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Peasant agriculture and the quest for food sovereignty in mainland Tanzania

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Tanzania has an undisputable potential for production of food crops yet it faces recurrent food shortages. Over 80 percent of the food producers are peasants, who ironically are regularly affected by hunger. This study sought to interrogate the utility of the neoliberal food security framework, which has been guiding agricultural policies in the country. In light of the food sovereignty framework, the study examined the implications of international rules guiding agriculture and seeds for Tanzania's peasantry; the level of the peasants' control of the food production process; and the role of state in the food production and distribution. A cross-sectional research design was employed, where the wave three of the Tanzania National Panel Survey's (NPS) data was used concomitant with qualitative primary data collected from the four major food producing ecological zones of Tanzania. Both quantitative and qualitative modes of analysis were deployed. Findings show that corporate interests in the Global North and lack of political will on the side of developed countries have hindered meaningful efforts by the international community to fight hunger in Third World countries. International rules guiding agriculture are hostile to the peasantry but Tanzania has been exempted from multilateral commitments to implement them. Notwithstanding the exemptions, Tanzania has been forced by donors and neoliberal international institutions to adopt the rules such as the UPOV model law of Plant Breeders Rights with tremendous negative consequences for the peasantry. The peasants lack control over the food production process while the state has failed to effectively support agriculture as the engine of the economy; embracing instead the neoliberal ideology, which is constantly pushing the state away from playing its developmental role. The study concludes that the food security framework, which is supporting a corporate model of agriculture, is unlikely to redeem the peasantry. The support and acceptance accorded to the food sovereignty framework found in the Global South indicates that it can be a panacea to the current problems affecting the peasantry in Tanzania. With its huge peasant population and the remnants of ujamaa, it is recommended in this study that Tanzania is an ideal country to adopt a food sovereignty framework to transform its ailing agriculture sector.