

Seedling

biodiversity • cultures • food sovereignty

- ◆ 20 years of fighting
- ◆ Two decades of corporate plunder
- ◆ Haiti's farmers say "no"

GRAIN's twentieth
anniversary issue

July
2010

GRAIN

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Front cover: Planting rice in Kolongo, Mali (Photo: Lamine Coulibaly/La Via Campesina)

Back cover: A banner-draped vehicle on the march against Monsanto's "gift" of seeds, Haiti, 4 June 2010 (Photo: La Via Campesina)



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GRAIN is a small international non-profit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. To find out more about GRAIN, visit www.grain.org.

Seedling

Seedling is GRAIN's quarterly magazine, published in January, April, July and October. It provides background articles, news, interviews and much more on the issues that GRAIN works on. Seedling is available free both in paper format and on GRAIN's Seedling website (www.grain.org/seedling). To receive Seedling in paper format or to inform us of a change of address, please contact GRAIN at the address or email above.

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In this issue . . .

Welcome to GRAIN's 20th anniversary! Yes, GRAIN has been around since 1990, and to celebrate this we have devoted most of this issue of *Seedling* to looking at how we – and this issues that we deal with – have changed over this period. To mark the occasion, we have also altered our design into one that we feel is modern, practical and pleasing to the eye. We hope you agree.

Perhaps the biggest change that GRAIN has undergone in these years is the broadening of our focus and the decentralisation of our operations. As we describe in our opening article, we embarked in the late 1990s on a radical decentralisation process that brought us into much closer connection with regional and local realities and struggles around the world. We transformed ourselves into a truly international collective, and we strengthened and deepened our relationship with local groups and regional networks. This greater exposure to local struggles and social movements made us realise that we could not limit our work to campaigning on specific issues at international fora. We decided that we had to analyse the changes in the wider food system that were having such a harmful impact on the social movements that we work with.

As we describe in the second article in this issue, today just ten corporations have come to control about half of the global market for commercial seeds. Most of these corporations were originally pesticide and pharmaceutical producers, which have now redefined themselves as “life science” companies. They are at the forefront of the development of genetically modified crops, largely as the means for developing a captive market for their own products, particularly pesticides.

Along with the increase in corporate control over seeds, farming itself has increasingly become subject to the wheeling and dealing of the corporations. In the livestock sector, for example, more than half of the world's pork and two-thirds of the world's poultry and egg production now take place on industrial farms, which are generally either owned by large meat corporations or under contract to them. Indeed, the speed with which corporations in different sectors have merged and consolidated has

been awesome. A relative newcomer in the global food system is the finance industry, with banks and investment houses increasingly taking control of fertile farmland and pushing commodity speculation to levels that the world hasn't seen before. The recent food crisis, with food prices spiralling out of control due to speculation, is just one example of what happens when banks decide to start making money out of food.

Along with most of the social movements that we work with, we are increasingly convinced that the world would be far better off without agribusiness. The expansion of agribusiness control over the food system has generated hunger and destroyed livelihoods, as well as exacerbating climate change and other environmental calamities. The good news is that most of the food in the world is still produced and gathered by peasant farmers and other rural communities, often outside global markets and without high-tech monoculture farming. It is on the basis of their food systems that we need to rebuild the way that we produce and consume food.

Resistance is growing, particularly among social movements. In another article in this issue we look at how peasant organisations in Haiti, despite their desperate needs in the wake of the earthquake, are saying “no” to Monsanto's donation of tonnes of hybrid maize seeds. Experience has made Haitian farmers more aware than most of the way in which transnational corporations can take advantage of natural calamities to increase their penetration and tighten their control.

We hope that you find our reflections in this special issue both interesting and thought-provoking. We are looking forward to the next 20 years with a mixture of trepidation and anticipation. Trepidation at the scale of the disasters that agribusiness is creating for the planet and the people who live on it; and anticipation at the response that is gaining momentum among the social movements. We invite you to continue with us on our journey towards 2030.

Twenty years of fighting for seeds and food sovereignty

GRAIN

A twentieth anniversary invites reflection. Reflection on where we came from, the path we have travelled, and the challenges ahead. Without pretending to provide a full analysis, we present below some discussion on this. In the process, we have talked to many of the people who have accompanied us over the last two decades, and asked them about the paths that they have taken, and for their reflections on the struggle for a better food system and a better world. Some of their responses are included in the text and accompanying boxes.

When we set up GRAIN back in 1990, we were keen to influence the international fora that were drawing up agreements around seeds and biodiversity. We often found ourselves at the FAO in Rome, where governments were negotiating an agreement on the rules of the game for conserving and exchanging seeds and benefiting from seed diversity. Those were also the days when the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was taking shape, which was eventually signed into existence in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit. Just before that, we were deeply involved in the campaign against the patenting of

life forms, and organised a major conference at the European parliament to denounce the plans of the European Commission to create a piece of legislation that would permit this. At the same time, we participated in a three-year “multi-stakeholder” dialogue, organised by the Keystone Foundation, which got us to sit at the table with other NGOs, government officials and people from the seed and biotechnology industries and from agricultural research institutes, trying to find some consensus on how to save and use the world’s agricultural biodiversity.

What was driving us then? We were concerned about the increasing concentration in the global seed industry, which was then being taken over by transnational agrochemical and pharmaceutical corporations, leading to an ever stronger push for monocultures and uniform seeds all over the world.

Food sovereignty

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy without the dumping of agricultural commodities into foreign countries. Food sovereignty organises food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption. Food sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-price imports from other countries. Landless people, peasants, and small farmers must get access to land, water, and seed, as well as productive resources and adequate public services. Food sovereignty and sustainability are a higher priority than trade policies.” (Via Campesina, The International Peasant’s Voice: www.viacampesina.org)

We were worried about emerging new technologies, such as genetic engineering, that would push diversity further towards extinction and tighten the corporate grip on farmers and the global food system. We were alarmed by legislation being proposed in a number of industrialised countries that would allow for the patenting of life forms and the privatisation of the very building blocks of life. And we noticed that the institutional response to the rapid decline of agricultural biodiversity was limited to collecting seeds from farmers' fields and storing them away in genebanks.

The panorama around us was bleak and the fight fierce, but we thought we could achieve something by lobbying governments and delegates to stop these developments and to support instead the contribution and role of small farmers. Judging from the growing debate around genetic engineering, the massive participation of civil society in the 1992 Earth Summit, and the subsequent meetings of the CBD and other environmental fora, this optimism was shared by many. But, as the 1990s evolved, a cruder reality became apparent. Increasingly, the shaping of agriculture and food production, and the role of transnational corporations in it, were defined elsewhere: in corporate boardrooms and in trade ministries. The 1990s were also the decade of the establishment and rise of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), where, shielded from the critical eyes of civil society organisations, a ruthless neoliberal trade agenda was being forced upon the world, especially on "developing" countries that still had some level of market protection. More economic growth and international trade at any cost had become the central dogma of all policies. And no treaty or agreement related to environmental or agricultural issues was allowed to interfere with this vital concern.



Programme cover for the conference at the European Parliament, 7–8 February 1989, which GRAIN organised.

Then came Seattle in 1999. The confrontation between governments trying to push the world further down the neoliberal route with a new WTO agreement, and social movements taking to the streets to stop them, had a powerful impact on both the WTO and on the people and organisations fighting for a better world. The WTO never fully recovered from the blow, and the industrialised countries, in response, started signing bilateral or regional trade agreements instead, to secure their interests. To the social movements and NGOs involved in fighting the neoliberal corporate agenda came the realisation that we could actually win by having a clear, radical and coherent line of analysis and action.

Another world is possible

Often hidden from view, and unexposed at international fora, were the organisations and movements that were quietly resisting and building at the local level. The importance of these experiences became forcefully clear to GRAIN when we got ourselves involved in the "Growing Diversity" project.¹ During a three-year period (2000–2003), this project worked with hundreds of organisations around the world to discuss, analyse and document the experiences of groups working at the local level to build local food and agricultural systems based on biodiversity. A massive amount of evidence came out of this project that an agriculture different from



Farmers stop health ministry officials slaughtering their pigs at a pig-farming centre near Cairo, Egypt, in April 2009. The government had ordered a massive cull of swine throughout the country because of swine flu.

¹ See: www.grain.org/gd



GRAIN's founding staff, Henk Hobbelink and Renée Vellvé, in 1987

the one being promoted by the industrial powers and corporations was not only possible, but also more productive, more sustainable, and better for the farmers and communities involved. It became clear to us that the work at local level of organisations and communities resisting the neoliberal onslaught while developing strong alternatives was the backbone of any struggle to bring this other world into being.

There was another development in the first decade of the present century that started strongly influencing agendas around agriculture and food systems. This was the emergence of the call for food sovereignty and the growing presence and maturity of small-farmer organisations such as Via Campesina. Via Campesina was created in 1993, and erupted on the international stage at the global civil society forum held parallel to the 1996 world food summit in Rome, where it launched food sovereignty as the alternative framework for a global world food system. Food sovereignty articulates the prioritisation of food policies oriented towards the needs of local communities and local markets, and based on local knowledge and agro-ecological production systems (see Box: “Food Sovereignty” on page 4). For the first time, the global movement for a different food system had a concept and an action agenda that connected all the dots, brought together local and international struggles, and formed a basis for building alliances between different social movements and NGOs. In the decade that followed, many more groups and movements started to use food sovereignty as their framework for action, and this framework was articulated and further elaborated in numerous international and regional fora. The movement received a tremendous boost at the global food sovereignty forum held in Nyeleni, Mali, in 2007, at which organisations representing small farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, women and youth joined with NGOs and groups from the environmental movement to further articulate a common action agenda for the future.

In the late 1990s, GRAIN embarked on an ambitious and radical decentralisation process that would bring us much closer to regional and local realities and struggles, and transform us into a truly international collective (see Box: “A brief history of GRAIN”). This process transformed GRAIN’s agenda as well. The increased exposure to local struggles and social movements made us realise that we could not limit our work to the issue-oriented agenda of agricultural biodiversity, and we gradually broadened our focus to deal with the wider food system. As a result, we were able to produce new analysis and fresh thinking on issues such as agrofuels, hybrid rice, bird flu, swine fever, the food crisis, climate change and land grabbing, and connect them with the struggles for food sovereignty. At the same time, we strengthened and deepened our relationship with – and support role to – groups in Africa, Asia and

A brief history of GRAIN

GRAIN’s work goes back to the early 1980s, when a number of activists around the world started drawing attention to the dramatic erosion of genetic diversity – the very cornerstone of agriculture. Our work began as research, advocacy and lobbying under the umbrella of a coalition of mostly European development organisations. The work soon expanded into a larger programme and network that eventually needed its own independent base. In 1990 Genetic Resources Action International, or GRAIN for short, was legally established as an independent non-profit foundation.

In the second part of the 1990s, GRAIN reached an important turning point. We realised that we needed to connect more with the real alternatives being developed on the ground in the South. Around the world, and at the local level, many groups had begun to rescue local seeds and traditional knowledge, and to build and defend sustainable, biodiversity-based food systems under the control of local communities, while turning their back on the laboratory-developed “solutions” that had only got farmers deeper into trouble. In a radical organisational shift, GRAIN embarked on a decentralisation process that brought us into closer contact with realities on the ground in the South and in direct collaboration with partners working at that level. At the same time, we brought a number of those partners into our governing body and started regionalising our staff pool.

By the turn of the century, GRAIN had transformed itself from a mostly Europe-based information and lobbying group into a dynamic, truly international collective – functioning as one coherent organisation – that was linking and connecting with local realities in the South as well as with developments at the global level. In that process, GRAIN’s agenda shifted markedly, away from lobbying and advocacy, and towards directly supporting and collaborating with social movements, while retaining our key strength in independent research and analysis.

Latin America. "Think globally, act locally" became GRAIN's very way of working.

Seedling,
May 1988



Lessons learnt and challenges ahead

As explained in detail in another article in this Seedling, the past 20 years have witnessed a tremendous increase in the dominance and control that huge transnational corporations exercise over the global food system. In essence, the entire neoliberal globalisation process has been an exercise in handing over that control to them, and it has created tremendous inequity, human suffering and environmental damage in the process. As a result, we are now faced with well over one billion people going hungry every day, massive environmental destruction, and a climate crisis that we won't be able to stop unless profound changes are implemented.

The challenges we face today are enormous. As the ever worsening and interconnected financial, food and climate crises are clearly showing us, the current neoliberal development model is beyond repair. At the same time, never before in history have we been faced with such powerful interests that want us to continue on the current destructive path. The matter lies beyond the question of what kind of economic development model to follow, or which seeds to use and which pesticides to avoid. It has become a matter of survival, for all of us. Below we highlight a number of reflections on issues that, from our perspective, we have to deal with, if we are to be successful.

Surviving in a hostile world

There is no point in denying that, despite the growing struggles of social movements, the world for most people has become a worse place to live in than it was 20 years ago. We would argue that the same is true for most other species as well. Several decades of the ruthless imposition of a neoliberal corporate agenda have left us with an aggressive policy environment, with a tremendous loss of democratic spaces at all levels: locally, nationally and internationally. While 20 years ago many of us were involved in all kinds of dialogues and roundtables, today it sometimes feels as if there is no one left to talk to up there. Many states have largely become

"Disillusion in government"

Maryam Mayet

Mariam Mayet grew up during the apartheid struggle in South Africa. After being involved in different NGOs in the 1990s, she set up the African Centre for Biosafety, with which she has since sustained a tireless effort to fight GMOs in Africa and to promote instead the use of local seeds.

"Over the last decades there has been a profound change across the world in the food system, over who owns it and controls it. During this time there has been a radical shift in power from ever weaker nation-states to corporations. In South Africa, we were not plugged into global movements but we experienced huge disillusionment with our government because it did not change the agenda but started implementing neoliberal economic policies and privatising. Over the years one has learnt to understand much more profoundly the nature of the struggle, the nature of ownership and big capital. Once you understood what is at stake, you know where you stand and can take a very clear position.

The problems have become more complex and there is a lot of apathy because people feel overwhelmed by the scale and level of corporate intrusion, the insidiousness of it. These corporate powers are extremely well-funded and are implementing their agenda with military precision.

Issues like genomics, IPRs, patenting, are all galloping into the future, without us being able to take stock and consider the impacts.

There are examples of grassroots resistance that have been inspiring – shining examples of where we should be going. But in South Africa the anti-apartheid struggle was largely urban-based, and we do not have many examples of rural struggle. But we know that we will be successful only if we build up our internal capacity

and work in networks. We realise that engaging with the multilateral system has been counter-productive and has pulled us away from the real struggles. We are aware that we should not have engaged in that as much as we did. It is local struggles that are important, that we need to keep building up, little by little, and doing the right thing every day. We have been deeply disillusioned, and we feel a great urgency to change things. There is also much anxiety. We keep asking ourselves: what more can I do?

If we are to move forward, relationships between NGOs, movements and communities must be allowed to unfold, we must provide ongoing support to the communities, and we must train farmer leaders. As in the trade unions, communities need to take ownership of the issues. We often want quick-fix solutions, without allowing communities enough time to process and to take ownership of the issues, and not taking enough time to make sure that we support the real struggles. We have to learn from this.

In Africa humanity is profound, and the joy and celebration of humanity is deep-seated. As a movement in Africa we care about the heritage of Africa. To me it has been an honour to be part of that movement. I have learnt a lot from others, and to me it has been a journey to fulfil my destiny. My hope is that something will get through to people, that I can set an example for my son and the next generation."

"We need relationships, not domination"

Diamantino Nhampossa

Diamantino Nhampossa is executive coordinator of Mozambique's National Farmers Union, UNAC. UNAC is member of Via Campesina, and currently serves as its regional coordination office for Southern, East and Central Africa.

"UNAC was formed in the late 1980s, when Mozambique shifted from a centrally planned to a market economy. The country was pressured by the international powers and institutions to implement structural adjustment programmes, and to dismantle state institutions and policies that supported farmers. UNAC was set up to address this problem.

After liberation, there were still many farmers involved in politics during the early 1980s, and politics was strongly linked to the liberation movement. It was seen as part of the class struggle. But since then all ideologies have been swept away, and the thinking now is very market-oriented. And there is no ideology in the market. At the same time, there has been a huge impoverishment of Africa and a new class has developed that has benefited from the World Bank restructuring processes. The movements, trade unions and farmers' organisations have become very weak, often co-opted by government. They have very little space of their own, where their voices are recognised.

In the last five years I see a new resurgence of the peasant movement, coming from the very poor farmers. The extreme suffering of the peasants in rural areas has led to a new way of struggle. It is now a new age for the movements. Commercial farmers have taken up the all the space, so that there is very little room for small farmers. Small and big farmers have some common

issues, such as access to markets, but on most other issues (land, for example) their social and ecological perspectives differ quite a lot. They do not have the same views on GMOs, fertilisers, pesticides. The debt issue has a much bigger impact on small farmers than on larger ones. Commercial farmers also want to control the land and to push small farmers off it, which often leads to conflict. Commercial farmers do not understand how to manage land sustainably.

The biggest mistake made by Africa was to accept Structural Adjustment Programmes, because through these the region lost its vision of becoming a Sovereign Africa. Once we accepted conditions on foreign aid and loans, we were saying that Africa could not walk by itself. We need to redefine help/assistance – we need solidarity, not a big boss telling us what to do. We need relationships, not domination. Since 1987, since independence, we are not moving forward, things are getting worse. Mozambique is now dependent on foreign aid for almost 50% of its national budget. We will remain poor if we keep looking to the outside for help.

Social movements must remain independent and draw their political power from the people. They should be challenging and very vocal, and focus on the basic rights of farmers. They should not stay at the periphery but engage with the core of policy, and transform policies in order to promote the radical transformation of society."

☛ instruments to implement a full-blown corporate privatisation agenda, and many public institutions have turned into mere servants of that same agenda. When we entered the 21st century, we were promised by world leaders that this would be the century of democratisation, of human rights, of the environment, of ending hunger – but already it has become perfectly clear that we are heading in exactly the opposite direction. This often leaves us in a very hostile environment, with increased repression against those that speak out, the criminalisation of those who mobilise, and the silencing of those who denounce.

Aziz Choudry, a long-time activist and researcher, formerly the organiser of GATT Watchdog and currently Assistant Professor at the University of McGill in Montreal, who has been collaborating with GRAIN in numerous activities countering free trade regimes, points to the importance of historical memory and the need to retain the knowledge of struggles from the past.

"The anti-globalisation struggles, which emerged as people came to understand how, through the Uruguay round of GATT, there was a move to impose a comprehensive package of rules on the planet to serve corporations, followed in a long history of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles. The WTO and the subsequent advance of bilateral trade and investment agreements are just the latest

tool serving the same agenda. So we need to see our struggle within this longer and larger history of resistance, and to look more to past struggles for guidance."

For Aziz, given the comprehensive nature of the threats we all face, the cross-fertilisation of ideas and the dialogue between people coming from different contexts and mobilised around different issues, become all the more important.

"Activism is bound to always face lots of contradictions and ambiguities, but this should not be a barrier to building more linkages. There is a clear need to build alliances that respect people's different situations and world views. The most significant and effective struggles are happening in movements that are grounded in local contexts but connected to global perspectives. This is difficult, non-glamorous movement building work that, incrementally, is creating spaces where power can be challenged. We rarely hear about these struggles, but they are where hope for the future lies."

Brewster Kneen, another long-standing author and activist – and for many years part of GRAIN's Board of Directors – agrees. He adds:

"A big challenge we have lies in how we deal with the state. The state is a relatively recent

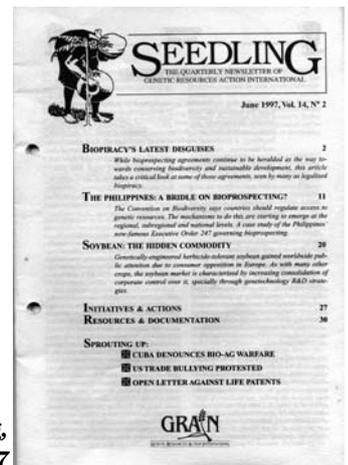
construction, and we do not have to accept it as a given. It can be very debilitating when people's movements define themselves in reference to the state. These movements need to be constructed on their own terms. We need to question the authority of the state. What we do should be based on what we feel we have a moral responsibility to do, not what the state tells us we can or cannot do. This is a strange land but we have to venture out from our traditional territory."

Many others that we have talked to have reached similar conclusions. Today we live in a world where a lot of traditional pillars and forces with which we thought we could build a better world have been eroded or corrupted. The way to deal with this is to construct our own terms of reference, to learn from our history, and to build alliances and dialogues across different issues and realities.

Following or setting the international agenda?

In the past 20 years, the most interesting, promising and mobilising concepts and advances have emerged when social movements have decided to look at things from their own perspectives rather than within frameworks set by the powerful. We can recite a long list of negotiations that we enthusiastically got involved in because we felt that we could achieve some positive results, but in which we got trapped in endless debates, where we saw our proposals being stripped of their essential meaning and corrupted into empty promises. At the FAO we argued for "Farmers' Rights" to challenge the privatisation of seeds and genes, and to promote the notion that rural communities are the starting point for seed saving and crop improvement. We ended up with a

**Seedling,
June 1997**



Treaty that allows the patenting of genes, is mostly focused on managing gene banks, and – as lip service – might financially support a few projects that involve on-farm management of plant genetic resources. At the Biodiversity Convention we challenged "biopiracy", and urged the recognition of local communities in the management of biodiversity. We got "benefit-sharing regimes" that do nothing about the monopoly control that corporations obtain on the biodiversity collected from the forests and are essentially about regulating who gets paid for what when genetic resources change hands. They do little to protect local communities from the continuous undermining of their territorial integrity and the biodiversity that they manage, and indeed justify the "business as usual" approach. In the words of Erna Bennett, commenting on the role of NGOs in intergovernmental negotiations, in an article in *Seedling* in 2002: "playing the game by the enemy's rules has achieved nothing but to show us how we

"We need to globalise the struggles"

Piengporn Panutampon

Piengporn "Chiu" Panutampon has been a key figure in Thailand's vibrant social movement. Over the years, she has been an integral part of several civil society groups and has been involved with the struggles of various sectors – health, labour, farmers, fisherfolk – gaining an invaluable insight into, and assessment of, Thailand's burgeoning social movement.

"In the 1990s, globalisation made our world more complicated in the social, political, and economic spheres. It has given birth to new actors, forces and power structures. We're no longer just talking of multinational corporations from the West, because in Asia we have seen an explosion of capital and the emergence of regional TNCs, like Charoen Pokphand in Thailand. This expansion of capital pervades all spheres of life, making capital more difficult to confront.

One of our most important achievements has been to raise the level of consciousness and debate among the people on issues that concern them. Whether it's primary health care or GMOs or FTAs. Our strong growth in terms of sharing information and analysis – making sure that it reaches the people, gets understood, and triggers collective reflection and action – is something we can proudly claim we have contributed to.

Yet at the same time, we acknowledge that we cannot

compete with the overpowering influence of a capitalist economy. The impacts of globalisation on people's cultures and values have been drastic; there is so much emphasis on catching up with the capitalist economy by satisfying individualistic needs and tendencies. Consumerism has become the norm. People are interested only in getting rich so that they can conform to that norm. We have failed to beat it. We didn't pay enough attention to organising the people against capitalism. So economic progress has become the central measure of our quality of life. The value of sharing and the culture of taking responsibility for others have been eroded.

We need to globalise the struggles. We cannot fight FTAs just in Thailand. They have to be fought in every corner of the world. But how do we get ourselves more organised? That is the biggest challenge, and a very difficult one."



Tent set up in street protests against land grabbing, held outside the FAO meeting in Rome, Italy, November 2009

got to where we are. But it has not shown us how to get out.”

In contrast, we at GRAIN have learned by experience that, when movements clearly define their own perspectives, strategies and time-lines, much more interesting things tend to happen. We have already referred to the growing movement against the WTO, which maintained a clear and radical stand against the neoliberal development model. We have also mentioned the food sovereignty initiative, which

allowed people to see the fuller picture of the kind of food system that has to be built. It helped to dissolve apparent conflicts of interest – between farmers in the North and in the South, between producers and consumers, between farmers and pastoralists, and so on – by clearly pointing out where the real source of the problem lies. It helped to build alliances between different social movements, and had a strong mobilising effect. It showed that another food system is possible. All these processes are increasingly difficult for those in power to ignore, or to manipulate.

NGOs or movements?

One of the more encouraging developments in the past two decades has been the surging, maturing and growth of social movements involved in the struggle for a different food system. Although voices critical of the high-tech, Green Revolution approach had been surfacing in the 1970s and 1980s, the dominant thinking twenty years ago was still that the solution to hunger lay in increasing food production by deploying better technology. Among the dominant class, this remains the thinking today. But social movements have begun to articulate a coherent analysis and vision of what is wrong with the current approach, and what should be done to create a food system that feeds people and doesn't throw them off the land. It implies a clear stand against the corporate-controlled production model and a strong vision for a kind of agriculture that is oriented towards local needs, and controlled by local communities.

“Challenging TNC control over the food system”

Cris Panerio

Cris Panerio is regional coordinator of MASIPAG, and has been with the organisation since 1994. MASIPAG is a national network of small farmers in the Philippines, widely known for its successful work on farmer-led research and crop improvement initiatives, involving the conservation and the management of the country's rice biodiversity.

“In the 1990s, the failure of the Green Revolution became more pronounced. Everyone was looking for practical alternatives that work. They saw MASIPAG as a viable one. But there was little appreciation of how the “trial farm” strategy that we use starts the process of regaining farmers' control over the rice seeds, something that we lost massively during the Green Revolution. It is the foundation of farmer-led, on-farm rice breeding that MASIPAG has been promoting, and where farmers choose rice selections that are adapted to their local conditions. Since then, MASIPAG has expanded to another important crop – maize – and in the past four years has started with the conservation and improvement of native chickens.

We are promoting diversified and integrated farming systems to build resilience among farmers, especially in the face of global warming. There are now several agricultural universities and local government units that are not only supportive of MASIPAG, but also even promote MASIPAG as a framework for agricultural development. But the official policies of the government continue to push the monoculture Green Revolution strategies.

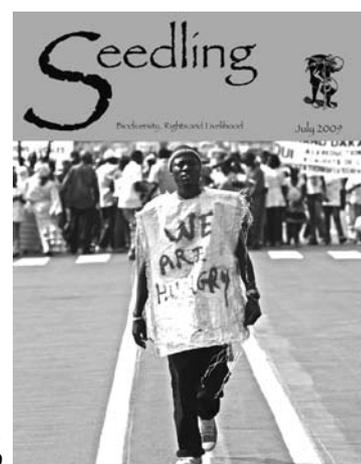
The problems of the county remain – it's the same poverty caused by social injustice, an economy dominated by foreign

interests, and a government subservient to it. But there is hope in programmes like MASIPAG, which is a direct response to TNCs' control of the global food system. It has actually put a face, substance and process to concepts like “food security” and made the word “alternative” concrete.

As a movement in itself, one of MASIPAG's greatest achievements has been to develop farmer leaders who can articulate the needs, problems and aspirations of the farming sector. Helping to raise their political awareness was central to that. Farmers are now able to engage with the government and assert themselves on issues like hybrids, GMOs, and so on with concrete alternatives. Not only did they gain confidence in themselves but also the active support of local governments, other NGOs, and academia in going about the farmer-led process of agricultural and community development. While in the old days farmers were merely “beneficiaries” of development packages, now they are active participants and their inputs are recognised. Farmers, previously impoverished by poor agricultural practices and policies, have been able to regain their dignity as human beings.”

The relationship between NGOs that have participated in governmental negotiation processes, with sectoral, issue-oriented agendas to achieve progress within the possibilities that these processes offer, and the social movements that have argued for radical change has not always been easy. One example is the tension between those trying to make the WTO more transparent, and those who want to get rid of the WTO altogether. Another example is the (non-)participation in the mushrooming multi-stakeholder dialogues that have sprouted up in the past decade, such as the “roundtables” on sustainable soya, sustainable oilpalm, sustainable biofuels, and so on. These bring together industry groups and some NGOs to draw up criteria and certification schemes to promote the sustainable cultivation of these crops. Others, GRAIN among them, have denounced these as processes that seek to justify the status quo, fail to tackle the real problems and fail to provide any solutions. Yet another example is the different strategies around climate change: Via Campesina recently felt itself obliged to “distance itself from certain ‘self-convened’ groups, and those who say they speak on behalf of social movements but who in reality are representing the views of their NGO”.

Antonio Onorati, one of GRAIN’s founding Board members, and a tireless fighter to create more institutional and political space for social movements in institutions such as the FAO, calls this the danger of “self-referential NGOs”.



**Seedling,
July 2009**

“Back in 1990 civil society presence at governmental negotiating fora was dominated by NGOs coming with position papers and participating in debates. Well-intentioned people talking to well-intentioned diplomats who were willing to listen to our discourse and perhaps incorporate some of it into their official positions. Over time, quite a number of these groups have increasingly become self-referential – setting their strategies and objectives in isolation – and thus become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. If we are to achieve anything at places where governments get together and negotiate,

“We articulated a continental and a global movement”

Itelvina Masioli

Itelvina Masioli works for the Movimento dos Sem Terra (MST), the landless farmers movement in Brazil. She is also member of the coordinating group of CLOC, Latin America’s small farmers’ movement, and of Via Campesina.

“I think that many things have changed over the last 20 years, some for the good and some for the bad. From the point of view of the offensive of the neoliberal model, of the offensive of transnationals and the transnationalisation of capital in agriculture, there have been a lot of changes. Land has become more concentrated; the expelling of people from the countryside has occurred – and continues to occur – in a very marked way; transnationals are controlling the whole agricultural process, from seeds to commerce. In general, the situation is tougher, because poverty has increased in the countryside, neoliberal policies have had an impact, and more people in the countryside depend on hand-outs. In places like Brazil slave labour has increased and there has been a growth in contamination, monoculture, and everything else that the model implies.

But, on the other hand, in these 20 years the peasant movement has grown. Today we can say that we have built a continental movement, which is CLOC, and a global movement, which is Via Campesina. Without any doubt we can say that this is the main strength we have accumulated in the last 20 years. We have succeeded in turning the struggle in the countryside, the struggle for land, and the struggle for agrarian reform, for

native seeds and for local markets, which were once exclusively peasant struggles, into struggles that involve the whole of society. Confronted with all the crises in capital, we have strengthened our historic demands, like the ones for agrarian reform, for sovereignty, for defence of land and life. Today it has become clear that what is largely responsible for all the disasters and impoverishment is the capitalist model, and there is widespread talk about the need to change the production and consumption model.

The debate and the historic demands of the peasantry have become politicised, and they have become issues that involve the very survival of humanity. This has meant that the struggle, which 20 years ago was undertaken only by the peasantry, has moved to the centre of political debate, when one talks about the need for social change and for building another humanity. What was once a solely peasant debate is today at the centre of the debate involving the whole of society.

It seems to me that this is a hugely important advance that we have made in the last 20 years, this capacity to articulate a continental and international movement. And, at the same time, as a class we have made our historic demands available for everyone in the construction of a popular project for society and for agriculture.”



Placard at protest outside the Philippines headquarters of the International Rice Research Institute, on the occasion of IRRI's 50th anniversary, April 2010

we need first to get them to recognise social movements as a representative force negotiating for its own interests. This is what we have been fighting for in the past decade at the FAO and elsewhere.”

Aziz Choudry identifies the problem of compartmentalisation that many NGOs tend towards, focusing on specific issues in which they are specialised.

“We need to inoculate ourselves against this. Grassroots, radical movements tend to look at issues broadly, look at the connections and focus on the underlying causes of problems. Many NGOs fall into a technical discourse and do not challenge things being framed within the dominant language. For example, some NGOs look at how to improve IPR laws, while for many indigenous people the issue is about a fundamental contradiction between Western legalistic approaches and world views that cannot accept such things as the patenting of life. A major problem is that often such NGOs take up a lot of political space and are ‘able to marshall political power’. Actually, many NGOs have, in fact, benefited quite well from neo-liberal globalisation, as they’ve stepped in to fill the void left from the roll-back of the state.”

We tend to agree. For independent groups such as GRAIN to be able to continue to play a meaningful role, it is crucial to be in constant active collaboration with social movements, accompanying their processes and understanding their priorities. This does not mean uncritically following their agendas, as we are also part of the debates and learning processes of the movement. But it does imply, from

our own autonomy, constructing relationships in which a constant dialogue on priorities and strategies informs our own thinking and actions.

Movement building, alternatives and alliances

What has become very clear over the past decades is how help, however well intentioned, can become a dependency trap, rather than a push in the right direction. Gathuru Mburu, of the Kenyan Institute for Culture and Ecology, and also the African Biodiversity Network, puts it this way:

“Now I understand better that solutions will not come from outside Africa. We need to change our mindset because we are much too dependent on help and ideas from outside. The solutions we are looking for are under our noses, very close, but we keep on looking to the outside. This dependency blocks our minds to the solutions and capacity we have at our doorstep. If anything, we need support for African solutions. Over the years our knowledge has been devalued, our agriculture classified as unproductive, and our people as uneducated. Our focus should now be on working with communities so that they can chart their own destiny, make their own decisions, with or without support. We could have done better – often we didn’t empower communities to do their own advocacy work, rather we tried to do it on their behalf. We ignored their capacity to handle their own local situation. If we had understood the importance of local knowledge and local struggles earlier, we could have forestalled many things that have happened in the meantime.”

Or, in the words of Diamantino Nhampossa of the Mozambique small farmers union UNAC:

“We need to redefine help: we need solidarity, not someone telling us what to do. We need relationships, not domination.” (see Box, p. 8)

A factor that, ironically, has sometimes undermined the movement building and the formulation of a clear, holistic and integral alternative to the industrial food system has been the imagined desire to come up with measurable results within the time-frame of project periods. On many occasions this project mentality has done more harm than good. As a result, we now have many interesting initiatives, ranging from local seed banks and organic gardens to community biogas production schemes and local credit facilities. But as many of them are disconnected from a wider struggle and vision of the role of rural communities in society, they hardly challenge the expansion of the industrial food system. So here is another goal for us to meet: we have to become more effective in building a social force that challenges the industrial food system across

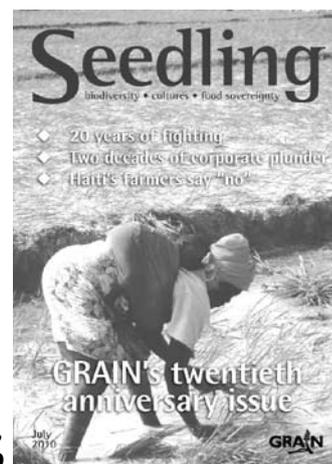
the board, while at the same time guaranteeing livelihoods so that local communities can survive.

It is here that Antonio Onorati sees the strength of rural social movements and small farmer organisations:

“Compared to social movements in urban areas, like trade unions among industrial workers, the rural movements actually have a pretty clear idea about the alternative society that they want to build. They have no choice; they have to resist to survive, and in that process they start organising or reviving alternative structures, local markets, seed exchange systems, chemical-free agriculture, direct links with consumers, and so on. Unavoidably, these lead them to clash with the production models that Monsanto, the World Bank and WTO are pushing for.”

In that sense, the food sovereignty agenda is one that not only denounces, but also provides solutions. For us at GRAIN, if we have learned one thing in the past 20 years, it is about the central importance of supporting and participating in processes that are clearly aimed at creating an autonomous framework from which alternatives can be built and action taken. The struggle for food sovereignty is one of these. This does not mean that there should not be any

relationship with, or involvement in, governmental processes. But such relations have to be built from our own strength, and oriented towards creating political space for putting our own agenda on the table rather than running after the agendas of those in power.



Seedling,
July 2010

Two decades: some reflections from Latin America

The past twenty years of globalisation have greatly transformed people's struggles in Latin America. Today, the region is a laboratory of spaces of reflection derived from the exchange of many diverse experiences. People are more aware of the struggles of others, and this knowledge has fostered a holistic approach, involving new and renewed strategies for organising and resisting. Some of the most significant changes include:

1. An emphasis on horizontal exchange: wounds and dreams are shared directly among localities, regions, and countries.
2. An urgency to understand the whole panorama of how corporations and governments operate together to produce successive and related impacts, devastations, crises and catastrophes.
3. An understanding of regions beyond geography, taking into consideration the constant migration and movement of people and, despite this reality, the urgency of building communities.
4. A realisation that money from governments and other agencies for projects inevitably leads to debts and bondage.
5. A reticence about the concept of "development" and, instead, an enthusiasm for workshops, assemblies, seminars and encounters where experiences are shared and where people can themselves identify causes, sources, problems, obstacles and interconnections.
6. A determination by indigenous peoples to exercise autonomous control over their territories.
7. An awareness among communities that to approach projects in isolation cannot solve their problems, because such an approach does not challenge the larger context, and thus entrenches dominant powers.
8. A recognition of how linking with other processes of resistance in other regions or countries brings valuable knowledge for local struggles.
9. An acceptance of complexity, of our complex world (as opposed to a linear world), as a basis for thinking and understanding.
10. A daring conviction that rural people (specifically peasants and indigenous peoples) are the most informed about the whole panoply of attacks and actions because they face them completely and without filters.
11. A growing alliance, which has emerged organically, between large segments of the indigenous peoples' and peasants' movements with ecological movements and segments of small-farmers' movements, to honour, defend and expand the space that peasants occupy when they produce their own food: the liberty that comes from living at the fringes of the system, and the long-term advantages of staying that way.
12. A crucial contribution from many young people surveying cyberspace for any information pertinent to the struggles of social movements – information that exposes the links between corporations and the political class, the dirty work of the operators, the finances and functions of programmes and agencies, and information that, when presented in regional and national workshops and encounters, whether about biodiversity, maize, water, land certification, ecological reserves, or environmental services, enables a holistic view of connections and horizons.

Global agribusiness: two decades of plunder

GRAIN

We offer a brief overview of the expansion of agribusiness in the global food system in the past two decades, with some thoughts on what we can expect from these companies in the years ahead.

Back in the early 1990s, many of *Seedling's* pages were devoted to discussions about international treaties and public research agendas. Corporations were part of the discussion, but mainly as a looming threat, one group of actors pushing forward the industrial model of agriculture that was destroying agricultural biodiversity. Fast-forward twenty years, and the landscape has changed. Corporate power in the food system has grown by leaps and bounds. Today corporations set the global rules, with governments and public research centres following their lead.

The fall-out of this transformation for the planet's biodiversity, and the people who look after it, has been devastating. Corporations have used their power to expand monoculture crop production,

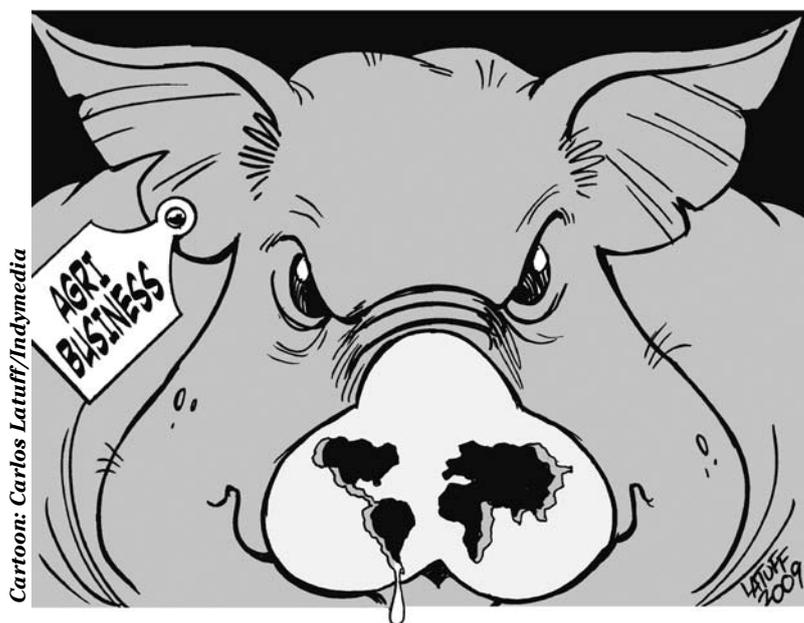
undermine farmers' seed systems and cut into local markets. They are making it much more difficult for small farmers to stay on the land and feed their families and communities. This is why social movements are increasingly pointing to food and agribusiness corporations as the problem in the global food system and the focus of their resistance.

Seeds

Over the past two decades the seed industry has been dramatically transformed, from an industry of small seed companies and public programmes to an industry dominated by a handful of transnational corporations (TNCs). Today just ten corporations control half of the global market for commercial seeds (*see* illustration, "Top 10 corporations' share of the global seed market", page 16). Most are pesticide producers focusing on the development of genetically modified (GM) crops that support a chemically intensive agriculture.

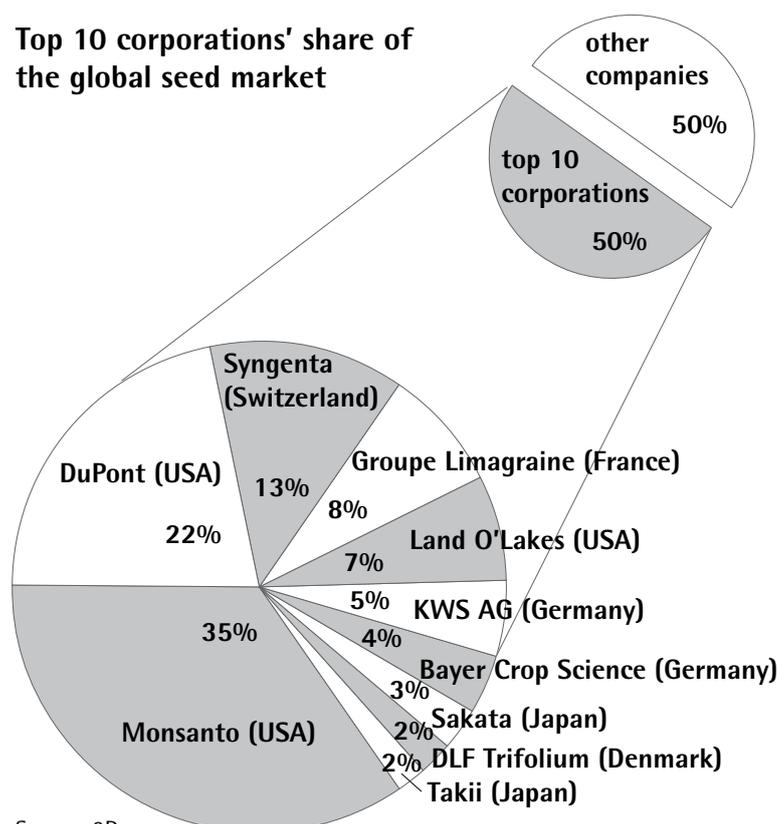
The high level of corporate control in seeds, however, is confined to those crops where these companies have been able to bring GM varieties to market (soya, oilseed rape, and maize) and to those countries with relatively large commercial seed markets, particularly where the commercialisation of GM varieties has been allowed. In the US, for instance, just one company, Monsanto, controls over 90 per cent of the seed market for soya. Corporate efforts to expand markets are thus focusing on opening more markets to GM crops and on capturing seed markets for crops in which they are still only minor players. With the latter, they are primarily doing two things. One is to buy up all or part of smaller seed companies, as Monsanto did by taking over the vegetable seed company Seminis, or as Limagrain is doing by buying into wheat seed companies in the Americas and rice seed companies in Asia. The second is by developing hybrid and/or GM varieties of crops such as rice, wheat and sugar cane, which have traditionally resisted private sector involvement because of the general practice among farmers of saving seeds.

With the rise of transnational seed corporations, the public plant breeding systems, which were so significant 20 years ago, have been reduced to



Cartoon: Carlos Latuff/Indymedia

Top 10 corporations' share of the global seed market



Source: 3D

- charge of the seed supply, rather than public seed programmes, as was the case in the past. Typically, these initiatives seek to build up local private seed companies that can establish marketing channels and build up networks of seed growers. While most of these small seed companies will inevitably be bought up or squeezed out by larger transnationals, in the meantime they not only get markets up and running, but also provide critical domestic support to push for changes to seed regulations, intellectual property laws, and biosafety legislation that undermine

Whose seeds feed the world? Farm-saved seed: 67.5%; certified seed: 32.5%

(Percentages for cereal crops in 14 developing and developed UPOV member countries surveyed by the International Seed Federation in 2005)

farmers' seed systems and pave the way for the big corporations to step in and take over the market.

The implicit (and rarely stated) intent of these programmes is to supply seeds to a new class of medium-scale and large-scale farmers in Africa and elsewhere who can pay for the seeds. There is no interest in supporting seed systems that are controlled by and that serve peasant farmers producing for their families and communities. The

expansion of the corporate seed sector is indeed inseparable from the corporate expansion in farming and markets discussed below. The most dramatic case is the boom in sales of Monsanto's GM soya beans that has accompanied the massive expansion of soya plantations for export in Argentina and Brazil since 1996. Similar models of production are now being applied and pursued elsewhere, across the Americas, Africa and Asia, displacing local seed systems with corporate seed systems in the process. In fact, in many cases the introduction of corporate seeds precedes the imposition of corporate farming. For instance, Chinese programmes to promote the use of Chinese hybrid rice varieties in Africa are part of a long-term effort to establish large-scale rice farming on the continent for export back to China.

The situation today with seeds is like a form of apartheid. On one side, there's the so-called formal sector: the private companies, the national and international research institutes and the governmental agencies pursuing the development of varieties for an industrial model of agriculture completely at odds with the needs of small farmers and local food systems. This side has lots of money and is supported by all kinds of laws (intellectual property rights [IPRs], seed regulations, investment protections, and so on), and it also has all the access it needs to the biodiversity developed by farmers and now stored in gene banks. On the other side, there are farmers' seed systems, which still provide food for much of the planet, but which receive almost no support from governments, who instead are increasingly repressing and even criminalising them.

Farming

Much has been said about the rise of corporate control over seeds. But there has been an equally dramatic rise in corporate control over farming during the past two decades that has received less attention, and that now threatens to get much worse. As with the Green Revolution, some of this control has come about through seeds, since GM crops and hybrids enforce a chemically intensive model of

Table: PepsiCo's farming operations

Farms	10 potato farms in China; 1 dairy farm in Jordan; 1 dairy farm in Egypt
Contract farming operations	12,000 farmers for potatoes in India; 1,200 farmers for barley in India; 6,000 ha (approx.) under contract farming for rice, tomato and chili in India

Table: Some agricultural commodity trading companies investing in farms

Company	Farms
Cargill	Palm oil, sugar cane, dairy, cattle, poultry, pigs, sugar cane, aquaculture
Olam	Dairy, almonds, palm oil
Bunge	Sugar cane, cereals, oil seeds, cattle
Louis Dreyfus	Sugar cane, cereals, oranges
Mitsui	Cotton, dairy, oilseeds, cereals, poultry, shrimp
Glencore	Oilseeds, cereals
ADM	Sugar cane, palm oil (with Wilmar)
Noble Group	Oilseeds, cereals
Charoen Pokphand	Pigs, poultry, aquaculture, fruit and vegetables, palm oil
Wilmar	Palm oil, sugar cane

Source: compiled by GRAIN

farming. Of greater significance, however, has been the intensification of vertical integration.

In the 1960s and 70s, many of the farms and plantations set up under colonial occupation were nationalised, and the general trend among global food corporations was to move away from direct production. For the most part, capital chose instead to enter farming through the input side – by controlling the sale of seeds, fertilisers and machinery. In recent years, however, that trend has turned around.

Corporations are exercising more and more direct control over farming, particularly through contract farming. In the livestock sector, for example, more than 50 per cent of the world's pork and 66 per cent of the world's poultry and egg production now takes place on industrial farms, which are generally either owned by large meat corporations or under contract to them.¹ In Brazil, 75 per cent of poultry production is under contract, while in Vietnam 90 per cent of dairy production is under contract.² Contract production is also expanding for export commodities such as cacao, coffee, cashews and fruits and vegetables. It is even on the rise for staple foods, such as wheat and rice. In Vietnam, 40 per cent of rice production is farmed under contract with companies.

Part of the reason for this vertical integration is that global retailers are demanding strict adherence to certain standards, which they dictate. Their suppliers thus want to ensure that farmers produce

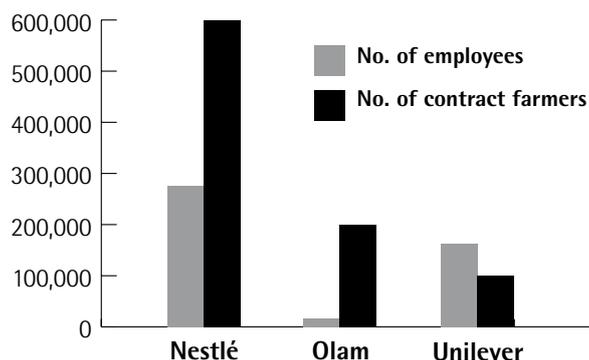
Cargill, the world's largest agricultural commodity trader, earned almost US\$10 billion in 2008–10, up from US\$1.5 billion in 1998–2000

according to strict specifications. These companies have extreme market power, and can force their contract growers to agree to near bondage-like conditions. As these farmers are not employed directly by the companies, the companies do not have to comply with labour laws or deal with unions (see illustration: "Who works for whom?").

One consequence of this trend towards vertical integration and tightly integrated supply chains is the emergence of what can be called corporate farmers. These are companies, sometimes owned by families and often owned by a mix of investors and even shareholders, with large-scale operations, typically in different parts of a country and sometimes in more than one country. In Argentina, for instance, where the emergence of such companies is particularly striking, just 30 companies now control over 2.4 million hectares of farmland.³ In the Ukraine, 25 companies control around 3 million hectares of farmland – 10 per cent of the country's total.⁴ Most of these new corporate farmers have special supply arrangements with downstream corporations,

Who works for whom?

Contract farmers are the dominant workforce in the food industry



Source: Compiled by GRAIN

as China's poultry producer DaChan has with McDonald's, and some of them have been taken over by their downstream clients, such as Hortifruti, the biggest fresh-fruit and vegetable producer in Central America, which was acquired by Walmart. Indeed, increasingly the transnational corporations are doing the farming themselves, whether it is with fruits, cereals, dairy, beef or sugar cane (see Table: "Some agricultural commodity trading companies investing in farms").

1. E. Blackmore and J. Keeley, "Understanding the Social Impacts of Large-Scale Animal Protein Production", Oxfam Novib/IIED, Preliminary Scoping Report, as input to the Conference on the Social Impacts of the Large-Scale Meat and Dairy Production and Consumption, 2009.

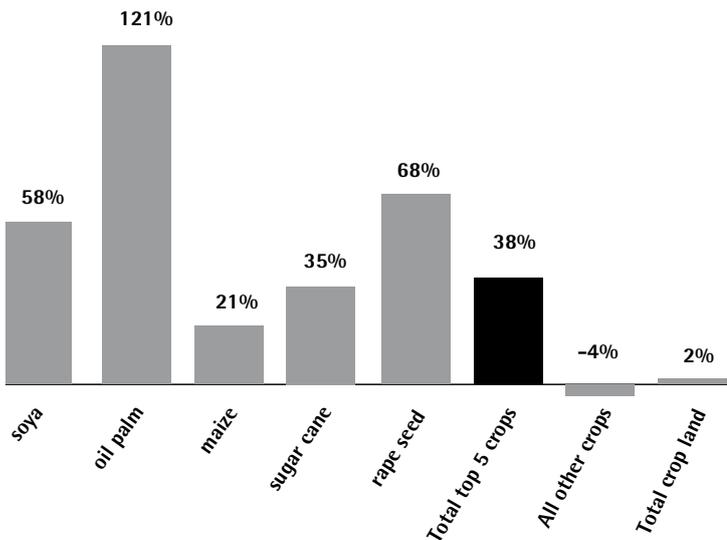
2. UNCTAD, World Investment Report: Transnational Corporations, Agricultural Production and Development, 2009: http://unctad.org/en/docs/wir2009_en.pdf

3. Klaus Deininger, "Large scale land acquisition – What is happening and what can we do?" World Bank, Presentation to Land Day event, Rome, 24 January 2010: <http://farmlandgrab.org/10920>

4. Maryna Moiseeva, "The largest landlords of Ukraine", Delo, 5 October 2009: http://www.smart-holding.ua/en/press-center/articles/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=882

Occupying fertile land: industrial commodity crops spread at the expense of others

(% increase 1990–2007)



Source: FAOSTAT

And there are other forces driving this recent corporate push into farming. The convergence of the food and financial crises in 2008 triggered a wave of investment in overseas food production and farmland, both by financial investors looking for a secure source of long-term profits and by certain governments rethinking their reliance on the corporate global food system to assure their food security. The recent creation of new markets for biofuels has also brought more corporations into farming. With legislation guaranteeing markets for ethanol and biodiesel in industrial and so-called emerging economies, financial investors and corporations from the energy sector have been pouring money into farming operations for biofuel production.

The overall effect of these developments is a massive expansion of monocultures. Soya alone accounts for over a quarter of the total increase in global agricultural area between 1990 and 2007 (see illustration, “Occupying fertile land”). What is perhaps most striking about these figures is that the

Three of every 10 pesos spent on food by Mexicans are now spent at Wal-Mart. Shoppers in the UK spend £1 of every £7 at a Tesco supermarket.

bulk of the expansion in monoculture production has not been about producing more food for people. The expanded agricultural area growing soya, timber, maize and sugar cane has mainly been used for industrial uses, especially biofuels and animal feed.

Markets

In the 1980s and through to the 1990s, there was a wholesale dismantling of the state or parastatal companies and agencies that, at least in theory, balanced the interests of farmers and the urban population. International commodity boards, which had similar intentions, were also broken apart during these years. Meanwhile, through the creation of the WTO and subsequently through bilateral trade and investment agreements, a comprehensive package of neoliberal rules was imposed on countries around the world, setting the stage for a huge upsurge of foreign investment in agribusiness and the globalisation of food systems. The net result of these processes has been the concentration of tremendous power in the hands of transnational agribusiness corporations. The door has swung wide open for them to remake food systems to suit their global operations.

For countries in the South, this new wave of corporate control has meant, among other things:

1. an on-going shift in the production of traded agricultural commodities towards places, such as Brazil, where the costs of production are low and state support, in infrastructure, finance and policies, is high (see “Asparagus exports”, below)
2. the aggressive entry of northern supermarkets (Wal-Mart, Carrefour), food service companies (McDonald’s, KFC), and food processing companies (Nestlé, Unilever) into domestic food systems
3. the replacement of local markets and systems of food production with global supply chains of food and feed organised by food and agribusiness TNCs.

Governments have, by and large, eagerly embraced these trends – falling over each other to provide incentives to foreign investors, signing up for and implementing Western-based IPR laws and food safety regulations that favour corporations and criminalise small farmers and local food systems, and pumping scarce public funds into the creation of infrastructure to facilitate corporate expansion.

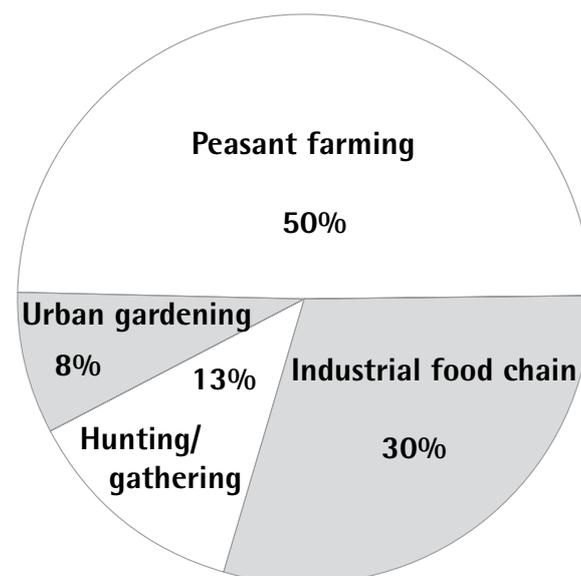
Asparagus exports

From 1990 to 2007, global exports of asparagus increased by 271%. Peruvian asparagus production accounted for more than half (58%) of the increase in global exports during this period. Over those years, asparagus production in Peru increased from 58,000 tonnes to 284,000 tonnes. Around 90% of Peruvian exports of asparagus go to the US and Europe. In Peru, asparagus was formerly produced by small-scale farmers, but today they account for less than 10% of the country’s production, which is now dominated by large-scale exporting companies. Just two companies control a quarter of Peru’s asparagus exports.

Some southern governments, such as those of China, Brazil, Thailand and South Africa, have been able to support the development of their own agribusiness TNCs, but these are few and far between and almost exclusively confined to agricultural production. Moreover, these TNCs are replicas of Northern TNCs, organised according to the same logic, and often tightly integrated with larger northern TNCs, whether as suppliers to food corporations such as McDonald's and Nestlé or as clients of agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto and Hybro Genetics.

Moreover, the whole machinery of corporate agribusiness, whether it's JBS in Brazil or Shineway

Who feeds the world?



Source: ETC Group, "Who will feed us?", November 2009. www.etcgroup.org

in China, has become inseparable from the global financial sector. The past two decades of globalisation has, more than anything else, been about the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of Wall Street and other financial centres. Today's captains of finance can move trillions of dollars around the world every day, looking for the quickest and highest returns. More and more of this money is now flowing into corporate agribusiness and commodity speculation. Access to this huge pool of capital is propelling the expansion of agribusiness, giving companies the financial resources to take over smaller firms or to set up new operations, while also harnessing them ever tighter to the logic of fast and high returns, which are made off the backs of workers, consumers and the environment. Meanwhile, the amount of speculative capital in agricultural commodities has skyrocketed in recent years, and this, combined with rising corporate control at all levels of the food chain, means that prices have little to do with supply and demand, and that food distribution has become disconnected from need. Today's corporate global food system is organised according to one principle only: profit for the owners of the corporations.

People

It is hard sometimes not to feel overwhelmed by the growth of corporate power in the food system.

Between 1974 and 1994, the difference between world prices (what is charged by traders) and domestic prices (what is paid to farmers) doubled.

Table: Ten southern agribusiness TNCs involved in food production.

Sime Darby (Malaysia)	World's largest producer of palm oil, expanding into West Africa and branching into the production of rice.
CP Foods (Thailand)	Asia's largest meat producer, also a major presence in seeds and rice trading. Expanding into Europe, Africa and Middle East.
Wilmar (Singapore)	Major palm oil and sugar producer. ADM owns a minority stake in the company.
Olam (Singapore)	Major agricultural commodity trader, with a presence in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Moving upstream into the production of staple foods, such as rice and dairy. Partly owned by Singapore SWF Temasek.
JBS (Brazil)	World's largest meat company with a focus on beef. Major recent expansion into North America and Australia and into poultry.
Karuthuri (India)	One of the largest producers of cut flowers in the world, with production based mainly in Kenya. It has more recently moved into the production of food crops for export on land it has acquired in Ethiopia.
Savola (Saudi Arabia)	The largest food company in the Gulf region, it is involved in the production and processing of foods as well as retail through its ownership of the Panda supermarket chain.
COFCO (China)	A state-owned conglomerate, it is China's largest food processor and trader. It recently expanded into dairy production.
COSAN (Brazil)	Fourth largest sugar producer in the world. It recently entered into a major ethanol joint venture with Shell Oil.
New Hope (China)	A privately owned conglomerate that is China's largest producer of feed and one of its largest producers of pork, poultry and dairy. The company has recently launched operations in Vietnam, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Cambodia

UNCTAD



Participants at the World Forum for Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni, Mali, February 2007

It is especially depressing when one considers that this corporate expansion is built on the destruction of local food systems, which provide livelihoods and food to people shut out or exploited by the agribusiness food chain.

Nevertheless, the corporate food system is not entirely ubiquitous. In fact, most seeds are not sown for it, most farmers are not part of it, and most people are not fed by it. Around the world, the foundations for entirely different food systems

has generated unprecedented food safety problems and has made agriculture one of the most dangerous sectors to work in, whether as a farmer or a worker. And it has funnelled the wealth created through global food production into the hands of a few.

The main story in agriculture over the past twenty years has been the rise of agribusiness. If humanity is going to survive with any dignity on this planet, the next twenty years need to see its decline.

The other G20: average GDP for 135 non-G20 countries in 2005: US\$49 billion; average annual sales for top 20 retail corporations in 2005: US\$75 billion

are still in place, and movements are emerging and gaining force everywhere to revitalise them and roll back the corporate food order. If capital is pushing so hard to take over agriculture, it is only because so much of it still functions outside corporate chains of production; so much of it remains in the hands of peasants, fisherfolk, and indigenous people, and within local cultures and the circuits of local markets.

The truth is that we do not need agribusiness. Rather, as the last two decades have shown, we have every reason to get rid of it. Twenty years of expanding agribusiness control over the food system has generated more hunger – 200 million more people go hungry than 20 years ago. It has destroyed livelihoods – today 800 million small farmers and farm workers do not have enough food to eat. Agribusiness has been a leading cause of climate change and other environmental calamities, the effects of which it is ill-prepared to deal with. It

GOING FURTHER

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Haiti's farmers call for a break with neoliberalism

GRAIN

Peasant organisations in Haiti are angry at the Haitian authorities for allowing multinational donors and corporations to take advantage of the post-earthquake reconstruction programme to deepen the country's reliance on the outside world. They are calling instead for a radical programme of agricultural reconstruction, to rebuild the country's ravaged peasantry and bring about food sovereignty.

On 4 June 2010 some 10,000 Haitian peasant farmers marched from Papaye to Hinche in the country's central plateau. They burnt several bags of hybrid maize seeds, part of the donation that Monsanto has made to the post-earthquake reconstruction programme (see Box 1, page 22). Their slogans for the march included "long live native maize" and "Monsanto's GMO and hybrid seeds violate peasant agriculture".

In an interview with GRAIN, Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, a Haitian peasant leader who heads the Mouvement Paysan Papaye (MPP) and helped to organise the protest, said that Monsanto was trying to take advantage of the aid programme to make farmers dependent on its seeds and to destroy peasant agriculture. It was necessary, he said, to say a strong "No" (see Interview, page 24). Similar actions were undertaken in solidarity in Montreal, Canada, and Seattle, USA.

Chavannes Jean-Baptiste's position is in line with the stance adopted by 15 peasant associations, including one youth and one women's organisation, who in March 2010, with the support of the Haitian non-governmental organisation PAPDA (Plateforme

Haitienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif), published a strong critique of the Haitian government's emergency response to the earthquake.¹

Following the severe earthquake in January 2010, which killed some 230,000 people and forced half a million to move back to the countryside from Port-au-Prince, the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR) announced a US\$687-million Emergency Food Production Assistance Programme. Its main objectives, it says, are "to promote the social reintegration of migrants from the cities in rural areas", "to increase their employment opportunities", "to increase their revenue-earning capability through labour-intensive activities to enable them to purchase immediate food supplies for their immediate needs", and "to establish food security on a permanent basis".

There is little to object to in these objectives in themselves. But where those who drew up the PAPDA document disagree with the government is over the strategy to be used to reach these ends. They say that the government is failing to take the essential first step, which is to challenge the neoliberal policies that destroyed peasant agriculture in the first place. And they say that unless the government does this, it will be unable to rebuild the livelihoods of the mass of small farmers.

Until the 1980s, Haitians grew enough rice, beans, maize, sweet potato and cassava to feed themselves. But then, after the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, Haiti began to liberalise the economy. "The IMF and the World Bank decreed that we apply structural adjustment", said Camille Chalmers from PAPDA.

1 "Commentaires des organisations paysannes et du Programme de Plaidoyer pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (PPSA) de la Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA) sur le Programme Spécial d'Urgence et d'Appui à la Production Alimentaire du Ministère de l'Agriculture des Ressources Naturelles et du Développement Rural (MARNDR)", March 2010. http://www.papda.org/IMG/pdf/commentaires_sur_document_speciale_du_MARNDR_Layout.pdf

Monsanto's gift to Haiti

In May, Monsanto announced that it had delivered 60 tonnes of hybrid seed to Haiti, the first shipment of a total donation of 400 tonnes of seed, mainly maize, but also other vegetables, to be supplied in 2010. It is estimated that 10,000 farmers will benefit and that, at market prices, the donation is worth US\$4 million. The US company United Parcel Service will deliver the seeds, while the Winner project, a five-year US\$127-million agricultural programme funded by USAID, will distribute them.¹

According to some reports, the decision to donate seed to Haiti was decided at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland: "[Monsanto's] CEO Hugh Grant and Executive Vice-President Jerry Steiner attended the event and had conversations with attendees about what could be done to help Haiti."² It seems unlikely that any Haitian farmers were included in the conversations in Davos.

Monsanto has reacted indignantly to the charge that the donation is little more than a ruse to get the farmers hooked on seeds that need to be bought each year, rather than saved, as is the case with their traditional varieties. G. Young, a company spokesman, responds to the accusation on the company's website:

"Imaginative, yes. Accurate, no. Our donation of hybrid seed to Haiti is about farmers, people and food. Haiti's farmers need good quality seed, because the better the seed, the better the chances for more food from the same land. Haiti's people need food – better quality food, more food and more nutritious food. We learned in Malawi that a donation of hybrid seed turned a region from a food aid recipient to a food exporter. Malawi farmers were given a chance to show what they could do with good seed.³ And they did it. Haiti's farmers can do the same thing."⁴

1 Jonathan M. Katz, "Connection between Haiti and Monsanto", Political Friendster, 14 May 2010: <http://tinyurl.com/2vmfran>

2 *Ibid.*

3 GRAIN has a different interpretation of Malawi's "green revolution". While it recognises that this "revolution" has boosted dramatically Monsanto's hybrid maize sales, GRAIN believes that the country's present policies are unsustainable unless land is redistributed and unless the country moves away from its narrow focus on chemical fertilisers and hybrid maize. See GRAIN, *Seedling*, January 2010, "Unravelling the 'miracle' of the Malawi's green revolution", http://www.grain.org/seedling_files/seed-10-01-1.pdf

4 See http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto_today/2010/seed_donation_to_haiti.asp

☛ *"They told us that we're right next to the biggest agricultural producer in the world, so there was no reason to produce our own food because we could buy it cheaply. Instead of farming, peasants should go to the city to sell their labour to US assembly plants that make textiles and electronics for export."*

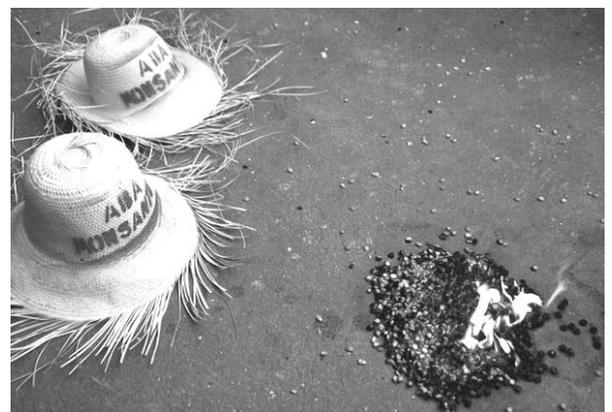
Thousands of peasant livelihoods were destroyed. According to the PAPDA statement,

"the neoliberal policies struck the rural communities at the heart of their rural resistance, provoking the massification of the rural exodus and the accelerated growth of urban shanty-towns. Local peasant agriculture was broken into pieces, to the benefit of the big corporations that operate in the food market. Peasant farmers, eliminated from the market by the liberalisation of foreign trade, had no source of income, becoming heavily dependent on outside help. Unemployment increased on a massive scale."

The state sector was cut to the bone by the neoliberal reforms, and left without the resources, human or financial, to prepare Haiti for natural disasters, be they earthquakes or hurricanes. According to the PAPDA document,

"The scale of the [earthquake] damage is intrinsically linked to the characteristics of a state built in defiance of the people. It is no secret that back in 2007 a report from Purdue University warned of the imminence of an earthquake but the state did not publicise the alert and took no measures to prepare and protect the people."

Now, in the wake of the hugely damaging earthquake, MARNDR has announced an agricultural reconstruction programme that, says PAPDA, will do far more to benefit multinationals than to benefit peasant farmers. More than half of the US\$687 million has been allocated to infrastructure projects – irrigation systems, rural roads, the repair and reinforcement of river banks and so on. The second most important allocation is for the acquisition of mechanical equipment such as tractors and other motorised farm equipment (US\$113.5 million), followed by reforestation (US\$58 million), animal husbandry – cattle and goat rearing, aviculture, apiculture – (US\$37 million), and anti-erosion structures (US\$20 million). A considerable outlay is also earmarked for fertilisers (US\$18.4 million), pesticides (US\$4.7 million) and seeds/seedlings (US\$5 million).



Haitians' response to Monsanto's gift. The donated seeds are burned on the demonstration held in central Haiti on 4 June.



On 4 June 2010 some 10,000 Haitian peasant farmers marched from Papaye to Hinche in the country's central plateau.

Because the vast majority of Haiti's farmers cannot afford tractors or chemical inputs, even if they are subsidised, the programme will benefit only a small minority. Moreover, because Haiti does not produce its own chemical fertilisers, pesticides or farm equipment, foreign companies will win the contracts to provide these. It is very likely too that multinationals will also win the infrastructure contracts. Rather than promoting national self-sufficiency, the programme will deepen the country's dependence on foreign inputs. And the PAPDA document believes that over time the programme will be rejigged to favour foreign interests even more blatantly: "It will be redrafted, dictated, and revised by international actors. It will be made even worse after USAID and other agencies have imposed their own rectifications."

The PAPDA document comments bitterly: "Humanitarian aid is obsessed with the laws of the capitalist market, which means that most of the money goes back to the donor countries. Capitalism's concern to make profit is never-ending." The Haitian authorities, it says, no longer see peasant farmers as legitimate players who need to be consulted:

"MARNDR denies the existence and resources of the peasant population. This neoliberal choice rejects peasant knowledge and expertise.... MARNDR continues to treat international NGOs, and [foreign] enterprises as genuine national actors in the place of peasant farmers whose interests are always, conveniently, put last."

Mervyn Claxton, an expert on Caribbean political economy, also believes that the Haitian authorities are failing to seize the opportunity to kick-start a genuine peasant economy that could move the country towards real reconstruction:

"Haiti has a range of traditional rice, maize, and bean varieties. Rice was brought to Haiti by African slaves more than two centuries ago.

There are several traditional varieties which are grouped under two main types – mountain rice and swamp rice. Those traditional varieties are known to be more nutritious than the cheaper, subsidised American rice ('Miami' rice), which replaced them two or three decades ago as a result of trade liberalisation. Haiti's traditional rice is therefore better for combating malnutrition, which the government considers a major problem, than imported HYVs [high yielding varieties].... The use of HYVs will almost certainly increase the risk of food insecurity instead of reducing it, because their absolute need for a regular, adequate supply of water would not be met during the periods of chronic drought to which Haiti is prone.... The use of HYVs will promote exclusion rather than inclusion because their absolute need for water has made the Ministry exclude non-irrigated or non-irrigable areas from that part of the Emergency Programme. Proprietors of the less cultivable, less fertile, excluded farm lands would necessarily be the country's poorer farmers."

Peasant movements have a vision, too, of the alternative farming model they wish to construct. In the PAPDA document, they call for a redefinition of policies so that there is a clear break with past practices: "rupture with the neoliberal model of development; rupture with exclusion; rupture with imperialism; and rupture with the centralising state". Instead, they say, reconstruction should mobilise four important social forces: women, peasantry, youth, and artists and artisans.

Doudou Pierre, who, like Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, is a member of the Mouvement National des Paysans de Congrès de Papaye (MPNKP), fleshes out the alternative model. He says that agriculture in Haiti should be "relaunched" around two guiding principles. One is food sovereignty, which means producing most of Haiti's food at home: "We could produce here at least 80 per cent of what we eat." And the second is integrated land reform. "We can't talk

about food sovereignty if people don't have land. Our plan is take the land from the big landowners and give it to peasants to work." And, once they have land, the farmers will need support from the authorities. "The state has to give us credit and technical support and help us store and manage water."

Once these structural changes have been implemented, proposals abound as to how peasant farming could be supported. The Centre for Economic and Policy Research wants international donors to agree to purchase Haiti's entire rice crop for the next two years. It says that, with this incentive,

local farmers would be able to produce almost as much rice as would be provided in food aid, and the devastated peasant sector would be put on the road to recovery. Another group is calling for the government to get schools to buy all the food they need for school meals from local small producers.

The government has given no indication that it will accept any of the proposals put forward by peasant organisations or think-tanks linked to them. It is scarcely surprising that Chavannes Jean-Baptiste and his fellow protesters are angry.

Interview with Chavannes Jean-Baptiste

Chavannes Jean-Baptiste heads the MPP, Haiti's largest and oldest peasant organisation. He gave this interview to GRAIN shortly after the march on 4 June.



"It is our way of struggling"

It is well known that Haitian agriculture has been severely damaged over the last few decades. Is it still possible to build food sovereignty? Can Haiti produce all the food it needs?

The situation of Haitian agriculture is very serious. We produce only about 40 per cent of the food that the population needs. We depend on food from the United States and the Dominican Republic. Haitian soils have been destroyed by erosion, because we have only 2 per cent vegetation cover. Less than half the land can be cultivated.

Despite this situation, however, the country is capable of producing enough food to feed its population of ten million, and to export some produce. Our problem is a political problem. The country doesn't have a plan for developing agriculture.

The first step is to decide what kind of agriculture we want. The government doesn't want to develop peasant agriculture. It wants to hand over the country's land to multinationals who want to produce agro-fuels and fruit for export and to send the rural population to work in the export industries. Only 4 per cent of the national budget goes to agriculture. And 85 per cent of this money is used to fund the ministry of agriculture itself!

What we need before anything else is agrarian reform. And then a policy of food sovereignty so that the country has the right to define its own agricultural policies. We need to grow healthy food in a way that respects the environment and Mother Earth.

We have 300,000 hectares of land that could be irrigated, but only 25,000 hectares benefit from irrigation. Today there are ways of using drop-by-drop irrigation in the mountains so that many families could benefit. If a family had a little water, it could take advantage of agro-ecological techniques, of permaculture, so that, with just 2,500 square metres of land, it could produce enough food to feed itself and sell enough crops to be able to send its children to school, to buy clothes, and so on. With just 100 square metres, a person can earn over US\$1,000 year by sowing papaya and vegetables.

Do you have support among the peasant community for your alternative vision? Aren't they seduced by neoliberalism, with all its promises of money and modernity?

You just have to look at the response we had to our call for a march on 4 June. With very little time to organise, 10,000 people came on the march. I am the spokesman for the MPP and for the Mouvement National des Paysans de Congrès de Papaye (MPNKP). When I speak, I speak directly in the name of 200,000 peasants – men and women. We can easily mobilise 100,000 people. All we need is a bit of time and some resources.

We have been carrying out programmes of popular education for many years. Peasants – men and women – are well aware today that the neoliberal project spells death for the peasantry. That is very clear from the organisations. Of course, there are some people who are going to believe in the false promises of neoliberalism.

Why did you decide to burn Monsanto's seeds?

It was, of course, a symbolic gesture. It was a way of saying a very firm "no" to the company and the government. Monsanto is trying to use the reconstruction effort to introduce hybrid seeds. We got the government to stop the GM seeds they first suggested, but even hybrids, which have to be bought from the company every year, are a very strong attack on small-scale farming, on farmers, on biodiversity, on creole seeds, and on what is left of our environment.

We have found that direct action works. Some years ago we burnt an American pig in front of the agriculture ministry to protest against the destruction of our creole [native] pigs. As a result, the authorities consider us a violent organisation, which isn't true. But it doesn't matter. If the government decides to attack us, it will only mobilise people and make our movement stronger. We succeeded in getting the creole pigs back. That is what matters. It is our way of struggling.

Seeds

"Miracle crop" not so miraculous after all

The Kenya Forestry Research Institute (Kefri) and the World Agroforestry Centre decided to carry out a thorough investigation¹ into jatropha because of the growing discrepancy between what was being said at conferences about its properties and farmers' experiences on the ground:

"Nearly everywhere you turn, someone is promoting this 'wonder crop' as the solution to our energy woes. Perhaps even more seductive than claims of energy independence, however, has been the argument that *Jatropha* can alleviate rural poverty and make use of marginal land not suitable for food production.

Reading some news reports, this has seemed like a real win-win situation. Farmers, biofuel producers, consumers and the environment would all benefit from growing and processing *Jatropha*. According to an article on Time Magazine's website from earlier this year, 'renewable energy, it turns out, does grow on trees ... unlike corn and other biofuel sources, the *Jatropha* doesn't have to compete with food crops for arable land. Even in the worst of soils, it grows like weeds.'

Local [Kenyan] papers have also joined in the chorus of praise for this seemingly magical crop, with unverified claims like '*Jatropha* is resistant to drought, pests ...' and 'experts say a hectare of *Jatropha* can produce 1,900 litres of fuel! Of course, the so-called 'experts' are rarely cited, and, even when they are, the basis of their statements is almost never verified."

Yet, on the ground, farmers were reporting disappointing results,² an experience that scientists too were beginning to share:

"The scientific literature and news reports from around the world are increasingly documenting a growing



African jatropha nursery

Photo: Servaas van den Bosch/IPS

disappointment about the crop's performance, especially in the marginal areas where it has been advertised to thrive. The fundamental goal of this study was to separate fact from fiction through an independent, objective collection and analysis of empirical data from current *Jatropha* farmers on the agronomic and economic realities of growing the crop."

So what were the results of the investigation carried out by the two institutions?

"The results of this survey, taken from interviews with hundreds of *Jatropha* farmers throughout Kenya, show extremely low yields and generally uneconomical costs of production. Based on our findings, *Jatropha* currently does not appear to be economically viable for smallholder farming when grown either within a monoculture or intercrop plantation model.

The only model for growing *Jatropha* that makes economic sense for smallholders, according to actual experiences in the field so far, is growing it as a natural or live fence with very few inputs. Of course, this is precisely how *Jatropha* has been grown in this part of the world since it was introduced centuries ago."

Their recommendations are stark:

"Therefore, we recommend that the all stakeholders carefully reevaluate their current activities promoting *Jatropha* as a promising bioenergy feedstock. We

also suggest that all public and private sector actors for the time being cease promoting the crop among smallholder farmers for any plantation other than as a fence."

The concern expressed in this study is replicated elsewhere in Africa. Maurice Oudet, the president of SEDELAN, an organisation that works with peasant farmers in Burkina Faso, came back from a trip to the north-east of the country, alarmed about the way *jatropha* was spreading like wildfire among peasant farmers. They have been seduced, he says, by the vague promises of high returns. He called *jatropha* a "cancer" after consulting a dictionary which defines cancer as "an abnormal proliferation of cells in the centre of a cell to such an extent that the survival of the cell is threatened". It's just that, he commented.³ Another study concludes that *jatropha* is an "aberration" for Mozambique.⁴

1 Endelevu Energy, World Agroforestry Centre, Kenya Forestry Research Institute, "A field assessment of the agronomic and economic viability of *Jatropha* and other oilseed crops in Kenya", December 2009:

<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/publications/PDFS/B16599.PDF>

2 In an article published in 2007, GRAIN was highly sceptical of the claims being made for *jatropha*: "A rosy picture indeed, but unfortunately what is actually happening does not support this optimistic view that *jatropha* will provide poor farmers with both cheap energy and significant income ... The reality is that *jatropha* has already been converted into another plantation-based agribusiness commodity, tightly controlled from seed to fuel by transnational corporate networks." See GRAIN, "*Jatropha* – the agrofuel of the poor?", *Seedling*, July 2007:

http://www.grain.org/seedling_files/seed-07-07-5-en.pdf

3 Le Sedelan, 381, "*Jatropha* et Souveraineté alimentaire, Le *jatropha* : un cancer !":

<http://www.abcburkina.net/content/view/763/1/lang/fr/>

4 Justiça Ambiental e União de Camponeses, *Jatropha*! Uma aberration pour le Mozambique, August 2009: http://www.swissaid.ch/global/PDF/entwicklungspolitik/agro-treibstoffe/executive_summary_f.pdf

The colony of Puerto Rico

Carmelo Ruiz-Marrero, director of the Puerto Rico Project on Biosafety, recently posted this blog:

"RUM (University of Puerto Rico's Mayagüez campus) biotechnologists proclaim with great pride that they are developing a GM cassava (also known as yucca or manioc) with increased nutritional content, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The test field of this 'wonder yucca' is in a UPR experimental substation in the municipality of Isabela.

Right across the road are the offices of Monsanto Caribe and over 325 acres of their GM crops. Just west of the substation there is a large lawn, possibly as large as the substation itself, dotted with military antennae which form part of an emergency global communications network to be used by the Pentagon in case of a nuclear war.

I do not mean to say that one thing is related to the other, but I find it very educational to see right next to each other two symbols of the colonial oppression we Puerto Ricans live under: the military industrial complex and the corporate biotech 'life sciences' industry, two reminders that we have no authority in our own land and no say in our destiny."¹

¹ See <http://bioseguridad.blogspot.com>

We haven't seen anything yet

According an article in the *Wall Street Journal*,¹ at least nine weeds in the USA have developed resistance to the herbicide glyphosate, which is sold by the US biotech giant Monsanto under the Roundup trademark. These weeds have spread to millions of acres in more than 20 states in the midwest and the south. Dupont, another of the world's big biotech companies, believes that by the middle of this decade at least 40 per cent of the land planted with maize and soya in the US is likely to harbour at least some superweeds resistant to Roundup.

This means that Roundup Ready soya, which was genetically modified by Monsanto

to be resistant to Roundup, is increasingly ineffective. One farmer from Arkansas told the newspaper that Roundup no longer controls pigweed, which is running rampant on his fields. The weed can grow six feet high "on a stalk like a baseball bat", he said. As these stalks damaged his farm machinery during the last harvest, he had to resort to practices from his father's day to control it, employing a crew of 20 labourers to attack the weed with hoes. As even this was only partially effective, he also used paraquat, an older and highly poisonous herbicide, to eradicate the weeds.

All this is great news for the biotech companies, even paradoxically Monsanto. "The herbicide business used to be good before Roundup nearly wiped it out", said Dan Dyer, head of soya research and development at Syngenta. "Now it's getting fun again."

The "fun", of course, is the chance to push ahead with new research to genetically modify crops to be resistant to other herbicides apart from glyphosate.

Although the companies are tight-lipped about their plans, some information is available. Dow Agro-Science is developing GM maize that will be resistant to the powerful herbicide 2,4-D, which it manufactures. It should be on the market by 2013. Syngenta is field-testing soya that has been genetically engineered to be resistant to a relatively new herbicide that it makes, called Callisto. Monsanto is also developing a new soya, resistant to the herbicide dicamba.²

Sales of Roundup are unlikely to fall with the arrival of these new GM crops, as glyphosate will remain a central part of the farmer's arsenal. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "most companies developing crops tolerant of other herbicides want to build them on a Roundup Ready platform, so to speak – putting their new herbicide-tolerant genes into crops that already carry tolerance for Roundup."

Although this is little discussed in the mainstream press, one cannot help wondering where this technical merry-go-round is going to end. The big advantage of the first generation of GM crops was supposed to be that, by allowing farmers to use Roundup, a

relatively benign herbicide, at a key moment in the growing season, both the quantity and the toxicity of the herbicides the farmers used would decline. This was not the case, as sales of herbicides did not fall significantly. But now, with the second generation, a cocktail of more lethal herbicides will be used from the outset, which clearly implies a step-change in the use of herbicides.

This clearly presents a grave risk to human health, the ecosystem and neighbouring farmers. For instance, grapes are highly sensitive to 2,4-D, and one wine-maker from Texas told the *Wall Street Journal* that he would go under if 2,4-D-resistant cotton were to be adopted by nearby farms. "A neighbour could take me out in one night", he said.

Despite the lip-service paid to the alleged "environmental friendliness" of GMOs, it has been clear for some time that what big commercial farmers really like about GM technology is that it permits no-till farming, which means that they can reduce labour costs. And, as the *Wall Street Journal* points out, this advantage is one that they are anxious to retain: "Farmers have no wish to return to labor-intensive methods. The success of expensive seeds that are Roundup-tolerant shows growers will pay a steep premium to control weeds chemically."

Ecologists are fighting back, though few are hopeful of their chances of securing more than sporadic victories. One case in point concerns 2,4-D, one of the chemicals used in the manufacture of Agent Orange, the main defoliant used by the US military in the Vietnam war. In 2008 the Natural Resources Defense Council petitioned the Environment Protection Agency for 2,4-D to be banned, citing research that shows that it disrupts hormones in trout, rodents and sheep. Dow is rebutting these claims. A decision is expected later this year.

¹ Scott Kilman, "Superweed outbreak triggers arms race", *Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 2010 http://www.gmwatc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12263

² See GRAIN, "12 years of GM soya in Argentina – a disaster for people and the environment", *Seedling*, January 2009, <http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=578>

*You cannot buy or make a sacred site.
They come from creation
They contain the patterns of our birth and the knowledge of all time
They are strongholds of life.*

Tshavungwe Nemarude

Clan fights to save sacred sites

The Ramunangi clan in Venda, one of the former apartheid homelands in the far north of South Africa, is seeking an urgent interdiction from the courts to prevent a tourism lodge being built on their sacred site. The Ramunangi clan is part of a community-based movement called Dzomo la Mupo (the Voice of the Earth), made up of seven communities and led by the Makhadzis (female elders). Along with protecting the sacred sites, rivers and forests, the Dzomo la Mupo has been setting up nurseries to help with reforestation and to revive traditional seeds, including millet, sesame and maize.

The sacred sites at the centre of this conflict consist of the Phiphidi waterfall and the surrounding forest. In Venda culture, these sites are places where the custodians perform rituals for rain, where they bury their ancestors and where they celebrate a good harvest. The communities take their duty to protect these sacred sites very seriously, because it is from these sites that their cultural, spiritual and community values and governance systems emanate.

For three years the Ramunangi clan has been fighting to stop development projects being undertaken on their sacred sites. The developers gained the go-ahead for the tourism project, which involves building chalets and related facilities on the site, from



Phiphidi Falls

local chiefs, particularly Chief Jerry Tshivhase and the self-proclaimed king, Kennedy Tshivhase. Despite numerous attempts by the Ramunangi to hold talks with these traditional leaders, the latter have refused to receive them, and bulldozers have now started work near the sacred waterfall. Letters calling on local government officials to uphold the Ramunangi's constitutional rights have also fallen on deaf ears.

In affidavits filed in support of their

application for a court order, the clan accuses the traditional leaders and the government of violating legal requirements and denying the clan's responsibility to maintain the spiritual well-being of the Venda people.



Members of Dzomo La Mupo gather outside the sealed-off Phiphidi Falls before marching on



Waterfall custodian Tshavungwe Ramunangi performs a snuff ceremony to protect the sacred site



MERC... ANMAN
N'ETENK... LE GRAN

BAZ NORMAL #2

ANNASYNAL... KARE...
MILIK

