

Pedagogy, Participation, and the Nyéléni Global Process

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Intro and Summary:

The Nyeleni process which most recently culminated in its third global forum held in September in Sri Lanka signifies today **a unique pedagogical and participatory space for common political voice and demands shaping** of social movements working towards systemic change. The first Nyéléni forum born out of the struggles of the global food movement and carrying a focus on [Food Sovereignty](#) took place in 2007 in Selingué, Mali, whilst the second Nyéléni forum carrying a focus on [Agroecology](#) took place in 2015, also in the same village.

The third forum placed a strong emphasis on *Peoples' Sovereignty* in its broadest sense. Held from 6–13 September 2025, it gathered around 700 representatives from national and regional organisations, spanning six regional constituencies and 13 global movements—including RIPESS Intercontinental. Delegates represented small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, agri- and food workers, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, food artisans, the urban food insecure, human rights defenders, minority and migrant rights groups, academics, climate justice advocates, the social and solidarity economy, the health sector, artists, and NGOs. Notably, for the first time, more than 60% of participants were women and gender-diverse people, while one-third were youth.

The forum marked the ending of a two years Nyéléni process phase dedicated to gathering and drafting inputs into a **Common Political Action Agenda (CPAA)**, which will be launched during the upcoming COP30 in November in Bélém, Brasil. The CPAA is to be seen as a living document to collaborate and contains besides analysis and positioning six interrelated axes of convergence pointing to pathways creating the social, economic, political and cultural conditions for radical change. It also sets out concrete points regarding the strengthening of movements to implement that agenda and political action points. A shorter Final Declaration of the Forum will soon be published, highlighting key global campaigns that signal the way forward.

The writing explores Nyéléni's participatory and pedagogical features which are elaborated upon by taking the process of the coming to the Nyéléni CPAA at hand. This is done starting from the later sections of the CPAA, whilst the first section of the CPAA comes at the end of this writing, as a reference to the question: **what is Nyéléni?** How can we pinpoint the significance of the Nyéléni Global Forum today? What is its central message? Why have movements wanted to join Nyéléni? This question of how to frame the Nyéléni process is an important one, not only for understanding its evolution but also for recognizing what it brings to the forefront.

When listening to the participating voices in the Nyéléni process one can discern different answers to this question. This writing through a revisiting of the history of the Nyéléni process brings to the forefront that **throughout its existence Nyéléni has been a space for common political action building for a movement recognizing the centrality of land and food in their struggles**, and that one answer to the question as to why movements join is that they acknowledge the unique potential of working towards food sovereignty for systemic change in our communities and through these societies, whilst contributing their own values, principles, and objectives to the collective struggle for food sovereignty.

Pedagogy and Participation throughout the building of the CPAA

The third Nyéléni Forum was shaped by an extensive organisational structure: [a Global Steering Committee](#), which, in addition to the previous forum member organisations, included networks such as the Peoples' Global Health Movement (PHM) and RIPESS Intercontinental, a supporting International Facilitation Committee assisted by a technical secretariat, six regional constituencies with their respective steering committees and secretariats, and numerous Nyéléni working and sub-working groups.

Through this structure, and particularly during the two years leading up to the forum, the Nyéléni process fostered a movement-led participatory and pedagogical space. This space aimed to deepen understanding of the values, principles, and practices of participating movements, and to strengthen their convergence toward a shared political vision and action agenda for systemic change.

“Movement implies moving.. as we pastoralists do. Important is the direction where we are going, but most important is that all the lambs that are in the back of the flock are staying together. Such is our challenge” — Verdiana Morandi (World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples and Pastoralists)

CPAA Section 3: What we seek to achieve and how

In this manner importantly [six axes of convergence in the working towards systemic change](#) were established and given content, namely to:

1. Construct and defend people's democracy and rights, peace and international solidarity
2. Build peoples economies
3. Achieve Food sovereignty and agroecology
4. Secure land, water, territories and agrarian reform
5. Achieve Health for all
6. Achieve Climate Justice and Energy Sovereignty

Work on the CPAA began roughly two years before the third Nyéléni Forum. The process included regional constituency meetings, such as [the Nyéléni European and Central Asia regional meetings in Istanbul in 2024](#). Throughout this period, drafts of the CPAA were continuously reworked in response to feedback calling for a text that would be less academic, more inclusive, and more coherent. Delegates were given room to contribute with reflections on conceptual approaches, on for instance the idea that [our commons are beyond natural resources the social practice of commoning](#): a paradigm assisting us to envision another economy and see unity in our struggles globally. Delegates at large were encouraged to take up active roles in different working groups of the forum, as for instance in that of communications, and to become a part of either press, text, social media, or audiovisual sub working groups. [The communications working group was able to meet in conjunction to a last Steering committees meeting in May 2025 in Sri Lanka](#), which included an empowering narrative workshop and the elaboration of a working plan also catering to the objective of facilitating a participatory and pedagogical Nyéléni process.

This participatory and pedagogical process then continued in diverse ways during the Nyéléni forum itself in Kandy, held at the National Institute of Cooperative Development (NICD). The NICD which was founded in 1945 as the Sri Lanka Cooperative school aiming to empower the cooperative sector in particular and the country's farmers movement. In recent years, it had faced a pressure to be privatised under the austerity measures of the IMF and as such hosting the forum at this venue - including renovation efforts done prior to the forum - stood in support for the present government of Sri Lanka to keep the NICD as a public space. The Forum at large expressed support for the people of Sri Lanka, who in

2024 elected a new progressive government committed to pursuing alternative economic strategies and fostering civil reconciliation, despite the constraints inherited from previous financial agreements.

The Forum's programme was designed with the understanding, as one participant insightfully noted, that although the process had spanned nearly two years of consultations and regional meetings, true engagement would unfold once everyone gathered in person. The days of the forum were then almost entirely used to shape the CPAA as well as the Final Declaration. Both at the beginning and the end of the forum the 6 regional constituencies as well as the 13 global organisations were given time to draft and redraft their inputs in person. The meetings served to discuss the Nyéléni process, and address the political documents be it on missing elements or for instance wordings. Results of the meetings were brought back to plenaries later in the day for all to hear of.

During the first days of the forum also a number of assemblies allowed for a reviewing of the CPAA through specific lenses, during the the **assemblies of Diversities, Women, Youth and Indigenous peoples**.

"This is a historical moment for everyone here. The first Assembly of Gender and Sexual Diversities and Allies. People of all races, languages, sexualities, identities, and abilities are welcome to build with us. This space cannot be taken for granted. It is the result of years of struggle and a collective agreement to fight for a transformative world, where justice, dignity, care and safety is guaranteed for all," commented Paula Gioia (La Via Campesina).

The diversities assembly ended with a call to build intersectional convergence and defend diversity in all its forms as a human and ecological right, central to systemic transformation. [Nyéléni was the name of a mythical single daughter women peasant in Mali](#) and during the Women's assembly participants debated how feminism can be made central to the systemic transformation that is wanted to be built through Nyéléni.

During the youth assembly for delegates under 35, common themes were the need to create enabling environments for youth to come to dignified livelihoods as part of the development of solidarity economy building and rooted in shared visions for justice. As one delegate put it: *"Land is the root of freedom. Whoever controls our food, controls our freedom."* The indigenous peoples assembly called for yet more deepening of understanding of how to support the indigenous peoples issues into an agenda for systemic change.

CPAA Section 4. How we will strengthen our movements to implement our agenda

During the fourth day of the forum participants broke out into five different groups, to explore key areas for strengthening **the Nyéléni movements to implement the CPAA:**

1. Mobilisation and collective action
2. Movement building
3. International solidarity and mutual aid
4. Political formation and people's knowledge production
5. Popular communication

These discussions gave rise to rich reflections on the road ahead beyond the forum. So it was discussed how to recreate the Nyéléni process on territorial levels as well as on how to take the CPAA on to other relevant movements and processes as today's fragmentation between movements is a common concern globally. On knowledge production, participants emphasised that theory must emerge from practice, and that traditional, Indigenous, and feminist agroecological knowledge should be integral to the CPAA.

The subject of communications received particular attention throughout the forum process. Discussions noted how grassroots communications should be simple, inclusive, collective,

horizontal, participatory, creative, democratic and elaborated on how to use this to carry the CPAA forward also after the forum. The communication team of the forum already held a forward looking meeting before the forum ended, wanting to hold on and build further on the new alliances formed in Kandy, exploring collaborations with visual artists to popularise and translate the CPAA through accessible creative media.

A next break out point for the Forum's delegates came in the form of **four dialogue rounds which took place between trade unions, scholars, philanthropists, and social movements** discussing possible alliances, topics of common interest, and how they can contribute to advancing the CPAA. Discussions there brought to the forefront how the Forum process wants to yet better incorporate unions, which are seen as an important ally for the movement as they are deeply embedded in many common struggles like the struggle against multilateral trade agreements, militarism, the rise of conservative agendas, and rural succession.

The significant group of scholars present at the forum confirmed their want to keep on working in the Nyéléni process also after the forum as well as explore subjects as that of empowering and non extractive research between scholars and practitioners (RIPESS Europe in this context shared its [Guidelines on non extractive research on the Social and Solidarity economy](#)).

The dialogue with philanthropists revolved around solidarity philanthropy and financial autonomy whilst in the social movements dialogue global initiatives as COP30, ICCARD+20 and the WSF 2026 were discussed, and on how to take the CPAA there.

CPAA Section 5. The path forward: our collective pledge for systemic transformation

Pedagogy and participation in the Nyéléni processes of convergence are set to remain the focus also post the third Nyéléni forum as can be seen from the different convergence action areas that have been proposed for the forthcoming time:

1. A global day of mobilisation, with the main banner against imperialism, genocide, war, and the use of hunger as a weapon.
2. A Nyéléni Day, during which convergence actions will be carried out in the territories.
3. A training school on intersectionality, feminism, care, and their relationship to food sovereignty.
4. Dialogue sessions with the union movements on food sovereignty, just transition, technological sovereignty, and more.
5. Assemblies of social movements and Indigenous Peoples at international events like the COP30.
6. Debates on grassroots multilateralism and the need for radical changes to UN institutions.
7. Developing grassroots communication to disseminate our progress and vision.

Also several global campaigns are being considered for the movement to jointly rally for as La Via Campesina's proposal for [a new trade framework based on the principles of foodsovereignty](#). This inspiring endeavour has itself found empowerment from the struggle for the adoption of [the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#), which was adopted after nearly 20 years of mobilisations by La Via Campesina and allies by the UN General Assembly in 2018.

All meetings, assemblies, plenaries and dialogues of the Nyéléni forum were assisted by a team of note takers and most importantly - **a COATI translators team of more than 70 members guaranteeing the translation of all main program session into 17 languages** paying tribute to linguistic justice. Divulgarion at the forum directed both to delegates as well as to those following from afar was furthermore enabled and enlivened by a [Nyéléni daily](#)

[bulletin](#) brought out by communications team (from which also this article draws) and daily sessions by [Nyéléni radio](#) (find the interviews and music done behind the link).

The Nyéléni forum was enlivened most remarkably also by **Nyéléni's Virtual [Art gallery](#)**, "This is not a traditional gallery. It is a living tapestry woven with our memories, struggles, and dreams. Here, there is no beginning or end, only journeys. Here, bodies, territories, grief, and radical imagination are honored. In the spirit of Nyéléni, we weave pathways toward food sovereignty, global justice, and systemic transformation. Welcome to this living convergence". For each of the six axes of convergence, visitors could listen to music, explore digital artworks, paintings, and video pieces. Art was not treated as a byproduct of the Forum, but as a central political tool for expressing struggles and amplifying messages worldwide.

Art was emphasized as being not a byproduct of the Forum but a central, powerful political tool for conveying struggles and messages globally and was not only virtual at the forum. The Fearless Collective right outside the NICD venue facilitated the creation of a mural, and Vicky Shahjehan told the mural is a result of a methodology developed and practiced by the Collective. Beginning with "the emptiness of an empty plate", participants reflected on food security, sovereignty, and justice, and on what it feels like when rights are taken away. These reflections were then brought to life in the mural: a farmer fighting against sugarcane, a fisherwoman battling windmills, images that give visibility to a segment of society so often taken for granted: the farmers who produce the food we eat.

At many moments throughout the forum solidarity was expressed with struggles globally, of course not in the least with the struggles of the Palestinian people. It was a painful moment then, when a planned demonstration in support of Palestine was, at the last minute, forbidden for international participants, ostensibly due to visa restrictions on political activity.. Out of concern for the safety of the Sri Lankan steering committee, delegates and the local organisations that worked hard to make this Forum possible, the decision of the organisations coordinating the process was to comply with the request and avoid a shutdown or worse, of the Forum. But Sri Lankan comrades marched, and the halls of NICD joined in loud and clear the demo screened on the auditorium:

"The political action we are taking in this forum connects to all the other actions taking place around the world, including the Freedom Flotilla, Friends of the Hague, and countless other alliances at local, regional, national, and international levels," Jana Nakhal of the Global Steering Committee representing the NENA region.

The centrality of Land and Food struggles in the working towards Systemic Change

How can we pinpoint the significance of the Nyéléni Global Forum today? What is its central message? This question of how to frame the Nyéléni process is an important one, not only for understanding its evolution but also for recognizing what it brings to the forefront. The first forum organised towards defining Food sovereignty, then the second forum laid out the contours of Agroecology as being the way towards food sovereignty. Today, the third forum flagships Systemic Change whilst enlarging its movement base. It is a question worth pausing on, as the framing of each Forum reveals what the Nyéléni process brings to the forefront as its overarching message.

CPAA Section 1. Who we are

As the first section of the Nyéléni's CPAA reads, "We are social and popular movements and organizations from all corners of the world...We inherit the legacies of the struggles of food

sovereignty and other goals that have kept the fight against oppression alive and have opened the paths to emancipation... We share values and a political vision encompassing food sovereignty and agroecology, popular feminism, people's sovereignty and self determination over their territories, social, economic, environmental, health and education justice, a feminist economy and international solidarity... We are a collective construction calling on all social and popular movements and organizations.."

Revisiting the history of Nyéléni

As part of Nyéléni's pedagogical process, a series of preparatory webinars were organised for delegates ahead of the Forum. One of these, "The History of the Nyéléni Process and the Convergence of Movements for Food Sovereignty" (June 2025), featured Jun Borrás, Professor of Agrarian Studies at the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Borrás traced the roots of the Nyéléni process back to the 1980s, a decade marked by the ascendancy of neoliberal policies, the weakening of the Left (including trade unions and socialist parties), and the simultaneous rise of social movements and NGOs. The latter, he noted, were caught in a contradiction: both beneficiaries and critics of neoliberalism. Many of these NGOs came to speak on behalf of rural populations, and organisations such as the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) claimed to represent all categories of farmers at the United Nations, while in reality acting as alliances of commercial farmers, agro-capitalists advocating for "food security" rather than food sovereignty.

During these times leading also to the establishment of the WTO in 1995 having agricultural policies at its core, capitalist agriculture brought about a rift between production, distribution and consumption which led to many social and environmental problems. In itself capitalist agriculture was successful, in the sense that productive capacity increased substantially - but this increase was fraught with contradiction. Whilst food productivity, business entrepreneurship and wealth for some was increasing, the world at large was seeing at the same time all the more hunger, health problems, unemployment, food waste and the effects of greenhouse gases. The resulting rift between food producers and consumers, between the rural and the urban, did not give way to any positive visions for the future. A beginning conceptualisation of **Food sovereignty - which was eventually consolidated as being the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems, ensuring they can produce healthy, culturally appropriate food through ecologically sound and sustainable methods - was meant to heal these ruptures.**

With the looming crises becoming more than evident, **social movements started to build alliances, with land struggles defining many of them.** The misrepresentation by NGOs as also by the IFAP became increasingly questioned and so then the **International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)** was established on an adhoc basis in response to the World Food Summit of 1996 in Rome and its focus on food security. The [IPC](#) subsequently developed into a permanent, autonomous, and self-organised space for global civil society to advance the agenda of food sovereignty, as outlined in [the first Nyéléni Forum's Declaration](#). It brings together eleven global and eight regional organisations, encompassing more than 6,000 national organisations and representing around 300 million small-scale producers engaged in food production and consumption. The IPC is recognised by the FAO as a primary civil society partner. This broad alliance includes, alongside La Via Campesina, movements such as the World March of Women, Habitat International and Friends of the Earth International.

Paul Nicolson, a founding member of La Via Campesina, stressed during the webinar, that many NGOs at first did not accept the concept of Food sovereignty, let alone the institutions. The Food Sovereignty concept then importantly got a push from **the World Social Forum process** between 2000-2007. However, for the alliance of movements formed

around food sovereignty the World Social Forum was seen as a too limited space in its merely facilitating of debate on alternatives. Instead, a space of action was wanted in order to concretize alliances. Such then, as Paul called it, the ground zero which prepared for the first Nyéléni forum in 2007, with the IPC being an international movement of movements wanting to facilitate a space of political voice and action formation with the movements involved: La Via Campesina, The World Women's March, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Friends of the Earth International, International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty Rome (IPC), Food Sovereignty Network (represented by the Development Fund, Norway and Food & Water Watch, USA), Network of Peasants and Farmers of West Africa (ROPPA), the National Coordination of Peasant Organisations, Mali (CNOP).

The first Forum was then held not in any hotel, but in a peasant village - named Nyéléni after a mythical woman farmer, a single daughter and all that this entailed - built for the purpose in Mali to ensure that those who would come, were the ones that should be there, and not those that could pay. A mapping of social movements defending food sovereignty was done in order to ensure the right participation. This forum laid out the contours of food sovereignty, whilst In 2015 the second Nyéléni forum laid out a common definition of Agroecology as a key element for the construction of food sovereignty.

In the webinar Paula Guioa of La Via Campesina continued to recount that in 2019 a new Nyéléni forum process was launched. Emphasis was placed on the aspiration of reaching out to and building alliances among movements that are fighting the same battle against corporate capture and for a reclaiming of democracy from below, **offering the experience of and building on the food sovereignty movement**. A global meeting took place in June 2023 in Rome where **new allies from the Health, Social Solidarity Economy, and Climate Justice struggles were invited to join a global committee of allies willing to join forces and co-create the Nyéléni process with the IPC**. Food sovereignty, Paula emphasized, was still leading in transformation and offering a guiding vision, but this hand in hand with others. There is too much fragmentation and it is as such time to review strategies. So today's Nyéléni larger convergence towards systemic change came about, whilst building up its political agenda from the consultation of all.

Back to the question of what Nyéléni is, and listening also to other voices having expressed themselves during the forum, it seems the question has at least three answers found among the forum's participants. One answer puts it so that in order to achieve food sovereignty we need to achieve systemic change. And this means widening up the Nyeleni base to achieve the convergence of different social movements and organisations working in different ways towards systemic change. Nyéléni then is framed as a forum facilitating the convergence of movements working towards Systemic Change.

Another answer, as found also in the above, puts it so that in the Nyéléni process the struggles for Food sovereignty are leading the transformation, but are not the only one. There is too much working in silos and therefore Nyeleni is about the reviewing of strategies whilst enabling the larger necessary convergence towards Systemic Change.

Yet a third answer points to the unique and great potential the working towards Food Sovereignty has for Systemic Change, as our food system is so central to the organisation of our societies. Movements join the Nyéléni process precisely in recognition of this potential, contributing their own values, principles, and objectives to the collective struggle for food sovereignty. In this answer, Nyéléni remains carrying a main focus on Food Sovereignty, and on its unique, great and hope-giving potential for Systemic Change locally and globally everyone of us can join onto (Grow your own food!)

Framing is communication. In any case, the answers above do not stand in contradiction to each other, and they - as well as the history of Nyéléni - all point to the fact **the Nyéléni process has been from its inception a movement of movements united by the centrality of land and food in their struggles, and a space for common political action building. The third Nyéléni forum then stands to have been a truly empowering and strengthening momentum in this.**

“What breaks the stone is not the strength of water. What breaks the stone is the continuity of the drops,” Yildiz Temurturkan (World March of Women)

After 7 days of meetings and plenaries, of discussions and drafting, of sharing meals, fears and hopes, of joy and dance, the global steering committee of the Nyéléni forum was mandated to in an interim character continue the follow up of the forum, which means the working towards the launch of the CPAA at the COP peoples forum in Belem in November, as well as to design an evaluation of the forum. The discussions of regional constituencies and global movements today included plenty of evaluative remarks, from the revision of the governance structure of the forum to issues of methodology and inclusivity, and delegates furthermore proposed that all participants of the forum will be heard for the evaluation, from all organisations and regions. **Viva Nyéléni!**

