



Peasant Agroecology Achieves Climate Justice

a primer



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This primer is developed as part of the project Building Climate Justice Advocacy with small-scale farmers in Southern and Eastern Africa developed and implemented in partnership between Afrika Kontakt and La Via Campesina in Southern and Eastern Africa (LVC -SEAf), with input from allies.



Both La Via Campesina and Afrika Kontakt agree that we are far from solving the climate crisis. The fundamental part of the problem has not been addressed: That it is our global socio-economic system that is causing climate change. Therefore, we must demand that the system is changed. More than that, we need to play our part in the creation of alternative strategies for real change. During the COP21 in Paris, climate activists were calling for justice under the rallying cries of system change, not climate change. Many of these activists come from the frontline battles of climate change. For them climate change is real and happening on an everyday basis. For them there is no more time to wait around for politicians to take action. Instead they are taking actions themselves through practices that remain ignored by many politicians and policy-makers or are actively undermined by the system.

The aim of this primer is to show the impacts that small-scale peasants are facing from climate change, but also the solutions they are using to address climate change. This primer draws on the knowledge of peasant farming communities from Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, D.R. Congo, Kenya, and Mozambique. Due to their communities' strong connection to—and dependence on—nature and its natural resources, they are some of the most vulnerable in the world to the impacts of climate change. But their close connection has also enabled large bodies of knowledge that have been passed on through generations and which could offer much needed solutions to the climate crisis. The current state of play with the international negotiations, along with the calamitous projections for the future climate, calls for urgent action. We now know for sure that the system that caused climate change will not be the system to solve it. Instead we need to open our eyes to the many solutions that are already happening, and we need to scale them up. This entails a change in the global system.

Glossary

Climate Change is long term changes in the Earth's climate caused by human activity, which generally leads to warmer global average temperatures and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.

Corporations are organisation that seeks to maximise their profits in terms of money (or substitutes), usually by selling a product without regard to the consequences of their profit seeking on nature and on people. In the context of this primer, this mostly refers to transnational corporations (TNCs).

Extractivism is a mode of production and a way of thinking about Mother Earth, not as a living organism, but a mere (albeit valuable) resource to be dominated and exploited for profit. Its history is marked with gross violations of human rights of local communities and of countries as a whole, and it is the main cause for the degradation of ecosystems and nature more generally, because these are seen as less important than the value that they can make for private (and public) capital in the market.

Patriarchy is a system that oppresses, exploits and commodifies women (their bodies, lives and sexuality), and women's work (formal and informal, overwork as well as the type of work and working conditions); and deprives them of access to common goods (resources, water, land, environmental protection, and food sovereignty). Patriarchy is also engrained in many traditions and norms, which are often used to maintain this hierarchy and power.

False Solutions are programs and policies that are promoted by corporations, agribusinesses, and governments as solutions to climate change. However, these solutions use the same capitalist practices and logic as those that caused climate change in the first place. These include commodification, extractivism, GMOs, and greenhouse gas intensive agriculture, among others. Such solutions promoted by corporate elites are based on market, trade and consequently on exploitation.

Greenhouse gases (GHG)/emissions are the primary driver of climate change. They are gases emitted to the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels in industry and transport, degradation of soil, and land use change which alter the atmosphere to retain more heat and change the climate.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are an organism in which the genetic material has been altered to give it a desired trait. In agriculture this is primarily used to give the plant resistance to pesticides and herbicides. International Intellectual Property laws allow companies to own the genetic material of the plant as intellectual property, and control the supply of that seed.

Agribusiness is a type of corporation that produces food or agricultural products (agrofuels, textiles, etc.) for profit, mostly aimed at international markets. In the context of this primer, we refer to those whose products are primarily produced through the use of modern, mechanized, industrial agriculture on large plantations, with a high reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and are processed industrially and distributed globally.

Commodification is the transformation of goods, services, ideas and even people into objects of trade (to buy and sell) called “commodities”. Many current false solutions are founded on the commodification of our common goods like water, forests, and air.

Food Sovereignty is a conception of a food system that respects the rights of food producers to produce and commercialize culturally appropriate food, as well as the right of consumers to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced. It denies the influence of corporations who seek to profit from the production of food. Food Sovereignty is about systemic change – about human beings having direct, democratic control over the most important elements of their society – how we feed and nourish ourselves, how we use and maintain the land, water and other natural resources around us for the benefit of current and future generations, and how we interact with other groups, peoples and cultures.

The impacts of climate change are real

The term climate change refers to long-term changes in the Earth's climate apparent from the late 20th century. It is caused by increasing greenhouse gas emissions as well as degradation of nature that reduces its ability to capture those emissions from the atmosphere. This causes changes in the earth's climate that adversely affects weather cycles, such as rain patterns, and causes more frequent extreme natural disasters such as devastating floods, tropical storms, and droughts.

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Climate change is already causing destructive changes. While the consequences of climate change affect everyone regardless of borders and other constructed boundaries, those who are responsible for climate change are not the ones to bear its burden. In fact, climate change is affecting, and will disproportionately affect, the people who did not create the crisis. While the discussion on climate change at global level often revolves around predictions on future consequences and the perceived threat of increasing migration, the effects are already very much a present lived experience of people, in particular the rural populations of the so-called Global South. The world's most vulnerable and marginalized: Peasants, rural women, landless peoples, and indigenous communities, feel the impacts of climate change everyday. Changing rainfall patterns, heatwaves, increased risk of flooding, and intensified and prolonged drought periods have most affected those whose lives are directly dependent on the land and have been observed throughout the affected communities visited for this primer.

The Sub-Saharan region in particular is susceptible to the effects of climate change, where consecutive years of declining summer rainfall and changing and unpredictable weather patterns have caused widespread scarcity of food and water. The United Nations

have declared multiple famines in recent years in countries like Somalia, Sudan, Burundi and Ethiopia while floods from extreme rainfall claimed many lives and displaced thousands in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Moreover, recent climate models and research suggest that temperatures in Southern Africa will increase one and a half times quicker than the global average in coming years, painting a grim picture of the future for the region if no real global action is taken to reverse the current trends.

Global profit-driven industrialization at large is the main contributor to climate change. This current globalized system of production and consumption is completely dependent on the use of fossil fuels, a kind of energy which releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, causing and worsening the climate crisis. The dominating neoliberal model of development, with its central goals of economic profit, limitless growth, and expansion of markets, is the central culprit of climate change.



More and more people are living the dreadful effects of climate change. Meanwhile, those who caused it remain in positions of power and influence. The corporate elite have refined their influence on global policy making, effectively pushing their own agenda on national and global legislative frameworks on climate change, while blocking any progressive action to seriously stop the temperature increase in the planet.

Why do we need Climate Justice?

True Climate Justice demands that the fight against climate change become much more than just a technical and scientific effort. Climate change is a result as well as a symptom of the dysfunction of the current system, and consequently can only be truly addressed by changing the system. Climate Justice is a fight to transform the global economic system and for the just redistribution of resources. It is a fight against power structures that give authority to a corporate elite who, despite having caused the climate crisis, are also given the mandate to solve it.

As a major driver of climate change, the industrial food system is no exception. It is dominated by corporate elites commonly referred to as agribusiness, a group of corporations who seek to control land, seeds, and the entire food system. They make massive profits from the dispossession of peasants, and a model of agriculture that destroys forests and is highly energy intensive. They use their power to influence policies at national and global level, including policies that supposedly address climate change; the result is false solutions such as "Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)", "Reduction of Forest Degradation and Destruction (REDD/REDD+)", "Blue Carbon", etc.

Power must be returned to the peasants that do the labor and have the knowledge to feed the world. Agribusiness solutions, grounded in the idea of constant economic growth regardless of the consequences, is not going to solve the problem. Instead, it will only

serve to protect the interests of the corporate elite rather than the people. The world needs structural transformations where we divert away from economic drivers for our rationales, and transform the food system to protect the environment and feed communities.

Box 1: The Corporate Elite

“The corporate elite” refers to those corporations that have concentrated vast amounts of wealth through their control of big parts of key global markets such as patented seeds and fertilizers. Their main purpose is to grow and increase their economic holdings. Therefore, any concerns towards impacts on society or nature are secondary to this.. With more wealth comes more influence on political decision making, as such corporations that have acquired vast amounts of wealth at the global level have significant influence over global decision making such as in the Conference of Parties COP¹, G8(20)², the EU³ and SADC⁴. They use this influence to make policies that benefit their motives alone, not those of society at large.

They are able to do this despite not being democratically elected to occupy this position and are thus accountable to no one but their own shareholders. Corporations such as Monsanto, Agrium, Bayer, Yara, Cargill, Mosaic, ChemChina and DowDupont, to name a few within the agribusiness sector, control big shares of the agribusiness market and use this position to maximize their profits – often at the expense of the climate and small-scale farmers.

¹ Conference of Parties

² Group of Eight/Twenty

³ European Union

⁴ Southern Africa Development Community

Even though corporate elites, with their reckless actions, lack of responsibility, and impunity, are one of the main drivers of climate change, these corporations are not the ones paying the price for this. Instead, they are invited to the table of decision-making and to co-write the same legislation that is supposed to regulate their conduct. In the meantime peasants (as well as farm-workers, landless peoples, pastoralists and fisherfolk), as well as consumers, who are kicked off their territories or are influenced (often forcefully) to work and abide by a model of industrial production and consumption, are left more susceptible to the impacts of climate change and are not invited to the decision-making spaces.

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A big part of achieving Climate Justice is to address the inequalities within the food system. In this movement, Peasant Agroecology is identified as a model for the food system, built on solidarity with and among affected communities whose voices have been silenced in the fight against climate change by those in power, and with women, who do the work of feeding their communities while men pursue profitable enterprise. These peasant women and men are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and they develop solutions every day. Vast bodies of independent research demonstrate that their solutions can help mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change⁵⁶, while sustaining and improving communities' resilience to it. We need a transformation of the food system, where power, resources, and responsibility is redistributed from the elites to the producers and consumers, who are the ones who can most significantly contribute to solving the climate crisis.

⁵ IFAD, 2011: *Smallholders can feed the world*. <https://bit.ly/2fFO4DQ>

⁶ IFAD, 2013: *Smallholders, food security and the environment*. <https://bit.ly/2IJ0Ko3>

False Solutions

Current so-called solutions being promoted by corporate elites to address climate change are often themselves drivers of encroachment onto people's rights. While the COP and bodies such as the UN Committee on Food Security (CFS), UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Rio+20 (UNCSD), the World Bank and others are seemingly beginning to understand the relationship between rising greenhouse gas emissions and industrialized agriculture, their answers to the climate crisis still persist with a strong echo of the mistakes of the Green Revolution (see Box 3).

False Solutions such as *Climate Smart Agriculture* use phrases taken from Peasant Agroecology, but within a model of industrial agriculture⁷⁸. They include practices such as no-till monoculture and hybrid-seeds. While adopting some language of Peasant Agroecology, nowhere in these proposals are the fundamental matters of right to local and nutritious food, dignified livelihoods, land and self-determination addressed, namely the fundamentals of Peasant Agroecology.

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In the Climate Smart Agriculture agenda, the same core assumption of solving complex social and political problems by bringing technical so-called solutions to “underdeveloped” and “uneducated” peasants remains from the Green Revolution. In this way, the wealth of those who benefit from these solutions, namely the major agribusiness corporations, are preserved. This is but another Green Revolution in a new packaging. They say ‘climate smart’, but *smart* for whom?

⁷ Food First, 2014: *UN-masking Climate Smart Agriculture*

<https://foodfirst.org/press-releases/un-masking-climate-smart-agriculture/>

⁸ JPS, 2017: *Climate Smart Agriculture: What is it good for?*

<http://tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2017.1312355>

Along the same lines, the COP-processes⁹ have endorsed several false solutions that preserve the market structure intact and produce a number of financial schemes and mechanisms such as CDM, REDD, Blue Carbon, and bioenergy carbon capture and storage (BECCS). There are many dangerous distractions being paraded by those with power. Non-binding treaties and the exclusions of main economic sectors from the obligations, conveniently avoids addressing the root causes of climate change, namely the corporate elite and the current economic system. They claim that their false solutions can stop the rising of greenhouse gas emissions. But in reality, these mechanisms provide no real solutions to the problems at hand; quite the contrary, they accelerate the commodification of nature while promoting the false claims that privatisation and industrial agriculture technologies are the only means to fight climate change. Climate Justice will not be handed from above but must be taken from below.

Peasant Agroecology

Peasant Agroecology is a way of life that treats the Earth with respect and care, not as a resource to be exploited. It is a way of life that understands that the intimate relationship that humans have with their local ecologies cannot be reduced to a single value in money, and that understands that doing so leads to disastrous consequences for people and planet. Its culture is built upon the exchange of seeds, the exchange of knowledge, the planting of varieties of crops and recycling of nutrients to keep the health and vitality of the soil. This is the way of life of peasant farmers and it cannot be exchanged for money. It is by engaging in this way of life, and sharing knowledge and experience with other peasant farmers, that new knowledge for growing food in a changing climate is created, and that Peasant Agroecology is built. *Food must be grown for people, not for profit.*

⁹ Conference of Parties

Peasants who practice agroecology withstand and recover more quickly from extreme weather events such as droughts and floods. By using indigenous knowledge, traditional seeds, and planting different varieties of crops, farmers ensure that they have a healthy and varied diet for themselves and their families. By planting a variety of crops with small grains that can be stored for years such as sorghum and finger millet, they are more resistant to future droughts. By conserving biodiversity, they take care of the soil; rather than destroying the local ecology for large commercial plantations, they preserve grasses and trees that can conserve water. By using manure that can be taken from and processed on the farm, peasant farmers keep nutrients and recycle them. Not only this, but by producing locally instead of for global markets, they use far less energy, emit less greenhouse gases (through transport and packaging of food for supermarkets), and are thus essential in the fight against climate change. Food for export removes nutrients from the local ecologies, which then need to be replenished in other ways, i.e. by using



chemical fertilizers and pesticides which damage the soil and trap farmers into buying more chemicals from agribusiness corporations. This is how big agribusiness corporations, in being part of the global market food system, create a demand for their fertilizers, and make it so that peasants have to pay to continue to farm. But peasants must farm for a healthy cycle of nutrients on their farms, not in a cycle of dependency.

Box 2: Cycle of Dependency

Corporate agribusinesses have the power to convince governments and peasant communities to invest in their products, such as fertilizers, pesticides and improved seeds. They sell these as the solution to grow more and higher quality crops.

These are false solutions. When peasant communities buy into these false solutions, they become dependent upon corporate agribusiness, caught in process of progressive erosion of local and traditional knowledge on how to sustain their soil, preserve the ecosystem and produce their own seeds, to mention a few. In this way these corporations exacerbate the dependency of the peasant and hence, ensure profits from peasants made vulnerable.

Once trapped in this cycle, communities risk losing their indigenous knowledge of growing food in a sustainable and resilient way. This greatly hinders the capacity of peasant producers from using practices that build life into the system and cool down the Earth. This dependency is created and maintained through several mechanisms:

The corporate seeds are not viable for the following season, meaning that the producers is left to buy seeds every single

year. Using these seeds will trap the farmer into a dependency relationship with corporate agribusiness.

Reliance on synthetic fertilizers degrades the ability of the soil ecosystem to sustain itself and generate nutrients. After few seasons the soil is often all but dead, and farmers won't be able to grow any crops without the even heavier reliance and use of synthetic inputs.

There are programs that encourage producers to take on debt in order to access these corporate products. In the end, this leaves peasants in debt, with degraded production systems, and when the seasons do not behave as expected (due to climate change), peasants are left with both low yields and a debt that they cannot pay off.



Peasant Agroecology is a valuable tool, capable of breaking these cycles of dependency, by restoring degraded soils by protecting and improving food sovereignty (including seed sovereignty) of peasant communities,, and by ensuring access to territories necessary for food production and general community life.

Peasant Agroecology is not opposed to new technologies. In fact, the agroecological approach is based in science, and provides a unique platform for the development and integration of technologies that are beneficial. But it is opposed to any kind of technology that is used by corporate elites to gain control of food systems, and which encroaches on or erodes the rights of food producers and consumers, all in the name of expanding their profits. If instead these technologies contribute to the sovereignty of peasants over their production, their territories, their culture, and their lives, and if they can contribute to climate justice, then they can likewise contribute to the peasant way of life.

Peasant Agroecology, and the knowledge it is built upon, is a system of close collaboration with the community and intense connection to the land and the local ecology. It is already producing results in the fight against climate change. However this progress is obstructed at every step by the current system which demands profit from the production of food.

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Agribusiness: Creating and exploiting crises

Reclaiming agriculture from the global market and the corporations that dominate it is a key to fighting global climate change. Energy intensive practices in industrial agriculture based on Green Revolution technologies contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions which are the primary driver of climate change. The next biggest contributor to the crisis is land use change. It destroys biodiverse environments to produce large monocrop plantations, which further reduce the Earth's ability to capture carbon from the atmosphere. With this in mind, we need to address the problem of commodification of agriculture.

*Box 3: Green Revolution technologies.
A whole lotta trouble*

The Green Revolution is the name given to an extractivist model that is based on technologies and practices of industrial farming. The technologies require high energy inputs and attempt to maximise agricultural productivity. They include heavy farming machinery, chemical fertilizers, and genetically modified crops, among others.

People are replaced by heavy farming machinery. This requires less labour, but high amounts of fossil fuel energy, leading to increased CO₂ emissions. The use of chemical fertilizers releases the greenhouse gas N₂O into the atmosphere but it also damages the soil, making peasants dependent on buying more chemical fertilizers every year. These technologies are well suited for large monocrop plantations, which require vast amounts of land, often resulting in the destruction of forests which leads to even more CO₂ emissions.

These changes, brought by the industrial revolution, represent a more fundamental shift that occurs in the change from traditional to industrial agriculture. These modern systems use far more energy to produce food than Peasant Agroecology. In fact, this mode of farming is virtually impossible without access to cheap and easy to use fossil fuel energy. This reliance is fundamental. This is why attempts to reform the system (by means of false solutions) will never be able to reduce the emissions needed to halt climate change.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) as well as hybrid seeds are other Green Revolution technologies are presented as a mean of coping with climate change and feeding the world, but actually harm peasants and their way of life. These seeds are owned by large agricultural corporations like Monsanto, Bayer, DowDuPont, or ChemChina; corporations that use their massive financial and political power to convince governments

to adopt laws that criminalize traditional peasant practices, such as seed exchanges and seed saving. In this way, they force farmers to buy the modified seeds together with the fertilizers and pesticides that were created to only work with the seeds. Government programs encourage peasants to take on debts so that they can purchase these soil degrading chemicals and genetically modified seeds¹⁰.

Some seed regulations already have damaging effects to farmers in South Africa¹¹, trapping them into a cycle of dependency, damaging soils, and ensuring a market for corporate seeds¹². In other countries such as Uganda and Tanzania, these regulations on seeds have just recently come into law¹³. These laws are often required in order to receive aid programs from countries where these industrial practices dominate.

These technologies are used to enrich corporate elites, and worsen the effects of climate change with increased greenhouse gas emissions, further hurting peasants in the fight for Climate Justice.

Whilst the world is in crisis, these corporations see an opportunity for massive profits. Expecting a steady rise in the global demand for food over the next decades, agribusiness is moving to monopolize the

¹⁰ Grain 2015: *Land and Seed Laws Under Attack: Who is Pushing Changes in Africa?* <https://bit.ly/2GpQhkG>

¹¹ African Center for Biodiversity 2017: *Seed Capture in South Africa: A Threat to Seed Freedom, But Seed Movements Fight Back.* <https://bit.ly/2lnvIY9>

¹² African Center for Biodiversity 2017: *Harmonised Corporate Seed Laws in Africa: Where does this leave smallhold farmers?* <https://bit.ly/2q1IQ8q>

¹³ African Center for Biodiversity, 2016: *Changing Seed and Plant Variety Protection Laws in Tanzania.* <https://bit.ly/2pVQzW7>



global market, and create a global culture of extractivism using the damaging methods of industrialized farming. The same governments who meet up to provide false solutions to the climate crisis under the Conference of the Parties (COP), meet up to plan changes in the laws of African countries to benefit these corporations. These laws include criminalizing traditional peasant ways of life, including practices such as saving and sharing seed. Under the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, ten African countries including Mozambique would have to change their seed laws in this way in order to receive funding from the donors of the G8 (now the G20¹⁴). Often these kinds of policies that prioritise corporate profits over people and planet are tied to international trade deals. Powerful corporations that control these industrial farming technologies convince governments to give them the legal and financial support to impose these technologies on peasants all over the world.

¹⁴ Group of Twenty

Peasant Agroecology

Harmony with Nature

Observation and understanding of the relationship and interactions of organisms with each other and with their environment.

Local Ecology and Biodiversity

Intercropping with a variety of crops with different characteristics. Different root systems binding soil structure and protecting against soil erosion.

Diversity: Protects biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems. Subsistence farming. High nutritional availability, food sovereignty.

Production for Local Community

Small- and medium scale.

Taking Care of the Soil

Organic fertilizers - Builds life into the soil, nutrients derived from farm byproducts. Indigenous pest control - preserves life of soil. Maintains soil for future generations.

Seed Sovereignty

Peasant rights over seeds.
Exchange and saving of seeds.

Low Input Costs

On-farm nutrient recycling. Independence of corporate products. Energy efficient.
Labour intensive - requires close contact with the land.

Local Markets

Focuses on producing culturally appropriate foods. Relies on strong local market networks and shortens distance between producers and consumers, reducing food miles.

Industrial Agriculture

Domination of Nature

Intense exploitation of natural resources for corporate profit.

Monocultures

Intensification, concentration of one single crop.

High risk for pest outbreaks.

Soil erosion. Requires intensive irrigation.

Uniformity: Loss of agrobiodiversity and destruction of ecosystems. Market oriented farming. Reduced nutritional availability, high risk of malnutrition.

Globalized Supply Chains

Large scale.

Exploiting the Soil

Chemical fertilizers - destroys the ability of soil to hold nutrients. Toxic pesticides - Kills beneficial microorganisms and insects as well. Harmful for human health. High risk of flooding, soil erosion, and landslides. Degrades soil, compromises future generations.

Seed Dependency

Seeds owned by big agribusiness.

Laws that criminalize peasant practices

High Inputs Costs

Corporations making profits.

Energy intensive - peasants displaced. Requires intensive use of fossil fuel energy.

International Markets

Focuses on production of food commodities. Aims at large-scale commercialization in international markets. Long distance distribution chains (high GHG emissions).

The spread of the model of industrial agriculture directly threatens Peasant Agroecology in the fight for Climate Justice. Agribusiness claims that they alone can solve the climate change and food crises with this destructive model. But these are the same practices that caused these crises in the first place, and they continue to harm peasants by trapping them into taking on debt, and purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides that are owned and controlled by these massive corporations. These are the same practices that enable them to grow their power in the global food system by justifying land grabbing, and by the suppression of indigenous knowledge.

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The key to the claims of agribusiness are based on removing issues of injustice from our understanding of climate change. In other words, by claiming that solutions to the climate crisis are technical (those of the green revolution) and not political (those demanded in Climate Justice). As such, by selling the products they own as solutions to the crisis of climate change, they convince governments to promote industrial agriculture practices to small scale farmers. By bringing small scale farmers into this global commercial agriculture, they are cornering them into a system where agribusiness controls the products required for food production. This means suppressing and eliminating indigenous knowledge.

In many cases, the crisis narrative has been used to justify land grabbing. Arguments that lands need to be used more efficiently for example, rely on claiming that peasants can't take care of the land. In this way, agribusiness corporations dispute and grab rural spaces from peasants, transforming local environments into large monocrop plantations for export, commodifying Mother Earth, and sucking local natural resources out of communities' hands and into the pockets of global corporate elites. The first step in the fight for Climate Justice is to fight these false narratives. People and nature must be at the center of the food system.

Box 4: Land Grabbing: Green Deserts in Mozambique

Here we discuss how production of eucalyptus as a cash crop induces land grabbing. But the crop itself can be cotton, tobacco, or crops used for agrofuel, just to name a few. In the end, it is about a simple question: Should land be a space to have a direct and intimate relationship with nature, to provide food, and secure livelihoods for many peasants? Or alternatively, should it be a resource to be exploited; a source of money for a small corporate elite using industrial agriculture methods? The obvious answer for Peasant Agroecology and Climate Justice is the former.

Driving out of Chimoio in Manica province, Mozambique, it is impossible to escape the sight of vast plantations of eucalyptus trees lined up in carefully organised rows like well-disciplined soldiers. Earlier we had passed an equally imposing avocado plantation, fenced and with armed guards minding the entrance. A member of the local peasant organization UNAC motions to look at the eucalyptus¹⁵ as we drive by,

“That’s what they call Green Deserts,” she says.

The owner of these massive eucalyptus plantations is the Portuguese company Portucel Soporcel Group, which recently changed its name to The Navigator Company. In the region, they are already infamous for land grabbing. As we were told by a member of the farmer organisation 3 De Fevereiro, the company routinely tricks peasants into giving up their land, offering jobs on the plantation, compensation for their land, and even promises to build schools and hospitals. Once the deal is done however, these promises are discovered to be empty, and the peasants find themselves landless and without jobs. The company converts vibrant agricultural lands that

¹⁵ This narrative is drawn from joint research project between Afrika Kontakt, UNAC, ZIMSOFF and LVC SEAf.

peasants depend on for their food and livelihoods into these Green Deserts so that they can make money exporting paper to foreign markets. Often they do not even consult the peasants. Taking advantage of the fact that many peasants in the area do not have land titles, they go directly to the state, claim that the land is degraded and that no one is using it. They then pay the state for it, and kick off the peasants once they have the documents. This is a typical example of land grabbing.

The plantations serve one purpose; to make money for the corporate elite. The paper is exported to the global market, using more energy, spitting out more greenhouse gases, and thus exacerbating climate change. Additionally, biodiverse lands are destroyed for monocrop plantations, as the soil is degraded and the ecosystem loses its capacity to capture as much CO₂. The peasants now find themselves without land, without their heritage, and without livelihoods, adding to the number of people affected by corporate greed. The fight for Climate Justice is also a fight against land grabbing, a process where agricultural lands are stolen from peasants to make money for the corporate elite.

Further Reading:

A Land Grab for Pulp <https://bit.ly/2GQd7Sx>

Newsletter Julho 2017 <https://bit.ly/2GQpmKT>

Como Resistir as Empresas de plantacoes de arvores?
<https://bit.ly/2EEyT66>

The G8 and land grabs in Africa <https://bit.ly/2GU09iW>

The land grabbers of the Nacala Corridor <https://bit.ly/24R2D8N>

Um Hectare, Uma Chapa de Zinco <https://bit.ly/2EH7mRm>



Peasant Agroecology achieves Climate Justice

Peasants around the world are fighting climate change and the system that causes it by taking control of their food system. The movement for Peasant Agroecology and Food Sovereignty directly confronts the power that is built around corporate control over resources such as seeds, fertilizers, land, and water. People, not transnational corporations, should be at the centre of the food system. They know the land, they innovate, and they share their knowledge with each other. They are the peasants who can feed the world, and cool the climate, and they are the consumers who deserve healthy and nutritious, culturally appropriate foods. By building a culture around food which recognizes the importance of respect for all people and the planet, Peasant Agroecology is the first and most important step towards achieving Climate Justice.

Peasant Agroecology frees producers and consumers from a system where they are compelled to worsen the climate crisis and are also stripped of their tools to cope with it. Agricultural practices from the Green Revolution force food producers to take on large debts and produce food for export in an environmentally damaging way. By contesting this extractivism, the grassroots are fighting for Climate Justice.

Large agribusiness corporations push for energy intensive farming for the global market that doesn't take care of the soil or the local environment and with no regard for the impact on the Earth. They push for false solutions to climate change that primarily seek to protect the market and sell their products rather than actually fighting climate change. In so doing they ignore, suppress and even destroy local bodies of knowledge, which are of absolute importance in the fight for climate justice and against climate change in these frontlines where climate change is taking place. It is this knowledge therefore and not the knowledge of distant experts at the Conference of Parties (COP) that must be encouraged and be allowed to flourish to fight climate change.

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As the effects of climate change become more and more violent, agribusiness still advocates for privatisation and large scale cash crop plantations which are more vulnerable to climate change impacts such as droughts and floods. Peasant Agroecology fights this by doing the opposite; planting a variety of crops that are appropriate for the local environment, and calls for fierce protection of traditional rights to the land. Through patenting laws, which are often agreed by governments in trade deals, large agribusiness corporations are trying to eradicate methods of cooperative exchange and the peasant way of life in order to build a system where farmers depend on products that are sold by these companies. Peasant Agroecology encourages these traditional practices such as seed exchanges, and energy and nutrient conservation on the farm, which enable farmers to experiment with drought resistant crops and build life into the soil.

Peasant Agroecology requires that government policies do not inhibit traditional production practices, and this must be fought for. This is fighting for climate justice. Decisions over how local environments are managed and for whom, should be made to mitigate climate change and feed the world. Peasant Agroecology is political, and it is a way of life that must be defended.

Peasant Agroecology is for everybody

Contrary to industrialised agriculture that is for the few, Peasant Agroecology is inclusive, and available to everybody. It also gives a voice to those who are left most vulnerable and marginalised. Women play a particularly critical role in the global food system, as they are the largely the main food producers, both in sheer numbers and as guardians of biodiversity and agricultural seeds¹⁶. Considering the detrimental effects our food system in exacerbating climate change, the position of women and girls are made further vulnerable due compounding patriarchy that dictates to the roles they are expected to fulfill or those in which they should rather not take part. Being responsible for the bulk of household chores which range from collecting water for household use and fuel for cooking to guaranteeing the wellbeing of children and elderly, women's socially constructed gender roles are highly dependent on the conditions that nature provides. Climate change alters rain patterns and hereby water resources become more scarce and distant, and crops need more management to grow. It forces women (and children) to walk longer distances to provide enough water and resources for fuel for their households, and it increases their difficulty for harvesting crops throughout the year, especially as they cannot rely on traditional seasons anymore.

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¹⁶ Nyéléni 2007: *Women's declaration on food sovereignty*
<https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article310>

Women are systematically disadvantaged by the current system, which insists in keeping them invisible. Women suffer structural violences, (economical, employment, environmental, physical, sexual and psychological), while femicides keep also increasing¹⁷. Neo-liberalism and patriarchy walk hand-in-hand and they “have intensified oppression and discrimination and increased situations in which violence is perpetrated against women and girls in rural areas, as well as created more insecurity and instability in women’s working conditions [...], in the midst of a climate of violence that undermines [their] dignity”¹⁸.

The patriarchal capitalist system has been enforcing industrial agriculture, where women are the first victims of its oppression. In the African context, women often do not have secure access to land – and therefore have no access to resources and self-determination over their livelihoods and bodies. Despite the fact that women are the main contributors of labor and value-adding in food production and consumption, they are kept out of decision making processes from



public policy to households finances, and are mostly hardly affected by malnutrition. It is most often the men who have the power to take decisions for the households, such as which crops to grow, which ones to sell, and which ones to store, and how to use the income generated. Furthermore, industrialized agriculture and the globalized markets are also codependent, and this further exacerbates the problems of patriarchy, gender-based inequalities and violence.

Although Peasant Agroecology cannot defeat patriarchy in and of itself, it does address certain oppressive norms of patriarchy. It has the potential to change the lives of many women because the key role that they play is recognised and reflected in practice. Decision making is slowly being expanded to include women transversally in different movements and organizations. For example, in decisions made within organisational structures (such as LVC and member organisations). Despite this, certain key expressions of patriarchy still persist, specifically gendered roles and decision making within the household, which in many areas remain firmly entrenched. This often depends on the cultural setting (both at community and at household levels) in which peasant agroecology is practiced, and the extent to which communities and approaches take gender issues as a core element of their visions, strategies, and methodologies of work. This remains an obstacle to Peasant Agroecology as an instrument to challenge and overcome patriarchy.

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Other aspects of patriarchy are also, to some degree, alleviated. Due to the low cost of practising Peasant Agroecology women can more fully participate and benefit from the higher yields and diversified cropping. By growing a diversity of crops, building resilient ecosystems, and sharing knowledge, women can take control of their food systems and provide more nutritious food for themselves and their households. The decreased dependence of women on men

¹⁷ LVC 2017. Declaration - V Women's Assembly.

¹⁸ LVC 2014. Manifesto - IV Women's Assembly of La Via Campesina.

in Peasant Agroecology has the potential to alter power dynamics, with women taking their fair share of responsibilities and power, in line with the weight of their key role. Whilst industrial agriculture has largely failed to address the arising challenges facing women and gender dynamics, the use of Peasant Agroecology shows it can do so. Once again, Peasant Agroecology is not only a set of practices: it is a way of life. A way of life that seeks to be inclusive, and where authority is not given to men simply for being men. Climate change is a political, social, and ecological crisis which will only get worse if the voices of peasants producers (as well as consumers), and especially women, continue to be silenced or ignored. This is why fighting for Climate Justice goes hand in hand with confronting gender-based power relations.

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The migration of male family members to urban centers or to foreign countries seeking for better living conditions, together with the death, imprisonment and persecution of male community leaders, confront rural women with an even more vulnerable reality. They are overburden with the tasks of providing food for the survival of their family, protecting their children—who are increasingly exposed to sexual violence, death and uprooting—while defending their territories and own bodies from abusive forces¹⁹.

Youth are also undermined by patriarchy. In sub-saharan Africa for example, youth suffers forced migrations due to war, climate change and oppressive economic and social conditions. Land grabbing by transnational capital for industrial investments, energy production, extractivism and “development” is commonplace. The labour of youth and migrants is undervalued and brutally exploited²⁰.

Commodification of land and territories, and their exploitation by speculative investment and land grabbing also restricts the ability of youth to access land, especially young women. At the same time,

¹⁹ LVC 2017. Declaration - V Women’s Assembly.

the harsh realities and low returns in agriculture make it difficult for youth to prosper on the land. The situation is further aggravated by the severe and differentiated impacts of climate change²¹. In order to root out patriarchy and discrimination wherever it exists, the youth too must commit to the difficult work of self-evaluation and examining the ways in which they may perpetuate patriarchy and racism²².

Peasant agroecology is the road to food sovereignty and the solution to the global multi-layered crisis. It is a political vision, a way of life and a source of knowledge coming from our ancestors. Agroecology has become a key instrument to bring together a wide range of successful experiences around the world. For example, the *campesino-to-campesino* (peasant-to-peasant) methodology is a successful and important instrument to share information and strengthen communication and training processes. This methodology respects the traditional knowledges of territories and peoples, in such a way that knowledge can be effectively exchanged between generations²³.

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The youth also represents a bridge between urban and rural populations. While apparently very different, some of the structural discriminations both groups face are the result from the same oppressive forces of global capital and power. Youth around the world are already mobilizing around urban agriculture, returning to the land, building community food sovereignty or working for social justice in any capacity²⁴. Peasant Agroecology and Climate Justice are for everybody.

“The Earth is Our Mother”

The industrial food system is an attempt to dominate life on Earth for the enrichment and domination of a small elite. Those that control it ignore the floods, the droughts, the lifeless soils, the

billions of hungry people, and the ample signals of the breakdown of the natural systems that sustain us. It works hard to hide this damage it causes and force those most vulnerable to bear the burden. The current food system/ regime destroys life in the soil, it destroys forests, grasslands, oceans, rivers, and lakes, it drives and accelerates climate change, and subjugates rural peoples to a life of servitude. It is a model of death, oppression and violence.

Peasant Agroecology is a model of life. A way of living that recognizes that the Earth is our Mother. It is built collectively by people and communities that still understand the language of nature and are able to live in harmony with it. It builds and strengthens the ecosystems that supply healthy food, capture carbon, and encourage biodiversity. It liberates those rural people that are forced to change their way of life and destroy their environment. In Peasant Agroecology the land is sacred. Peoples' connection to the land is sacred. The seeds, the soil, the water, the air, are not resources to be sold for profit, but the sources of life on earth.

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Climate change is a dire threat to human existence. It is a humbling reminder that as much as some societies may try to remove themselves from the natural world, we are very much part of it, its force is much more powerful. It also shows us the desperate need for transformation. The only way for the food system to reduce emissions and to cope with current climate change is complete and total transformation. And for that we must look to those peasant communities, those rural women, those at the very margins of society, that already live the alternative. We must look to those that already live in harmony with nature, whatever the cost. To those who build life into their food system and communities, and have the knowledge to feed the world. The peoples of the world demand it, and true Climate Justice gives us a path to achieve it.

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