

# **UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW – FOURTH CYCLE**

**Submission to the 42th session of the  
UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review Working Group  
Geneva, April 2023**

**CUBA**

**Submission by:  
Centre Europe – Tiers Monde (CETIM)**



Organization with consultative ECOSOC status  
Rue Amat 6, 1202 Geneva  
+41 22 731 59 63  
[www.cetim.ch](http://www.cetim.ch)  
[contact@cetim.ch](mailto:contact@cetim.ch)

**Food, agriculture and human rights in Cuba**

## INTRODUCTION

1. The human rights action developed by the Republic of Cuba has been characterized by historical commitments towards the defence and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights within and beyond its borders. Cuba has unremittingly denounced to the international community the grave human rights violations suffered by its peoples as a direct consequence of the economic and financial embargo still unacceptably (and illegally) imposed on the country by the United States of America. While doing so, and despite the myriad challenges, Cuba has concomitantly carried out an internal politics which is greatly oriented by the fulfilment of human rights to its population. The country's high ranking in global indexes for development and social standards<sup>1</sup> reveals the overall success of Cuba in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, and in particular of the right to food, setting it as an example to be followed by others.

2. In the area of agriculture and food production, Cuba has played a leading role in the implementation of environmentally and socially sustainable agricultural systems through a long-term commitment by Cuba's government and population to agroecological farming practices and to the protection of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. This has played a key role in helping Cuba promoting the right to food for its people.

3. This situation was possible with the promotion of a process methodology called "Campesino-a-Campesino (CAC)", used to build a grassroots' agroecology movement. This significantly increased contribution of peasants to national food production in Cuba, resulting not only in positive results in terms of fulfilment of the right to food, but including resilience to climate adversities.

4. The development and consolidation of food systems based on peasant agriculture and agroecology in Cuba constitute concrete steps forward in the promotion and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), a human rights instrument adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018. Cuba voted in favour of this adoption and played a central role during UNDROP's negotiation. This positive role should now be translated into clear, tangible support for UNDROP's implementation, both nationally and internationally.

5. In this contribution to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Cuba in 2023, we present measures that Cuba should take in further advancing in the implementation of the UNDROP. We are confident that Cuba can become a model on the implementation of the rights enshrined in the UNDROP. As the UNDROP was not yet adopted when Cuba was last reviewed by the UPR in 2017, this topic was not included in any of the recommendations addressed to Cuba in 2017.

---

1 <https://www.sustainabledevelopmentindex.org/>; <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/cuba>

## **THE UNDROP IN BRIEF<sup>2</sup>**

6. The aim of the UNDROP is to better protect peasants, fisherfolk, livestock breeders, gatherers and agricultural workers (hereinafter referred to as peasants), all of whom are disproportionately affected by hunger and extreme poverty. Their vulnerability notwithstanding, peasants play a key role in global food security and in the preservation of natural resources, biological diversity, and food systems. Peasants are thus key contributors to ensuring the resilience needed to cope with climate change and other crises.

7. The UNDROP complements and reinforces other human rights instruments, and reaffirms the principle of international law according to which the obligations set out in the UN Charter, including those relating to human rights, take precedence over obligations under other treaties.

8. The UNDROP thus affirms that States should elaborate, interpret and apply the international standards and agreements to which they are a party in a manner consistent with the rights enshrined in the UNDROP (Art. 2.4). It affirms that States should ensure that their agricultural, economic, social, cultural and development policies are coherent with the realization of the rights its sets out (Art. 15.5). It also recognizes the importance of international cooperation in support of national efforts for the realization of the rights set out in the UNDROP (Art. 2.6).

9. The UNDROP recognizes many rights, including the rights to food and food sovereignty (Art. 15), to an adequate standard of living (Art. 16), to land and other natural resources (Arts. 5 and 17), to a safe, clean and healthy environment (Art. 18), to seeds (Art. 19) and to biological diversity (Art. 20). It stipulates that States should respect, protect and fulfil these rights (Art. 2), guarantee their enjoyment without discrimination (Art. 3), and eliminate all forms of discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas (Art. 4). It also provides that international and regional organizations shall promote respect for and full implementation of the UNDROP, and contribute to the full realization of the rights it sets out, including through the mobilization of development assistance and cooperation (Art. 27).

## **AGROECOLOGY AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN CUBA**

10. With the food and economic crisis that hit Cuba in the 1990s, the country saw in a socially engaging agroecological farming model a way out to the hunger and the extreme dependency on foreign trade (for agricultural inputs, chemicals, machinery, and food itself). The dominant monocultural system of the 1980s then gave place to an accelerated diversification in food production that resulted in the greatest growth in food production in Latin America from 1996 to 2005. Not only was the acute phase of the food crisis in the island put to an end, such period also paved the way to the solidification of agroecology as a widely accepted practice in Cuba, both institutionally and socially. With the support of the state on credit, subsidies, agrarian reform, and on the creation of cooperatives, Cuban peasants had finally regained control over agricultural land and propelled the agricultural transition to agroecologically integrated and diverse farming systems, therefore playing a protagonist role in providing Cubans with healthy and nutritious food.

---

2 This presentation of the UNDROP is taken from the report elaborated by CETIM and its partners in the framework of Switzerland's UPR in January 2023.

11. The positive results of Cuba in terms of food production and food security is, therefore, due to a successful process of land distribution (agrarian reform), as well as to the successful horizontal innovative methodology called Campesino-a-Campesino (farmer-to-farmer, or peasant-to-peasant, known as CAC), in which as peasants become the protagonists in the process of generating and sharing technologies.

11. CAC is a participatory method based on agroecology practices, oriented by local peasants' needs and culture. It is build upon peasants' protagonism and knowledge, as a way of making use, fostering and socializing the rich agricultural knowledge.

13. The spread of agroecology in the peasant sector has indeed coincided with a major relative increase in its contribution to national food security and sovereignty. Agroecological peasant agriculture also allowed to break the dependence on imported inputs in times of economic crisis, and increased the resiliency of the economy to ever more frequent climate shocks. Moreover, the banning of dangerous pesticides and fertilizers in Cuba, as part of the agroecology strategy, has been and is extremely beneficial for biodiversity and environmental protection.

14. Agroecology promotion and awareness raising in Cuba starts in primary school, and it goes through all other educational levels, up to post-doctoral courses. This is made possible by the collaboration of States Ministries and bodies, schools and universities, research centres, peasant and rural organizations and religious entities, with the support of international organizations.

15. In this area, it is worth highlighting: 1) the capacity building developed by Cuba's National Association of Small Farmers - ANAP (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños), which counts every year around 12'000 participants in its agroecology courses; and 2) the 2019 "Plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education", which focuses on the fulfilment of the right to food through the promotion of urban agriculture, agroecology, food sovereignty, with particular attention to integrating the gender perspective.

16. Despite these achievements, the challenges ahead are considerable. First, Cuba continues to import up to 60-65% of its food consumption. Second, climate change and environmental disasters (hurricanes, floodings, droughts) severely impact Cuba's food production capacities. Third, Cuba still presents high dependence rates in the use of fossil fuel energy for food production, increasing its vulnerability in case of natural disasters.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

17. In the light of the above, we present the following recommendations that Cuba should consider in the framework of the current UPR cycle:

18. Cuba should continue developing efforts and putting resources to support agroecological practices and the CAC method, privileging the participation and protagonism of peasants. In this sense, Cuba should consistently promote and implement the UNDROP as a vector for agroecology's consolidation, thus

contributing to the building of just and equal food systems.

19. Cuba should promote new laws and policies, in addition to reviewing existing ones, in the light of the articles and provisions enshrined in the UNDROP. This is particularly important in the context of the severe economic crisis and environmental risks that are affecting the country and its agrarian sector.

20. Cuba should develop specific educational programs to promote and raise awareness on the UNDROP.

21. Cuba should foster its international cooperation in order to share good practices in terms of agroecological knowledge and assist other countries in adopting them.

22. In light of UNDROP's article 4, Cuba should adopt specific measures to guarantee peasant women's rights, especially to improve their physical and mental well-being, as well their access to social security.