

# PEASANT AGROECOLOGY FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND MOTHER EARTH

Experiences of La Via Campesina



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LA VIA CAMPESINA



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# INTRODUCTION

We, as women, men, elderly and young people, peasants, family farmers, indigenous peoples, day laborers, landless rural workers and other rural peoples, are fighting to defend and recover our land and territories, to preserve our way of life, our communities, and our culture. We are also defending and recovering our territories because the agroecological peasant farming we carry out there is key to constructing food sovereignty, and is our first line of action in our defense of Mother Earth. We are committed to producing food for people – the people of our communities, villages and nations – instead of producing biomass for cellulose or agrofuels, or exports for other countries.

The indigenous peoples in our midst, and all our traditions and rural cultures, teach respect for Mother Earth, and we are committed to recovering our ancestral agricultural knowledge, so that we may produce in harmony with, while we protect, our Mother Earth. Ours is the “model of life”, of the countryside with peasants, of rural communities with families, of territories with trees and forests, mountains, lakes, rivers and coastlines, and is in firm opposition to the “model of death” of agribusiness, of farming without peasants or families, of industrial monocultures, of rural areas without trees, of green deserts and land poisoned by chemical pesticides and genetically modified organisms. We are actively challenging capital and agribusiness, disputing land and territory with them.

When we control our own territory we aim to put into practice peasant agroecology based on local systems of peasant seeds, which is more beneficial to Mother Earth, as it helps to cool the planet, and which has been demonstrated to be more productive per unit area than industrial monoculture, offering the potential to feed the world with healthy, wholesome, locally produced food, while guaranteeing us and future generations of rural peoples a decent life. Food sovereignty based on agroecological peasant farming offers solutions to the food crisis, as well as to other crises also caused by capitalism which humanity is currently facing.

We believe that the origin of agroecology lies in the accumulated knowledge and knowhow of rural peoples, systematized by a dialogue between different types of knowledge (“diálogo de saberes”) in order to produce the “science”, the movement and the practice of agroecology. Just as is the case with seeds, agroecology is the heritage of rural peoples and must be placed at the service of humanity and Mother Earth, without cost or patents. It is “ours” and is not for sale.

We must remember, retrieve, document, exchange, share, disseminate, teach and use this knowledge of our peoples actively, whilst defending it against cooption, privatization and distortion. Many of our organizations have processes for recovering, recompiling, sharing and teaching this knowledge of the science of peasant agroecology, via local processes and community groups, formal and informal schools, and horizontal exchange processes, such as from peasant to peasant, family to family, community to community and from organization to organization, as well as through videos, bulletins and community radio programs, pamphlets, publications, leaflets and other creative ways of sharing and transmitting our knowledge of agroecology.

We are, however, aware that agroecology is currently under threat from attempts at cooptation. Partly owing to our success in promoting agroecological transformation from the bottom up, now even conventional institutions are beginning to regard agroecology as an important set of alternatives. The institutional vision of agroecology is nevertheless very different from ours, and that worries us.

In fact, at this moment agroecology can be broadly divided into two stances. The institutional stance

basically regards it as a series of additional tools for industrial agriculture, which is faced with reduced productivity and increased production costs, as a result of the ecological degradation it provokes in productive resources such as soil, water, pastureland, functional biodiversity, etcetera. This stance regards agroecological tools as a means of rendering this industrial model slightly more sustainable, without in any way challenging either the relations of power or of exclusion, nor the monoculture structure, nor corporate control, which places financial gain above people and above Mother Earth. They speak of “climate smart agriculture”, “sustainable intensification” and of industrial style organic farming. As far as we are concerned, that is not agroecology, and we reject it. The other stance, which is unquestionably ours, does not regard agroecology as a tool for industrial farming, nor as a mere toolbox of techniques, but rather as an alternative to industrial farming, a way of life, an option for transforming food production into something more beneficial to humans and to Mother Earth. Our agroecology is absolutely political, it does not conform either to structures of power or to the monoculture system, but instead challenges power and places local communities at the centre of food production, in harmony with Mother Earth.

The time has come to fight and put up a resistance in favor of true peasant agroecology, a transforming, emancipating agroecology led by rural peoples. We can find examples of this agroecological peasant farming throughout the planet, although the names used vary a great deal from one place to another, whether they be agroecology, ecological or biological farming, natural farming, organic farming, or something else.

We believe that in this moment, in which we are advocating for peasant agroecology, it is important to share the progress we have made, in identifying, documenting, systematizing and sharing our success stories. To this effect we offer an initial selection, a first offering, which reflects our geographical and cultural diversity, our processes, ranging from the very local to national and international processes, the vital contribution of women, our training processes, the importance of constructing peasant markets which support agroecological production, our fight for better public policies, which, instead of subsidizing agribusiness, will support agroecological peasant production, so that we can continue to work as peasants, producing healthy, local food for our people. We hope that this will allow us to simultaneously share our experiences and processes and demonstrate the great potential that peasant agroecology has for humankind.



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# IALAS: CLOC Agroecology Training Schools - La Via Campesina South America

La Vía Campesina believes that in order to respond to the major challenges [...] in the international struggle – in the struggle to defend seeds, water, biodiversity..., we must increase our analytic capacity for working with nature.[...] for this reason our challenge is to build an international peasants' struggle. We wish to provide training the Vía Campesina way and each organization will train its members in its own way. We must strive collectively to see how, in which manner, we will proceed in each reality. (Egídio Brunetto)

Since the founding of La Vía Campesina International, there has been an ongoing concern about having an education and political training process for the members and leadership of the social organizations comprising this peasant movement.

To this effect, La Vía Campesina felt it was strategic to design political and agroecological proposals linked to the education process. The movement already had informal Agroecology Schools organized to offer courses and activities without granting degrees. These do not take the form of formal education, nor do they require a certain level of schooling in order to be able to take part. Instead they are courses, workshops, meetings, seminars, campaigns, working methods based on the concept of “peasant to peasant”, and agroecology conferences with political discussions on agroecology, such as native seed campaigns, discussions on soil preservation, permaculture, etc. But as the years went by, the movement felt the need to take this political and agroecological training further, offering formal education as well, because, as agribusiness progressed, there was a greater urgency to for agroecology in the worldwide fight for food sovereignty.



This is how Agroecology Training Schools and Institutes (IALAs ) came to be built. Included amongst these are: The Latin American School of Agroecology (ELAA) located in Paraná, Brazil; the Paulo Freire Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA – Paulo Freire) in Barinas, Venezuela, the Guaraní Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA – Guaraní) in Paraguay; the Amazonian Latin American Institute of Agroecology (IALA – Amazónico) in Pará, Brazil. Also the Peasant University, or Universidad Campesina “SURI” (UNICAMP SURI) in Argentina; the National School of Agroecology of Ecuador (ENA), as well as the new proposals for IALAs in Nicaragua, Haiti and Colombia.

The common characteristic of these Agroecology Schools and Institutes is that they offer formal education, whether that be at the level of special programs for high school dropouts, vocational high schools, or even higher education levels. Some were built with the support of the progressive governments that have come into power in Latin America in recent years, others in association with universities and institutions of higher education, in order to provide recognized degrees.





This article presents the main elements of these schools and institutes, their achievements, progress and challenges, from the perspective of training and forming “organic intellectuals” from the collectives and social movements of La Vía Campesina, to consolidate the counter hegemonic struggle against capital in the countryside.

## 1. LA VIA CAMPESINA'S AGROECOLOGY SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTES

In 2005, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, La Vía Campesina International decided to build Agroecology Schools and Institutes in different parts of America. La Vía Campesina's Agroecology schools and institutes are part of a larger project, which is to build a new society.

We can affirm that all of these schools and institutes, in their respective fields of specialization, share the same common political and pedagogical principles, such as internationalism, work, praxis, organizational structure, and a strong link with communities. They follow certain lines of action in order to broaden each principle.

### 1.1. Internationalism

La Vía Campesina was formed to serve as an international articulation of rural movements, and to build a unified fight against the different expressions and consequences of capital in the countryside. To this effect, the agroecology schools and institutes have some common



characteristics. Internationalism as a principle, crosscuts all pedagogical practices, both in the activism of students, teachers and coordinators from different countries, and in the exchange of political, cultural and organizational visions across borders, and of agroecological knowhow and practices.

Another principle of this internationalism is to consolidate and strengthen the bonds between organizations and social movements in the different countries of the continent, sharing the struggle against agribusiness and capital in the countryside, which is expressed in different ways in different countries and/or regions.

### 1.2. Work

Our material needs are satisfied by work. Work is not just an activity for producing commodities, it is a practice that is necessary for bringing humans into contact with one another and with nature in order to satisfy their basic needs. It also makes it possible to live for something beyond simply satisfying basic needs.

Work, in this case, is a pedagogical principle, a part of the educational experience that is experienced by carrying out agroecological production in the territories where these schools and institutes are located, as well as by the construction and daily maintenance of the school itself.

Students also work in the communities surrounding the schools, dissemination and the sharing agroecological and organizational experiences.

### 1.3. Praxis

The link between practice and theory is established when we try to build knowledge aimed at social and productive transformations. Praxis materializes in the constant search for the link between socio-productive study and practice. Many of our schools use the pedagogical principle of alternation, where they alternate between time at the school and time in the community. This helps guarantee that each student maintains an organic connection with the grass roots of his or her own social movement, community or organization.

Through alternation between Community Time and School Time, an on-going dialogue takes place between the specific needs of social movements, of the communities from which the student activists come, and the more theoretical and in depth studies carried out in School Time.

#### 1.4. Organizational structure

Organizational Structure, or “organicity” (the degree of organization present in a particular space) allows new levels of human relations, political management and the collective building of educational processes to be put into practice, by means of exercising direct democracy, leadership, participation and commitment in terms of decision making, and the distribution and the carrying out of tasks.

Through organized groups, students participate democratically in the political, social, productive and pedagogical construction of the school and/or institute.



## 2. COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY THESE SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTES

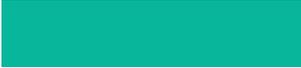
The experience of our schools is characterized by constant monitoring and self-evaluation processes, of the political and agroecological experiences underway.

As processes in construction, they are permanent challenges for La Vía Campesina, from the perspective of strengthening these experiences and consolidating a common training program which takes into account all the diversity present in this international space.

Some of these larger challenges that we set for ourselves, are related to the construction of new “political projects” for the countryside.

1. *Guaranteeing a central role for agroecology in the field of struggle against agribusiness, and as a basis for building political projects for human emancipation that take into account the ecological dimension of life.*
2. *Consolidating agroecology as a guiding set of principles for the production of healthy food, free from toxic substances and GMOs, in order to build Food Sovereignty.*
3. *Making agroecological training accessible to everyone, and multiplying the leaders and organic intellectuals in our social movements.*



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4. *Guaranteeing political-pedagogic, scientific and material autonomy in the construction and consolidation of these schools and institutes.*
  5. *Guaranteeing the continuity and strengthening of the schools and institutes that are already in existence.*
  6. *Promoting research and studies in the field of agroecology that could favor the construction of a counter hegemony.*
  7. *Making progress in the construction of the political-pedagogical principles of political and agroecological training, based on the specific reality of each experience.*
  8. *Documenting and systematizing the political-pedagogic processes of the agroecological schools and institutes, as well as the socio productive and organizational experiences acquired from these educational experiences.*

# LA VIA CAMPESINA AFRICA 1

## SHASHE AGROECOLOGY SCHOOL: A TRUE CENTRE OF AGROECOLOGY AND PRACTICAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The experience of the Shashe community in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, is a microcosm of the broader vision of La Via Campesina (LVC). Shashe is a community of peasant farmers who gained their land first through a land occupation, and were then benefitted by the Fast Track Land Reform Program implemented by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2000. The land that they now farm was formally the landholdings of absentee cattle ranchers, and today this land produces far more food than ever before, food produced largely through ecological farming practices. Thus Shashe shows that the dream of LVC is possible: land reform and agroecological peasant agriculture as building blocks of food sovereignty.

The peasant families in Shashe are members of the Zimbabwe Small Organic Farmers Forum (ZIMSOFF), which represents peasant families practicing organic, traditional and agroecological agriculture in Zimbabwe. ZIMSOFF has developed processes of participatory ecological land use planning and management, and encourages value-added artisanal transformation to improve the welfare of its members. The organization has some 19,000 smallholder farmers organized in four large groupings, namely the western, eastern, northern and central clusters. These clusters are made up of 64 local smallholder farmer organizations (SFOs), which nurture dynamic alliances. This article focuses on the Shashe SFO, in the central cluster, and where the peasant Agroecology School of Zimsoff and La Via Campesina is located.



The Shashe SFO farmers are a group within of the 380 official land beneficiaries resettled in 2000 at the Shashe block of farms, which covers about 15,020 hectares. Of this area, about 23% was allocated for residential and arable purposes, and the rest for grazing. The area is generally dry, receiving about 400mm of annual rainfall, and was mainly used for ranching by the former white farmers. The new, formerly landless african peasant farmers, have broadened the land use, as they are now producing both crops and livestock. The Shashe Agroecology School is part of the La Via Campesina's network of over 40 agroecology schools around the world, and promotes the exchange of experiences through horizontal learning, to disseminate agroecological and sustainable peasant agriculture practices. They have collectively developed key resistance strategies to fight against dependence on agro-chemicals and fertilizers, and to survive climate change.

## **AGROECOLOGICAL FARMING PRACTICES AT SHASHE**

At Shashe SFO, farmers employ various agroecological practices to ensure food sovereignty, mitigate climate change effects and reduce dependence on purchased agro-inputs, thus keeping farm income in the family's purse. These practices include the use of organic manure, mulching, minimum tillage, multiple cropping, the exchange and use of traditional seeds and open pollinated varieties, among others. Such practices are the foundation to build a new agricultural future for the farmers, not only at ZIMSOF, but globally.

### **Promoting organic fertilizers and mulch: reducing dependence on chemical fertilizers**

Organic fertilizers have been used by peasant farmers in Zimbabwe for generations, and thus indigenous knowledge of these abounds. The benefits of manure, for example, are well documented in literature. The Shashe SFO famers use manure from cattle and goats to fertilize their fields and gardens. Some of the farmers also use enriched composts (various plant materials mixed with poultry manure).

Crop residues, particularly from maize, are commonly used to bulk the manure. These are put into the cattle corral after harvest and trampled by the animals, mixing with dung and urine. The manure and maize stalk mixture is dug up and heaped up before the rain begins. The further decomposition destroys weed seeds and increases nitrogen content, and then it is broadcast in the fields before ploughing. Some farmers, who lack sufficient manpower, directly apply the manure to the fields, but this practice allows undestroyed weed seeds to germinate and propagate. Some farmers overcome this challenge by organizing working parties to exchange labor, to dig and empty their corrals of manure.

To completely destroy the weed seeds, and significantly increase nitrogen content, some farmers, like Mr Mavedzenge, allow complete decomposition of the manure under anaerobic conditions in a completely sealed pit for at least one rainy season. This boosts the nitrogen content three times over. Again, this organic manure is weed free, cool, and ready to be used by the plants.



According to Mrs Mudzingwa, the plants that grow from organic manure are as good or better than those that grow from inorganic fertilizers. Their crops grow as well as those crops that use artificial fertilizer, so there is no need for them to spend large sums of money buying chemicals. Moreover, she said, the nitrates in artificial fertilizers are soluble and leach easily, causing soil imbalances affecting soil organisms and fertility.

Beside the organic manure and compost, they also use liquid manure. 40-50kg of manure is put in a sack and suspended in a 300-litre drum partially filled with water for 10-14 days. The manure is sometimes mixed with legumes and leaves to increase the nitrogen content. The nutrient rich water is then diluted and applied to vegetables. According to Mrs Mudzingwa, a farmer at Shashe SFO, the farmer's effort is to feed the soil, which in turn feeds the plants, that finally feeds people.

### **Building a firm foundation for seed sovereignty through seed sharing and exchange**

In their effort to build seed sovereignty at Shashe, the farmers visited and gathered traditional seeds and open pollinated varieties from different parts of Zimbabwe. Mr. Mpofu and his wife Elizabeth Mpofu, the General Coordinator of La Via Campesina, keep and multiply a wide variety of seeds collected from different areas through exchange and sharing with other farmers. They have more than 15 different varieties each of maize, sorghum, millets, beans, round nuts, ground nuts, cowpeas, pumpkins, melons and many other traditional crops. Most seeds have been shared with other farmers within the SFO. For instance, Mr Mpofu has kept his maize seed for 8 years, and most farmers come to him to get certain traditional maize varieties which they no longer have. As representatives of the farmers, they continue to scout for more suitable seeds, particularly traditional and open pollinated varieties, to benefit the local farmers.

The Agroecology School also produces seeds for most vegetables they grow. They allow the plants to flower and produce seed. This practice was learned from other farmers through

horizontal exchanges of knowledge.

### **Conservation farming methods**

Most farmers are employing various conservation farming methods, to help cope with aridity of the area. Mr Abmelek Mutsenhure's homestead is located on a sloping rocky area. He uses contours to reduce run-off, and also practices minimum tillage. The soil dries fast and he thus uses mulch to prevent loss of soil moisture on hot days, and to retain rain water in the soil, allowing crops to grow normally even during long dry spells. Mulching is done, using maize stalks, when his crop is knee high. He practices multiple cropping whereby maize, legumes and other traditional plants are planted together in the same field.

When he moved to Shashe, his first and second crop harvest was poor due to run-off and quick drying of soil. That's when he decided to use both contours and minimum tillage, and his harvests have improved a lot. The contours are made of stones which are abundant locally.

### **Capacity building: Horizontal learning and dialogues**

Shashe SFO uses farmer to farmer methods to learn and share new farming practices. Mr Abmelek Mutsenhure is the extension promoter at the Shashe Agroecology School, and he leads by example, by farming and experiencing the challenges the farmers face. This helps him to understand and be a better teacher to share the art of agroecological organic farming.

According to Mrs Mudzingwa, farmers don't listen to field officers (government agricultural extension officers) who rely on abstract theory to teach them about farming, but prefer to learn from each other, because the SFO farmers have tangible and practical knowledge to share, especially via demonstrations on their own farms. Farmers at Shashe SFO keep records of all their farming activities to help them to track changes and improvements on their farms.

## **FOOD PRODUCTION: SELF SUFFICIENCY AND HEALTHY FOOD**

### **Growing culturally appropriate food crops for own consumption**

Most farmer households at Shashe SFO have small kitchen gardens, located very close to the homesteads, where they grow vegetables, onions and tomatoes for their own consumption. The crops grown in these gardens constitute a critical part of the stew they call "relish." Other dietary components, such as starch and proteins, come from a wide variety of cereals and pulses that the farmers grow on the bigger fields. These include the cereals, maize, sorghum, and millets, and pulses such as cowpeas and beans.

Mrs Mudzingwa said that small farmers ensure household food security by growing different types of small grains, which give meaningful yields even during droughts. These crops include sorghum, pearl millet, sunflower, groundnuts, and cowpeas, which are easy to grow and require less manure. These crops, unlike maize, particularly the sorghum and millets, can easily be

processed into “mealie” meal, using a grinding stone, rather a grinding mill. The mealie is used to cook sazda, porridge, maheu (a partially fermented traditional brew with very low alcohol content) and to brew beer. They also grow sunflower, which they process into oil, with the cake residue used to feed chickens.

Groundnuts are either processed to make peanut butter, or cooked to make various traditional meals, some of which include a mix with boiled maize grain and shelled nuts. Other pulses, which are used as relish, include cowpea varieties such as the black eyed pea, which is easy to cook and tastes nice.

### *Multipurpose garden: feeding the school, income generation and training*

The Shashe Agroecology School has a sizeable garden where all the families pool their resources, particularly labor, to grow various crops through the year with irrigation. The irrigation water is drawn, using a diesel operated water pump, from a nearby borehole, and stored in a large concrete cistern located on a rise. Gravity is then used for irrigating the crops.

According to Albert Ngonese, a youth at Agroecology School, the garden is divided into two, one section is worked by the women and the other by the youth. The women’s portion has various vegetables such as rape, chomolia, cabbage, carrots, cucumber, tsunga and herbs. These vegetables are either sold to raise money for women’s activities, or used to prepare meals for visitors at the school. The youth use their part of the garden to grow crops which they sell to raise funds for different activities. During our visit, they had grown maize, which they intended to sell in December as green mealies.

### *Kitchen gardens*

Most farmer families at the SFO have small kitchen gardens where they grow onions, vegetables and tomatoes. These small gardens are important in ensuring that the farmers are food self-sufficient and allow them to have savings (less money is spent on food), thus boosting their effective incomes. The farmers try to grow whatever they can to cut down on purchased food costs.

### *Gardening for commercial purposes*

Mr Mavedzenge and his wife have a sizeable (0.4 ha) garden under tomatoes, spinach and Chinese cabbage, which they sell to supermarkets in Masvingo. They water the crops using drip irrigation, and use organic manure to fertilize the soil. During our visit they had planted about 15,000 tomato plants and spinach.

### **Livestock**

In addition to growing crops, most farmers keep a wide variety of livestock such as cattle,

sheep, goats, pigs, donkeys, chickens, turkeys, ducks, guinea fowl and rabbits. The beef and milk, chicken, guinea fowl and goat meat are commonly consumed sources of protein. According to Mrs Mudzingwa, the chickens are easy to keep because they do not compete with humans for food, but eat food which humans don't eat, such as insects and weeds.

### Food processing, storage and preservation

The Shashe SFO farmers use traditional methods to preserve vegetables, and use pumpkin and cowpea leaves to make dried vegetables (mufushwa) which can be stored for long periods without spoiling. They also process crops such as sunflower and groundnuts to make cooking oil and butter respectively. For instance, Mr Mutsenhure owns a hand operated oil presser and a peanut butter machine. He said that farmers in Shashe grow sunflower because they know that there are machines that produce oil. Cooking oil is expensive for most farmers, and most of them cannot afford it since they are not employed off the farm. So it's cheaper for the farmers bring their sunflower for processing at his homestead. The sunflower cake produced from the extraction of oil is used as animal feed, mainly fed to the chickens.



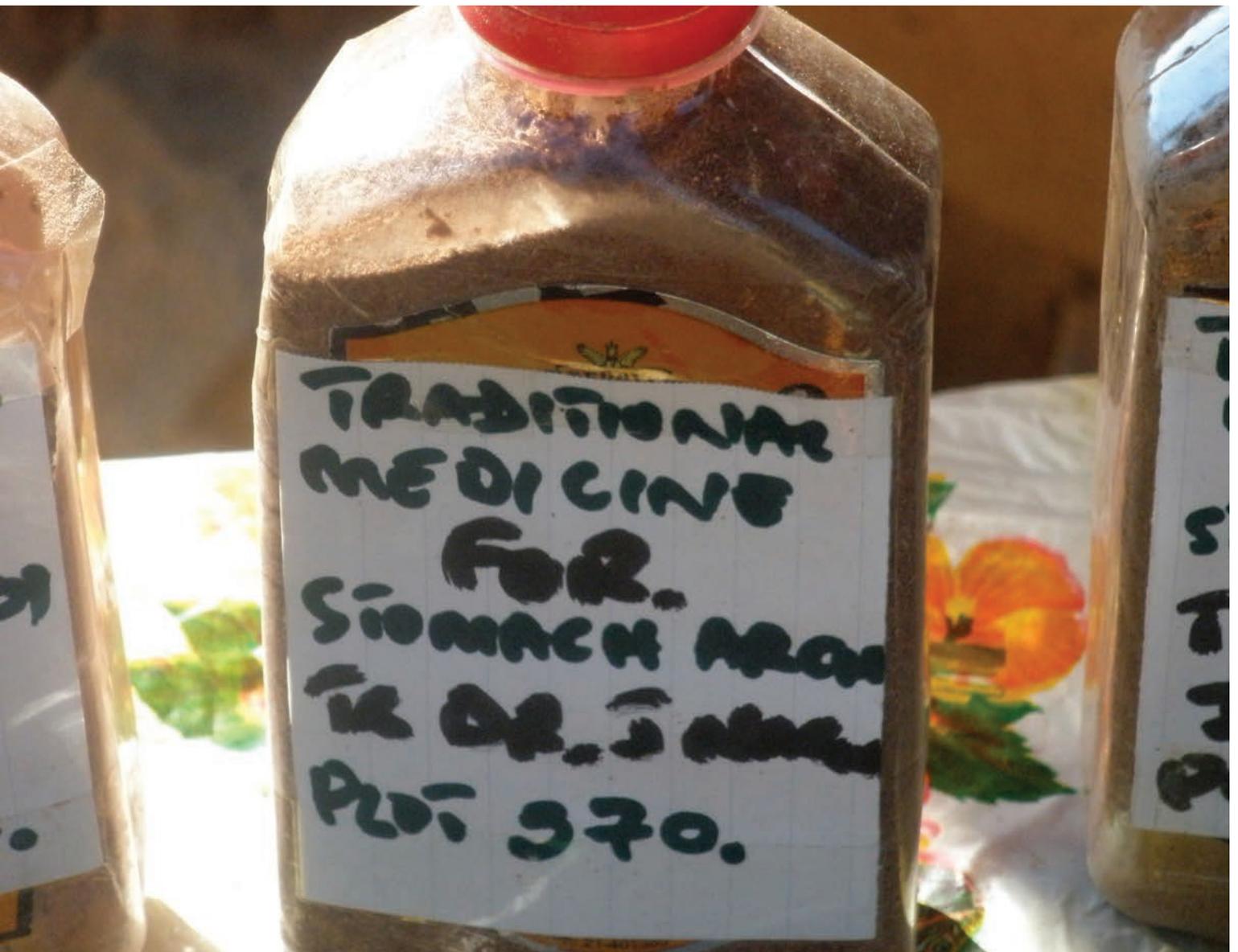
## **CREATING A VIBRANT LOCAL MARKET FOR PRODUCE AND STRENGTHENING INTERDEPENDENCE**

According to Mr Mudzingwa, farmers grow what they eat, so they are the first market; the neighbor is the second market. Thus, they are building local markets for the local produce. This reduces the need to transport and sell produce to towns, and retains most cash within the farmer's purse. Other produce traded locally includes protein rich sources such as meat and milk and chickens. The cereals, particularly maize, are usually sold to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) in times of good harvest. The farmers keep adequate amounts of maize grain in their granaries to feed their families. During times of grain shortage, farmers with surplus grain sell to those who are in deficit. Again, farmers tend to exchange grain for labor, particularly during ploughing and weeding. The other cereals such as sorghum and millets are sold locally, mostly to farmers who brew beer.

## **LIVING WITH AND BENEFITING FROM NATURE: STONE WALLING AND SOLAR ENERGY**

Farmers at Shashe have mastered the art of living with nature, and also of benefiting from it. Some parts of Shashe are rocky and the farmers have found useful ways to use the rocks to stop soil erosion in gardens and homesteads. Some have used the stones to make perimeter fences at homesteads. The farmers said that stone walls are durable, strong and inexpensive to make. Some farmers use them for building purposes, while others use them to terrace the contours in the gardens. The farmers also conserve local trees, from which they also get their medicines, usually administered by Dr Nago, a traditional healer and kraal head, who is a member of the Shashe SFO. Some also grow moringa, a common medicinal tree used to boost a person's immune system. The moringa leaves are used as relish.

In sum, the experience of Zimsoff at Shashe, shows that if landless peasants can get access to land, they can use agroecology to grow healthy food at low cost, in harmony with nature, for their families and for the market.



# LA VÍA CAMPESINA AFRICA 1

## Agroecology and Community-Supported Agriculture in Mozambique: A Peasant Alternative to Industrial Agriculture



The National Peasant Union of Mozambique, UNAC, has for some years now promoted the practices of agroecology, conservation of native seeds and local systems of food production. Guaranteeing food sovereignty and defending peasant agriculture are the aims of UNAC. As part of several exchange programs with other La Via Campesina organizations, such as the Zimbabwe Organic Smallholder Farmers Forum (ZIMSOFF) and the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA) of Brazil, Mozambican peasants have developed numerous community supported agricultural projects in all ten provinces.<sup>1</sup>

A good example, which began in 2012 in Marracuene district, in the capital city of Maputo Province, is a project that has involved some 4,500 peasant families and was developed in partnership with the MPA of Brazil. It aims to develop a system that recovers native seeds: improving, conserving, (re)producing and storing them for future seasons. As part of this process, peasant agricultural practices were expanded and technical training was provided on policies and systems of production.

A good illustration of how agroecology has made a difference since 2011, comes from Namaacha district, in southern Maputo Province, bordering Swaziland. With the support of UNAC, a

diversified production of crops; onion, tomato, cabbage, lettuce and carrots was introduced in an area where the peasants had been producing strawberries to sell in Maputo. Now, all is produced 100% agroecologically, using organic fertilizers, composts and techniques. The main fertilizer is manure from cows and the mulch is hay which is spread to avoid weeds and maintain soil moisture. “Our products are tastier and healthier. The strawberries that come from South Africa, although they might look better, are dehydrated because they use chemicals,” says Aida Bambo, part of UNAC’s technical staff in the Namaacha district.

The Associação dos Produtores de Morango de Namaacha (APMONA) is involved in the project. APMONA is a local strawberry producers organization, which consists mostly of widows and their families. Their production is based on a model that divides the land into individual and community shares – a portion of the produce goes to each member and her family, and the rest is channelled to the local market in Namaacha. As Bambo puts it, “The benefit of having a collective machamaba is that peasants share knowledge with each other – it’s a space for learning”.

The new community-supported system lets peasants grow their crops for self-consumption and for the local market, as well as produce and sell strawberries as a side line. The area has become known for its’ strawberries and the farmers sell directly to the restaurants and hotels in Maputo. Rosa Jorge Obete, co-founder of APMONA, asserts that since she has switched to agroecology, she has saved more money in production, especially since she avoids the costs of chemicals. “It has allowed me to put my children in school and helped me with daily costs. We are now able to manage our expenses. We live well, not like before,” says Obete.

## AN ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE

Over the past few years, Mozambique has become a major stage for landgrabbing. From small-scale projects led by private investors seeking land for forest production or for tourism development, to mega-projects, facilitated by foreign state development agencies, looking to do agribusiness, which has become the new trend in Mozambique. That model of agriculture, based on export, produces crops that are usually alien to the local community, such as soy, maize and sugar cane, which are aimed at world markets and other countries’ internal demands for food, cattle feed and biofuel.

In these processes, local leaders in communities are co-opted, while the central government in power receives immediate gains for providing access to land for transnational corporations and private enterprises. As land in Mozambique is legally owned by the state, concessions are given for 50 years and are renewable for 99 years. Looking at the overall pattern in Mozambique, agriculture could soon become a corporate driven sector, with local peasants

<sup>1</sup> Examples are in Cuamba (Niassa), Pemba (Cabo Delgado), Mecubri (Nampula), Gurue (Zambezia), Gorongosa (Sofala), Mutarara (Tete), Chimoio (Manica) Chokwe (Gaza), Panda (Inhambane), and Namaacha and Marracuene (Maputo)



being disempowered, losing their means of livelihood as well as their ancient cultural connection to the land.

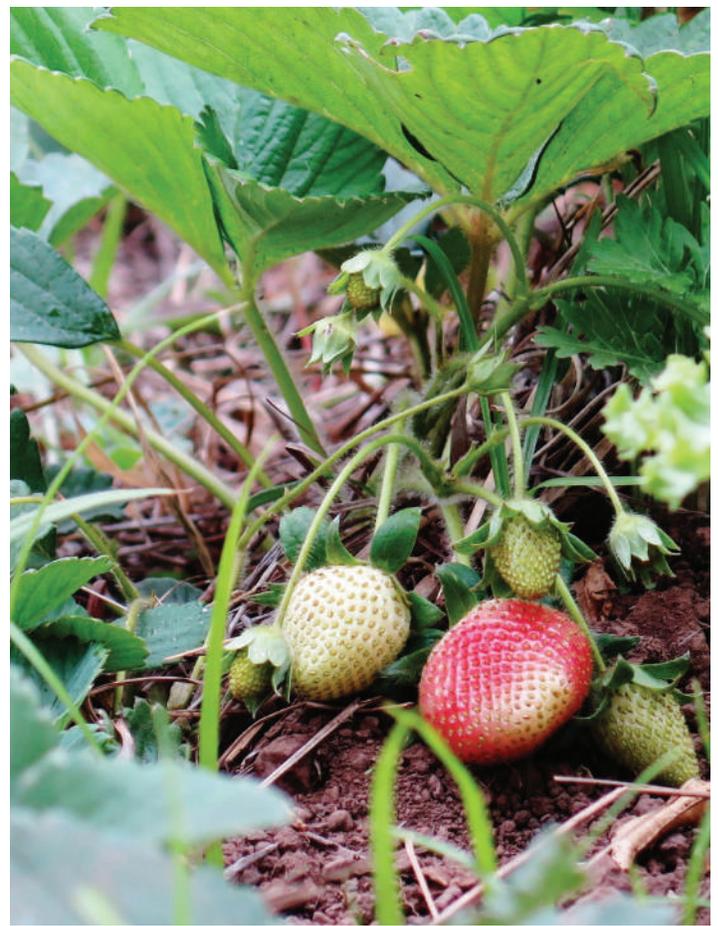
However, UNAC – Africa’s first, and a major member of La Via Campesina – is resisting these trends, finding alternatives to the prevailing system. By denouncing land-grabbing throughout the country and by defending local systems of food production, including native seeds and organic, agroecological practices – the UNAC struggles to ensure food sovereignty, and to showcase peasant agriculture as a viable option for agriculture and development in Mozambique.

Agroecology, which has been growing throughout the country, is a set of practices and methodologies that are contrary to industrial, large-scale, monoculture production. While using organic methods based on community-supported and community-driven agriculture, peasants are rescuing a model of production that has been pursued by local communities all over the world. In a recent position document, UNAC said that “the methods of agroecological production allow us to obtain food products that are of good quality and do not harm the environment, simultaneously improving and conserving the fertility of the soil, thanks to a good utilization of natural resources and without the use of chemical products.”

Mozambique’s peasants are using methods of farming, which are part of the social and cultural life in their rural communities. They demonstrate that this can be an alternative to the corporate agriculture that the government, coupled with international organizations and private interests, is pushing in Mozambique. Contrary to the claims of government and corporations, which

only emphasize underdevelopment and backwardness, peasant agriculture is, in fact, viable. With models such as agroecology, ensuring soil preservation, the use of organic fertilizers, and community supported methods of production, peasant agriculture is ultimately more inclusive, sustainable, equitable and stable than any other farming method.

Based on this paradigm, rural communities in the country (which represent a large majority in Mozambique) would be empowered, guaranteeing the livelihoods of future generations and ensuring food sovereignty at the community and national level. It would, finally, set Mozambique on a path, over the long-run, toward a sustainable development model, while defending native seeds and local, organic food production as well as the environment –hence, an alternative to the corporate export-driven monoculture production that is threatening to overcome all.



# LA VIA CAMPESINA SOUTH ASIA

## Zero Budget Natural Farming in India

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), promises to turn peasant agriculture into a near zero budget (or external cost) activity. India is home to rich and diverse traditions of natural farming, and there are hundreds of alternative methods, practices, and teachers in the country. ZBNF is one of these natural methods, and is also called Zero Budget Spiritual Farming. It is particularly popular because of its ability to reach out to thousands of farmers and greatly reduce their monetary expenditure. It is essentially a spiritual endeavor that promotes a harmonious relationship with nature, in contrast to high budget external cost conventional agriculture. ZBNF is based on ancient Indian farming techniques and principles of Hinduism such as non-violence, the holiness of the cow and self-reliance. Beyond the ecological and spiritual aspects, it is also a social movement with a large social base that promotes a politicized discourse to transform the food and farming system.

Generally speaking, ZBNF is a version of natural farming, and the many different teachers all express some combination of Gandhian and ecological principles, Hindu spirituality, and the influences of the 'do-nothing farming' teaching of the famous Japanese farmer and author, Masanobu Fukuoka. ZBNF itself is a matched set of practices and instructions on almost every aspect of farming, which can be easily followed by farmers. It is especially suited to those that want to make the transition away from chemicals, to eventually reach totally self-reliant systems like those of Fukuoka.

The innovator of ZBNF, its "guru" and main proponent, is Mr. Subhash Palekar, from the state of Maharashtra, which has the highest rate of farmer suicides, a rampant social problem in the country. Palekar's effort is definitely the most polemical of natural farming, with a fiery rhetoric that dismisses the western science of the Green Revolution, and paints the government, agricultural universities, and corporations as the enemies of farmers. He works on a national scale, tirelessly spreading ZBNF with an almost superhuman dedication, increasing the number of followers through massive training sessions that can last up to 5 days and accommodate up to 3,000 farmers each.

## WHY ZBNF?

Tragically, the highly neoliberal policies of the Indian economy have led to a grave agrarian crisis, which is making small scale farming an unviable vocation. Small farmers, the majority of all farmers, increasingly find themselves in a vicious cycle of debt, because of a lack of public sector credit, volatile market prices for their crops, rising costs of fossil fuel based inputs, and the cost of commercial seeds. Loan sharks become the major recourse in these



situations. More than a quarter of a million farmers have committed suicide in India in the last two decades, which is clearly a symptom of failed agrarian policies.

ZBNF is a serious solution that comes from the very grassroots of India, and is promoted by a social movement of the very farmers who, fed up with the faulty top-down policies, are taking things into their own hands. ZBNF promises to enable farmers to achieve “swaraj,” or self reliance. None of the inputs for ZBNF need be purchased from the market, and instead of degrading soils, as in the Green Revolution, ZBNF restores them, increasing the resilience of the farm in the long run, and providing chemical free food.

## THE PRACTICES

Palekar explains the practices in detail in his books and in his training camps. He has published a series of 4 or 5 books, which can be ordered from his website. The following is a brief list of some of the main practices of ZBNF.

### THE FOUR PILLARS OF ZBNF

**1. Jivamrita/ jeevamrutha** is a fermented microbial culture, that is neither manure nor fertilizer. It provides nutrients, but most importantly, acts as a catalytic agent that promotes the activity of microorganisms in the soil, as well as increases earthworm activity; Palekar calls it 'Life Tonic'. During the 48 hour fermentation process, the aerobic and anaerobic bacteria present in the cow dung and urine multiply as they eat up organic ingredients (like pulse flour). A handful of undisturbed soil is also added to the preparation, as an inoculate of native species of microbes and organisms. Jeevamrutha also helps to prevent fungal and bacterial plant diseases. Palekar suggests that Jeevamrutha is only needed for the first 3 years of the transition, as the system becomes more and more self-sustaining.

#### How to prepare jeevamrutha:

- Put 200 liters of water in a barrel
- Add 10 Kg local cow dung and 5 to 10 liters cow urine. Palekar also allows the urine of humans to be used instead of cows, but ideally it should come from someone who doesn't consume meat, alcohol or antibiotics.
- Add 2 Kg of Jaggery (a local type of brown sugar), 2 Kg of pulse flour and a handful of soil from the bund of the farm.
- Stir the solution well and let it ferment for 48 hours in the shade. Now jeevamrutha is ready for application.
- 200 liters of jeevamrutha is sufficient for one acre of land.

#### Jeevamrutha Application

Apply the jeevamrutha to the crops twice a month in the irrigation water or as a 10% foliar spray.

**2. Bijamrita/beejamrutha** is a treatment used for seeds, seedlings or any planting material. Bijamrita is effective in protecting young roots from fungus as well as from soil-borne and seed-borne diseases that commonly affect plants after the monsoon period. It is composed of local cow dung, a powerful natural fungicide, and cow urine, a strong anti-bacterial liquid. In fact, before the introduction of dangerous synthetic fungicides, Indian farmers had been treating their seeds with local cow dung and urine and farm soil for thousands of years.

#### How to prepare Bijamrita:

- Take 20 liters of water, 5 kg of cow dung, 5 liters of local cow urine, 50 grams of lime and a handful of soil from the farm.
- Put 5 Kg local cow dung in a cloth, and bind it with tape. Hang this in 20 liters of water in a barrel for up to 12 hours.
- Take one liter of water in a bucket and add 50 gm lime to it, let it sit overnight.
- The following morning, squeeze the bundle of the cow dung in the water three times continuously, so that all the essence of the cow dung will accumulate in the water.
- Add a handful of soil from the bund of the farm to the water solution and stir it well.
- Finally, add 5 liters of Deshi cow or human urine to the solution and add the lime water. Stir well. Use to treat seeds.

### **Bijamrita Application as a seed treatment**

Add Bijamrita to the seeds of any crop: coat them, mixing by hand; dry them well and use them for sowing. For leguminous seeds, just dip them quickly and let them dry.

### **3. Acchadana (mulching):** According to Palekar, there are three types of mulching:

**a. Soil Mulch:** This protects topsoil during cultivation and does not destroy it by tilling. It promotes aeration and water retention in the soil. Palekar suggests avoiding deep plowing.

**b. Straw Mulch:** Straw material usually refers to the dried biomass waste of previous crops, but as Palekar suggests, it can be composed of the dead material of any living being (plants, animals, etc). Palekar's approach to soil fertility is very simple- provide dry organic material which will decompose and form humus through the activity of the soil biota which is activated by microbial cultures.

**c. Live Mulch (symbiotic intercrops and mixed crops):** According to Palekar, it is essential to develop multiple cropping patterns of monocotyledons (monocots) and dicotyledons (dicots) grown in the same field, to supply all essential elements to the soil and crops. For instance, legumes are of the dicot group and are nitrogen-fixing plants. Monocots such as rice and wheat supply other elements like potash, phosphate and sulfur.

**4. Waaphasa (moisture):** Palekar challenges the idea that plant roots need a lot of water, thus countering the over reliance on irrigation in Green Revolution farming. According to him, what roots really need is moisture or water vapor (Waaphasa). Moisture is the condition where the air and water molecules are in balance. This creates a 'micro-climate' which optimizes plant growth: 'On the surface of the soil, where air circulates in between 2 plants, the temperature of that air should be 25 to 32 degrees Celsius and humidity of that air should be 65 to 72%. Under that soil, there should be waaphasa (moisture). This is why water should be applied outside the canopy of the plants, where the feeder roots are situated, and at noon when the sunlight is the strongest, so that this moisture will be formed quickly.

Other important principles of ZBNF and points to note:

1. Intercropping – This is primarily how ZBNF gets its “Zero Budget” name. It doesn’t mean that the farmer is going to have no costs at all, but rather that the greatly reduced costs will be compensated for by the products of intercrops, making farming a close to zero budget activity. Palekar explains in detail the associations that work well for the south Asian context.
2. Contours and bunds-- To preserve rain water, Palekar explains in detail how to make the contours and bunds, which promote maximum efficacy for different crops.
3. Local species of earthworms . Palekar is especially opposed to the surface feeding worm, *Eisinea feotida*, which is exotic in India and dominates the vermicompost industry. He claims that the deep soil local earthworms are the most beneficial.
4. Cow dung should come from the cow that is indigenous to India, *Bos indicus*. Palekar, in his experiments, has found that the number of microorganisms in the *Bos indicus* dung is much higher than that found in European cow breeds such as Holstein. The entire ZBNF method is centered on the Indian cow, which historically has been part of Indian rural life. However, Palekar also suggests that the dung from indigenous animals of other regions could be substituted in those regions, as with camels in certain countries.

## The Movement

ZBNF is not just a set of practices, but a growing social movement. Hundreds of thousands of farmers are practicing (millions according to the proponents of the movement), which could make it one of the largest movements in the world. The farmers identify themselves as part of a collective action for change, and call themselves “natural farmers”. The movement does not have a central bureaucratic structure but instead, relies on self-organized activities by farmers’ groups at the local level. It does not depend on governments nor NGOs, nor does it have bank accounts or fund-raise . Yet training camps of massive proportions are organized through a number of strong and diverse allies that believe in ZBNF, and who provide it with constant support, either through resources or by giving it legitimacy. Some of the most important of these are Hindu Ashrams (monasteries) that have provided free accommodation and food for the large training camps, and have granted moral legitimacy to the movement. Farmers’ movements, such as the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, (KRRS, a member of La Via Campesina), also have strongly supported the movement as the alternative to the Green Revolution and as a solution to climate change. Many of the members of the farmer’s movement practice ZBNF methods and organize their own training and exchange efforts to spread this kind of agriculture.

As the guru, Palekar’s charisma has played a key role in the promotion of the movement. His



style of speech, (his “discourse”), has conveyed, the ZBNF philosophy and practices to farmers in an appealing manner. There is a strong resonance of his discourse among the farmers, as he uses metaphors and symbols related to Hinduism in his speeches. He has also made strong criticism of the organic farming industry, which has been co-opted by agribusiness, and promotes the same reliance on markets for external inputs, rather than the self-reliance promoted by methods like ZBNF. This deployment of a mystical and political discourse has been very effective in reaching a large number of farmers and convincing them to go the



natural route. This is in contrast to some proponents of agroecology, who use a more narrowly technical discourse and focus only on the biological aspects of farming.

# LA VIA CAMPESINA EUROPE

## WE DO NOT INHERIT LAND FROM OUR PARENTS; WE BORROW IT FROM OUR CHILDREN

African proverb

We are just passing through, and it is an honor and our responsibility to take care of the land; to ensure that, during our time, it does not lose its' fertility, biodiversity or production capacity, and that its' ecosystems are preserved and not polluted.

My son Alfredo will, if he wants to, be the eighth generation in a long history of farming. Some of our people have experienced wars and periods of great social, cultural and technological upheaval. Recently, my grandfather built solid constructions that survived the test of time, and my father faced the challenge of converting to organic farming. I think the biggest challenge today is climate change. Indeed, its' effects, which can no longer be remedied, are beginning to have an impact on agricultural production.

On our farm we cultivate olives for olive oil, vineyards, cereals, and forage to feed a herd of dairy sheep. We have an orchard where we keep old varieties of apples and also winter vegetables. Over the last 10 years, it has become increasingly difficult to control the major grape fungal diseases. The haying season, as well as autumn-winter cereal threshing, are often adversely affected by the rain. This is the second year of low olive oil production: the olive fly caused losses in olive trees in 2014 in Sabina, my region, and in many other regions of Italy. We've also experienced a loss of soil fertility due to erosion caused by heavy rainfall.

That's not much, perhaps, when compared to the typhoons in Asia, but Europe is in a more protected geographical location, and therefore is less affected by changes in climate.

I believe that the only viable strategy to cope with these changes, in the medium and long term, is an agroecological vision geared towards the construction of highly resilient and adaptable systems. In this context, the search for knowledge and knowhow typified in peasant farming is the way forward, because it is both innovative and at the same time, deeply rooted in local knowledge and resources.

The reintroduction of locally adapted varieties of resilient plants and seeds are future goals. Seeking them out in the the fields and the memories of the peasants are, to some extent, already underway. Every passing moment could be the last for this work, given that farmers, the ultimate custodians of farming heritage, are quickly dying out.

Another future goal is the reintroduction of wooded areas to favor the regeneration of natural ecosystems, and because of the very important function of trees in capturing CO<sub>2</sub>, which might help limit global warming.

Already being implemented in part, is the short-term goal of growing fresh vegetables to meet

the increasing demand for healthy and high quality food. In fact, we already work with GAS (fair trade groups), and have seen the social importance and economic advantages of fostering short -chain and direct-sales markets. As for horticultural crops, a lot of labor and knowledge are necessary for saving and multiplying seeds, work that is essential in order to have locally adapted plants and to reduce costs. To tackle the serious problem of garden slugs (also due to climate change), the rediscovery of some varieties of wheat, with straw that is rich in silicon, can be used to mulch the crops and guard against the slugs.

Another goal is the home processing of farm products, such as apples and grapes. The wine-making sector, in particular the “natural wine” sector, is very attractive: the possibility of producing wine with minimal (or zero) additives seems both feasible and revolutionary.

Other very important issues are about labor, as well as the cultural and social situations of farming and of the rural environment. The economic crisis requires a shift in perspective and organization. In this sense, I believe that here, too, I have much to learn from other examples of rural and community organizations, as well as from the networking and collaboration as has been illustrated by numerous peasant groups and farmers in many other parts of the world.

Last, but not least, is the reported end of oil. The prospect of completely giving up petroleum-derived auxiliary energy seems impossible in the eyes of the spoiled sons of the rich, prosperous and ultra-mechanized West. In the notebook No. 6 of “La Via Campesina: Our Seeds, Our Future. I read that 90% of non-mechanized and non-motorized farmers save and multiply their seeds independently. Perhaps that is where we should be looking, in order to set up a new farm organization system, rather than looking at a farm’s history. At the end of the day, we’ve only been making extensive use of oil-dependent technology for half a century (three out of eight generations). We still have equipment and technology that was used at a time when the only energy forms were human labor and animal traction.

I hope that a virtuous use of the loans provided by the RDP (Rural Development Plan) can help me to achieve some of these goals.

# LA VIA CAMPESINA NORTH AMERICA

MIGRANT FARM WORKERS BUILD A  
PEOPLE'S AGROECOLOGY IN NORTH  
AMERICA



“CAMPESINO-A-CAMPESINO AGROECOLOGY ENCOUNTER: A Collaborative Learning Exchange for Promoters of Agroecology, Traditional Wisdom and Respect for Mother Earth” was the first LVC North American conference on agroecology. It was held on February 12-14 2015, at the Campesinos’ Gardens in Fellsmere, Florida, and on February 15-16 20 in Florida City, Florida. This Encounter marked the culmination of several years of collaboration and exchange among members of La Via Campesinas’ North American Region, the Farmworker Association of Florida (La Asociación Campesina de Florida and the Rural Coalition). In addition, there was participation of other U.S. and international allies, notably the Landless Workers Movement (MST) of Brazil.

The Encounter served as a catalyst to lay the foundation for building a strong peasant-based, people's agroecology movement across North America that links to the struggles of our international brothers and sisters. Such a movement can inspire local communities and their allies with practical examples of the transformation needed to heal Mother Earth and to begin to confront the destruction caused by capitalist industrial agriculture.

The regional agroecology movement was begun by the Campesinos' Gardens of Central and South Florida, and is sustained by the teachings of a social movement of 20 years. It is an innovative process that hinges on supporting LVC's concept of Food Sovereignty. It is rooted in the idea that everyone has the right to healthy, fresh, culturally-appropriate food to feed their communities and to heal Mother Earth. Our sustenance should be provided by small scale and peasant farmers, using people's agroecology, (defined as peasant-based agroecology), upholding their right to practice sustainable agriculture based on traditional wisdom.

The purpose of the Encounter was to provide an inviting and inclusive space for women, youth, elders, and families from farming communities, both from within the U.S. and internationally, and to share and learn from each other about agroecology, food sovereignty, and social transformation. A creative and collective space that honors our varied cultural roots and traditions was created to guarantee an authentic social movement experience of agroecology utilizing *místicas* (ceremonies), cultural events, workshops, discussion and debate. One young participant shared, "Campesino-a-Campesino Agroecology is about planting people on the land to grow food, grow community-cooperation, grow consciousness and respect for Mother Earth with Food Sovereignty at its heart."

Both young and older organizers and campesino peer trainers provided "hands-in-the-earth" workshops to help participants to embrace place-based agroecology in theory and in practice. Sessions were imparted by member organizations of La Via Campesina such as Rural Coalition, FWAf, and BoricuA – and other allies. Peer led-workshops were offered to transfer practical knowledge for sustainably cultivating organic produce, while enriching and healing the soil. Included were topics such as natural pesticides; disease and nutrient control; composting and ecological fertilization techniques; companion planting; polycultures; seed conservation and optimizing local resources.

There were also many workshops, small group opportunities and political and social discussions where local community members and allies shared perspectives on the local, regional and international contexts of exploitation, destruction, the poverty and hunger created and maintained by the dominant model of corporate controlled agriculture and food production. We explored ways that a political and social movement can promote agroecology, the establishment and expansion of worker controlled cooperatives, and community gardens that demonstrate a concrete and successful alternative to conventional agriculture across the North American region.

Special attention was given to hearing the voices of migrant farm workers themselves, to learn firsthand about the obstacles and socio-economic challenges faced by them and other farm worker families in the Southeastern United States. They shared harsh stories of peasant



workers and producers and their long term fight for the elimination of pesticides in their work fields and communities. Reina Lemus, from Farm Workers Association in Apopka, shared that “The super exploitation and oppression that we have lived, here in the plantations of Florida, where we work like machines for wages based on the amount we are able to pick, and not any type of hourly fixed wage, has been worse than anything we experienced before in our home countries. Even though we organize to fight for better wages it is a long and a very slow struggle. It does not change the basic working conditions. We realized that we need to find things that give us hope, like these agroecological community gardens. We work together even when we are tired but we can see the fruit of our labor for ourselves and we can better feed our families.”

We also heard from Tirso Moreno, director of the 32-year-old Farmworker Association of Florida, about the myriad strategies that have been developed to defend laborer rights, health and safety, and the socio—economic and political rights of their newer immigrant members: African-Americans, Mexicans, Haitians, Central American. These strategies range from collective bargaining, cooperative organizing, fighting wage theft, advocacy and training for health and safety protections, fighting legal battles to gain redress for workers who have been poisoned by toxic chemicals while working in the fields, among others. Tirso shared that “We are working on building worker-controlled cooperatives of pickers who can interface with cooperatives of small scale producers, who are our friends, for better working conditions , better wages, better production and better prices. We are using the principles and values of collective organizing and cooperative work in our community gardens that we have organized on public land claimed for these gardens in 4 out of the 7 communities where the Farm Workers

Association is organized across the state of Florida. “

We heard inspiring stories from young and new immigrant farmers about the potential for economic opportunities using agroecological techniques, organizing cooperative efforts between new immigrant small scale producers and immigrant farmworkers, working together and developing direct marketing relationships with allied consumers in rural, suburban and urban communities.

Ben Burkett, is a Southern, African-American Farmer leader of the National Family Farm Coalition and Rural Coalition, as well as a representative of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. He told us about their long-term experiments with cooperative structures as a strategy, developed since the 1960’s, as a means to reduce and prevent land loss among African-American farmers across the southern United States. There are now 75 family farmer based cooperatives across the South that are a part of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. “You see, here in the South we struggled in the civil rights movement in the 1960’s, fifty years ago, for our right to vote. But when we won that, we looked around and realized that we had no guaranteed right to our land, to be able to feed ourselves and make a living. So we organized again to fight for our land”, said Ben Burkett.

Several workshops provoked reflections that helped share a deeper understanding of, and reaffirm the importance of, farmers’ and farm workers’ organizations. Working in connection with our sisters and brothers of the global social movement, this type of organizing is the basis for transformative organizing in the United States and North America. Diana Garcia Padilla, from Texas, and an ally from the New Immigrant Farmers Initiative (NIFI) said that agriculture and food production in collective community gardens is now becoming a “hot”

topic of great interest to a wide variety of both urban and rural folk. “I believe that organic, agroecological farming offers us new opportunities for generating some income, it offers opportunities to teach our children how to work and live well. It offers new ways of feeding ourselves and building community. At our community garden we organize a harvest dinner, and open up the garden as shared space, using whatever we have in our harvest - people of all ages, men and women , come and share and they love it. ”

Together, we explored the effects of gender-based discrimination and violence, and identified concrete ways that these undermine the strength of our families, communities, and organizations. Both women and men, elders and youth worked together to identify tangible steps that can be taken now in our efforts to reduce the marginalization of women and youth, and to increase their participation in all aspects of decision-making, as well as, in all types of organizing efforts. This greater inclusion of women and youth can only strengthen and energize our work.





*“The Florida experience is unique in that women form a majority of the FWAFL leadership and are predominant among the rural labor force in Central and South Florida’s produce and ornamental plant production. Many of these women leaders have had the opportunity to share in previous Agroecology Encounters organized by La Via Campesina in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Cuba among others. The U.S. Agroecology Encounter reflected this - with women leadership at each garden, mixed gender workshops on feminism in agroecology, and child-care for families so more women can participate in panels and debates. These are just some ways the Encounter reflected our core values for equity and sustained the environment needed for women’s leadership to flourish and feed our movement”*

*– Angela Adrar, Rural Coalition*

This Encounter has strengthened our commitment to agroecology as a transformative process and as a foundation for building food sovereignty and for healing and protecting Mother Earth. It has also strengthened our confidence in collective work as the basis of the struggle for social, ecological and environmental justice. When working with these concepts and principles, we create changes through which the earth and the people can again be connected in harmony.

We look forward to creating deeper relationships between migrant campesinas in Florida and campesinas in Mexico, and to having our sisters and brothers in Canada continue the good work sown in Florida. Both the Rural Coalition and the Farmworkers Association of Florida will be hosting year-long exchanges with the MST (Landless Peasant Movement) of Brazil, that will enrich the political and technical training we need to continue building and expanding our agroecology process rooted in the Campesinos Gardens. We will also create a united front of resistance to multinational agri-business companies like Tropicana, Dole, PepsiCo, and others that continue to exploit peasants for profit in the United States as well as in Brazil.



# **WE PLEDGE TO CONTINUE BUILDING AGROECOLOGY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY FROM BELOW!**

- We will build organizational structures within our organizations and in La Via Campesina, at the regional level, to support our member organizations in their work to promote agroecology among their families and members.
- We want to build an awareness of the “we” instead the “me”, to change the focus from individualism to collectivism and cooperativism.
- We believe that agroecology is not an option, but rather a necessity! We unite with our ancestors to demand respect for our cultural heritage and to continue the fight for agroecological peasant-based agriculture.
- We are committed to finding ways to increase the participation and leadership of women and girls and to combat discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity and age.

- We will promote regional training programs, exchange visits, production of and sharing of popular educational materials. Also in focus will be identification, documentation, systematization and sharing of success stories in the region and internationally, and the development of programs to promote peasant based agroecology from farmer to farmer and from community to community.
- We will promote furthering basic education, emphasizing popular education methods to socialize and share agroecology. We want to connect popular and ancestral/native languages.
- The continuing commitment of our organizations (rooted in the struggles of the indigenous, Afro-descendant and land grant/acequia communities that are protected under the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo) to halting the historical and continual land theft and to protecting the tenure of people on the land and to assuring that land is in the hands of the people and communities who will care for it, and to feeding our communities and protecting our Mother Earth and her resources for our children's children.
- We will pressure governments at all levels (local, state, regional and national) to adopt public policies that promote agroecological peasant agriculture and food sovereignty. We are committed to getting and holding on to our public land and to develop agroecological methods of production.
- We will build a powerful voice of farm workers, small farmers and peasants to be present, along with other sectors of civil society, at national, regional and international events and advocacy venues. Our message is that we oppose false solutions to climate change and demand the adoption of the Principles of Cochabamba.
- We will always fight against exploitation of farm workers, the theft of wages of rural wage laborers and the widespread use of toxic agro-chemicals that harm farm workers and consumers.
- We insist that Agroecological Peasant Agriculture and Food Sovereignty are the true solutions to the multiple crises that we face--economic, social, environmental, climatic. We recognize that popular movements provide true social change that can resist the power of globalized multinational corporations.

**We can feed ourselves with agroecology and food sovereignty!**

**NO! to the food system of corporations, NO! to GMOs, NO! to land grabbing!**

**Agroecology, for the people, for life and forever!**

**Agroecological peasant agriculture cools the planet!**

**YES! to Agroecology, NO! to Climate Smart Agriculture!!**

# LA VIA CAMPESINA CENTRAL AMERICA

**The Goddesses' Cooperatives in northern Nicaragua: a new model of agroecology and gender equality.**

*“Las Diosas do not just talk, they act, they practice, propose, demonstrate with their leadership, that it is possible to achieve desired changes, another social and productive model in peasant regions based on agroecology.”*



The Between Women Foundation, FEM (La Fundación Entre Mujeres) created the Mixed Co-operatives Center (Central de Cooperativas Multisectoriales) called Las Diosas (or “The Goddesses”), which is comprised of six grassroots co-operatives that use alternative productive systems with an agroecological focus, producing items such as coffee, hibiscus flowers, basic grains and livestock. These women cross the threshold of the household sphere culturally assigned to women, and promote the organization of some 400 women in Las Segovias in Estelí, and Pueblo Nuevo, in northern Nicaragua. For the last 10 years, the women of Las Diosas manage the land, the productive resources and food production. They promote literacy and continuing education for women, acquisition of land for women, training in and defense

of womens' rights, and critical analysis of power relations within the home and the dominant economic system.

Women in FEM and Las Diosas are building a food sovereignty model based on recovering native seeds, and make a strong connection to the transformation of a seed into a plant and human transformation: by promoting new relations in which gender violence is “unlearned,” and ideas imposed by conventional production models, such as agrochemicals, are rejected.

The fact that women are now the proprietors of their own plots of land has changed the community landscape. There is a happier, livelier approach to life, since their hands and bodies are carrying out activities that increase their reserves of healthy, nutritious food, and preserve the flora and fauna, the water sources, the forests, and the native seeds.

Through the creation of seed reserves and sanctuaries, Las Diosas is a powerful reference point for the retrieval and preservation of native seeds. Women speak in their homes, neighborhoods and communities about the importance of ceasing to consume toxic products and, using their own experiences and voices, convince others that it is possible to return to using natural methods. They also promote agrobiodiversity in plantations and garden plots. Several seasons ago, they set up “ancestral knowledge spots,” in order to recover water sources and soil and to increase biomass and diversity. Las Diosas networks with solidarity markets on community, local, national and international levels, and defends their beliefs with the conviction that the



fight for sovereignty, using their bodies, their rights and their seeds, is crucial.

## **Links between Agroecology and Peasant Womens' Rights**

The principles that form the basis of agroecology, in terms of access to resources, food sovereignty and sustainability of womens' livelihoods, contribute significantly to reducing gender inequality and the effects of neoliberal policies and climate change. Organized action, access to alternative technology and consciousness raising about womens' rights, are regarded as factors that affirm the sustainability of production systems and gender equality.

### **Right to land and productive resources**

In order to put agroecology into practice, women must change power relations within their families, as well as have access to and control of productive resources. To achieve this, FEM provided support by buying land for agricultural workers on coffee plantations. A training process began with this group to create a critical awareness in women about the importance of owning their own land, and how that connected them to their own human development, with a focus on personal rights. In addition, it initiated a transition process to obtain organic certification for their coffee. During the transformation process from conventional to organic, it was considered undesirable to only supply the multinationals, just to earn large profits, and local markets were given equal footing. Organization was required in order to make tangible progress and take up their rightful positions in the coffee value chain. That is why, in their socialization



spaces, they organized grass roots cooperatives which they subsequently consolidated, strengthening womens' organizational fabric. Las Diosas proudly produces, processes and sells organic coffee and chia seeds that carry the brand name "Las Diosas" to local, national and international markets.

### **Native Seed Reserves and Sanctuaries: without land there is no security**

"We don't want any banks, we're not welcomed by those institutions", said Las Diosas representatives when using the phrase "Seed Reserves" instead of "seed banks". The first condition that had to be met for their new model of alternative production, was women owning land. The resources required for production and the empowerment of women are considered to

be imperative, in order to achieve food sovereignty, whereby women administer and control native seed reserves.

To achieve food sovereignty, we need to eliminate genetically modified seeds, reduce the use of agrochemicals, use organic seed treatments and establish basic seed agroecological systems. In order to achieve this, seed reserves of sorghum, corn and beans were created. The purposes are:

- Strengthen local seed production and quality seed storage to guarantee their availability for producers during each productive cycle.
- Support the production of basic foods, in order to contribute to families' food and nutritional security, with the retrieval of native varieties of beans and corn.
- Reduce dependence on the external supply of seeds and basic grains for consumption.
- Recover, and select and breed to improve, promising native seed varieties in the communities with the establishment of seed reserves and participative plant breeding processes.
- Increase the income of families in the communities by exchanging and saving seeds and grains for basic consumption.



- Strengthen the organizational, technical and administrative capacities of the members of women seed savers collectives.

## **Biointensive Agriculture**

The women have at their disposal, areas of land (the average size is about 1.4 ha), where biointensive agriculture is implemented with the sowing of corn, beans and different vegetables. This ensures a complete and nutritive diet, sufficient income, biodiversity and food security for their families. Their methods can easily be adopted by other producers, carrying out permanent small scale organic, diversified production that makes use of materials available locally, on the farm. It only requires 4 hours of work daily, which means that the women can do other things for their own benefit, such as engage in training and leisure activities. In 2015, Las Diosas will promote, particularly in the driest communities, biointensive agroecological projects to organized young women, who will be granted a third of a hectard of land and other needed resources.

## **Strengthening of Alternative Agro Chains**

In the pilot area, only seasonal work in tobacco and coffee production is available, but it is characterized by being badly paid and having unhealthy working conditions with only the poorest quality food. Now, women participate in the production, processing and sale of hibiscus flowers, chia seeds and bee products, using agroecological production systems that have been adapted to the conditions in their communities. There is a pilot scheme underway, offering training to add value to these products. In recent years, hibiscus flowers have been used in winemaking, jams, and dehydrated for tea and soft drinks. These alternatives have generated decent, sustainable jobs.



## **Knowledge Spots**

A specific means of putting their acquired learning into practice, given the lack of specialized support for agroecology from public and private institutions, Las Diosas provide support and promote access to technology in each Knowledge Spot co-operative, where women produce organic crop inputs such as bocashi, microorganisms from the mountains, lime-sulphur insecticides, different types of minerals, Bordeaux mixture and other natural products for crops. This goes hand in hand with the validation of new types of coffee which respond very well to these alternative organic

inputs, and are resistant to coffee rust disease. Soil conservation, contour plowing and the establishment of living and dead erosion barriers on their plots are practices that are promoted.

## **Participatory Plant Breeding**

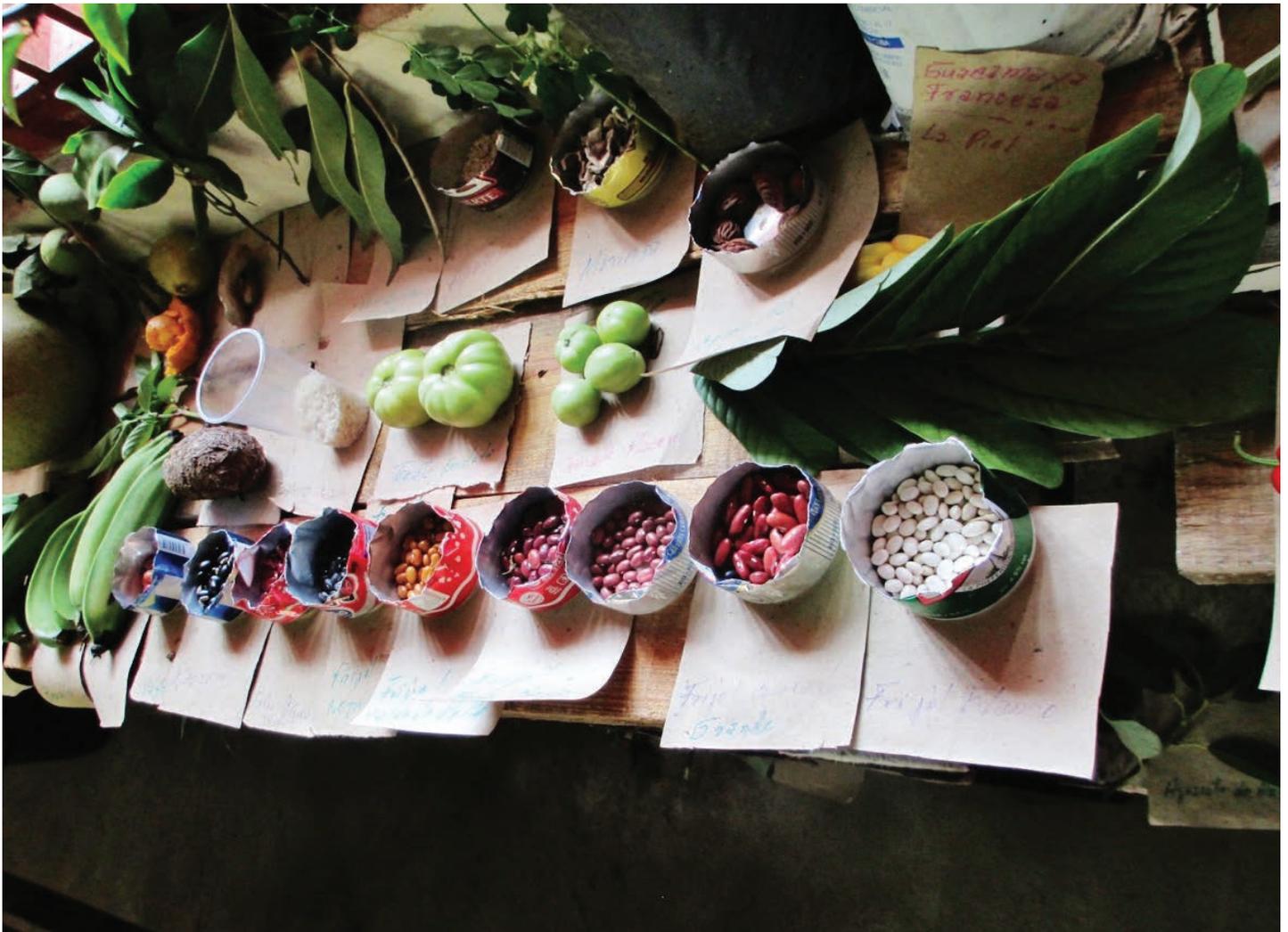
With the aim of identifying corn and bean varieties that are most resistant to climate change, experimental plots of land were set up, whereby a total of 24 women worked to improve seeds in 6 communities. Before embarking on the plant breeding training, each community, together with the women, characterized the cropping cycle time period for each seed variety, and those most resistant to pests and diseases, drought and excess rain. The ten best plants from each harvest were selected from each plot of land, yielding 250 bean plants selected from the entire batch. The harvest from these plants was mixed and they were replanted in the same plots of the same size. This activity was repeated over various reproductive cycles until a stable seed was obtained. To date, 18 varieties of beans with characteristics that can resist the effects of climate change have been identified.

## **Services provided by the Las Diosas Center to strengthen agroecological production systems.**

Many local cooperatives face limitations in terms large scale production of organic fertilizers and coffee seedlings, so the Las Diosas Center produces these, providing its' members with organic consumables. It also provides revolving credit for coffee production for in each productive cycle, and supports the certification and quality control by carrying out periodic tastings, and by selling directly to consumers, guaranteeing the best prices. Their external coffee buyers are also linked to the fight for social justice ("Fair Trade"), and so the relationship is far more than a mere commercial transaction.



The process of full ownership of a new productive model, linked to overcoming the limits faced by women on account of gender, is the main achievement of Las Diosas. Together with their unique local and community experiments, they validate and share with others wishing to ally themselves with the process of transformation, to ease the grievous living conditions that characterize Nicaraguan peasant life.



# LA VIA CAMPESINA CARIBBEAN

The National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), Cuba  
**Producing our own seeds: alternative or necessity?**  
**Seeds: a vital component of agricultural production**

Ecological agriculture is based on the presence and interaction of various plant and animal species in productive systems. These diversified systems contribute significantly to the Food Sovereignty of our communities. Peasant production of healthy, agroecological food at fair prices, for farmers and consumers, is a challenge for all organizations of La Via Campesina International.

Increasing food production is vital for peasants, though the availability of fertile land and water are scarce and contaminated in our regions. We also need good quality seeds, adapted to specific climatic conditions, to meet the needs for adequate food production. Specialists maintain that 90% of crop yield and quality depends on the quality of the seed used. Thus production and conservation of local seeds are essential in the management of agroecological systems.

This allows farmers to:

- Gain greater independence or autonomy in our systems of production.
- Ensure the quality of our seeds, as a result of having direct control over their production, harvest, and storage.
- Reduce costs, given that seeds do not have to be purchased at continually rising market prices.
- Have seed varieties at our disposal that are adapted to the conditions of our land, our preferences for certain varieties, and our food consumption habits.

Seed production is even more important in today's world where large multinational companies promote genetically modified seeds (GMOs), and push stringent intellectual property rights that legally prohibit farmers from reproducing, sharing or storing seeds.

## **Seed production in Cuban agriculture**

The seed situation in Cuba does not as desperate as in some countries. The Cuban state has national varietal improvement programs aimed at promoting agricultural production. These play



an important role in providing improved seeds for main food crops, in addition to recovering and conserving the genetic resources developed by Cuban scientific institutions.

Our formal seed system was designed with the aim of introducing, selecting, multiplying and evaluating genetic materials through networks of experimental stations, universities and research institutes. However, from the beginning of the 1990s on, in a new and more challenging economic and environmental context, this “top-down” system of technological generation and transfer began to cause problems.

The demand for new seed varieties put a strain on supply, which was felt throughout large regions of the country. The public sector companies reduced their seed output, and informal seed systems emerged, which maintained and even increased their seed production in the midst of economic crisis.

### **Seeds and the ANAP “Peasant to Peasant” Agroecology Movement**

During the period of shortfall in formal seed system production, traditional peasant agriculture has acquired a newly special significance. It began with identifying peasants who produced and conserved seeds from several varieties, using traditional methods, thus guaranteeing the diversity of their crops. This phase coincided with the launching of a campaign promoting agroecology inside the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP). Several years later, it became the “Peasant to Peasant” Agroecology Movement, which was based on a permanent process of communication, exchange and teaching between peasants, with technical collaboration, specialists and researchers at their disposal.

This movement recovers and promotes diverse agroecological practices, which the members of the Cuban peasant organization carry out using traditional methods, such as native seed production and conservation. This work is made possible by the actions of our peasant promoters and facilitators. The following are 2 examples:

**Promoter: Miguel Acosta Varela, Finca Villegas**

**“Primero de Mayo” Credit and Services Agricultural Co-operative (CSA), Artemisa, Cuba**

A plot measuring 1.5 hectares was granted to Miguel to make use of, under the Agrarian Reform Law 259, which came into force in 2008, in response to the need to increase food production. The farm is now 3.5 hectares, as a consequence of this same policy of land grants. The farm produces fruit, beans, corn, sunflowers, tomatoes, lettuce, radishes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes and cassava. Its chickens, ducks and pigs are fed on mulberry, moringa and suagr cane, which are grown on the farm for this purpose.

**What motivated you to produce native seeds?**

I started producing seeds because of the poor quality and the shortage of certain seeds in the market. I had experience working in a state seed company, and I knew a bit about the production process, and the conservation of seeds.

**How important do you think this production is on the farm?**

It's very important to know what I'm producing, and the conditions in which it was produced, its varietal purity, the quality and the germination rate of my seeds.

**Which species do you produce?**

I produce seeds of beans, pumpkins, corn, okra, tomatoes, cucumbers and cachucha chile. As well as saving seed, as in the case of tomatoes, I also produce seedlings which I sell to other farmers. This helps make the farm more profitable.

**How do you produce and preserve the seeds?**

In the production area, I select the best plants before harvest. I look for healthy plants and well formed fruit. I preserve the seeds of those plants in recycled plastic or glass jars and I keep them in the fridge. The corn and the bean seeds, which are larger quantities, are kept in 20 liter vats. The most important detail is to fill the containers and to seal them airtight, to guarantee there is no oxygen, so that insects won't attack them.

**Agronomist Jesús Pérez Pérez, facilitator of CSC “Primero de Mayo” Coop, works in the collective area of the co-operative.**

Jesus produces papaya, chile and pepper seeds on a small scale, as well as training peasant promoters of the co-operative in various fields. He has a simple shed where he produces seedlings for the co-operative’s members. He has been trained in workshops run by researchers from the “Liliana Dimitrova” Horticultural Research Institute.

He says that producing his own seeds guarantees good germination, varietal purity and also reduces external dependence on input suppliers, which is crucial for the economic and ecological sustainability of agricultural systems.

**Participative Plant Breeding: a new means of improving seeds.**

This new methodology for variety improvement in plants is based on a close collaboration between researchers and farmers. It was promoted by the National Institute of Agricultural Science (INCA), with the following results:

- Setting up of peasant experimentation groups, in which the farmers become experimenters and multipliers of genetic diversity.
- Implementation of Local Agrobiodiversity Fairs, in order to increase the diversity of varieties in peasant communities, and support the development of local seed systems, contributing to retrieving and strengthening local seeds, customs and traditions.
- Development of experimental plots of land in peasant farms, to create spaces for sharing and exchanging seeds, opinions, experiences and knowledge.
- Active participation of farmers in the generation, validation and multiplication of seeds and solutions that may contribute to resolving specific problems in the communities.

In 2000, the Project for Local Agricultural Innovation (PIAL) began, for the participative improvement of crops and seeds, initially involving 15 farmers and 6 technicians, in 2 communities and 2 agricultural co-operatives. PIAL has grown through different stages and is currently present in 10 provinces, 45 municipalities and 186 cooperatives, and has achieved the following benefits, among others:

- Dissemination of more than 20 peasant varieties of beans, corn, chick peas and rice.
- Three new varieties of corn using participative plant breeding.
- Creation of 3 recipes for making animal feed with local resources.
- Creation of 22 local seed banks for the varietal diversification of crops (beans, corn, soya, sunflowers, cowpeas, tomatoes, pumpkin, yam, yucca, bananas, rice)

- Introduction of non-traditional crops (yam, sesame seed, chick peas, crotalaria, stevia).
- Conservation of vegetables and fruit for consumption and sale by over 80 families.
- Dissemination of traditional ecological methods for seed conservation.

These results are some examples of the close links between science and the Cuban peasantry, expressed in different projects and work agreements between the National Association of Small Farmers, and our Scientific Centers, in which the “Peasant to Peasant” Agroecology Movement plays a key role. These working agreements include joint actions for increased food production with principles of sustainability. Their achievements give support to the idea that attention and support should be concentrated on peasant organizations.



# LA VIA CAMPESINA SOUTH AMERICA

**A Peasant Program for Supplying  
Healthy Food for People**

## History

In recent years in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, the Small Farmers Movement (MPA) of Brazil, and other peasant movements that are members of La Vía Campesina Brazil (MST, MAB, MMC) had been having a tough time breaking through the political agenda. They had been fighting an increasingly losing battle, characterized by the following factors:

- The erosion of public policy in support of family farming. The National Program for Strengthening Family Farming (PRONAF) had lost influence, and had been taken over by the logic of finance capital in agriculture, pushing the introduction of technological packages based on agrochemicals for peasant farming.
- The number of family and peasant farms had dropped significantly. The rise in power of agribusiness prevented the settlement of landless families, and blocked the debate on agrarian reform as a development policy.
- The construction of dams, driven by mega-development projects, displaced thousands of families in different regions of the state.
- People lived under the effects of brutal repression of the last government, which carried out attacks to dismantle social movements.



## Food sovereignty unites

In order to fight back they created a resistance framework, starting with a political restructuring to be led by La Vía Campesina, concentrating on specific elements which would transform the problems faced by ordinary people into social movements. To confront agribusiness, peasant movements concentrated on building a countryside-city alliance, with the aim of forming a powerful social force capable of returning the

focus of the political agenda to the agricultural and peasant debate.

Following a series of meetings with the Metalworkers' Federation, the Unemployed Workers' Movement and the Popular Youth Rise-up movement, a new countryside-city alliance took up

the struggle for Food Sovereignty as their own, arguing that the need for agrarian reform and the construction of a new generation of public policies must promote peasant agriculture and agroecology.

This new social movement alliance worked on and put forth a Peasant Program for a Peoples Food Supply, with the following elements:

1. To build a program affirming that the basis of development in the countryside is peasant agriculture, creating a counter hegemonic space for agroecological food production for all of society.
2. To unite, through healthy food production, the combined forces of the countryside and the city, which share a common interest in social change for the people of Rio Grande do Sul and of Brazil.
3. To build a program which creates the material conditions for supporting peasants in the countryside, particularly the rural youth, by furthering new sustainable productive processes, increasing incomes, raising consciousness and promoting new gender relations, thereby improving quality of life.
4. To strengthen womens' roles as productive workers, based on their historic relationship with the land, food production and preparation, as well as, by implication, the preservation and reproduction of peasant culture.
5. To build a socially controlled program to assure quality food for the local population, and to create new mechanisms of distribution and consumption of food, focusing on the use value of goods.

## Strategy and Function

**- In large cities and factories:** Workers demand better food in the factory canteens. The food, which is purchased in bulk, is tasteless and of extremely bad quality. The workers are located in large urban centers. The companies organize the work in large regional clusters, which should be targeted for the new peasant to people food supply program.

Activists of peasant movements were sent to debate with Metalworkers' Union representatives and to talk with the workers at the factory gates. The peasant program for supplying food is being consolidated through alternative distribution, be it via institutional policies guaranteeing food purchases from peasant coops, or via direct sales to urban workers. Part of the plan is to create direct sales points of food for workers.

**- Stimulating the co-operative system:** In each region, peasant co-operatives were selected to operate the program. The projects were presented to the Ministry of Rural Development, approved (under pressure from the movements), and contracts were signed. These assured production credits and purchasing at fair prices, and are not subject to the conventional banking rules that usually make it hard on farmers.

**- Mass agroecological transition:** A program was developed to help the co-ops transition to

agroecological production, including:

**a. Investment in Peasant Production Units:** Create infrastructure that helps peasants produce food.

- **Soil bio-mineralization:** Restore the soil's fertility by using rock dust, organic fertilizers, green manures and biofertilizers.



- **Food Sovereignty focus:** Diversification of crops, and new vegetable production areas, fruit orchards, seed saving, and raising small livestock.

- **Introduction of Voisin Rational Grazing (VRG):** This is a rotational pasture system based on agroecological principles, to sustainably use small pastures to boost dairy and meat production.

- **Refrigerators:** Guarantee bulk milk storage in 500 liter

refrigerators.

- **Fruticulture:** Fruit tree plantations on the coops, with up to a hectare of land per family.

- **Seedlings:** Set up nurseries of forest, fruit tree and vegetable seedlings.

- **Agricultural equipment:** Provide appropriate small machinery for agricultural activity to increase coop member productivity in the field.

- **Irrigation:** Acquire tools/equipment and construct irrigation canals so that families can irrigate up to 3 hectares of land.

**b. Food Processing and small-scale agro-industrialization of production:** As a means of stimulating cooperation, small scale agro-industrial cooperatives process and can foods such as fruit juice, canned vegetables, meat, fish, cheese, delicatessen items, dairy products, etc.

**c. Production of bio-agricultural inputs:** Produce alternative inputs such as organic fertilizers, bio-fertilizers, and biocontrol agents for pests and diseases.

**d. Logistics and distribution:** Acquire vehicles to transport food to and from collection and distribution points.

### **The future of the Peasant Program for a Peoples' Food Supply:**

In its plenary session, La Vía Campesina Brazil fought to nationalize the Peasant Program. The political platform placed Food Sovereignty at the top of its agenda for the next period. The experience of Rio Grande do Sul with its Peasant Program demonstrates the importance of forming new alliances that include organizations other than peasant movements. The inclusion of workers, particularly metal and oil industry workers on a national level, is the minimum condition for building the political forces needed to build the program.

Another consideration of the program is to examine the role of the State in the construction of a new agricultural model based on agroecological production. The struggle for Food Sovereignty becomes the fight to recover the public functions of the State, and to construct a new institutional order in which peasants and the working classes in general, play a leading role.

# LA VIA CAMPESINA SOUTH AMERICA

**ORGANIZED PEASANTS FEED BOGOTÁ WITH HIGH QUALITY,  
HEALTHY FOOD, AT A FAIR PRICE**

The mercados campesinos (peasant markets) in Bogotá, Colombia, come from an alternative, fair trade initiative of peasant organizations and their urban allies, and celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2014. During that time they have won their enshrinement in public policies, and gone a long way toward widespread recognition of the peasant economy as a key piece of building food sovereignty and autonomy in Bogotá and the central region of Colombia.

## **Origin of the Peasant Markets**

In 2003, as part of the National Agrarian Congress, several peasant, indigenous peoples' and afro-Colombian organizations held a meeting in Bogotá for a broad discussion on the main needs of the peasant sector in the country. Out of this they launched the "Agrarian Mandate," a document that demanded that the state develop policies to meet fundamental rights of



peasants in the countryside. The right to life (in the sense of not being at risk of assassination by paramilitaries), full democratic rights, and food sovereignty were just the beginning of the list. The right to land, the right to enjoy a safe and protected environment, to political recognition of the peasant class, to recognition of peasant, indigenous and afro-descendent women and their rights, are all necessary for build a truly pluricultural Columbia. Other demands were the end of forced displacement, a political solution to the armed social conflict, and the reconstruction of the agricultural, livestock and food economies, and fair prices for small farmers in recognition of the peasant as the fundamental producer of food.



Subsequently, a group of peasant organizations, including FENSUAGRO – a grassroots member organization of La Vía Campesina – suggested re-creating long-gone market spaces, that had traditionally been meeting points for communities in previous eras; where people used to gather to sell and trade their products directly with the consumer. Thus, in November 2004, a group of some 60 peasant leaders decided to open a farmers’ market in the central Bolívar Plaza of the capital city, despite resistance by the city government. This emblematic venue had ceased to be a meeting point for peasants 120 years ago, when it was converted into a historic monument for the national political class.

Despite the skeptical reaction to this very political action, the peasants occupied the plaza for one day, and sold out their entire stock of goods before midday. This forced a dialogue between the social movements and the city administration of Bogotá, on the importance of peasants in supplying healthy and high quality food to the city.

The Peasant and Communal Dialogue Committee (Comité de Interlocución Campesino y Comunal, or “CICC”) was formed, as a space for dialogue between peasant community leaders, which in turn allowed for advocacy actions to pressure for regularizing peasant markets.



### **Advocacy actions carried out by peasant organizations**

As the result of pressure by peasants and their urban allies, the city of Bogotá caved in and approved a food supply policy called the “Master Plan for Food Supply and Security” (Decree 315, 2006), in which peasant markets were recognized as an instrument to benefit the peasant and urban economies, and as a space for direct sale of peasant produced goods.

The persistence of the organizations comprising the “CICC” succeeded in influencing the District Council of Bogotá so that, in 2010, Agreement 455 was approved, promoting rural-urban integration through itinerant peasant, indigenous, and afro-Colombian markets. The city administration even agreed to provide financial support for the markets, allowing the direct sales by peasants of their products. This policy was developed with the support of the District Secretary for Economic Development.

The organized political pressure by the peasant movement not only got the capital city government to come around, but also achieved agreements with 43 municipal governments in regions where peasants grow crops for Bogotá. These local governments in many cases have agreed to allocate part of their municipal budgets for transportation of crops to the capital for

sale, and for some equipment needed for peasant production in their municipality.

## **Peasant Markets and Agroecology**

Through the clever design by the movement of the peasant markets, experiments promoting products grown with agroecological techniques have been successfully carried out in peasant communities. Today such agricultural production practices are implemented in more than 20 rural areas, in addition to the production of agroecological inputs for crop production, like liquid and solid organic fertilizers, biological insecticides and fungicides, among many others.

Agroecological products are sold in special stalls in the now 8 peasant markets in the capital, where they've met wide acceptance by consumers seeking healthy alternatives and clean, environmentally friendly food. Many peasants have decided to convert to agroecological production after observing the positive response of consumers to these stalls. The most widely promoted items in these stalls are heirloom products like barberry, quinoa, bore, yacon, amaranth, traditional potatoes and native seeds from each region. Concepts like Food Autonomy and Sovereignty are promoted in educational activities in the markets. The exchange of knowledge is a fundamental part of perfecting this revival of historic memory of ancestral peasant production.

## **Peasant Markets are Inclusive**

To take part in the peasant markets requires meeting certain minimum conditions which guarantee the continuity and permanence of the process.

### **1. For Peasants:**

- To be a small or medium scale agricultural producer. This criteria for participation is fundamental since this process does not include middle men or shopkeepers.
- To be a member of a Municipal Peasant Committee (Comité Municipal Campesino or CCM), of a local town and, if no committee exists, to take the leadership initiative to create one with the support of the organizations.
- To be willing to defend economic, political, cultural and environmental rights in the local territory.

### **2. For consumers:**

- To interact with producers and recognize the valuable role they play in supplying food.
- To support the peasant economy by purchasing the products sold by the peasants at a fair price.
- To spread the word about the benefits of peasant markets in local communities.

### **3. For Institutions:**

- To generate and carry out public policies that strengthen the peasant economy.
- To guarantee transportation of peasants and their products to the markets
- To actively support the process by providing technical assistance and training that promote agroecology in the region.



## Achievements

In the ten years of existence, the peasant markets have had significant achievements.

The most significant are as follows:

- Greater participation of women and young people in the marketing process of peasant production, by which the family economy is strengthened.
- Influence in four departments of the central region of Colombia: Tolima, Meta, Cundinamarca and Boyacá, where 75 towns participate actively.
- Peasant action via the Municipal Peasant Committees to demonstrate their management skills to the municipal governments and, in particular, to their communities.
- Regulation of prices in the neighborhoods of Bogotá where peasant markets are held.
- Elimination of some of the links in the intermediary chain, making it possible for peasants to sell their products directly.
- Establishment of “fair prices” as a market balancing element, whereby the peasant earns much more than s/he would through intermediary, and the consumer benefits by acquiring a healthy, excellent quality product, at a good price.

Latin America and the world need to open new doors that make it possible to counteract the neoliberal policies that currently suppress local economies. Generating alternatives that guarantee fair market prices, and access to high quality, healthy food for urban people, must be the aim of peasant organizations. The peasant markets in Bogotá are showing the way.



# DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR AGROECOLOGY, MALI 2015

Nyéléni, Mali - 27 February 2015) We are delegates representing diverse organizations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples and communities (together with hunters and gatherers), family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people. Together, the diverse constituencies our organizations represent produce some 70% of the food consumed by humanity. They are the primary global investors in agriculture, as well as the primary providers of jobs and livelihoods in the world.

We gathered here at the Nyéléni Center in Sélingué, Mali from 24 to 27 of February, 2015, to come to a common understanding of agroecology as a key element in the construction of Food Sovereignty, and to develop joint strategies to promote Agroecology and defend it from co-optation. We are grateful to the people of Mali who have welcomed us in this beautiful land. They have taught us through their example, that the dialogue of our various forms of knowledge is based on respectful listening and on the collective construction of shared decisions. We stand in solidarity with our Malian sisters and brothers who struggle – sometimes sacrificing their lives – to defend their territories from the latest wave of land grabbing that affects so many of our countries. Agroecology means that we stand together in the circle of life, and this implies that we must also stand together in the circle of struggle against land grabbing and the criminalization of our movements.

## **BUILDING ON THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

Our peoples, constituencies, organizations and communities have already come very far in defining Food Sovereignty as a banner of joint struggle for justice, and as the larger framework for Agroecology. Our ancestral production systems have been developed over millennia, and during the past 30 to 40 years this has come to be called agroecology. Our agroecology includes successful practices and production, involves farmer-to-farmer and territorial processes, training schools, and we have developed sophisticated theoretical, technical and political constructions.

In 2007 many of us gathered here at Nyéléni, at the Forum for Food Sovereignty, to strengthen our alliances and to expand and deepen our understanding of Food Sovereignty, through a collective construction between our diverse constituencies. Similarly, we gather here at the Agroecology Forum 2015 to enrich Agroecology through dialogue between diverse food producing peoples, as well as with consumers, urban communities, women, youth, and others. Today our movements, organized globally and regionally in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), have taken a new and historic step.

Our diverse forms of smallholder food production based on agroecology generate local knowledge, promote social justice, nurture identity and culture, and strengthen the economic viability of rural areas. Smallholders defend our dignity when we choose to produce in an

agroecological way.

## **OVERCOMING MULTIPLE CRISES**

Agroecology is the answer to how to transform and repair our material reality in a food system and rural world that has been devastated by industrial food production and its so-called Green and Blue Revolutions. We see agroecology as a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life.

The corporate model over-produces food that poisons us, destroys soil fertility, is responsible for the deforestation of rural areas, the contamination of water and the acidification of oceans and killing of fisheries. Essential natural resources have been commodified, and rising production costs are driving us off the land. Farmers' seeds are being stolen and sold back to us at exorbitant prices, bred as varieties that depend on costly, contaminating agrochemicals. The industrial food system is a key driver of the multiple crises of climate, food, environmental, public health and others. Free trade and corporate investment agreements, investor-state dispute settlement agreements, and false solutions such as carbon markets, and the growing financialization of land and food, etc., all further aggravate these crises. Agroecology within a food sovereignty framework offers us a collective path forward from these crises.

## **AGROECOLOGY AT A CROSSROADS**

The industrial food system is beginning to exhaust its productive and profit potential because of its internal contradictions – such as soil degradation, herbicide-tolerant weeds, depleted fisheries, pest- and disease-ravaged monocultural plantations – and its increasingly obvious negative consequences of greenhouse gas emissions, and the health crisis of malnutrition, obesity, diabetes, colon disease and cancer caused by diets heavy in industrial and junk food.

Popular pressure has caused many multilateral institutions, governments, universities and research centers, some NGOs, corporations and others, to finally recognize “agroecology”. However, they have tried to redefine it as a narrow set of technologies, to offer some tools that appear to ease the sustainability crisis of industrial food production, while the existing structures of power remain unchallenged. This co-optation of agroecology to fine-tune the industrial food system, while paying lip service to the environmental discourse, has various names, including “climate smart agriculture”, “sustainable-” or “ecological-intensification”, industrial monoculture production of “organic” food, etc. For us, these are not agroecology: we reject them, and we will fight to expose and block this insidious appropriation of agroecology.

The real solutions to the crises of the climate, malnutrition, etc., will not come from conforming to the industrial model. We must transform it and build our own local food systems that create new rural-urban links, based on truly agroecological food production by peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, urban farmers, etc. We cannot allow agroecology to be a tool of the industrial food production model: we see it as the essential alternative to that model, and as the means of transforming how we produce and consume food into something better for humanity and our Mother Earth.

## **OUR COMMON PILLARS AND PRINCIPLES OF AGROECOLOGY**

Agroecology is a way of life and the language of Nature, that we learn as her children. It is not a mere set of technologies or production practices. It cannot be implemented the same way in all territories. Rather it is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of our territories, can and are practiced in many different ways, with each sector contributing their own colors of their local reality and culture, while always respecting Mother Earth and our common, shared values.

The production practices of agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces our use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from industry. There is no use of agrottoxics, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies in agroecology.

Territories are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. Peoples and communities have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships to their lands. They are entitled to secure, develop, control, and reconstruct their customary social structures and to administer their lands and territories, including fishing grounds, both politically and socially. This implies the full recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, and constitutes the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.

Collective rights and access to the commons are a fundamental pillar of agroecology. We share access to territories that are the home to many different peer groups, and we have sophisticated customary systems for regulating access and avoiding conflicts that we want to preserve and to strengthen.

The diverse knowledge and ways of knowing of our peoples are fundamental to agroecology. We develop our ways of knowing through dialogue among them (diálogo de saberes). Our learning processes are horizontal and peer-to-peer, based on popular education. They take place in our own training centers and territories (farmers teach farmers, fishers teach fishers, etc.), and are also intergenerational, with exchange of knowledge between youth and elders. Agroecology is developed through our own innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding.

The core of our cosmovisions is the necessary equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. We recognize that as humans we are but a part of nature and the cosmos. We share a spiritual connection with our lands and with the web of life. We love our lands and our peoples, and without that, we cannot defend our agroecology, fight for our rights, or feed the world. We reject the commodification of all forms of life.

Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what make it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our

food system. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.

The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It means we minimize the use of purchased inputs that come from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers, and is based on the solidarity of shared risks and benefits.

Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.

Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical for moving forward. Migration and globalization mean that women's work is increasing, yet women have far less access to resources than men. All too often, their work is neither recognized nor valued. For agroecology to achieve its full potential, there must be equal distribution of power, tasks, decision-making and remuneration.

Youth, together with women, provide one of the two principle social bases for the evolution of agroecology. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many of our societies. Youth bear the responsibility to carry forward the collective knowledge learned from their parents, elders and ancestors into the future. They are the stewards of agroecology for future generations. Agroecology must create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership.

# STRATEGIES

## I. Promote agroecological production through policies that...

1. Are territorial and holistic in their approach to social, economic and natural resources issues.
2. Secure access to land and resources in order to encourage long term investment by small-scale food producers.
3. Ensure an inclusive and accountable approach to the stewardship of resources, food production, public procurement policies, urban and rural infrastructure, and urban planning.
4. Promote decentralized and truly democratized planning processes in conjunction with relevant local governments and authorities.
5. Promote appropriate health and sanitation regulations that do not discriminate against small-scale food producers and processors who practice agroecology.
6. Promote policy to integrate the health and nutrition aspects of agroecology and of traditional medicines.
7. Ensure pastoralists' access to pastures, migration routes and sources of water as well as mobile services such as health, education and veterinary services that are based on and compatible with traditional practice.
8. Ensure customary rights to the commons. Ensure seed policies that guarantee the collective rights of peasants' and indigenous peoples' to use, exchange, breed, select and sell their own seeds.
9. Attract and support young people to join agroecological food production through strengthening access to land and natural resources, ensuring fair income, knowledge exchange and transmission.
10. Support urban and peri-urban agroecological production.
11. Protect the rights of communities that practice wild capture, hunting and gathering in their traditional areas – and encourage the ecological and cultural restoration of territories to their former abundance.
12. Implement policies that ensure the rights of fishing communities.

13. Implement the Tenure Guidelines of the Committee on World Food Security and the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines of the FAO.

14. Develop and implement policies and programs that guarantee the right to a dignified life for rural workers, including true agrarian reform, and agroecology training.

## **II. Knowledge sharing**

1. Horizontal exchanges (peasant-to-peasant, fisher-to-fisher, pastoralist-to-pastoralist, consumer-and-producer, etc.) and intergenerational exchanges between generations and across different traditions, including new ideas. Women and youth must be prioritised.

2. Peoples' control of the research agenda, objectives and methodology.

3. Systemize experience to learn from and build on historical memory.

## **III. Recognition of the central role of women**

1. Fight for equal women's rights in every sphere of agroecology, including workers' and labour rights, access to the Commons, direct access to markets, and control of income.

2. Programs and projects must fully include women at all stages, from the earliest formulation through planning and application, with decision-making roles.

## **IV. Build local economies**

1. Promote local markets for local products.

2. Support the development of alternative financial infrastructure, institutions and mechanisms to support both producers and consumers.

3. Reshape food markets through new relationships of solidarity between producers and consumers.

4. Develop links with the experience of solidarity economy and participatory guarantee systems, when appropriate.

## **V. Further develop and disseminate our vision of agroecology**

1. Develop a communications plan for our vision of agroecology
2. Promote the health care and nutritional aspects of agroecology
3. Promote the territorial approach of agroecology
4. Promote practices that allows youth to carry forward the permanent regeneration of our agroecological vision
5. Promote agroecology as a key tool to reduce food waste and loss across the food system

## **VI. Build alliances**

1. Consolidate and strengthen existing alliances such as with the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)
2. Expand our alliance to other social movements and public research organizations and institutions.

## **VII. Protect biodiversity and genetic resources**

1. Protect, respect and ensure the stewardship of biodiversity
2. Take back control of seeds and reproductive material and implement producers' rights to use, sell and exchange their own seeds and animal breeds
3. Ensure that fishing communities play the most central role in controlling marine and inland waterways

## **VIII. Cool the planet and adapt to climate change**

1. Ensure international institutions and governments recognize agroecology as defined in this document as a primary solution for tackling and adapting to climate change, and not “climate smart agriculture” or other false versions of agroecology
2. Identify, document and share good experiences of local initiatives on agroecology that address climate change.

## **IX. Denounce and fight corporate and institutional capture of agroecology**

1. Fight corporate and institutional attempts to grab agroecology as a means to promote GMOs and other false solutions and dangerous new technologies.
2. Expose the corporate vested interests behind technical fixes such as climate-smart agriculture, sustainable intensification and “fine-tuning” of industrial aquaculture.
3. Fight the commodification and financialization of the ecological benefits of agroecology.

We have built agroecology through many initiatives and struggles. We have the legitimacy to lead it into the future. Policy makers cannot move forward on agroecology without us. They must respect and support our agroecological processes rather than continuing to support the forces that destroy us. We call on our fellow peoples to join us in the collective task of collectively constructing agroecology as part of our popular struggles to build a better world, a world based on mutual respect, social justice, equity, solidarity and harmony with our Mother Earth.

The International Forum on Agroecology was organized at the Nyeleni Center in Mali, from 24 to 27 February 2015 by the following organisations: Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP) as chair; La Via Campesina (LVC), More and Better (MaB), Movimiento Agroecológico de América Latina y el Caribe (MAELA) , Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (ROPPA) , World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP).

# LA VIA CAMPESINA

La Via Campesina is the international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. It strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature.

La Via Campesina comprises about 164 local and national organizations in 73 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether, it represents about 200 million farmers.

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