Re-thinking agrarian reform, land and territory in La Via Campesina

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Published online: 05 Sep 2013.
GRASSROOTS VOICES

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Introduction

Transformations in the model of economic development in Brazil have forced changes in the nature of the struggle for land and agrarian reform. There is no longer room to call for a classic bourgeois agrarian reform, supported by an industrial bourgeoisie or by nationalist forces. Nevertheless...agrarian reform is ever more urgent and necessary. Today the struggle for agrarian reform has become a class struggle against the model of agriculture dominated by Capital. This means that the peasants’ struggle for land rights and a new model of agriculture face a new correlation of forces – with powers of coercion and consensus building that are stronger than those of traditional landowners in the past – and new social actors arrayed against them: capitalized landowners, financial capital, and transnational corporations.

Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) of Brazil

Since the founding of La Via Campesina and the launching of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, we have had many significant achievements, and at the same time the world has undergone major changes... But the changes are not just in the world around us. We also have grown in our struggle, thanks to the exchange among cultures, to our processes, our victories and our setbacks, and to the diversity of our peoples. That is why over the past few days we have been meeting to reflect upon and update our visions and concepts in the struggle for agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory. We have begun to outline some key elements of a new vision of agrarian reform and the sovereignty of peoples over their territories.

Bukit Tinggi Declaration on Agrarian Reform in the 21st Century, La Via Campesina and the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform

This special Grassroots Voices (GV) section includes a variety of contributions that illustrate major changes over the last 20 years in the thinking of rural social movements concerning agrarian reform, land and territory, particularly in the case of La Via Campesina (LVC). It is motivated and informed by a workshop held by LVC in Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra, Indonesia, from 10–13 July 2012, on Agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory in the 21st century: the challenge and future.

The world is changing, and so the agrarian struggles of rural social movements and their visions of agrarian reform, land and territory change as well. Their evolution in thinking has come about dialectically, both as a result of transformations in the external world, and based on the internal learning and exchange of experiences that take place inside the movements as they interact with each other and with the world. While issues of agrarian reform, land and territory have been with us for much longer (Sobhan 1993, Rosset et al. 2006, Lipton 2009), this GV focuses on the past two decades of struggle, since the founding of LVC as a...
transnational social movement (Borras 2004, Desmarais 2007, Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010).

LVC celebrated 20 years of agrarian struggle in 70 countries in June of 2013, at its VI International Conference, held in Jakarta, Indonesia. In preparation for the conference, LVC held international internal thematic seminars during 2012 that served as spaces for collective learning and reflection, analysis of current reality around the world, and updating of visions, positions and plans of action for its central issues of struggle (i.e. agrarian reform, public policy for food sovereignty, agroecology, women and gender, youth, etc.). The Bukit Tinggi event was part of this series, and was organized by LVC’s Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR). In the discussions that took place, it was abundantly clear that social movement visions of agrarian reform today are very different from what they were in the early years of LVC.

This edition of GV includes an essay by Shalmali Guttal with highlights from Bukit Tinggi and earlier landmark events in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006) and Nyéléni, Mali (2011). An annex provides access links to the final declarations of each one. The ‘Land, territory and dignity’ Forum held in 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, marked a key turning point in the broadening of LVC’s vision of agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory, while the event in Mali targeted land grabbing. Also included is an analysis of the evolving conditions and models of struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil, by the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), that clearly explains how the recent wave of (re)capitalization of agribusiness by financial capital has forced the Movement to adapt its vision of agrarian reform and its tactics of struggle.

The testimony of Indra Lubis, leader of a peasant organization in Indonesia and member of the International Operative Secretariat (IOS) of LVC, and an essay by Faustino Torrez, a Nicaraguan peasant leader, give us an internal view from key members of the GCAR team, on the hows and whys of the changing vision of agrarian reform. The testimony of Elizabeth Mpofu, a peasant leader from Zimbabwe and emerging international leader of LVC, gives us an inside look at perhaps the most important state-implemented land reform carried out in recent decades anywhere in the world. She tells us how the recovery of indigenous cosmovision, the accompaniment by spiritual healers and traditional authorities, the conviction of former liberation fighters (called ‘war veterans’), and women’s leadership in the struggle, were key elements in a movement within the larger land occupation movement that achieved agrarian reform from the State. This movement within a movement has a mission of endogenous community development based on agroecological farming, and is based in land reform settlements across Zimbabwe. The linkages in this case between land occupations from below, land reform by the State, and agroecology are emblematic of a number of the issues touched upon in this GV. Finally we include a short analysis of land grabbing in Europe, and the testimony of Morgan Ody, a young farmer active in land struggles and occupations in France.

In order to set the scene for extracting some specific conclusions from these contributions as well from my long-term role as team member of the GCAR and participant-observer, it is necessary to briefly review some movement history.

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3See Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2010) for an explanation of the history, structures and internal processes of La Via Campesina. See also http://www.viacampesina.org.
4See Via Campesina (2013b).
5See also Via Campesina (2011).
The evolution of La Via Campesina since 1992

The idea of LVC emerged at a meeting of farmer leaders from Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, the USA and Canada, held in Managua, Nicaragua, in April of 1992. At that meeting, peasant and family farm leaders identified neoliberal policies being imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as conditionality for external debt negotiations, and the trade liberalization taking place through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations as forces ‘bringing farmers to the brink of extinction’, extinction that would be inevitable unless farmers could build unity to fight back across international borders (Managua Declaration 1992).

A year later, in Mons, Belgium, peasant leaders from various continents formally founded LVC. They pointed to the productivist model of agriculture and the criminalization of social protest as additional aggravating practices (Mons Declaration 1993). This was a time period in the nations of the South marked by the structural adjustment policies that weakened state presence in the countryside, depriving peasants of support prices, technical assistance, subsidized credit and inputs and other accoutrements of the developmentalist state (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010).

While the GATT soon became the World Trade Organization (WTO), cheap imported food flooded the markets of many countries, undercutting the ability of local peasant communities to make a living. These were imports whose very cheapness was based on ever lower prices paid to farmers in large agroexport countries, creating the objective basis for joint struggle between peasants in the South and family farmers in the North (Rosset 2006a).

The reformist and revolutionary agrarian reforms of previous decades were being reversed through counter reforms led by the World Bank and its land administration and titling programs. These were designed to create functioning land markets to attract investment to rural areas, inevitably leading to the reconcentration of land. Though the Bank dressed up this privatization of communal and public lands as ‘market assisted land reform’, in fact the net effects ran contrary to the interests of peasants (Borras 2006, Rosset et al. 2006).

By 1999, LVC was ready to virtually declare war on the WTO in Seattle (Rosset 2006a), and to simultaneously target World Bank land policies. That year LVC created the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR), with the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN International) International as a non-governmental organization (NGO) partner, in support of struggles for land and agrarian reform around the world (Via Campesina and FIAN 1999, Borras 2008). Later a third partner, the Land Research Action Network (LRAN), would be added to the Campaign to provide research and analysis support. GCAR was created to support existing struggles for agrarian reform, to promote new initiatives of agrarian reform, to carry out international lobby and solidarity work, and to engage in dialog [i.e. with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)] and/or protest (i.e. against the World Bank) directed at international institutions concerned with land issues. A further key element was (and is) an emergency network to respond to situations of actual or imminent violations of the human rights of peasants struggling for land.

One of the earliest acts of the GCAR was to convene the First International Meeting of Landless Peasants in July of 2000 in San Pedro Sula, Honduras (Declaration International Meeting Landless 2000). The meeting focused on the dichotomy between ‘agrarian reform’ and the market mechanisms being pushed by the Bank, on agrarian reform as a ‘state
obligation’ derived from the Right to Food, and on gender equality both in terms of land rights and in terms of the roles of women and men inside the movement itself.

Later that year LVC held its III International Conference in Bangalore, where the first detailed analyses were generated of what was meant by food sovereignty (Via Campesina 2000a) and by agrarian reform (Via Campesina 2000b). LVC analyzed the limited capitalist or bourgeois agrarian reforms of the past, and those carried out by socialist governments, highlighting the limitations of the former, and the worst-case situation of those countries that had benefitted from neither. A significant rise in landlessness as a result of a decade of neoliberal policies was observed.

In the Bangalore document (Via Campesina 2000b), agrarian reform was defined as a ‘broad process of distribution of land ownership’. Emphasis was placed on individual family plots. In a foreshadowing of what LVC would later call ‘genuine’ or ‘integral agrarian reform’,8 the argument was made that just distributing land would not be enough to ensure the wellbeing of peasant families, and that therefore agrarian reform would have to include major changes in the overall policy environment for peasant agriculture (trade, credit, crop insurance, education, democratic access to water and seeds, etc.).

For the first time, agrarian reform was linked to the construction of food sovereignty, the major new paradigm being launched by LVC at the same III Conference. Land was to be distributed to produce food for people, rather than exports for the global economy. In strategic terms, land reform was pitched not as an exclusive struggle of peasants, but rather as a solution to many of the larger problems of Society (Rosset 2006c).

LVC itself is a space of encounter among different cultures and cosmovisions of the rural world, indigenous and non-indigenous, farmer and farm worker, East and West, North and South. The inherent differences across this diversity have over time led to confrontation and debate, usually resolved in expanded visions and evolving collective constructions. The encounter with other rural cultures and actors outside of LVC has also profoundly affected thinking and visions. Perhaps the most important such encounter took place in March of 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The ‘Land, territory and dignity’ Forum was organized by LVC and other organizations of global civil society in the days immediately preceding the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), hosted by the FAO with the presence of member states.9

The Porto Alegre process was the first time that LVC really engaged with the non-peasant peer actors who share the rural territories that are contested in struggles for agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory. Of particular note was the encounter of LVC with groups of nomadic pastoralists, fisher folk and indigenous peoples. The collective analysis that was produced included a call to re-envision agrarian reform from a territorial perspective, such that the distribution of land to peasants would no longer mean a truncation of the rights of pastoralists to seasonal grazing areas, fisher folk to fishing sites, and of forest dwellers to forests. Porto Alegre also reflected a persistent emphasis on the obligation of states and the reindication of land occupations as a tool of struggle.

Finally, Porto Alegre is significant because on 8 March 2006, thousands of Brazilian peasant women took the first mass action by LVC against land grabbing (ironically, before the term ‘land grabbing’ came into common usage to describe large-scale land

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8See, for example, Via Campesina (2006a).
9For LVC, the mere fact that FAO organized the ICARRD conference was a victory and a testimony to the impact of the struggle for agrarian reform. It was also considered a victory that the official declaration of ICARRD recognized the continued need for agrarian reform (Borras 2009).
acquisitions). They destroyed hundreds of thousands of *Eucalyptus* seedlings being grown in greenhouses by the Aracruz paper pulp corporation for transplant to an ever-growing ‘green desert’ that was placing enormous tracts of land out of the reach of landless peasants (Via Campesina 2006b). By doing so they made the one of the first major outcries against the human and ecological costs of agribusiness plantations and land grabbing, firmly established the leadership role of peasant women in the defense of land and territory, and sparked a debate about the meaning of ‘violence’ and ‘non-violence’ in the context of social movements. When the mass media and the state government accused them of violent, ‘terrorist’ acts, they responded that they, and all of LVC, are committed to non-violent direct action, and that this action might include the occupation and/or destruction of corporate property, but not violence against persons. They pointedly asked what represented the greater ‘violence’: the pulling up of seedlings of a tree species that when used in monoculture plantations is known to destroy the soil, or the deprivation of thousands of rural women of access to the land they need to feed their families, thus propagating the ‘silent violence’ of hunger.

The World Social Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2011, has special importance in the defense of land and territory because of the *Dakar appeal against land grabbing* (Petition online 2011) that was issued by many organizations from civil society that were present there, including LVC. While many in LVC feel that land grabbing is not a new phenomenon (see the Indra Lubis testimony in this GV), there is no doubt that the same flood of financial capital into rural areas that is described by the MST in Brazil is fueling this latest wave of land acquisition, which has rapidly grown to represent one of the most significant contemporary threats to peasants and indigenous people around the world. In November of 2011, LVC organized the International Conference against Land Grabbing in Nyéléni, Mali, that is discussed by Shalmali Guttal in her essay in this GV. Not only has agribusiness been newly (re)capitalized, but so have other extractive and/or land grabbing industries, including mining, dam and infrastructure construction, tourism and others, all putting more and more pressure on peasant and indigenous territories. The new rise of land grabbing and the response by LVC and other social movements are among the significant changes that have taken place during the past 20 years of struggle.

The contribution to this GV by the European Coordination of LVC (ECVC) highlights a major new ‘discovery’: that land grabbing is not just a phenomenon of the South, but in fact is rampant in the North as well. This reflects an earlier conclusion that real estate speculation in Europe and North America, among other land issues, has made access to land a virtual impossibility for youth and other new farmers, so that an agrarian reform is urgently needed in the North in addition to the South (SOC and LVC 2010). Young French farmer Morgan Ody tells us how older and new farmers have formed an uneasy alliance in Europe to defend and occupy farmland earmarked for development by land grabbers. At the youth assembly of the VI International Conference of LVC held in Jakarta in June of 2013 (where youth accounted for more than 30% of the total delegates to the Conference), young European farmers stood arm in arm with young peasants from Africa, Asia and the Americas in the collective repudiation of land grabbing, demands for access to land for young farmers and commitment to agroecology (see Via Campesina 2013a).

**Key changes in thinking**

The 2012 event in Bukit Tinggi was an opportunity to reflect on these and other changes, and to re-think ‘Agrarian Reform in the 21st Century’ in light of them. In this section I
highlight and summarize some of the key changes in the vision of agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory that have taken place inside of LVC, and that are reflected in the analysis of Bukit Tinggi and in the other documents in this GV.\(^\text{10}\)

**The evolving object of struggle**

If at the very earliest stages of the agrarian struggles that led to the founding of LVC the object was to just obtain a piece of land, any land, to use as a means of production, that began to rapidly evolve in a number of ways. The bad experiences of getting land but not being able to stay on it, because of low crop prices and a hostile economic environment for peasant agriculture, meant that almost from the very beginning LVC called for ‘genuine, integral agrarian reform’ in which access to land was to be accompanied by policies and programs supportive of peasant agriculture. From there it was a short step to place agrarian reform in the context of food sovereignty (Rosset 2006c). In this GV, the MST highlights this latter aspect of the contemporary dispute over land between peasants and agribusiness. Whereas peasants demand land to produce food for the Brazilian people, agribusiness wants land to produce agrofuels and exports.

Yet perhaps an even bigger change has been the way in which the movement has increasingly learned to think in terms of territory. The second international meeting of the landless was held by LVC at the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002. At that meeting, LVC leaders from indigenous peoples’ organizations challenged LVC and the GCAR to expand their shared vision of agrarian issues to include the indigenous perspective of territory, rather than just land.

In the words of the veteran agrarian leader Faustino Torrez in this GV, who was profoundly affected by that debate:

Territory expresses the identity of a people, it is where the ancestors lived and where they still reside, it means knowledge and ways of knowing (‘saberes’), historical memory, and the right of usufruct of the communal resources which properly speaking belong to the Mother Earth.\(^\text{11}\)

In fact, many of the movements inside LVC, and not just the indigenous peoples in Latin America, have long had a territorial perspective. The Indonesian peasants described by Indra Lubis, and the landless black peasants in southern Africa, whose land was seized by European colonists, don’t want just any land, they specifically want to recover their ancestral territories, and this has increasingly marked the broadened vision of agrarian struggle inside LVC, which increasingly has begun to think and speak about territory.

At the ‘Land, territory and dignity’ Forum held in Porto Alegre before ICARRD in 2006, this expanded vision was crystallized in the declaration of that event, which speaks about the growing threats to those territories still in the hands of indigenous people and peasants, and from thence forward the GCAR was to call for ‘agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory’ instead of just agrarian reform. More recently the calls by indigenous people inside and outside of LVC for *Buen Vivir* (‘living well’ in harmony with each other and with the Mother Earth) have found resonance in the discourse of LVC, as described by Shalmali Guttal.

\(^{10}\)Also based on my own participant-observer experience.

\(^{11}\)Page 43 in this *Grassroots Voices*. }
Land and territory for what?

The growing concern for the Mother Earth inside LVC has in turn resonated with a questioning of why we want land and territory and how we use it; in other words, ‘Land for what?’, or ‘Territory for what?’ While many organizations in the early years of their struggles called for more credit, subsidized agrochemicals and machinery for peasants, that is becoming less true for LVC member organizations (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Typically, agrarian movements that gained land through occupations and/or land reform from the State obtained poor quality, degraded land; land in which soil compaction and degradation are such that chemical fertilizers have little impact on productivity. This is land that can only be restored by agroecological practices to recover soil organic matter, fertility and functional biodiversity. Furthermore, many in the agrarian movements inside LVC, like the MST, began to ask what it means to bring ‘the model of agribusiness into our own house’. By that they refer to the natural tendency of landless peasants, who had previously been farm workers for agribusiness, to copy the dominant technological model of production once acquiring their own land. Yet, as Rosset et al. (2011, 162) said,

Reproducing the agribusiness model on one’s own land – by using purchased chemicals, commercial seeds, heavy machinery, etc. – will also reproduce the forces of exclusion and the destruction of nature that define the larger conflict. There is an increasing search for alternatives by the grassroots membership of LVC member organizations, partly in response to the dramatic fluctuations of prices of petroleum-based inputs over recent years, putting these inputs largely beyond the reach of many peasant farmers.

Thanks to the gradual working out of this logic, and to the hard experiences of trying to compete with agribusiness on their terrain – that of industrial agriculture where who wins the competition is who has access to more capital, which is demonstrably not peasants who have recently acquired land – we can say today that, based on LVC’s series of agroecology encounters over the past five years, almost all LVC organizations now promote some mixture of agroecology and traditional peasant agriculture rather than the Green Revolution. Both the discourse of farming in ways that protect the Mother Earth and the health of farmers and consumers, along with the practice of recovering traditional farming knowledge and making the transition to agroecological farming, are growing fast in LVC (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012).

The question of ‘Land and territory for what?’ has another answer as well, which is also increasingly common, and that is land and territory for (re)constructing and defending community. Gaining access to one’s own land, and/or diversifying production, make it more possible for youth to stay on the farm, for some family members who had migrated to the city to return and engage in productive activities, and for reduced patriarchy inside the peasant families as more members of the family engage in productive activities on the farm and gain their own income sources and spaces of decision-making. This reintegration on the land, of the extended peasant family that has been atomized by forced modernization in the countryside, has been documented for land occupations and agrarian reform settlements in Brazil (Fernandes 2000) and for agroecological diversification away from monoculture in Cuba (Machín Sosa et al. 2013, Rosset et al. 2011). Similarly, questions of how to organize physical space on land gained through land occupations, in

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12Paraphrased by the author as heard on many occasions.
order to favor community cohesion and continued political mobilization, are increasingly under discussion (see Bertolini and Carneiro 2012).

**On the evolution of land occupations or ‘land reform from below’**

A persistent problem with the tactic of land occupations has been the manner in which the media, governments and public opinion fixate on examples of land occupations tainted by corruption, in which the powerful manipulate and often pay the landless to occupy land in order to title it and pass it on the behind-the-scenes patron. This tends to delegitimize land occupations as ‘invasions’, and can make it difficult for movements to mobilize support for the untainted, ‘legitimate’ land occupations that they engage in (see discussion of this phenomenon in Guatemala in Martínez Aniorte and Villagrán García 2009, 134–7). A typical media framing (Mongabay.com 2008), in this case from Brazil, affirms that:

My neighbor’s 25,000 hectares of forest reserve was first invaded, instigated by the same corrupt network. That problem has trickled over to us. Poor squatters are used as cannon fodder. They are paid to occupy the land so some big guy can eventually claim it and then sell it. By the time the authorities look into it, the backer has long moved on, taking his money with him.

Really, not until the MST in Brazil raised land occupation to an art, or a science, with organizationally and ideologically well-prepared occupiers (see Rosset 2006b), did the image of land occupations begin a partial shift, as they were able to eliminate tainted occupations and, by preparing people well, ensure much lower rates of land abandonment after the successful creation of land reform settlements (Fernandes 2000). The success of the MST has been widely noted inside LVC, and their methodology has diffused across national borders and continents as a result of exchanges of experiences.

Indra Lubis explains the continued centrality of land occupations for LVC. This ‘land reform from below’ is essential to give people the ‘small victories’ that are needed to sustain commitment to the larger struggle. It is also the most effective way to pressure governments to act on land reform laws that otherwise languish without implementation.

Over time the discursive ‘enemy’ of peasants and object of protests has grown, from mostly large landlords to including the World Bank, transnational corporations and finally international financial capital. In Brazil, for example, the land available for land reform and thus suitable for occupation has shifted dramatically in recent years as a result of the recent waves of capitalization of agribusiness (see MST in this GV). As unproductive large landholdings have become productive agribusiness export platforms, the argument used historically in the dispute for public opinion has lost its relevance. It no longer makes sense to argue about the essential unfairness of the majority of the land being in the hands of a few ‘who don’t even use it’, while millions who desperately need land have none at all. Today the MST increasingly targets occupations at agribusiness, and argues forcefully about the benefits for all of Society and for the environment of peasant agriculture producing food without agrotoxics. They contrast this with the damage wrought by large-scale industrial monoculture for export and agrofuels (Martínez-Torres 2012). This is mirrored in the overall evolution of LVC discourse against transnational corporations (TNCs) and financial capital, and toward the benefits of peasant and family farm agriculture for building food sovereignty, growing healthy food, slowing global warming and taking care of the Mother Earth (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012).
Targeting transnational agribusiness backed by financial capital is raising the ante for LVC member organizations. In the case of Brazil, targeting feudal-style landlords brought repression in the form of hired gunmen, corrupt local judges and local police. But targeting TNCs increasingly brings private security forces and militarized federal police into play, along with increased juridical criminalization of struggle, and ever-increasing demonization of the struggle in the mass media. LVC organizations around the world are facing this more intense wave of criminalization, repression and media stigmatization.

**Territory for whom?**

LVC has been transformed by the internal and external dialog with non-peasants who share rural territories, including landless laborers, indigenous people, forest dwellers, nomadic pastoralists, riverine and coastal peoples – particularly artisanal fisherfolk – and others. As a result thinking has evolved, as described by Indra Lubis, Shalmali Guttal and Faustino Torrez, from traditional forms of agrarian reform which, while they meant access to land for peasants, under certain conditions and circumstances also meant enclosure and loss of use rights for the non-sedentary farmer peoples that shared territories prior to ‘land distribution’ (Joireman 1996, La Via Campesina et al. 2007). In the renewed vision, agrarian reform must take into account the needs of all of these actors, and should have mechanisms to ensure peaceful coexistence, perhaps modeled on traditional land use and common property resource systems. The challenge remains how to do this.

A related issue raised at Bukit Tinggi is the need to build alliances on the land issue, not just with other rural peoples, but with the urban poor as well. The financial speculation that drives rural land grabbing also drives urban real estate speculation, which leads to massive evictions of the urban poor. This could be the basis for rural-urban, agricultural-non-agricultural and North-South solidarity and joint struggle for what some might call ‘land sovereignty’, defined broadly as:

…the right of working peoples to have effective access to, use of, and control over land and the benefits of its use and occupation, where land is understood as resource, territory, and landscape… This embraces struggles by indigenous movements, rural labourers, urban activists and social movements North and South who have sometimes been excluded by traditional land reform campaigns. (Borras and Franco 2012, back cover)

While the issues of women and land rights, and women as leaders in the struggle for land and the defense of territory, have been in the LVC since the earliest declarations, it was at the International Seminar on ‘Agrarian reform and gender’ hosted in 2003 in Cochambama, Bolivia, by LVC and GCAR, that female and male peasant leaders from 24 countries had the opportunity to debate these issues and engage in the collective construction of visions and processes (Declaración de Cochabamba 2003, Monsalve Suárez 2006). Discrimination against women in past agrarian reform processes was discussed in depth, and the pernicious presence of patriarchy inside social movements for agrarian reform was hotly contested. Since then, these have been central issues inside LVC. At the V International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008, LVC took on persistent patriarchy inside the movement:

…All the forms of violence that women face in our societies – among them physical, economic, social, cultural and macho violence, and violence based on differences of power – are also present in rural communities, and as a result, in our organizations. This, in addition to being a principal source of injustice, also limits the success of our struggles. We recognize the
intimate relationships between capitalism, patriarchy, machismo and neo-liberalism, in detri-
ment to the women peasants and farmers of the world. All of us together, women and men
of La Via Campesina, make a responsible commitment to build new and better human relation-
ships among us, as a necessary part of the construction of the new societies to which we
aspire... We commit ourselves anew, with greater strength, to the goal of achieving that
complex but necessary true gender parity in all spaces and organs of debate, discussion, analy-
sis and decision-making in La Via Campesina, and to strengthen the exchange, coordination
and solidarity among the women of our regions. We recognize the central role of women in
agriculture for food self-sufficiency, and the special relationship of women with the land,
with life and with seeds. In addition, we women have been and are a guiding part of the con-
struction of Via Campesina from its beginning. If we do not eradicate violence towards women
within our movement, we will not advance in our struggles, and if we do not create new gender
relations, we will not be able to build a new society (Via Campesina, 2008a).

The challenge has been to move from the discursive commitment to equality in the
struggle to the material reality of equality. Nevertheless, the vision of women inside
LVC has significantly marked the internal debate over land titling.

**Individual versus communal property**

I am asking all of you here,
If you have ever wondered,
If the land is actually ours,
And not of he who has more?

I am asking if, about the land,
You have never wondered,
That if that hands that work it are ours,
Then is it not ours, and should it not be given to us?

Let’s cut down the fences! Let’s cut down the fences!
Because the land is mine, yours, and his and hers,
It is of Pedro, María, Juan and José.

*A desalambrar*, Daniel Viglietti (1968)\(^{13}\)

The protest song *A desalambrar* has for decades been the anthem of landless peasants in
Latin America cutting down the fences and occupying the lands of landlords. Yet an Argen-
tinean agrarian activist recently commented to me in an ironic tone that *‘A desalambrar* (cut
down the fences) is now the slogan of the investment consortia who obtain rental conces-
sions based on evicting peasants to plant large-scale monocultures’. Her comment is
illustrative of the state of the debate on individual versus communal property rights, and
touches at the heart of a debate about land titling that took place at Bukit Tinggi.

The debate over titling has historically been driven inside LVC by indigenous people
and by women. It has also been informed by the positive legacy of certain forms of com-
munal land tenure created by earlier agrarian reforms (i.e. the *ejido* system in Mexico). To
simplify: early on, the goal of many of the agrarian struggles that today are part of LVC was

\(^{13}\)Partial translation by the author of the lyrics of *A desalambrar* by Daniel Viglietti (1968).
to get a piece of land with a piece of paper (title), typically in the name of the male head of household. This was backed by agrarian legislation in many countries, which only demanded the name of the man (Deere and León 2001). Women inside and outside of LVC began to clamor for equal rights to property ownership. Yet this coincided with the World Bank neoliberal drive to privatize and parcelize land in fungible titles, and soon the whole question of private land titles was problematized in LVC, coming to a head in Cochambamba in 2003. The debate that took place there was described as follows by Monsalve Suárez (2006, 198–200):

Consideration of this phenomenon led some women in Cochabamba to point out that the reforms that recognized and strengthened women’s right to land in these circumstances did so within the neoliberal framework of protecting and strengthening individual property rights, and to that extent, such reforms represented a doubtful or, at least, ambiguous advance. To place the issue squarely in context: how secure can individual entitlement to lands for peasant women be when established in a context of privatization and economic liberalization policies that have already brought about the dispossession and loss of lands of many families and communities? …The linkage between advances in women’s right to land with those of women’s individual right to private property continues to be an implicit one, and is a predominant idea in a great many public policies and in the debate over gender and land.

The identification of women’s right to land with that of their individual titling of land has been intensely questioned and debated in sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps more than in other regions, because some have seen in the issue the intention of changing customary systems of land tenancy to the market and to foreign investment…[while] in Latin America the contradictions of women’s rights to land and property constituted as individual rights have been called into question primarily by indigenous peoples… The tension between the rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples to preserve their traditional customary law and practices is still there, even though several steps have been taken toward reconciling the feminist vision with the indigenous vision. Indigenous women have started to question the construction of customary normative systems and the decision-making structures of their towns and communities, pointing out that they are excluded from those processes…

The participants in the Cochabamba seminar advocated communal forms of land tenancy, and it remained clear that this did not exclude also advocating women’s individual right to land, as a personal right and under conditions equal with men. The question now, therefore, is how to strengthen women’s rights to land in different systems of land tenancy, and not only as individual private property.

These and similar debates14 over time led to a more common emphasis in LVC on demanding collective titles. Yet the issue remains more open than ever, both in terms of whether women are better served by individual legal title (thus legitimating land privatization in the eyes of many), or by defending common property regimes and/or demanding collective titles (and having to battle patriarchy at the community and household level). There is also the question of what is best in terms of collective defense against land grabbing. Monsalve Suárez (2006, 199) concluded in 2006 that

communal property, in its diverse modalities considered in the law, could become an important tool in stopping neoliberal purposes. If it is intelligently taken advantage of by peasant and indigenous organizations, it can be an instrument for counteracting the expansion of the new latifundio and, more broadly, the land market.

14See, for example, the rich discussion in Herrero and Vilella (2009).
Yet my Argentinean friend could argue in 2013 that tearing down the implicit enclosures of small-scale private property actually favors corporate land grabbers.

This was reflected in the debate in Bukit Tinggi in 2012. As the participants repeated many of the earlier debates on land titling, from demanding individual titles in the name of the man, to demanding the same in the name of the women or of both the man and the woman, to demanding collective titles, an African woman delegate spoke of how legal community land titles actually facilitate land grabbing. ‘With a community title’, she said, giving specific examples, ‘all it takes, all too often, is just getting the [male] leader drunk, so that he signs a long-term concession that leads to the eviction of hundreds of families from their ancestral lands’. While a number of delegates pointed out that it would be less of a problem with women leaders, another delegate observed that in many countries there are now local intermediary businesses who consolidate individual land titles into large blocks that can be signed over in bulk to investors.15 ‘Foreign corporations don’t want to haggle with thousands of individual peasants’, said another delegate, ‘they prefer territorial communal titles so they can get access to the whole thing with a single negotiation’. The center of the debate shifted to the problematic nature of any sort of legal title, unless it explicitly prohibits sales, rentals, leases and concessions. As Shalmali Guttal tells us, the participants finally could agree that the key most likely lies in building some form of self-determination and autonomous control over territories, but how to do so in different contexts remains an open topic of debate.

A more nuanced interpretation of state-led agrarian reform

While LVC and the GCAR were firm in calling for states to take the lead in agrarian reform at least through Porto Alegre in 2006, recent experiences with ‘peasant-friendly’ governments in various countries are leading to a more nuanced interpretation. The World Bank-driven market-led land reform of Lula and the Workers’ Party (PT) party in Brazil (Rosset et al. 2006), the slow pace of the ‘agrarian revolution’ in Bolivia, growing disillusionment with Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and the early difficulties with the ‘war against latifundios’ in Venezuela (Gascon and Montagut 2010, Enríquez 2013) have all helped solidify the shared understanding that without a well-organized and powerful peasant movement, it is an illusion that even progressive governments will move significantly on redistributive land reform.

This has been reinforced by those cases where significant progress has been made. There is a shared belief that the success of the Cuban peasantry in feeding Cuba with agroecology after the collapse of the Berlin Wall (Machín Sosa et al. 2013; Rosset et al. 2011) was the key element in leading to more recent phases of the Cuban agrarian reform, and that the national scope and level of organization of land occupations in Zimbabwe (see Elizabeth Mpofu in this Section) were central to achieving what LVC considers to be the most significant redistributive ‘land reform’ in decades, albeit not an ‘integral agrarian reform’, because of the paucity of credits and other supports for beneficiaries.16 But the overall conclusion is that is will be no state-implemented ‘land reform from above’ without land occupations, or ‘land reform from below’ (Rosset 2006b).

15There are a growing number of ways that land is being consolidated for land grabs. The ‘sowing pools’ in Argentina provide an illustrative example (Grosso et al. 2010, Goldfarb 2012).

16See the recent ‘revisionist’ analyses of the land reform in Zimbabwe by Scoones et al. (2010), Cliffe et al. (2011), and Moyo (2011).
Establishing new rights

Since its founding, an important part of the struggle of LVC has revolved around claiming new rights (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010, Monsalve Suárez 2013). When LVC put forth food sovereignty as a superior concept to food security, they were moving beyond the ‘right to food’ and claiming a right of rural peoples to produce, thus implying state obligations to protect markets and implement agrarian reform in order to assure that right (Desmarais 2007, Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). Similarly, the GCAR has claimed a ‘right to land’ as derivative of the ‘right to food’ and the ‘right to feed oneself’ (Via Campesina and FIAN International 1999, Borras 2008).

The adoption in 2007 of the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples convinced LVC to try to get a broader definition of peasants’ rights from the UN system. In 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, LVC held the First International Conference on Peasants’ Rights, in Jakarta, Indonesia. The declaration from that conference calls for an international convention on peasants’ rights, as:

We have inherited a long history of peasants’ struggles defending our rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the main human rights treaties are important instruments in our contemporary struggles. Nevertheless, we feel as other oppressed groups such as indigenous peoples, and women, that [the] time has come to fully spell out our distinct individual and collective rights… A future Convention on Peasant Rights will contain the values of the rights of peasants – and should particularly strengthen the rights of women peasants – which will have to be respected, protected and fulfilled by governments and international institutions. For that purpose, we commit ourselves to develop a multi-level strategy working simultaneously at the national, regional and international level for raising awareness, mobilizing support and building alliances with not only peasants, but rural workers, migrant workers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, fisher folks, environmentalists, women, legal experts, human rights, youth, faith-based, urban and consumers organizations as well. We will also seek the support of governments, parliaments and human rights institutions for developing the convention on peasant rights. (Via Campesina 2008b)

Since then LVC drafted a proposed text, helped by sympathetic UN officials, and lobbied hard at various levels (see Edelman and James 2011). On 27 September 2012, the UN Human Rights Council adopted resolution A/HRC/21/L23, in which it commits to establish an intergovernmental working group with the mandate of negotiating, finalizing and submitting to the Human Rights Council a draft UN declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (United Nations 2012). LVC hailed this as a small but important victory on the road toward full recognition of the rights of peasants, including their right to land and territory.

Also in 2012, the Committee on Word Food Security (CFS) of the FAO completed the intergovernmental negotiations of the Voluntary guidelines on the tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security. This was the product of a remarkably participatory process under the Civil Society Mechanism of FAO (McKeon 2013), although the result represented significant compromises with non-social movement actors (TNCs and governments). The completion of this process is seen as a step towards better protection of the right to food and access to natural resources, but LVC and allies cautioned that ‘there’s still a long road ahead before peoples’ rights to land, fisheries and forests are fully recognized and respected’ (see Via Campesina 2012). The most glaring deficiency in the

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17Via Campesina (2009).
Guidelines is expressed in the word ‘voluntary’. At Bukit Tinggi, participants agreed to always omit that word, simply referring to them as ‘the Tenure Guidelines’, or ‘TG’, as ‘we have nothing to gain from the voluntary part; we will fight for compliance as if they were mandatory’.18

The peasants’ rights issue, and the guidelines, can be seen in two ways. The first way is in view of the fact that member organizations of LVC are always hungry for additional international commitments to wield against their governments in the public opinion debates surrounding peasant struggles. LVC responds to this collective internal demand by working towards additional instruments at the international level. The second way to interpret this institutional engagement is in the light of the discussion by Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2010), concerning the differentiated engagement that LVC has or does not have with different multilateral institutions. These are divided between those for whom there is ‘no hope’ from a peasant perspective, and to whom LVC will only show resolute opposition, protest and denunciation (WTO, International Monetary Fund, World Bank), and those, generally in the UN System, who at least in theory might have some democratic aspects, with whom LVC will engage in dialog, though on its own terms (FAO, Human Rights Council, etc.).

Multiple crises and the ‘green economy’

LVC sees the present historical period as marked by multiple crises of the capitalist system. These include the financial, food, climate, energy and social crises (see Via Campesina 2008c). While LVC argues that food sovereignty based on integral agrarian reform and agroecological peasant agriculture offers the clearest solutions for ‘cooling the planet’ and resolving the food and social crises (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012), the continual tendency of capitalism to reinvent itself through its periodic crises means that it continually develops new threats to peasants and indigenous peoples. As Shalmali Guttal examines in her summary of the debates in Bukit Tinggi, this can be seen in the new drive for the euphemistically named ‘Green Economy’ and the concomitant financialization of Nature. LVC denounces various elements of the Green Economy as ‘false solutions’ to the crises. These include agrofuels, payment for environmental services, carbon credits, so-called Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and REDD + , ecotourism, etc., all of which can generate ‘green grabbing’. Green grabbing is nothing more than land grabbing for agrofuels, to cash in on carbon credits, for so-called ecotourism, etc. (see discussion in Fairhead et al. 2012). In its participation in the Conference of the Parts (COP) process (climate summits) and the Rio +20 summit, LVC has focused on making the distinction between real and false solutions to the crises (Salleh 2010, Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012), using this as an argument for agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory in the context of food sovereignty.

Conclusions

The past 20 years of agrarian struggle in a changing world have led to evolution in the thinking and vision of movements such as LVC, who are engaged in struggles for land and territory. The world is different, with new waves of financial capitalization of

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18The TGs may ultimately be the object of different interpretations based on competing political strategies, as explained by Borras et al. (2013).
agribusiness and extractive industries, that drive renewed land grabbing, with the successes and failures of ‘land reform from above’ and ‘from below’, with the contemporary crises of the capitalist system and the financialization of nature, etc.

Movements have responded to these changes with new ideas, strategies and tactics, and they have also evolved in response to internal dynamics concerning gender, indigenous cosmovision and concern for the Mother Earth, etc. At the same time they have been profoundly affected by encounter and dialog with non-peasant peoples, moving from a narrow focus on land to an expanded vision of territory. A constant in the struggle has been the use of land occupations as a tactic, though the framing discourse to defend this practice in eyes of public opinion has shifted, with an ever-greater emphasis on food sovereignty, healthy food and protection of the Mother Earth as arguments in favor of agrarian reform.

Some debates have been opened yet not resolved; key among these is the issue of land titling, where the concerns of women, indigenous people and other rural peoples, and the rising threat of land grabbing all demand ever more innovation, cooperation and creativity from the movements. Of one thing we can be certain: over the next 20 years of struggle, we will continue to witness the evolution of movement thinking and visions concerning land and territory.

The final declaration of the VI Conference in Jakarta (June 2013) reads in part:

We reject capitalism, which is currently characterized by aggressive flows of financial and speculative capital into industrial agriculture, land and nature. This is generating huge land grabs and a brutal displacement of people from their land, destroying communities, cultures and ecosystems… Agroecology is our option for today and the future… Peasant agroecology is a social and ecological system encompassing a great diversity of technologies and practices that are culturally and geographically rooted. It removes dependencies on agro-toxins, rejects confined industrial animal production, uses renewable energies, and guarantees healthy food. It enhances dignity, honors traditional knowledge and restores the health and integrity of the land… We demand a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform. This means ensuring full rights over land, recognizing indigenous peoples’ legal rights to their territories, guaranteeing fishing communities’ access and control of fishing areas and ecosystems, and recognizing pastoral migratory routes. Only such reform ensures a future for young rural peoples. A Comprehensive Agrarian Reform also includes a massive distribution of land as well as livelihood and productive resources to ensure permanent access to land for youth, women, the unemployed, the landless, displaced, and all those willing to engage in small-scale agroecological food production. Land is not a commodity. Existing laws and regulations need to be reinforced, while new ones are needed to protect against speculation and land grabbing. We continue to fight for land and territories (Via Campesina 2013c).

References


ANNEX: Access to key historical documents referenced in this Grassroots Voices


EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Porto Alegre, Nyéléni and Bukit Tinggi: evolving views of agrarian reform

Shalmali Guttal

Land reform is a struggle not only between peasants and landlords, but a struggle for all of society. What kind of society do we want to live in? Do we want inequality, global warming, poverty, misery and urban slums? Agrarian reform and food sovereignty are the keys to changing this society.

We need to develop international solidarity around issues of land; we need to connect land reform, food sovereignty and agroecology.

Participants at the Bukit Tinggi workshop, 2012

From 10–13 July 2012, about 150 representatives from peasant, fisher-folk, indigenous peoples, women, youth, human rights and activist research organizations from Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe met at an international workshop and seminar in Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra, Indonesia, to explore a collective vision for agrarian reform and defense of lands and territories. The meeting, ‘Agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory in the 21st century: the challenge and future,’ was organized by the Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform (GCAR)19 and hosted by the Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI) and La Via Campesina (LVC).

The main goals of the Bukit Tinggi workshop were to update ourselves on the present historical moment, identify the elements of a common vision of agrarian reform and defense of land and territory, identify the main barriers to realizing our vision, and threats to our movements, and formulate future strategies by examining the lessons learned from the past two decades of struggles. This paper presents the main discussion points at the workshop. But first we begin by reviewing earlier discussions held in Porto Alegre, Brasil, in 2006, and Nyéléni, Mali (2011), which laid essential groundwork for the debates in Buki

19The Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform (GCAR) is made up of La Via Campesina, FIAN International and the Land Research Action Network (LRAN).
Tinggi. This essay consists exclusively of syntheses of the discussions, analyses and conclusions from each of these crucial events.

From land to territories

Indigenous peoples talk about loving not only our lands but our entire territories.

Participant at the Bukit Tinggi workshop, 2012

In GCAR, our search for a new vision of agrarian reform that encompasses the changing context and unites peoples at the forefront of struggles for resource rights, justice and self-determination gained new traction at the ‘Land, Territory and Dignity Forum’ in Porto Alegre, Brazil in March 2006. Held in tandem with the ‘International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development’ (ICARRD) organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the Forum was a historic meeting of social movements, human rights defenders, engaged scholars and activist researchers, who decided to join forces to resist capitalist and neoliberal models of resource governance and rural development, and build a collective vision of agrarian reform that responds to our diverse priorities.

The new agrarian reform must recognize the socio-environmental function of land, the sea and natural resources, in the context of food sovereignty, to which we should commit at the highest level of will. We understand that food sovereignty implies policies of redistribution, equitable access and control over natural and productive resources (credit, appropriate technology, etc.), by peasants, indigenous peoples, communities of artisanal fisher-folk, pastoralists, unemployed workers, Dalit communities, afro-descendant communities and other rural communities; rural development policies based on agroecological strategies centered on peasant and family agricultural and artisanal fishing; trade policies against dumping and in favor of peasant and indigenous production for local, regional and national markets; and complementary public sector policies like health care, education and infrastructure for the countryside.

Final declaration, ‘Land Territory and Dignity’ Forum, Porto Alegre, 2006

Two critical advances were made in Porto Alegre in terms of our collective thinking. First, there was agreement that agrarian reform must be based on the concept and principles of food sovereignty. Second, agreement that agrarian reform must respect and defend the concept of ‘territory’, i.e., the bio-ecological surroundings on which human collectives depend to satisfy material and economic needs, construct social and political relationships, and develop culture and spirituality. For rural communities, especially indigenous peoples, land is not only a means of production, nor can it be regarded in isolation from other elements of nature. Land is embedded in territory, which includes water, air, forests, plants, animals, fish, other living creatures, culture, sacred sites, ceremonies and practices. Territories connote holistic relationships between people and their environment. Neoliberal models of governance unbundle nature and disembody its elements, making them easier to commodify, privatize and market, and making it simpler to alienate people from life-sustaining ecosystems, resources and relationships. For peasants, fisher-folk, pastoralists, workers and indigenous peoples, the defense of land and territories is thus a matter of survival as well as a political imperative.

All of the original peoples, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, tribes, fisher-folk, rural workers, peasants, the landless, nomadic pastoralists and displaced peoples, have the right to maintain their own spiritual and material relationships; to possess, develop, control, use and reconstruct their social structures; to politically and socially administer their lands and territories, including their full environment, the air, water, seas, rivers, lakes, ice floes, flora, fauna and other resources that they have traditionally possessed, occupied and/or utilized. This implies the recognition of their laws, traditions, customs, tenure systems, and institutions, as well as the recognition of territorial borders and the cultures of peoples. This all constitutes

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20See annex to the previous contribution.
the recognition of the self-determination and autonomy of peoples.
Final declaration, ‘Land Territory and Dignity’ Forum, Porto Alegre, 2006

In November 2011 we met again at the Nyéléni peasant training center in Mali for the ‘International Conference against Land Grabbing’ organized by LVC. Here, we sought to analyze and understand better the triggers, drivers and dynamics of land and resource grabbing, and identify strategies to strengthen the capacities of our movements and communities to defend food sovereignty, the commons and our lands and territories. In the conference declaration, Stop land-grabbing now!, we noted that land grabbing is a global phenomenon led by national and transnational elites, investors and governments, and facilitated by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to control the world’s most precious resources. We recognized that although women produce most of the world’s food and take primary responsibility for family and community well being, they continue to be dispossessed from the lands they cultivate and their rights to resources by patriarchal structures.

The fight against land-grabbing is a fight against capitalism, neoliberalism and a destructive economic model... Land grabbing displaces and dislocates communities, destroys local economies and the social-cultural fabric, and jeopardizes the identities of communities, be they farmers, pastoralists, fisher-folk, workers, dalits or indigenous peoples. Those who stand up for their rights are beaten, jailed and killed. There is no way to mitigate the impacts of this economic model and the power structures that promote it.

Final declaration, International Conference against Land Grabbing, 2011

Changing contexts

In Bukit Tinggi in 2012, we began by reviewing Porto Alegre and Nyéléni, as part of a more comprehensive process of collective reconstructing of historical antecedents. The developing consensus saw the issues of agrarian reform and freedom from hunger in the twentieth century as directly linked to decolonization and liberation struggles. Agrarian reform was viewed in many newly independent nations as a crucial step towards redressing past injustices, but implemented with varying commitments and results. Agrarian reform included distributing land to the landless for agricultural production, ensuring appropriate access to infrastructure, credit, resources, markets and public services, and policies that supported small-scale producers and rural economies. By the early 1980s, new movements started to emerge of indigenous peoples and other rural peoples negatively affected by dams, mining, infrastructure and conservation projects, tourism, etc., who called for the defense of ancestral domains, territories and self-determination.

In the twenty-first century, the participants felt that agrarian reform has still not been fully implemented anywhere. Around the world, fertile lands, water sources and bodies, and rich ecosystems have been or are being seized and enclosed by investors, financiers, government agencies, military forces and even environmental organizations. Past agrarian reform successes are being reversed, and IFIs, FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and many governments are imposing neoliberal governance frameworks that facilitate the widespread dispossession and alienation of local agricultural producers from their resources through seizures and enclosures. Lands and forests are often identified as idle, underused, degraded, or marginal to justify their transfers to large investors.

Both peasant movements and agribusinesses are growing, but family farmers who become entrepreneurial are crushed by agribusiness. Rural indebtedness is increasing because of credit programs to integrate farmers into global value chains. Fisher-folk have

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21See annex to the previous contribution.
22See annex to the previous contribution.
not been able to escape the trap of neoliberalism and markets either. Since the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, the Government has intensified investment in coastal areas, allowing corporations to take over the fishing waters and lands of fisher-folk. Across Asia and Africa, governments are pushing fisher-folk to integrate into global markets, and promoting mega infrastructure, energy and tourism projects, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and industrial aquaculture in coastal areas.

Struggles for rights to food, water, land, resources, self-determination and life itself by affected peoples and human rights defenders are dealt with extremely harshly by states and corporations. Those who oppose destructive policies and projects are branded as anti-state, anti-development, dangerous and terrorists. Evictions, intimidation, violence, arbitrary arrests, incarceration, assassination and disappearances of rights defenders and those who propose alternative development models are increasing in all our countries.

Some international institutions argue that the redistribution of land to landless and land-poor communities is no longer possible, that large-scale, land-related investments are necessary for economic growth, and that land acquisition by states and private investors is thus inevitable. What is needed instead, they argue, are rules to mitigate negative impacts and make these deals ‘win-win’, for example through initiatives for transparency, consultation and information disclosure, as outlined in the World Bank designed Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (PRAI). Many NGOs are also involved in these initiatives and huge amounts of money are being spent on building false expectations that communities can benefit from these deals. The participants did not support this approach, feeling that it mainly serves to legitimize further land grabbing under the guise of ‘ethics’.

**Challenges and threats**

We recognized that our visions and strategies must evolve to respond to the multiple crises of food, climate, finance, poverty and unemployment, as well as strengthen our movements.

Participants identified capitalism, imperialism and neoliberalism as forces that drive the ongoing exploitation of nature, peoples and cultures, while destroying rural economies and livelihoods in myriad and inventive ways. Free trade and investment agreements promote export-oriented agriculture, facilitate land and ecosystem conversions, and enable land, water and resource grabbing, which destroy sustainable modes of agricultural production, local food systems and the livelihoods of small-scale agricultural producers. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are capturing control over markets, nature and labor by capturing national/international regulatory power and building vertically and horizontally integrated value chains.

We discussed how financial liberalization has enabled huge amounts of surplus capital to flow into extractive industries, industrial agriculture, forestry and fisheries, agro-fuels, energy and transportation infrastructure, tourism projects, urban expansion and conservation areas. The ‘new Green Revolution’ in Africa and elsewhere – which promotes genetically modified organisms, synthetic biology and land conversions – is attracting financing and other support from governments, multilateral agencies, corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A rapidly expanding threat that was highlighted is the financialization of both agriculture and nature, whereby different aspects of agriculture and nature can be commodified and traded in financial markets. This is showcased in the Green Economy, which is promoted by UNEP, IFIs and many governments as an innovative program for ‘sustainable development’ in the midst of the climate crisis. The Green Economy proposes ways to extract
profit from nature by assigning financial values to forests, biodiversity, soil, water, agricultural practices and other elements and functions of nature, and packaging them as tradable credits to achieve economic growth. Equally insidious is the Blue Economy, it was felt, which will commodify and privatize marine areas and life-forms. Under this rubric, governments are creating marine protected areas that bar the access of local fisher-folk to traditional fishing waters. At the same time, they sign investment treaties and joint-venture agreements that allow large investors free access to coastal and fishing areas. In Indonesia, a law has been passed that gives the private sector access to marine areas for over 90 years through concessions.

Climate change has brought new challenges to the production capacities and livelihoods of small-scale food producers through increases in natural disasters and unpredictable changes in temperature, precipitation, water availability, pests and production conditions. The so-called solutions to climate change, however, neither address these challenges nor tackle climate change. Participants told stories of how many so-called ‘solutions’, such as Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD/REDD+), ‘climate smart agriculture’ and agrofuels, are destroying the coping mechanisms, resilience and autonomous adaptive capacities of small-scale food producers, and creating opportunities for corporations and traders to acquire rural peoples’ lands, forests, coasts and other natural resources.

War, occupations and military invasions in the name of national security (as in Palestine, India, Philippines and Sri Lanka) present particularly complex threats to food sovereignty and self-determination of local peoples because of the use of lethal weapons, protracted exposure to state and non-state armed forces, and the militarization of land, water and other resources. In many countries, violent conflicts over natural resources are increasing, and laws are being changed to make dissent/protest against state-supported investment projects and expropriation illegal.

We face today the relentless destruction of local cultures, communities, economies and food systems. Distress migration from rural areas is rising sharply with particular impacts on women and future generations. In most countries, rural areas are starved of public investments in education, healthcare, electricity, water, sanitation, recreation and essential infrastructure. Rural life is becoming increasingly difficult for people, especially the youth, who do not see a future for themselves in family farming, fishing and pastoralism.

The drivers

We saw how TNCs are the most visible grabbers of land and natural resources in every region, for mining, real estate, tourism, industrial agriculture, energy and transportation infrastructure and speculation. These include powerful corporations and state enterprises in the geographic South who often operate through ‘South-South’ investments, such as Brazilian and Indian companies in Mozambique, Chinese companies in the Sudan and South Africa, and Thai companies in Laos and Cambodia.

But corporations are able to secure control over resources through the support of home and host country governments. The state is a major actor in both expropriations for ‘national development’ projects as well as enabling corporations and elites to acquire control over land and natural resources. States establish corporate-friendly laws and regulations, identify so-called marginal, empty and idle lands for investors, offer a variety of subsidies and carrots to attract large investors, use coercion and military force to impose policies and projects, and use courts to suppress dissent and resistance to the theft of lands and resources.
IFIs and multilateral institutions facilitate land and natural resource grabbing by promoting extractive, destructive and economic growth-driven development models, discouraging states from legislating and regulating in favor of workers, small-scale producers and the environment, and collaborating with capitalist interests to design and push instruments of financialization such as the Green and Blue Economies, REDD+ and carbon trading.

Official narratives of ‘crisis’ deepen the problems created by capitalism and justify mechanisms that enable control over the world’s resources in the hands of elites. The global financial, food and climate crises have triggered a rush among private and state investors to capture control over land and natural resources, since these are the only ‘safe havens’ left that guarantee secure financial returns. The Green and Blue Economies transform the climate crisis into opportunities for profit and facilitate investments into the territories of peasants, fisher-folk, pastoralists and indigenous peoples, who are then accused of destroying forests, oceans, coral systems and other natural resources.

Learning from our struggles

We need to fight for our dignity and die for our land!

We need new and systematic tactics and strategies to oppose land grabbing that go beyond sabotage and boycotts. We must fight against governments, entrepreneurs and even our own stupidity.

Participants at the Bukit Tinggi workshop, 2012

Taking stock of key lessons from our struggles, we recognized that secure access to land, territories, food, jobs, shelter, peace and dignity are basic human rights, intertwined with the right to life. The declaration of rights of peasants – women and men proposed by LVC is a crucial step forward in highlighting the rights of small-scale agricultural producers, as the Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples has been for the rights of indigenous peoples.

We learned that agrarian reform reunites families, slows the out-migration of youth, generates employment and revitalizes local economies. We noted that agrarian reform struggles have not responded well to the particular situations of women. In many communities, women’s rights to land are not recognized, their rights to resources and all things in their households are tied to their husbands, and they lose access more easily than men. When lands are grabbed, women work harder to feed their families and communities, and are often pushed off their lands to the farthest, more remote areas. Women play crucial roles in defending lands and territories and rebuilding local food systems, but are rarely visible in leadership positions in peasant movements (though this is slowly changing inside LVC). Moving towards equal social relations must start from within our own movements and organizations, respecting women’s contributions and capacities, and overcoming the socio-cultural barriers to women’s empowerment.

Agrarian reform struggles need to be driven by peasants, it was affirmed, with local autonomy and self-directed processes to build new societal relations. Even where progressive governments are in power, agrarian reform cannot be sustained without strong peasant movements – as shown in Zimbabwe, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nepal. We learned that land occupations by peasants are an effective strategy of agrarian reform from below, but for them to be successful, they need political and economic support from local communities, social movements and the press/media.
We heard how monocultures destroy lands and entire ecosystems and therefore decided to focus on agroecology, through which peasants can reclaim control over their seeds, soils, water and agricultural production, fight against the commodification of natural resources, and protect and nurture the earth. Saving native species and nurturing biodiversity are central to ensuring the health and richness of our territories.

We acknowledged the mismatch between the locations and intensity of land grabbing, and the organizing of resistance. In places where the worst land grabs are happening, there are few social movements, and mobilizing and sustaining resistance are difficult. We thus recognize the importance of building and strengthening alliances with other movements, organizations and coalitions, and organizing communities where needed. The ‘grabbers’ are quicker than we are and usually have more money and access to state power than we do. We need to ally with constituencies fighting against land, forest, water and sea grabbing, SEZs, free trade and investment agreements, etc. and accordingly; our strategies need to address a broader spectrum of issues – for example, environmental policies, mining, fisheries, rivers, dams energy, health care, education, women’s rights, civil and political rights, etc.

**An agrarian revolution**

Food sovereignty will be the heart of our struggle. If we are united we can fight together.

Participant at the Bukit Tinggi workshop, 2012

In Bukit Tinggi, food sovereignty was re-affirmed as the appropriate paradigm for developing a vision that is meaningful in the present conjuncture. Food sovereignty necessarily demands secure access and control over lands, forests, migratory routes, fishing areas, water bodies (including seas), genetic resources and ecosystems by small-scale food producers. Food sovereignty cannot be realized without resource sovereignty and the active involvement of small-scale food producers in governing their territories, including customs and rules for sharing and nurturing domains that cross geo-political boundaries.

A new, revitalized vision of agrarian reform should be accompanied by aquatic reform. It must restore pride of identity and the dignity of peasants, indigenous peoples, fisher-folk, pastoralists, workers and women; respect the rights of the earth and the cosmovisions of different cultures; effectively fight poverty, unemployment and hunger; ensure a future for young people in the countryside; rebuild inter-dependence between producers and consumers; ensure social, economic, political and environmental justice; respect local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men, and guarantee the rights to resources, territory and self-determination for small-scale food producers. The rights of women, youth and historically marginalized groups (by social, cultural and economic discrimination) and their participation in decision-making must be prioritized. Although women are organizing and empowering themselves, they continue to face the worst acts of violence and repression from state, security and societal forces. The new agrarian reform must ensure the safety, dignity, abilities and rights of women in all spaces and struggles. The youth are our future and have a lot to teach the movements about new technologies, trends, outreach and communication methods, etc.

To counter the destruction wreaked by decades of neoliberalism, agrarian reform must be revolutionary in nature: a revolution that goes beyond land redistribution, and in which defending territories from expropriations, capitalist enclosures and exploitation is an
imperative. The agrarian revolution must create enabling conditions for enhancing living standards for the majority, rebuilding rural economies and ending distress migration. These include the public provision of good quality, affordable and accessible services such as health, education, electricity, water and sanitation, transportation, recreation, credit, banks, markets, etc. Despite the necessary focus on rural areas, our vision must also address the challenges in urban areas with respect to land, water, housing, food and essential services. The same forces of speculative capital that drive land grabbing and displace rural peoples also drive real estate speculation that lead to mass evictions of the urban poor. We must build rural-urban ‘land sovereignty’ alliances to fight common enemies.

Our vision calls for production, distribution and consumption models that enrich and empower small-scale food producers, and are non-exploitative, environmentally responsible and slow down climate change. Energy policy is particularly important since minerals, land, forests, rivers, seas and sea-beds are being captured to feed high-energy industries and lifestyles. Successful examples include agroecology, recovering native seeds and animal breeds, water harvesting, locally generated renewable energy, reviving traditional foods, re-building local food systems, and establishing cooperatives for production, marketing, quality control, etc. At the same time, we have to use all possible measures – legal, regulatory and direct action – to stop land, resource, water and sea grabbing.

Learning from the past, we realize the importance and urgency of building unity and solidarity among different constituencies and movements. Our struggles for food sovereignty, agrarian reform and defense of land and territories are struggles for peace, justice, dignity and life. We must join forces to end state, military and corporate occupations of lands and territories (as in Palestine, Mali, Mexico, Indonesia and India, among others), oppose war and the militarization of our economic systems, and challenge the criminalization of our struggles. We have the right to dissent, organize, associate, assemble, protest and build alternatives, and these rights must be upheld.

Finally, we concluded that popular education and committed outreach to society are crucial to mobilize broad-based opposition to land-resource grabbing, and to build public support for our vision of agrarian reform-revolution and governance of our lands and territories. To achieve this, we agreed to build alliances with like-minded researchers, journalists, academics, consumer groups and non-governmental organizations. As we elaborate our new vision and build our movements, we will continue to assess what needs to be done to strengthen our capacities and build on past successes. The generation of knowledge within, by and for our movements on diverse subjects ranging from trade, investment and finance to agroecology and marine conservation will be crucial in order to build well-informed, wise, ethical, active and influential movements for revolutionary agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory in the twenty-first century.

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MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

The nature of the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil: historical context and contemporary challenges

by the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) of Brazil

(1) Capitalism, in different historical periods, supported different agrarian reform programs. Here we will make a brief historical review of the focus given to agrarian reform, and its national and international context, during the process of development and consolidation of capitalist societies. At the end we describe the challenges the MST and the struggle for agrarian reform are currently facing in our country.

(2) In the transition of European feudalism – even the Asian mode of production and pre-capitalist societies in general – to commercial capitalism, peasants fought against rural oligarchies and feudal lords for the right of access to land. These struggles, limited to the demands of peasants themselves, cannot be characterized as struggles for agrarian reform.

(3) Only after the development of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century did the term ‘agrarian reform’ begin to be used. During this time, agrarian reform became both a government and State policy to change the patterns of land ownership and agricultural production of a given country and therefore meet the demands of the emerging urban-industrial societies.

(4) The transformation of the agrarian structure served the immediate interests of peasants who were struggling for land and against the plunder of landlords. But it went beyond that, as it became an instrument to boost the process of industrialization and to create and strengthen the internal market of capitalist societies.

(5) In the process of development of industrial capitalism, principal challenges to developing the internal market for manufactured products were the enormous concentration of land ownership, and the fact that most of the population lived in the countryside, landless and without an income, largely excluded from the marketplace. To resolve this contradiction, the industrial bourgeoisie, who controlled the State structures, imposed agrarian reform programs (or the democratization of land ownership to peasants) against the interests of the rural oligarchies.

(6) By democratizing land ownership, expropriating the landlords and overcoming the remnants of feudalism, the bourgeois state aimed to transform peasants into producers of goods for local industry as well as food producers for the urban population, while making them consumers of manufactured goods.

(7) From 1870 and beyond, this type of agrarian reform, initiated in the countries of Western Europe and the United States, has been implemented in other countries all over
the Northern Hemisphere. This process lasted until the 1950s with the Korean War. In different countries and historical moments, agrarian reform supported industrial development processes deployed by the bourgeoisie.

(8) These changes in land tenure, made by the bourgeois state, are called classical bourgeois agrarian reforms or simply bourgeois agrarian reforms. They share the following basic characteristics: they were pushed by the industrial bourgeoisie, strengthened the internal market through the democratization of land ownership and sought to transform peasants into producers and consumers of goods.

(9) From this model of classical bourgeois agrarian reform numerous other proposals emerged in peripheral economies, suited to their distinct realities, to the challenges that they aimed to overcome and, especially, to the correlation of political forces in the historical period in which they were implemented. Here in Latin America, the government of John F. Kennedy organized a continental meeting in Punta del Este (1961) to encourage governments to implement bourgeois agrarian reform programs, as a way to develop the internal market and prevent peasants from radicalizing, as had happened in the Cuban revolution. And economists of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) disseminated this thesis as a means of addressing underdevelopment throughout the 60s.

(10) There were also agrarian reforms carried out by the so-called nationalist governments, for example, by General Cardenas (1939–46) in Mexico, General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–75) in Peru and Jacob Arbenz in Guatemala (1951–54). Colonel Nasser in Egypt distributed all fertile land along the Nile River to peasants in the 1960s. In Brazil, the inclusion of agrarian reform on João Goulart’s structural reforms can be seen as an attempt at this kind of land reform, within a national project of capitalist development.

(11) There were also the anti-colonial land reforms, which intended to distribute land to local peasants, who reclaimed it from capitalist colonizers. But they were not called agrarian reform, just the right to the land of those who lived and worked in it. In this perspective, land distribution to peasants served as the basis for the social revolution of Haiti (1804) by Dessalines, and in Uruguay (Artigas Government) and Paraguay (França Government) in the 1810s, and the partial land distribution that was implemented during the Mexican revolution of 1910–20.

(12) There was a growth of national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa after the Second World War (1939–45). The groups and individuals that fought for the independence of their countries expropriated the lands of European settlers and handed them over to the peasants. These agrarian reform programs sought mainly to consolidate the political sovereignty of new nations. Countries such as Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Algeria and Libya, etc. are examples of places where this type of agrarian reform program was implemented.

(13) There are also examples of agrarian reforms by grassroots-driven governments, who in different historical processes intended to make a transition from capitalism to a socialist society. Agrarian reforms that occurred in Cuba, with the Revolution of 1959, Vietnam, from the victory over the United States in 1973, and the Nicaragua’s Sandinistas in 1979, are some examples.
Finally, there are agrarian reforms carried out by revolutions that have overcome the forms of capitalist organization. Those are socialist agrarian reforms. They nationalized land ownership, as a national asset, socialized ownership of the means of production and implemented varying forms and degrees of collective farm work. These agrarian reforms were carried out within a set of policies adopted by governments that were formed as a result of revolutions that were dedicated to socialism. Therefore, these agrarian reform programs were subject to radical changes in the general mode of production. We can cite as examples of this type of agrarian reform those that occurred as result of the revolutions in Russia (1917), Yugoslavia (1945), China (1949) and North Korea (1956).

In Brazil, throughout our history, we had several proposals and attempts to carry out an agrarian reform within the development framework of national capitalism. Some abolitionists, like Joaquim Nabuco (1849–1910), defended the idea that a process of land distribution should follow the freedom of Afro-descendant people from slavery. They were defeated by the oligarchy, who were involved in slavery and who had influential political power, the so-called ‘coronéis da terra’ (colonels of the land).

While Brazil was still in the transition from the model of plantation capitalism to industrial capitalism, the first peasant movements emerged and there was much struggle and dispute over land. Peasant communities led by religious leaders – like Canudos, in Bahia state (1894–96), Contestado, in Santa Catarina state (1912–16) and Calderão in Ceará state (1926–37) – exemplify this kind of struggle for land. These movements for agrarian reform sought to ensure the survival of peasant communities and their way of life under extremely unfavorable political and physical conditions. The peasant fighters did not even call it agrarian reform.

The term ‘agrarian reform’ and the agrarian reform struggle emerged in Brazil only after the Second World War. The struggle for agrarian reform grew with the growth of grassroots mobilizations, and was carried out by peasant movements – Peasant Leagues, the Union of Farmers and Farm Workers of Brazil (ULTABS) and the Movement of Landless Farmers (MASTER) – which were the first organizations to achieve national scale and in 1961 struggled under the motto ‘Agrarian reform by law or by force’. The programs of agrarian reform advocated by peasant movements of the time, and then by the popular government of João Goulart mentioned above, were defended as a strategy to develop the internal market for the local industry, in the mold of classical bourgeois agrarian reform.

Throughout the 1950s, until the military coup of 1964, the debate about the development of the Brazilian agricultural sector dominated the policy-making spaces. The agricultural sector was way behind in terms of social inequalities in the countryside and productivity because of the four centuries dedicated to the agro-export model. The debate was around whether it should be done through a bourgeois agrarian reform or through a pact between the industrial bourgeoisie and the rural oligarchy to ensure that land structure would stay the same.

During the dictatorship, the military government imposed ‘modernization without reforms’ and harshly repressed the peasant movement. As a result, the industrial bourgeoisie, unlike the European bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, allied itself with the rural oligarchy to develop a national capitalism dependent on the central countries.
There are many theories and interpretations of why the Brazilian industrial bourgeoisie did not defend the need for agrarian reform to industrialize the country. Among the reasons put forth is the fact that the Brazilian industrial bourgeoisie was not a truly nationalist bourgeoisie, who wanted to develop the nation. Also, Brazilian industry was born dependent on foreign capital and was not invested in developing a robust internal market. Another reason was that the bourgeoisie could make larger profits through the overexploitation of labor, and it was necessary to have a huge reserve labor army, composed of peasants who migrated each year to cities and drove wages down. Even today, the average salary in the Brazilian industry is one of the world’s lowest.

In the period 1964–84, with the imposition of a military dictatorship, the project developed by the bourgeoisie for the agricultural sector was based on a conservative modernization that was a painful process for peasants. From a political point of view, they physically annihilated all forms of peasant organization. And with a silent and repressed public, the bourgeoisie imposed their hegemony throughout society and agriculture. It was a period of growth of capitalist agriculture geared towards the global market, based on large tracts of land, agricultural mechanization, adoption of pesticides and the expulsion of peasants from their land. The only way out for peasants was to migrate to the city, to the agricultural frontier, or to the Amazon region to work in a still-hostile environment for agriculture. The result was the adoption of the ‘green revolution’ as a technological model to increase labor exploitation and productivity. It caused the largest migration of peasants in modern history, and one of the highest concentrations of land ownership in the world.

In the 1980s, with the re-democratization process, the cyclical crisis of capitalism and the resurgence of the struggle for land with new peasant movements contributed to the re-emergence of a political discourse around agrarian reform. Nevertheless, the struggle and demands for agrarian reform were still based on the goals of a classical bourgeois agrarian reform: democratizing land ownership as a form of reproduction of the peasantry, to integrate them in the internal market and to increase their income in order to improve welfare. In this historical political context, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) was born.

The theoretical framework of the MST program, because of the historical conditions of that period, was based on the assumptions of a bourgeois agrarian reform. Nevertheless, the more visible role of the peasantry, the more radical struggles, the backlash by the landowners and the bourgeois state, and the explicit political discourse of progressive and revolutionary struggles, which merged the struggle for land with the right to work, the struggle for agrarian reform with the democratization of land ownership and the struggle for a more just and egalitarian society with the ideals of socialism, all helped the MST to occupy a prominent space in the popular struggles of our country and politicize the struggle for agrarian reform.

In the early years, from 1979 to 1984, the peasant movement that would later give birth to the MST was limited to promoting the struggle for land. Then, from 1984 to 1992, with the expansion of the MST across more states of Brazil, the movement became an influential actor in the struggle for agrarian reform and benefitted from internal contradictions within dominant power, especially the conflict between the specific interests of the industrial bourgeoisie and of the rural oligarchies. The industrial bourgeoisie was interested in distributing
idle tracts of land under the dominion of large landowners (latifúndio) to the mass of landless peasants.

(25) Again, the goal of the industrial bourgeoisie was to promote the development of productive forces in the countryside and its integration into the market. On the other hand, the landed oligarchies reacted fast to the threat of losing control over land, and especially of losing their political influence over rural populations. This conflict grew inside of a State in which landowners were a minority group, yet still wielded undisputed power and influence. Landowner power was enough to systematically stop the implementation of agrarian reform, even if it was needed for the development of industrial capitalism.

(26) The power of the latifúndio (landlordism) manifested itself through the use of force and violence against peasants and their struggles. The crackdown on the MST, and the struggle for land in general, was organized by the rural oligarchies in the most archaic form of hired gunmen, together with their continued control over local police and judiciary in rural areas. They also benefitted from the connivance of the state governments, mostly conservative, who often were made up of people with origins in the latifúndio. This violence, produced by the most backward and unproductive sector in the Brazilian economy, was covered in the national and international media and ended up provoking an outpouring of sympathy and support for the struggle for agrarian reform.

(27) In the second half of the 1980s, these conservative forces of landlordism regrouped and, in 1986, created the Rural Democratic Union (UDR) to coalesce forces in the National Constituent Assembly, and unleashed a wave of selective violence against peasants and their organizations. The killings of Father Josimo in Maranhão in 1986, and Chico Mendes in Acre in 1988, attest to this criminal practice of landowners. The Federal Constitution of 1988, despite being considered progressive overall, was still very conservative on the theme of agrarian reform.

(28) The Brazilian bourgeoisie, while a hegemonic class, faced popular mobilizations in the 1980s for the democratization of the country, and the re-emergence of labor unions and student movements. Yet they won a major victory in 1989, the first presidential election by direct vote after the military dictatorship (1964–84). That electoral victory, first with the government of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–1) and then with Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), helped the bourgeoisie to pull together and unify the more conservative sectors of the country around a political and ideological agenda. These political-economic forces, aided by the information and ideological apparatus of the bourgeois media, implemented a new model of economic development, neoliberalism.

(29) Empowered by electoral victories, neoliberalism imposed: (a) opening of national markets, ensuring unrestricted mobility of capital and foreign goods; (b) cuts in social spending; (c) privatization and denationalization of strategic sectors of the national economy; (d) political and legal facilitation allowing international capital to capture natural resources, whether minerals, energy, biodiversity or agriculture; (e) changes in social safety net programs and labor legislation, inflicting setbacks and defeats on the working class as a whole.

(30) These neoliberal policies added force to transformations in the capitalist structure of production and work – technological innovations, decentralization and outsourcing – and to a renewed offensive of international capital, what we call ‘globalization’. The working
class suffered a string of tough defeats at the hands of neoliberalism and has since entered a period of decline of mass movements, organizations, construction of alternative proposals and weakened competition for a place in the national political agenda. In other words, the neoliberal decade of 1990 managed to create a climate of consensus and coercion, to the benefit of the bourgeoisie over the working class.

(31) This neoliberal offensive to take control of national wealth took a bit longer to penetrate Brazilian agriculture. First, international capitalism prioritized the most dynamic sectors of the urban economy. Then in the second term of the Cardoso government, international capital, associated with transnational agribusinesses and local landowners, began to direct their interests at Brazilian agriculture. But throughout the 1990s the MST was on the offensive in the struggle for land, imposing an agenda of agrarian reform on the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. In this period, the struggle for agrarian reform received the sympathy and support of social groups in society who opposed neoliberal policies. It is the period in which the MST played an important role in grassroots struggles in Brazil, and the leading role in the struggle for agrarian reform.

(32) The neoliberal offensive on Brazilian agriculture, begun under Cardoso, increased in the 2000s, introducing a new model of agriculture. Meeting the demands of national industry (1930–80) and the needs of the internal market were no longer priorities. This new model of domination of capital in the countryside is geared to meet the demands of global markets. Today it is a model of capitalist exploitation where large landowners are now in alliance with international and financial capital. It is Capital, rather than rural oligarchies, that now accumulates wealth from the countryside.

(33) A global division of labor and production, also established in the 1990s, defined this new model of capitalist agriculture. The central countries (metropolises) of capitalism assigned southern hemisphere countries the role of being the suppliers of agricultural raw materials, wood pulp, energy sources and minerals to the global market. This agribusiness model is a product of the recent hegemony of international and financial capital in the world and over production.

(34) In this model, the bourgeoisie, the State and governments have assumed the political position that a bourgeois agrarian reform is no longer needed for the development of the productive forces in agriculture. The unproductive land held in latifúndios, which under the previous economic model could be dedicated to agrarian reform after the political pressure of peasants and based on the needs of national industry, are now targeted and disputed by agribusiness capitalized by international and financial capital. Thus, there is clearly a newly fierce competition between two models of agriculture – peasant agriculture versus agribusiness – that are incompatible. We are seeing the revival of a conflict that existed in the time period 1889–1930 dominated by rural oligarchies. Should agricultural land be used for the production of food by peasants, or for production destined for agricultural exports, as advocated today by agribusiness? Agribusiness fights intensively against any kind of agrarian reform, both the classic bourgeois version and the rural social movements that are struggling for land. From the point of view of Capital, the ‘agrarian question’ in Brazil has now been resolved.

(35) This agricultural model of agribusiness subordinate to international capital was further enhanced from the global crisis of 2008, because a huge amount of fictitious, speculative
capital flowed into the Brazilian economy as a refuge from the vulnerable global market, and was invested in land assets and other natural resources. At the same time, part of this capital was placed in agricultural commodity futures markets for speculative purposes. This raised the average prices of agricultural commodities, increased land rent and land prices, and constituted yet another barrier to the process of democratization of land ownership. As a result we have witnessed an even greater concentration and rapid denationalization of land ownership in the last decade.

(36) This new model of agriculture changes the correlation of forces in the countryside. The large landowners – now capitalized and modernized – allied and subordinated to financial capital and transnational corporations are favored with a dominant position in the current model of agriculture, with increased concentration of land ownership, increased control over public policy and with the support of Society. The large landlord holding unproductive land, violent and backward, is seen by agribusiness as a fraction of their social class that should modernize and capitalize. Otherwise, they will lose their land, not to a bourgeois agrarian reform but to the agro-export economy.

(37) There are, however, some regions of the country, in which old-style landowners retain control of the land and wield political power. Data from government and academic research attest to the existence of approximately 30,000 such large landowners, backward landlords from the point of view of capital. But if landless peasants carry out land occupations on any of these estates, they immediately face agribusinesses as their main adversary, for three basic reasons:
(a) The land they occupy is also desired by agribusiness;
(b) There is a class identity and solidarity between capitalized large landowners and backward landlords;
(c) Agribusiness is perfectly aware that they are engaged in a dispute between different and incompatible agricultural models. Even if peasants do not organize occupations of large estates, agribusiness still seeks to take control over these lands, through purchase or lease, and also tries to take over public lands. Agribusiness today is engaged in a permanent offensive for the control of territories. This offensive of agribusinesses can always count on the support and connivance of the state and federal governments.

(38) Likewise, agribusiness considers the protection of areas belonging to traditional communities, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, as well as the restrictive rules of Brazil’s Forest Reserves Protection Code, as economically backward and retrograde. They pushed the ruling class to prioritize the lobby against the rights of these populations and changes in the rules of the Forest Reserves Protection Code in their political agenda.

(39) These transformations in the model of economic development in Brazil have forced changes in the nature of the struggle for land and agrarian reform. There is no longer room to call for a classic bourgeois agrarian reform, supported by an industrial bourgeoisie or by nationalist forces. Nevertheless, from the point of view of a peasants’ and a grassroots agenda of development for the country, agrarian reform is ever more urgent and necessary.

(40) Today, the struggle for agrarian reform has become a class struggle against the model of agriculture dominated by Capital. This means that the peasants’ struggle for land rights and a new model of agriculture faces a new correlation of forces – with powers of coercion and consensus-building that are stronger than those of traditional landowners in the past –
and new social actors arrayed against them: capitalized landowners, financial capital, and transnational corporations.

Moreover, those administrative apparatuses of the Brazilian state that had been structured to meet the needs of the peasant agriculture sector, like the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCRA), the Research Centre for Agriculture Development (EMBRAPA), the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), and the National Rural Extension Agency (EMATER), have been marginalized and stripped of resources, because they were created to meet the demands of the now extinct bourgeois models of agrarian reform. They are incapable of adjusting and perceiving that the agrarian reform settlements achieved by social movements today are laboratories for a new and different model of agriculture. These government agencies have become incapable of formulating public policies that meet the demands of peasants, becoming obsolete, expendable or, worse, co-opted by agribusiness.

This change of the nature of the struggle for agrarian reform requires new strategies of social movements and the MST in particular:

(a) We must construct and defend a new policy agenda for agrarian reform, and it should be grassroots-driven. It should not be another a classic bourgeois agrarian reform, which only divides the land among small property owners and integrates farmers in value chains as suppliers of raw materials and food for the urban-industrial society.

(b) Challenged by the new power of agribusiness, we need to build alliances among all peasant movements, and with the urban working class and other social sectors interested in real structural changes.

(c) The struggle for agrarian reform must now be seen as part of the fight against the model dominated by Capital. It is a new stage in our struggle with greater challenges and more complexity than were faced during the period of industrial development (1930–80), when agrarian reform settlements for food production in unproductive areas were seen favorably compared to a not very productive large estate sector directed toward export markets.

(d) The starting point for the new confrontations with Capital, and its model of agriculture, are the disputes over land and territory. But the disputes extend from there to the control of seeds, agroindustry, technology, natural resources, biodiversity, water and forests.

Our current program for a Popular Agrarian Reform is not a socialist program – although the strategic objectives of our struggle are to build a society with higher forms of socialization of production, natural resources and a new phase of social relations in the Brazilian society. A socialist agrarian reform, which has as its foundation the socialization of land, would require the implementation of policies of a socialist state, and would be the result of a long process of politicization, organization and cultural changes among the peasants, i.e. a social revolution. The objective and subjective conditions for that are not present in this historical period.

Thus, our struggle and our program for a Popular Agrarian Reform aim to contribute to real structural changes and, at the same time, are dialectically dependent on such transformations. A new ‘national project’ needs to be constructed collectively with all the grassroots political forces, and aimed at meeting the interests and needs of the Brazilian people. Therefore we seek with the popular struggle for agrarian reform to accumulate forces, achieve wins for peasants and inflict losses on rural oligarchies, organize and politicize our social
base and broaden and increase the support of Society for our struggle. That is our participation in the struggles of the entire working class toward building an eventual revolutionary process that reorganizes society and its modes of production under the ideals of socialism.

(45) This new nature of the struggle for agrarian reform presents new challenges, such as:
(a) The popular agrarian reform must be shown to solve concrete problems of the entire population of the countryside;
(b) While the agrarian reform is to be based on the democratization of land, it must demonstrate to Society that it will produce healthy food for the whole population, and that this is a goal that Capital with its the model of agribusiness is not able to or interested in achieving;
(c) The accumulation of forces for this type of agrarian reform now depends on an alliance between the peasants and urban workers. The landless alone will not be able to achieve a popular agrarian reform.
(d) The popular agrarian reform should represent the accumulation of forces for peasants and all of the working class toward building a new society.
São Paulo, March 2013.

TESTIMONY

I come from a peasant family in a rural village in West Sumatra. All the members of my family practice mixed farming. The situation in Sumatra is completely different from that of the farmers on the island of Java. In Sumatra we have 5 or 10 hectares per household. We grow rice, rubber, coffee and other cash crops, as well as food for self-subsistence, and most of our fields are intercropped.

I was a student at one of the state universities in West Sumatra in the early 1990s, before the end of the Suharto dictatorship. Some of us in the student movement, along with grassroots peasant leaders and activists, had the idea of building an autonomous movement of Indonesian peasant organizations. Since in Indonesia at that time it was forbidden to even speak of grassroots organizations, we started a small non-governmental organization (NGO) in Padang, West Sumatra. The founders were a group of local farmer leaders, students, activists and lawyers. Forming an NGO was a practical strategy for the movement. I was president of the student body in my university in 1995 and 1996, so I had a strong
network with most of the university student leaders of my province, and we worked together to build a peasant organization behind the scenes.

We carried out advocacy campaigns and mobilizations of peasants and students in West Sumatra, starting with a case against palm oil plantations. We had a good opportunity to learn about customary laws and practices related to land use, because this province has a long history of indigenous communities which maintain their traditional practices.

When Suharto fell in 1998, we formally announced the West Sumatra Peasant Union in Padang. This was shortly after the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI) formally declared itself on 8 July 1998. By the time FSPI organized its first conference in 1999, we were already a member. Some 30 peasant leaders travelled by their own resources from West Sumatra to Medan to participate in that first national conference, together with delegates of other peasant unions from many provinces in Indonesia.

I have always adhered to the principle that because I belong to an organization, I must consult with the membership regarding every detail of my role and contribution. After the first FSPI conference in February 1999 (at that time the name was still FSPI though later it became the Indonesia Peasant Union, or SPI), Henry Saragih was elected chairperson, and he asked me to join FSPI’s national leadership. So I consulted with my colleagues of the West Sumatra Peasant Union, and they agreed in principle, but told me I was not to jump directly to the national level; rather, I should work at the provincial level for six months more before fully occupying my time with the national work.

Eventually, I started working in the FSPI national office in Medan as head of the national campaign department. In that department, I worked intensely with the local struggles of FSPI members around the country, campaigning against large-scale palm oil plantations, against land grabbing and in favor of agrarian reform. Those were our top issues at the time. We organized many actions; for example in 1999, we organized the first large peasant gathering in Jakarta since before Suharto took power, with some 5000 peasants. This was our first public action after the fall of the dictatorship. I was in charge of organizing that national action. At that time FSPI’s strategy was to bring our struggle into the open. Because previously we had to operate in a clandestine manner, we now needed to inform the public of our organization and our struggles.

Since our main focus was the demand for agrarian reform, we invited a head of the national government’s land administration agency (Badan Pertanahan National – BPN), and we also invited the Minister of Forestry, and both came to give speeches. At the time it was very risky to raise the issue of land reform. We took a big risk because after the 1965 coup, in Indonesia the term ‘agrarian reform’ was taboo because it was associated with one of the prohibited parties. But we felt we were defending our Constitution, which includes an article saying that all natural resources, such as land, air and water, belong to the state but are to be fully used for the welfare of the people. Also, the Basic Agrarian Law No. 5 was still in effect (though unenforced); it had been passed by Sukarno to replace the colonial land law, clearly establishing a legal basis for agrarian reform, and guaranteeing that everyone have enough land. The Sukarno Law was never repealed during the Suharto years, and it still exists but was never implemented. Agrarian reform was a very politically tense topic at the time, yet we raised the issue and were successful in the sense that the existence of FSPI and the issue of agrarian reform appeared in many national media outlets for the first time.

However, before FSPI went public, peasant land occupations were already taking place. We might say that the history of FSPI (now SPI) is really based on the issue of agrarian reform and the history of land occupations. FSPI was born of the land struggle, water
issues, territorial issues of the indigenous peoples and especially the struggle of land occupations. These continue to be the basis of SPI’s struggle today.

With respect to land occupations in Indonesia, typically a community or a village is trying to recover their ancestral land which had been stolen from them. The people reoccupy and struggle for the land because it is part of their history, the history of their ancestors; it’s a living story of their community.

In Indonesia we have a very strong traditional community land system, and Basic Agrarian Law No. 5/1960 very clearly states that land law in Indonesia is based on pre-existing indigenous community-based systems. The law recognizes and respects these systems, while trying to balance them with the national interest. This is especially true in West Sumatra, which is one of the most indigenous provinces in Indonesia. Yet we did not speak of the ‘issue of indigenous peoples’, because in West Sumatra everyone is indigenous. Our Minangkabau culture is matrilineal, and according to our indigenous beliefs and knowledge, we exist because we have territory; without our territory we do not exist.

One of the first FSPI struggles was against a palm oil plantation in West Sumatra that was nationalized from a Dutch company. We have also had cases against mining companies, other palm oil companies and against a new airport. The first congress of the West Sumatra Peasant Union was held in the area where the government was planning to build the new airport. We organized against the land grabbing to build that airport. While we lost in the sense of the land, in contrast with other struggles, the government had to pay us more than ample compensation.

As head of education in FSPI, I traveled around Indonesia, mostly working on organizational issues, because we were new and needed to explain to our members the role and struggle of FSPI as a national peasant movement. Member training focused on the agrarian reform struggle, land occupations and peasant land rights under the Basic Agrarian Law. Along with this educational process, we continued to organize actions and land occupations around the country.

In 2001, FSPI, along with other peasant organizations and NGOs, organized the National Conference on Agrarian Reform. Through a great deal of discussion and debate, we formulated our definition of agrarian reform in the context of Indonesia, and we discussed peasants’ rights. We had been communicating with the government on these issues, and the human rights commission worked with us to organize the conference, in part because they had been receiving a lot of complaints of repression in the context of land conflicts. We concluded that we needed to propose a mechanism to more broadly address land reform. Of course, we needed to keep up the pressure on the national human rights commission to solve the conflicts case by case, but we also needed an umbrella organization to work collectively on the issue.

Before moving the national office to Jakarta in 2001, we were just four people on the FSPI’s national executive body. After working as head of the campaign department, I was head of the education department, and finally I headed FSPI’s international relations department. I was working in Jakarta, but regularly travelled back and forth between Jakarta and Medan.

At the end of 2004, just before FSPI hosted the International Operative Secretariat (IOS) of La Via Campesina (LVC) in 2005, I was still the head of FSPI’s international relations department. As such, I began to be in touch with LVC. I was a member of the LVC delegation at the 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and I attended the meeting of the G4 nations and the Global Forum on Agriculture Research as an LVC representative. I was also an LVC representative at the Asia coordination level, with a mandate to bring the issues of Indonesian peasants to the international level.
When the proposal arose that the IOS of LVC be based in Indonesia, among FSPI leaders we discussed the political decision of whether or not to accept the IOS. At LVC’s fourth conference in Sao Paulo, the final decision was made to move the LVC headquarters to Jakarta. After receiving the mandate, LVC prepared for the move, and FSPI as well, because some of us would move from FSPI to work in LVC’s international secretariat. We agreed that each of us moving to LVC would commit to stick with the task until the end of the FSPI mandate for hosting the IOS. We understood that this was not a matter of appointing individuals, but rather that the IOS was the collective responsibility of FSPI as an organization.

Since then, I have taken on quite a varied mix of tasks in the IOS of LVC, partly because of my history in FSPI where my role was always changing. In the beginning, I was in charge of IOS’s Asian and African continental issues; now I’m in charge of Asia, while on the issue level I’m in charge of agrarian reform and of trade issues.

Based on my experience in SPI and in LVC, my mind has been opened and I now realize that we as Indonesian peasants are not alone. We have common problems with other peasants, common struggles across Indonesia, Asia, Latin America, Europe and Africa. We fight together for natural resources and defend our dignity as indigenous peoples, peasants, small farmers and rural communities across continents. I now realize that the agrarian struggle is the main reason not only why FSPI was born, but also the reason LVC was born, because the struggle for land, water and territory, and the agrarian reform struggle in general, are the basic struggles for many organizations. Also, I think it’s quite important to see the experiences of those in Latin America, in Asia, in Africa, to learn from each other and exchange our strong spirits. LVC has a very successful methodology of working among peasants, among the landless, among small farmers, using the exchange of experiences to build unity across the diversity of national peasant organizations.

Of course we have different cultures, development conditions and government policies. But in general I say we are similar across continents. For example, the peasants, indigenous people and others are victims of big development projects. Displacement by large dams has occurred in Brazil and in Indonesia, as has displacement to make way for big plantations in many countries. Perhaps the companies, the culture or the way of electing the government varies depending on the country. The form of government, the police or the military might be different, but in general we are victims of the economic model chosen by governments under pressure by international capital and financial institutions.

I have also become aware of some differences among us. For example, while in Asia and Latin America we more or less share the same position on the issue of agrarian reform, for our comrades in Africa, many of whom still have traditional land use systems in place, it seems they do not focus so much on this issue, but rather they directly fight land grabbing, or engage in the struggle over water. But I see that in Asia and Latin America we have a similarity, that for us as rural people it’s not just a matter of land, a matter of territory, but a matter of changing the very structure of society, because what we struggle for really is justice. This is an unjust world, and we need agrarian reform, not just land to the tiller; but beyond that, it is about changing the structure of society to bring about balance and social justice. This is part of the difference I observed with our friends in Africa, but later I realized that this varies in different parts of Africa. For example, South Africa and Zimbabwe have focused more on agrarian reform, and thus are more like Latin America and Asia.

Since I have been the IOS liaison with the African continent, I have visited Africa several times. One of the big promises after the apartheid regime in South Africa was implementation of land reform, and a state agenda exists on that issue. Through our
Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform (GCAR), I learned that South Africa is one of the countries in the World Bank project of market-assisted land reform. This is like a fake land reform and is similar to what we face in Indonesia, though the name is different; in Indonesia we call it a land administration project. In general, it’s similar to the World Bank’s so-called land reform in Brazil, where they also push market-assisted land reform. However, what happened in Zimbabwe is different; there, national leaders, the government, have decided to work seriously on the land reform issue. Also, during the World Social Forum in Kenya, I noticed that the issue exists in Kenya as well, but the movement is not yet strong enough to bring it up as a national issue.

One successful result of GCAR in the work of LVC is that we forced the agrarian reform issue back onto the UN agenda in the form of the FAO International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), held in 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. There, agrarian reform was once again formally recognized by the UN and by its member States. I think this is one of our big successes, to have gotten it back on the agenda, even though we realize that we still have a lot of homework ahead to achieve implementation. But many LVC organizations now use ICARRD to claim legitimacy from the UN and by states, which is politically very important. So it is not just a matter of the local struggle of SPI in Indonesia, or of LPM (Landless People’s Movement) in South Africa, MST (Landless Movement) in Brazil or of COCOCH (Coordinating Council of Campesino Organizations) in Honduras, or any other LVC member, but it’s about universal rights.

From what I have seen in the past 20 years of LVC, and based on my personal involvement for the past 15 years, I think LVC has become more visible and is now recognized as the principal representative of the international peasant movement, of international landless peoples and of indigenous peoples worldwide, because our membership includes all continents. LVC has also developed respectful relationships with many other actors, such as nomadic pastoralists, fisher folk, migrants, consumers and others. In the process of LVC, as we tried to strengthen our own organization we also realized that our struggle cannot be achieved alone; we need to build strategic alliances. With respect to this, LVC is in some sense seen as a first among social movements, among peoples’ organizations, even by NGOs. We need a new understanding of the role of our NGO allies as a support system for social movements.

After 20 years, while LVC has been strengthening itself internally, it has also been moving from the struggle in rural areas, at the village level far from the cities, to the national and global stage. Meanwhile, we are publicizing the issues of peasants, the landless and of all our members.

A key point, I feel, is that LVC makes proposals; we are not just against things and saying ‘Stop!’', but we produce concrete ideas as alternatives for the situations we oppose. For example, we began with a proposal on implementation of agrarian reform, and then we raised the issue of Food Sovereignty, a concept which is now accepted by many organizations even if their vision is somewhat different from that of LVC. Recently LVC has become strategically involved in climate issues, arguing that sustainable family farming can cool the planet, and we formulated a proposal which poses agroecology as the alternative for various global problems – the food crisis, the role of TNCs, and the climate issue. LVC has a strong membership across continents, and we struggle forcefully against the dominant government and economic model in the world, yet at the same time we propose alternatives.

In the 20 years of Via Campesina, we of SPI, along with others in agrarian struggle across continents, have learned lessons as a movement, and these have changed our way of thinking. One example is that of nomadic pastoralists and the fisher folk. I remember
in the old days when people talked about the struggle for agrarian reform they were only thinking of farmers, or only of landless peasants, and sometimes our comrades in Africa said that agrarian reform was a problem there, because it gave the land to one actor, the peasant, but excluded others like the nomadic pastoralists for whom land reform was a form of enclosure. Now in LVC we must take into account other rural people such as pastoralists and fisher folk.

We have reconsidered the old theories of agrarian reform, and studied revolutionary theory related to this topic. But today we no longer just talk about land, water or agrarian resources, but we are also starting to address the issue of territory. In LVC we have many of the indigenous peoples, whose main concern is the struggle for autonomy over their territory, and we also have allies such as pastoralists and fisher folk who are also talking about territory. So this issue is becoming important. Just last year, in Indonesia, we organized an international internal LVC seminar to try to reformulate what we mean by agrarian reform after 20 years, and we have incorporated territory into our struggle for the defense of land and water.

Today we need to share our new and evolving analysis, further elaborate it, and educate LVC members about what we mean by ‘Agrarian Reform in the 21st Century’. This is part of our ongoing process of collective analysis. For example, with the multiple crises in the capitalist world, a new wave of land grabbing has arisen, which clearly varies across continents. For Asia and Latin America, land grabbing is not a new issue; it’s part of the history of why our national organizations and LVC were born. But some of our members in Africa, for example, see this as a new issue because with the new global crisis their continent has become the arena of competition among large transnational companies and strong foreign states to try to gain control of land on that continent. Perhaps Africa was not so important for many TNCs and wealthy states before, but that has changed, and that’s why in Africa land grabbing is more of an issue, and anti-land grabbing campaigning has more strength.

In Asia and Latin America we faced this earlier on. With the global crisis, land grabbing is increasing, but since we have faced this before we don’t see it as new; rather we keep pushing agrarian reform as the alternative. We feel it’s just not enough to detain land grabbing; we also need to make a positive proposal to change the structure of society in order to bring about justice on an international level.

I think capitalism still has not found a way out of the global economic crisis, and we are already almost five years into it. But now international capital is trying to use the crisis as a way of growing and accumulating even more profit. So I think the main focus for LVC in the future will be to keep the agrarian reform and territorial issues alive, as levers to change the unjust situation in society. That will still be our top priority, but of course with the global situation at the moment, we must continually reformulate our strategy and tactics. I think the principal strategies will be similar; for example, agrarian reform, and promoting food sovereignty, agroecology, peasant seeds and biodiversity. LVC needs to keep focusing on these issues, but at the tactical level we need to be more clever. For example, on the issue of land and territory we were successful in bringing the agrarian reform issue to the UN in 2006, but our enemy is now also trying to use the same UN system to advance their agenda. For example, the World Bank is now more aggressively working with ICARRD, with the FAO, with UN Habitat, etc. We need to get the UN back on track, because the TNCs are going to the UN to fight with us in the same arena. So I think it’s important for LVC to analyze this situation and formulate a new strategy for working with the UN. To put it another way, I would say we have to dance with our own choreography in the UN and to our own music, not with choreography that’s not ours, nor to their music. If we try to dance to their music, both we and they will dance and feel happy, but the result will be not ours but theirs, even though we all feel happy.
together. So I think working with the UN will be a very big, important challenge for LVC in the future in terms of struggles over land and territory.

At the same time, LVC needs to stick with land occupations. Occupying land isn’t outmoded or based on old theory or old practice. With land occupations we achieve small victories and that’s how we grow. We can talk about the UN or about international policy, but our members at the local level can’t wait for such and such a negotiation, for a certain policy to be agreed upon and implemented. It will take years to obtain results from the system at the policy level. Yet the land issue continues at the grassroots level, so we must keep occupying land at the grassroots level, and implement agroecology and the cooperative model. It’s important for LVC to keep hope alive in the people, not just create or dream of a utopia to be won at the international level. We must keep hope alive with actions and small victories at the grassroots level, and there is a necessary relation between the grassroots and international levels. For example, if we carry out land occupations, this is also a very effective pressure tactic to bring about implementation at the policy level. This is the importance of global campaigns – to justify the land occupations on the local level in order to influence those international policies toward which we are working.

In LVC, it’s not always our role or our position to study or formulate a policy. A lot needs to be done and we have our limitations in that area, so for that we have our allies. Nevertheless, it’s not the role of our policy allies to lead the process. While the job of some of our allies is to justify what works at the national or international level, it doesn’t just magically come about, or happen in a vacuum. Justification takes place at the local level. The people need land or want to protect their territory; the fisher folk would like to protect their fishing areas. These issues must be connected and must justify one another, so if we carry out occupations of land, or of fishing areas, they will need to be supported and justified by work at the international policy level. But in the push for new policies and in the public debate, we are building alliances in the process and putting the peasant and indigenous peoples’ organizations in the lead of that process.

Finally, I have gotten a feeling during the 20 years of LVC, and during the years of the IOS in Jakarta, that the demands of Indonesian peasants for an International Peasants’ Rights Convention have been very helpful and important to LVC. This started with local discussions in Indonesia, then was socialized among the LVC membership, and has now become one of LVC’s main struggles. Many different actors have been formally recognized by the UN, such as indigenous peoples and workers, but peasants do not yet have any rights in the UN system. We are very happy that last year the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva formally accepted LVC’s proposal on the Peasants’ Rights Convention as a part of the UN process. Indonesian peasants are very glad to be able to contribute to this international struggle, to peasants in all continents, and we are conscious that SPI has played an important role in strengthening LVC.

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REFLECTION

Our evolving collective vision of agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory

Faustino Torrez, Nicaragua

In La Via Campesina we have engaged over nearly two decades in a process of collective construction of positions of agrarian reform and the defense of land and territory. Over time we have evolved a new concept of Agrarian Reform that recognizes the socio-environmental functions of land, the sea, and natural resources, in the context of food sovereignty. This implies policies of redistribution and just and equitable access to and control of natural, social and productive resources (credit, appropriate technologies, health, education, social security etc.) by peasants and family farmers, indigenous people, landless workers, artisanal fisherfolk, pastoralists, the unemployed, Dalit communities, Afrodescendants and other rural peoples. In our current view, endogenous development policies should be based on agroecological strategies centered on family and peasant agriculture and artisanal fishing; trade policies that oppose dumping and favor peasant and family farm production for local, national and international markets, and public policies to complement these in the areas of education, health and infrastructure for the countryside.24

Based on these principles we engage in collective action, resistance and mobilization, and develop concrete proposals for the improvement of the conditions of the families who live from the land and territory, and access to natural resources.

The history of agrarian reform

Throughout history the struggle for land and territory has included the need to obtain access to natural resources. The origin of the concept of Agrarian Reform dates from the end of the eighteenth to the end of the twentieth centuries, responding to two principal motives. Capitalist agrarian reform sought to create internal markets for national industrial development and to transform landless farmers into independent entrepreneurs, while socialist agrarian reform redistributed land to farmers in the context of more profound processes of change of the capitalist mode of production and thus included other mechanisms such as the collectivization of land and the means of production, and the nationalization of lands.

24Translated from Spanish by Ronald Nigh and Peter Rosset.
Each kind of agrarian reform had its peculiar characteristics according to the historical conditions of each country and to the existing degree of organization among the peasantry. Among the polemics and differences among them were debates over the process of democratization of land, and the reduction of poverty and rural inequality. Throughout, we perceive a clear antagonism between the notion that agrarian reform should be based on the market versus the belief that it should serve the interests of the peasantry.

Over time we observe that the concept that rural social movements have of agrarian reform has broadened. The notion of territory had been incorporated, also, and non-farming activities like fishing, forest livelihoods and pastoralism. We now understand that agrarian reform is not just an issue concerning peasants and landlords, but rather all of Society. In our spaces of collective construction we are currently engaged in the joint search for the combination of the peasant perspective with indigenous cosmovisions, the latter of which can be summed up in the phrase Buen Vivir (‘living well’; at peace with ourselves, and in harmony with each other and with the Mother Earth).

The World Bank and market-assisted agrarian reform

For decades the World Bank (WB) ignored the subject of unjust land distribution and the need to implement integral agrarian reform in many countries of the South. In response to the strong criticisms provoked by neoliberal structural adjustment policies, for their disastrous effects on the well-being of the majority of rural populations, in the mid 1990s the World Bank announced a change in its policies to prioritize poverty reduction and, in this context, discovered Redistributive Land Reform. Since that time the World Bank has been propagating its ‘negotiated’ or ‘market-assisted agrarian reform’ in various regions of the world.

This offensive, while it opens certain opportunities, involves serious dangers, since the model does not guarantee integral and broad agrarian reform that affirms the right of peasant families to access land and other productive resources. Furthermore, the manner in which the Bank is applying its model ignores the social forces struggling for agrarian reform in their countries and threatens to reverse their conquests.

Since the implementation of structural adjustment programs and the spread of economic globalization, governments have implemented models of agrarian reform based on the Bank’s ‘market-assisted agrarian reform’ with which it hopes to substitute traditional models in which the state has the direct responsibility of carrying out agrarian reform, using the privileged tool of expropriation.

In many countries, the reforms promoted by the WB resulted in the privatization of lands and other natural resources, and new waves of concentration. Based on the sale of lands belonging to small producers to landlords, and vice versa, the latter with heavy debt burdens for the purchase of low quality land from the wealthy at inflated prices, the ‘market-assisted agrarian reform’ results in a spiral of land loss and debt for peasants, who finally are expelled into misery.

Agrarian reform and broad-based human development

On the other hand, agrarian reform is not only about (re)distributing land. The concept of agrarian reform has a strong connection with broad-based human development and the generation of employment, and is fundamental for food sovereignty.

The effect of the failure to implement integral agrarian reform should not be seen as a problem for peasants or indigenous people but as a problem of all of Society. Most urban
and migration problems in the world are a direct consequence of this failure. With integral agrarian reform we could achieve sufficient food production, job creation and, especially, social stability and thus true peace.

We need to be clear that peasants and indigenous people are not naturally poor, but rather they have been impoverished, and the ‘failure’ of development banks and the destruction of natural resources is not their fault; rather it is governments and their policies and functionaries that have led to the current environmental and economic disaster. Today there is talk of poverty reduction and more ‘conditioning’ of debt, but it must be made clear that we should not be seen as people needing social welfare and charity policies, but rather as the subjects and protagonists of our own development.

Agrarian reform and original peoples

One of the most significant contributions of the cosmovision of indigenous peoples is that territory is not just a geographic space, but rather encompasses much more. Territory expresses the identity of a people, it is where the ancestors lived and where they still reside, it means knowledge and ways of knowing (‘saberés’), historical memory, and the right of usufruct of the communal resources which properly speaking belong to the Mother Earth.

The original peoples see agricultural cycles in terms of the cosmic ordering of time and space, and energy flows in the family and the community. Therefore, when transnationals and extractive industries build their megaprojects in indigenous territories, it is not just based on the simple displacement and criminalization of peoples, but is like a destructive force in their lives, that shatters collective structures of power and social organization, threatening the survival of a generation and the loss of a culture.

It is no longer possible to address agrarian reform without bringing indigenous peoples into our struggle. They are on the front lines of the battle to defend territory, and thus over time they have become the principal strategic member and ally of the struggle for a real, genuine and integral agrarian reform.

The Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform

The Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform was launched in 1999 by La Via Campesina and FIAN25; more recently the Land Research Action Network26 was incorporated, for the purpose of jointly reinforcing the struggle for agrarian reform and access to land as a prerequisite to the right to adequate food for landless peasant families. We believe that subject of agrarian reform implies a long-term commitment, since land reform has as its object change in the central institutions of society as well as the relationship among the different actors.

The leadership of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR) has been recognized by various sectors such as peasant organization, researchers, NGOs, donor agencies, certain levels of governments and international agencies such as FAO and the World Bank as the principal network of civil society that has monitored and lobbied for land issues. The GCAR is a network of organizations dedicated to land-related issues, for the purpose of converting agrarian reform into a priority in the agenda of social movements, NGOs,

25 www.fian.org
26 www.landaction.org
government agencies and governments. The GCAR has gathered valuable knowledge and experience to support local and national struggles for agrarian reform. The Emergency Network and Investigative Missions have turned out to be essential tools for denouncing human rights violations related to the struggle for land and the defense of territory. The letters of support and visits have been highly appreciated. In some cases the interventions have had an immediate positive effect for the peasants involved. In most cases, concrete change requires long-term support. The exchange of information and experiences has been extremely successful for developing forms of action and reinforcing the global movement for agrarian reform.

Genuine and integral agrarian reform

It is becoming clear to us that we need a genuine and integral agrarian reform, a hybrid cosmovision that incorporates space, territory, water and biodiversity, an agrarian reform that begins with a wide process of distribution of land and/or the defense of territory. The possession and use of land should be subordinated to a principle that rights to land accrue only to those who work it, depend on it and reside upon it with their family. We need an agrarian reform that aids the reinsertion of peasants on their land; this would also serve to regulate rural-urban and international migration. We defend the principle of land as social and not individual property. Land speculation must be prohibited and capitalist corporations (industrial, commercial and financial) should be prevented from acquiring large extensions of land (land grabbing).

Genuine and integral agrarian reform is characterized by the democratization of agrarian structures, changing the relations of economic and political power that cause land concentration. Such an agrarian reform should prohibit the commoditization of the right to produce and (re)introduce control of overproduction, limiting exports and dumping, and guarantee food sovereignty.

Redistributive policy implies, above all, the expropriation of private lands that serve no social purpose. The goal should be to redistribute land and power, altering the relations of power in society in favor of farmers and the coalitions that support them. Such an agrarian reform cannot be carried out through market mechanisms. Past agrarian reforms favored one sector over others. Future agrarian reforms must balance the needs of peasants and family farmers with those of fisherfolk, indigenous people, the landless, pastoralists and other rural peoples, and must be true agrarian reforms that guarantee these peoples total access to and control over the land and its resources. It must be an agrarian reform that gives legal guarantees to peasants who have occupied lands to survive, an agrarian reform that guarantees communal land ownership, and that is designed to resist the threat of counter-agrarian reform.

Toward a new focus for agrarian reform

To transcend classical agrarian reform, we need a rebirth of the concept that goes beyond land as a means of production, incorporating notions of space, territory and cosmovision. We must resist concepts of rural development that come from the city, which are in opposition to the proposals of GCAR and La Via Campesina. Such are the production systems installed by multinational corporations in the countryside. We need to work for our own model of agriculture, a different vision. We cannot keep favoring a countryside that is looking toward the city, that wants live in the style of the city. This is not sustainable.
We are facing a huge offensive of consumerism. The GCAR has played an important role in revealing truths about our culture and our lifestyles. We need to present our different vision of integral agrarian reform, one that contemplates all the aspects of a person’s life.

We need to speak of an Integral Agrarian Reform. This would incorporate the best of peasant life, balancing traditional and modern practices in such a way that we are not buried by the latter. We must fight to make rural women and youth more visible.

We must adapt to the times we are living in, with a practical vision. Life happens today, every day. If we don’t see today, we will have difficulty projecting tomorrow. We are in a contradictory moment of both a strong depeasantization, ever decreasing peasant agriculture in many places, displaced by the territorial logic of agribusiness, with repeasantization in other areas. This differentiates our concept of agrarian reform. We are also facing a farm crisis due to the loss of young people from the countryside and the advancing average age of farmers.

Another reality is that the neoliberal economic system has made peasant and family farm agriculture unviable. We peasant families have had to combine multiple activities, where, for example, the men have gone out to sell their labor and the women have assumed the role of sustaining agriculture. Women have shown us that we need to fight to preserve our peasant seeds as the first step toward recovering our autonomy and building food sovereignty. We defend a model of peasant, family and indigenous production that combats the commoditization of life.

When the World Bank and most governments speak of agrarian reform, they do not support our land occupations, but rather credit schemes to buy land. Unfortunately this only reinforces the private property paradigm and inevitably leads to the reconcentration of land. We must urgently rethink the entire system of property corresponding to the neoliberal model. Breaking out of the disastrous neoliberal model requires rethinking the entire property regime of any country.

We are involved in a collective reflection to reconstruct these issues. We have seen several agrarian reforms, which in the end have been swallowed by market-based models, and we want a clean break from that.

**Land grabbing**

We are seeing a return to a colonial-style scheme of land grabbing, the use of large tracts of land for agribusiness, mining, multinational plantations, etc. They attempt to concentrate huge amounts of land, many of which could be used in agrarian reform and food production. The poor distribution of land and the process of reconcentration in the hands of the few – in this case, multinational corporations who promote monoculture of soy, sugar cane and eucalyptus in Brazil; African oil palm in Colombia and Indonesia; Jatropha and grain for export in many countries, etc. These corporations displace and evict poor families, pollute rivers and privatize access to water, putting the life and livelihoods of peasants at risk. The corporations are buying and invading communal and family lands historically used for food production. Thus, land grabbing is an aggravating cause of the food crisis, along with speculation and the results of the application of the technology of the Green Revolution (degrading the productive capacity of farm land) and the policies of commercial agriculture on the world level.

**Criminalization of struggle**

For decades, peasants and indigenous people of the world have been united to struggle for agrarian reform, and to recover and defend our territories, but we have been criminalized for
our struggle. This criminalization of struggle and the repression, involving the police, the army and the private security of corporations, translates into assassinations, judicial persecution and a high level of impunity, because nothing is investigated nor are the responsible parties ever punished in spite of the evidence presented.

Conclusions
La Vía Campesina has been an important space of struggle in which peasants, family farmers, the landless and indigenous peoples have encountered each other’s cosmovisions. Out of this we are collectively constructing a new concept of integral agrarian reform and the defense and sharing of territories with each other. In this struggle we are confronting land grabbing, neoliberal policies like market-assisted land reform, and the criminalization of social protest. Nevertheless, we are forging unity in our struggle for true agrarian reform as a pillar in the construction of food sovereignty.

Faustino Torrez is a high level cadre of the Rural Workers’ Association (ATC) of Nicaragua, and represents La Via Campesina (LVC) on the coordination team of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR).

TESTIMONY
‘I have the responsibility to achieve food sovereignty in my own home and in Africa’

Elizabeth Mpofu, Zimbabwe

My name is Elizabeth Mpofu. I was born on the 30th of December of 1959 in Manicaland Province in the Buhera district of Zimbabwe. I grew up in Buhera, in a family of eight children. I had four sisters and three brothers. My parents were farmers and we were able to go to school thanks to selling the products from our farm, especially groundnuts and maize.

Only my brothers were offered opportunities for secondary school education, as the cultural belief was that girls only needed to be able to read and write letters. So after primary school I stayed at home for a year trying to explain to my parents why I wanted to go further with my studies. I spent most of my time helping with the farm work and came to love
agriculture. If not working on my parents’ farm I would go to look after my parents’ herd of cattle. After a year, my parents finally agreed I could attend secondary school.

When my father got a job in Harare he thought of inviting me to stay, and tried to find a place for me to go further with my schooling, but as he had no decent accommodation I was forced to stay with a cousin. After some two months staying with him he took advantage of the absence of his two wives and raped me. I became mentally ill, which ended with my life being in jeopardy. This was a sad moment for me and my family, as I was not staying at home but fled to the bush where I subsisted on wild fruits. Finally, my parents consulted traditional spirit mediums (healers) and were able to cure me by following their instructions, and I finally reunited with my family. But my life was worsened, and now, although together with my family, I was left with no option but to stay at home and look after the baby. I was 14 years of age and I just thought that was the end of my life.

But then, during the liberation struggle, known in Zimbabwe as the ‘Third Chimurenga War’, I joined with other boys and girls as war collaborators, assisting our liberation fighters whom we called comrades. That is when I realized that there was indeed a purpose in going through so many personal struggles, struggles that made me strong.

In 1982, after the liberation of our country, I married a police officer stationed in Buhera. When he was transferred to Masvingo, I joined an organization headquartered there called the Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Environmental Conservationists (AZTREC). I was later elected as Board chairperson of this organization comprised of liberation war veterans, traditional chiefs, spirit mediums and traditional healers. This composition shows the objectives and the values of this organization.

As we were all landless farmers, in 2000 we took part in a land occupation organized by the local branch of the organization, and we applied for that land to be regularized in the name of the families engaged in the occupation, so that we could practice traditional sustainable agriculture, which was no longer being practiced but which we felt needed to be recovered. In AZTREC we were working towards the revival of traditional knowledge and farming systems. When we and other families carried out the land occupation, it was not so easy, as the white farmer who claimed to be the owner of the land (land that had been stolen from black farmers) tried his level best to fight with us re-settlers. But because of the support of our government and the land reform we were pressuring for, we finally overpowered him over a two-year period.

I already had experience with organic farming, because when I was producing vegetables in the police camp where my husband was stationed before retiring, many other women were using chemical fertilizers, but I did not apply any kind of chemicals to my plants, and my vegetables were in great demand and tasted the best. Also, when there was no water for the garden, only my vegetables remained green.

Editor’s note: AZTREC was (and is) a national alliance of demobilized liberation fighters (‘war veterans’) who were promised but never received land, with traditional spiritual leaders, and with traditional indigenous authorities. All had struggled together in the war of liberation, but were being partially left out of the new Zimbabwe, due the failure to deliver on land reform, and by the imposition of State structures that left traditional authorities powerless and ignored indigenous culture. While remaining nominally in the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) camp, they represent(ed) a sort of internal pressure group from below, who pushed for the ever delayed land reform to be implemented, and for the recovery of traditional indigenous cosmovision (including traditional, agroecological farming practices) as the basis of ‘endogenous development’ – rather than conventional modernization – to be constructed once land redistribution finally occurred. They were part of the forces and strategists behind the massive, nationwide wave of land occupations in 2000 that were among the factors that led to the implementation of land reform by the State.
With the values that we built in AZTREC, and with the support of some NGOs like the Fambidzana Permaculture Center, we had received some training about organic farming and agroecology. For me, agroecology relates to endogenous development in the sense that it is based on the use of our own natural resources, that surround us, and on the use of natural pesticides. It is farming practiced from within. Producing what we want, in the way we want, in ways which are friendly to our environment.

The Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers Forum (ZIMSOFF), of which I am now chairperson, emerged from the smallholder farmers’ Convergence of August 2002, held parallel to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The convergence was aimed at increasing smallholder farmers’ visibility to each other, visibility in decision-making, visibility in sustainable agriculture, and visibility of the smallholder farmers’ contribution to sustainable development.

The Participatory Ecological Land Use Management Association (PELUM) – of which AZTREC was a grassroots part – facilitated the coming together of these smallholder farmer leaders from different countries. This enabled us to meet, speak, celebrate and share our agenda in the context of the rest of the world. Once back home in Eastern and Southern Africa, the PELUM Association helped smallholder farmers from this regional block to review the smallholder farmers’ convergence. The process of review and reflection led to the formation of the Eastern and Southern Africa Smallholder Farmers Forum (ESAFF). ZIMSOFF started as the Zimbabwean country chapter, that was formally constituted to build Food Sovereignty as a pillar towards enhancing the livelihood security and wellbeing of its membership through farmer-led sustainable development practices.

Today ZIMSOFF is a decentralized community-based peasant organization primarily based in four land reform clusters spread across the whole of Zimbabwe. Its 3000 member families in the eastern cluster, 10,000 in the central cluster, 4000 in the northern cluster and 2000 in the western cluster are mostly beneficiaries of the land occupation and land reform process, and are dedicated to sustainable farming practices. A lot of its impetus and membership comes from the original AZTREC social base and vision of endogenous development.

Today, ZIMSOFF is a member of La Via Campesina (LVC). We see LVC as the Father and Mother, with our same objectives. We hope that ZIMSOFF and LVC together will bring us the future we want. We are fighting for food sovereignty based on land reform and agroecology as the backbone of all programs. Agrarian reform relates to food sovereignty in the sense that how can someone talk of food sovereignty if one does not have a piece of land. So agrarian reform is so important, and in my case I just appreciate what our government in Zimbabwe did to make sure our citizens have land on which to produce food.

As a woman leader I must face many challenges. In my community there is that belief that women should not be leaders. I get limited recognition both because I am a woman and because all peasants are seen in society as low class, especially when we struggle for recognition. As a leader, I feel that I should be listened to, but being a woman I need to be strong when necessary. I have benefitted from liberating coaching to develop my democratic and facilitating skills, to make our programs more effective. In fact, LVC has given me the courage that as a woman I can do it, I can lead, and through training, attending conferences and workshops, and participating in campaigns, I am able to understand our issues and how we should fight and organize our struggles. Really, it is through LVC that I am now able to stand in front of a large audience and speak to them with confidence.
At the same time, I am a committed housewife who is supposed to fulfill my family duties. I have the responsibility to achieve food sovereignty in my own home and in Africa. Linking these two together in endogenous sustainable development, I can improve my own life and the lives of others.

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KEY DOCUMENT

Report summary on Land concentration, land grabbing and people’s struggles in Europe

European Coordination of La Via Campesina (ECVC) and Hands-Off The Land Alliance (HOTL)²⁸

The report, involving 25 authors from 11 countries, reveals the hidden scandal of how a few big private business entities have gained control of ever-greater areas of European land. It exposes how these land elites have been actively supported by a huge injection of public funds – at a time when all other public funding is being subjected to massive cuts. While some of these processes – in particular ever-increasing land concentration – are not new, they have accelerated in recent decades, in particular in Eastern Europe. They have also paved the way for a new sector of foreign and domestic actors to emerge on the European stage, many tied into increasingly global commodity chains, and all looking to profit from the increasingly speculative commodity of land.

Among other findings, the report reveals:

Increasing land concentration

Land ownership in Europe has become highly unequal, reaching, in some countries, proportions similar to Brazil, Colombia and the Philippines – all notorious for their unequal distribution of land and land-based wealth. While in the European Union (EU) there are some 12 million farms, the large farms (100 hectares and above) that only represent three percent of the total number of farms, control 50 percent of all farmed land.

This concentration of land ownership started decades ago, but has accelerated. In Germany, for example, a total of 1,246,000 holdings in 1966/67 shrank to just 299,100 farms by 2010. Of these holdings, the land area covered by farms of less than 2 hectares, shrank from 123,670 hectares in 1990 to a mere 20,110 hectares in 2007, while farms of 50 hectares and larger expanded in area from 9.2 million hectares in 1990 to 12.6 million hectares in 2007.

In Eastern Europe, the concentration of land ownership has been particularly marked since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Many farmers were bankrupted when their countries entered the EU and highly subsidized agricultural products began flooding their markets. In the first six years, the majority of small farmers were not even eligible to apply for EU agricultural subsidies, which fuelled sales of farms. Here, a new elite group of speculators/investors have succeeded in capturing vast tracts of land.

Public money, through subsidies paid under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), have supported this concentration of land and wealth. In Italy, for example, in 2011, 0.29 percent of farms accessed 18 percent of total CAP incentives, and 0.0001 percent of these (that is 150 farms) cornered six percent of all subsidies. In Spain in 2009, 75 percent of the subsidies were cornered by only 16 percent of the largest farmers. In Hungary in 2009, 8.6 percent of farms cornered 72 percent of all agricultural subsidies.

Currently, the CAP subsidy scheme is being changed to subsidies per hectare of farmland. Unintended consequences of this might be that it further fuels the European land grabbing in the Eastern and Mediterranean parts of Europe, as it will marginalize small farms, and continue to block entry by prospective farmers.

Creeping land grabbing
Alongside land concentration, new actors have arrived to grab land, especially in Eastern Europe. The report highlights cases of Chinese companies in Bulgaria undertaking large-scale production of maize, of Middle Eastern companies in Romania embarking on large-scale production of grains, and of European companies involved in grabbing up land in many European countries for a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural purposes.

Just like their counterparts in Ethiopia, Cambodia or Paraguay, all these large-scale land deals are being carried out in a secretive, non-transparent manner. As elsewhere, the ‘grabbers’ are foreign and domestic companies, with the apparent participation of regional European capital, including both traditional agribusiness controlling commodity chains and finance capital including pension funds – not unlike in Latin America or Southeast Asia.

This has further aggravated the already concentrating trend in land control. Outside the EU: in Ukraine the 10 biggest agroholdings control about 2.8 million hectares, while some oligarchs own up to several hundreds of thousands of hectares each. In Serbia, the four largest Serbian landowners together allegedly control more than 100,000 hectares.

Land is being grabbed across Europe for multiple reasons: production of raw materials for the food industry dominated by transnational companies, extractive industry, bio-energy, ‘green grabs’ such as vast solar greenhouses, urban sprawl, real estate interests, tourism enclaves and other commercial undertakings. In France, for example, each year more than 60,000 hectares of agricultural land are lost to make space for roads, supermarkets and urban growth or leisure parks. These are often more scattered cases of usually smaller land deals. But they add up, and also tend to encroach into the most fertile and productive agricultural lands.

Blocking entry to prospective (young) farmers
This is an unprecedented dynamic of land grabbing and land concentration. The structure of CAP subsidy schemes and accompanying national policies do not really contribute to the entry into farming by prospective farmers, most of them young people. This was already a serious issue before. This issue has become even more of a problem in the midst of
increasing land concentration and creeping land grabbing. The current and planned CAP subsidy schemes are likely to solidify the barrier to more democratic access to land and entry to farming by young people. Access to land is a basic condition to achieve food sovereignty in Europe.

If there is one positive insight from this, it is the fact that across Europe there are many young people who are willing and eager to take up farming – despite the popular belief that young people are no longer interested in agriculture. This growing popular interest among young people to take up farming is partly provoked and inspired by increasing interest in healthy, local food and sustainable agriculture by youth.

Yet the harsh reality of European agricultural policies means that these future farmers are either losing their small plots of land or being denied entry. The winners of the growing land concentration and creeping land grab are large industrial farm-holdings, clinging to a system of agriculture that has significant environmental and social costs.

Growing and spreading farmers’ and people’s struggles

Fortunately, the hope for halting and reversing the European land grab lies with many of these same social groups that are getting dispossessed and marginalized. All of the cases examined in the study highlight how new movements, cross-class, rural and urban, and from different occupations, are emerging in Europe. Their actions, as in many regions of the world, are both defensive against land concentration and land grabs but also proactively seeking to occupy land and advance alternatives. The study includes the case of the community of Narbolia, Sardinia, mobilizing against the use of prime agricultural land for massive solar greenhouse projects, and the case of opposition to the Notre Dame des Landes airport project in Nantes, in France.

In terms of proactive struggles, it highlights the case of the Rural Workers’ Union (SOC) in Andalucia, where landless peasant farmers are collectively occupying land and cultivating it using ecological farming systems, and the Agricultural Solidarity Economies of the Danube (SoLiLA) in Vienna where young people are coming together to ‘squat’ fertile urban land for community-supported agriculture and city food gardening, and thus preserve it from conversion to urban commercial projects.

These struggles are transforming both urban and rural spaces into new battlegrounds in the struggle for control of the direction of European agriculture.

Conclusion

A study of Europe’s land dynamics points forcefully to the need to rethink the conventional ‘Global South-centric’ view of contemporary land issues. It shows, first, that land grabbing is a critical issue today, but is not the only urgent and important land issue in the world today; the generic issue of land concentration is just as urgent and important and probably even more prevalent than the former, at least in the European context.

Second, it reveals that land concentration and land grabbing do not occur only in developing countries in the South; in fact, both are underway in Europe today.

Third, as is happening elsewhere in the world, it points to the hope inspired by people’s struggles against land concentration and land grabbing unfolding in Europe. Their struggles underscore the urgent need for a truly transnational political struggle against contemporary enclosures of one of humanity’s most critical resources, the land we live on.
TESTIMONY

Twentysomething, European and struggling for land

Morgan Ody, France

On 13 April 2013, more than a thousand people gripping hoes, forks and shovels marched through the beautiful countryside of Notre Dame des Landes, in the northwest of France. At the entrance of Les Cent Noms (‘The Hundred Names’) a man in his twenties explained with sparkling eyes that a group of 12 people the same age were planning to plant fruit trees, cultivate potatoes and vegetables and build a hen-house on a field they had occupied.

Land struggle around an airport project in the French countryside

For the last four years the municipality of Notre Dame des Landes has been the scene of a new type of land struggle. Since the late 1960s, the government had been planning to locate a new airport there. The project was initially blocked by strong resistance by farmers, who were joined in the early 2000s by several citizens’ organizations. In spite of this local opposition, the authorities decided to move forward, and in 2009 they awarded the contract for the construction and management of the airport to the transnational company Vinci. They were planning for it to open in 2017.

But starting in 2009 young people started to occupy houses in the area, which was soon renamed ‘ZAD’ (zone to be defended by the people’s movement). Vacant houses were squatted first. As more and more people kept coming, the later arrivals started to build huts. In 2011, activists from the Reclaim The Fields network joined together with the Notre Dame des Landes squatters to start a vegetable farm on the ZAD, with the aims of building self-sufficiency for local resistance and providing a positive and long-term vision to the occupation. Six young farmers settled on the Le Sabot farm and began growing vegetables for the occupying community.

Last autumn the government launched a huge police operation to evict the squatters and those farmers who were refusing to sell their farms. More than a thousand riot police took control of the roads and destroyed a dozen houses. Soon the resistance was organized and local people, farmers, squatters and citizens from surrounding areas built barricades and new huts for people who had lost their homes. Le Sabot was one of the spots most fiercely defended from the police, with several barricades built and a convergence of farmers’ tractors on the day it was attacked.

The resistance soon broadened, with people from across the country sending food and clothes, occupying city halls in solidarity, and demonstrating in most French cities. On 17
November, 40,000 people marched in Notre Dame des Landes against the airport project and for the protection of farmland. On 24 November, after two days of virtual civil war in the depths of the French countryside, the Prime Minister sent a ‘dialogue commission’ and most of the policemen left. Some 200 police remained to secure the three access points to the area. The government was clearly hoping that winter would discourage people from staying under the rustic conditions of the ZAD. Yet as the months passed, the determination of the squatters remained strong.

Today more than 200 people live in huts on the ZAD. Their main goal is of course to stop the airport project, but they also make use of abandoned spaces to learn to live together, to cultivate the land and to build partial autonomy from the capitalist system. Agriculture is a central element in their resistance. Since December 2012, farmers and squatters meet once a week to discuss the future of the 2000 hectares in the ZAD, assuming the airport project is abandoned, which more and more people now believe. An invitation has gone out for new farmers to come to Notre Dame des Landes, to help build it as a space for experimentation with agroecology, autonomy and solidarity between new and old farmers. The 13 April ‘Sow the ZAD’ march – which also commemorated La Via Campesina’s International Day of Peasant Struggle – is an expression of this joint struggle.

**Farming: a new perspective for European youth**

A subset of European youth are today seeking a future in farming. They are far from a majority, but it is remarkable that some urban people, often with good educational backgrounds and no prior link to agriculture, want to start farming.

The growing concentration and land loss in European agriculture today, with anti-small farmer policies, has meant that for most children of farmers, staying on the farm is neither an option nor a goal. Yet at the same time, a positive image of farming has grown in urban areas, linked to ideas about ecology and autonomy. This has come together with the economic crisis and the reality of increasing unemployment, high levels of stress in office work, and impossibility of finding an affordable home. Seeing little or no future for themselves in the city, farming is an increasingly attractive alternative for young people.

**Urbanization, big projects and landless farmers**

A civil resistance has been growing across Europe, against urban sprawl and big projects based on rural land grabs. Current farmers and young prospective farmers both play a key role in the movements against these projects. In 2010, in Dijon, hundreds of people marched to oppose a housing project on farmland. A land occupation was then transformed into a working farm. Similar cases have occurred in Switzerland and Austria, with a new land occupation in Avignon, France.

The new solidarities between existing farmers and newcomers are not easy to maintain because of cultural and ideological differences, like organic versus conventional farming. Yet they are crucial to empower the resistance. In Notre Dame des Landes the new squatters played a key role in defending the barricades, but the government pulled back only when farmers encircled the area with 80 tractors, making it impossible for the police to pass. Despite inherent differences, the struggle for land in Europe can only be fought with this new alliance between old farmers and prospective new farmers.
Morgan Ody is a young farmer in Bretagne, France. She grows vegetables and sells her produce through community supported agriculture (CSA). She is active in Confédération Paysanne, a French farmers’ organization that belongs to La Via Campesina (LVC). She participated in the actions at Notre Dame des Landes and Dijon.