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editorial

rooted in resistance: territories for climate justice

For Indigenous Peoples, peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, workers and other rural communities, land, waters, forests, and ecosystems are the foundation of life. Indigenous Peoples understand their territories as the total habitat they occupy or use, where culture, identity, and livelihoods are rooted. Beyond food production, these territories sustain essential social, cultural, spiritual, and ecological roles. Yet, land and natural goods are deeply contested, with their unequal distribution reflecting structural discrimination and historical injustices. Across centuries, processes of enclosure, colonialism, and dispossession have concentrated control in the hands of powerful actors, reinforcing oppression and exclusion.

Today, climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and environmental injustice – driven by neoliberal economies rooted in financialization, patriarchy and colonialism – intensify these struggles. Communities' access to, use of, and control over land and territories remain essential for advancing systemic transformations envisioned by the food sovereignty movement. Territories are sites of resistance against extractive projects that endanger health, livelihoods, and ecosystems, but also spaces where communities build alternatives based on agroecology. These models promote food sovereignty, dignity, and justice – social, climate, environmental, gender, and intergenerational.

As social movements mobilize toward Climate COP 30 and the Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, this edition of the Nyéléni Newsletter highlights the centrality of land and territories in shaping just and sustainable futures.

*FIAN International, Friends of the Earth International,
ETC Group, La Via Campesina*

From Nyéléni to the People's Summit: converging for change

« There is no single issue struggle because we don't live single issue lives. »

Audre Lorde

In 2025 and 2026 social movements have several opportunities to converge and build our systemic alternatives to the intersecting crises we face today. These moments also give us an opportunity to mobilize against the entities grabbing our land and territories, oppressing our communities and dividing our movements with far right politics – transnational corporations, oligarchs and their nexus with authoritarian leaders. The 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum (that took place in September), the People's Summit towards COP 30 and ICARRD+20 (The Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development) bring together social movements who work for system change, from different starting points and different geographical and political realities but working towards common goals.

At all these spaces the question of how to counter the escalation in resource grabbing from neoliberal policies (as outlined in article “In the spotlight 2”) is central. One of the key answers to this question is the demand for agrarian reform and redistribution.

The climate justice movement fights the fossil fuel system which makes our world unlivable, while polluting and grabbing lands and seas from fishers and peasants. We fight the military-industrial complex which is responsible for untold suffering, for 5% of global emissions and for criminalising environmental defenders while sucking up trillions in public money that should be spent on public services or climate finance. We struggle against the financialization of nature - when supposed climate action becomes another route for banks and hedge funds to profit from destruction, while dispossessing Indigenous and rural peoples. We know that climate justice isn't possible without economic justice - reparations for historical damage, debt relief. It is not possible without land reform, indigenous and peasant knowledge and tackling gross inequality. So we are sisters with other movements including the food sovereignty movement.

Food sovereignty offers a completely different framework to organise food production and consumption. It demands food as a human right, not as a commodity, focuses power back in the hands of rural and urban working classes many of whom are also food producers. It relocalises food systems and respects and builds traditional knowledge. The framework also politicised agroecology - the science, practice and movement of ecological agriculture which has become one of the most ensuring examples of grassroots solutions across the globe.

In the 3rd Nyéléni Forum, movements deepened and broadened the framework to achieve systemic transformation, for example tackling false solutions; opposing food as a weapon of war as we can see with devastating effect in Gaza and adding crucial economic and climate justice aspects. Expanding and strengthening our alliances and collective struggles for emancipation, justice, autonomy and the right to self-determination is the call of these moments.

Grassroots movements of Indigenous Peoples, peasants, fishers, Black peoples, feminists, workers and migrants are the main protagonists in achieving climate justice and food sovereignty and resource redistribution.

It is peasants, fishers and Indigenous Peoples that are the first line of defence in fighting extractive projects on their lands. It is the waste pickers who struggle for a world without petroleum based plastics. It is grassroots feminists who have demanded economies for life and care, not for extraction. It is communities of black and indigenous peoples who give to the world their historical and traditional knowledge of medicine and food production. Putting land back in their hands means the real grassroots solutions can become a reality.

Organised peoples have historically brought about progressive change big and small. Today we face crumbling democracies, the rise of powerful oligarchs and corporations in collusion with the political class. Together from Nyéléni to the People's Summit to ICARRD+20 we will face this challenge with hope and solidarity. With real, practical solutions that make the life of everyday people better.

« One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk. »

Tashunka Witko

in the spotlight 2

Agrarian reform and redistribution must be at the heart of climate policies

Placing land and territories under the control of small-scale food producers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural communities is one of the most effective strategies to advance climate justice. Secure and equitable tenure is directly linked to ecologically sound resource management of territories, sustainable food systems, social justice, peace and well-being. Without redistributive policies, the concentration of land and resources will continue to fuel ecological destruction and deepen inequality.

Land inequality plays a central yet under-recognized role in the triple environmental crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Today, just 1% of farms control 70% of global farmland, while the majority of rural communities, Indigenous Peoples, and small-scale food providers face dispossession and violence. This not only undermines their human rights but also weakens their proven capacity to act as stewards of ecosystems. Territories under their governance consistently show lower deforestation rates, higher biodiversity, better water management and stronger climate resilience.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, land has increasingly been treated as a financial asset, leading to speculation, large-scale acquisitions, and displacement of communities. More recently, “green grabs” tied to carbon offsets and biodiversity markets have accelerated, with such schemes now representing 20% of large land deals. These initiatives, marketed as climate solutions, often dispossess communities and erode ecological stewardship. Meanwhile, corporate, industrial food systems – dependent on monocultures, fossil fuels, and agrochemicals – remain major drivers of greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and soil and water degradation.

In contrast, small-scale producers – who use only 35% of global cropland yet feed more than half the world’s population – practice diverse, agroecological farming systems that enhance resilience and reduce emissions. Their contribution is indispensable for climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and food sovereignty. However, their ability to continue this role depends on secure rights to land, water, and territories.

The question of who owns and controls land is thus inseparable from the challenge of building a just and sustainable future. Addressing land inequality through redistributive tenure policies is not only a human rights obligation of states but also a social and ecological necessity. Agrarian reform can stop and reverse land grabbing, curb inequality, strengthen community-based conservation, and enable just transitions toward agroecology and sustainable food systems.

Therefore, agrarian reform and redistributive tenure policies must be fundamental pillars of climate strategies. Promoting them through public policies empowers rural communities and Indigenous Peoples to govern and manage their territories in a self-determined way. Special emphasis needs to be put on measures to ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of peasants and other small-scale food providers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural communities in the context of carbon and biodiversity markets. In sum, placing land under the control of rural people and communities and securing their existing tenure rights – in particular collective and customary rights – lays the foundation for just transitions to sustainable and equitable economic models and societies.

box 1

Toward the ICARRD+20 to advance food sovereignty and climate justice

The Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD+20) will take place in Colombia in February 2026, following a call from grassroots organizations of peasants, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, and rural communities. Colombia, one of the few countries advancing agrarian reform, offered to host this global event.

ICARRD+20 comes at a critical moment, as land grabbing, speculation, inequality, and ecological destruction continue to displace millions and deepen hunger and poverty. For rural communities, land and territories are the foundation of life, culture, dignity, and food sovereignty. Therefore, this conference is not just a policy forum – it is a space to demand justice, challenge corporate power, and push for systemic change rooted in people’s rights.

The first ICARRD in 2006 was historic, opening space for both governments and social movements, who organized the “Land, Territory and Dignity” forum. It paved the way for major gains such as the Tenure Guidelines, the UN Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), which strengthened recognition of land as a human right. However, despite victories in some countries, implementation has been limited.

Twenty years later, and in light of the multiple crises the world is facing, small-scale food producers’ organizations expect ICARRD+20 to go further: to confront land concentration, secure collective and customary rights, advance redistributive agrarian reform, ensure gender and generational justice, and defend territories as spaces of resistance, hope, and transformation.

box 2

Greening through data but data can't be green

While the movements for food, agricultural and climate justice want to sync their struggles towards system change, carbon markets blossom with digital tools and processes: finding information, making calculations, programing a productive activity, transmitting information across seas or automating the nurseries—among others—, and they appear as frictionless, precise and clean.

Under the new digital world order, small and micro farms, community forests, and even the backyards in peasant homes can enter the carbon markets as their capacity for CO2 sequestration can be calculated and auctioned.

Satellite measurements, precision agriculture with sensors in fields and forests, increased connectivity, widespread use of smartphones and tablets, modeling with artificial intelligence, increased robotization and automation in factories—these are some of the deployments that corporations hope to scale up as part of their efforts to offset their emissions. This would be combined with the payment of carbon credits, green and blue bonds, climate bonds, and other financial instruments to be discussed at COP30.

The boost that digitalization is giving to carbon markets must be denounced as the scam it is, a snake biting its own tail. Digital technologies can never be clean because they depend on fossil fuels to power data centers and gadgets, and require the most aggressive extractivism to obtain their materials.

Will we see large digital technology companies at COP30 looking to lure people in with compensations, while offering their tools to measure speculative emissions?

voices from the field

1 Timbulsloko: A village sinking into the sea

Susan Herawati, KIARA, Indonesia

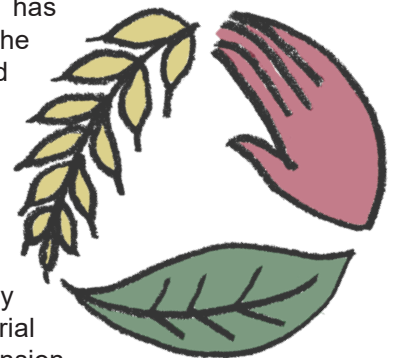
Timbulsloko is a coastal village in northern Java, located in one of Indonesia's fastest-sinking regions. Seawater intrusion was first recorded in 1990, marking the start of a dramatic transformation of the village's landscape and livelihoods. By 1995, the sea was rising steadily, climbing an average of 18 centimeters each year between 2002 and 2016. Together with the sinking land beneath, this rise has left much of Timbulsloko permanently underwater. More than 100 hectares of land and between 400 and 1,300 meters of coastline have already vanished, along with many homes.

This is not simply a natural disaster.

Industrial expansion has deepened the crisis. After the Lapindo mudflow displaced industries from East Java in 2006, they relocated to Central Java, attracted by lower environmental risks and labor costs. Demak, the district where Timbulsloko is located, quickly developed into an industrial hub. This and the expansion of Tanjung Mas Port worsened the situation. Industries extract massive amounts of groundwater, making the land sink even faster. As a result, floods have become unbearable, and every year more of Timbulsloko disappears.

This slow disaster has transformed the villagers' way of life. In the 1960s, the coast was covered in rice fields, coconut groves, fruit trees, and vegetable farms. Families thrived on rice, corn, and legumes, and agriculture sustained both diets and incomes. But as the sea swallowed fertile land, farming became impossible. Residents were forced to shift from farming to shrimp and milkfish farming, and now most depend solely on fishing – often under precarious conditions.

The consequences are severe. Falling incomes and food insecurity have left families struggling to survive. What was once a thriving agricultural community now stands on the frontlines of the climate crisis, caught between rising seas and unsustainable development policies that continue to push it further underwater.



2 Community self-governance of land as a path to climate and gender justice

Massa Koné, UACDDDD, Mali

In Mali, the struggle for land has long been a struggle for dignity. For decades, rural communities, women, and civil society organizations – led by the Union of Associations and Coordinations of Associations for the Development and Defense of the Rights of the Disadvantaged (UACDDDD) – pushed for recognition of their rights. Their persistence bore fruit in 2017, when Mali adopted a historical Agricultural Land Law (LFA), followed by an implementing decree in 2018.

For the first time, rural communities' customary tenure rights were legally recognized, creating a new framework in Mali's land governance system that protects communities' control over their resources. Central to this system are the Village Land Commissions, or COFOVs (commissions foncières villageoises).

The COFOVs are more than legal structures – they are spaces of grassroots democracy. In regions threatened by agribusiness and extractive projects, they return decision-making power to communities, who collectively set the rules for land use, management, and transfer. Women, historically excluded, now take leadership roles, pass on knowledge, and safeguard food sovereignty. Their presence affirms that land justice and gender justice are inseparable.

To date, UACDDDD has supported the creation of COFOVs in over 380 villages through a ten-step participatory process grounded in national law and decades of struggle. By prioritizing women and youth, this approach ensures inclusive, equitable, and peaceful land governance. Importantly, COFOVs defend not only equitable access to land but also collective management of territories based on peasant agroecology.

As the world heads toward COP 30, Mali's experience offers a vital lesson: climate justice will not emerge from top-down promises, but from communities governing their territories as commons. The COFOVs demonstrate that profound transformation is possible if communities are enabled to govern their lands as a common good, for the future of all.

3 The healing power of agroecology

Angie Belem Ruiz, Galaxias-UNICAM SURI, Argentina

Agroecological refuge galaxies are collectively managed farms in Argentina, created on land reclaimed from agribusiness. Launched in 2018 by UNICAM SURI (Universidad Campesina - Sistemas Rurales Indocampesinos), the peasant university of the Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero (MOCASE-VC), they offer refuge, healing, and dignified work to young people, women, gender-diverse people, and migrants facing exclusion, violence, or addiction.

I arrived at Las Galaxias when I was sentenced to prison for being part of a group of young people who had problems with drug addiction in a slum on the outskirts of La Matanza, Buenos Aires. The court sentenced me to five years. At the trial, a coordinator from Las Galaxias asked the judge to let me serve my sentence in one of their communities, working the land instead of being locked up. To my surprise, the judge agreed, allowing me not only to live and work there, but also to have my two youngest daughters with me.



I started by learning how to raise goats with Mabel, a farmer who taught me how to milk, ensure hygiene, cool the milk, and make cheese. Later, I took care of the laying hens: feeding them, giving them water, grazing them, and cleaning their coop. Today, at Galaxia La Dorotea, I take care of sheep and share responsibilities with other young people.

Thanks to this work, my life has been transformed. Producing healthy food and living in community has become therapeutic and educational. I went from being a prisoner to being a coordinator, with organizational and administrative responsibilities.

Agroecology healed me. It restored my dignity, deepened my bond with my daughters, and showed me that cooperation and living in contact with the land can turn despair into hope. For me, the Galaxias are more than a refuge: they are a path to freedom, while healing Mother Earth and building just and sustainable food systems.

voices from the field

4 Putting people in power

Movement of People Affected by Dams, Brazil

For the past two years in a row, the Brazilian Amazon has experienced the worst droughts in its history. Large rivers such as the Madeira River in Rondônia, the largest tributary of the Amazon River, which reaches a depth of more than 20 meters, fell to less than 25 centimeters in 2024. Throughout this period, traditional and riverside communities (in Portuguese: *ribeirinhas*) have seen their food and fish production compromised, as well as their access to health, education, and other rights.



The intensification of the climate crisis and, consequently, of extreme events has been happening faster than the state's response to it. Therefore, while continuing to pressure governments, the affected populations organized in the

Movement of People Affected by Dams in the region began to organize their own adaptation measures, based on the principle of meeting the needs of the people first and in a collective format.

In Rondônia, as a result of the struggle for climate justice, those affected have achieved the construction of more than 800 systems, networks for water collection, filtration, storage, and distribution, built by the people in a collective effort.

The populations that have historically contributed least to global warming and protect our forests are now not only paying the highest price, but also need to develop solutions without the same conditions. The answer to the crisis we are experiencing lies in putting the people in power and transforming society and development from the ground up.

Water for life!

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box 3

Agrarian reform, agroecology, and the struggle for climate justice

The climate crisis we face today is rooted in a long history of dispossession—where our peoples have been forced from their territories— and colonization whose legacy continues today in and the corporate control over our food systems.

The industrial agriculture model, which puts profit ahead of people and nature, has systematically destroyed biodiversity, polluted the planet, and worsened the climate crisis. Every year, we see this in extreme weather events, with the heaviest burden falling on those who work the land, fish the waters, and grow food for our communities.

To push back against this destructive corporate-led food system requires a fundamental shift in how we relate to land, water, commons and territories—and how control over them is shared. Therefore, for peasants, Indigenous Peoples, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and all small-scale food producers and land workers, the fight for agrarian reform is central to the broader fight for climate justice. This is because, simply put, without peoples' control over land, water, seeds, and territories, agroecology—the practice that heals the earth and supports communities—cannot be practiced.

Integral agrarian reform is thus more than just redistributing land. It's about reclaiming the commons needed to build territories of care and economies based on solidarity. This must happen through the democratic participation of those who produce and consume food. The agrarian reform called for by social movements like La Via Campesina is therefore a struggle for the material conditions that allow small-scale producers to live with dignity and grow food in harmony with nature, through agroecology.

Why Agroecology? Peasant agroecology rejects dependence on chemical inputs and corporate seeds. Instead, it nurtures biodiversity, conserves soil and water, and rebuilds lost or damaged ecosystems. It is a production model, a political vision and a way of life grounded in respect for Mother Earth and collective well-being of all.

By combining biodiversity, soil health, water conservation, and local knowledge, peasant agroecology builds resilient food systems that store carbon in soils and vegetation. These farms absorb significant carbon, helping reduce atmospheric CO₂. Tree cover, crop diversity, and ecological balance revive the soil, restore the landscape and prevent erosion, while regulate regulating local climates, maintain moisture, prevent erosion, and cooling the earth both locally and globally. Applied to fisheries and pastoralism, agroecology protects aquatic ecosystems, preserves biodiversity, and ensures fair access to resources. Pastoralists use mobility and rotational grazing to prevent desertification and maintain soil fertility.

The struggle for agrarian reform and agroecology must therefore advance hand in hand if we are to dismantle the corporate food system and achieve true social, economic and climate justice.