

The Challenges Of The Multiple Crisis For African Small-Scale Farmers



La Via Campesina
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THE CHALLENGES OF THE MULTIPLE CRISIS FOR AFRICAN SMALL-SCALE FARMERS

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Training material for African peasant organizations and their members, based on the political training seminar held in Mali, Nyéléni, May 17th to 28th, 2010



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Credits

This publication is the result of a political training seminar for La Via Campesina African leaders, women and men, which was held in Mali, in the Nyéléni Center, at Sélingué, from 17th to 28th May 2010.

We want to take the opportunity here to thank all the individuals and institutions who made this tremendous adventure possible: CNOP Mali, whose leaders and staff got involved fully in that activity, and without whom nothing would have been possible.

Our very big “THANK YOU” also goes to the whole team of interpreters who allowed full communication among the participants in working conditions that were not always easy.

Another big and special “thank you” to our “teachers”, especially to Jacques Delpéchin, Xavier Papet, Mamadou Goita, François Houtart, Paul Nicholson, and Nico Verhagen, some of whom traveled very far to come and share their experience and knowledge and commitment with the African LVC leaders.

We also want to thank the La Via Campesina team of volunteer translators and editors who make it possible for La Via Campesina to work across the world and across our wide diversity of cultures and languages.

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Introduction

For the first time in the history of La Via Campesina (LVC) in Africa, peasant leaders, women and men, from farmers' organization that are members of LVC and friends from all over the continent gathered to attend a political training seminar in Mali, in the Nyéléni center, from May 17th to May 28th 2010.

This seminar is considered by the member organizations to be a major step in the strengthening of the struggles against the neoliberal model that is affecting farmers all over the world, but more particularly in Africa.

Our continent, in a process that can be seen as neo-colonization, is considered as a resource territory by finance capital: in the name of market and capital all kinds of life are being disregarded and despised. They are forgetting that Africa is the cradle of Humanity, the place where everything started millions of years ago. It may also be the place where mankind and all kind of biodiversity will be saved from global disaster.

This publication, intended as a small reminder for those who could attend the seminar in Nyéléni, aims to be a tool for the leaders from the peasant and small farmer organizations in Africa. We hope it will help them reach their bases with political education, in the sense of raising awareness and consciousness among them. What is presented to us as an accident – the financial crisis, climate crisis, food crisis, among others - is no accident at all: this is a human-created situation, which benefits a few and harms the majority.

As Africans, we also need to question the so-called “New Green Revolution for Africa”, which is no more than an attempt by the transnational companies against life under all its forms and a threat against the survival of biodiversity.

This publication aims also to help African peasant leaders, women and men and their social bases, understand the reality we are currently facing as African farmers, looking at our past, struggling with the present, and challenging the future regarding food sovereignty.

Please do not see this publication as a “frozen/master document” but only a few resource materials to stimulate our reflection and thinking. Feel free to translate the contents into your local languages.

Globalizing the struggle, we are globalizing hope.

The international Coordination Committee Members for Africa:

Ibrahima Coulibaly (Mali)
Fatimatou Hima (Niger)
Alphonsine Nguba (Democratic Republic of Congo)
and Renaldo Chingore João (Mozambique).

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1. Thinking about our History: *The Sharers vs. The Keeper*¹

By Jacques Delpéchin²

Reflections on how to go about collecting healing histories, legends, myths of Africa

Objective: Reclaiming African history by the peasants for the people from all walks of life. Reclaiming humanity by the African peasants.

African history, or maybe one should say “histories”, are the roots that keep humanity united. Nurturing and maintaining humanity requires dedication. Such dedication is of the same kind that can be found when a new life appears. In Africa, or rather on the Planet, people who work on the land have learned from thousands and thousands of years how to nurture all the elements which keep life alive. Food producers, peasants, women know how to nurture new lives and/or new plants. But, in the present context of globalization, everything is being done to negate that knowledge. The challenge is to reclaim it.

Context: We live in unusual, unprecedented times

When those who are supposed to know best about finances, food, banking, housing, and health show that they know the least, we must turn to those who, in the words of the great poet archivist historian of humanity’s conscience (Aimé Césaire), are proud to declare that they have not invented anything, but are the ones closest to the sources of humanity’s histories: the ones who, from time immemorial, shared their stories, myths, legends with their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. To keep sharing in times like these, in the teeth of calls to turn the stories into mysteries is the most courageous act of fidelity to humanity. In times of human rights agitated by the very ones who deny humanity, fidelity to humanity is the single most important duty of all who know that globalization is a variation of apartheid. Why is it so difficult to find the answer to global apartheid?

How does one gain (regain) self-confidence?

The context in which Africans are operating, especially the peasants and the ones who have been marginalized, is one dominated by the politics of discrimination against the poorest members of society.

¹ These names are inspired by Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel, *KMT: In the House of Life*. An Epistemic Novel. Penguine, Senegal: Per Anklh. Chapters 15 and 16. 2002.

² Dr. Jacques Delpéchin is a committed intellectual, academic, and activist for peace, democracy, transparency and pro-people politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Brazil. He is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Berkeley-based Ota Benga International Alliance for Peace in the DR Congo.

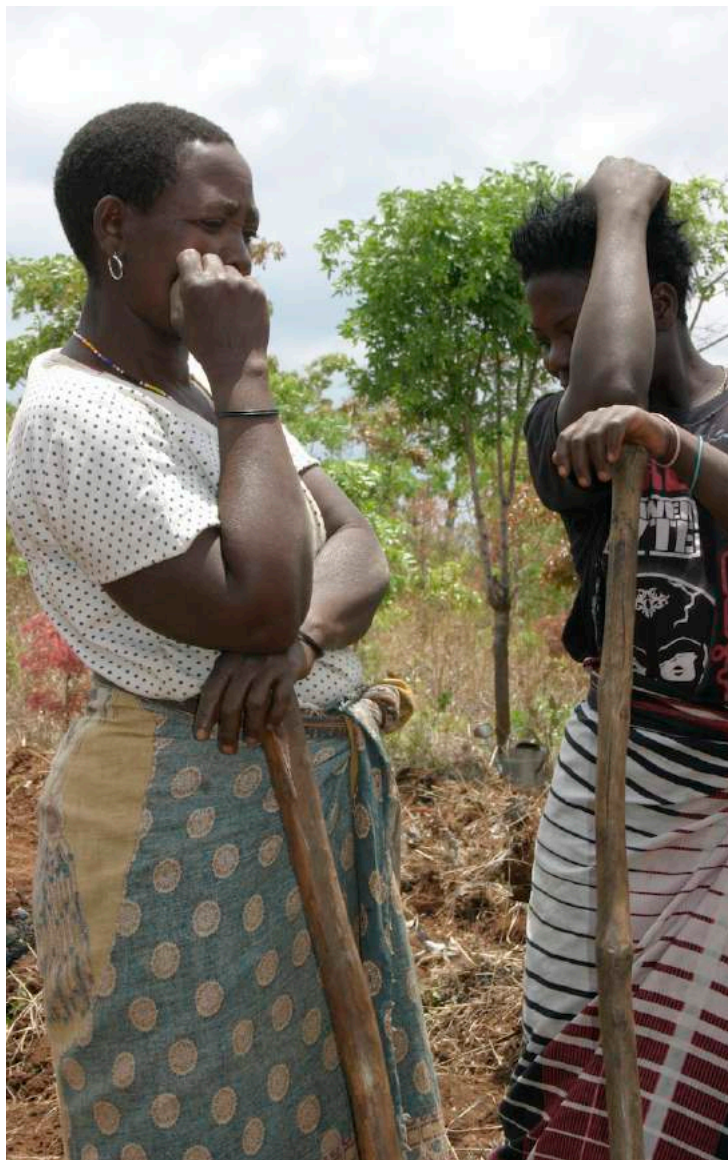


Photo Credit:
Nick Paget

The result is that the poor, the peasants, the women, i.e. the ones who keep humanity alive, lose their self-confidence, and begin to despise themselves. They begin to treat themselves in the way the so-called leaders would like to see them act. The purpose of reclaiming African history from its roots is to go against these self-destructive practices. The proof that it can be done is that, at various moments, inside and outside of Africa, Africans have affirmed their humanity by overthrowing slavery, colonial rule, and apartheid.

Searching and collecting

Telling stories, myths, and legends about people, animals, and plants is crucial to the promise of fidelity to humanity. The story of humanity is more in tune with healing than with killing, no matter how softly the latter may be done. This exercise may require explaining the purpose. History as practiced in academia often appears as a sort of police search. When people think that too many questions are being asked they may simply shut up. But the stories that are being sought are about how humans relate to nature, how people relate to each other, how animals relate to each other. The purpose is NOT to replace the academic; the purpose is to demonstrate that there are other ways of recounting history. Other memories are possible. Other narratives are possible. One should say: other narratives MUST be found if humanity is going to be alive rather than merely survive. “Mieux vaut vivre que survivre” (“Living is better than surviving.”)

If you cannot find the narratives, search for them while keeping in mind that it is not just for the sake of African peasants, but for humanity. Tell everyone that our future, the future of humanity (all of it, not just of the

poorest, not just of the weakest, but also above all, of those who thrive on manufacturing poverty and misery) depends on searching, and reaching for, those who can share the stories. They still exist, but have been ignored. The task at hand is not just to save Africa, it has to do with saving humanity.

Disseminating

While collecting stories, one should always remember that oral transmission (through griots, story tellers, mothers, grandmothers) has played a crucial role in how Africa has managed to maintain fidelity to humanity. In disseminating stories, all means must be used, but if the process of re-membering the dis-membered is going to succeed, then we must not be forget how the dis-membering of humanity took place.³

One side of humanity decided to enslave another side, and got away with it (A Crime Against Humanity) for centuries. The consequences of that process are still deeply embedded on the descendents of the enslavers (and their allies) and the descendents of the enslaved. The determination to recount other narratives must be asserted peacefully. The mode of assertion/dissemination will have to rely, at least at the beginning, on what is best known.

³ “Re-membering the dis-membered” is borrowed from the title of Ayi Kwei Armah’s latest book (out in 2010). In *The Eloquence of the Scribe – A Memoir on the sources and resources of African Literature*, 2006. Penguine, Senegal. Per Ankh) Armah used a similar image “reconnecting the disconnected” (chapter 13).

Who are the sharers of stories? (Identification of those who know the stories, histories, myths, and legends)

The process of recovery and healing may seem at first impossible and/or difficult. In part this may be so simply because the process of ignoring or silencing those who know other memories, other narratives, has been successful. So successful that people who are looking for those who know may walk past them without even noticing them. This difficulty (of finding where to go, who to go to for these histories/stories) will be superseded by continuing to ask for them, and, obviously, at the same time, explaining the purpose of the work. The kinds of questions will be as simple as: who are they, where do they live, which stories do they recount. Once the process has been primed, so to speak, other questions and ways of finding the buried histories will emerge.

Do these sharers (of histories/memories) live in the cities or far from the cities? The process of looking for the ones who remember the stories, legends, myths is no different from what the peasants do all the time: they keep looking for the best seeds, all the time. The difficulty to be overcome is one of reversing the habits that have been imposed by a political and cultural leadership in tune with the former colonizers and their allies. There are stories from the deep past, but there are also stories which grew out of the post-colonial period, resisting the post-colonial rulers.

Some questions which could help the reviving/re-membering process:

- Which stories were shared?
- Were there special occasions for sharing (e.g. initiation⁴)?
- Why were initiations ritual held? Why were they important? Under which circumstances should/could new rituals be held?
- What needed to be done in the community in order to maintain its health, its unity?
- What were the qualities of good leadership? How were good leaders identified?

Asking those who still remember if they know stories about:

- Relating people to their environment
- Relating people to the earth
- Relating people to food
- Relating people to each other
- Relating people to plants
- Relating people to animals
- Relating people to water
- Relating people to the ancestral spirits (relating the dead with the living)

Recording the stories (Imprinting/disseminating)

This has to be done by and through ALL the means possible: electronic, visual, manual, oral, written. Everyone shall be involved not just in collecting from the sharers, but also in creating easier access to the stories, and avoid falling into the trap of the **keepers**.

- Using all the means of retelling: theatre, television, cinema, poetry,
- Networking across borders, across regions must be intensified.
- At all levels, from collecting through to dissemination

⁴ See, for example, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of An African Shaman*, 1994. Penguin Group, by Malidoma Patrice Somé. This book has chapters that remind one of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. E.g. chapter 10: The Voyage Home, chapter 18: Returning to the Source. All of which point to the fact that Césaire did not mean the native country (le pays natal) in either the geographical or historical sense, but in the sense of reconnecting with the spiritual/mental roots of humanity/Africa.

About the Sharers (quoted from Armah's KMT, p. 257)

Year 1286 of the coming together of companions in the house of life. Words of the scribe Selket, elected by companions in the house of life to set down in writing the meaning of their deliberations so that the memory of their ideas, words, decisions and actions may not be lost, and so that their names may not be forgotten. The loss of our names is the death of our soul. Memory is soil. Water and light for life.

Introduction of the scribe: I was one with knowledge in the making of gardens. I coaxed the beauty of flowers and the healing essences of vegetables from the ground, with no waste of water. Because of my skill with plants, neighbors came to buy herbs from me, as well as crops. I gave wealth to my family, and still the buyers came. I gave my husband money for his trade. He was a traveling merchant.

About the Keepers (quoted from Armah's KMT, p.272)

Year 1309 after the coming together of the companions of Maât and Jehwty in the house of life. Words of remembrance set down by Saqwty, elected scribe of the companions.

The introduction of the scribe. He says: I grew up famous in my village on account of my absent ways. From an early age I saw I had the gift of shaping things with my hands. What I shaped was beautiful. Yet something about me presaged trouble. Skill I had, and grace like a gift of nature. But I seemed incapable of deciding what to do with that easy elegance. It was death which, coming like a burglar, shook me out of my long absence of soul. Both my parents died, my mother of a disease of the womb, my father a year after. He seemed unwilling to sustain life after the loss of my mother, sister to his soul. My mother gone, my father following after her, I was pushed to end the thoughtless pleasures of a long infancy. I was like one called to take the place of my parents, to grow up in an adult place.

An example of what can be done: the story (collected from the newspaper *Le Monde*.....An Archeologist in the DRC-Un Archéologue au Congo) recounts what he is doing as an archeologist/historian. As one follows the history, it is difficult not to ask oneself why African peasants are not doing the same. The immediate explanation is often "lack of means/funds". Possibly, but this explanation is not satisfactory.

http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/visuel/2010/07/08/un-archeologue-au-congo_1384916_3212.html

(accessed on July 10, 2010)

other example:

<http://www.filmreference.com/Directors-Du-Fr/Faye-Safi.html>

(Accessed on July 10, 2010)

Safi Faye, a Senegalese female film director who has done documentaries of peasants and fishermen, shows that they do have a story to tell, and they can do it well. Because this comes to us via a film, there could be a danger that those who could do very well without a film might end up being discouraged from trying it because they mentally decide that such a mode of expression is out of their reach. It is crucial NOT to be awed by technology. Improvised theater is very popular in Africa, and has been practiced for centuries. The great Kenyan novelist, Ngugi wa Thiongo, ran into problems with the government simply because he sought those who did remember the stories so that popular theatre could be developed. The task of reconnecting the disconnected cannot be left to those who did so much to disconnect humanity from itself.

Faye's first significant film, *Kaddu beykat* (which means "**the voice of the peasant**" [emphasis, jd] in Wolof, Senegal's main African language), was made in 1975. Here, her perspective of her own ethnic group, the Serer, is a far cry from the often culturally distant and biased gaze of alien Western observers. Faye gives a voice to largely illiterate Senegalese farmers, who discuss their socioeconomic needs and political problems.

Kaddu beykat, initially banned in Senegal, condemns the colonial heritage of peanut monoculture and denounces the government's lack of agricultural diversification to ensure the welfare of the rural populace.

Conclusion

As I pointed out in our conversations at Nyeleni, the key ingredient is for the peasants of Africa to stand up, to take advantage of their own historical knowledge in order to bring about narratives which have been silenced and/or ignored by academics, by politicians. A new culture has to arise, defined by those who are its producers, its sharers (the peasants). Sharing is something the politicians (the keepers) are not interested in. The sharers must find a way of imposing their way, without being aggressive, without falling into the habits which have ended up silencing African history. In his novel (about Ancient Egypt –KMT– Ayi Kwei Armah has a chapter explaining why and how the sharers lost to the keepers. Set in Ancient Egypt, the story is pertinent to our times, but this time humanity (the sharers/the African peasants) cannot afford to lose.

The challenge is threefold:

1. Asserting the conviction that various roots of African history can be found in the African peasantry. The difficulty comes from the fact that this conviction has been systematically undermined during colonial rule and most of post-colonial rule. There has been loss of self-confidence. The peasants are the ones who know best how to reclaim the needed self-confidence.
2. It would be wrong to first regain self-confidence in order to move on to "reclaiming Africa's humanity". These processes are intertwined.
3. Create a new mindset, create a culture of respecting African history, African culture, African people, African peasants. This can be done or should be done through multiple channels. This, like the others, relies on creativity. Creativity cannot be taught.

2. International Process on Agriculture and Food

By Xavier PAPET⁵

(Presentation made during the Political Training Seminar, LVC Africa, Sélingué, 20th May 2010)

FIAN, LVC and the World Campaign for the Agrarian Reform

FIAN (Foodfirst Information and Action Network) is an international Human Rights non-governmental organization funded in 1986 for the advocacy of the right to food around the world. FIAN is present in all continents in the form of sections, coordinations and individual members. Its international Secretariat is based in Heidelberg, Germany.

- *Right to Food* ? Included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948 after the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1966, the right to food was defined however rather belatedly, in 1999, by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment no.12: "The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement."⁶

Since 1999, the right to food witnessed new developments after the Food World Summit organized by FAO in 2002. Indeed, the governments of the member states are engaged in drafting and adopting the "Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food"⁷ in order to deliver concrete recommendations and supply legal tools for the realisation of the right to food. Even if these guidelines remain voluntary (the States can choose whether to implement them or not at their will) and the negotiations are long and tedious (they were adopted in September 2004), they are however an essential stage to struggle against hunger and malnutrition. It is necessary to emphasize the essential part played by the civil society organizations during this negotiation in order to make their voices heard.

- *The World Campaign for the Agrarian Reform* : It is a joint initiative from FIAN International and the *Via Campesina* which has been running for more than 10 years. This campaign was at first addressed to South America and the Agrarian Reforms carried out by certain countries, particularly Brasil, Guatemala and Colombia. One of the main objectives of this campaign was to denounce the

⁵ Xavier Papet is a French activist from the International Human rights organization FIAN (FoodFirst Information and Action Network, www.fian.org)

⁶ See <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G99/420/13/PDF/G9942013.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷ See full document at : <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM>

consequences of the land policies lead by the World Bank and to advocate and promote alternatives based on the respect of the right to food and the food sovereignty.

World Bank's Land Policy⁸

Following the policies of structural adjustment (PSA) which severely reduced the social policies of the states involved (health, education, support and agriculture, etc.), the World Bank showed interest in the agricultural sector while searching new investments. The PSA were implemented in those developing countries where agriculture is key to the economy. However, the World Bank has continued to implement the same principles as in any other sector of the economy, being the objectives the economic growth and the increase of productivity. The methods used were the same as those of PSA, that is : liberalisation of markets, inclusion of agriculture in the international market agreements, support of scientific and technology investments, particularly biotechnologies, diversification of crops intended to exports, improved use of water for market-privatization (leading to the boom in water prices in all countries which follow this type of policies). By these measures, the World Bank intended to improve the living standard of rural people while there was no reference to the right of these people in the programme.

The Agrarian and Land Policy of the World Bank, called "market-assisted agrarian reform", opposed the traditional agrarian reform policies which were based on the redistribution of nonproductive land and supported rural people with no land or with such a small amount of land that make it impossible to live on. One of the aims of the World Bank was to create individual property titles for those who were able to buy the land, neglecting thereby the ancient rights of rural communities which focused on the collective rights over their land. Therefore, these policies contributed to the disappearance of the community land, such as, for example, the Mexican "ejidos", and to the emergence of conflicts within the communities, often to the detriment of women.

In spite of the failures resulting from these policies in a range of countries, particularly in Brasil, South Africa or in Egipt and the withdrawal of certain projects, the World Bank has not modified the essentials of these policies. The World Bank still does not consider human rights as the key to any long term agrarian policy that respects rural people who base their living on agriculture and can therefore gain respect for their rights.

The new phenomenon : the monopolization of land

The liberalisation of agriculture markets, linked to phenomenons such as the quick extension of the single-crop farming intended for agrofuels, the financial speculation on prices of food products or poor cereal harvests in certain countries (for example, in Australia) have caused a food crisis unprecedented since 2007/2008. The price of food commodities soared, causing millions of people around the world to be exposed to unsafe food. Unfortunately, this can be proved by the numerous people suffering from hunger and malnutrition, a number which has dramatically increased, exceeding the billion of people in 2009. In one year, over fifty million people have joined the group of victims from hunger and malnutrition. Its first consequence has been the outbreak of "hunger riots", popular protests denouncing the price increase in about fifty developing countries.



A second consequence of the world food crisis has been the increase of food imports for those countries depending on foreign countries for feeding their people. This is particularly the case of countries in the Persian Gulf and South Korea. With regards to reducing their food dependence, these countries try to

⁸ See : <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/global-campaign-for-agrarian-reform-working-document/pdf>

purchase or hire foreign land on a long-term. Africa is heavily affected by this phenomenon. About 30 million hectares are estimated today to be in hands of foreign investors, either States, public-private partnerships or multinational companies. This phenomenon is too recent but its extent raises big concerns as it puts in danger both food safety and the right to food of local people who work in agriculture. Furthermore, foreign investors enjoy the support of local governments and without them no transaction would be possible. It must be noted that the most well-known transaction involved Madagascar, where Daewoo, a multinational South Korean company, wished to obtain the location of more than 1.3 million hectares of land, which is half of the arable land of the country, for a 99-year lease. This transaction caused in part the fall of the government which was in power at the moment of the agreement and was later suspended by the transitional government.

However, the monopolization of land continues to spread and it is very difficult to obtain specific information on the constitution of transactions.

As any international transaction, this phenomenon needs also international regulations in order to control the terrible effects on local people. How a continent such as Africa, where two hundred millions of people suffer from hunger or malnutrition, can improve their living standards of their people if the land to be used for agriculture is used to feed other peoples or produce, for example, agrofuels?

International protection of the rights of rural people

LVC has been involved for several years in the defense of the UN Human Rights system aiming at the recognition of the specific rights of peasants –Women and Men- at an international level. Supported by the senior UN rapporteur on the right to food, Zea Ziegler, by FIAN and the CETIM, LVC has proposed a "Declaration of Rights of Peasants – Women and Men."⁹ However, we are still far from a formal recognition of the rights of peasants by an International UN Convention. The International Human Rights Law offer several possibilities on the protection of rural people's rights, particularly in Africa.¹⁰

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are all useful tools to be used by the civil society organizations to condemn violations or obtain compensation for those violations.

With regards to the monopolization of lands, the FAO is involved in drafting the "Voluntary Guidelines for the responsible Governance of the management of land and natural resources"¹¹, and also involved are the civil society organizations, which have been asked to give their opinion on the subject. This is a very important process and the rights approach must be defended in order to respond to the terrible consequences of the monopolization of land over local people. By this rights approach, the victims of hunger and malnutrition can be considered as holders of the rights whereas the States can be considered as holders of rights and obligations in accordance with the international conventions that they ratified.

We must continue the fight at all levels so that the fundamental rights of rural people are respected, and we must also continue to use the existing political space to move towards the respect for the rights and food sovereignty.

9 See the text of the Declaration : <http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/EN-3.pdf>

10 See "Defending African Peasants' Rights", FIAN International, 2009 : <http://fian.org/resources/documents/others/defending-african-peasants-rights/pdf>

11 See : <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/directives-volontaires/en/>

3. Ending Africa's Hunger

By Raj Patel, Eric Holt-Gimenez and Annie Shattuck ¹²

This article was first published in the daily US newspaper The Nation, on September 2, 2009

More than a billion people eat fewer than 1,900 calories per day. The majority of them work in agriculture, about 60 percent are women or girls, and most are in rural Africa and Asia. Ending their hunger is one of the few unimpeachably noble tasks left to humanity, and we live in a rare time when there is the knowledge and political will to do so. The question is, how? Conventional wisdom suggests that if people are hungry, there must be a shortage of food, and all we need do is figure out how to grow more.

This logic turns hunger into a symptom of a technological deficit, telling a story in which a little agricultural know-how can feed the world. It's a seductive view, and one that appears to underwrite President Obama's vision for ending hunger. In an interview with an African news agency, he shared his frustration over "the fact that the Green Revolution that we introduced into India in the '60s, we haven't yet introduced into Africa in 2009. In some countries, you've got declining agricultural productivity. That makes absolutely no sense."

In a squat beige Seattle office building, the world's largest philanthropic organization has been thinking along the same lines as the president. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with an endowment of more than \$30 billion, has embarked on a multibillion-dollar effort to transform African agriculture. It helped to set up the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) in 2006, and since then has spent \$1.3 billion on agricultural development grants, largely in Africa. With such resources, solving African hunger could be Gates's greatest legacy.

But there's a problem: the conventional wisdom is wrong. Food output per person is as high as it has ever been, suggesting that hunger isn't a problem of production so much as one of distribution. It's true that African soil fertility is

¹² **Raj Patel** is a British born American academic, journalist activist and writer, who has lived and worked in Zimbabwe, South Africa and the United States for extended periods. He is best known for his 2008 book, [Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System](#). **Eric Holt-Giménez** is the executive director of FoodFirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy. He is the author of the 2009 Food First Book *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*. **Annie Shattuck** is a policy analyst at Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy. She is co-author of the book *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice* with Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, which examines the root causes of the global food crisis and grassroots solutions to hunger springing up around the world.

poor, though, which might explain why President Obama feels that the continent needs a Green Revolution.

At best, however, the first Green Revolution was an ambiguous success. As John Perkins writes in his magisterial *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, it was instigated by the US government not out of a direct concern for the well-being of the world's hungry but from a worry that a hungry urban poor might take to the streets and demand left-wing changes in the Global South. The term "Green Revolution" was coined by William Gaud, administrator of USAID in the late 1960s. Referring to record yields in Pakistan, India, the Philippines and Turkey, he announced, "Developments in the field of agriculture contain the makings of a new revolution. It is not a violent Red Revolution like that of the Soviets, nor is it a White Revolution like that of the shah of Iran. I call it the Green Revolution." Steeped in the cold war, the first Green Revolution was designed to prevent any other revolutions from happening.

The Green Revolution appeared successful because the global quantity of food produced increased dramatically. From 1970 to 1990 the amount of food available per person rose by 11 percent, and more than 150 million people were lifted from the ranks of the world's hungry. But most of that rise was driven by transformations inside China. Subtract China from the picture and the heyday of the Green Revolution saw global hunger increase by 11 percent. In South America, hunger grew by nearly 20 percent despite impressive gains in output driven, in part, by improved crop varieties. Those varieties required large landholdings in order to be economically efficient, which meant that the peasants working that land had to be kicked off. Those displaced peasants migrated to the hillsides and tropical forests, doubling the area of cultivated land--in other words, the increase in food came not only through technology but also simply by having food growing on a greater area.

Beyond the massive displacement of peasants, the Green Revolution wrought other social damage--urban slums sprawled around cities to house displaced workers, pesticide use went up, groundwater levels fell and industrial agricultural practices began racking up significant environmental debt. Today, because of the Green Revolution's catastrophic economic and ecological consequences, even its strong advocates in India have recommended that up to 70 percent of farmers farm organically.

The architects of Africa's new Green Revolution at the Gates Foundation are sensitive to these flaws. In an interview, Roy Steiner, deputy director of agricultural development, was well versed in the history, emphasizing that the Gates Foundation's agricultural priorities are directed at small farmers (known as "smallholders") and women. The past offered some salutary lessons, he said, because "if you look at the depletion of water tables and the overuse of fertilizer, a lot of that has to do with very poor policy choices. It pushed a certain mode of agriculture that we know now was an overuse."

Nonetheless, the Green Revolution being prepared for Africa bears more than a passing resemblance to its predecessor. For starters, in the 1960s the push for a Green Revolution was accompanied by fears about national security and stability; the recent global spate of food rebellions, in dozens of countries from Egypt to Haiti to India, has made food a security concern once again. Furthermore, the first Green Revolution was made possible through the philanthropy of a billionaire American family--the Rockefellers; the second is bankrolled by Gates. This is not a superficial coincidence: the destinies of millions of the world's poorest farmers are again being shaped by the richest Americans, and philanthropic choices are very different from democratic ones.

One of the most important choices involves the role of technology. At the Gates Foundation, Roy Steiner emphasized that "we believe in the power of technology." It's a belief with clout: about a third of the foundation's \$1.3 billion in agricultural development grants have been invested in science and technology, with almost 30 percent of the 2008 grants promoting and developing seed biotechnologies. Through a range of investments, the Gates Foundation is turning its faith into reality. This reliance on technology to address a growing political and social problem loudly echoes the thinking behind the first Green Revolution.

1. Why Africa Is Hungry and Knowledge Is Never Neutral

Some of the changes made possible by Gates's funding are welcome. An African Centre for Crop Improvement has been set up at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, which is designed to change the way African agricultural scientists work. Rather than carting them off to Europe or North America, where they learn about the pressing agricultural issues facing French or American farmers, the new center encourages African scientists to face African challenges while based in Africa. Other Gates investments are geared toward training more women PhDs and providing an infrastructure to source food aid locally.

These are valuable efforts, but one might pause to ask why the need for such philanthropic intervention arose in the first place. The faltering quality of African agricultural research institutions, and the decline in government spending on agriculture, is a result of the budget austerity imposed by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, in the 1980s and '90s. As Filipino scholar-activist Walden Bello has noted, Africa exported 1.3 million tons of food a year in the 1960s, but after being subject to international development loans and free-market fundamentalism, today it *imports* nearly 25 percent of its food. In a 2008 report, the Bank's internal evaluations group lambasted the policies that led to this situation. What the Gates Foundation is doing is using its private money to fund activities that once were in the public domain and were, albeit imperfectly, under democratic control.

The preference for private sector contributions to agriculture shapes the Gates Foundation's funding priorities. In a number of grants, for instance, one corporation appears repeatedly--Monsanto. To some extent, this simply reflects Monsanto's domination of industrial agricultural research. There are, however, notable synergies between Gates and Monsanto: both are corporate titans that have made millions through technology, in particular through the aggressive defense of proprietary intellectual property. Both organizations are suffused by a culture of expertise, and there's some overlap between them. Robert Horsch, a former senior vice president at Monsanto, is, for instance, now interim director of Gates's agricultural development program and head of the science and technology team. Travis English and Paige Miller, researchers with the Seattle-based Community Alliance for Global Justice, have uncovered some striking trends in Gates Foundation funding. By following the money, English told us that "AGRA used funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to write twenty-three grants for projects in Kenya. Twelve of those recipients are involved in research in genetically modified agriculture, development or advocacy. About 79 percent of funding in Kenya involves biotech in one way or another." And, English says, "so far, we have found over \$100 million in grants to organizations connected to Monsanto."

This isn't surprising in light of the fact that Monsanto and Gates both embrace a model of agriculture that sees farmers suffering a deficit of knowledge--in which seeds, like little tiny beads of software, can be programmed to transmit that knowledge for commercial purposes. This assumes that Green Revolution technologies--including those that substitute for farmers' knowledge--are not



Photo Credit:
Tineke D'Haese

only desirable but neutral. Knowledge is never neutral, however: it inevitably carries and influences relations of power.

The first Green Revolution spawned and exacerbated many social divisions, especially around access to land and resources, since the scale required by Green Revolution technologies meant that it was systematically biased against smallholders. The Gates Foundation is clearly aware of the importance of smallholder agriculture; but a leaked internal strategy document suggests that something else is more important: "Over time, this [strategy] will require some degree of land mobility and a lower percentage of total employment involved in direct agricultural production." "Land mobility" is an Orwellian term meaning the land stays where it is but the people on it are driven off. The foundation stands behind this idea, saying that peasants will head to cities "because there are a lot of them who don't want to be farmers [and] people make their own choices."

This idea of choice is an integral part of the conventional wisdom about agriculture in Africa. At least until the financial crisis, it was true that young men tended not to want to remain in agriculture if they could avoid it; but that choice was conditioned, in part, by policies that underinvested in rural areas compared with urban ones. One of the consequences of the financial crisis has been to change that field of choices. For the first time in years, men who had migrated to the cities find there's less opportunity in urban than in rural areas.

They're returning to family land that has been farmed by women, who have developed rich knowledge about agriculture. The technologies that the Gates Foundation funds, like hybrid seed and synthetic fertilizer, require much less know-how than some of the diverse traditional systems managed by women. In many African cultures, women grow the majority of food, but men control access to cash. Rather than supporting and building on women's agricultural knowledge systems, cash-based agricultural technology allows men with the economic wherewithal to displace women as farmers.

African farmers' organizations have repeatedly rejected this high-tech approach to agriculture and instead are making their own choices. Since AGRA announced its plans in 2006, groups representing the largest farmer federations in Africa have come together in a series of meetings to organize support for African agroecological solutions to the food crisis.

Despite institutional neglect, ecological farming systems have been sprouting up across the African continent for decades--systems based on farmers' knowledge, which not only raise yields but reduce costs, are diverse and use less water and fewer chemicals. Fifteen years ago, researchers and farmers in Kenya began developing a method for beating striga, a parasitic weed that causes significant crop loss for African farmers. The system they developed, the "push-pull system," also builds soil fertility, provides animal fodder and resists another major African pest, the stemborer. Under the system, predators are "pushed" away from corn because it is planted alongside insect-repellent crops, while they are "pulled" toward crops like Napier grass, which exudes a gum that traps and kills pests and is also an important fodder crop for livestock. Push-pull has spread to more than 10,000 households in East Africa by means of town meetings, national radio broadcasts and farmer field schools. It's a farming system that's much more robust, cheaper, less environmentally harmful, locally developed, locally owned and one among dozens of promising agroecological alternatives on the ground in Africa today.

It was innovative ecological technologies like push-pull (and not traditional Green Revolution approaches) that were praised by a recent international effort to assess the future of agriculture. "The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development" (IAASTD), a report modeled after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, took

more than four years to complete and relied on the expertise of more than 400 scientists. It was adopted by fifty-eight countries in the global North and South (though not the United States, Canada or Australia). The IAASTD found that a focus on small-scale sustainable agriculture, locally adapted seed and ecological farming better address the complexities of climate change, hunger, poverty and productive demands on agriculture in the developing world. That report--the most comprehensive scientific assessment of world agriculture to date--recommended development strategies that are in large part the opposite of those backed by the Gates Foundation.

The Gates Foundation acknowledges the relevance of the IAASTD's insights. But it continues to invest heavily in biotech solutions to the problem of hunger and gives short shrift to the agroecological approaches recommended by the report. What's more, there's empirical reason to doubt whether biotech can deliver what Gates is hoping for. Genetically modified (GM) seeds are expensive, proprietary and contribute to the corporate monopolization of the world's seed supply. Despite extraordinary restrictions on research into the effects of GM products--the industry refuses to allow independent researchers to study patented seed--evidence is finally emerging of the significant environmental and health risks they pose, prompting the American Academy of Environmental Medicine earlier this year to call for an immediate moratorium on GM food.

Prestigious research organizations like the Union of Concerned Scientists have demonstrated that GM crops (which are legal for commercial use in only three African countries) do not increase intrinsic yields, and, in the developing world especially, can increase costs and risks to smallholders, with mixed, often negative effects on their incomes. Although the Gates Foundation has promised crops genetically engineered for drought tolerance, these crops have yet to outperform traditional varieties, according to an assessment by the Australian government. The foundation has also spent more than \$111 million to "biofortify" (genetically engineer) crops to have a higher vitamin content, despite past technical and cultural failures that indicate a diverse diet goes much further than genetically engineered supplements in supporting good nutrition.

2. Africa's New Poster Child: The Malawi 'Miracle'

One place where the new Green Revolution has gotten a head start is the small East African nation of Malawi. After a severe drought in 2003, more than a third of the country needed food aid to survive. Bucking advice from the World Bank, the country began giving out vouchers on a large scale for subsidized fertilizer in 2005. The rains returned, yields rose, Malawi began exporting grain and the international community declared the hunger crisis over.

The Gates Foundation has been aggressively supporting the funding of fertilizer in Africa through grants to establish a network of private agro-input dealers. While the program doesn't explicitly subsidize the price of fertilizers to farmers, it encourages national policies to increase fertilizer availability. If the problem for African farmers is soil fertility, funding fertilizer seems unimpeachable. A closer examination of the data raises some troubling questions, though. It isn't clear whether it was the fertilizer or the rain that caused yields to increase. Worse yet, according to sources in Malawi, hunger has not abated at anywhere near the levels believed by the international development community.

Indeed, there's reason to think that fertilizer subsidies may render societies more vulnerable to famine. Roland Bunch, a former agronomist at World Neighbors and author of *Two Ears of Corn*, a handbook on people-centered agricultural development, explains the problem. "The indirect effects of subsidized fertilizer are that farmers stop amending their soils with organic matter because it is easier to apply fertilizer. When the subsidies dry up--as

they invariably do--farmers are left with soils that are so inert that they can't even grow a good green manure to restore fertility. At that point, with neither chemical fertilizer nor green manures being feasible, we could easily witness a famine across Africa like nothing we have ever seen before."

This is a concern echoed on the ground. Rachel Bezner Kerr, a professor at the University of Western Ontario, has been working in Malawi for more than a decade. She says that Malawi's fertilizer subsidies are "masking food security problems for the long term." Bezner Kerr works with a project in Malawi that takes a different approach to soil health by relying on local farmer experimenters. One village headman has, for instance, encouraged his village to adopt ecological agriculture, which not only improves yields but produces a diverse diet that has improved the health of the community's children, at a fraction of the cost of Gates's genetically engineered nutrition projects. Much like push-pull, the result of that project, which spread to more than 7,000 households, is that families--and the soil--are better off.

When asked about how AGRA affects projects like hers, Bezner Kerr says, "When farmers get vouchers [for fertilizer], they wonder, Why incorporate crop residues? If AGRA is putting all that money into fertilizer, it is taking away from efforts like ours." Like Bunch, she's concerned about the economic as well as the environmental sustainability of fertilizer giveaways. "What happens when AGRA leaves?" she asks.

3. Is Bill Gates Africa's Latest Strongman?

The Gates Foundation responds to criticism of its funding decisions by saying that it is learning all the time, with a state-of-the-art system that will soon let the project officers seek feedback through the cellphones of more than 10,000 farmer stakeholders. It's unusual in the world of foundations to have such a strong commitment to correcting mistakes. In its flexibility and openness to reform, the Gates Foundation seems ready to depart from the trajectory of the first Green Revolution.

Stung by widespread criticism over its Green Revolution approach, AGRA representatives have begun participating in public consultations with NGOs and African farm leaders. While this dialogue is an important step, the farm leaders are unhappy about being consulted so late in the game. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, recently convened a dialogue on AGRA. There, Simon Mwamba of the Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum expressed this frustration in no-nonsense terms: "You come. You buy the land. You make a plan. You build a house. Now you ask me, what color do I want to paint the kitchen? This is not participation!"

Nnimmo Bassey, director of Environmental Rights Action in Nigeria, suggests, "If the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations wish to extend the hand of fellowship to the African continent, they should move away from strategies that favor monoculture, lead to land grabs and tie local farmers to the shop doors of biotech seed monopolies." This is feedback that can't so easily be shot back to base through a cellphone.

The calls from African organizations to be able to set the agenda for their own agricultural development are heard only faintly in the United States. That's largely because when it comes to African hunger, prejudices about the incompetence of African farmers and the marvels of biotechnology do a lot of the thinking for us. But the Gates Foundation isn't a victim of poor reasoning. It actively promotes an agenda that supports some of the most powerful corporations on earth. Far more than the peer-reviewed IAASTD study, Gates's strategy reflects another report, funded by the foundation itself: "Renewing American Leadership in the Fight Against Global Hunger and Poverty" from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Knocked out in a couple of months by a small

team led by a Gates Foundation senior fellow and stacked with staff from institutions receiving substantial Gates money, the report, while rightly calling for renewed investment and education, again ignores the structural and political causes of Africa's hunger, ascribing it to a technical deficit. The report concludes that the United States needs to "reassert its leadership" in "spreading new technologies," because it will increase trade and "strengthen American institutions." Worse, the council's solutions--with classic Green Revolution hubris--ignore the successful endogenous solutions that have been spreading across the continent for three decades.

Rarely in the history of philanthropy has one foundation--or more correctly, one man--had this kind of power. When Obama made his remarks on the Green Revolution, one *Seattle Times* journalist suggested that "President Obama and other world leaders seem to be taking their cue from the Gates Foundation." It's not hard to see the paths through which the thinking in Seattle might have made it to Washington, DC. Many AGRA and Gates Foundation employees are former industry and government insiders. Rajiv Shah, a doctor with no previous agricultural experience who was headhunted by the Gates Foundation, is now at the Department of Agriculture, as under secretary for research, education and economics, and also chief scientist.

The foundation's reach extends far beyond Washington. With billions committed to agricultural development, the Gates Foundation has a financial heft equal to that of a government in the global North. In 2007 the United States contributed \$60 million to the system of international public agricultural research centers. Gates has pumped \$122 million into the system in the past eighteen months alone and given a total of \$317 million to the World Bank.

Africa's Green Revolution has another similarity with the first Green Revolution: the technological preferences of the philanthropist shape the approaches on the ground. For the Rockefellers, that meant agricultural technology based on industrial chemistry and oil. For Gates, it's about proprietary intellectual property. Africa's Green Revolution is, in other words, just a new way of doing business as usual.

In its push for technological solutions, its distaste for redistributive social policy and disregard for extant alternatives--as well as in the circumstances that have made food an international security concern--this Green Revolution looks very similar to its predecessor. The biggest issue, however, isn't one of commission but of omission. Just as in India, where peasant demands for land reform in the 1960s that might have led to more sustainable and durable progress (as such reforms did in China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea) were ignored, African farmers advocating their own solutions to the food crisis are being marginalized. In particular, the vocally articulated demands--for agroecological alternatives, state support for farmer-led research, for land reform, for women's rights in agriculture, and for sharing access to water--all fade into the background when Gates's answers are amplified.

It will take a suite of policies, addressing both the technical and sociopolitical reasons for hunger in Africa, to make lasting change. Technologies for development need to be accompanied by other, political reforms, including canceling debt, removing food and agriculture from the World Trade Organization, investing heavily in farmers' organizations and their proven sustainable agricultural technologies, and supporting the peer-reviewed approaches generated by the science of agroecology.

Models for this kind of change already exist. In Mali, peasant movements have successfully persuaded the government to adopt as a national priority the idea of "food sovereignty," a shorthand for the democratization of the food system. Similar efforts are happening at regional and local levels in other countries. But for those initiatives to register in the United States, the conventional wisdom

regarding the Green Revolution needs to be replaced. The tragedy here is not that Africa hasn't had a Green Revolution but that the mistakes of the first may be repeated once more, and that one foundation has the power to make the rest of the world bend to its misguided agenda.

(Source URL: <http://www.thenation.com/article/ending-africas-hunger>)

4. The deadly sequence of crises and ways out of the situation

By François Houtart¹³

The many faces of the crisis

When 850 million human beings live below the poverty threshold and when this number is rising; when every twenty-four hours tens of thousands of people die of starvation; when day after day ethnic groups, ways of life and cultures disappear, putting our human heritage in danger; when the climate deteriorates and when people ask themselves whether it is still worthwhile living in New Orleans, in the Sahel, in the Pacific Islands, in central Asia or by the shores of the sea, we cannot be content simply to talk about a financial crisis.

The social consequences of the latter are already being felt well beyond the borders of its original source: unemployment, the high cost of living, exclusion of the poorest people, vulnerability of the middle classes and the ever-growing list of victims. Let us be clear, this is not simply an accident or a mishap, or an abuse committed by certain economic actors who should be punished, what we are up against is a logic which pervades our entire economic history from the last two centuries. From crises to regulations, from deregulations to crises, the progress of facts and events has always behaved in response to the pressure of profit levels: when these rise there is deregulation, and when they fall we see regulation, but always in favour of the accumulation of capital, which is itself defined as the dynamic behind growth. Therefore, what we are experiencing today is nothing new. This is not the first crisis in the financial system, and many say that it will not be the last.

However, the financial bubble created over the last few decades, thanks, among other things, to the development of new information technologies and communications, exacerbated all of the aspects of the problem. The economy has become increasingly virtual and differences in incomes have soared. In order to accelerate profit rates, a complex structure of derivatives was put in place and speculation took hold as a *modus operandi* in the economic system. However, what is new is the convergence of logic between the deregulations seen today in the global situation.

The food crisis is one example. The increase in prices was not at first the result of lower production, but rather the combined result of the fall in stocks, of speculative operations and of the expansion in the production of agrofuels. The lives of human beings have therefore been subjected to profit-taking. The Chicago stock exchange figures are an illustration of this.

¹³ François Houtart is former professor of the Catholic University of Lovaina, founder of the Tricontinental Center (CETRI), and author of the book: *"Agroenergy, solutions for the climate or escape from the Crisis of Capital?"* Ruth Casa editorial y Ediciones Sociales La Habana, 2009

The energy crisis, for its part, goes well beyond the economic explosion in oil prices. It marks the end of the cycle of cheap energy from fossil fuels (petrol and gas) whereby maintaining low prices caused a careless use of energy, which favoured an accelerated growth trend, allowing the quick accumulation of capital in the short and medium term. The over-exploitation of natural resources and the liberalisation of trade, especially since the 1970s, increased the transport of goods and merchandise and encouraged the means of individual travel, without any consideration of the social and climatic consequences. The use of petroleum products as fertilisers and pesticides became widespread in productivist agriculture. The way of life of the upper and middle classes was built on wasting energy. In this domain also, the value of exchange overrode the value of use.

Today, with this crisis putting the accumulation of capital at serious risk, it has been discovered that there is some urgency in finding solutions. These must, however, in such a perspective, respect base logic: they must maintain profit levels, without taking externalities into account, in other words ignoring anything that does not enter into the accounting calculations, meaning that the cost must be borne by groups or individuals. This is the case with biofuels and their ecological consequences: destruction arising from monoculture, of biodiversity, of soils and of subterranean waters; and their social consequences: the expulsion of millions of small farmers who move to shanty towns and make migratory pressures worse.

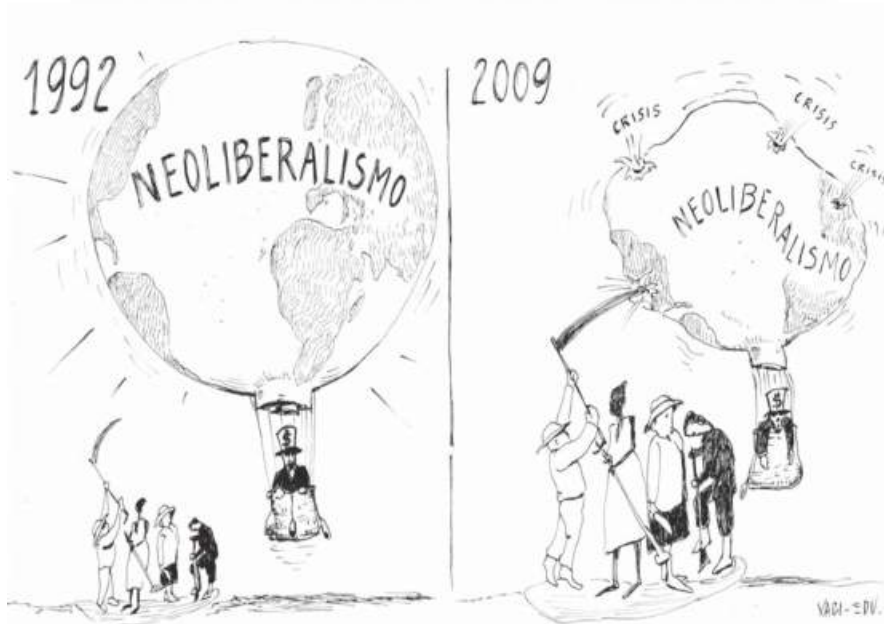
The climate crisis, the gravity of which worldwide public opinion has not yet become fully aware, is, according to experts from the GIEC (International Group of Climate Experts) the result of human activity. Nicolas Stern, former associate of the World Bank, has no hesitation in saying that "*climate change is the biggest failure in the history of the market economy*". In fact, now as previously, the logic of capital does not recognise "externalities", except when they begin to reduce profit rates.

The neoliberal era which caused these crises to develop also coincides with an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and an escalation in global warming. The increase in the use of raw materials and of transport, as with the deregulation of measures for protecting nature, increased climate devastation and diminished the regenerative capacity of nature. If nothing is done in the near future, between 20% and 30% of all living species could disappear in the next 25 years. The acidity level of seas and oceans will rise dangerously and there could be between 150 and 200 million climate refugees by half way through the 21st century.

It is in this context that the social crisis exists. To develop 20% of the world's population very spectacularly, who are capable of consuming goods and services with high added value, is more interesting in terms of accumulating profit in the short and medium term than responding to the basic needs of those with little or no purchasing power, who being incapable of producing added value and having a low consumer power, are nothing more than a useless crowd, all the more susceptible to being the victims of welfare policies. The phenomenon is aggravated by the predominance of financial capital. Once more, the logic of profit-making has prevailed over the needs of human beings.

This entire set of dysfunctions leads us to a real crisis of civilisation, characterised by the risk of the exhaustion of our planet and the extinction on life, which represents at the same time a crisis of sense. Is regulation the answer? Yes, if it constitutes stages of a radical transformation and enables us to find a way out of the crisis other than war. No, if it serves only to prolong a destructive logic. A human race which renounces reason and abandons its ethics loses its right to existence.

However, apocalyptic language in itself does not achieve action. What is needed is a full assessment of the situation, enabling action to be taken. Research and the implementation of alternatives are possible, but not without some conditions. In the first place this requires a long-term vision, a necessary utopia; secondly, specific measures are required which must be structured at intervals over time; and finally, social actors are required who are capable of putting plans into action, in the context of a fight in which the toughness of the struggle will be proportional to peoples' resistance to change.



Ways out of the crises

In light of the financial crisis, which is affecting the entire world economy and which is combining with other crises such as the food crisis, the energy crisis and climate change to culminate in a social and humanitarian disaster, various different reactions are looming on the horizon. Some propose punishing the culprits (the chicken thieves, as Michel Camdessus, former director of the IMF, called them), replacing them and going on as before. Others highlight the need to regulate the system, but without changing the parameters, for example George Soros. Finally, there are those who think that it is the logic of the current economic system that is at stake, and that we need to look for alternatives.

The urgency of finding solutions is the main challenge. There is little time left for acting effectively on climate change. Over the last two years, according to the FAO, 100 million people have fallen below the poverty line, and the imperative need to change the energy cycle has come to our very doors. A whole host of alternative solutions exist, in all domains, but they require coherence and development in order to guarantee their effectiveness; not a new dogma, simply articulation.

The long-term vision needs to be centred on several major themes. In the first place, a rational and renewable use of natural resources, which requires a different philosophy of working with nature: no more limitless exploitation of a resource with profit as the goal, but instead respect of that which forms the source of life. Supposed socialist societies have barely made any inroads in this respect.

Next, value of use must take precedence over value of exchange, which would involve a new definition of economics: it must no longer be understood as the production of added value, or the source of private accumulation of wealth, but

as an activity which ensures the basics of material, cultural and spiritual life for all human beings throughout the world. The logical consequences of this would be considerable. From that point onwards, the market would serve to regulate between supply and demand instead of increasing profit levels for a minority. The waste of raw materials and energy, the destruction of biodiversity and the atmosphere, would be overcome, by taking social and ecological “externalities” into consideration. The logic would change in terms of priorities in the production of goods and services.

A third major theme involves democracy becoming widespread, not only with respect to the political sector and participative democracy, but also applied to the economic system, throughout all the relevant institutions and among all men and women. A participative conception of State necessarily follows, as well as an assertion of human rights in all their dimensions, both individual and collective. Subjectivity will once again find a place.

Finally, the principle of multiculturalism must complement the other three themes. All of our collective knowledge, including traditional knowledge, must be brought together in order to create alternatives, all philosophies and cultures must be involved, the monopoly of Western civilisation must be ended, and all moral and spiritual forces capable of promoting the necessary ethics must be brought into play. Amongst the different religions, the wisdom of Hinduism in relation to nature, the compassion of Buddhism in human relations, the thirst for justice in the prophetic teachings of Islam, the everlasting quest for Utopia in Judaism, the emancipating forces of the theology of freedom in Christianity, the respect for the source of life in the concept of Mother Earth among the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the sense of solidarity expressed in the African religions, all have the potential to contribute significantly to a framework of mutual tolerance guaranteed by the impartiality of political society.

Utopias all these may be, but the world needs utopias, as long as they can be made to work in practice. All of the principles mentioned above are open to specific applications, and have already been used as the basis for propositions by many social movements and political organisations. The adoption of these principles would allow us to begin a truly alternative process in comparison to the rules which currently preside over the development of our capitalist economy, the worldwide political system and the cultural hegemony of the West, and which have caused the social and natural consequences which we are experiencing today. The principles expressed could lead to new and great directions which it is within our power to design.

Indeed, it is clear that respect for nature calls for the collective control of resources. It also requires us to constitute the most essential elements for human life (water, seeds, etc.) as our human heritage, with all of the legal consequences that entails. It would equally require ecological “externalities” to be taken into account in economic calculations.

To prioritise the value of use calls for a transformation of production systems, which in the current climate are focused on the value of exchange in order to contribute to the accumulation of wealth, which is the driving force behind economy. This would lead to the restoration of public services, including in the fields of health and education, or in other words the decommodification of these services.

The general spread of democracy, especially in the organisation of the economy, implies the end of the monopoly of decisions linked to the ownership of capital, but also the implementation of new forms of citizen participation. Accepting multiculturalism in creating the principles expressed means not reducing culture to just a single one of its constituents, but rather allowing the richness of human cultural heritage to be expressed, putting an end to patents on knowledge, and expressing a social ethic in our many diverse languages.

Utopia! Yes, because although this does not exist today, it could exist tomorrow. We need utopia, as a synonym for inspiration and a creator of coherence in our collective and individual efforts. However we also need definite applications, in the knowledge that changing a development model cannot be done in a day and must be achieved by a whole series of actions, carried out at different times. How, then, can we propose measures which are based on this logic and which could be the subject of popular mobilisations and political decisions? Many propositions have already been made, but to these many more could be added.

In terms of natural resources, an international pact on water envisaging collective management (not solely state-managed) would match an existing awareness of the importance of the problem. Some other directions could be suggested: the sovereignty of nations with respect to their energy resources; a ban on speculation on food products; regulation of the production of agrofuels by way of respecting biodiversity and preserving soil and water quality and the principles of peasant farming; the adoption of the measures required for limiting the rise in the earth's temperature to one degree centigrade over the course of the 21st century; public control of oil and mining operations by means of an international operations code which has been checked and sanctioned, concerning the ecological and social effects (among these the rights of indigenous peoples).

Concerning value of use, specific examples can also be supplied. We would require the re-establishment of public services – water, electricity, the postal service, telephone lines, internet, public transport, the health system, education – according to the specific nature of each sector. Demanding a five-year guarantee on all goods manufactured would extend the life of products and reduce the use of raw materials and energy. Putting a tax on all manufactured goods travelling more than 1000 km between where they are produced and where they are sold (which could be adapted depending on the product) which would then be allocated to local development in the most fragile countries; reinforcing the working standards established by the ILO based on a reduction of working hours and quality of work; changing the parameters of GDP, by introducing qualitative elements which encompass the idea of “living well”.

The applications of universal democracy are innumerable and can encompass all institutions which call for a publicly recognised statute, as much for their internal workings as for equality in their relevant relationships: businesses, syndicates, religious organisations, sporting or cultural entities. Concerning the United Nations Organisation, the two-thirds rule could be proposed for decisions in principle and an absolute majority for implementing measures. As for multiculturalism, it would involve, among other things, a ban on patenting traditional knowledge; making discoveries linked to human life (medical and pharmaceutical discoveries) available to the general public; and the establishment of the material bases necessary for the survival of particular cultures (territorialism).

An appeal has been launched for specific propositions to be brought together as a coherent set of alternatives, which will constitute the collective goal of the human race and the applications of a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity by the General Assembly of the United Nations. In effect, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations, a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity could play this role. Admittedly, Human Rights have travelled a hard road between the French and American Revolutions and their adoption by the international community.

The process was progressive even before it proclaimed a third generation of rights, which included a social dimension. Very Western in its perspectives, the document was complemented by an African Declaration and by a similar initiative in the Arab world. Without a doubt, the Declaration is often manipulated according to political interests, especially by Western powers. However it remains a basic point of reference, vital to any political legitimacy

and a source of protection for all people. Today we must add to this Declaration, because it is the survival of humanity and our planet that is at stake.

One thing is certain: we cannot escape from this crisis without eschewing the parameters of a capitalist economy and redefining the concepts of growth, development and prosperity. The translation of all this into collective and individual practices will be the result of numerous social struggles, the work of intellectuals and moral values injected into the lives of societies. It is also an imperative requirement for all those who refer to Christianity.

5. Libyan land grab of Mali's rice-producing land¹⁴

By Lamine Coulibaly and Boaventura Monjane¹⁵

Land grabbing of small farmers' land by large national and foreign companies is becoming an increasingly concerning issue in Mali. After investing in various sectors of the economy in Mali and in Africa, these national or multinational corporations are looking for new avenues of opportunity, namely land. For example, MALIBYA, a Libyan company, has been allocated 100,000 hectares of land in the Office du Niger region, the country's main rice-growing region and precisely in West Macina, in the Ségou region, the fourth region of Mali. It has been awarded this land by the Malian government as part of its promotion of private investment in rice production. According to the convention signed by both countries, this strategic project's main objectives are to guarantee the countries' food self-sufficiency, to develop agricultural industry and to develop livestock farming.



Photo Credit:
Tineke D'Haese

According to MALIBYA's managing director, Abdalilah Youssef, 'the first stage of the project (financed by MALIBYA) includes firstly constructing a 40km-long water supply canal stretching from the Kolongotomo region to the project site in the Boky-Wèrè region. The minimum capacity of the canal is 130m³. This allows us to supply more than 11 million m³ a day and more than 4 billion m³ a year. The other element is the road, also 40km long. The contract cost is estimated at FCFA 25 billion. It will be carried out over the space of 12 months.' The Chinese company CGC has been commissioned by MALIBYA to carry out the work on the canal and the road alongside it.

'It will be the biggest canal in Mali and one of the biggest in Africa. We have begun to implement the project, which will be carried out in stages, the first of which covers 25,000 hectares of agricultural land and for which we started work more than a year ago. The project will be multifunctional and will encompass farming (in particular rice production with around 200,000 tonnes produced a year), livestock farming and industry.

Therefore, in addition to crops, we will also see animal production (with

¹⁴ This article was published on Via Campesina's web page in August 2009, but is still relevant today.

¹⁵ Communicators of La Via Campesina.

predicted production at 25,000 tonnes of meat a year) and processing factories for agricultural produce (such as for tomato purée and laboratories),’ the managing director of MALIBYA explained to the private newspaper L’Aube in its 10 November 2008 edition.

Indeed, the Macina Cercle is a farming region and in terms of area the largest rice-producing region in the Office du Niger. It is not just an animal farming region par excellence but also a transit and departure region for transhumant livestock.

Therefore, whilst Mali’s government declares its commitment to guaranteeing food self-sufficiency for the country, it continues to sign a worrying number of agreements with foreign investors. This allows the latter to control the country’s most important agricultural land.

It should be remembered that some years ago, on the fringes of a Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) summit in Bamako, the president of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, offered 100,000 hectares in the Office du Niger region to CEN-SAD. There is every reason to believe that CEN-SAD is run by Libya!

Libya, with increased dependence upon multinationals for the supply of agricultural produce, imported 177,000 tonnes of rice valued at \$62 million in 2005 according to figures from the FAO. We can see that Libya, following the example of other Arab countries, is trying to overcome this food dependence by implementing projects such as the one in Mali.

Whatever the final destination of the rice may be, its production won’t help farmers in Mali that much because it will mean that certain local farmers will see their land seized and it will have to compete directly with other producers for water supply from the Niger River, the most important irrigation resource in the region. The company has even entered into negotiation with the government in order to get priority for water allocation out of season, when water levels are low. According to the information at our disposal, MALIBYA intends to farm the 100,000 hectares of land itself, hiring locals as farm workers.

In addition, there is concern about the way in which this project will destroy the great diversity of local rice seed and instead favour a small number of enhanced seed varieties and modern agricultural techniques, as is outlined in the convention.

‘We have signed a contract with a Chinese company for hybrid rice production. Today, Mali’s rice yield is 2 tonnes per hectare. By introducing this new variety of hybrid rice, yield will be improved and will increase from 2 tonnes to 8 or 9 tonnes per hectare. It is mainly the powerful countries who produce this hybrid rice and have the monopoly. It does not yet exist here. It will be a first in Mali, in Africa even,’ underlined MALIBYA’s managing director.

According to specialists, this variety of rice has limited taste, which is an important consideration for small producers who sell to local markets.

Furthermore, farmers are unable to preserve and reproduce the seeds of this variety and must repurchase each year.

In addition, local farmer’s organizations fear that the Libyan company will introduce genetically-modified (GM) rice to Mali through this project.

The Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP), an umbrella organisation representing farmers politically and defending their interests, was quick to take on the case after farmer’s organisations at the heart of the matter called on it to do so. It dispatched a mission with representatives of the Support Programme for Territorial Collectivities in order to give an account of the extent of development work on the land and repercussions for the local population.

Observations

Visits and interviews with different actors, inter alia, the Prefecture, Office du Niger authorities, councils, the affected population (carried out from 7 to 10 July 2009) provided the following observations:

- The lack of an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, even though work has been going on since October 2008
- The lack of clarity in information provided to the different actors concerning the project's execution
- The building of a monitoring office building along the 'Boky-wèrè' animal trail
- The total obstruction of 7km of the 'Kolongo' animal trail by the road and a canal under construction without adequate alternatives being provided for animals
- The Office du Niger in Kolongo, which refused to sign the lease having not been included in the signing of the convention, has done a U-turn and is currently defending the project
- The collectivities receive no tax for the extraction from quarries of products used to build the road
- The company is extracting from quarries without permission from the collectivity or other local authorities. Certain areas where quarrying is taking place are either cemeteries or plots of land that have already been divided up by the Kolongo council to extend the town
- Dust clouds are caused by lorries on frequent supply trips and worsened by the lack of watering, despite many attempts at intervention by the collectivities concerned with government involvement
- The destruction of cemeteries for development work on the canal and the road
- The demolition of houses, villages, orchards and market gardens due to road construction and quarry activity (only 58 families are to be compensated out of the 150 families recorded as affected). Expropriation of houses and villages in the region without compensation at present

Biofuel development

If that wasn't enough, this visit also allowed us to ascertain that another 100,000 hectare area in the municipality of Monipébougou, also in the Macina Cercle, belonged to the TOMOTA group. This private player in Mali's economy grows jatropha on the land for use as a biofuel.

The farmers in the municipality, who have no wealth other than their land, have also been expelled to serve private interests. According to deputy mayor Mamadou Coulibaly, 'this land was granted without the involvement of those actors affected at the heart of the problem and no convention was signed between the group and the town. What's more, ploughing work has reached the road, which is a large national road, without taking into account the markers placed in order to identify animal trails.

This puts into question the results collected by collectivities in their research into solutions to bloody or even mortal conflicts between livestock breeders and farmers. We wrote to the Prefect, the Governor, to the Ministry of the Environment and even to the TOMOTA group so that everybody's rights are respected, including the farmers expelled from their land and the council which wants to see the animal trails respected in order to avoid conflicts,' Mr Coulibaly explains on the group's site.

These same farmers, having not been compensated, have to work for the TOMOTA group for an average of FCFA 500-700 a day to provide for their families.

The evicted

By ‘putting the cart before the horse’, the population affected by the MALIBYA project can only wait for conclusions to be made regarding their compensation. Such as Antoinette Dembélé, a sixty-year-old who for decades has devoted her life to market gardening. She used to farm the plot of land that her husband left her before he died in order to pay her family’s bills and other social expenses. As part of the development work, she was dispossessed of her plot of land located next to the water supply canal.

‘The Chinese came and destroyed my garden and everything in it: guava trees, orange trees, papaya trees, onions and so on. And up until now I haven’t received any compensation for this. We tried to refer the matter to the local authorities: the council, the Office du Niger... these made it clear that they could not do anything against a governmental decision and that they had no other choice but to leave it. I’ve been forced to stay at home and sell small things like cigarettes and condiments to meet the needs of my family. It is very hard to keep fighting in this way as they have told us that the land belongs to the government and only the trees and plants that we planted or cultivated are ours. If we try to ask the Chinese who are carrying out the work about this, they tell us to go and see the President of the Republic and that they don’t have to account to anyone. There’s nothing left to do but hope that we’ll be compensated.’

A committee has been set up by the village to list all the problems in order to present this to the council and inform villagers of decisions taken. However, many inhabitants do not realize it exists, which undermines its legitimacy and its role defending the local population. Others state that this committee is being manipulated by defenders of the project.

Importantly, everything leads us to believe that this project will only be advantageous to Libya. This is contrary to the hopes of inhabitants, who hope to benefit from the development of the 100,000 hectares. This is due to a lack of clear information on both sides. Information is biased at all levels and varies according to the interests of the concerned parties e.g. the Macina prefecture, the Office du Niger or inhabitants. This causes local authorities to believe in this project. Such as Macina Prefect M. Cissé: ‘after reports and meetings with representatives of the two investors, which hadn’t taken place before work began, I believe that this is a very promising project that will allow a large area to be developed thus helping the Cercle’s development. I haven’t seen any malicious intent from either MALIBYA or TOMOTA, just a problem of approach perhaps.’

The director of Office du Niger in the Kolongo region, who had put up resistance to the project as he had not been involved in the process of signing the convention, has since made a U-turn and is defending the project. He believes that the development of the main 17km-long supply canal will also be able to serve the Office du Niger for the development of other plots of land. All these wishes expressed by different actors indicate the lack of awareness regarding the contents of the convention. The convention signed by the two countries remains almost invisible. The authorities concerned, the general population and, most of all, local farmers know nothing of its content or its very essence. This perhaps explains a certain amount of hope that people will benefit as a consequence of this investment. Yet there is absolutely no guarantee within the convention that the population will gain from it.

Defending local producers

Having become a particularly complex and sensitive subject, the issue of land gives rise to grave concern surrounding the future of small producers. As a consequence, numerous state structures (The Support Programme for

Territorial Collectivities, the National Directorate for the Production of Animal Resources) and private structures from civil society (Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP) and the Mali Livestock and Meat Federation (Fédération de Bétails et Viandes du Mali)) have formed a national commission in order to defend the interests of the affected population who live off agriculture, livestock farming and fishing. The CNOP intends not only to reinforce the struggle together with civil society organisations, but also to liaise with members of parliament to ask National Assembly ministers for agriculture and the environment to shed light on the case and guarantee rights to all actors. Although a renewable 50-year lease is mentioned in the convention, a number of observers also fear a permanent land grab by Libya here through the granting of a title deed. This would create unprecedented dangers such as rebellions and the destruction of the rice-producing area seed system through the introduction of enhanced seeds, or even perhaps GMOs.

6. Food sovereignty in Africa: The people's alternatives¹⁶

By Mamadou Goita¹⁷



Photo Credit:
Douglas Mansour

In Africa as a whole, but particularly the western and central regions, agriculture¹⁸ is the primary occupation for the majority of the populations. Mostly it is practiced at a rural subsistence level, by families who pool together their knowledge, labour, skills and resources in order to create wealth and produce surplus. Production is, first and foremost, used to meet the food needs of the family. However, if there is a surplus produced, this is then sold or traded to meet other needs. This differs from private agribusiness, where members are linked through capital (monetary contributions of the sole proprietor, or the partners).

The first chapter of this essay will reflect on agriculture at a global scale, but from the perspective of a specific context. In the second chapter, we will look at the promotion and protection of local products, in order to achieve food sovereignty in Mali, West and Central Africa. The final chapter will present a framework of solutions to the problems identified.

Agriculture and its challenges for socio-economic development

Keeping in mind the description we have given above, it is clear that agriculture, as it is practiced in most of the continent, is much more than just food production and economic activity. It has multiple orientations and contributes in many different ways to society's fundamental aspirations. From the social perspective, subsistence agriculture, as practiced in countries like Mali, provides employment, which in turn maintains the social fabric, if it is practiced at a family scale.

Culturally, agriculture reflects our diverse tastes in food (our foods according to our tastes and our culture). It also promotes local consumption and agricultural biodiversity. This is one of the primary reasons for valorising local production. These local foods constitute a viable

¹⁶ This paper was presented at a colloquium organized by the Gabriel Peri Foundation and the Parti de l'Indépendance et du travail-Senegal on 18–19 May 2010

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¹⁸ When we refer to "agriculture", we include in the term the entire agro-silvo-pastoral activities including plant- and animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry.

counterfoil to the changing urban dietary trends that are dependent on foreign foods. At an environmental level, agriculture can contribute to maintaining soil fertility, conserving genetic resources and water quality.

At independence, most African countries strongly advocated for food self-sufficiency through the promotion of local agricultural production. With the introduction of the SAPs (structural adjustment programmes) this policy was abandoned in favour of food security based on the international liberalization of commodity markets. Under this system, the question of who produces the food becomes of secondary importance.

In Africa, liberalization implies the political disengagement of the State and the decentralization of agricultural services. At an economic level, it has to do with development of GMOs (genetically modified organisms), bio-piracy and the privatization of genetic resources. Lately, we have also seen the development of agrofuels. At the social level, we still see high levels of illiteracy among rural farmers, which limits their access to information.

The widespread liberalization of trade in agricultural goods has had serious consequences for Africa: the worsening of the food situation, as well as the loss of rural jobs; the impoverishment of the peasant populations; and a subsequent spike in the rural urban exodus, which poses a serious threat to political and social stability. A large part of the African population now has limited access to food.

Under these circumstances, it is vital to deepen the analysis and understand all the factors that impact agriculture and rural development policy.

The recent high-level FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) meeting of experts in Rome, under the theme 'Ending hunger by 2050', provided yet another opportunity to demand commitment from the so-called rich nations controlling global capital and destroying African economies to 'save' the continent from starvation. As is always the case with Africa, once again the world is obsessed with addressing the consequences while blatantly ignoring the root causes of the problem.

The food crisis of 2007–08 revealed the lack of coherence between international institutions and states in managing food and agriculture problems. The media focused on two problems at the root of rising food prices¹⁹. The foremost one related to China and India and their modes of consumption. But as time rolled on, the deeper causes of the crisis became more apparent. It had to do with a boom in production of agrofuels, the insufficient stocks of cereal products in Europe and the US, and financial speculation – one of the main pillars of the neoliberal economic model that has been applied to food commodities.

China and India are not responsible for the crisis. In the 2007–08 period, these two countries were net exporters of agricultural products. Their cereal stocks rose by more than 10.9 megatons for China and 7.8 megatons for India. In contrast, the US (with a deficit in fisheries stocks) and the European Union (with cereal stocks deficit) were net importers. Statistics show that the EU and the US are responsible for 94 per cent of the drop in global cereal stocks for the period 2007–08.

The policy of promoting agrofuels in the EU and the US is a key factor in the crisis. The use of maize grew from 12 per cent of total production in 2004 to 23 per cent in 2007, with the goal being 32 per cent in 2008. This growth impacted negatively on the availability of food products, especially maize, since the

¹⁹ This section is inspired by an article written by the author in November 2008 entitled 'The Drama of the Food Crisis'

quantities used for ethanol production were higher than the quantities exported by the US.

The EU's decision to start a biodiesel programme also led to a rise in the price of oil crops. The decision to start producing agrofuels, especially by the EU, attracted speculators to oil crops and maize.

It is clear that the steep rise in prices of agricultural produce is mostly due to insufficient stocks of grain and maize in the US and the EU, the growth of agrofuel production and financial speculation on cereal and oil crops.

In addition to this, we must point to an even older problem: the role of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank in Africa. After the debt crisis of the 1980s, when the prices of raw materials collapsed, the IMF and the World Bank obliged African countries to adopt SAPs, which entailed:

- A reduction of the acreage used for subsistence farming and specialization in one or two export crops (cotton for Burkina Faso, Mali and Benin, coffee and cocoa for Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, etc). In Mali for instance, cotton production grew from less than 200,000 tonnes to 620,000 tonnes by the end of the 1990s. This growth in production was as a result of expanding acreage and not necessary yield per acre, which remained more or less the same. The country paid a heavy price for this, with an increase in debt and reassignment of technical assistance away from agro-silvo-pastoralism. Cotton was soon the only commodity benefiting from any investment in terms of production and marketing.

The economy became more and more export-oriented, with development strategies based on access to export markets:

- A reduction on technical assistance at the level of producers
- A removal of price-stabilization mechanisms that had helped to sustain other forms of small-scale production
- An abandonment of policies aimed at self-sufficiency in cereal production
- The brutal opening of domestic markets to external commodities to the detriment of locally produced, and in some cases, strategic commodities, etc.

All these measures, combined with the opening of African markets to foreign capital, led to economies becoming extremely fragile and susceptible to the vagaries of the global markets, a big reduction in budgets for social services, a drop in subsidies for local products and the destruction of nascent local, national and sub-regional markets. It also pitted small-scale producers squarely against large multinationals...

African populations are paying the heavy price for these policies that very soon proved to be dangerous. The intransigence of the Bretton Woods institutions destroyed modes of production and, consequently, modes of consumption in African countries as well.

In a destructive process that was roundly condemned by social movements all over, the situation soon became clear for all to see: in one year, the prices of rice and wheat doubled, maize prices rose by more than a third. Cereal stocks dropped to a 25-year low. The price of a meal increased exponentially, and the threat of famine became very real.

Numerous marches and meetings were organized in Africa to protest a situation that was clearly unjust, especially to urban populations: people could not cope with skyrocketing prices of basic goods, including fuel and cereals, their survival was at stake. Similar marches and actions were organized in Europe, in France for instance, and these were referred to as 'marches for purchasing power'. Even though these marches were different in form from the African initiatives, the underlying principle was the same. People wanted a more equitable distribution of national resources. They wanted to bridge the rich-

poor divide. They wanted their share of that economic growth that is being extolled year after year by the political leaders to justify their neoliberal economic policies. Yes, it turns out that people want their share of this growth, not just in Africa but in all other continents too.

Repeated calls for action on the food crisis forced those responsible to come up with new strategies, the ended up producing more negative than positive outcomes. Some of these are:

- The lifting of tariffs on food commodities, notably rice, in most African countries, leading to a great liberalization of markets
- A pledge of around US\$200 million in food aid to Africa by President Bush
- The signing of agreements between AGRA²⁰ (Alliance for a Green Revolution), FAO, WFP (World Food Programme) and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development)
- The rice initiative in Mali and other West African countries like Burkina Faso and Senegal, with very little technical support and even less social capital in its implementation
- Irrational decisions taken in certain countries concerning agricultural policy, based on neoliberal principles, 'fast-food' policymaking became the hallmark of this 'artificial crisis'
- Demands by the WTO (World Trade Organisation) for markets to be opened up for greater trade, even if it would be at the expense of poorer countries, and more specifically, women and children
- The frenetic sale of land to foreign investors, better known as the 'land grab', etc.

The sum of these actions is a further attack on the peasant societies who have needed systemic change all along. The current view of the food and agriculture crisis is very reductionist, especially when viewed in the context of the struggles being waged by civil society and social movements:

- It reduces the scope of analysis to the rise in prices of cereal crops
- It restricts the search for solutions to the crisis to urban problems while neglecting those of the rural areas where the real food production takes place.

The variety of viewpoints and analyses on the ongoing crisis prevent a deeper examination of the real causes of these crises and the possibility of finding long-term solutions to the African food sovereignty question. Granted, there are problems of food sovereignty in Africa. And yes, the rise in prices of certain foods has affected Africa. But the question is: how did we end up in this situation? What good decisions need to be taken to emerge from the crisis? These are the key questions that we must seek to answer.

One "positive" result of the crisis is that it unmasked the paradox of Africa's situation. Most African countries were surplus producers of agricultural commodities prior to December 2007. Despite this, February 2008, most of these countries had declared a food crisis, either due to official lies regarding food stocks, or speculation on cereal commodities. Either scenario seems plausible.

One can also point to speculation at a global level, and the weakness of the state vis-à-vis private business. Another important factor is the lack of capacity and mechanisms to collect reliable data necessary for planning. It is often the case that states themselves have not taken responsibility for certain key elements of the socio-economic development process.

Mali exemplifies the present paradox. The production of the main cereals (millet, sorghum, maize and fonio) has increased every year, except for the 2004–05 harvest year, due to a locust invasion. Agricultural production as a

20 Among the members of AGRA there is the "Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation", the "Rockefeller Foundation". The Alliance is headed by Koffi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations.

whole in all these years was at least 500,000 tonnes in excess of domestic requirements. In 2008–09, cereal production in Mali was 4 million tonnes, and peaked at 6.3 million tonnes in 2009–10, according to official figures from the Ministry of Agriculture.

While it is true that certain regions suffer chronic shortfalls, the national production is amply sufficient to cover the needs even of these regions. The problem therefore lies in the differentiated access to food for some sections of the population, as well as weak domestic markets for local produce.

In the case of Mali, the problem was clearly not the volumes of food produced. There were other factors such as:

- Rising cereal prices due to speculation, coupled with low domestic purchasing power
- Changing consumption patterns, with more being spent on imported rice and wheat for bread
- Devaluation of local produce in terms of consumption, and hence less reliance on local expertise used to produce it. Consequently, this led to more reliance on international markets
- Low producer prices, which led unscrupulous traders to start stockpiling and speculating.

Increasing the value of local produce is an important mechanism for preventing such crises, as well as achieving long-term food sovereignty. This is one of the six key principles laid down by social movements who met in Sélingué, Mali, for the World Forum on food sovereignty, 'Nyeleni 2007'. It would be very difficult for any country to achieve food sovereignty without taking this mechanism into account.

The valorization of local produce in a context of food sovereignty

For thousands of years, local husbandry has produced thousands of different varieties of plants and animals. All of these varieties have responded to various local requirements in terms of consumption, climates and other traditional forms of use.

In places where traditional agricultural practices still exist, such as Mali, you can find dozens of varieties of cereals (millet, maize, wheat, rice, etc), pulses, fruit, as well as other plants that are a product of local innovation and participatory research.

When we talk of 'local product', we understand the concept 'local' as also referring to localised cultural practices, traditions and markets. Local products are therefore linked to local development, which in turn impacts on the national development. Local products, therefore distinguish themselves from the 'transnational' products – those coming from places 'other than here'²¹ – and that are linked to rampant liberalization. These products end up on our plates through practices that destroy our rural economies.

Local products constitute one of the most dynamic elements of food consumption on our countries, because they have a way of responding to social evolution given that they are a distinctive part of our individual and collective identities. In Mali, one speaks of the Sarakholé and his 'bassi gnoukou na'²²; the Malinké and his 'tigudègè na'²³; the Tombouctouciens and his 'takoula mafé'²⁴; and the Minianka and his 'Jawèrè sikhé'²⁵, etc. These dishes are cultural markers.

21 'Home-grown' at a local, regional provincial, national, sub-regional and eventually African continental level

22 Couscous with Bamanankan vegetable sauce

23 Bamananaka groundnut sauce

24 Wheat pastry with tomato sauce

25 Millet cakes with bean vegetables and karite butter

In terms of crops, livestock or other harvest, our sub-region has great potential if these resources are valued and used rationally, and can be spared from food deficit and malnutrition.

Local producers face unfair competition from imports that are often cheaper than local produce because of the dumping practices induced by the "open your markets without restrictions" policy imposed by the SAPs of the IMF. Local farmers cannot compete with heavily subsidized productions from large scale agroindustrial farms in the US and the EU. The dumping of these cheap products on the market force the prices down to a level where locally grown product is not competitive anymore. As a result, the local markets are weakened.

This unfair trade impoverishes our producers and forces local traders to play along and further weaken local markets.

The current EPA (economic partnership agreement) negotiations may deliver the final nail in the coffin in terms of whatever little hope still exists. The ACP (Asian, Caribbean and Pacific) countries have been asked to further open up their markets, knowing very well that they will not be able to export their products to northern markets because: a) they do not meet the hygiene and sanitation standards imposed there; and b) they are not state-subsidized and therefore not competitively priced.

In spite of all this, local produce is still overwhelmingly consumed in rural areas. The current food crisis has given an impetus to the consumption of local produce in urban areas. Although it has been significantly weakened, agriculture is based on well-adapted and resilient local varieties.

There are huge risks associated with linking African agriculture to global markets dominated by subsidized produce from the US and the EU. There is also the threat of GMOs and other industrial hybrids that could wipe out traditional systems, but a flicker of hope remains.

Without a doubt, radical measures are necessary to safeguard local production and producers, who make up close to 80 per cent of the population in some countries, from utter ruin.

The valorisation of local produce is a must for the entire sub-region, whose economy relies on agriculture. These valorisation policies must address not only production, but also the commercialization of the products as well as raising their nutritional profile. The demand for food in African cities presents a unique opportunity for local producers.

Certain Women's organizations and NGOs have been at the forefront of promoting and transforming local produce. But they remain largely unknown because they have tended to focus on niche and elite markets, such as supermarkets, excluding the masses.

In terms of small business, we have witnessed families marketing some of the produce targeted for family consumption. This has contributed significantly to meeting the food needs of the population.

In spite of the progress that has been made by NGOs like l'Association Malienne pour la Sécurité et la Souveraineté Alimentaire (AMASSA/Afrique Verte Mali), and others, there are still problems that need to be overcome, including:

- A lack of equipment needed to transform local production. Many smaller organizations are unable to acquire, for example, solar driers, without external help. There needs to be a national strategy to deal with this.
- An inability to successfully sell their produce due to competition with imported goods that are preferred because of lifestyle habits, price and ready availability. In addition, aesthetic considerations such as packaging

and subliminal messages carried by advertising ("imported = better") make the imported goods a preferred choice, especially by women consumers.

- Sadly, packaging of local produce remains a challenge and has not been seen as a priority for these smaller organizations.

Packaging is an important way in which the seller communicates with the buyer. In essence, it is less about having expensive packaging and more about having containers, which preserve quality and hygiene standards. In local markets, packaging is often recycled from some other use – old cement bags and discarded plastic wrappings or bags – which does not help to positively present the produce. It is not about buying expensive wrapping that will increase the price of the produce, rather it has to do with clean packaging that is adapted to the produce and meets hygienic standards.

It is a delicate balancing act between good quality packaging (clean, sanitary and protective) and keeping the costs of production low. This will enable local producers to provide goods that are priced suitably for their markets because the consumer price is an important factor when it comes to food sovereignty.

Food safety and hygiene lie at the heart of valorising local products. One of the arguments for shunning local produce is that it is not hygienically safe. The question then becomes: How can you safeguard your consumers while keeping prices manageable? The produce tests currently being proposed by the National Agency for Food Safety to ensure certification are a good idea. The agency still needs to be adapted to adequately meet the needs of local food processors.

However, the cost of individual certification of products is still prohibitive for producers. There is a need for a system that allows for tests based on economies of scale, that is to say, a system where producers join together and a certification is issued for a range of products. This way, the costs of certification are limited, and the consumers rest assured about the quality of what they buy.

One must add that certification and the testing of foods are not an end in themselves but rather part of a larger strategy to valorise local produce and encourage consumption. It would be more sustainable to sensitise local producers to issues of quality so that these are internalized and implemented in daily practice. Self-regulation in this regard could go a long way in boosting local production and processing.

What are the alternatives for greater valorisation of local products?

The valorisation of local produce is inextricably linked to the broader question of food sovereignty. The solutions we propose go beyond adding value to products. We are proposing mid- to long-term solutions:

- Actively supporting and fostering family farms so that they perform better and become more sustainable. It is important to note that in Africa, family farms are the ones that feed the majority of people on the entire continent
- Strengthening food security, with special emphasis on local produce
- Implementing mechanisms to support African agriculture (in the form of subsidies for both production and consumption) through investments, water management and other means. It is imperative that we develop agro-ecological alternatives to the industrial model. African social movements must unite to fight against an agricultural model and practices that are pushed by multinationals and some rich countries. This form of agriculture is destructive and detrimental to Africa's predominant mode of production, family farming
- Better organizing and managing of domestic, local, sub-regional and regional markets for cereals by means of a Grain Exchange that would

allow to link producers and consumers and help exclude speculation on cereals²⁶

- Ensuring reasonable producer prices in order to promote investment in farming and enable producers to access basic social services
- Promoting social security for producers and set up disaster relief funds
- Establishing a fund for the processing and marketing of local produce
- Establishing systems for locally based participatory research and integrating this into the national knowledge repository
- Resolving land tenure and agrarian issues, taking into account the realities of each particular country. It would be important to avoid the system of individual land title, which has a tendency to lead to privatization of agriculture and land speculation. It is also necessary to declare a moratorium on the sale of land, which has taken on a worrying dimension in some countries.
- Re-nationalizing agrofood industries that are strategic to agricultural development. Industrialization will be a key determinant for the development of agriculture in Africa.
- Implementing agricultural policies that are based on food sovereignty and who implement the key idea that food, food production and agriculture are issues linked with basic human rights.

These proposals will contribute to mid- and long-term solutions allowing the development of sustainable agriculture in West and Central Africa. We must learn from the past and act without delay in order to avoid the inappropriate 'fast-food policy' actions that have been taken by certain countries and their partners.

26 Research conducted by "Afrique Verte" in three Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), which tested its relevance for the three countries. AMASSA in Mali; APROSSA in Burkina Faso and AcSSA in Niger continued this research

7. Historical Overview of La Via Campesina

By Annette Desmarais

(this text was firstly published in the booklet by La Via Campesina, "Policy Documents")

La Vía Campesina emerged in a particular economic, political and social context that was undermining the ability of peasants around the world to maintain control over land and seeds. It emerged during a time when a particular model of rural development was altering rural landscapes, threatening to make local knowledge irrelevant and denigrating rural cultures. Key elements in this phenomenon were the encroaching globalization of a modern industrial model of agriculture, on the one hand, and the search for an alternative approach among those most harmed by the epidemic of dislocation left in its wake.

In May 1993 at a conference held in Mons, Belgium, forty-six representatives (men and women) of organizations of peasants, small farmers, indigenous peoples and farm workers from various regions formally created La Via Campesina. But, the roots of La Via Campesina stretch way back. Throughout the 1980s the founding members of La Via Campesina participated in dialogue and exchanges with counterparts within their regions and internationally. This eventually led to the creation of regional movements like the CPE (European Farmers Coordination) in Europe as well as ASOCODE and the CLOC in Latin America.

The dialogue and exchanges also led to the signing of the Managua Declaration signed by representatives of eight farm organizations from Central America, the Caribbean, Europe, Canada and the United States who had gathered to participate in the Second Congress of the Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos held in Managua, Nicaragua in 1992.

La Vía Campesina formed in the North and south around common objectives: an explicit rejection of the neo-liberal model of rural development, an outright refusal to be excluded from agricultural policy development and a fierce determination not to be "disappeared" and a commitment to work together to empower a peasant voice. Through its strategy of "building unity within diversity" and its concept of food sovereignty, peasant and farmers' organizations around the world are working together to ensure the well-being of rural communities.

The goal of La Via Campesina is to bring about change in the countryside – change that improves livelihoods, enhances local food production for local consumption, and opens up democratic spaces change that empowers the people of the land with a great role, position, and stake in decision-making on issues that have an impact on their lives. The movement believes that this kind

of change can occur only when local communities gain greater access to and control over local productive resources, and gain more social and political power.

Since the signing of the Uruguay Round of the GATT in 1994 representatives of rural organizations from the North, South, East and West organized in La Via Campesina have walked together in the streets of Geneva, Paris, Seattle, Washington, Québec, Rome, Bangalore, Porto Alegre, Cancún and Hong Kong, among other cities. Whenever and wherever international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) meet to discuss agricultural and food issues, the Via Campesina is now there. La Via Campesina is also there in local communities when peasants and farming families in locales as diverse as Honduras, Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Indonesia, Europe or Canada are resisting the spread of genetically-modified seeds or are being evicted from their land to facilitate urban sprawl, the development of golf courses, intensive shrimp farms, large pig barns or plantations of eucalyptus.

For many this is all very surprising. For over a hundred years those who thought they knew what was happening in the countryside around the world have predicted the disappearance of the peasantry. Surely, by now they should all be gone! Instead, integrated into La Via Campesina peasants are turning up everywhere, a troublesome and discordant voice in the chorus extolling the praises of globalization.

La Via Campesina presence has not gone unnoticed. Wearing dark green caps, pañuelos, white t-shirts and waving green flags embossed with its brightly coloured logo while energetically chanting slogans, the Via Campesina has become an increasingly visible and vocal voice of radical opposition to the globalization of a neoliberal and corporate model of agriculture.

This resistance took an extreme turn on September 10, 2003 – the first day of the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO held in Cancún, Mexico – with the tragic death of the Korean farm leader, Lee Kyung Hae. Lee, along with another 120 Koreans had joined the Via Campesina delegation in Cancún in efforts to get the WTO out of agriculture. Wearing a sign -- “WTO kills farmers” -- Lee walked up to the high wire fence that had been build to “protect” trade negotiators from protesters and stabbed himself to death.

This ultimate and tragic act of resistance symbolized what La Via Campesina had been saying all along: liberalization of agriculture is a war on peasants, it decimates rural communities and destroys farming families. Lee’s desperate cry for change subsequently helped strengthen the Via Campesina as it has since declared September 10th an International Day of Protest Against the WTO. On that day, organizations in many countries mobilize for food sovereignty. Clearly, Lee’s death has not been in vain.

The growing visibility of La Via Campesina as a key social actor, strongly rooted in local communities while at the same time being increasingly engaged and more skillful in the international stage, has attracted the attention of many rural organizations in search of alternatives. Between 2000 and 2004 the movement grew by over forty-one percent. During the movement’s Fourth International Conference held in Itaici, Brazil in June 2004, forty-two organizations joined La Via Campesina. The 5th Conference also integrated thirty-eight new organisations joined the movement. La Via Campesina now includes about 150 organizations from 70 countries.

Much of La Via Campesina’s success is due to the fact that it is balancing – with great care and effort – the diverse interests of its membership as it openly deals with issues such as gender, race, class, culture and North/South relations, which could potentially cause divisions. According to La Via Campesina the conflict is not between farmers of the North and peasants in the South. Rather,

the struggle is over two competing – and in many ways diametrically opposed – models of social and economic development. On the one hand, a globalized, neoliberal, corporate-driven model where agriculture is seen exclusively as a profit-making venture and productive resources are increasingly concentrated into the hands of agro-industry. La Via Campesina, on the other hand, envisions a very different, more human, rural world, a world based on food sovereignty. Here, agriculture is peasant-driven, based on peasant production, uses local resources and is geared to domestic markets. In this model agriculture plays an important social function while at the same time being economically viable and ecologically sustainable.

The formation and consolidation of La Via Campesina is living proof that peasant and farm families have not been compliant accomplices during this process of economic restructuring, nor have they been passive victims in the face of increasing poverty and marginalization. Instead, they are actively resisting the globalization of a corporate model of agriculture. Indeed, peasants and farmers are using three traditional weapons of the weak – organization, co-operation and community – to redefine ‘development’ and build an alternative model of agriculture based on the principles of social justice, ecological sustainability and respect for peasant cultures and peasant economies. This involves building viable alternatives ranging from small agricultural cooperatives, local seed banks, fair trade ventures to reclaiming traditional farming practices. It also means linking these efforts beyond the local by working at the national, regional and international levels. In forming La Via Campesina, peasant organizations effectively internationalized and succeeded in carving out a space in the international arena. La Via Campesina is filling that space with peasant voices, articulating peasant demands and peasant alternatives in efforts to resist the imposition of a corporate model of agriculture. The solidarity and unity experienced with La Via Campesina yield perhaps the most precious gift of all, hope. Hope that ‘another’ agriculture is possible. Indeed, La Via Campesina enables us to imagine that change is possible and that an alternative project is being created. This is clearly captured in La Via Campesina’s slogan “Globalize the Struggle – Globalize Hope.”



Photo Credit:
Douglas Mansour

8. Vision and Values of La Via Campesina

(this text was firstly published in the booklet by La Via Campesina, "Policy Documents")

The time for food sovereignty has come; peasants and small scale farmers will play an active role in the transformation towards a world society based on justice.



Photo Credit:
La Via Campesina

Peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, indigenous people and agricultural workers, men and women are united in La Via Campesina to realize food sovereignty and to stop the destructive neo-liberal process. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples and governments to chose the way food is produced and consumed in order to respect our livelihoods, as well as the policies that support this choice.

We represent almost half of the world population and are capable of producing food for our families and all the people living on this planet! We are organized in vibrant communities that have a long-standing experience in managing natural resources and producing food, food that is healthy, nutritious, culturally appropriate and produced in a sustainable way based on local resources.

Together with the fisher folk, indigenous people, pastoralists and others who live in the rural areas we have the right to exist, to be respected and to live a dignified life! We want to build close links with people living in the urban

centers in order to provide them with healthy food from people to people, without the destructive interference of transnational corporations.

Agriculture and food production is dominated by transnational corporations

Transnational companies have as a declared goal to destroy peasant based agriculture in order to industrialize agricultural production, turning peasants and farmers into agricultural workers on their plantations and controlled properties, and into consumers of their products and slum dwellers. They deliberately seek the complete vertical integration and full domination and control over food and agriculture from the seed to the plate in order to take in huge profits. This exploits workers, concentrates economic and political power, and destroys rural communities.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are the key institutions that implement these neo-liberal policies through trade liberalization (such as Free Trade Agreements), the dumping of surpluses that destroy local markets, the patenting of life, the corporate led privatization of land, water and seeds, and the introduction of Genetically Modified Crops and agro-fuels. These bodies have been conceived and used solely as instruments of domination by large firms and transnational corporations and by governments of the industrialized countries, especially the US, the EU and Japan.

Genuine agrarian reforms should bring fundamental changes

The organizations of La Via Campesina believe that a fundamental change is urgently needed. We need genuine agrarian reforms in our countries in order to support and rebuild peasant-based production. We have built a strong international movement and we have been able to shift the international debate on agriculture towards food sovereignty and agrarian reform. We see that the interest in food sovereignty in public opinion, and in some international institutions and national governments, is increasing. More and more people and organizations are joining us in the conviction that changes are needed and possible!

We must respect nature and its resources

La Via Campesina promotes a deep respect for our planet's biodiversity, including all of nature's assets, ecosystems, cultures and traditional people's knowledge. Biodiversity encompasses all the different forms of plant and animal life, human and economic relations, and people's habits, cultures and forms of governance. Diversity is life. It is our way of life and we must defend it. We must respect, conserve, restore, and protect for future generations all the natural resources of our planet such as land, water, flora, fauna and minerals and use farming techniques which produce healthy food and which respect our environment. We will therefore not put into practice technologies such as genetic manipulation which endangers natural resources.

Land should be used to serve society

Land is a finite natural resource that must first of all serve life and benefit society. La Via Campesina defends the democratization of its ownership and use. We are against the use of land to exploit other people or other nations, and we oppose the concentration of land ownership. We defend a genuine agrarian reform that guarantees everyone the right to work on the land, and that democratizes its ownership, giving priority to family, collective and cooperative forms of agriculture. We defend the rights of peasants to organize themselves in diverse ways within their communities and in the places where they live. We defend the necessity of governments and states to protect and stimulate family, peasant and cooperative farming with adequate agricultural pricing policies, technical assistance and market guarantees, as a means of producing foodstuffs and preserving our culture.

Seeds are life

Humanity has developed until now thanks to free reproduction and democratic access to seeds. La Via Campesina defends the principle that farmers and their communities have the right and the duty to produce, preserve and exchange their own seeds as the best means to preserve biodiversity. We are against the development and use of transgenic seeds, trade monopolies, and the patenting of seeds and knowledge. We demand state funding and research support for the preservation and cultivation of native and traditional seeds which must belong to the people. Seeds are the patrimony of the people, they should be at the service of humanity.

Women play a key role in food production and decision making

La Via Campesina wants women's rights to be fully recognized and respected. Women should therefore have equal access to productive resources. We also want to achieve full and equal women's participation at all levels and in all spaces of our organizations. We commit ourselves to fight against any kind of violence and discrimination against women.

Youth are the present and the future of our countryside

It is key to fully include young people in our movement and create a positive perspective for them in our communities. They are not only the future, they are also the present because they are actively participating in the building up and strengthening of our organisations. Therefore, the youth are actors of social change in the rural areas. They should get access to the resources necessary to produce : land, seeds, water...

We should also attribute some value to the work of children who also contribute to our process of social change.

Migrants are also our joint responsibility

Desperate living conditions and the search for a decent future are forcing millions of people around the world to migrate. Most of them come from the rural areas. We have to defend their rights and respect their effort to find a decent life. We have to support the improvement of living conditions everywhere to prevent forced migrations and we should defend migrant's rights in the countries that receive them.

Human Rights for all peasants and family farmers, men and women

People who live in rural areas still suffer many kinds of violence; exclusion prevents them from having access to fundamental rights such as food, water, employment, decent housing, education, health care, rest and culture. There is also physical and psychological violence such as forced labor, slavery, torture, prison, migration, exile and even assassination. Many are the victims of armed conflicts and wars. We struggle so that human, social, political, economic, cultural and individual and collective rights are respected in all communities, in all social groups, and by all political regimes and governments. The right to land is a basic human right. We support new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, races, classes and generations and we will struggle for a better world, without wars and nuclear weapons.

We need markets with justice, controlled production and distribution

Vía Campesina advocates for a decentralized model based on food sovereignty which promotes farmer owned and controlled production, processing and distribution through farmer owned and controlled cooperatives and associations that benefit farmers and their communities. Agricultural trade must be based on relationships of equality, cooperation and fair exchange. Food cannot be marketed as a mere commodity in order to obtain economic and political advantages. Agricultural trade must be subject to justice between all the economic actors.

Peasants and small farmers are cooling down the planet

One of the key causes of the increase of greenhouse gases emissions in agriculture and climate change is the development of high input industrial production. The use of fertilizers, pesticides, long transport lines and high levels of mechanization go along with high use of fossil and other non renewable energies. Low input agriculture based on local resources primarily for domestic consumption is one of the solutions to global warming. Peasant and small farmers are a crucial part of the solution of this global problem.

Institutions have to be democratized

We need institutions that support the implementation of food sovereignty, and protect our rights and interests against the destructive behavior of transnational corporations, big land owners and others that misuse their power to accumulate wealth by exploiting people and plundering resources. We need International Institutions that create the space and set a framework that allows national and local governments to respond to the need of their people.

We need international institutions that can control national governments if they are repressive, corrupt, if they do not respect the rights of their people or if they sell their country out to transnational corporations.

On the other end, we should get rid of international institutions that are violating people's rights such as the WTO, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We need a redefinition of the roles and the functioning of all international bodies, based on equality, justice, people's participation and human rights.

Shared values help us to become stronger and contribute to the necessary transformation of our societies

The way we act as persons in our societies and in our movement is key for the changes we want to bring along as well as for the strengthening of our movement. Relationships in our societies must be based on the cultivation of values that benefit humanity, such as solidarity, social, political and economic justice, equality, and democracy. These values do not just constitute declarations of principles, but they must set the course of our day-to-day behavior, of our movements, organizations, political regimes and States.

We want to strengthen solidarity and unity among the members of our movement as well as to respect diversity through alliances with other organizations.

In our organization we seek to build the broadest possible consensus based on collective mechanisms of decision-making. We respect minority positions. The active participation of all is a key goal. We appreciate the diversity in cultures, philosophies and religions. We will combat all forms of cultural and sexist prejudice and discrimination. We defend the right to equality to all, regardless of gender, age, color, caste, ethnicity or religion.

We commit ourselves to continuous auto-critical learning, to deepen our analysis and understanding and to remain open to criticism and ready to change.

In our actions we want to be strong and radical. Strong actions are necessary to gain the attention of our leaders and the broader public, to stop destructive actors such as the Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and to provoke the necessary shift in the balance of power in order to allow solutions that serve people's needs. However our actions are always non-violent and the integrity of the persons is always respected.

As a movement we also try to organize our meetings and gatherings in a way

that is consistent with our principles: using local resources, staying in simple places and enjoying the food produced by the peasants that receive us. We also try to remain as independent as possible from external resources, choosing low cost options and building on our own resources as much as possible.

Building a new society is not possible without allies and broad support within our societies

La Via Campesina is convinced that building alliances is crucial to achieve deep social changes. During the International Forum on Food sovereignty, Nyeleni 2007, key social movements came together and agreed on a joint strategy and action program towards food sovereignty.

Nyeleni 2007 was a very inspiring moment that showed us that there is broad support for food sovereignty and that we will be able to develop our struggle over the coming years.

La Via Campesina wants to understand the analysis and priorities of its allies in order to continue to build up a joint agenda of peoples sovereignty and to be able to continue our joint struggle in real solidarity. For the time being, the balance of power is not yet favorable to us. This means that we have to continue to accumulate strength. We have to continue to build our movements and our agenda through mobilizing actions, good analysis and massive training and education. We need to develop a more in-depth analysis of the neo-liberal ideology and develop our own ideas and concepts, in order to undermine its credibility and propose real alternatives.

La Via Campesina: dynamic and confident in the future!

Since its creation in 1993, La Via Campesina member organizations have been in the forefront of the struggle against neoliberal globalization. Uniting their forces in La Via Campesina peasant's organizations have managed to bring the peasant's voice to the international arena and make itself heard. We are confident that together with other social movements, befriended NGOs, researchers, friends in governments and international institutions we will be able to build a broad alliance for change!

9. Education and training within La Vía Campesina

This document is a synthesis of numerous debates that have taken place throughout the seminar about methods of education (June 2007). This seminar has used the base of the MST (Landless Worker Movement) as a model.

This is a document in progress and we invite everyone to comment, contribute to, and complete it. Education or consciousness-raising should be a priority in each of our organizations and we hope that this document will help initiate a dynamic debate about the role and character of our education.



Photo Credit:
La Via Campesina

1. Necessity and Importance of Education or Consciousness-Raising

The formation of consciousness happens in the course of a complex, contradictory, and extensive process of reflection on theory and practice.

It is a never-ending process of creation and synthesis of new understandings derived from conflicting ideas, as these ideas confront reality. It is a process of creating and recreating understandings of reality. Such consciousness-raising actively engages itself with the desire to distinguish reality, not only to understand it, but with the intention of transforming it.

It is important to establish an honest interpretation of reality so that these movements and organizations can present and provide political guidance with the greatest accuracy possible, concerning the fulfillment of their immediate and long-term strategic objectives.

It is clear that these advances will only happen due to concrete actions and struggles. Even so, these struggles need to be supported by theories that provide them with possibilities, development and direction.

In the present-day field of struggle, it is not harvest time, and we currently do not have enough influence to shift forces to achieve Nutritional Sovereignty. However, we can sow and plant to gather strength and experience. We must create and disperse knowledge, values, morals, and ethics. It is time that we prepare the soil, time to cultivate, time to care for the seeds to germinate with the hope that they will mature and give good fruit.

2. Political Planning and Principles of Education. Conception of Consciousness-Raising

The following are some basic principals of Education/Consciousness-Raising:

1. Education should be tied to a strategic and political project that works for the transformation of society. As the project is in construction, education should support this process. It should encourage questions, doubts, and truths.
2. Education should be a part of our struggles and our search to strengthen ourselves. These same activities are spaces for raising the level of consciousness. They should have middle and long- term objectives.
3. The key point should be the social practices of peasants. This enables understanding, orientation, improvement, and reorientation of practice by constructing a dynamic and permanent interaction between theory and practice. In this process we should value native or “home-grown” wisdom.
4. One’s formative process should create itself on top of a foundation that has been developed in different moments and in unique ways: from the behavior of leaders with permanent roles in meetings and assemblies to demonstrations, conferences, individual forums, courses, exchanges of experience, to workshop visits. It does not only consist of educational courses alone. The involvement and the example of leaders and founders mobilize the organization.
5. Political education should be organized and implemented on all levels: the grassroots, counsels, leadership circles, squads, task forces, sectors, etc., always according to the objectives and demands of an organization. Each level of the organization requires a genuine political education with adequate and fitting content, language, and methodologies. Consciousness-raising education should be a permanent process at each level. Approaches to education should be creative, collective, happy, open, and non-authoritarian, while encouraging participation and strengthening the autonomy of each organization.
6. We should incorporate an open political thinking process in our educational work. It is important to recognize the internal diversity of La Vía Campesina. We must respect minority positions and opinions. We do not want to create an elite group of leaders who hold absolute power. If we invite “experts” to offer advice, we should interpret their message for the entire organization.
7. Another principle of education is the development of different dimensions of each human person: strengthening autonomy, creating equal opportunities, and increasing the self-esteem of peasant family farmers. We should support self-reflection and self-critique in each person’s own way of acting and working. The process of formation should stem from ideas at the grassroots, where people know what they want to learn and design ideas according to their needs.
8. One challenge is interpreting the strategy of transnational businesses, institutions, other social sectors, etc.
9. Nutritional Sovereignty and the proposals of La Vía Campesina should be the central focus of consciousness-raising.

Special Effort is needed for the Formation of Youth

The process of education should touch all generations. It is important to create new youth fronts. Such youth want to get out to the countryside, go into the Free Trade Zones, and meet other young people. This makes it difficult to create a continuous force of young people, when there is so much migration and movement.

There is a lot of disparity between women and men. Women, particularly younger women, have a number of obligations and have difficulty participating in organizing. Educational methods should be taken into account for these women. Information should arrive where the women are and we should facilitate their integration into the organization.

3. What profile do we want for our militants?

The militants are made up of the people who carry out the vision of a movement, defend its values, and fight for change. They must learn to struggle with their own emotions, not only with indignation as before. A human being's reason and heart are intertwined. One's ideas are not born nor do they survive without emotion or feeling. A militant should know how to nourish culture, consciousness, the symbols, and commemorations. It is essential to care for those who fight and lead the struggle.

Militants should be dynamic, have political and ideological clarity, as well as analytical and critical capacity. They must have perseverance, a capacity to communicate, and be capable of adapting discourse into local reality. They should live in solidarity with others, have an internationalist spirit, and be loyal to their organizations and to La Vía Campesina. They should know how to make relationships with society and also with institutions. They should know how to define strategies and concrete ideas and proposals. They should develop coherence between what they say and what they do. At the global level, a militant should have the political capacity to move her/himself into the international scene to positively influence as strongly as possible within the given context.

A good militant does not do so in order to "represent the masses," but instead is a person who says the first word and hears the last and makes the synthesis of the two. They are persons who invite, visit, and motivate, while attending to the calls of the organized and dedicating time to convince those unmotivated. A militant explains with patience each decision and through persuasion, attempts to encourage and spread appropriate ideas.

A militant also verifies if a family income is sufficient to lead a dignified life. This helps during times of difficulty and gathers the collective whole for solidarity actions. A militant invests in youth and orients them so that they appreciate and affirm themselves.

They maintain serenity when confronting internal disputes in order to guarantee their right to back up and search for solutions to questions.

A militant respects individual rights and for this reason, acts with speed so that his/her relationships do not dissolve, and are strong when decisions need to be made. Militants distance themselves from personal interests in favor of those of the organization.

They participate in the mystical ceremonies, in the cultural workdays and celebrations, and encourage other militants to do the same. They use art, music, poetry, and theater as didactic resources for political education and for entertainment. They face dangers and take care of the lives and health of themselves and of those who they lead.

Finally, the 21st century militants should be people who live with others of her/his class, but dream like few do, and with simplicity, try to allow others the pleasure of dreaming too.

4. What are the principle needs for education?

We need education in the following areas:

1. Share experiences of political training, struggles in the fields of organization, politics, philosophy, history, sociology... Capacity of communication in Via Campesina and understanding of the importance of sharing experiences and understanding.
2. Methods to explain the grand themes of thinking in the educating of the base. Methods to train educators to develop popular education.
3. Analysis and instruments to confront the neo-liberal ideology, the ideology of imperialism, of international capitalism. Develop a good analysis of the reality (including the ideological level) and consciousness/knowledge of the mechanisms, the institutions, the policies and the impacts of neo-liberalism.
4. Principle concepts like Food Sovereignty, the model of production that we defend, our proposals and the values that we defend.
5. How to develop specific strategies at the national level and within Via Campesina for the more radical mobilizations and actions that we propose.
6. Develop education to develop the *mística* (*socio drama ceremonies*) in the organization.
7. Work with other sectors and the construction of alliances with them.

5. What special points need to be taken into account for an educational methodology?

We need to conserve the lines and concepts that **unite** while at the same time leaving organizations free to have educational processes as they propose in their countries. We should develop a process for the *mística* of La Via Campesina to be really assimilated by the organizations.

We need to be clear how we relate with nature and we should integrate cultural expressions, music, stories, and literature.

We should be able to support training programs in the countries beginning with popular education and taking into account the problem of illiteracy. To adapt training to the specific situation of the *campesinos* and *campesinas* and to seek to increase the amount of time spent on education.

We need to think how we can gather words that are useful to everyone in La Via Campesina. It is very important that the words are not sexist. We need concrete and accessible tools (documents, people....) who can explain the grand themes in our bases. Tools of analysis, proposals and solutions for the global problems, explaining their relation to local problems.

We need special tools to empower women, young people, emigrants. This means specific pedagogic and political strategies to form and implement them. We should overcome the indifference especially of the youth who are fascinated with the neo-liberal-capitalist system.

We should integrate more the emotional aspect of our work because we work with people. In certain spaces, rationality is too dominant. We should connect reason and emotions more, utilize more of our emotional intelligence. A key theme is historical memory. How do we maintain life? It could be through written and oral testimonies. Education in the transfer of technical knowledge (computers, communication technology...). We should create internet websites, periodicals, videos, etc. to speed communication.

We have to guarantee free spaces in our activities for people to connect, to set aside moments of free time.

We need to mobilize sufficient resources to enable training.

Photo Credit:
La Via Campesina



6. Some central ideas for training at the national and regional level

Training Schools

Every movement within Via Campesina should construct its own **Educational Schooling Process**. It doesn't have to be about constructing a physical structure, but to develop policies of training militants and local point persons (*cuadros*). It is necessary to have spaces for training, with planning, division of tasks and responsibilities that involve the bringing together of movements. The training is part of the organization.

The training school should be the meeting place of political ideas, the principles that found and strengthen the organization, that orient the political praxis of the militants and leaders as constructors, builders of the organization..

Continental courses

Each continent can begin thinking about the possibility of organizing and implementing at least one course per year of political training for militants, directors, organizers. It is necessary to define who the participants will be well and to mount an adequate program, as well as to define a good pedagogical coordination. The contents can be coordinated in part at the international level to integrate this level into the continental course.

These courses, in addition to developing a theoretical study, would be: a) a space to unify the debate around common questions; b) an important place and time to exchange experiences between different movements and countries; c) a space to discuss and deepen the methodologies and strategies of training in different countries; d) a space to understand the international context and La Via Campesina.

Applications of formal education

We should use applications of formal education. Diverse experiences exist in many countries. We have to see how to influence universities for a diverse and different education.

Exchanges of experiences between countries

Personal exchanges between countries are crucial for the work of training. They are part of the activities of many organizations and we think that it is

important to strengthen them. For people with little experience, a basic way to improve their understanding involves an exchange in the region. One advantage is that not as many resources are needed (travel by land) and this facilitates the participation of more people. The exchange of experiences with other regions is important to exchange experiences of conflict, of education, and of strengthening organization by strengthening a common analysis and strategy. Another important form is the exchange of materials and methods through the web page, electronic mail, video, etc.

Many initiatives already exist that can serve as examples:

- El IALA (Agroecology Institute Paulo Freire) in Venezuela. It can develop itself as an important space for training youth.
- Special university courses for campesinos and campesinas (agroecology in Paraná, Brazil).
- Special training for women (seminars, schools....)
- Collaborations with community radio, artist collectives, collections of exchange of knowledge.
- Schools of historical memory.
- The Francisco Morazán School of Nicaragua, the “Nyeleni” training center in Selingué, Mali, a center of training for ecological agriculture in Indonesia, the Summer Campesina University in France, and many other initiatives.

7. What role for the Via Campesina on the international level?

Both vision and mission of the Via Campesina international should be clear in order to bring forward a coherent proposal regarding education. Via Campesina should analyse the international context in order to define what are the needs in terms of training and also analyze the process on a continuous basis and in every region, in order to establish common grounds.

Via Campesina should develop a memory bank of its history, and the peasant history through the use of words and images. It should show the role played by peasants in every country. There is a need to create within the Via Campesina a cultural idea of peasantry, to build values and as well as a common identity within its diversity. The Via Campesina can help to dynamically coordinate its member-organizations, with NGOs, networks, researchers etc. A coordinating team able to articulate the work needed for training at an international level must be created.

Addressing the main issues of Via Campesina and its international context

The Via Campesina must distribute analysis, strategy and proposal documents relevant both to the international context and to the central themes of the organization (Food Sovereignty, Gender issues, Agrarian Reform, Biodiversity, Human Rights, Migration, Sustainable Peasant Agriculture, World Trade, Climate Change, GMO...)

The various organizations can approach the topics using the most suitable methods and teachings according to their cultural and ideological situation. They can develop documents referring to the reality of their bases and adapt them to the situation of every region and every country. In this way every organization will be able to add topics that they consider relevant.

Special training for activists who have to operate at the international level

Within its international meetings the Via Campesina must create a space for training for the participants in order to increase their weight in the international political process. This requires a specially assigned time, material aimed to satisfy every need of the participants and maybe the presence of people, either internal or external to the Via Campesina, who can carry out the task.

Exchanging practical experience of production.

To make available and distribute among all the organizations of the LVC practical experiences endorsing our political ideas. If we believe that it is important to advocate for seed preservation, we should show tangible examples of networks that struggle against the use of GMO imposed by transnational companies.

Exchanging material and experiences on education.

The use of existing experiences on training can be a base for the development of new proposals for training. The Via Campesina can create a database of training experiences in order to share problems and challenges. The exchange of training staff will allow the evaluation of the training programs in the countries in which we operate. We need to find ways to strengthen training initiatives within the organizations.

8. Concrete possible actions for education to be coordinated at the international level

a. To launch an edition of "Via Campesina booklets" aimed to prepare activists, training staff and collaborators. These booklets may approach topics of study; include official documents of meetings; documents regarding common analysis; documents regarding both the international topics and our local realities; etc. The decisions regarding the topics treated in these booklets, as well as their translation and distribution will have to be coordinated.

b. Specific documents must be produced. Their function will be to prepare those members of the Via Campesina staff who are directly involved in specific struggles (i.e. "the strategy regarding the FAO International Conference on climate Change" or the "proposed analysis for the struggle of free trade agreements")

c. Special material for women and young people must be developed.

d. Develop an efficient system of promotion and distribution and an internal web page easily accessible by the organizations. The page will be a database for material and there will be a list of "experts" on resources, both internal and external to the Via Campesina.

e. Promote the exchange of experiences between the training schools and the LVC. The Francisco Morazán school in Central America could help to coordinate it.

f. Promote the exchange between regions of experiences central to struggle and training (priority to be defined)

9. We are going through a building process

A lot of educational work has already been done through the struggle, daily actions and special activities such as training courses. With this effort we want to contribute towards a clarification of the objectives of training programs within the Via Campesina and strengthen them through a stronger coordination between the organizations

We want to strengthen the philosophical, historical and sociological rationale. To the agricultural topics we want to add other major issues concerning rural society and its environment.

We must deal with our uncertainty, we must analyze more deeply our realities and elaborate our theory accepting different views free from any dogmas.

We must tackle this ideological task. Neoliberals have a strong ideology that right now has been assimilated by a large fringe of the population. How are we going to counteract this?

We need analysis and discussions within LVC in order to produce activists capable of counteracting this situation with efficient strategies that allow positive changes in our society.

The wealth of LVC lies in its diversity as well as in its perception of the values that unite us. The struggle against neoliberalism and imperialism is one of the basic tenets of LVC along with the struggle to promote our peoples' sovereignty. Education and leadership development must be part of this process.

La Via Campesina is the international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women and youth, indigenous people and agricultural workers. La Via Campesina's main goal is to develop solidarity and unity among small farmers' organizations and to promote sustainable agricultural production and local food markets based on small and medium sized producers. It is an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent of any political, economic, or other type of affiliation. Born in 1993, la Via Campesina now gathers about 150 organizations in 70 countries around the world.



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