



# Cracking some hard nuts

**Behind the scenes, and together with others, GRAIN has been involved in two projects this year which are now drawing to a close.**

## Evaluation

The first project is an external evaluation commissioned by two of GRAIN's funders, SwedBio and the Dutch Biodiversity Fund. We focused the evaluation on GRAIN's information and outreach work. This includes not only our regular publications, like *Seedling*, but also our website, specialised email lists and informal information tools and services. Also included were some of the collaborative information projects that GRAIN participates in with other groups, such as the magazine *Biodiversidad* and the website *bilaterals.org*, which are not, strictly speaking, GRAIN outputs.

Patrick Mulvany (UK) and Carmelo Ruiz (Puerto Rico) conducted the evaluation. Between them, they were able to assess GRAIN's information work in English and Spanish. For our work in francophone Africa, the evaluators were supported by Mamadou Goita from Mali. The work began in March and concluded in September 2007. In July, GRAIN's

staff and Board held a progress review together with the evaluators and most of GRAIN's funders. It was a lively discussion that enabled us to air different views on GRAIN's information work.

Researching, producing and sharing useful information and critical analysis are at the heart of GRAIN's work – no matter where we are or what specific issue we're addressing. For the staff, our main hope was to get a better orientation on GRAIN's audience today and some insights into how to develop a number of specific outputs. Needless to say, the evaluation was not a simple exercise. The evaluators talked to all GRAIN's staff and Board members, many of our partners, and close to one hundred people who in one way or another use our information. In addition, nearly a thousand people responded to an on-line survey about GRAIN's information work.

The main finding of the report is that

people want "more" of almost everything that GRAIN produces! While such a response is certainly very encouraging, it also poses a tremendous challenge. In reality we are a small group of 15 people and can do only so much. We will prioritise producing more independent analysis and also, we hope, shorter material, and try to de-prioritise a few tasks that mostly involve compiling information.

In terms of concrete planning for the coming years, we will be redesigning our website, and we will continue to develop the design, contents and outreach of *Seedling*. At the same time, we will keep our strong bias in favour of collaborative research with other groups.

We want to thank everyone who contributed to the evaluation for their valuable inputs. If you have any comments or suggestions to make about GRAIN's information work, we always appreciate and learn a lot from your feedback.

## Growing diversity

The second project is quite different. Between 2000 and 2002, GRAIN was involved in a major initiative called the "Growing Diversity" project. It was a three-year effort to bring farmers, fisherfolk, hunters, gatherers and indigenous peoples together from across the world to exchange their experiences in managing biodiversity and to identify key issues for strengthening this work at community level. One issue that came up was access to funds. This can be a real problem for local groups and movements, and it's something that GRAIN is confronted with very often. Many of the people we work with day to day have no financial support for their work. GRAIN cannot provide that support. We are not a funding agency and do not wish to become one. But we can't just sit back and ignore the problem. There is a lot of good, important work going on that needs support.

In 2006, we decided to commission a study on whether and how it could be possible to set up some kind of funding

mechanism by which people who have difficulty getting support for their work in defending agricultural biodiversity – whether strengthening local seed systems, fighting genetic contamination, or preventing the loss of community knowledge – could find some accessible support. GRAIN would never run (or try to benefit from) such a fund, but if we can help to come up with ideas and work with others to get something going, that could be useful.

A few of GRAIN's funders agreed to support a special study on this, and Bob Brac from Montpellier, France, was commissioned to do the research. After talking with many groups working at local, national and international level, as well as with many different donor agencies, the study was completed in September 2007, after also benefiting from a passionate debate with GRAIN's own funders. The findings of the study are not positive in the sense of easily identifiable solutions, though we learned a lot in the process. As many people know, there is less and less

public money available for social groups to tap into for their activities. Private money, such as that held by foundations, is usually difficult to reach and conditional upon their own agendas. Funds for small grants do exist, but they are usually run by NGOs that have very well-defined agendas and constituencies. It would seem, then, that there is not much space for real change in this area – especially to meet the costs of small, highly political and often radical grassroots activities.

We are not giving up, though. GRAIN plans to consult with and mobilise like-minded groups to try to break through these barriers and to see if it is possible for a committed group to set up something new. We need some kind of solidarity fund to support groups doing valuable work on the ground to advance people's control over food-related biodiversity. If anyone wants to participate in this effort to build something new, independent and radical, please get in touch with us. It is a difficult challenge – but too important to ignore.