Editorial

Fair winds for the Nyéléni newsletter!

Following the International Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Mali in February 2007, the social movements that brought this initiative to life have decided to create a tool for communication and exchange in order to continue the fight for food sovereignty and to defend the interests of disadvantaged groups such as small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and pastoralists. The situation of these groups continues to deteriorate due to the ongoing assaults of an increasingly inhuman capitalism. A new wave of land-grabbing can now be added to the problems of our times, a reality which the World Bank seeks to legitimize in its latest report. It is therefore urgent and critical for social movements to regroup and to strengthen our alliances in order to deal with the neoliberal offensives, unprecedented in the history of mankind.

This newsletter aims to bring a small stone to the edifice of resistance that will be built to counteract transnational corporations, the World Bank and their allies. We urge all organizations and all movements committed to the struggle for food sovereignty to embark with us on this great journey.

Ibrahim Coulibali
President of CNOP
National Coordination of Peasants’ Organizations of Mali
Member of the International Coordinating Committee of Via Campesina

Who we are

In the last years hundreds of organizations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organizations were present in the Nyéléni Forum 2007 and feel part of a broader Food Sovereignty Movement, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.


Now is the time for Food Sovereignty!
In the spotlight

A renewed threat to food sovereignty: land-grabbing
All around the world small food producers have been struggling for the right to produce food for themselves and their communities; and everywhere this right is jeopardized by free market policies imposed for years by WTO and IFIs which force them to grow crops for export or allow products to be dumped in their national markets at very low prices. For many years small farmers have confronted the concentration of land ownership and have demanded agrarian reform. For their part, governments are trying to criminalize the movements engaged in direct reclamation of lands as part of their struggle and instead of listening to these calls for agrarian reform and food sovereignty, are collaborating with private interests to move in the opposite direction.

Governments and private companies are stealing land!
Over the last ten years foreign governments and private firms have been increasingly investing and acquiring large surfaces of fertile land in other countries – especially in Africa and Asia - but also in Latin America and in Eastern Europe, for the purpose of agricultural production and export. The food crisis and the global financial crisis have caused this alarming phenomenon to intensify in the last couple of years. On one hand there are countries who want to secure food for their population in the long term, such as China, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, United Arab Emirates (*). They are grabbing land to produce food crops for export at cheap prices. Often this acts as a way to re-structure or “outsource” a country’s food production. For example in Korea it is better “business” to grow cheap food in Cambodia and import it than to produce food directly in the country. On the other hand there are the private investors, big corporations and joint ventures – including governments - who consider land as a new source of safe financial investment. Many of them are grabbing land to produce large monocultures for agrofuel markets or for carbon trading offsets. These controversial agreements on land have been taking place in secret and almost always there has been no proper consultation with local communities (**). 

The long-awaited report of the World Bank backs land-grabbing!
On September 8 the World Bank finally released its report on land-grabbing. In 2009 the Institution committed to publish a complete report on this worrying phenomenon. However even the World Bank, which works closely with governments and big business found it difficult to get access to detailed information. The report actually denounces the lack of transparency in the majority of these agreements, shows how many times these transactions put in danger the rights of local communities, and highlight the importance of small-scale farmers. Even so, instead of condemning this attack on people’s sovereignty, the Bank still thinks that land-grabbing and large-scale farming can offer a win-win situation. Small food producers have been feeding the world for centuries and various studies demonstrate that smaller farms produce far more per acre/hectare than larger ones (**). Instead the Bank seems to justify land-grabbing with the need to increase land’s productivity using unsustainable agribusiness models. This is why, together with the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) the Bank published a set of principles for “socially responsible” land grabs (RAI) in January 2010. The seven principles are constructed to look reasonable and persuasive, even though they are not. Transferring lands from local communities to corporations to produce industrial monoculture crops for export will never create a favourable situation for communities or for food sovereignty.

The FAO’s initiative to regulate natural resource tenure
In this context of land-grabbing and food crisis access to land and natural resources has become more of a concern than ever. The FAO’s current initiative to develop Voluntary Guidelines for Land and Natural Resource Tenure would provide a framework that States can use when formulating their own strategies, policies and legislation. The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and FIAN are supporting the participation of Civil Society to the FAO process and they are organizing specific consultations with women, indigenous and tribal peoples, fisherfolk, peasants and landless, forest communities, pastoralists and urban poor. The final document will be available in October 2010; but in order for these guidelines to be acceptable, they need to be binding for all countries. Civil society movements are also calling for a change in the current approach to land and natural resources; they say there is a need to recognize collective rights to natural resources and territories in the current legal framework (**).
Nomad people are characterized by their mobility(...). Often other peoples turn up and they think, «This land is abandoned, let's occupy it.» (...) Governments, private companies or the military arrive and devour the land of the nomads. Transnational corporations are probably one of the worst plagues for us, because they want to take more and more land, and the nomads lose their livelihoods because the land is part of their territory. The concept of territory is very important for all the indigenous peoples, but especially for the mobile peoples, because they have customary rights over lands, but other actors do not recognize that right». On the issue of land-grabbing he concluded: «Many governments grab lands, (...) they take it from the people without any compensation and without any previous agreement, and they give it to transnational corporations or to others, who want to invest in land, as for example growing agrofuels.» But he concluded: «In my country, in Iran, we still have 700 nomadic tribes, who practice seasonal migration of livestock. They are creating organizations to defend themselves and their rights!»

Voices from the field

Evictions are pushing small food producers off their territories

Last year, the Malian government sold off 100,000 hectares (ha) of its people’s land to the Libyan company MALIBYA. Libya is grabbing land to guarantee its own food security. In the same region, another 100,000 ha of land belongs to the TOMOTA group. This private group grows jatropha for the agrofuel market. Because of these agreements, many farmers have been evicted from their land. Antoinette Dembélé is one of them, to read more http://farmlandgrab.org/7483

Nomad people struggle for their survival and the survival of their way of life

Taghi Farvar is a nomad from the Shahsevans tribe of Iran, and he is the secretary general of the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP). During the Regional Consultation to Europe, Central and West Asia on the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Tenure of Land and Natural Resources, he was interviewed by Real World Radio. Farvar strongly defended the importance of natural resources and land: «The conservation of nature and natural resources is essential for the nomad peoples of the world, because in this way they protect their own way of life.»

Land reform in few steps

1950-1960 State-led land reform - After the World War II many countries carried out land reforms. Some of them were successful as in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Cuba. Others were big failures, generally when ‘reforms’ gave only poor quality land to poor families and failed to support them with favourable policies.

1980-1990 World Bank-led market-based land reforms – Since the 1980s the World Bank has taken the lead in promoting comprehensive land reform; including for example the promotion of policies to title lands; the facilitation of land markets and the support of ‘land bank’ credit for land purchases by the poor. These market-based interventions do not bring real solutions and in many cases cause new land loses and conflicts.

1990 – present Agrarian Reform from the people - Landless movements are bringing land reform to national and international policy debates. In spite of being constantly criminalized by the governments, these movements are growing rapidly around the world, from Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua, to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Thailand, India and countless other countries.

During the World Food Summit in 1996, La Via Campesina brought into the public debate the concept of Food Sovereignty, promoting an alternative to neoliberal policies (www.via-campesina.org). Since then, this concept has become a major issue in international agricultural debates. Food Sovereignty can only be achieved through redistributive agrarian reforms!

The information is extracted from http://www.landaction.org/display.php?id=422

Read and circulate it at http://farmlandgrab.org/12200

A large group of Civil Society Organizations wrote an international call to Stop Land Grabbing now!

Send a letter to the ministry in your country representing your government in FAO (usually the ministry of agriculture) with a copy to the ambassador of your country in FAO requesting them to ban land grabbing.


To read, watch, listen and share

In 2006 the FAO organized the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD). The FAO’s current initiative is the follow up of this conference. The final declaration of the meeting, signed by 92 governments, recognized elements of the peasants’ struggle for food sovereignty, including the need to support traditional and family farming; to redistribute land and other agrarian resources; the need to implement fairer and people-centered agricultural policies; the importance of local and national markets and the role of peasants’ organizations in defining agricultural policies (www.icarrd.org). The FAO and the other international institutions should take into account the results of the Conference and question all policies that move in the opposite direction, such as this new wave of land-grabbing. All around the world social movements and civil society are resisting and denouncing land grabbing!

(*) GRAIN, (**) FIAN, (***) The inverse relationship between farm size and output, (****) IPC, to know more please check the section To read, watch, listen and share.

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www.nyeleni.org
At the Americas Social Forum, social movements fight for real change!
10 thousands activists gathered in Asunción in Paraguay to take part in the IV Americas Social Forum, from the 11 to the 15 of August. The Forum called on social movements to strengthen the struggle for people’s sovereignty: food sovereignty, sovereignty over energy and natural resources and women’s sovereignty over their lives. The social and indigenous movements are demanding that governments keep all promises made to their peoples. In Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador - and in Brazil and Argentina – the peoples are encouraging their leaders to distance themselves from the neo-liberal system and concretely speed up the process towards a new egalitarian and sustainable model.

For more info http://www.forosocialamericas.org/

To read the final declaration
http://www.cadtm.org/Social-Movements-Assembly

Making salt at the US Social Forum in Detroit

Over a half-century ago, Mahatma Gandhi led a multitude of Indians to the sea to make salt—in defiance of the British Empire’s monopoly on this resource so important to the people’s diet. The action was the beginning of the end for Britain’s rule over India. At the US Social Forum, which took place in Detroit from the 22 to the 26 of June, the US food movement declared to be ready to “make salt”! A better food system needs to seek food sovereignty from the monopolies that dominate the food systems with the complicity of governments. In particular the struggle for food sovereignty in the Unites States is inextricably linked to the struggle for workers’ rights, immigrant’s rights, women’s rights, the fight to dismantle racism in communities, and the struggle for sovereignty of indigenous communities. In order to create a better food system, corporate control of seeds, land, water and natural resources must be broken up.

For more info http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/3001

The long struggle of European dairy producers!

Thousand of milk producers from many European countries demonstrated in Brussels during a session of the European Council of Agriculture Ministers on the 12th of July. Since mid-2008, the dairy market has been dramatically deteriorating; the decision of the European Union in 2003 to remove the quotas for milk production by 2015 and the parallel drop in the milk price are negatively affecting dairy producers’ income. The situation has caused massive protests. Dairy producers are struggling for fair prices, public supply management and for the end of EU dumping…

For more info on the milk demonstration

Farmers resist land-grabbing in Uttar Pradesh

A massive Kisan Panchayat (Farmers Meeting) led by BKU (Bhartiya Kisan Union) was held in Tappal village (near Alligarh) in Uttar Pradesh on August 20. This was the culmination of the ongoing farmers protests in the region over unfair land acquisition by the government for Jaypee industries. The land will be used to build the Yamuna Expressway as well as for the construction of a township and other private real estate development. The main and urgent demand of the farmers is to increase the rate of compensation. More than 15,000 farmers attended the panchayat and others arrived from across the country.

Farm land grabbing is a major problem in India with an ongoing wave of land acquisitions for development projects.

To keep updated on the situation
http://lvcsouthasia.blogspot.com/

News stories, photos, interviews to info@nyeleni.org by the 10th of October!

To read, listen, watch and share

• To keep updated on land-grabbing, check the blog http://farmlandgrab.org/
• For more info on land matters check the Land Research Action Network website at http://www.landaction.org/spip/?lang=en
• To listen to full coverage of the CSO Regional Consultation for Europe, Central and West Asia on FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Land and Natural Resource Tenure. July 7-9, 2010, Rome, Italy check http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Consulta-Regional-de-OSC-para-la
• To participate in the call to action Ban land-grabbing! http://www.fian.org/news/news/ban-land-grabbing-call-to-action
• For reports and more references www.nyeleni.org

One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.
Tashunka Witko, 1840–1877