

## Promoting Seed Sovereignty: *Fighting for the Right to Seeds*

Chavannes Jean-Baptiste of Haiti's Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP) muses, "In the old days, Haitian peasants never sold seeds; seeds were for sharing and exchanging."



Today the old ways have been pushed aside. Seeds have become big business.

This assault on the basic human right to food commercializes and commodifies one of life's most essential assets. It jeopardizes human health, threatens the global food supply and steals away the livelihoods of small farmers around the world.

That's because today's most powerful seed producers aren't farmers at all – and they aren't just selling seeds. They're agrochemical giants selling an entire system of food production based on genetically modified and hybridized seeds that require a host of toxic inputs. And it's a system built on petroleum power, rather

than people power, meaning that it simultaneously contributes to climate change and global poverty.

Farmers around the world are fighting back. Many, including Grassroots International's partners, are organizing to reclaim the right to seeds, to biological diversity, to land, and to a dignified way of life.

### Sowing Seeds of Independence

"There's no national sovereignty without seed sovereignty," says Abu Saif, program director for the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC). Grassroots International supports UAWC's seed bank, the first one in the Middle East.

Seed Sovereignty is an idea echoed by Grassroots partners worldwide, who understand this: Whoever controls food production wields enormous power. Additionally, a diversity of seeds allows farmers to adapt to different climates and soil conditions, and protect future food stores. For those reasons, the invasion of genetically modified seeds and single-crop fields foisted by agrochemical companies like Monsanto threaten not only small farmers but the entire food system.

In Haiti, resisting the cycle of dependency that accompanies large-scale industrial agriculture



is a vital part of securing authentic independence and self-sufficiency. That struggle advances daily thanks to partnerships between Grassroots International and local groups like the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP), who play a key role in halting the invasion of GMOs by safeguarding – and cultivating – native seeds.

Likewise, for more than 20 years, Grassroots' partner La Via Campesina has been at the forefront of promoting seed sovereignty for its member organizations, comprised of more than 250 million small-scale producers around the globe.

La Via's approach, at work in every corner of the globe, is threefold: protect native seeds, challenge laws that threaten the rights to seeds, and halt the spread of GMOs. ■

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## Letter from the Director .....

Seeds are the basic building block of all the food we eat, and are also the epicenter of a roaring battle for our global future. On one side, you have the “Goliaths” of the story: Monsanto, Syngenta, Cargill and a handful of other massive agrochemical giants that are trying to invent, patent, control or otherwise corner the market on seeds.



On the other side, you have literally millions of “Davids” – farmers like Carlos Henríquez in Mexico, Adiammal in India, Fu’ad Abu Saif in Palestine, Elizabeth Mpfu in Zimbabwe and Edla Lopes in Brazil. Despite enormous pressure, these partners of Grassroots International continue to save seeds – as their ancestors have done for generations – to preserve biodiversity, and to provide life-giving sustenance for their families and the world. Indeed, small farmers like these still provide more than 70 percent of the world’s food, a fact that Monsanto would very much like to change.

As people who care about the planet and about those most vulnerable to hunger, we need to ask some serious questions: What is the most effective, ecological and humane way to feed the world? How can farmers sustain themselves, their communities and us? What is the long-term impact of how we grow food, and who benefits from it?

The answers to all those questions support the “Davids” of the world – the small farmers who are using sustainable methods that produce more food than their industrial counterparts, while also reducing greenhouse gas emission. That’s the determination of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. And that is also our experience from working with small farmers and indigenous peoples around the world.

With your support, Grassroots International continues to provide much-needed support to those who are standing up against the giants of industrial and corporate-driven agriculture to protect the most fundamental of all our food stuffs: Seeds. Local and heirloom seeds are more productive, insect resistant and require less toxic inputs than the genetically modified or hybrid seeds developed in the laboratories of Monsanto and other seed giants.

As Elias Freitas Mesquita, one of our partners from Brazil’s Popular Peasant Movement who participates in their Creole Seeds Project explains: “Seeds are the center of food sovereignty. Without our seeds we cannot have food sovereignty. We want a system that relies as little as possible on any external products, like corporate seeds or fertilizers. We want to produce something that is good and healthy for everyone. To be sovereign is to have control over seeds and land, techniques and knowledge – everything necessary for food.”

By preserving seeds and farmers, you are helping Grassroots International quite literally seed the movement for food justice. Thank you for nurturing a productive future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nikhil Aziz".

## Growing Resilience

Despite the worst drought conditions in 50 years, cashews, berries, passion fruit and limes are growing in abundance on a farmer settlement in the northeastern Brazilian state of Maranhao.

The secret? Local seeds, coupled with sustainable farming methods. “The secret is using agricultural practices that are in harmony with the local environment, not at war with it like industrial agriculture,” says Edileu, a farmer at the settlement.

Such efforts are key to maintaining the critical biodiversity that agribusinesses are systematically – and alarmingly – eroding.



As they restore knowledge and self-sufficiency, the promotion of local seeds and the teaching of sustainable farming techniques empower communities. These forces also build strength and resilience in the face of increasing climatic challenges.

As Iowa farmer and noted food sovereignty expert George Naylor warns, “We farmers are canaries in the mineshaft. The rest of the world had better start listening.” ■

# Leave a Legacy that Endures

It's never too early – or too late – to start thinking about what your legacy will be. Making decisions about your estate promises to bring you precious peace of mind, but it may also represent the most realistic opportunity you'll ever have to actually 'change the world.'

By remembering Grassroots International in your will, you'll leave a legacy of lasting change without diminishing any of the assets you'll need during your lifetime.

There are many reasons to plan a gift through your estate, though far and away the most important is the feeling you'll get, knowing the profound impact of your gift on our world... a legacy that will endure far into the future.

As you consider what your legacy will be, here are some key points to consider:

- ✓ *You should provide for family and loved ones first, of course.*
- ✓ No decision is set in stone. You can change or adjust your plans at any time.
- ✓ Planned giving may actually offer you significant financial advantages, from tax benefits to a reliable stream of income in your later years.
- ✓ Planned giving may represent your best opportunity to make a significant contribution to the mission you care so deeply about.

To learn more about options for planned giving, visit:  
[www.GrassrootsOnline.org/what-you-can-do/legacy-giving](http://www.GrassrootsOnline.org/what-you-can-do/legacy-giving).

If you've already made Grassroots International part of your estate plans – or if you'd like to learn more about the benefits of planned giving – please contact Carol Schachet at 617.524.1400 or email [carol@GrassrootsOnline.org](mailto:carol@GrassrootsOnline.org).

## It's Your Legacy.

*Make it count when you make a planned gift to Grassroots International today!*

*"I like knowing I'm part of something that lots of like-minded people are committed to."*

– Allen Howard

## Seeding the Resistance

The farmer settlement where Edileu lives and works was once a site of protest.

For six years, families aligned with the Grassroots-supported Landless Workers Movement (MST) lived in tents to assert their constitutional right to land. After securing the land, ongoing partnership with Grassroots International helped the settlement achieve success – thanks to you!

These families – and others like them throughout Brazil – are at the center of an enormous drive to

resist the displacement and destruction caused by huge agro-fuels plantations.

While many families feel they have no choice but to give up their land, another Grassroots partner – the Popular Peasant Movement (MCP) – is proving that there are viable alternatives through its Creole Seeds Program.

Since 2006, MCP members have organized 40 community seed banks and produced more than 400 tons of heirloom varieties of corn, rice



and beans. In addition, the Creole Seeds Program is helping farmers resist the negative consequences of agribusiness while creating

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Everyone has a right to land, water and food! Enclosed you'll find my gift to build grassroots movements around the world for a just and sustainable future.



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Please send me information about including Grassroots International in my will or insurance policy.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Your e-mail, please, so we can keep you informed about how your support helps. *(We never share your e-mail.)*

- Questions? Contact Shannon Duncan at 617.524.1400 or [sduncan@GrassrootsOnline.org](mailto:sduncan@GrassrootsOnline.org)
- Prefer to donate online? Visit [www.GrassrootsOnline.org/donate](http://www.GrassrootsOnline.org/donate)

Our complete annual report is available on our website or by mail upon request.

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## Seeding the Resistance *Continued from page 3*

international opportunities for exchanging knowledge. And now farmers from Mozambique and elsewhere are asking MCP to share the Creole Seeds Program with them.

Across the world, in Palestine, the preservation and cultivation of native seeds provides a peaceful means of resisting Israeli occupation. There, seed banks have rescued native Palestinian crops from disappearance while the cultivation of these seeds keeps land in Palestinian hands.

Today, seeds are at the center of a struggle to preserve human rights, to protect human health and to halt the environmental catastrophes that threaten us all. Through your continued support of Grassroots International, seeds will continue to be powerful agents of change in communities around the globe. ■



Grassroots International works in partnership with social movements to create a just and sustainable world by advancing human rights to land, water, and food through global grantmaking, building solidarity across organizations and movements, and advocacy in the US.