



**Grassroots
International**



IMAGINE. AGITATE. TRANSFORM.

40 Years of Grassroots International





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Dear Friends,

Grassroots International's 40th anniversary marks a major milestone in our long-term accompaniment of social movements working to transform the world – a milestone in what remains an expansive road ahead. At our 40th, we look back and look forward as we rededicate ourselves to supporting the movements and struggles that are paving the way. This booklet is part of a collective process of reflection by our staff, board, and broader community.

Apparent in these pages are both change and continuity. There is no doubt that our movement partners are up against an ever-intensifying set of challenges. The interlocked food, ecological, and economic crises. The global authoritarian wave, rampant war and militarization, and brazen attacks on human rights and rights defenders. An ongoing global pandemic, accompanied by alarming spikes in hunger as well as gendered and white supremacist violence. Corporate megamergers, repressive surveillance technologies, and more.

By necessity, movements have evolved with shifting global conditions, continuously offering up powerful new frameworks and strategies, from the bottom up. And Grassroots International has evolved together

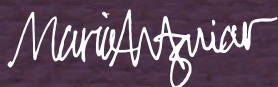
with them, as detailed within.

The continuities in our work are no less striking. A sharp focus on root causes, on politics, on tracing power to its sources – and calling these out. An internationalist lens that sees our fates as interconnected across borders. An intersectional lens that recognizes overlapping systems of oppression, and our own positioning within them. Clarity in embracing the protagonism of social movements and our role in accompanying them. A commitment to pushing the bounds of philanthropy, and challenging its very foundations. Firm dedication to praxis – to ongoing processes of action, reflection, learning, and evolution.

We are deeply grateful to you – our movement partners, donors, funders, and allies – for your unwavering commitment, solidarity, and love that drive this work. Together with you, we look forward to the next chapter of building and deepening solidarity philanthropy, in service of movements.

Onward toward justice and peace – for people, for the Earth, and for all its living systems!

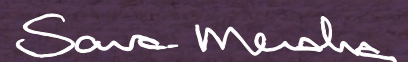
On behalf of the Grassroots International staff, board, and community,



Maria Aguiar
Board Chair



Chung-Wha Hong
Co-Executive Director



Sara Mersha
Co-Executive Director

OVERVIEW

Born Out of Necessity

It is 1983. Reaganomics and Thatcherism are in full force, further paving the way for economic globalization. Much of the world remains in a colonial hangover. Famine is looming in Eritrea and Ethiopia, but the world is slow to respond. Lebanon is in crisis following a US-backed invasion by Israel, but humanitarian response is hampered by divisive politics. Enter Grassroots International.

When Oxfam America shut down its emergency program in Lebanon under political pressure, former Oxfam consultants and staff Chris Cartter, Dan Connell, and Assaf Kfoury started Grassroots International as a “people to people project for social change” in a one-room office in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dan Connell shares:

“Our first initiative was a famine warning in 1983 based on the twin scourges of drought and war, fully a year before it hit the BBC and NBC. The second was the launching of a Peace in Lebanon campaign, aiming at halting US

military intervention and supporting a non-sectarian approach to aid. At the root of both crises were politics. There was no honest way to avoid that, though many tried. And from there, the rest is history.”

The rest is indeed history, which is still being written today. This section aims to bring readers through a brief overview of the origins and evolution of Grassroots International. The following sections then take a deeper dive into our evolution through six key thematic areas of our work.

From National Liberation to Alter-Globalization

Throughout the 1980s and into the 90s, Grassroots International supported a variety of struggles led by people’s movements in resistance to colonial powers, apartheid and oppressive regimes, including those in Palestine, Eritrea, the Philippines, and South Africa. We added Haiti as a geographic focus area in 1991 following the coup d’état that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and

**We have moved more than
\$50 million to social movements
across the globe.**

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR GROWTH

In 2022, Grassroots International provided **200+** grants totaling **\$9+** million to **50+** long-term partners and **100+** allies in **15+** countries plus at the regional and global levels.

it continues to be a key site for our solidarity work. Support for Palestinian liberation has been a consistent thread running through our work since the days of our founding into the present.

In the early 1990s, a mix of world occurrences – from the fall of apartheid South Africa to the rise of the World Trade Organization and regional free trade agreements – seemed to mark the end of one era and the start of another. In the words of Grassroots International’s current board chair and former staff member Maria Aguiar, social movements realized that “It was no longer a conversation about power in their own countries alone. It had to be global ... We weren’t going to win anything without taking it up a notch – because we needed to fight against globalized powers now.”

Indeed, economic globalization imposed from above was increasingly being met by a counter-globalization, or alter-globalization, movement from below. This movement was connected to earlier national liberation struggles while also different from them in its distinctly transnational nature. Grassroots International stood with these efforts on multiple fronts. We expanded geographically to areas that were hotbeds of resistance to the forces of globalization, including Mexico and Brazil. Our Mexico program later evolved

into our first region-wide program, on Mesoamerica, in response to the signing of the regional free trade agreement, CAFTA. We also issued our first grant to the still-nascent transnational agrarian movement La Via Campesina.

From Resource Rights to Right Relationship – and Beyond

The same year that we began our relationship with La Via Campesina, 1996, was when it launched “food sovereignty” onto the global stage – with resounding implications for global social justice struggles (see *Food Sovereignty*, p. 18). This was also the time of a growing environmental justice movement (See *Ecological & Climate Justice*, p. 26). Both of these emerging global movements would intersect and intertwine on multiple fronts, particularly around climate and agroecology, as captured in the slogan “Small farmers cool the planet.”

Following the energy of our movement partners, in 2005, Grassroots International adopted “resource rights” as the framework guiding our work. This move marked a strategic shift to work that, while still grounded in place, more intentionally connects themes across borders, particularly around defending the rights to land and territory, water, food, and seeds.





With this clear organizational mandate, not only did we redouble our commitment to fund global movements around food sovereignty, ecological justice, and human rights. We actively engaged with them on the work, from advocacy and social action campaigns, to bringing more progressive funders into the fold, to building internationalist linkages between US and global movements. A commitment to *long-term partnerships*, through active movement accompaniment extending well beyond funding, continues to be a hallmark of our work.

In the years since, we have continued along much the same path, with a broadened perspective and scope informed by our partnerships with Indigenous, Black/Afrodescendant, feminist, and youth movements, among others. First, we have moved away from the framing of “resources” to a more holistic perspective embracing the idea of being in right relationship with the Earth and living systems. Here we have been deeply inspired by Indigenous worldviews of *buen vivir* and rights of Mother Earth, as well as systems change frameworks such as just transition, and ecological justice as a whole.

Second, faced with growing trends of authoritarianism, right-wing violence, war, and militarization, we have more firmly embraced and aligned with powerful responses grounded in grassroots feminisms and healing justice. As a reflection of this, during our last round of strategic planning (for 2020-2025), we added *grassroots feminisms* and *healing and wellbeing* to what are now five interconnected grantmaking strategies, including *sustainable livelihoods*, *movement building*, and *human rights defense*.

Solidarity Philanthropy for Global Movement Building

Recalling our origins, Grassroots International was essentially born out of a need to mobilize resources to movements, with clear politics. Key to our growth and evolution over the years has been the cultivation of relationships with our donors and funders as long-term partners and political allies for the long-haul, much like the relationships we have with social movements.

Together with this amazing community of donor partners, we will continue to



develop a praxis of “solidarity philanthropy” – philanthropy based not on ideas of charity, aid, or top-down strategies, but redefined as a movement support sector. As we look to the future, in the midst of war and violence, extreme inequality and ecological destruction, the need to support globally powerful and connected movements, to build common struggles deep and wide, could not be more necessary. And at this moment, as we gear up for our next chapter, we continue to be inspired by our movement partners’ visions of a new world with “sustainability of life at the center,” and a powerful call to “globalize the struggle, globalize hope.”¹

We reaffirm our commitment to mobilize all of our creativity, energy, and resources to build a stronger, more sustainable support system – for social movements to build in ways that are both deeply rooted and also internationalist, to bring about the transformation that they have long been working toward and that we all need.

¹With thanks and recognition to the movements involved in the Berta Cáceres International Feminist Organizing School (IFOS) for their framing of “feminist economies for the sustainability of life” and to La Via Campesina for its slogan “Globalize the Struggle, Globalize Hope!”

HOW WE MOVE MONEY TO MOVEMENTS



FLEXIBLE CORE FUNDING

for movements to direct resources where they are most needed. This is our main form of funding.



LEARNING EXCHANGE

for movements to cross-pollinate, building knowledge, skills, and solidarity.



CRISIS RESPONSE

for movements to carry out life-sustaining work during emergency situations.



INFRASTRUCTURE

for movements to further advance toward their long-term visions through investment in physical facilities, land, communications, movement coordination infrastructure, and more.

OUR HISTORY

1983

Our Beginning

Grassroots International founded amid famine in East Africa and Israeli invasion of Lebanon. We issue our first grant for a shipment of seeds to Eritrea and launch our Peace in Lebanon campaign.

1991

Haiti Emergency Program

After a coup d'état ousts President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, we provide support to organizations resisting the military government and defending human rights.

1994

Countering Globalization

The fall of apartheid and the rise of both the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Zapatista movement signal a new era for Grassroots International: countering globalization from above with an internationalism from below.



1980s

People's Liberation

Support for people's liberation struggles, including those in South Africa, Eritrea, the Philippines, and Palestine.

1993

Popular Resistance in Mexico

We start our Mexico program in anticipation of the then-forthcoming free trade agreement NAFTA, and in support of popular resistance by Indigenous and peasant movements.

1996

Funding Food Sovereignty

As world leaders meet for the World Food Summit in Rome, peasants from across the globe converge outside in protest. Under the banner of La Via Campesina, they put forward food sovereignty — the right of people to define their own food systems — as an alternative to corporate agriculture. Just a few months before, we had issued our first grant to La Via Campesina for an international gathering in Mexico.

1998

Launch of Brazil Program

As the global justice movement grows, we commit support to a key center of the resistance: Brazil. Grassroots International is there on the ground, building relationships with groups like the Landless Workers Movement (MST). We provide the MST with emergency funding for human rights work.



2006

Mesoamerica Program

The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) marks the latest in corporate attacks on living standards across the region. “Free trade zones,” land grabs for extractive mega-projects, and more follow. We step up with a Mesoamerica solidarity program — supporting movements in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, along with regional organizing.



2005

Resource Rights

From the Bolivian water wars to battles against corporate seed patent policies, movements of the global majority continue rising for environmental justice and human rights. In this context we adopt the framework of “resource rights” for our work — building on our support for food sovereignty to bolster struggles for land, water, food, seeds, and the planet.



2007

Nyéléni Global Forum for Food Sovereignty

The global food crisis of 2007-08 means prices for foodstuffs like rice and wheat double. The crisis is born from the many problems of industrial agribusiness — proving the urgency for food sovereignty. Diverse global movements converge in Mali to chart a common framework and action plan for the growing food sovereignty movement. We are there providing multiple support functions, and help make participation feasible for our partners.

2009

Denouncing US-Backed Coup in Honduras

When the US government supports a violent military coup against the democratically elected government in Honduras, leading to intense repression, we increase funding to Honduran peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant movements.

2013

Climate Justice Alliance

As part of the resource rights work, we put a greater and greater emphasis on climate justice organizing. We serve as an early member of the Climate Justice Alliance, another advocacy and organizing alliance with members in the US, Puerto Rico, and beyond.

2015

COP21 & Climate Justice Initiative

Grassroots supports and participates in mobilizations both inside and outside the COP21 Climate Summit in Paris (and subsequent COPs). We launch the Climate Justice Initiative, raising over half a million dollars for frontline climate justice work around the world.

2010



Haiti Earthquake Response

An earthquake results in more than 300,000 deaths. While the International aid that pours into Haiti is notoriously misused and squandered, we provide emergency support built off decades of relationships.

US Food Sovereignty Alliance

Coming together with our US allies, we help to found the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA) to nurture and strengthen food sovereignty organizing and advocacy in the US.

2014

Solidarity with Palestinians

Palestinians receive the blunt force of indiscriminate and collective punishment as the Israeli military bombs and invades Gaza. 2,310 Palestinians are killed, 70 percent of whom are civilians. Grassroots International joins the international outcry and calls on the US government to stop funding the Israeli military. We step up our support for on-the-ground human rights, medical, and community mental health efforts.

2016

CLIMA Fund

We join our allies Thousand Currents, Global Greengrants Fund, and Urgent Action Fund to launch the collaborative CLIMA Fund to shift a greater proportion of philanthropic funding toward support for climate justice.

2018

Black Organizing Solidarity Between US and Haiti

We co-organize a delegation of Black women organizers from the US to meet with Haitian social movements, in collaboration with our strategic ally, Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity. This is one of many delegations we conduct throughout the years for donors and activists.

Donor Engagement Groups

As we expand political education for donors, we hold our first donor engagement group, focused on Palestine. This is followed by similar donor engagement programs around various themes, most co-organized with ally organizations.



2017

Puerto Rican Movements

Category-5 superstorms devastate Haiti and Puerto Rico, highlighting the intersections of the climate crisis and colonialism. Grassroots International deepens relationships with Puerto Rican movements working toward “just transformation” in the wake of the hurricanes, laying the groundwork for our Puerto Rico solidarity program, formalized in 2020.

Funding Environmental Justice

From 2017 through 2020, we host and manage the BEAI Fund of the Building Equity and Alignment for Impact initiative, channeling nearly \$3.5 million into frontline environmental justice efforts in the US and Puerto Rico.



2019

Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights

Building on over a decade of supporting community mental health programs, Grassroots International deepens our commitment to healing justice with the incorporation of the Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights (formerly the Martín-Baró Fund). This development dovetails with the adoption of Healing and Wellbeing and Grassroots Feminisms as two additional core grantmaking strategies.



2022

West Africa Solidarity Program

From hosting major international forums on food and land issues to launching a Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, West African movements have been at the forefront of global responses to land and water grabbing. We step up our support for these struggles by transitioning our nearly decade-long West Africa initiative into a permanent program.

ONWARD!

2020

Lifting Up Black Liberation

To support critical momentum on Black liberation struggles, Grassroots increases funding to Black and Afrodescendant movements to \$2.8 million and engages in donor organizing around this theme.

COVID-19 Response

Grassroots International responds to COVID-19 with more than \$850,00 in emergency relief grants coupled with support for long-term efforts essential to recovery in the US and the Global South.

2021

Berta Caceres International Feminist Organizing School

Grassroots feminist groups from over 40 countries participate in an international feminist organizing school (IFOS) anchored by our close ally Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJ). IFOS is an offshoot of a multiyear collaboration between Grassroots International, GGJ, Indigenous Environmental Network, and World March of Women to significantly expand support for feminist movements globally.

2023

Infrastructure Fund

We launch this new fund of \$4 million (and growing) as a key means of strengthening long-term movement support.



**The future is uncertain, but
our commitment is unwavering.
We look forward to shaping
history together.**



DEFENSE OF TERRITORY



Photo by FEPHAC

“Territory is related to our ancestors and to our cosmivision as Original Peoples. It is about our relationship with all beings in the ecosystem in the place where we live, including everything from deep underground through everything in the sky above us.”

– Daniel Pascual

Comité de Unidad Campesina/Peasant Unity Committee (CUC), Guatemala

From movements for national liberation and Indigenous sovereignty to resistance against the corporate takeover of land and water, struggles for territory have been a central theme of Grassroots International’s work since our inception. At its core, defending territory is about protecting and promoting holistic relationships – between diverse aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and the lives and cultures entwined with them. This struggle encompasses a variety of identities and livelihoods: peasants, Indigenous Peoples, fishers, pastoralists, and communities of color on the frontlines of extractive projects. Today, social movements are using the lens of territory to unite diverse struggles over land and water, focusing on the sacred connection between people and the particular places where they live – a connection that is routinely threatened in multiple contexts across the globe.

Among the sparks that birthed Grassroots

International were conditions facing Palestinians expelled from their ancestral territory through settler colonialism, and their struggles for the right of return. Then and now, Palestinian movements have emphasized the importance of territory in their broader struggles for sovereignty and systemic transformation. Attacks against territory by the Israeli settler colonial project – whether the uprooting of trees or the demolition of homes – are visceral for the Indigenous Peoples of Palestine. Supporting their struggles for territory and liberation remains a focal point of our work.

The Indigenous defense of territory knows no borders. Across the Americas, Indigenous Peoples’ movements have been highlighting water as territory. In the US (also known as Turtle Island), Indigenous water protectors have waged a historical cross-tribal battle from Standing Rock reservation to shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline. Meanwhile, the



Lenca people of Honduras have organized to stop the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam megaproject threatening the Gualcarque river, led by our partner Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH/Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras). More recently, Grassroots International has been learning from and with Indigenous movements in Brazil who are protecting Amazonian forests and waterways in the face of extreme right-wing repression.

Our accompaniment of struggles in defense of territory has grown ever more expansive since powerful financial actors set their sights on arable land in the Global South as a secure form of investment following the burst of the housing bubble in 2008, spurring a global

rush on farmland. Social movements stress that land grabbing also signifies grabbing the water connected to the land, including that which is out of sight below the ground. And they emphasize that this not only impacts the ability of communities to farm, but also to fish, forage, herd animals, and a host of other livelihoods.

Some of the most egregious instances of land and water grabbing have taken place on African soil, and across the African Diaspora, from Haiti to the Afrodescendant communities in Latin America. A particularly extreme case is that of West Africa, where highly secretive deals between multinational corporations and local subsidiaries have essentially ripped vast tracts of land out from under the people who live in deep relationship with their territories. A parallel process has been a corporate push to intensify agriculture by heavily commodifying it through the forced or coerced use of GMO and/or hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and other harmful practices. The results of these twin processes have been disastrous for African peasants and their Indigenous seeds, both of which are cornerstones of food sovereignty.

West African social movements have been quick to respond to these linked threats against territory. A key strategy for movements has been to use the lens of territory as a framework for convergence within and between their constituencies.



Photo by Brooke Anderson

Our partner the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles - West Africa brings together diverse social movements from 14 countries – such as farmers and pastoralists, and rural and urban people’s organizations – to defend territory collectively. An important way they have carried out this work is through cross-regional popular caravans that educate decision makers about ways to protect African territory from land grabs, including those purposed for climate change mitigation.

Territory is an issue area that intersects with all of the others we prioritize at Grassroots International. In its absence, food sovereignty, ecological justice, and human

rights would be rendered meaningless. The defense of territory additionally intersects with grassroots feminisms and healing and wellbeing, with the recognition of the body as a form of territory, and the connections between violence against bodies and violence against Mother Earth. Led by our partners, we are committed to further exploring these linkages across all areas of our work.



FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”

– Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007

Among the many struggles Grassroots International has accompanied through the years, few have shaped the trajectory of our work as much as the global movement for food sovereignty.

In the early 1990s, peasant movements from across the global South and North united under the banner of La Via Campesina to form what would eventually become one of the world’s largest and best-known social movements. Their impetus was that peasants and other small-scale food providers contributed the majority of the world’s food while bearing the brunt of an oppressive global food system increasingly controlled by multinational corporations. Gathering in Rome outside the World Food Summit of 1996, they demanded food sovereignty, or the right of people, not corporations or financial institutions, to shape their own food and agriculture policies.

In the years since, food sovereignty and the movements promoting it have grown in power and influence, inspiring policies from the local to global levels; spurring alternative food systems; serving as a counterweight to corporate agriculture and its false solutions; and shifting development discourse once narrowly centered on “feeding the world” through food security. Food sovereignty has also served as a powerful framework for convergence, uniting diverse movements across the globe. A key part of that work has been the articulation of agroecology, bridging the worlds of food sovereignty and climate justice.

Grassroots International is proud to have accompanied this movement from the start, with our first grant to La Via Campesina the same year that it launched food sovereignty on the world stage in 1996. This budding movement was a natural fit for us. From our early work on famine response in East




Africa involving getting seeds, livestock, and tools directly in people's hands, to support for national liberation movements in which struggles over land and territory were central, the basic principles of food sovereignty resonated with us deeply.

Over the years, our partnership with La Via Campesina has deepened and blossomed on multiple fronts, from support of its operations at the global, regional, and national levels; to partnership with many of its member organizations; to accompaniment in communications, advocacy, and the expansion of its donor base. We have also built long-term relationships with Indigenous movements whose rich cosmologies and histories of resistance have profoundly shaped understandings of food sovereignty. Through these groups and others, the food sovereignty movement has steadily expanded beyond its original peasant base to become the incredibly vibrant movement it is today, encompassing

other small-scale food providers (fishers, pastoralists, etc.) as well as urban, labor, feminist, Indigenous, and environmental struggles.

A key moment of convergence was the Nyéléni 2007 Global Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, in which diverse movements came together from across the world to articulate a shared definition, framework, and action agenda for food sovereignty a decade into its evolution. Grassroots International accompanied this process with financial, technical, and political support – with an active presence on the ground at Nyéléni and in multiple processes flowing out of it.

Among these processes was follow-up to Nyéléni in the North American region in the form of supporting a still-nascent and gradually coalescing food sovereignty movement in the US. Grassroots was poised to play a key facilitating and support role in



these efforts, building upon work in the years prior with allies like National Family Farm Coalition and Border Agricultural Workers Project (US members of La Via Campesina) to raise awareness of food sovereignty in the US. This involved infusing global movement perspectives into domestic food movement spaces like the Community Food Security Coalition, sometimes facilitating the direct participation of international partners.

These efforts got a boost during the food crisis of 2007-08, when the problems of the food system were laid bare. Through a series of movement-building events, various strands of food sovereignty organizing in the US came together with the 2010 formation of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA), of which Grassroots International is a founding member. Also around this time was the founding of the Food Sovereignty Prize in 2009, with La Via Campesina as the first honoree. This annual award, an alternative to the corporate-backed World Food Prize, continues into the present through the USFSA.

Today, more than two decades into the global struggle for food sovereignty, it remains as relevant as ever. As the food system and our

planet as a whole face heightened threats, our social movement partners and allies have initiated a new Nyéléni process to strengthen their collective capacity to confront the challenges at hand. Grassroots International is once again honored to accompany this process each step of the way.




Photo by MST

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENSE



Photo by CUC



“Peoples’ right to self-determination is a fundamental principle of international law. We have the right to make decisions that are not imposed on us by the US, France, and other powers.”

– Antonal Mortime

former director of Plateforme des Organisations Haïtiennes de Défense des Droits Humains/Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations (POHDH)

While human rights defense encompasses a wide array of strategies and issues, Grassroots International’s niche in this area is to support social movements in their efforts to defend, define, and realize human rights in the face of ongoing attacks against themselves and their communities. This work comes at great risk. That’s why movements are simultaneously taking their demands into the courts, onto the streets, and all the way to the halls of global governance institutions in pursuit of justice – making international solidarity critical.

Looking back over our history, many of our now long-term programs and partnerships arose out of instances of heightened human rights violations – from the 1982 Israeli attack on Lebanon out of which we were born, to the 1991 military coup in Haiti sparking our Haiti program, to the NAFTA and CAFTA free trade agreements catalyzing our Mesoamerica program, to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria motivating our Puerto Rico program. In each

of these scenarios and countless others, communities already living a precarious existence have become all the more vulnerable to violations of their basic human rights. Such violations have been further exacerbated in the face of a global wave of authoritarian regimes fueled by extractivism at all costs.

Grassroots International has long prioritized support for human rights defense carried out by our partners and allies. This work includes supporting movements to document human rights violations, strengthen collective security, campaign against impunity, and expand legal service capacity and litigate. Our human rights accompaniment also includes amplifying alerts coming from our partners to generate international solidarity, in some cases serving as the tipping point needed for their demands to be met.

A critical component of this work is defending the defenders. Across the globe,



those defending human rights are at heightened risk of harassment, imprisonment, kidnapping, and assassination. An example with far-reaching ripple effects was the 2016 assassination of beloved Lenca human rights and environmental defender Berta Cáceres, co-founder and coordinator of our Honduran partner COPINH. Movements across Honduras and beyond have been demanding justice ever since, with several important wins in recent years, and an assertion that “Berta didn’t die, she multiplied.”

Tragically, Berta is one of thousands who have met similar fates at the hands of state and corporate forces – a stark reminder of the very real dangers inherent in human rights defense, and why supporting this work on multiple fronts is so essential. To fill current gaps in global coordination on human rights

defense, several of our global movement partners and allies have joined together to form a coordinated network for movement-led human rights defense – an effort which Grassroots International is honored to participate in and support.

Our partners are also working on human rights defense through direct engagement in global governance spaces. One example is the tireless work by Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) to bring crimes against the Palestinian people carried out by the Israeli government to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Another is the reform of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) following the 2008 food crisis, catalyzed in large part by social movements. Social movements are now engaging directly in CFS proceedings to an unprecedented



degree. In the process, they are shifting global debates around food and agriculture; putting food sovereignty on the policy agenda; achieving the passage of innovative legal instruments; and pioneering new forms of grassroots participation in policymaking – even in the face of pushback by powerful interests.

Additionally, our partners are challenging the limitations of existing human rights frameworks – particularly around collective rights to land, water, seeds, and territory – by developing their own. A powerful example is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). Adopted in 2018 after years of mobilization by movements of peasants and rural workers from across the globe, UNDROP is a key instrument in global and national

policymaking in support of food sovereignty, and a reference point in agrarian struggles worldwide. La Via Campesina and allies are now calling for a UN special procedure on UNDROP to allow for its effective implementation at the international level.

Similar to UNDROP, another multi-year process combining grassroots mobilizing and engagement in intergovernmental processes is a global campaign calling for a United Nations binding treaty to regulate transnational corporations that are currently violating the human rights of communities across the globe with impunity. Grassroots International stands firmly with those driving this process – and with all of our partners in their struggles for basic human rights, with justice and dignity.

ECOLOGICAL AND CLIMATE JUSTICE



“Wake up humanity – we’re out of time! We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction ... Our Mother Earth – militarized, fenced-in, poisoned, a place where basic rights are systematically violated – demands that we take action ... Let us build societies that are able to coexist in a dignified way, in a way that protects life.”

– Berta Cáceres

Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras/Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras

Grassroots International has long supported people’s sovereignty over and the protection of land, territory, water, seeds, and food. Increasingly, social movements are approaching this work under the frame of ecological justice: the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance.¹ This broad framing is key to understanding the interconnected struggles that ecological justice encompasses.

Among these struggles is environmental justice. Capitalism’s destructive impact on the environment is highly racialized. The concept of “environmental racism” was coined in the early 1980s after the state of North Carolina chose rural and predominantly African-American Warren County as a dumping ground for highly toxic waste. This and other

events sparked mass organizing and direct action, eventually leading to a reckoning with environmental racism as a growing manifestation of institutional racism in the US and beyond. The call for environmental justice has grown louder ever since, and is among the core issue areas of our US-focused work.

The severity of climate disruption became painfully apparent towards the end of the millennium, particularly in the Global South and in low-income communities of color in the Global North, giving rise to a global climate justice movement. Grassroots International has accompanied this movement from early on, anchored in the belief that grassroots climate solutions, led by frontline communities affected the most, are the way forward. These solutions not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also address the root causes of the climate crisis in the first

¹movementgeneration.org/ecological-justice/



place – particularly the extractive economy that exploits labor and the Earth’s resources and that prioritizes profit over people and the planet.

A pivotal moment in the coalescence of the global climate justice movement was the 2010 People’s World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights in Cochabamba, Bolivia. In response to the failures of the UN climate negotiations, this gathering brought together those most impacted by climate disruption to analyze its root causes and to develop a collective vision of real solutions from the grassroots. A main output was the Cochabamba Peoples Agreement, developed through a consensus process involving over 30,000 grassroots organizers and movement groups around the world – including several of Grassroots International’s partners and close allies. Grassroots was honored to be present in Cochabamba as well as support the participation of a number of our partners.

Since that time, we have accompanied movements in advancing ecological and climate justice through real solutions like agroecology, community-controlled renewables, and Indigenous territorial rights. Based on the knowledge that corporate agribusiness is responsible for 30-50% of global greenhouse gas emissions, social movements are advancing agroecology, a science, a practice, and a movement around farming in sync with nature. Likewise, as corporations continue to extract deadly fossil fuels, movements are creating systems for decentralized and community-controlled renewable energy. And as corporations and carbon markets attempt to lay claim to trees, fields, genetic resources, and waterways, movements are putting their lives on the line to stand up for biodiversity and Indigenous rights to territory.

Ecological and climate justice movements have also constructed powerful political frameworks aimed at exposing and uprooting



what they call CO₂lonialism – particularly in the form of false solutions and greenwashing coming from polluting industries through initiatives such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), Blue Carbon, and Climate-Smart Agriculture. The complexity of this work has led movements to create new alliances and networks engaged in a range of coordinated actions – from mass protests and direct action, to learning exchanges, to research exposing false solutions, to policy work within global governance institutions.

Grassroots International has walked alongside our partners throughout this process, and supported these diverse solutions, strategies, and actions from the local to global levels. One example is our accompaniment of movements in the Niger Delta who are growing a Pan-African climate justice movement infused with a deep commitment to stopping and rolling back extractivism in all of its forms. Another

example is the US-based Climate Justice Alliance, formed in 2012 with Grassroots International as an early member. More than a decade on, this powerful alliance of 89 community-based and movement support organizations is uniting frontline communities in forging just transitions toward local living economies. We have been honored to support US-based movements in their efforts to make stronger solidarity connections with international movements, as we continue to accompany our Global South partners' courageous work to demand and construct a plan of life.



²ileia.org/2015/05/01/nyeleni-declaration-agroecology-for-food-sovereignty

GRASSROOTS FEMINISMS



“We defend not only the socialization of reproductive work, but also the subversion of the current system so that the economy, politics, culture and society are reorganized with the sustainability of life at the center. We also defend the bodily autonomy and self-determination of women, transgender and gender nonconforming people, since we know that our bodies are our first territories that we must defend.”

– Berta Cáceres International Feminist Organizing School Guidebook

Women and gender nonconforming people are among those most threatened in today’s global economic system, while also leading transformational change. Social movements have therefore centered a grassroots feminist narrative in their struggles and solutions, in order to deconstruct not only patriarchy but also racism, capitalism, and imperialism at large. The living definition of grassroots feminism, articulated by social movements, is “a worldview and political practice rooted in the realities and interests of women, queer, trans, and non binary people who have been harmed by the intersecting forces of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.”

Grassroots feminisms have been intentionally expressed as plural to embrace the broad spectrum of approaches at the cutting edge of challenging the binaries that were constructed to divide us. Gender dynamics are fraught with tension, even within social justice movements. Peasant, Indigenous,

Black, and Afrodescendant movements have long understood the importance of creating processes that promote gender equity within their organizations while also responding to gendered struggles in the world around them. At the same time, women and gender nonconforming people are building safe and intimate movement spaces by and for their constituencies.

Across the globe, La Via Campesina has articulated popular peasant feminism – *peasant* because it is from the countryside, and *popular* because it is driven by the people at the grassroots – as a movement manifesto. For La Via Campesina, a concrete way of interlacing popular peasant feminism with internal policy has been a commitment to gender parity in its structure and operations. Externally, the peasant movement took on a Global Campaign to End Violence Against Women, seeking to “publicly expose violence, in the social movements and in society.”



Photo by La Cole

Grassroots International has supported this campaign since its launch in Mozambique in 2008.

Likewise, we have learned alongside Black, Afrodescendant, and trans movements. In Grassroots' backyard of Boston, the Combahee River Collective came together in the 1970s to express a groundbreaking intersectional analysis of systems of oppression as well as sites of struggle and resistance. Our Puerto Rican partner La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción refers to the Combahee River Collective statement as a foundational document for its organizing in Black communities across the archipelago and beyond. Our partner Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH) shares ancestral wisdom based in a matriarchal Garifuna culture. Transfeminisms highlight how cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy operate together for the benefit of the few, and support us in imagining

the liberatory possibilities that come from uprooting these systems.

Indigenous movements have long pointed out the connections between gender discrimination, extractivism, and authoritarianism – issues that colonizers and land grabbers have used to divide and conquer. Many Indigenous feminisms are rooted in *body as territory*, expressing the inseparability of people from their lands and waters and the sacred place of the body as the first line of defense. Decolonial feminism calls this *territorio cuerpo-tierra*, or body-land territory, a methodology for undoing the entangled interventions of racialized capitalism, colonialism, extractivism, patriarchy, and violence.

In 1996, feminist movements that were politically aligned against racialized capitalism midwived the World March of Women, which would grow into a global voice for grassroots feminisms. The World March of Women achieved a historical milestone when it joined the facilitating committee of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty in 2005 alongside international movements of small-scale food providers and Indigenous Peoples. Later, after a period of allied work together, Grassroots International and the World March of Women entered into a long-term partnership in 2017.

Another major development was in 2018, when we jointly launched the Strengthening Grassroots Feminist Movements Collaboration alongside the World March of Women,



Photo by MST

Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, and the Indigenous Environmental Network. Among the outputs of this collaboration were support for feminist organizing in the face of authoritarian regimes, North-South Indigenous movement exchanges, and the launch of the Berta Cáceres International Feminist Organizing School (IFOS) to deepen global movement-building.

One movement framework that came out of that praxis was a crystallized vision of *feminist economies for the sustainability of life*. This vision “challenges the divisions and hierarchies between culture and nature, the public and private realms, productive and reproductive labor. We depend upon each other and we depend on nature.”¹ It pushes the

comfort zones of food sovereignty and climate justice by more comprehensively challenging systems based on patriarchal understandings of production and reproduction that are rife even within social movements.

On the ground, movements are indeed creating viable feminist economies from the grassroots, while living out the principles of multiple feminisms. We are honored to partner in this continually evolving work.




¹capiremov.org/en/tag/feminist-economy/

HEALING AND WELLBEING



Photo by Gabriella Báez/República 21 Media



“We have defined mental health as a basic human right ... We have carried on defending human rights at the same time as we have worked to serve the community.”

– Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj

Founder of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, 2012

Throughout our history, we have seen the importance of healing and wellbeing in providing movements with a bridge from the histories they have lived through to the future they are building. From our earliest days in solidarity with Palestine and onward, we have witnessed the collective intergenerational trauma wrought by ongoing settler colonialism, occupation, and militarization – and the centrality of healing to liberation. As Grassroots International has expanded our support to struggles in a diversity of geographies and contexts, we continue to witness how, in the face of often unfathomable violence and trauma, movements and communities make space for healing as a form of resistance.

As movements organize in diverse contexts, communities are turning to a variety of methods to heal – from community mental health outreach to healing circles of survivors of gender-based violence, to the arts, to

spiritual practices and rituals, to ancestral wisdom around medicinal plants and other ways of connecting with the Earth.

We have learned much from our decades-long partnerships – including to check in intentionally with our partners, who are often carrying the weight of others’ losses on top of their own. We have also learned to look inward and check in with ourselves, recognizing the connections between our wellness as an organization and what we project into the world.

While these issues have long been a common thread running through our work, we explicitly articulated them as a core part of our strategy more recently, as reflected in our 2020-2025 strategic plan. In addition to healing and wellbeing becoming one of our five official grantmaking strategies, we also identified nurturing “a vibrant organizational culture that supports the wellbeing of the



Photo by Gabriella Báez/República 21 Media

body, mind, and spirit as well as collective community building” as a core priority.

Just as we made these commitments, the volunteer-run Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights needed an organizational home to sustain itself after three decades supporting work at the intersections of healing and justice. It found that home with us, becoming the Martín-Baró Initiative for Wellbeing and Human Rights (MBI) at Grassroots International in 2019.

MBI carries the name of Ignacio Martín-Baró, a social psychologist and Jesuit priest committed to human rights, collective healing, and liberation, who was among eight people murdered at the Central American University in San Salvador in 1989. MBI keeps Ignacio’s legacy alive by bolstering grassroots efforts in communities affected by institutional violence, repression, and social injustice. The projects supported by MBI promote psychological

wellbeing, social consciousness, political resistance, and social justice – often drawing from ancestral knowledge and practices.

While MBI has become a vehicle for our work around healing and wellbeing, this work also extends beyond MBI to our overall approach to solidarity philanthropy. When concerns around wellness became even more urgent with the COVID-19 pandemic, Grassroots launched an emergency fund to support social movements in keeping their communities safe, from ancestral healing houses in Afro-Indigenous Garífuna communities of Honduras to mobile clinics across Palestine. We support similar movement-led healing work as part of disaster recovery efforts, and we are expanding our work to support social movements’ leadership in promoting healing and wellbeing in a variety of other ways, from collective care practices to ensuring access to health resources.



Photo by Gabriella Báez/República 21 Media

In 2022, we took two additional steps to deepen our work around healing and wellbeing. First, we joined the US-based group Move to End Violence and several of our partners for a learning exchange in Puerto Rico related to these themes. This process brought together movement organizers from Honduras, Puerto Rico, and the US to nurture transnational solidarity against violence in its multiple forms. In its intentionally intersectional approach, the exchange wove together struggles around gender and sexuality with struggles around race, class, land and territory, migration, and more. And it centered and uplifted powerful work around *healing justice* – a framework that we have been deepening our understanding of, in dialogue with our movement partners and allies.

Second, we instituted the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Healing (JEDIH) team at Grassroots International. Coming from a

desire to advance racial justice within our organization as well as through the work we support, we identified early on that a focus on healing would be a crucial component. Both the learning exchange and this new internal initiative signal Grassroots International's commitment to ongoing, iterative processes of learning, reflection, and practice to center wellness and healing in all that we do. We are eager to dig deeper into this critical area that our movement partners have lifted up as a fundamental starting point for social change.



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