HER STORY:
SOWING RESISTANCE TO INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE

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GRAIN

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Despite making up nearly half of the global agricultural workforce, women own less than 15% of agricultural land and are paid almost 20% less than their male counterparts. These disparities are not just statistics—they are lived experiences that define the daily struggles of rural women. Women small food producers are facing harsh reality across much of the world. From access to land and public policies to working conditions and decision-making power, women face systemic barriers that perpetuate social inequality.

As corporate-driven agriculture expands, traditional farming practices are increasingly displaced, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of rural communities. Women, already marginalised, bear the brunt of these changes. They are the caretakers of their families and communities, stepping in when male partners migrate for work, and ensuring the survival of the elderly and children. Their well-being is not just a personal matter—it is the cornerstone of rural resilience.

Yet, women's contributions and struggles often remain invisible, as do the specific harms caused to them by industrial agriculture.

To shed light on these issues, GRAIN shares the testimonies of women from South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. From the drone pilots of India's Namo Drone Didi programme to agroecological farmers of Mexico and dispossessed community leaders in Uganda, these women reveal the layers of adversity they endure, as well as their resilience in reclaiming their roles as leaders and innovators in their communities.

Their stories are a call to action—a reminder that the fight for food sovereignty is multifaceted, challenging both agribusiness and patriarchy. And rural women, small food producers are often at the forefront of all these fights.

Drone Didi: empowering women or entrenching inequality?

In rural India, where women make up more than a third of the agricultural workforce, a new initiative is taking flight. The Namo Drone Didi programme, launched by the Indian government, aims to train 15,000 women from self-help groups to become drone pilots for agricultural tasks such as crop monitoring, spraying agrochemicals, and sowing seeds. The programme, part of a broader effort to enhance rural women's economic autonomy, has been hailed as a game-changer. But for women like Anita Patel, a small farmer from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, the reality is more complex.

Anita flying the drone in the farm

"I'm a small farmer with a family to support," says Anita. "When my husband fell ill, I had to find work that allowed me to care for him and our children while still managing our farm. Becoming a Drone Didi seemed like a good opportunity."

Anita is one of the first women to join the programme, which is supported by the Mahindra Group, Garuda Aerospace, and the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO). Through a 10-day training programme at the National Skill Training Institute in Hyderabad, Anita learned to operate drones, a skill she now uses to spray biopesticides on her own organic farm and agrochemicals on neighbouring farms. "Using the drone is better than carrying 10 litres of pesticide on my back every day," she says. "But it's not easy. The battery only lasts 30 minutes, and I haven't received the extra batteries the government promised."7

A programme with promises and pitfalls

The Namo Drone Didi programme is part of a larger push to modernise India's agricultural sector, which employs nearly half of the country's workforce. Women, who are often paid 25% less than their male counterparts, bear a disproportionate burden of farm labour. The programme aims to address this imbalance by providing women with new skills and income opportunities.

"The idea is to reduce the physical burden on women while increasing their earnings," explains Gargie Mangulkar, a representative of MAKAAM, a nationwide forum for women farmers' rights. "But there are significant challenges, from technological limitations to the risk of increased debt."

The programme offers an 80% subsidy on drone costs, with loans available through the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to cover the remaining 20%. However, access to electricity—a necessity for charging drone batteries—remains a major hurdle in rural areas.

"In rural India, electricity is unreliable," says Gargie. "Without proper infrastructure, these drones could become more of a burden than a benefit."

The corporate connection

The Namo Drone Didi programme is closely tied to corporate interests. Garuda Aerospace, a Chennai-based startup, manufactures the Kisan Drone, the primary tool used in the programme. Meanwhile, IFFCO and other fertiliser companies are providing training and incentives, including free electric scooters for registered Drone Didis.

"This programme is a contradiction," says Gargie. "On the one hand, the government promotes natural farming. On the other, it's partnering with agrochemical giants to disperse pesticides."

Anita, who practises organic farming on her own land, sees both sides of the issue. "I use biopesticides on my farm, but when I'm hired to spray on other farms, I use whatever chemicals they provide," she says. "It's a job, and I need the income."

While the Namo Drone Didi programme has the potential to empower rural women, critics warn that it could also reinforce existing

inequalities. The shift towards digital agriculture, facilitated by initiatives like this one, could undermine traditional farming practices and increase corporate control over smallholder farmers.

“Drones collect granular data on land use and productivity,” says Gargie. “This data could be used by corporations to dictate farming practices, prioritise profits, and even identify and purchase the most productive lands.”

For Anita, the programme has provided a lifeline, but it’s not without its challenges. “I earn about 600 Rupees (7 USD) per day, but I still need to do two or three jobs to support my family,” she says. “I hope the government delivers on its promises, like the extra batteries. Without them, it’s hard to make ends meet.”

A call for sustainable alternatives

As the Namo Drone Didi programme expands, organisations like MAKAAM are advocating for more sustainable solutions. “Rural women

need better alternatives," says Gargie. "We're training women in agroecology, reviving traditional practices that are both sustainable and empowering. We started with 50 women, and there are now around 300 rural women practising agroecology."

For now, Anita remains hopeful. "This programme has given me a chance to support my family and stay close to home," she says. "But we need more support—like fairer wages and access to resources. Only then can we truly thrive."

85 years of San Isidro: women at the heart of peasant resistance

San Isidro, a small ejido[1] community in Mexico, has stood as a symbol of collective land ownership since the 1940s, when former President Lázaro Cárdenas granted 536 hectares to local peasants who organised themselves and demanded the right to self-manage their land. Today, San Isidro is one of more than 29,000 ejidos and 2,400 communities registered as social property in Mexico, a legacy of the agrarian reforms born from the Mexican Revolution and enshrined in the 1917

1. An ejido is term used in Mexico to designate an area of communal land used for agriculture in which community members have usufruct rights rather than ownership rights to land – see Wikipedia entry Ejidos

El Petacal hill, women of San Isidro on the land recovered from the AMWAY company 16 July 2022

Constitution. These reforms limited private land ownership to 100 hectares and placed over 50% of the country's territory—82% ejidal and 17% communal—under collective ownership, protecting it from sale or seizure by banks.

But the story of San Isidro is not just about land; it's about water, forests, and the people who have fought to preserve them. Ejidos like San Isidro hold 70% of Mexico's forests and two-thirds of its water resources. Yet, since the 1990s, these communal lands have been under threat. The 1992 constitutional reform, the economic crisis, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) opened the door to privatisation, allowing ejidal lands to be converted into private property. More than 22% of social property parcels have since been privatised, often under the guise of empowering women.

"Women will be the owners!" became a rallying cry for privatisation advocates, including the World Bank and the FAO. But the women of San Isidro knew these were deceptive promises.

Gender inequality in rural Mexico is stark. Women make up more than half of the rural population, yet only 28% of social property titles are held by women. Rural women also face worse labour conditions: 46% earn the minimum wage or less, compared to 32% of men.

In 2024, Mexico's agricultural exports hit a record high, with water-intensive crops like avocados and berries ranking among the top exports. These monocultures, driven by global demand, have come at a steep cost for communities like San Isidro.

For Trinidad de la Cruz, a lifelong ejidataria in San Isidro, the arrival of avocado farms and greenhouses has been devastating. "We continue planting milpa and cuamiles—corn, beans, squash, nopal, and chilli—but not like before," she says. "We are no longer backed by policies or credits, so many ejidatarios rent their land to outsiders for avocados, agave, and horticulture."

San Isidro is now surrounded by avocado farms, and while few in the community rent to outsiders, the pressure is mounting. "Many go to the city or the United States to find work," Trinidad explains. "I rent my 4 hectares to a neighbour who grows corn and sorghum because I'm older and can't work the land alone. But I won't rent to the avocado companies. We must preserve the ejido."

Ejidatarias and ejidarios signing the deed of possession of the land (1 July 2022)

In the neighbouring ejido of Alista, the situation is even worse. "About 80% of the land is rented out for avocados, agave, and grapes," says Ilma María Cruz, a resident of Alista. "The grapes are irrigated day and night, leaving no water for the community. We used to have a spring in the hills, but now water comes only two days a week for about 3 hours. How can we produce food like this?"

The privatisation of land and water accelerated after NAFTA, says Evangelina Robles, a lawyer who has worked closely with the San Isidro community. "Water concessions became much faster, and companies easily captured resources." One of the first to arrive was the US company Amway/Nutrilite, which bought lands intended for the San Isidro ejido and began installing greenhouses for horticultural production.

"They promised jobs and fair wages," says Trinidad, a seasoned ejidataria. "But in the greenhouses, it's all outsiders. They work long hours, pay for their own travel and lodging, and accumulate debts. Women work in cutting and cleaning fruits, while men and children work in the fields. It's exploitation."

Trinidad's comrade in arms, Ilma, adds that the health impacts are severe. Though not an ejidataria herself, Ilma has become a key figure in the community. "The pesticides are everywhere. You can feel it in the air, like chilli. Many people get sick, but the companies don't care."

The Resistance

Despite the challenges, women like Trinidad and Ilma are at the forefront of the resistance. “I was one of the first female ejidatarias in San Isidro,” says Trinidad. “When my husband died, the title stayed in my name, and I gained the right to participate in the assemblies. Today, out of about 80 ejidatarios, around 25 are women. It’s up to us to take care of the land, the children, and the elderly.”

“We decided to stop renting our land and started growing agroecological crops,” Ilma explained. “We use native seeds, collect rainwater, and grow corn, beans, squash, and fruit trees. It’s healthier and more sustainable.”

Their efforts are part of a broader struggle to reclaim land and water from agribusiness. In June 2022, San Isidro won a legal victory against Amway, which was supposed to return 280 hectares of illegally acquired land. But the company filed an appeal and even took the case to the World Bank, seeking U$3 million in compensation from the Mexican state.

“The community has access to about 60 hectares now, but it’s not easy,” says Eva Robles. “They face threats and armed presence. But women like Trinidad and Ilma are the backbone of this resistance. They embody the permanence of community in the face of dispossession.”
For the women of San Isidro, the struggle is about more than land—it’s about preserving a way of life. “We are fighting for our children, for our community, and for the future,” says Trinidad. “This land is our heritage, and we will not let it be taken from us.”

As monocultures expand and water becomes scarcer, the women of San Isidro stand as a testament to the power of collective resistance. Their story is a reminder that the fight for land, water, and dignity is far from over, but it is also far from lost.

Conamuri: Popular peasant feminism against patriarchy and the Green Revolution

Paraguay, despite a 17% decline in its rural population over the past decade, remains one of South America's most rural countries. Fifty-seven percent of that population consists of women. With men increasingly migrating to cities or abroad, they have become the primary defenders of their territories. Women bear the brunt of the violence of capital associated with agribusiness, as well as the cascading effects of economic, food, and ecological crises. Structural discrimination and patriarchy only deepens their vulnerabilities.

From this landscape of struggle emerged Conamuri. This organisation of peasant and Indigenous women has spent the last 25 years amplifying the voices of rural women who face the daily impacts of agribusiness. From violence and discrimination to water scarcity, health deterioration, and the loss of local seeds, these struggles are no longer confined to the private sphere. Thanks to Conamuri they are now central to the political agenda.

Women's participation in rural works has surged by 76% between 2008 and 2022, yet most are landless or have access only to small plots. It wasn't until 2002, with the introduction of the Agrarian Statute (law), that efforts to promote women's access to land, credit, and technical support began. Today, 46% of rural producers work on less than 5 hectares, relying heavily on agriculture for 70% of their income. State subsidies, remittances, and family help make up the rest, while pensions and land rentals account for a mere 3%. Over 84% of rural women lack any form of health insurance.

Conamuri is now a network of over a thousand women from nearly every department in Paraguay. They run an agroecology school, community gardens, local markets, and produce their own organic yerba mate. More importantly, they have developed a unique political and pedagogical approach: indigenous and popular peasant feminism.

A legacy of resistance

Conamuri was one of the first organisations to denounce the death of 11-year-old Silvino Talavera in 2003, caused by agrochemical

Photo: Hernan Vitenberg

fumigations in Itapúa. At the time, women were dismissed as "crazy" or told they didn't understand the realities of farming. Even their own comrades accused them of dividing the peasant movement. But the women stood firm, blocking tractors and protesting fumigations. After Silvino's death, national and international mobilisations against agrotoxins and transgenics began.

From agrotoxins, Conamuri expanded its focus to denounce the entire violent model of agribusiness—from land grabbing and water exploitation to the impacts on urban work, housing, and food systems. "From January to March, we face a 'chemical war' with aerial fumigations that poison entire communities," explains Alicia Amarilla, a historical leader of Conamuri. "Hundreds end up in hospitals, children die, but the cause is never declared as agrochemical contamination."

"Today, Alicia tells us, our struggles are recognised and respected. The massive campaign against HB4 wheat, dubbed 'Bread without Poison,' is a testament to 25 years of dialogue with a society that no longer tolerates being poisoned."

Until 2012, Paraguay cultivated only one transgenic crop: Monsanto's RoundUp Ready soy, approved in 2004 but illegally grown since the 2000s. Following the 2012 parliamentary coup against President Fernando Lugo, the approval process for transgenic events was simplified, surrendering sovereignty to agribusiness corporations. Today, 61 transgenic crops are approved, most resistant to one or more agrochemicals, including 25 varieties of maize, 10 of soy, 8 of cotton, and 1 of wheat (HB4).

In 2023, Paraguay imported more than double the amount of agrochemicals compared to 2015, with glyphosate leading the charge. Bayer-Monsanto, Syngenta, and Basf dominate the global market for seeds and agrochemicals, and their influence is felt deeply in Paraguay.

Today, 95% of Paraguay's surface is dedicated to agribusiness, totalling 5.5 million hectares—3.5 million of which are transgenic soy. "The 'soyification' of Paraguay has devastated our forests." explains Rosa Toledo, another San Pedro Conamuri leader. Since 1985, 142,000 km² of the Gran Chaco forest has been converted into cropland or pasture, making Paraguay the third-largest exporter of soy in the world.

The human cost of agribusiness

In 2013, more than 13 communities came together to confront the invasion of nearly 10,000 hectares of virgin forests in San Pedro, known as the "lung of San Pedro." The landless occupied part of the area to denounce land grabbing and deforestation by Inpasa, a company setting up a corn ethanol factory and monocultures of eucalyptus and soy.


Photo: Hernan Vitenberg

“The impacts are devastating,” says Rosa. “Fumigations near schools make the air unbearable. Insect attacks, previously unheard of, have become common. We partnered with a faculty of medicine to study communities surrounded by soy crops. In one community, we found ten children with leukaemia, numerous cases of cancer, eye and skin problems, and allergies. In another community without soy, there were almost no health issues. Agrochemicals are killing people slowly.”

Now, Paraguay has signed agreements with the Green Climate Fund for payments tied to reduced emissions. The Paraguay +Green project, aimed at sustainable forest management, is facilitating the advance of eucalyptus monocultures over peasant and indigenous territories. Between 2015 and 2022, eucalyptus plantations expanded by 90%. While primarily cultivated for pulp production, eucalyptus is also used to produce charcoal for drying grains like maize and soya, allowing these crops to be marketed with a ‘green’ label. Communities like the Qom see eucalyptus plantations as a Trojan horse for land grabbing. The trees deplete water sources, degrade the soil, and turn fertile land into deserts.

As a result, many residents are forced to rent out their land-not for a year, as with grain farming, but for 10 and 20 years at a time. Compounded by the need for immediate income and the lack of formal land titles, many end up losing their land entirely. Conamuri describes this process as the ‘expulsion package’—a systematic dismantling of rural communities.

Popular peasant feminism: a daily practice

“In the Santory community in Caaguazú, 300 families have resisted the advance of soy on nearly 3,000 hectares, protecting a vital wetland,” says Perla Alvarez, a Conamuri leader from Caaguazú. “We’ve created an agroecology school, Semilla Róga, where we exchange seeds and knowledge. Every month, we hold workshops on environmental legislation, seed production, and agroecological techniques.”

“But the challenges are immense,” continues Perla. “With the advance of eucalyptus and transgenic soy, water scarcity has become critical. Wells have dried up, and water cuts are frequent. The community has reactivated its resistance, proposing a municipal ordinance to declare our territory free of agrochemicals and officially recognise us as an agroecological community.”


Photo: Hernan Vitenberg

For Conamuri, popular peasant feminism is not just a theory—it's a daily practice. "It politicises our everyday tasks: caring for seeds, maintaining diverse gardens, practising traditional medicine, and protecting ourselves from violence," says Perla. "Even the kitchen, often seen as a place of oppression, is a space of power for us. It's where we transfer knowledge, share recipes, and organise resistance."

Conamuri also runs the Juliana School for Indigenous Women, offering training in indigenous rights, natural medicine, and violence prevention. "We've built a territorial 'trust network' to protect each other and denounce violence," explains Perla. "When a comrade is abused, we visit her home regularly until the situation improves. The state offers no shelters or support, so we rely on each other."

Through initiatives like the School of Women and Young Defenders of Food Sovereignty, Conamuri is internationalising its struggle. "We're building a continental dialogue on anti-patriarchal struggles," shares Perla. "Our challenge is to share care tasks with partners, family, and community, so women can fully participate in political life. But even meeting as political subjects is disruptive. From cultivating cassava to organising revolts, we're sowing life and resistance."

Stella Akiteng: a voice for the dispossessed in Uganda's Kiryandongo District

Once a thriving agricultural community, the fertile lands of Kiryandongo, western Uganda have become a battleground for land grabs by foreign multinational corporations.

Located 225 kilometres from Uganda's capital, Kampala, Kiryandongo is a melting pot of Ugandans from across the country. Many have migrated here after fleeing natural disasters, war, or violence in their home regions. The district is also home to a large refugee population, adding to its diverse and resilient community.

For most residents, life in Kiryandongo is a story of double displacement—marked by pain, humiliation, and hunger. Once a rich farming community, the land that earlier produced food for families and the nation has been transformed into industrial plantations of soya and maize. Women, in particular, have borne the brunt of this upheaval, their livelihoods destabilised and their futures uncertain.

The district's rich soils and ideal climate have made it a prime target for companies like Agilis Partners, Kiryandongo Sugar Limited, and Great Season SMC Limited. These corporations, often working hand-in-hand

Stella Akiteng

with local officials, have violently evicted thousands of families from their homes and farms. In their place, vast monocultures of soya and maize now stretch across the landscape, erasing the vibrant agricultural traditions that once defined the region.

For Stella Akiteng, a dispossessed farmer and community leader, the story is deeply personal. “I was a farmer,” she says. “I grew beans, maize, groundnuts, and other crops. Part of the harvest was sold, and the rest fed my family. But when the investors came, they took everything.”

Stella’s journey began with a double displacement. After her husband expelled her from their home for bearing only daughters, she returned to her father’s land, where she was allocated 60 hectares. But in 2017, corporations arrived, backed by the police and army, and seized her land. “They deceived district officials, claiming they were sent by the central government,” she recalls. “Now, my family and I are landless.”

The impact of these land grabs extends far beyond lost livelihoods. Families who once cultivated maize that fed Uganda and beyond now struggle to feed themselves. Schools have been shut down, and children are denied education. Even burial grounds are off limits to locals, forcing grieving families to discard loved ones’ bodies in the sugarcane plantations that was once their land.

“The sugarcane plantations have brought calamity and disease,” Stella explains. “Mosquitoes, venomous snakes, and wild animals roam freely, making the area unsafe for children, women, and men.”

Stella’s role as a community leader has taken on new urgency. Once a counsellor and member of the Nyamaleme Farmers Association, she now leads a network of displaced families fighting to reclaim their land and rebuild their lives.

The first day of displacement was particularly harrowing. “We couldn’t stop crying,” Stella recalls. “At first, everyone was overwhelmed, but over time, we began to encourage each other. We decided to create associations and groups to help each other survive. Before coming together, we thought we were doomed, with no hope. Now, we have hope—hope that we will reclaim our lives and land.”

These groups have become a source of strength and solidarity. “We share joy among ourselves,” Stella says. “Surviving hasn’t been easy, but we’ve found ways to support one another.”

A network of resistance

Stella's leadership has extended beyond Kiryandongo. She and her group have organised visits to other communities in Uganda affected by land grabs. The visits revealed the widespread nature of corporate exploitation.

In Kalangala, Stella learned how farmers were lured into partnerships with companies promising shares in oil palm plantations. "They were told they would benefit, but once the palms were planted, the companies prohibited them from growing food crops," she explains. The chemicals used on the plantations contaminated Lake Victoria, killing fish and devastating the local fishing industry.

In Mubende, Stella witnessed the environmental toll of eucalyptus plantations. "The trees suck up all the water, drying up wells and rivers," she says. Farmers were barred from grazing cattle or collecting firewood, leaving them without essential resources.

In Hoima, the destruction of Bugoma Forest for sugarcane plantations struck a chord. "The forest was a lifeline for the community, providing herbs, firewood, and more. Now, it's gone, and so is their way of life," Stella reflects.

These visits inspired Stella to unite affected communities. "We realised this wasn't just our problem—it's happening everywhere," she says. They formed an informal network against land-based investments in Uganda which has now joined forces with the Informal Oil Palm Alliance in West Africa, connecting with others across Africa to share strategies and resources.

For Stella, the fight is not just about reclaiming land—it's about securing a future for the next generation. "If this continues, there will be no land for food crops, only sugarcane plantations and tree farms," she warns. "If we don't act now, there will be nothing left for our children."

As a leader chosen by her community, Stella is driven by a deep desire for change. "All I want is a better future for our community and our country," she says. "We are learning from each other, standing firm, and associating with others. Together, we can overcome any challenge."

Her message to other women is one of resilience and solidarity. "I encourage women to stand their ground and overcome challenges," she

says. “If I die, the women who know me will follow my example. If I’m given the opportunity to do more, I will stand firm and take it.”

Stella’s story has become a testament to the strength of collective action. “When I share my testimony in church, women cry and ask me how I manage to stand firm, how I’m overcoming,” she says. “My answer is always the same: don’t suffer alone. Resilience comes from coming together, listening to others, and being compassionate. The world is full of pain, but together, we can heal and rebuild what was broken.”

The struggle in Malen: women fight for land and livelihoods


Jeneba Samuel

In Malen Chiefdom, southern Sierra Leone, oil palm is more than just a cash crop. For generations, women in this region have relied on oil palm for food, income, and economic stability. However, the arrival of industrial palm plantations has disrupted traditional livelihoods, as multinational corporations like SOCFIN Agricultural Company (SAC) have taken over land, often without the consent of local communities.

Since 2011, SAC, a subsidiary of the Luxembourg-based multinational SOCFIN, has acquired more than 18,000 hectares of land for industrial palm oil production in Malen Chiefdom. What has followed has been a bitter land conflict between the company, local authorities, and the communities. This conflict has escalated into violence, displacement, and a relentless struggle for justice. Amidst the turmoil, the women of Malen Chiefdom, have organised and are fighting to protect their land and way of life.

Jeneba Samuel: a story of resilience

Jeneba Samuel, a widow and farmer from Panina section in Malen Chiefdom, represents the resilience of her community. For years, she cultivated rice and oil palm on land inherited from her late father, sustaining her family through farming. However, in 2011, her life took a turn when the paramount chief and other community leaders sold family lands to SAC without her consent.

"They took our land without asking," Jeneba recalls. "When I tried to fight for it, I was beaten and sexually abused by five men. It was a painful experience, and still is."

Jeneba took her case to the police and the National Human Rights Commission, but no action was taken. Seeking support, she joined the Malen Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA), an association formed in 2011 to combat land grabbing in the chiefdom. Despite their efforts, Jeneba and other affected women have been unable to reclaim their land.

"I'm left with nothing," she says. "No land to farm, no benefits from the company, no job for me or my family. We're struggling to survive."

Jeneba's story reflects a broader issue in Malen Chiefdom. Women who once relied on oil palm and their other crops for food and income for their families now face displacement and economic hardship. SAC's plantations have not only taken their land but also disrupted the social and economic fabric of the community.

"The chiefs share the benefits with those they know," Jeneba explains. "The rest of us are left with nothing."

A 2017 report by FIAN Belgium echoes Jeneba's claims. It exposed serious allegations of corruption and a lack of transparency in SOCFIN's operations. Funds meant for land rent payments were diverted to local elites, with no accountability. The report also revealed a stark gap between SOCFIN's corporate social responsibility promises and reality. Between 2011 and 2017, the company announced 16.4 million for community projects,including schools,hospitals, and roads. However, only 2.5 million was actually disbursed.

Women leading the resistance

Despite the adversities, the women of Malen have shown immense courage and determination. On September 21, 2017, about 150 to 200 women were stopped by police on their way to Pujehun to demand action against SOCFIN for land grabbing and human rights abuses. The women, carrying banners and placards condemning the injustices, land grabbing and the rampant arrests refused to back down.

"We stood our ground," one participant recalls. "We told the journalists that arrived at the scene that peace was the way, but we also made it clear that we wouldn't be silenced."

After hours of standoff, most women reluctantly returned home, but six continued to Pujehun to attend a district meeting of key stakeholders, which they described as a small but significant victory.

The conflict reached a tragic peak on January 21, 2019, when a skirmish between community members and the police and military protecting SOCFIN's assets turned deadly. Two people were shot dead. In the aftermath, police and military raids were carried out in surrounding villages. People were beaten, houses vandalised, and properties looted. Hundreds fled their homes, and 15 people were arrested, adding to a long list of arbitrary detentions targeting MALOA activists.

Against this backdrop, a coalition of Sierra Leonean and international civil society organisations has called for urgent action.

A call for solidarity and action

Jeneba's plea is one of both resilience and hope. She urges her fellow women to stand strong and continue fighting for their rights. "We must not give up," she says. "Our children's future depends on it."

But the struggle in Malen is not just about land—it's about ensuring a sustainable future for the community. Women like Jeneba Samuel are at the forefront of this effort, their resilience a testament to the strength of those who refuse to be silenced.

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