecurity?

Agrarian Crisis and the Plight of Farmers
The current models of industrial and intensive agriculture, dwindling public investment in agriculture, lack of support pricing mechanism for agriculture products, international trade priorities that convert local markets feckless, corporate business interests coupled with the increasing frequency/scale/intensity of climate variability (severe drought, excessive flooding in various parts of the country/world) and disasters had led to the current crisis in agriculture. This crisis had resulted in exploitation and misuse of natural resources like land, sand (in river banks), seeds, water and soil, affecting the fertility of soil, quality of seeds/grains thus leading to less-nutrient food, rather toxic, increased input cost, indebtedness and huge gap between investment and incomes of the farmers. Farmers have no option but either leaving agriculture or committing suicides. More than 2000 farmers are leaving agriculture every day. Between 1995 and 2014, more than 3 lakh farmers committed suicides due to the crisis in agriculture.

This has had greater impacts on the food insecurity, persisting hunger and malnutrition in the country. Apart from that the traditional food producing communities which dependent on land and agriculture are forced to alienate from land and traditional practices, on contrary pushed towards market economy which heavily leaned towards high inputs and high costs attached to that. This forms the basis for agrarian crisis and also pushing small, marginal and rural farmers to commit suicides when they lose hope and forced to live in despair. The NCRB data has provided a grim picture about farmer’s suicides so far - till 2014, the averages are: 1995-2014 = 308826; Per Year = 15441; Per month = 1286; Per day = 42; Per hour = 1. 7. Suicides by farmers touched a grim high in 2015. The year 2015 had recorded 2,590 suicides until October -- the higher ever since 2001 -- went on to register 610 more deaths in just two months of January and February 2016. About 52 percent of the agricultural households in the country were estimated to be indebted. Only 10 per cent of poor and small farmers have got the benefit from farming related schemes.

BRICS, Food Security and Agriculture
There is also a need for the developing countries to withstand the pressure from rich countries on trade issues and assert their positions over public stockholdings, pricing support, subsidies/incentives, trade barriers and tariffs, and protection of local producers especially small scale farmers and food sovereignty of the countries. BRICS countries have huge responsibility and significant role/obligations in pursuing this agenda.

According to the joint declaration adopted on 23 September 2016 in New Delhi, Agriculture Ministers from BRICS countries have agreed to promote cooperation include creating basic agricultural information exchange system, strategy for ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable population, reducing negative impact of climate change on food security and adaptation of agriculture to climatic changes, enhancing agricultural technology cooperation and innovation, trade and investment promotion.

In this context, this Round Table will be discussing

The legal obligations of the State in protecting the food sovereignty and agriculture in the backdrop of BRICS - specifically India’s obligations, placing priorities as well in the negotiation and signing agreements.

What would be the cooperative measures can other BRICS nations would show case towards India to protect the food security and agriculture - landless and peasants as Brazil has good examples

Focus on measures to protect farmers, localised Indigenous markets in BRICS nations and also sharing of local best practices.

How can BRICS New Development Bank/AlIB/CRA can support agriculture and food security in terms of lending policies, credits to farming and farmers and also importantly land reforms and development.
What will be the measures of policies to provide more subsidies and minimum support prices for the agriculture and organic farming practices.

**Specific Objective of the Consultation is**

To demand progressive as well as rational allocation of resources specifically budgetary plans from BRICS nations to practically show case their efforts to implement SDG goal- No: 13. Climatic challenge and its impacts on peasants.

Speakers include those from movements on right to food, farmer’s unions and activists working on agriculture and climate change. Dr. Ana Maria Suarez-Franco, Permanent Representative at FIAN International, Geneva, Mr Vijay Jawandhiya from Shetekhari Sanghatana, Dr. Vaishali Patil, Activist, Vikas Sahyog Pratishthan and Gerardo C Vega (Federal Rural University, Rio de Janeiro) and other eminent speakers are engaging.

**Thematic are**

- Dr. Ana Maria Suarez-Franco, Permanent Representative at FIAN International Geneva : Empowering local systems to strengthen RtFN & Agriculture binding international/extraterritorial obligations : Role of BRICS
- Vaishali Patil, Social Activist: Politics of Nutrition – role of state and non state actors
- Vijay Jawandhia, Farmer Activist and Policy Analyst: Key Reasons for current agrarian Crisis and Way forward
- Atul Anjaan Secretary, All India Kisan Sabha : Responses & collective solutions of peasants movements to Nutritional and agrarian crisis
- Jorge Romano, Writer and Researcher (Brazil): Issues of food and agriculture and initiatives of state and civil society in Brazil
- Simone, MST, Brazil : Land and agrarian reforms in Brazil
- Ashalatha, Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAM) : Alternatives in agriculture and role of women
- Vineet Tiwari, JAISS : Peoples lead collectives and cooperatives as solution

2. India tops world hunger list with 194 million people, theHindu, May 28, 2015
3. Rapid Survey on Children (RSoC) data collected in 2013-14 by the Indian ministry of women and child development with technical support from Unicef shows 29.4 per cent of children (aged less than three years) to be underweight (low in weight for their age), while 15 per cent were wasted (low weight for their height) and 38.7 per cent were stunted (low in height for age). Rajib Dasgupta, India’s Malnutrition Shame, Indian Express, September 17, 2015 Available at Indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-malnutrition-shame/
4. The agenda of the BRICS meetings has considerably widened over the years encompassing global issues such as climate change, food and energy security, Strategic Development Goals (SDGs), International Economic and Financial Situation. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of all BRICS countries being the major producers, consumers and exporters of agricultural, horticultural and meat products. BRICS countries enjoy strength in the form of knowledge, expertise and research facilities and capabilities in agriculture. These strengths need to be converged and galvanised for ensuring global food security.