



Cooling the Planet:

Frontline Communities lead the struggle

*Voices from the Global Convergence
of Land and Water Struggles*

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“We, social movements, grassroots organizations and civil society organizations engaged in the defense of the rights to land and water are fighting back, asserting our rights and providing real solutions. We believe that peoples’ access to and control of land and water is essential to peace, to stopping climate change, as well as to fulfilling fundamental human rights and guaranteeing a dignified life for all.”

*Rights to Water and Land, a Common Struggle. Dakar to Tunis:
Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles*

The Declaration can be accessed and signed here:

<http://goo.gl/forms/yyhXa2Pb4c>

Small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists, fisherfolk and urban people – the *frontline communities* – are increasingly confronted by the grabbing of natural resources and systematic violations of human rights. Already pushed to the fringe, frontline communities additionally face the increasingly frequent natural disasters and impacts of climate destruction that are caused by the climate change – and the inability of governments to agree to real solutions.

Land, water and ocean grabbing, as well as food and climate injustices are not stand-alone issues but deeply intertwined and find common expression through the current dominant economic approach for the use, extraction, conservation and governance of natural resources. Powerful actors, driven by narrow economic interests rather than long-term sustainability are concentrating the political power to determine how resources are to be used, by whom, and for what purposes. In this process, natural resources are wrested away from their social and ecological dimensions of protecting the millions of people whose way of life, culture and traditions are tied to the access and control over their territories.

The Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles is a response to these injustices by frontline communities from all over the world.

During a public event held in Paris in December 2015 at the time of the COP21, representatives of frontline communities discussed and denounced the *false* solutions to the climate crisis, and promoted the *real* solutions that are rooted in peoples' knowledge and experiences.¹ They stressed how *converging* provides hope, opportunities and solidarity and, importantly, advances the struggle for systemic change.

The purpose of this report is to amplify the voices of frontline communities and to share the political messages of the 16 social movement leaders – who spoke at the meeting – with the masses who form the base of social movements all over the world. The report is meant to trigger deepened political consciousness and to support mass based movements in their resistance against the privatization agendas promoted by the political and economic elites.

The report itself is a product of joint collaboration between many social movements and allied organizations from all over the world. More than twenty groups have contributed to the writing of the report and many more assisted with preparations and the implementation of the public event in Paris. A list of all the groups is provided on the back cover.

BOX 1

What is the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles?

“The history of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles is deeply rooted in the fight against land and water grabbing. The convergence was initiated by grassroots organizations and social movements in order to link and strengthen the struggles for food and peoples' sovereignty and human rights. This process started in October 2014, when several social and grassroots movements from Africa as well as civil society organizations gathered at the African Social Forum in Dakar to protest against all forms of natural resource grabbing and the systematic human rights violations that accompany them. Delegates to the African Social Forum pointed out that their primary problem was that they were too divided. Recognizing the essential solidarity between their struggles they decided to meet again at the World Social Forum in Tunis, March 2015, to continue this dialogue with movements and organizations from all over the world.

The declaration “*Rights to Water and Land, a Common Struggle. Dakar to Tunis Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles*” sets out the vision, principles and aspirations of the Convergence and is intended to serve the process of building a strong and united movement struggling for the enforcement of public policies based on food and peoples' sovereignty and in order to realize our human rights. Moving on from Tunis, we decided to use COP21 as a struggle platform. Indeed, the struggle against global warming and for climate justice is deeply intertwined with the struggle for people's rights to natural resources and for food sovereignty. Without securing people's and communities' control over land, rivers, oceans, forests, seeds etc. we will not be able to stop global warming. It is important to keep in mind that all around the world people are being harassed, imprisoned and killed for defending their lands, forests and oceans. We are coming together at the regional and national levels, and the global convergence is increasingly relevant.”

Chantal Jacovetti, Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP) - La Via Campesina/Convergence Malienne Contre l'accaparement des Terres (CMAT)

False solutions against climate change

People's loss of access to land and water – the very natural resources upon which people depend for their livelihoods and food sovereignty – is not only a result of natural disasters induced by climate change, but often arise from the mechanisms promoted to address climate change.

Six leaders from the Americas, South East Asia, Europe and Africa share their experience with how the access and control to land and water is increasingly captured and concentrated into the hands of powerful actors, which is well known to dispossess masses of people from their territories, in the name of:

- **“development” – with mega dams for hydropower and mining industries** (Juan Pablo Soler, Colombia), (Caroline Ntaopane, South Africa),
- **“food security” – with climate-smart agriculture and bioenergy** (Adam Payne, UK),
- **“environmental protection” – with carbon offsetting programs such as REDD+ and Blue Carbon** (Zainal Arifin Fuad, Indonesia) (Riza Damanik, Indonesia),
- **or the production of “renewable energy” – with clean power plants** (Jihan Geraon, USA).

BOX 2

“The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is captured by neo-liberal governments and transnational corporations. The solutions placed on the table by this political and economic elite do not address the underlying causes of climate change and ignores the voices and rights of frontline communities. The solutions of the UNFCCC are false and we must familiarize ourselves with why this is so and share experiences on how to fight back.”

Paula Gioia, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft / La Via Campesina*

Juan Pablo Soler, member of the Colombian Movement in Defense of Territories and People Affected by Dams - Ríos Vivos Movement. Juan Pablo is active in the struggle against mega dams.

“Dams represent false solutions because they don't change the energy model that focuses on inefficiency. In Latin America, we have dams that emit huge amounts of methane and there are many mega dams across the world, which have emitted more than 104 million tonnes of methane into the atmosphere. These projects have negative effects on both nature and human beings. In Colombia, the territories are militarized in order to secure the dams. In the region of northern Antioquia, where the Hidroituango mega dam is being build, 47 massacres have been carried out and paramilitary groups have been involved in most of these. We take note of the fact that there is a legal investigation at the attorney's office to clarify if Hidroituango has benefited from paramilitary action in the region.

There is a need to understand the complexity of these dams, especially since there are some movements that think dams are necessary for development. Not only do they destroy the environment, but they take away our rights and access to territories and the water. We are showing people the environmental, health-related, and other costs of dams.

Our movement – Rios Vivos - is one that represents those affected by mega dams. We have a collective leadership and it is as a collective that we are trying to face corporations together and fight back.

Over the past few years, we have also talked to many other organizations and movements and we are steadily strengthening our mass base. Remember, a dam also affects people who fish down the river. So to stop them, we need to talk to others, and this kind of organization is essential. Unity is also required to effectively fight mining which also drains the waters of our rivers. Water is a fundamental part of the struggles that we are fighting in Colombia. In short, we are working at all levels to fight the corporations and construction of more dams.”

Caroline Ntaopane has worked on human rights, Women’s rights and environmental rights since 2006 and contributed to building the movement for women who are affected by mining (WoMin). She grew up in the highly polluted area in the Vaal Triangle and has fought hard against extractive industries and to make sure that the rights of communities are respected by corporations and government. Caroline is the National Campaigner of WoMin with focus on Energy and Climate Justice for women.

“We have many coal power stations in South Africa and our skies are full of haze and smoke from mining industries. Our communities complain to the government that they must hold corporations accountable but it is not happening. The electrical cables pass over our people’s houses, but they do not have access to electricity—only coal. So people go dig coal with their own hands just to be able to cook food but that also comes with a price. In our community, people literally die because of all the pollution.

The offset mechanisms of the UNFCCC is the big problem for us in South Africa because the industries can continue to pollute the air as long as they invest in offsetting schemes in places far away from us. Under these schemes, we will continue to suffer from pollution and climate change, so we are forced to fight back.

In order to change the system, we take to the streets and protest. All of us go, men and women and also the children, but the women lead our struggle for environmental justice and are in the frontline in campaigns. We also work with other groups and advocate for laws that will represent people and the environment instead of corporate interests. As part of this work, we are also educating communities about impacts and their rights, with a focus on women.

Convergence is about fighting for life, and ending injustice. If women and youth are organized, we can make change happen. We often say, ‘Nothing about us, without us.’”

Adam Payne is a farmer in the south west of England, producing sheep, pigs and vegetables on a small Organic farm. He is active with the Landworkers’ Alliance, and on the coordinating committee of the European Coordination Via Campesina.

“Climate-smart agriculture [a UNFCCC mechanism] basically repackages the same problems that are causing the crisis as solutions. From their perspective, it is quite smart, actually, because they can carry on what they are doing. Syngenta, Yara, the World Bank, and McDonalds are examples of companies and institutions that support Climate-smart agriculture — yet the industrial food system that they are part of contribute over 50 percent of greenhouse gasses. It is a continuation of the Green Revolution through industrial style farming and soaking crops in herbicides. Climate-smart agriculture is the wrong direction - for small-scale producers and food quality it is a disaster.

In the fields and in the streets, we are demonstrating resistance and defending our way of life. There has to be a shift away from markets to rights, with food sovereignty as a primary resistance strategy. A central area of our struggle is to maintain and promote farming livelihoods to keep people on the land. This also means caring for and working with local ecosystems without poisoning our nature, and selling our products directly to consumers. The other part of our struggle focuses on strengthening our unions and doing political campaigns and protests. We have actions against genetically modified crops and the companies that promote

them. An important part of our strategy is to strengthen our alliances with other organizations, and being part of La Via Campesina is critical in that respect. This gives us new hope and unite us internationally.

Our struggles cannot afford to wait. In the U.K., 15 percent of people worked on farms during my grandfather's generation. During my father's generation, that number had fallen to 8 or 9 percent. Today, it is less than 1 percent—and that is because the unions were not strong enough. There is a reason that the fist is the sign of resistance, and that has to do with convergence. 'Globalize the struggle, globalize the hope.'"

Zainal Arifin Fuad is a chairperson of Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI), an active La Via Campesina member in the South East Asian region. Zainal is involved in the struggle for Agrarian Reform, Food Sovereignty and Agroecology since 2003 and is fighting against the corporate regime occupying the land and territories that belong to the peasants.

"The REDD+ mechanism of the United Nations has robbed our people for massive areas of land in Indonesia. Some members of Serikat Petani are among those who suffer from REDD+ projects. To add insult to injury, the companies engaging in REDD+ are supported by some of the environmental NGOs who argue we can save our nature through privatization and international fund schemes. Today, we witness increased competition for land, food, fuel, feed, and forests, and this has all been intensified through deregulation and opening up for foreign takeover of our nature. And REDD+ is part of land grabbing based on climate change issues.

We conduct mass action from village, district, and province, national until International level. Furthermore, we built network with other social movements, NGOs, and students and academics as SPI's principle is "Peasant Struggle, people victory" on which they joint and struggle together with SPI and La Via Campesina as well for agrarian reform, food sovereignty and agroecology as solution for climate change.

We – La Via Campesina and some allies, lead the struggle for our human rights at the United Nations level in Geneva, where we have succeeded in convincing the Human Rights Council to develop the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas. We are organized and strongly motivated!"

Riza Damanik is a leader of the Kesatuan Nelayan Tradisionele Indonesië (KNTI – Traditional Fisherfolk in Indonesia). Riza is working to protect the rights of Indigenous and non-Indigenous fisher groups in the country, and he is also an active member of WFFP.

"*Blue Carbon* is a [UNFCCC] carbon offset scheme that focuses on marine mangroves and seagrass ecosystems. It is like REDD+ in the coastal regions. In our [Indonesian fisher people] case, Blue Carbon will lead to even more conservation projects where coastal areas and inland wetlands are enclosed, privatized and placed on the markets. But this also means that we are forced out of the areas, and it is therefore yet another form of Ocean Grabbing.

In West Nusa Tenggara, our fishers believe that the sea is our mother. In the local language fisher say "Ina soro budi, budi Noro apadike. Pai pana ponu, te hama hama" which means "The sea is the mother who provides, protects and loves. Therefore, we should maintain its sustainability". What we witness with Blue Carbon is that this political elite wants us to sell our mother.

Our small-scale fishing communities are especially impacted by these projects because their rights are much less visible and most often overlooked by governments who are only interested in economic growth. The fishers' voices are very rarely heard in policy and governmental decision-making processes, making it difficult for them to influence the content of the policies that directly affect their communities.

That is why it is crucial for small-scale fishers to be aware of their rights and work together to prevent damaging policies from being implemented.

One of the most important instruments we use to sensitize our communities to their rights as fishers is the International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries. We struggled for many years – from 2008 until 2014 – to secure the endorsement of this new instrument by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

One of the principles of these guidelines is the use of our own traditional and local knowledge. When we go to the sea to fish, we call it 'kotek lima'— to take what God gives —not just to go fishing. This means that we also take care of the nature because otherwise God will not be pleased. The interaction between fishers and nature is deeply entrenched and it is the back-bone of our traditional knowledge.

We also show the way forward with our traditional practices. As fisherfolk, we use low technology and very little fuel, and we provide food for the local consumers. In this way we are not contributing to the big carbon emissions. It is important that we continue to promote our practices and that it becomes a part of our struggle.

We realize the importance of strengthening connections between land- and fisher movements because the nature we depend on is interconnected. There is, for example, a transnational corporation [TNC] from the US that has a project in the highlands. The TNC pollutes the river and all people depending on the river system – both peasants, rural people and fisherfolk – suffer. This is why we must converge with other food producers and consumers in rural areas and the cities.”

Jihan Gearon is Navajo and African American. As Executive Director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, she builds for climate justice and just transition www.blackmesawatercoalition.org.

“In the United States, there is a lot of focus on the clean power plan, but in reality, it only applies to 3,000 out of some 19,000 power plants. In reality, the plan only addresses power plants, not coal mining or power distribution, even though they are all part of the problem. They say there is a shift to clean energy, but it is one that is focused on waste incineration, natural gas, and potentially even nuclear.

There are 28,000 homes without electricity on the Navajo Nation, and just as we have heard from our sister in South Africa, the electricity cables run straight over their heads and yet, the electricity is not for us. We might not have electric power but we have people's power.

Our strategy to fight the unjust system and the Carbon trading mechanisms, is to empower our communities to break our dependency on corporations for everything. In this way we can achieve a just transition. Reaching a regenerative economy is a specific step-by-step process and part of this is to understand that economy is about livelihoods and our home and not about money and financial markets. In our struggle we embark on a healing process, and that starts with relearning our culture — and denouncing our way of life is backward. We are relearning our songs, our ceremonies, and our relationship with our land and nature. This also means our relationship with water, which is at the core of our everyday life. Our projects on watershed restoration are very important as part of the healing process and it is the nucleus of food sovereignty.

We are often told that our vision is unrealistic, but the convergence, with all the stories from sisters and brothers from all over the world, confirms that we are right. Governments speak about a \$1 trillion investment in clean energy but this is not possible, and the energy they speak about is not even clean. The majority of the world's people experience injustice and they don't care about getting richer. What they want – or what we want – is to live in balance with nature and people. Convergence of struggles is important because it gives us hope.”

Real Solutions for climate justice

The *real* solutions articulated by frontline communities derive from local livelihood strategies and practices. Real solutions build on the needs and interests of the people and require a fundamental shift away from solutions that are developed by and for a minority elite. Real solutions and the struggles for them to be heard are intrinsically linked to the necessity of systemic changes. Real solutions are based upon putting together people-based solutions with tools that will allow empowering movements at all levels.

The real solutions are many and diverse as they are rooted in local practices and culture. Yet, there are so many similarities in the way we practice the real solutions all over the world. Six leaders share their take on what the real solutions are from their constituency's perspectives:

- **Fisher perspective** (Sherry Pictou, Canada),
- **Union perspective** (Valter Bittencourt, Brazil),
- **Pastoralist perspective** (Dodo Boureima, Niger),
- **Indigenous perspective** (Christiana Louwa, Kenya),
- **Peasant movement perspective** (Isabel Vilalba, Galicia – Spain),
- **Urban perspective** (Lorena Zárate, Mexico).

Sherry Pictou is from the Mi'kmaq community, Bear River First Nation, Nova Scotia in Canada, and a member of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP).

"I represent a small Indigenous community of the Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia, Canada known as L'sitkuk. For Indigenous Peoples, it is important to erupt this false notion of North and South divide by bringing attention to what is happening in the global north, where we have faced over 500 years of colonialism. Yet, we are experiencing a strong Indigenous resurgence in our struggle. This is not about returning to the way we lived 500 years ago. Rather, it is about respecting one another, the land and the water. It is about establishing a reciprocal relationship with all of life beyond the just the value of commodities. This is a resurgence of our culture and knowledge rooted in Land and Water based practices, which is intergenerational. This intergenerational wisdom and Land/Water based practices provides knowledge for sustaining nature and all of life.

To advance our struggle for rights, we work together with many allies. We are also an active member of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, which allows us to maintain strong global connections and ensure that the rights of Indigenous peoples are addressed internationally.

Tools like the Tenure Guidelines [UN Guidelines on the responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests²] and the UN Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries³ help frame the struggle by bringing the human element back in. The guidelines also help reinforcing the connection between land and water. This is very important for us, because from the Indigenous perspective, there is no difference between land and water — they are interrelated."

Valter Bittencourt joined social movements in the struggle for justice in 1996. From 2006 to 2015 Valter worked for the National Metalworkers' Confederation of CUT Brasil (CNM/CUT) and since April 2015 he has been responsible for Migration and Environmental areas at TUCA (Trade Union Confederation of the Americas), which represents 55 million workers of 56 affiliated organizations on the continent.

"It is ten years ago we [the labor unions] started to unite with other social justice movements, and that allowed for a new continental where we can take forward and strengthen our solutions. We are developing

alternatives to the capitalist model, and some of the central components in our solutions are the rights to water, agrarian reforms and our right to use native seeds and forests. This also requires for us to pay close attention to the policy frameworks such as free trade agreements.

In order to move forward, we also push for more participation in policy processes at national and international level. We engage with our national government but through our alliances, as labor movement, we are also able to participate in many governance spaces at the regional and international levels. In this way, we are also able to articulate our views and positions inside COP21 and in other UN spaces.”

Dodo Boureima is an agro-pastoralist from Niger. His organization, AREN, together with two other pastoralists’ organizations from Mali and Burkina Faso, initiated after a long consultation process the network Réseau Billital Maroobe (RBM). The network has both a sub-regional and African scope.

As part of RBM’s coordination committee, I am a representative for a pastoralist network active on pastoralist issues. Our solution combines our history with new ideas for our culture, our customs and our rights to land and water. Sharing knowledge and ideas is critical for us. This enabled us, pastoralist-herders, to adapt to climate and environmental changes.

Government policies and programs in our countries that aim to privatize and commodify our lands are not compatible with our core values. These hinder herd mobility to force us to a sedentary lifestyle.

Our communities are very vulnerable and exposed due to lack of adapted information and illiteracy. To alleviate this situation, the Network is setting up information systems that are accessible and strengthen communities’ capacity and direct actions. We often reactivate the traditional system of boycott of our products in the markets called “dangool pulaaku” when authorities wants to impose practices that disadvantage farmers. This works fine as many actors rely on these products and their pressure bends the authorities.

Strained for a long time due to unfair policies, the relationship between herders and farmers is improving due to the convergence of interests to defend together our rights to land and water against the poor governance of these resources. We created the Network to convince our governments and our regions that pastoralist-herders are not part of the issue, as they think, but rather the solution. We are doing so by unpacking prejudices and producing strong evidence.

United through our networks of farmers and herders, we are strong to defend our rights and fight against land grabbing in our countries. This is part of our strategy. We are also organized, at the global level, through Via Campesina. This enables us to collaborate with other groups in order to fight against TNCs on a global scale.”

Christiana Louwa is from the Indigenous El Molo community on the shores of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. Christiana is fighting for the El Molo People’s right to territories – land and water – and she is a member of WFFP.

“In the north of Kenya, where I come from, there is a need to have communal ownership of natural resources. We own them together, and together we share responsibility for them—and then people cannot grab our land, water, and territories. Our traditional knowledge has allowed us to strike a balance with nature over the years, and it reduces the impact of climate change. One example is our use of low impact fishing equipment which has no impact on climate change when compared to the industrial and export oriented forms of fishing.

We use every opportunity to highlight our struggles and solutions, including those of our “brothers and sisters” [other indigenous and non-indigenous groups] in Kenya. We participate in conferences and workshops, call for meetings with government, and make campaigns to make our voices heard. We also apply international instruments in our struggle, and the recently endorsed international guidelines on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries is one important instrument. With these guidelines we can sensitise our people to their rights and also remind government of their obligation to protect our right to communal land and water.

Isabel Vilalba is a farmer from Galicia. Isabel serves as the secretary of *Sindicato Labrego Galego*, the family farmer movement of Galicia. Isabel is also a leader of the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC).

“Our solutions are based on the communal formulas to land ownership and management, and in our culture. We produce food as a way of living in our rural areas by applying our traditional practices in combination with new technologies. We care for our environment and our entire production depends on healthy ecosystems. It is really straight forward, but our solutions does not seem to align with the political and economic interests of the elite.

When we hear about environmental destruction by mining companies we mostly think of the Global South, but it is happening in our backyards. Multinational companies such as Canadian Edgewater Exploration contaminates our water with poisonous substances and drain our region from the scarce water. This is one of the threats to life we are fighting against.

Our struggle takes many forms. We are in the streets mobilizing and protesting against mining, privatization of water and free trade agreements [FTAs], but we also mobilize and strengthen our networks to take the struggle beyond Galicia. In our struggle we are united with the working class, with housing movements, environmental movements, and those working on women’s rights. We are also very active in the European Coordination Via Campesina and obviously the struggle at the global level through La via Campesina.”

Lorena Zárate, based in Mexico, is the president of Habitat International Coalition Mexico.

“We work broadly with organizations on the right to housing, but are now bringing in struggles for water and land, and in urban and rural areas. The convergence is critical at different levels. Urban struggles often have to do with access to housing, and against being kicked out of our homes. We are working with Right to the City. Ways for us to articulate our struggles, and rural struggles, are very important to us. We are fighting against the privatization of water and land—it is common property. Many lines of commonalities exist, where we are working with LVC and others looking for lines of resistance between rural and urban areas.”

Convergence of struggles as the key to a future with justice for all

The existence of political multi-stakeholder spaces does not automatically generate an inclusive, equitable, transparent and accountable process, nor does it automatically produce outcomes geared towards human rights-based policy. Human rights language, spaces and instruments are increasingly being reinterpreted by corporate actors and misused in a very different way than they were originally developed for – to protect and promote the rights of people. This dynamic is part of a broader dramatic erosion of human rights standards concerning property, food, trade and investment regimes and the increasing criminalization of human rights defenders worldwide.

In a context of corporate take-over of (global) governance mechanisms and political processes such as UN specialized agencies including the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Conference of the parties for the UNFCCC or the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), the Global Convergence is a critical process to strengthen the frontline voices' for a human rights-based governance of natural resources centered on food sovereignty and peasant agroecology.

The Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles provides a space for struggles to converge, share their experience, express solidarity and coordinate mass mobilization, in order to intensify the fight against the grabbing of natural resources and the violence it inflicts in our society. Leaders from various constituencies emphasizes the importance of converging for their struggles:

- **Fishers' perspective** (Herman Kumara, Sri Lanka),
- **Anti-dam movement perspective** (Tchenna Maso, Brazil)
- **Anti-land grabbing movement perspective** (Massa Koné, Mali)
- **Fish workers' perspective** (Margaret Nakato, Uganda)
- **Peasant movement perspective** (Ludwig Rumetshofer, Austria).

Herman Kumara is the national convener of the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) of Sri Lanka. Herman has spent decades of his life in support of fisher people's rights to fishing grounds and coastal land. NAFSO is also organized globally as part of the WFFP.

"In Sri Lanka, we are living in a post-war context where the political elite together with the military is holding a firm grip on the power. This means we are living in a very oppressive environment where the social movements and human rights defenders are especially vulnerable. This situation calls for us to unite all possible forces. When the government was trying to make us disappear, we joined forces with many different sectors and groups. Together with farmers, women, pastoralists, organized labor and other movements, we created a joint platform and developed a shared vision and a proposal for change and reform. Through this process, we succeeded in changing our government and secured a new space for us to raise our voices to continue our struggles.

We need to keep talking about how the neo-liberal system destroys us. We are all victims, both producers and consumers. Today in Chennai, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are affected by the flooding but the UNCFPP does not address the underlying causes of climate change. Convergence is key in our struggle at all levels."

Tchenna Fernandes Maso, is a popular lawyer from the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) in Brazil. Tchenna is also active in La Via Campesina and is closely involved in a collective of human rights experts addressing Human and Indigenous Peoples Rights issues.

“The people affected by dams are not just those who are kicked off their land so that it can be built. Dams change our natural environment and directly affect the lives of millions of peoples living. The methane released from tropical dams puts these mega-constructions in the same category as fossil fuel-powered plants when it comes to emissions of greenhouse gases. Therefore, all of us are affected regardless of where in the world we live.

We started our fight against the Ita Dam in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and owned by the transnational corporation Tractebel, but it became clear that the struggle is not just about the construction of one dam. It is a struggle against an unjust system that seeks to construct dams across our nation. Our approach is one that builds on convergence, to enforce a much wider struggle that brings together movements from across the country who all want energy sovereignty and food sovereignty.

But the struggle is also not just a national one. The corporations who build these dams are multinationals or transnational corporations (TNCs) and we have to fight them and their capital too. To do so we need to think more about how we organize ourselves in the international struggles. We have to converge to defend *our* right to *our* land and the real solutions of energy and food sovereignty are at the center of converging.”

Massa Koné is the General Secretary of the Union and Coordination of Associations in the defense and development of deprived people’s rights (UACDDDD). He is the spokesperson of the Malian Convergence against land grabs (CMAT) and the Caravan of the West African Convergence of Land and Water Struggles. He is also one of the NO-VOX Africa coordinator (the voiceless’ movement).

“We are victims of the false solutions that go against our culture and destroy our dignity. Because of land grabbing we are not even able to bury our dead.

In Mali, our focus is on community rights and we work on how we can implement those rights. It is also important that we make sure the government knows our needs. For many years, the laws that have been put into place do not respect our dignity and rights — so we need to make it clear that we exist and have needs.

The policies that work against us damage farmers and fishers and other constituencies alike, and in the past each constituency focused on their own sector. We saw the need to come together because the same laws and policies were against all of us and step by step we created a movement of movements. As part of the process, we build alliances with other organizations [e.g. NGOs] and through their support we deepened our understanding of legal and political matters.

The African Social Forum in Dakar on October 25th, 2014, was a critical moment, where our movements came together to advance a joint political force. This convergence has now spread across West Africa and even globally.

An important area we all have to pay attention to, is the criminalization of our peoples because of unjust laws. We have to turn this around, so that it is the human rights offenders who are decriminalized. When we hear about arrest or injury to our people, we need to come together to fight against this. This call for all of us to strengthen mass mobilization.”

Margaret Nakato works with over 500 women organized in 19 groups in the fisher communities north of Lake Victoria in Uganda under Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT). KWDT is a member of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), an international network of small-scale fishers to uphold the fundamental human rights, social justice and culture of artisanal / small-scale fishing communities.

“In fisher communities we can no longer continue to treat loss of land in isolation as loss of land translates to loss of access to fishing grounds. This convergence is long over due.

In Uganda, land access is particularly low among women. With land bordering the lake a prime attraction for investment into tourism, real estate development and agribusiness investment, the women in the rural fisher communities are more vulnerable to loss of land to all various forms of investment. The loss of land in many communities has culminated in restricted access to the lake to the thousands of fishermen and fisher women whose livelihoods depend on fisheries resources. Lack of secure tenure of land has barred local investment in agriculture as tensions rise about loss of land and the fragile situation is worsened by the competing uses for land and water among investors and the local community members. The fisher folks are no longer allowed to go fishing in these areas, and their loss of access to certain fishing grounds without alternatives is in fact connected to the loss of land.

Many men did not notice what happened, and it was the women who started to organize the resistance. The men joined our struggle afterwards. One of the challenges is the lack of awareness of our rights as enshrined in national and international law by the fisher community, the law enforcement officers and therefore more incidences of loss of land and water territories.

In Uganda, we build alliances and converge to take our struggle forward, but it is clear that we also converge internationally. One immediate point of work is to promote the human rights instruments that are already in place. The Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines and the Tenure guidelines are two such instruments, and we need to bring these from the international to the local level. This will help our communities' understanding of their rights and create the basis for mass mobilization of our people and communities.

Financialization of resources key for food production and nature must stop. Food production is embedded in cultural and spiritual values, and we need to fight and mobilize to keep financialization out of it.”

Ludwig Rumetshofer is a peasant working at Österreichische Bergbauern- und -bäuerinnenvereinigung (ÖBV) - Via Campesina Austria - and is active in the European Food Sovereignty Movement.

“Last night, I found myself, a young farmer, having dinner with a young fisher from South Africa. We found out that we are in the same struggle, and using the same framework. That framework is food sovereignty. European small-scale farmers are doing little to change the system, but we are getting together to change that mindset. We are part of Nyeleni Europe which is about food sovereignty. In October 2016, people and movements from all over Europe will meet in Romania at the Nyéléní Europe Forum for Food Sovereignty, in order to strengthen our movement and jointly develop strategies.

Food Sovereignty is also about changing the mindset of food producers and consumers. This will unlock aspirations and motivation to take the political struggle forward. It all starts at the local level, where we build up our alternatives based on Food Sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is not just the real solution to the systemic failures we see all over. It is a tool for convergence, it brings people together.”

Closing remark

“During this event we have seen the impacts of the false solutions promoted by governments together with private corporations in the life of rural and urban communities. Those destructive practices go against human rights and disrupt nature and climate in our planet. Small-scale food producers have been working for decades and centuries with healthy practices, that respect Mother Earth and social relations between the communities. The multiple crises we are facing today are a clear symptom of this cruel and rotten patriarchal and imperialist system of exploration, called capitalism.

The Land and Water Convergence gathers the voices, the stories and struggles of all our people, who are all victims affected and suffering in the different corners of the world. Coming together and sharing our common visions and issues make us stronger and gives us the certainty, that we have to keep resisting against the power of elites and capital. We are the ones with the real solutions, people-based solutions, for the big climate damages private capital has been developing in the past decades. Moreover, our solutions are not just related to the climate itself, but to a holistic system change, based on solidarity, humanity and respect to Mother Earth.

The event today has reaffirmed, that we have to keep resisting locally, in order to change the global system, and that we have to organize our resistance in all levels. Therefore convergence is the only way we can build unity among us and turn our struggles into concrete movements. And for that food sovereignty can be more than a vision. Food sovereignty can be an umbrella to bring people together, to globalize our struggle and to globalize our hope!”

Paula Gioia, Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft / La Via Campesina

Endnotes

- 1 The public event welcomed more than 200 people on December 10th, 2015, at a venue named after the political activist and feminist who fought for the rights of women in the years after the French Revolution. Olympe de Gouge was executed in 1793, four years after the revolution had started. The event was chaired by Ms. Paula Gioia, from La Via Campesina, and Mr. Ange David Baimey from GRAIN and facilitated by the following moderators, by alphabetical order: Zoe Brent from the Transnational Institute, Martin Drago from Friends of the Earth International, Lyda Fernando Forero from the Transnational Institute, Shalmali Guttal from Focus on the Global South, Carsten Pedersen from the International Secretariat of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples and Philip Seufert of FIAN International.
- 2 See www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en. See also the People's Manual on the Tenure Guidelines at www.foodsovereignty.org/peoplesmanual.
- 3 www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf.

