



food
sovereignty

Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

women and food sovereignty: voices of rural women of the south

july 2011



**Friends of
the Earth
International**



friends of the earth international is an international federation of diverse grassroots-based environmental organizations with over 2 million members and supporters around the world. We challenge the current model of economic and corporate globalization, and promote solutions that will help to create environmentally sustainable and socially just societies.

our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent people living in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment in which equity and human and peoples' rights are realized. This will be a society built upon peoples' sovereignty and participation. It will be founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and free from all forms of domination and exploitation, such as neoliberalism, corporate globalization, neo-colonialism and militarism. We believe that our childrens' future will be better because of what we do.

friends of the earth has groups in: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Belgium (Flanders), Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Curaçao (Antilles), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, England/Wales/Northern Ireland, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Grenada (West Indies), Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of), Malaysia, Malawi, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Scotland, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Timor Leste, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United States, and Uruguay.

(Please contact the FoE Secretariat or check www.foei.org for FoE groups' contact info)

sign up to our e-newsletter Voices of the Earth at:

<http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/voices>

follow us on:

<http://www.foei.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/foeint>

if you would like to make a donation to FoE, you can do it at:

<http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/donate>

acknowledgements Miriam Nobre (World March of Women), Jumi Rahayu (WALHI - FoE Indonesia), Eduardo Sánchez (FoE Argentina), Frank Muramuzi (FoE Uganda), Ann Doherty (FoE Internacional), Real World Radio, ERA/FoE Nigeria, CESTA/FoE El Salvador, CEIBA/FoE Guatemala.

technical data

name: "Feminism and Food Sovereignty: Voices of Rural Women of the South"
material produced by: Mauro Ramos Pintos y Martín Drago - REDES - FoE Uruguay
editing: Lucas Silva and Karin Nansen - REDES - FoE Uruguay
editing of English version: Joseph Zacune
correction: Pablo Cardozo - REDES - FoE Uruguay
design and layout: Nicolás Medina - REDES - FoE Uruguay

available for download at www.foei.org

july 2011

friends of the earth
international secretariat

P.O. Box 19199
1000 GD Amsterdam
Holanda
Tel: 31 20 622 1369
Fax: 31 20 639 2181
info@foei.org
www.foei.org

political framework by miriam nobre - world march of women

Feminism is a theoretical approach and political movement that challenges women's oppression, and the inequality that exists between women and men. This movement denounces the fact that women's bodies, work and desires are exploited and shaped according to the desires and needs of 'the other', of men.

Most strands of feminism challenge the fact that our societies operate on the basis of inequality, exploitation and oppression. Feminists also challenge the intellectual and political traditions associated with 'modernity' that modern thinking that distorts historical developments, and employs and normalises dichotomous structures - male/female, public/private, etc - in order to justify the status quo that disadvantages women.

This approach does not take into account or provide tools to understand the different roles played by women within our societies, or the diverse social reproduction and care work tasks they undertake. In order to confront this, feminism has sought new ways to build analyses based on the daily life experiences and transformative practices that are integral to women living in a world dominated by men.

As part of this collective effort, feminist economic theory emerged as a critique of traditional economic thinking. The capitalist and patriarchal economy is organised around the division of production and reproduction. Prevailing economic theory that considers the market and export-oriented production for profitable growth as the central axes around which socio-economic activities revolve, overlooks the nexus that exists between the capitalist and patriarchal spheres.

Reproduction is a woman's task. This has become an accepted truth because it is linked to pregnancy, to a woman's constructed identity as the carer of others, and to the manifestation of love a woman feels for her family. As an integral part of the capital-work relationship, the costs of reproduction are those considered most 'adjustable', especially in times of economic crisis, due to the fact that women's work and time are treated as being flexible, readily available and without cost. The current hegemonic, neoliberal paradigm either ignores - and therefore does not recognise or financially reward - women's role in social reproduction, or incorporates this 'natural' role into capitalist industry and services, through the exploitation of women's labour.

The feminist economy broadens the idea of work to explicitly include and recognise biological and social reproduction i.e. domestic, community and other forms of care work. We need to develop new concepts to refer to these activities, and to the

permanent availability of women, both of which are foundational aspects of our societies.

Ana Bosch, Cristina Carrasco, Elena Grau and others define the term "sustainability of human life" as a "dynamic and harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, and between women and men." ¹ It is important to note that it was feminist economists in dialogue with eco-feminists that coined this term, "sustainability of human life".

The efforts we have made over the past years to build and strengthen alliances among women from different movements and organisations, including peasants, fisherfolk, migrants, environmentalists and others, underscore the need to work on a range of different issues, including women's access to land, water, seeds, and ultimately territory. There has to be recognition of their knowledge and their contribution to the production, preparation and distribution of food.

The main challenge for the World March of Women (WMW) is how to promote this debate in urban areas in order to strengthen the alliance between women from the countryside and the cities. This can be an extremely rich experience but it opens us up to potential contradictions. We find ourselves at a juncture between recognising and valuing social reproduction (that is undervalued and hidden in patriarchal, capitalist societies) - for example, the production, commercialisation and preparation of locally produced food - and trying to involve men in these tasks, and confining ourselves to positions associated with the feminine identity such as carers and nurturers.

the agribusiness model

Agribusiness is a corporate-led, profit-seeking and market-oriented production model. This production is primarily geared towards international export markets or the provision of food aid as a means of dominating poor people by controlling their access to food. Another pillar of agribusiness is the technological model underpinning the 'green revolution', which involves genetically modified seeds and their associated chemical inputs; the intensive use of agrochemicals; large-scale mechanisation; monoculture tree plantations; and the concentration of trade in food and agrofuels.

This corporate-driven model incurs environmental, social and economic costs. The environmental costs are the direct result of the destruction caused, whether by polluting water and soil or by emitting greenhouse gases. This mechanised, industrial

political framework by miriam nobre - world march of women

agricultural model is also characterised by the use of fossil fuels and chemical inputs, and 'food miles' due to the long distances that products are often transported.

Significant economic costs are derived from this unviable model of production because it wastes huge amounts of resources, and absorbs massive state subsidies. This model is also sustained by a massive transfer of resources, including through the exploitation of labour.

The social costs of displacement are born by those who produce food, including peasants, Indigenous Peoples and pastoralists, because of the collapse of local production and mass migration. Agribusiness is also based on the intensive exploitation of people's labour and is characterised by poor salaries and the denial of labour rights. It may resort to forced labour as well.

Work is organised according to the sexual division of labour. In intensively mechanised sectors, such as the soy or sugarcane industries, men are employed to undertake the most qualified jobs, such as drivers or mechanics, while women are hired to do supportive service-oriented jobs such as cleaning and cooking.

Paradoxically, in labour-intensive sectors (including those related to the production of fruit, flowers and vegetables), women, in particular young women, are hired for low salaries and accorded no rights. Their skills with respect to delicate tasks - such as fruit packing - are exploited without proportionate economic reward.

This model is based on corporate control and the concentration of production and trade, which strengthens authoritarian models of society. These corporate interests are reflected in party politics, the structure of the nation-state and the way land and territories are utilised, whether they are covered with vast monoculture plantations in the countryside or large shopping malls in cities. This is an authoritarian and monopolistic model that is maintained by ideological and repressive pressure.

work overload for women

Poverty levels stabilised in Latin America during the 1990s, which can be partially explained as a result of the larger participation of women in labour markets: in around 25-30% of households Latin American women are the only providers due to their increased participation in these markets.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in households where both partners work

one third of the income is contributed by women. In a quarter of households, women contribute 50% or more of total household income.² According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), women contribute 45% of agricultural production for family consumption, a figure that is even higher in situations of armed conflict.³

Multilateral institutions such as the UN and the World Bank speak at length about the feminisation of poverty. Some authors argue that there is little information available, especially since statistics about income levels and access to services are gathered per household, and that this discourse itself serves a political objective. "Poor women also embody values that capitalism needs in order to operate, but which capitalism cannot produce by itself, such as altruism and solidarity".⁴

Women are considered a resource, a profitable investment. Looking at it from this perspective, the discrimination suffered by women can be considered a 'market inefficiency' and an obstacle to opportunities for women. Women are considered as producers of human capital, and investment in them can be translated into improvements within the labour force.⁵ Furthermore, many activities carried out by women are not necessarily remunerated.

The World Bank highlights that the informal market - involving 'women entrepreneurs' - is more compatible with women's responsibilities within their families. Policies designed to address this are framed in terms of how to incorporate the poor into the market and how to improve their income starting from very low levels i.e. one US dollar per day. This approach fails to tackle and reverse the unfair distribution of profits.

the struggles we are involved in

Resistance to this monopolistic and authoritarian model is carried out through struggles against transnational companies (TNCs), a point of increasing convergence between feminism and the struggle for food sovereignty. For example, there are women from the WMW in Turkey that are mobilising against Cargill, and women from India denouncing Syngenta for the pollution it causes in small communities.

Another feminist debate is related to the collective experiences of women in the preparation and distribution food. Most of these experiences are intermittent and are associated with moments of crisis. Although not reported, many workers' strikes were sustained thanks to the work of women in collective kitchens.

political framework by miriam noble - world march of women

In the history of the workers movement there is a parallel history of women working in consumption cooperatives and organising themselves to struggle against rising food prices.⁶ These are women in extreme situations that have united to solve reproduction related issues in a collective manner, yet they were generally not considered to be part of political movements. Some feminists portrayed them as trapped in their roles as mothers, in their reproductive capacity. Men viewed them as a symbol of male impotence, in not even being able to provide for their own families.

The polarisation of our societies also reflects itself in food and agriculture systems. Food is directly associated with the experiences and culture of communities. Yet due to a class division in food distribution and consumption, mass production of poor quality food is served to the impoverished, whilst healthy, high quality organic produce is provided for wealthier sectors of society.

What do we need to produce and distribute nutritious food for everyone? Can we develop alternative ways to promote conviviality and personal development other than through excessive consumption? Alternative experiences already exist and can be learnt from, including different forms of community-based agriculture that link rural and urban women, and can result in joint initiatives related to the preparation of food.

The initiatives promoted by movements, even if faced with contradictions owing to the fact that they occur in the context of a capitalist and patriarchal society, serve as opportunities to learn how to organise, to develop new forms of conviviality, new ways of living together and solving problems together.

This is directly related to how urban populations are organised with regard to care work, whereby many women are involved in the care of children, partners and older people. Thus the fact that many men and some women are cared for by other women, means they are free to work full-time in market-based production. This allows the system to continue operating. The result is that the time dedicated to looking for, producing, buying and eating food is considered "worthless" and "invalid" (according to Robert Kurz). The time one had to eat, to have dinner and for conviviality is no longer considered a part of daily life.

This is why we think it is necessary to work further on the issue of how the agribusiness model is influencing our lives in the city as well. Strengthening the principles of food sovereignty and struggling against the agribusiness model are not solely tasks for those who produce food, but for society as a whole.

In order to accomplish these goals, we should not consider people living in the cities as mere consumers, we should take into account their other urban political identities such as workers (both men and women), movements for quality housing and feminist organisations, among others.

There are a series of emerging struggles in the cities, and through them we can build other ways of organising daily life and consumption that will serve to strengthen ties with those struggles taking place in the countryside.

1 Bosch, A., Carrasco, C and Grau, E. 2005. *Verde que te quiero violeta. Encuentros y desencuentros entre feminismo y ecologismo*. In Enric Tello (org.) *La historia cuenta*. El Viejo Topo, Barcelona,

2 Abramo, L. 2004. *¿Inserción Laboral de las Mujeres en América Latina?* In *Estudios Feministas* vol. 12 nº 2. Florianópolis

3 Wiederkehr, H. P. 2006. *Recuperación de semillas locales*. In *Ya es tiempo de Soberanía Alimentaria*. Journal Biodiversidad, sustento y culturas. October. Montevideo

4 Mestrum, F. 2006. *Las organizaciones internacionales y la lucha contra la pobreza*. In REMTE: *Mujeres y Cambio*.

5 ATTAC 2003. *Quand les femmes se heurtent à la mondialisation*.

6 Tilly, L. and Scout, J. 1989. *Women, work and family*. Routledge, New York, London.

introduction

The aim of this document is to present testimonies that reflect the situation of rural women in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The voices of these workers of the land highlight the unbalanced nature of gender relations in rural societies throughout these three continents. This inequality is evident in denial of basic rights, gender-based violence, economic discrimination and the negative impacts of agribusiness and extractive industries which disproportionately impact women.

Beyond the impacts and discrimination suffered by rural women, their testimonies allow greater understanding of their roles in both economic production and sustenance of life, tasks often carried out exclusively by the community's female members.

In addition to resistance towards industrial agriculture and land grabbing, the testimonies show alternative approaches to the agribusiness model. Many of the actions taken by women to fight for their rights are in fact traditional practices they have recovered and sustained.

These transformative developments are formed through a process of resistance, struggle, and organisation by rural women protecting and promoting biodiversity and food sovereignty.

the testimonies are presented under three broad headings:

- 1) the situation of women in the rural sector
- 2) worldviews
- 3) resistance and alternatives

The first thematic area includes an overview of the main issues facing rural women. The second includes testimonies that focus on the values and worldviews of rural women on agriculture, biodiversity and work. The third section highlights the struggles and resistance of women and the alternatives they implement to secure a more just world.



Photo: Eduardo Seidl

1- the situation of women in the rural sector / testimonials

1- the situation of women in the rural sector

Rural women are faced with inequality and injustice on a daily basis. This includes the relative difficulties they have in accessing rights as compared to men. Other negative impacts are caused by the entrenched patriarchal system and burgeoning expansion of agribusiness and extractive industries within their territories.

The various roles played by rural and peasant women are fundamental not only for natal reproduction in the rural sector, but also for the preservation of biodiversity.

There are two problems associated with this. First, their work remains inconspicuous and their importance unrecognized. Secondly, women are overburdened by different tasks, which in itself represents another form of inequality.

testimonials

Far from being anachronistic, the testimonies of rural women from different parts of the world show how relevant their demands for land ownership are. While access to land is problematic for all peasants, it is an even greater problem for women. Friends of the Earth Nigeria have highlighted this with reference to the presence of the multinational rubber company Michelin in the Iguobazuwa municipality:

There is gender inequality in access to land. Land access is critical for people to be able to use its forest resources. But both modern and traditional laws tend to be interpreted in favor of male ownership and control. In some cases, laws bar women from acquiring or disposing of land without their husbands' consent. Women are often ignored when it comes to developing policies on forest management. When Government and relevant authorities claim that public participation is necessary in the truly sustainable forestry policies, it should be meant because women, who constitute a major segment of the public, are excluded from policy development or implementation.

Rita Osarogiagbon,
ERA/Amigos de la Tierra Nigeria

Discriminatory policies related to land distribution are also denounced by rural women in El Salvador:

Another form of violence is reflected when government policies do not address women. We clearly experience that women are marginalised from access to land and land tenure rights, which are mostly given to men. The same thing happens when women apply for credit as this is not available for agricultural activities and production, which is carried out by women.

María Ana Calles, National Coordination
of Rural Workers (CNTC), El Salvador

Uruguayan rural women make the link between barriers to land access and the lack of public understanding about the vital tasks performed by women on a daily basis.

Women generally don't have access to land and we often don't have access to housing either since many of us are housewives and don't have a job that allows us to apply for credit to buy a piece of land, which is what we need the most. Household work and taking care of the family implies a physical, psychological and emotional burden for women. It hinders our access to management structures and social participation. It means giving up time for oneself, limiting our own development and it consists of routine and isolation.

Statement by the Association of Rural Women from Uruguay (AMRU) and the Network of Rural Women Groups (RGMM), during Rural Women's Day

1- the situation of women in the rural sector / testimonials

This discrimination is not limited to the fact that the work carried out almost exclusively by women is concealed; it also typically revealed in the form of salary differences based on gender.

Women (...) in El Salvador demand that our rights as peasant women be valued and recognised. One of these rights is access to employment and a fair minimum wage for peasant women because in the countryside sometimes we are paid 2 dollars and 72 cents, sometimes only 2 dollars, and other times we are just given work as a supplement to our husbands or our elder sons. We are not seen as women who are worthy of dignified employment. People think that since we are women, we belong to the house with our children, doing house chores but when we do this kind of work we are not paid either. So peasant women feel completely out of place. We don't feel our rights are being respected.

Maria Ana Calles,
National Coordination
of Rural Workers (CNTC), El Salvador

The increasing appropriation of lands, known as land-grabbing, by large transnational mining or agribusiness companies is currently one of the major threats to life and the peasant model of production. This has negative economic and cultural impacts, which disproportionately affects women. This is what has happened in the case of Iguobazuwa, Nigeria as referred to above.

In Nigeria, women who live in forest bearing communities rely on forest resources for their well-being and of those who fall under their care. A recent study of the Iguobazuwa Forest reserve in Ovia, Edo state reveals that all is not well with the nine communities hosting the highly vulnerable Iguobazuwa Forest reserve where the Anglo-French multinational rubber company Michelin invaded the forest. According to them, over the years they are peaceful people who have depended on the forest and their farmlands for survival until the early months of 2008 when Michelin-owned heavy bulldozers came and invaded their farms and forest reserve without due consultation. This has brought untold hardship on the people, in particular women. This act not only destroyed their serene environmental heritage but also dislocated their economic balance, social and cultural affiliations.

Rita Osarogiagbon,
ERA/Friends of the Earth Nigeria

I train my children in school. I used to be a large-scale cassava farmer. People used to come and buy a truck load of cassava from me and then resell it to other women who then went to sell it at the market. So when Michelin came with their evil bulldozers to destroy the fruit of my labour....I fainted....nobody was there to help me...when I regained consciousness, I found myself lying on weeds. It was then I started weeping. I was truly helpless. It was as if there was no reason to live again. Now, a bag of garri that used to sell for 1,500 naira at the local market, now sells at N4,500 naira. Now, no land, no farm, no food!

Mrs. Victoria Odogbee from Aifesoba community, Nigeria

1- the situation of women in the rural sector / testimonials

In Indonesia, oil palm monoculture plantations have resulted in the privatisation of lands that were traditionally owned by communities. The industrial plantations have destroyed the livelihoods and culture of local women:

The women were catching fish in the river in the middle of the oil palm plantation when suddenly a security guard came and shouted to them, 'Return all the fish to the river! None of you has the right to catch the fish here. This river does not belong to you anymore but to the company.' Then the women returned their fish to the river and with a heavy heart, walked home in silence.

Stephanus Djuweng,
Anbera Hamlet Community

Indonesia We used to eat rice mixed with cassava, we searched for vegetables in the forest, (we searched for) anything in the forest at that time. We ate our own chickens, obtained fish from the river, before the oil palm plantation came. Then we truly suffered. We never obtained meat by purchase as we had to search for it in the forest, by fishing, (if we wanted chicken) we had to raise one ourselves. For pork, if there were people who had it sold, then we could buy it. It was cheap then.

Sra. Kusun,
Anbera Hamlet Community, Indonesia

To some degree, this land grabbing takes place with the complicity of the local government. In Colombia, there is the case of the sugar industry in Valle del Cauca department. Family farmer Elisabeth Martinez talks about how this industry is backed by the government-run Agricultural Institute of Colombia (ICA):

(The bosses) are the owners of the sugar refinery, and even though we are the owners of the land, they establish the conditions. So they imposed on us that we had to accept being sprayed with glyphosate. We had a five-hectare field planted with fruit trees and I started noticing burn marks on the trees so I went to the ICA with some sample., The ICA certified that the trees were affected by glyphosate but that was the only time they certified anything because years have passed and the officials that come don't want to see the situation. They don't want to see the dead trees. They don't want to see the decrease in production.

Elisabeth Martinez,
Rural producer from Palmira, Valle del Cauca, Colombia

1- the situation of women in the rural sector / testimonials

The fact that governments favor extractive industries and agribusiness companies is not new, but this policy is often so powerful that the State becomes protector of these industrial interests at the expense of peasant populations. This is common practice in many Latin American, African and Asian countries.

In Uganda, Alice Kazimura, a rural woman who that fought together with her community against the presence of British oil and gas transnational company Tullow Oil, has denounced not only the government's complicity with the project but also how the State is directly defending it and going against the will of the local community:

In Bulisa, there is general lack of food, land grabbing, intimidation and total unrest as a result of the discovery of oil. The living standards are generally low. Our area is located at the base of the western rift valley and the only meaningful activity for earning a living is fishing. Taking away this land would be a deprivation of my livelihood. Even amidst these problems, the government which was supposed to be defending us as citizens imprisoned some of the NAPE (FoE Uganda) staff who had come to carry out more community awareness-raising.

Alice Kazimura,
Bulisa Catholic Association, Uganda

These human rights violations take place in countries with governments that are supposed to uphold democratic standards, but what happens in those countries that fall under the control of even more authoritarian regimes? The situation of rural women is clearly even worse during dictatorial reign. This is what the women from La Via Campesina in Honduras stated with regard to the coup d'etat that took place in that country in June 2009:

We denounce the institutional violence exerted against women during and after the coup d'etat when women who participated in resistance marches were kidnapped, raped, beaten and captured. We denounce the economic, social, cultural and repressive violence suffered by women in the countryside in their fight for access to land and comprehensive agrarian reform. We denounce the discrimination against women when fundamental rights such as food sovereignty, land, health, access to education, housing and employment are violated. We denounce the increased repression against women and the high rate of femicides that resulted in the murders of 400 women in 2009.

Statement by the Women of La Via Campesina Honduras at the launch
of the campaign against violence against rural women

1- the situation of women in the rural sector / testimonials

the roles of women in the countryside

As previously highlighted, increasingly well-organized rural women are asserting the importance of their work and knowledge, which are fundamental for reproduction and production. At the same time, many peasant women denounce that their efforts are concealed.

According to Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria:

Women play major roles in forest protection and the management of its resources. As caregivers, they are involved in the day to day running of their homes, subsistence farming, the collection of fuel wood, edible and medicinal leaves for their families as well as other people around them.

Rita Osarogiagbon,
ERA/Friends of the Earth Nigeria

In Costa Rica, peasant women highlight the absence of the State in the rural areas:

We also fight for healthcare, because we don't have medical attention. Social insurance is extremely poor here. Things are very bad in terms of health care conditions in this area. There are no economic resources available for us to be able to work.

Alba Alvarado,
Network of Rural Women from Costa Rica

Peasant communities are suffering many losses due to the establishment of mega-projects in their territories. In the resistance struggles, women work to recover their lost rights and to provide for their children. The following testimony is from Florence Nyombi, a rural worker from Uganda who has been displaced along with her community due to the construction of the Bujagali hydroelectric plant. Florence has lost her land, livelihood and access to the Nile River:

I struggled for my family of five children and my husband in order to survive. It is during this time that I consulted other members on how we could ensure that our children continue with education because in the area, there was not any school. So I became a trained teacher with and after consultations with other community members I started a primary school from my house. Each student was required to pay Uganda shillings 3000.

I have been struggling for the 3.5km² piece of land which Tullow wanted to grab from the community. It is on this same piece of land where communities grow crops, graze their animals and perform some of the cultural practices. As a mother and woman I felt this was not in order because I knew I would bear the blunt because traditionally it is my role of woman to grow and provide food, to provide care to the young children and fetch water and firewood.

Florence Nyombi, Rural woman displaced from Bujagali, Uganda

2- worldviews / testimonials

2- wordviews

These testimonies could be broadly defined as pertaining to local communities' worldviews, including their views on work and employment, the relationship between people and nature, how to promote and sustain biodiversity, and the role of women and men.

Recovering values passed down by ancestors is a key endeavor for these women:

They [agribusiness] have made us believe that large-scale production is the source of work and that working means doing the amount of hours you are asked to do and to stop caring once you leave work. They have been undermining our ways of working and make it appear as if we didn't work at all. Thus we say that this is our factory to produce our food and sustain it in the knowledge that we are eating healthy, safe food. We have food and, most importantly, we don't have to see our children become malnourished.

María Guadalupe Tolaba, Red Puna, Jujuy, Argentina

She claims that saving seeds is one of the fundamental roles of peasant women and is how they contribute to food sovereignty:

In terms of food sovereignty, we see that our role is to take care of seeds so that they become our food and also to raise the awareness of men and our families that grow food, take care of our orchards and lands. Healthy and organic food is used to firstly feed our families and then to sell the rest. This fundamental role is not only for women but we take on this work as part of the our role.

María Guadalupe Tolaba, Red Puna, Jujuy, Argentina

The logic of social movements is extremely different from that of capitalism. Without meaning to leave men aside, this is more strongly rooted among peasant women from all social organizations where women have played a key role to recover seeds and grow products that are truly beneficial. We, the women from the peasant social movements say: *"the first thing is to have food on our table, all the rest comes second."*

We believe that the land should be in the hands of the people who work on it. This is promoted by peasant women because ultimately, those who have stayed in the countryside preserving the peasant model are women. The men...it's not that I want to blame them for leaving the land, but the capitalist system has made them leave and go to the towns, to obtain resources to live well because we have to have cars, TVs, and who knows what. -[T]hat is the logic that has been imposed on us. And women said 'no' as we think that we have to be here to take care of the land, of our children, of animals because they provide us with life, with a future.

Loyda Olivo, National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organisations (FENOCIN), Ecuador

2- worldviews / testimonials

In addition to saving and sustaining seeds, rural women have to rescue and maintain their ancestral knowledge. Graciela Lopez from Bolivia refers to the "recreation of life":

We think that on the basis of the knowledge of our peoples, I'm not sure if we can restore life to what it used to be but we need to recreate life and allow the reproduction of life to happen, based on our knowledge about traditional forms of production.

Graciela López, Latin American Network of Women Transforming Economy (REMTE), Bolivia

In Guatemala, women raise the need to promote popular knowledge in a horizontal manner because that way efforts are more fruitful and beneficial for the community than any top-down training promoted by government authorities:

Exchanging knowledge and seeds with other families has helped us to implement new ways of cultivating our land and obtain different, important seeds for food crops in order to feed ourselves. Training programs sometimes are not enough for all people to participate but if people share what they have learned then we promote knowledge, participation and the struggle.

Florinda Ramírez,
Peasant from Cuilco, Guatemala

There is also a shared vision that includes seed preservation, food sovereignty and the relationship between people and territories:

[T]he issue of native seeds and natural resources relates to people's cultural heritage. It is extremely important that we are aware that human beings are part of nature. We are nature. We are not outside or beyond nature and that's why we don't have the right to destroy it, to destroy native seeds and native crops. We are facing a forceful process of the capitalist model that imposes its way of thinking and producing. Yet people are realizing that these models are not good human beings nor for nature.

Noelí Taborda,
Movement of Peasant Women from Brazil

2- worldviews / testimonials

For us, rural women, food sovereignty means having our own seeds, preserving them and also our food. Our life is at stake and depends on having basic food from the countryside and not just in the countryside. All people should preserve their seed and their food. That is being sovereign in my opinion: to defend this food that we all need and to have our own production.

Julia Lezama,
Network of Rural Women from Costa Rica

Currently, rural women have the necessary knowledge to preserve biodiversity and manage agricultural ecosystems, ensuring the long-term replenishment of resources.

Statement by the Association of Rural Women from Uruguay (AMRU) and the Network of Rural Women Groups (RGMM), on the occasion of the Rural Women's Day

It is extremely important that we participate in the production of food. We preserve our seeds, produce food, tastes and knowledge since our ancestral beginnings and we pass them on to our children as our most important legacy.

Statement by the Association of Rural Women from Uruguay (AMRU) and the Network of Rural Women Groups (RGMM), on the occasion of the Rural Women's Day

Preserving, strengthening and working as our grandparents have been doing for years by protecting and using nature, not as a commodity but to produce our food... living in harmony with nature and defending it from those who want to take control of it to grow soy or buy land to establish mining operations. These activities pollute the soil and deceive people through claims that mining will bring progress and job opportunities.

María Guadalupe Tolaba,
Red Puna, Jujuy, Argentina

2- worldviews / testimonials

Seeds from transnational companies are arriving in our region. Those companies don't value the food we grow in our area. This is why we don't want our seeds to be sold to transnational companies. We want them to be our seeds, sustainable, Andean, the ones we own as Peruvian Andean people because they are organic and natural from our areas. The seeds we have don't come from other countries, they are ours.

Mirna Estrada, National Federation of Peasant, Artisan, Indigenous, Native and Worker Women from Peru (FEMUCARINAP)

It's like this sir, I don't want money. It's not that I have a lot. I don't have much but the most important thing for me is land because I'm a newcomer and I don't have land. So I want to say that for my rubber orchard that has been burned down, you can just cut them down and replace them with oil palm but with condition that the same area will still be mine.

Mrs. Dom, Anbera Hamlet community, Indonesia

3- resistance and alternatives / testimonials

3) resistance and alternatives

This section highlights, in both political and economic terms, the process of building alternatives promoted by rural and peasant women. These alternatives are not just part of a wish list, but consist of the existing ways of working and living that rural women carry out in contrast to the production model that threatens their communities and territories.

Rural women are permanently concerned with rescuing and maintaining biodiversity, and preserving the land. These concerns are reflected in the use of more sustainable "agro-ecological" practices, and also in political organization:

In fact, the people from our movements are already doing it. In Brazil, especially in the Movement of Peasant Women is working hard on the issue of peasant agriculture so that we can recover our seeds and produce our own food. That this food is healthy, not full of poison, of agrochemicals. We are already working in that direction.

Noelí Taborda, Movement of Peasant Women from Brazil

Patricia is a member of Bionatur, a network of organic producers from Brazil that recovers, preserves, and maintains seeds, commercialising them to "counteract the dominant production model." Patricia, who works in this network together with more than 200 families is part of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), emphasized the importance of saving and protecting seeds:

Preserving seeds is preserving the heritage of the past, which preserves the link with past generations, so it is preserving our future because as we lose our heritage and culture, we are more vulnerable and could lose our identity.

Patricia, Bionatur,
Landless Rural Workers Movement of Brazil

Political self-organisation is increasingly valued and implemented by women in the countryside, in response to an increasingly desperate situation:

We have been working for many years on the issues that we face as women by meeting with each other to strengthen ourselves, gain confidence and participate. I think it is extremely important to regain awareness as women and regain the role of grandmothers and mothers but also of young women who we have been forced to neglect. Preserving, strengthening and working as our grandparents have been doing for years by protecting and using nature, not as a commodity but to produce our food... living in harmony with nature and defending it from those who want to take control of it to grow soy or buy land to establish mining operations. These activities pollute the soil and deceive people through claims that mining will bring progress and job opportunities.

María Guadalupe Tolaba, Red Puna, Jujuy, Argentina

3- resistance and alternatives / testimonials

Carmen, a Uruguayan rural woman, also referred to the importance of having a space to share common problems:

Many years ago when working in Las Violetas someone introduced me to a group of rural women and I joined them. It was a discovery for me and even more for people like us that wake up early in the morning, take care of our family, our children, pruning, planting...and there is not much time left for us. Men usually go to the bar, but women don't have a space. (At the organisation we discuss) serious issues for women derived from a situation of isolation that could lead to depression or even suicide in extreme conditions. When you share your problems you realise the scale of your problems and that you are not the only one suffering them.

Carmen Carlini, Association of Rural Women of Uruguay (AMRU)

In contrast to the repression, violations and lack of access to basic rights, the organisation, political work and awareness-raising processes are growing among rural women. Several of these testimonies were gathered in the framework of powerful struggles carried out by women. The testimony of Maria Ana Calles from El Salvador was gathered at an activity organised by her group on the Day Against Violence Towards Women on November 25th and the testimonies of Uruguayan rural women were gathered on the International Day of Rural Women.

The Honduran women were interviewed at the launch of a campaign against violence towards rural women organised by La Via Campesina. The testimony of Maria Guadalupe Tolaba from the Red Puna was gathered at the Assembly of Women during the first national congress of the National Peasant and Indigenous Movement (MNCI) in Argentina.

Often the most powerful form of resistance for peasant and indigenous women is to remain in the countryside:

The ones who stayed in the countryside preserving the peasant model are women. Women have said 'no' as we think that we have to stay here to preserve the land of our children, our animals as they are the ones that provide life. We have a stronger attachment and stronger passion for land and natural resources.

Loyda Olivo, in charge of the section on women and families National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations (FENOCIN), Ecuador

3- resistance and alternatives / testimonials

Political capacity-building is considered a fundamental tool for the defense of rights:

Politic education is important for supporting the women's movement in Sorowako. This would involve providing information about women's rights and strengthening the collective movement against repression.

Daya Montong,
Sulawesi, Indonesia

In 2009, during the drilling phase of Kasemene, we spent sleepless nights due to a lot of noise during blasting and air pollution caused by oil flares. I have been battling with oil companies trying to grab the small pieces of land I own and violating other human rights.

I have been struggling for the 3.5km² piece of land, which Tullow wanted to grab from the community. It is on this same piece of land where communities grow crops, graze their animals and perform some of the cultural practices.

Alice Kazimura,

Alice Kazimura,
Bulisa Catholic Association, Uganda



references

The following list includes the sources of the testimonies and the other documents used. Some documents haven't been published yet or are not available online. For the rest, we have included the links where the complete testimonies are available.

Alba Alvarado, Network of Rural Women, Costa Rica. Available at: <http://radiomundoreal.fm/No-tenemos-tierra-para-trabajar>

Alice Kazimura, Bulisa Catholic Association, Uganda. Testimony provided by NAPE/Friends of the Earth Uganda

Daya Montong, Sulawesi, Indonesia. Available at: <http://www.foei.org/en/resources/video/community-testimonies/asia-pacific/2009/10/19/re-sisters-daya-montong-from-indonesia>

Declaration of the Association of Rural Women of Uruguay (AMRU) and the Network of Groups of Rural Women (RGM/Via Campesina) in the World Day of Rural Women. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Juntas-en-su-Dia>

Elisabeth Martínez de Londoño, food producer from Palmira municipality, Valle del Cauca. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Paraiso-envenenado>

Florence Nyombi, displaced rural women from Bujagali, Uganda. Testimony provided by NAPE/Friends of the Earth Uganda.

Florinda Ramírez, Cuilco, Guatemala. Claudia Jerónimo (unpublished) "Rancho Por Venir". Interview. CEIBA/Friends of the Earth Guatemala.

Graciela López, Latin American Network of Women Transforming Economy (REMTE). Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Para-vivir-bien>

Julia Lezama, Network of Rural Women, Costa Rica. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/La-tierra-que-sufre>

Loyda Olivo, National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations (FENOCIN). Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Primero-la-mesa>

Maria Ana Calles, National Coordination of Rural Workers (CNTC), El Salvador. Available at: <http://radiomundoreal.fm/Compromiso-diario>

María Guadalupe Tolaba, Red Puna, Jujuy. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Nuestra-fabrica>

Mrs. Dom, Anbera Hamlet Community, Indonesia. From Julia Kam (unpublished) "The Gender Implications of Oil Palm Plantation on Indigenous Hibun Dayak Women in West Kalimantan, Indonesia". Julia Kam was President of the Regional Council of WALHI of West Kalimantan in 2006-2009.

Women of La Via Campesina Honduras launch campaign against violence towards women in the countryside. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Ellas-dicen>

Noelí Taborda, Movement of Peasant Women from Brazil. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Tecendo-alternativas>

Rita Osarogiagbon (unpublished) "Forests as Livewire to Human and Biological Diversity". ERA/FoE Nigeria.

Sra. Kusun, Anbera Hamlet Community, Indonesia. From Julia Kam (unpublished) "The Gender Implications of Oil Palm Plantation on Indigenous Hibun Dayak Women in West Kalimantan, Indonesia". Julia Kam was President of the Regional Council of WALHI of West Kalimantan in 2006-2009.

Stephanus Djuweng, Anbera Hamlet Community, Indonesia. From Julia Kam (unpublished) "The Gender Implications of Oil Palm Plantation on Indigenous Hibun Dayak Women in West Kalimantan, Indonesia". Julia Kam was President of the Regional Council of WALHI of West Kalimantan in 2006-2009.

Tatiana Bello, National Union for Agriculture and Food. Colombia. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Apuesta-en-falso>

Victoria Odogbee, Aifesoba Community, Nigeria. From Rita Osarogiagbon (unpublished) "Forests as Livewire to Human and Biological Diversity". ERA/FoE Nigeria.

www.foei.org



**Friends of
the Earth
International**



**Friends of
the Earth
International**