

Final Report

External Evaluation of GRAIN's Projects

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Sarah Wright, Lorenz Bachmann, Markus Frank

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Disclaimer

The findings and conclusions presented in this report reflect the independent assessment of the evaluation team, based on available evidence and stakeholder perspectives. While care has been taken to ensure accuracy, any remaining errors or omissions are the responsibility of the evaluators.

Table of Contents

<i>List of abbreviations</i>	5
1. Executive summary	6
1.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation.....	6
1.2 Methodology.....	6
1.3 Key findings.....	6
1.4 Key recommendations.....	7
2. Methodology	8
2.1 Evaluation design and approach.....	8
2.2 Data collection methods.....	8
2.3 Data analysis.....	10
2.4 Limitations.....	10
3. Background and project objectives, Brot für die Welt and Misereor	11
3.1 GRAIN: Work and history.....	11
3.2 Programme framework and ways of working.....	11
3.3 Partners and forms of collaboration.....	12
3.4 Project objectives, Brot für die Welt and Misereor.....	12
4. Results	13
4.1 Relevance	13
4.1.1 Overall relevance of GRAIN’s work and project objectives.....	13
4.1.2 Relevance by specific project objectives (Brot für die Welt and Misereor).....	14
4.1.3 How can GRAIN better assess the relevance of activities and outputs in responding to the needs of partner groups and the global political and economic context for future planning?.....	15
4.1.4 Gender.....	16
4.2 Coherence	17
4.2.1 Coherence: Complementarity with partner efforts.....	17
4.2.2 Complementarity by specific project objectives (Brot für die Welt and Misereor).....	17
4.2.3 Evidence from partners on GRAIN’s particular strengths that support coherence.....	18
4.2.4 Gaps, risks and areas for improvement.....	19
4.3 Effectiveness	19
4.3.1 Overall assessment.....	19
4.3.2 Effectiveness by specific project objectives (Brot für die Welt and Misereor).....	19
4.3.4 Which civil society groups have been reached by the project, and which not? What are the major factors limiting outreach?.....	24
4.3.5 What were the main factors that contributed to or challenged the achievement of objectives of the projects?.....	25
4.3.6 Overall effectiveness conclusion.....	26
4.4 Efficiency	26

4.4.1 Assessment and limitations.....	26
4.4.2 Use of resources and perceived efficiency.....	26
4.4.3 Support to partners and administrative efficiency.....	27
4.4.4 Overall efficiency judgement.....	27
4.5 Impact.....	27
4.5.1 Understanding and assessing impact.....	27
4.5.2 Cumulative and emerging impacts.....	28
4.5.3 Impact by specific project objectives (Brot für die Welt and Misereor).....	28
4.5.4 Cross-cutting impacts: knowledge, alliances and anticipatory capacity.....	31
4.5.5 Contribution to food sovereignty, rights and natural resources.....	32
4.5.6 Overall impact judgement.....	32
4.6 Sustainability.....	33
4.6.1 Overall assessment.....	33
4.6.2 Sustainability of knowledge, alliances and skills.....	33
4.6.3 Organisational resilience and principles.....	34
4.6.4 Sustainability through movement ownership.....	34
4.6.5 Risks and areas for strengthening sustainability.....	34
4.6.6 Overall sustainability judgement.....	34
4.7 Participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL).....	35
4.7.1 Learning from and with partners.....	35
4.7.2 Internal processes.....	35
4.7.3 Evaluation assessment.....	37
5. Evaluation grid.....	37
6. Conclusions, from the findings.....	38
7. Recommendations.....	39
Annexes.....	41
A. Terms of reference.....	41
B. Chronology of the evaluation.....	46
C. List of interviewees.....	47
D. List of documents on which the evaluation was based.....	48
E. Quantitative data from interviews.....	49
F. Tables of objectives - interview guiding document.....	51

List of abbreviations

NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
PMEL	Participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
ToR	Terms of reference
UPOV	International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants

1. Executive summary

1.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This evaluation assesses GRAIN's work under the current and preceding project cycles supported by Brot für die Welt and Misereor, with particular attention to the period leading into the 2025–2027 funding cycle. The evaluation examines the extent to which GRAIN's objectives and activities remain relevant, coherent, effective, impactful and sustainable, and how GRAIN's participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) system supports learning and accountability.

Given GRAIN's role as a research and movement-support organisation working in complex and rapidly changing political contexts, the evaluation focuses on contribution rather than attribution, recognising that outcomes emerge through collective action, alliances and shifting political dynamics over time. The evaluation was also conceived as partly formative, aiming to support organisational learning and adaptive practice at an early stage of the current project period.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation employed a participatory, mixed-methods and contribution-oriented design, aligned with OECD–DAC criteria and adapted to advocacy and movement-building work. As per the terms of reference (ToR), particular emphasis was given to the criteria on relevance, effectiveness, and impact.

Data collection included: 46 semi-structured interviews with GRAIN partners, staff and board members across Africa, Asia and Latin America; a two-stage participatory SWOT process with GRAIN staff; field visits in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe, and observation at a key movement event; a document and secondary data review; and, an online survey administered via QuestionPro, with 66 responses from a mix of partners, other social movement actors and local and regional civil society organisations, staff, donors, journalists and members of the general public.

Interview data provides depth on outcomes, contribution pathways and learning at partner and movement level, while survey data offers insight into reach, resonance, agenda-setting and broader external perceptions of GRAIN's work. The evaluation focused primarily on the experiences of GRAIN partners as the direct target groups of the projects being evaluated.

Ratings were assigned using the Brot für die Welt five-point scale, based on a systematic assessment of all evaluation questions under each OECD–DAC criterion, drawing on triangulated evidence from interviews, survey data, document review and participatory analysis. This approach ensures that ratings reflect the overall weight and consistency of evidence across sources, including both positive findings and identified limitations where appropriate.

1.3 Key findings

Relevance

The evaluation finds that GRAIN's objectives and programme areas across the evaluated projects address real and priority needs of partner organisations engaged in struggles for food sovereignty, climate justice and resistance to corporate power. Interviewees consistently described GRAIN's work as timely and responsive to emerging threats. Survey findings reinforce this assessment, with a strong majority of respondents agreeing that GRAIN focuses on issues important to their work and demonstrates a deep understanding of political and economic context. Partners also highlighted the value of GRAIN's agenda-setting work and anticipatory analysis, which enables movements to better understand and prepare for threats before they fully materialise, although capturing this anticipatory value in formal indicators remains challenging. The evaluation thus ranks this criteria at level 1 (L1), 'very high', indicating the question is positively evaluated.

Coherence

Across regions, respondents recognised GRAIN for its distinctive contribution combining rigorous research, political analysis, agenda-setting and network-building in ways that are grounded in grassroots realities and Global South perspectives. Survey data confirms this assessment, with nearly all respondents agreeing that GRAIN's work makes an important contribution to movements for sustainable food and agriculture systems, complementing and supporting the work of others. The evaluation thus concludes that GRAIN's work demonstrates a 'very high' degree of coherence (L1), with its activities strongly complementing rather than duplicating

the efforts of partner organisations and other civil society actors, despite some capacity constraints affecting depth of engagement in certain contexts.

Effectiveness

Overall, the evaluation finds that the projects' objectives are being advanced to a 'high' to 'very high' degree (ranking L1-L2), with particularly strong results evident when assessed over a medium- to long-term horizon.

1. Work with community and NGO coalitions to block carbon farming deals, particularly in Africa, has contributed to divestment, project delays and heightened scrutiny of corporate actors, even where struggles remain ongoing and new cases continue to emerge. Indicators associated with this objective have been met.
2. The STOP UPOV campaign and allied groups have had significant successes preventing the advancement of UPOV in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and consolidating movement-wide opposition to UPOV. Indicators associated with this objective have been met.
3. Partners and allies have disrupted investment in industrial agriculture, especially aquaculture and livestock and made progress in agenda-setting, coalition-building and defensive outcomes. Indicators within this objective have been met.
4. Partners and allies have worked to highlight issues with the chemical fertiliser industry and made progress towards highlighting the industry as a critical target of climate action although this indicator was not always tightly interpreted by partners. Indicators associated with this objective have been partially met.

Survey findings indicate that perceived success is stronger over the past five years than in the last 12 months, reflecting the cumulative, non-linear nature of advocacy and movement-building work. This aligns closely with interview evidence emphasising GRAIN's persistence and long-term engagement. At the same time, it is important to note that gains are often partial, contested and subject to reversal, particularly in volatile political contexts.

Impact

The evaluation finds that GRAIN's work has generated clear and, in many cases, significant positive impacts, particularly in terms of:

- Strengthened movement capacity and political analysis in all three regions.
- Durable alliances and networks across regions.
- Emerging shifts in how issues are understood within movements and in public debate around land, seeds, climate and corporate power.
- Increased ability of communities and movements to resist harmful policies and investments.

In light of these findings, the evaluation finds the impact is evaluated at ranking L1 ('very high').

Sustainability

Sustainability of GRAIN's work is rooted in long-term knowledge production, self-sustaining alliances, movement ownership of agendas, and a resilient organisational model characterised by principled consistency and a lean organisational structure. Survey respondents expressed strong confidence that GRAIN's publications, alliances and overall contribution will continue to influence debates and collective action for years to come.

While funding constraints and political repression pose increasing risks, partners expressed strong confidence in GRAIN's ability to maintain impact over time. Continued resourcing and protection of partners will be important to sustain these gains. Survey data corroborates this finding, with a large majority of respondents anticipating long-lasting influence from GRAIN's work. As a result, the evaluation concludes that the sustainability of GRAIN's work is ranked at L1 ('very high').

Participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL)

The evaluation finds that GRAIN's PMEL practices are strongly aligned with its values and ways of working, but could be more systematic. Learning, reflection and adaptation occur continuously through relationships and practice, yet are not consistently documented or shared across the organisation. There is potential to strengthen PMEL through light, participatory mechanisms that capture change and support learning without overburdening staff or partners.

1.4 Key recommendations

To strengthen and inform GRAIN's work, learning and organisational development, the evaluation makes the following recommendations. These recommendations are intended to reinforce and underpin GRAIN's existing strengths, rather than redirect its strategic orientation. The evaluation recommends that GRAIN:

1. Consolidates and protect GRAIN's long-term, movement-support approach.
2. Further embeds PMEL as a shared learning practice.
3. Upgrades risk awareness and protective practices as part of sustainable movement support.
4. Diversifies communication formats and continue to foreground movement-led alternatives.
5. Maintains flexibility within objectives to support responsiveness to emerging challenges and issues.
6. Strengthens cross-regional synthesis and collective learning with partners.