

SOLIDARITY Notes

NEWS FROM GRASSROOTS INTERNATIONAL

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Peasants Benefit all Humanity, Create Alternatives for Life

Often looked down upon, peasants are perhaps the most important people on earth. They feed the majority of humanity (estimated at near 70 percent by the UN), and use agricultural practices that actually cool rather than cook the planet.

Yet peasants themselves suffer hunger at rates higher than any one other population. How has this happened? In a word: Greed.

For millennia, the rich and powerful have grabbed the best farmland for themselves, forcing others to labor on it. That's in part why the term "peasant" became pejorative rather than celebrated. Agribusiness and seed monopolies have created a food system based on privatized seeds, big government subsidies for big businesses and food markets, and little enforcement for the rights of either the earth or those who labor upon it.

We must act to change the dominant food and farming systems—to build a global movement that will end the oppression of peasants!

Grassroots International is committed to ending this oppressive system, and to supporting those at the forefront of creating a more just and equitable food system.

We are honored to support small farmers who are taking back the land and taking back their pride as peasants. Powerful grassroots movements, like La Via Campesina (with over 200 million members) refuse to allow Big Ag to trample their rights and the planet. In fact, after more than a decade of peasant organizing, the United Nations adopted the Peasant Rights Declaration to enshrine the rights of small farmers to work the land and produce healthy food.

Our partners cannot rely on governments for justice, so we're working with them to create change from within their communities, and to enforce initiatives like the UN Peasant Rights Declaration. It's up to us – Grassroots International, our allies, the global peasant movement and compassion and politicized donors – to make these rights a reality.

Together, we're working to build a global peasant movement rooted in local alternatives to oppression. That



includes spreading agroecology as a winning alternative to toxic chemical agriculture. It means promoting food sovereignty so farmers and communities can thrive, end hunger and restore ecosystems.

Here are a few examples of the community-led projects and alternatives that Grassroots International is part of around the world.

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Banding Together ... To Command Haiti's Future

It was a historic show of unity and people power—when a new national platform was unanimously agreed to by 153 populist organizations in 2018. A future that holds the promise of prosperity for nine million Haitians has finally been illuminated.

Something had to be done. The government's continual corruption and incompetence drained the poorest of the poor—so the people took command of their own futures. By asserting and protecting essential peasant rights, Haiti now has a road map to a more equitable society.

Grassroots International is honored to have supported the development of the new platform, which lays out solutions to the “extreme misery” a majority of Haitians face.

The comprehensive platform aims to transform the country through land reform, reforestation, support for family farmers, ending foreign exploitation, and raising women’s rights and status. **The renewal of hope in Haiti is palpable!**



“All of us need to work hard and find the will to make change. We must...build a dignified life for our daughters, our sons, our families, family farmers, everyone.”

—Juslene Tyresias, a leader of Peasant Movement of Papaye

From the Executive Director

As we round the bend to 2020, we are seeing the deepening of the political, economic and ecological crisis, at home and around the world. But I feel so grateful that you and I are connected to some of the most amazing social movements that are harnessing the grassroots power, to create real alternatives and forge a different future.

In this issue of *Solidarity Notes* you'll learn about how Grassroots International's partners and the movements they are part of are creating alternatives to combat injustice around the world. You'll learn how movements all over Haiti came together over six years to develop a comprehensive platform for the future of the country. You'll read about the innovative projects—from the first seed bank in the Middle East to schools teaching agroecology and political organizing to communities to Boricua movements creating a new Puerto Rico. And you'll hear from former board member Tarso Ramos about the change he witnessed on-the-ground in Brazil during our recent delegation. It's all truly inspiring!

We all know that change doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen. I'm proud that Grassroots International and our donor-activists are funding these bottom-up solutions and alternatives that put people and the planet before profits. Thank you!

In gratitude and solidarity,
Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director



Peasants Benefit all Humanity, Create Alternatives for Life

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Seeds of Growth in the West Bank and Gaza

In Hebron, our local partner started and operates the first comprehensive Seed Bank in Palestine. The Seed Bank protects and preserves local heirloom seeds from the West Bank and Gaza. But it does more than that – it allows farmers to maintain their food sovereignty, preserve local culture and avoid costly GMO and patented corporate seeds.

Anyone with access to land can find appropriate regional seeds and keep the land productive, which is also a form of resistance to land grabs based on obscure Ottoman law. Israel utilizes the law to claim ownership of “unused” land.

One local leader, and Grassroots International partner, summed up our common objective: *“To have your own independent voice and independent thinking, you have to have food sovereignty and that starts with control over your own seeds.”*

Solidarity in Puerto Rican Crisis

Puerto Rico has faced multiple “hurricanes” that impacted the archipelago long before Hurricane Maria – namely, the debt, privatization, and US colonialism. In the immediate aftermath of the 2017’s hurricane season, Grassroots International made a



decision to support emergency response work with political allies and other groups committed to community-based just recovery work in the context of social transformation.

For decades, grassroots movements were building a base of support to promote sovereignty and community self-reliance. Now, their work is needed more than ever.

For example, Organización Boricuá, a Grassroots International grantee, is building food sovereignty by showing devastated small farmers a new way forward. The first step is in the classroom, teaching agroecology—farming methods of self-sufficiency, sustainability, and resilience.

“When we lose our relationship to the land, people are oriented toward death, not toward life,” said Dalma Cartagena from Organización Boricuá. *“Land gives us peace, power, happiness, and abundance.”*

Organización Boricuá is also marshaling volunteers and neighbors to rebuild wrecked farms and help farmers start over to build food sovereignty.

Central American Peasant Leaders

Our movement needs more leaders trained to organize communities and lift up the voices of the people. That's what the Central American Peasant School is achieving. Built and

supported in part by Grassroots International, and run by La Via Campesina in Nicaragua, the school has trained thousands of aspiring leaders from all over the region.

A new generation of leaders is strengthening peasant rights movements across Central America. They're organizing to improve market conditions for small farmers, and to better the lives and futures of all rural workers and their communities.

Haitians Defend their Lands

Members of the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP) know that Haitians live in an ever-changing political and environmental climate marked by questionable elections and extreme weather. As a result, MPP's work around sustainable food production, alternative energy and better access to water resources is a lifeline to people in the Central Plateau. To address the mounting challenges, the MPP is expanding a broad educational project, which includes both radio shows and local trainings, to bolster the community capacity and resilience. With support from Grassroots International, the MPP promotes agricultural practices that rebuild a degraded environment, combat climate change, and build food sovereignty.



“I feel so inspired the Grassroots International is supporting frontline groups. It means us Puerto Ricans can continue to gain the power and autonomy to confront whatever is coming and achieve the self-determination we deserve.”

—Jovanna Garcia Soto
Solidarity Program Officer for Latin America

In Palestine, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, and around the globe, Grassroots International is working with social movements to end hunger and exploitation— by empowering peasants and Indigenous People to demand their rights to land, water and food sovereignty.

Through a Donor's Eyes

Dear Fellow Grassroots Supporters,

Being a part of the Grassroot International delegation that met in Maranhão, Brazil, was a great honor—and it left me with two conflicting impressions.

First, it was a joy to see the creation of a viable alternative to the vicious capitalist world of domination and expulsion. There I witnessed social movements of landless workers, Afro-descendent Quilombola communities, Indigenous People, and prominent women leaders coming together—and building self-governing farm settlements, worker cooperatives, community-run schools. How inspiring!



But there was also the all-too-real threat of violence. Encouraged by the new fascistic leader of Brazil, there are escalating attacks on human rights—especially against social movements and land-based communities. And in this region, there have been frequent assassinations of community leaders.

In this uneasy balance, I can see—with a fresh conviction—just how vital a role Grassroots International has in the world.

I was glad that our delegation had arrived at this fraught time, with a message of unfailing solidarity with people's movements in Brazil. We are determined to help them survive and thrive, and to globalize their struggles with a stronger, unstoppable movement for justice.

I have gained something precious from rural Brazilians. I could see with my own eyes their living alternatives, their real-world local solutions to an oppressive system.

Please continue your support of Grassroots International. Another world is indeed possible!

Yours in solidarity,
Tarso Ramos



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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.



Legacy Gifts Build Important Movements for Everyone!

You can help build a lasting global movement for peace with justice, through thoughtful legacy gift planning. If this is something you would like to learn more about, please contact us at Legacy@GrassrootsOnline.org or call (617) 542-1400.

Your legacy gift to Grassroots International of any size will expand our support for movements and programs that empower women, Indigenous People, and youth—for many years to come.