

# VOICE OF DE RURAL WORLD

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## Land grabbing : destruction of the familial agriculture

**VMR**

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## Summary

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*The access and control of land in the context of Food sovereignty is the focus theme of VMR 99. In this edition the main article explain about the developing trend of land grabbing all around the world and how it destroys the family and peasant based agriculture.*

*People move away from rural areas and farming when and where their access and control over land and other productive resources are threatened or affected. During the peak of the global food crisis land grabbing is emerging as a new threat for the most vulnerable such as small and marginal farmers, indigenous people as well as other rural producers. Without any doubt we can predict that this will lead to the addition of millions new hungry people to the present over a billion who go to bed with empty stomach every night.*

*Land grabbing can be defined as purchasing or leasing of vast tracts of land by wealthier, food-insecure nations and private investors from mostly poor, developing countries in order to produce crops for export. But for ordinary people it means the loss of control over their life giving soil, water and other resources, cut off from access to food, lose of identity as well as lose of sovereignty.*

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*States, Trans National Companies (TNC), Agro Industries and other private sectors recently started to propagate a new slogan “More investment in Agriculture” but in reality they are misusing this by investing in “Land through land grabbing. In one side in response to the new wave of land grabbing and considering the wide challenges this land issue brings to our society, the World Bank (WB) is promoting a set of seven principles to guide such investments and make them successful. The FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development) and UNCTAD (United Nation Conference on Trade and Development) have agreed to join the WB in collectively pushing these principles. We should be carefully observing this move. At the other hand FAO is independently moving another process of launching a Voluntary Guidelines on responsible governance of land tenure. We should take note of it.*

*We are quite sure that you will get an overall view about land grabbing trends and its consequences over rural people and family farmers from the main article of this VMR and we wish you all success in your struggles against local, national and global land grabbers to ensure land access and land rights for the people. Please report us back if you have any information about concrete land issues and land grabbing in your places and countries so that we can react on it collectively as FIMARC family. Few questions raised in the article can be used for this.*

*Please note that the next VMR will bring a second analysis on the land issues with a particular focus on women. Please send us also your experiences, success stories, difficulties on this topic to share with every body.*

*Expecting your reactions and comments, I wish you a good reading.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*George Dixon FERNANDEZ  
Secretary General*



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## **Land grabbing : destruction of the familial agriculture**

*For some years, land grabbing is increasing all around the world. It is about the acquisition (rent, concession, even purchase) by multinationals or States, of vast cultivable zones abroad and within the country for long term (often 30 - 99 years), to produce basic foodstuffs or products for agro fuels, intended for export and in defiance of the right to food for the local populations as States and Trans National Companies (TNC) monopolize rich lands, for their only profit.*

*In this document, we propose a first analysis of this world reality. We hope that it will be a tool to allow every movement and group to look in their country on those realities, to analyze them, and to search how to act for the right of the peoples for food sovereignty and their right of enjoying from their wealth.*

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## **MILLIONS HECTARES BOUGHT BY STATES OR MULTINATIONALS**

Today in the world, still more than half of the humanity is rural and peasant. Everywhere millions of agricultural producers are marginalized and lose the access to land and natural resources. The activities connected to land are the base of the means of support, income, jobs and suitable management of the environment.

Now, a new problem appears. The food crisis is taken as pleads by States to monopolize lands in other countries, to produce the food which is needed for their people. Actually, we see a restructuration and an expansion of the industrial agriculture - the agrobusiness - in the countries of the South and Eastern Europe, with capital of the South (States or TNC). In 2008, 40 % of the cross-border agricultural investments came from Southern countries to Southern countries.

### **Land grabbing**

«The invasion of powerful foreign corporations which seize farmlands to the advantage of the interests of the industries of agrofuels, generates the instability in the food chain and pulls the eviction of the farmers from their own lands. Millions of persons were moved by civil wars and still worse by natural disasters as it was the case not long ago in Haiti and in Chile.

We want to express our solidarity to all the persons affected by these disasters."

*(Final Resolution of the world Meeting of the FIMARC  
Paraguay - March, 2010)*

### **Discretion in the transactions**

During the years 2008/2009, 20 million hectares of productive lands - which most in Africa - were sold or rented for going periods From 30 to 99 years. Contracts are signed every day, in any discretion, by big investors. Numerous examples can be quoted.

In Guatemala, multinationals develop plantations of palm oil trees - to produce agrofuels - and put the pressure on the small farmers so that they sell their lands.



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Mozambique concluded a long-term lease for fertile lands in Mauritius. Here, the State subcontracted the lease with a TNC.

It is Qatar which obtains 40 000 hectares of lands in Kenya. Qatar is going to produce fruits and vegetables for his populations there, and those products are going to be exported. And this in a zone of Kenya, rich in biodiversity and that will make 150 000 farmers deprived from their land, live. In spite of local protests, the project is developing.

It is Libya which obtains a long-term lease on 100 000 hectares in Mali to produce rice for the Libyans. Consequences in Mali: family farms expropriated, animals cross destroyed; no compensations paid to the farmers for their lands..



«Today, more than 40 million hectares of farmland - among which 20 millions in Africa - handed over or are in negotiation. More than 100 billion US dollars are paid out in these transactions. Private enterprises sign and realize these agreements. The information is hidden from the public, for fear of provoking reactions. "(GRAIN association and Via Campesina - November, 2009).

## Neo-colonialism

Countries "sellers" are located in Africa, in the Middle East, in Latin America, in Asia, in Eastern and Central Europe. Countries "buyers" are especially the "Western" countries (among which Japan and countries of Oceania); it is especially countries which have few fertile farmland.

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Olivier De Schutter – UN special reporter of the right to food - explains the land grabbing by 4 reasons: the rush of numerous countries to produce agrofuels; the growth of the population and the urbanization (fewer persons produce food); an increasing demand of basic foodstuffs; the land becomes a safe and profitable investment within the framework of the financial crisis.

It is necessary to underline that this phenomenon recovers from a neo-colonialism on behalf of buyers countries. You should not be allowed blinder by the role of States. It is necessary to look closer at the intentions and at the actions of the big agricultural or financial companies. Vast companies - in the name of States - monopolize immense agricultural land in other countries, for their food supply, or to provide the world market of agrofuels; it is a question of strengthening the food safety of the buyer country, to the detriment of the food sovereignty and of the food safety of the sellers countries.

*Questions proposed to the movements and group :*

- *In your region or your country, do you know some cases of land grabbing?*
- *Who are the « sellers »?*
- *Who are the « buyers » (State, public authorities, farmers, etc.) ?*





*Family farm - Croacia 2008*

## **EXPANSION OF THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVIST SYSTEM**

The World Bank "accompanies" this market of land grabbing, considering that land is a good as the other commodity. Now, for the farmers, land is "our identity as people; the peasant culture based on the autonomous economy, depending on natural resources; it is agriculture that answers the necessities of the society and not those of the market." (*Via Campesina*).

Now, the private investments are bound to the massive privatization of lands, to the transfer of the land right for the benefit of multinationals. Even if the World Bank wants to impose criteria, it is about a fool's bargain to the detriment of the small farmers and poor countries.

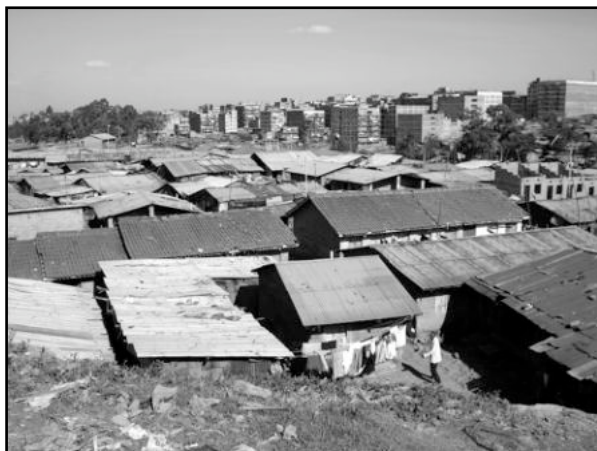
Everywhere where lands are monopolized by the other States or TNC, the same system of production is set up: monoculture, export of farm products, chemicals, GMO, heavy investments to have fast profits, etc..

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## It is a question of making profits

For “sellers” countries can this have profits? Some people say that it is true by the job creation in farms, but they forget to say that the land grabbing despoiled the farmers of their lands and their working tool.

The human rights violations are important: right to food of the populations, deprived of their tool of production; right of the agricultural workers, exploited as simple working force; right of the peoples for the self-determination on their resources; right to the local development of the human communities.



*Nairobi Chanty town - (Kenya), 2007*

Everywhere, it is a question of settling the industrial agricultural system, controlled by TNC of agro-industries or the finance, to export profitable products. The purpose is to produce food for “buying” countries of lands, or renters out. The requirements of the lobbies of the agro-industry everywhere are clear: obtain favourable financial and fiscal conditions for their investments and their profits.

More and more, the law of the free market is prevailing. The actors are not only States, but also especially agro-industrial companies and high finance. "We produce agricultural foodstuffs, as the others make shoes or computers ", says a person in charge of a finance company, considering that food is a good as the others. It is a question of making profits on the land and the foodstuffs. These companies have no concern of food sovereignty, or the food safety of the peoples.



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## An agriculture that is destroying the land

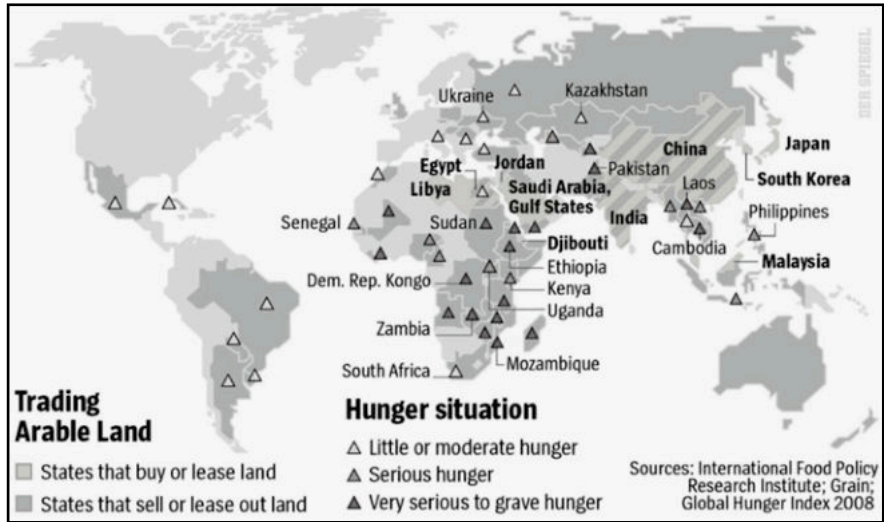
Land grabbing allows foreign investors to take the control over the land and water in developing countries. This is contrary to the intensification of the family and peasant agriculture and the local markets, the only system able to feed the local populations. The race for getting more land does not serve the interests of the local communities. It risks removing the peasant agriculture and it is going to create grave conflicts about lands, but also water resources.

It is one of the consequences of the financial globalization: primacy of the market on the needs of the local populations and the rights of the farmers and the communities to live on their productions; concentration of the exploitations in the hands of big owners to the detriment of the family and peasant agriculture; broadcasting of a productivist agricultural model which leads to farmers' marginalization and to transform many of them into "farmers without land"

States and TNC make the promotion of a non sustainable agriculture, because it is going to exhaust lands; this productivist agriculture is based on non renewable resources; it impoverishes the local and native communities, by destroying the earth, the productive resources; it accelerates the destruction of the ecosystem by the monocultures, and aggravates the climatic crisis.

*Questions proposed to the movements and groups :*

- *What are the ways of production used in these big exploitations (monoculture, chemicals,, GMO, etc.) ?*
- *What are the consequences of the land grabbing :*
  - *For the farmers, the families, the communities, the indigenous people) ?*
  - *For the family and peasant agriculture ?*
  - *For the environment and the future of the rural world ?*



## TO ACT FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

We speak about win-win agreements: but for whom? Is it enough to moralize and to discipline this new market? Or ask the good questions: who takes advantage of these markets? Who takes advantage of these exports? Who are despoiled of the lands? Should not you support the efforts of the small farmers to reach the food sovereignty?

Which kind of agriculture and which food system are able to be nourishing the populations without making them sick by chemicals? Which agriculture is able to maintain the farmers in the small family farms rather than to condemn them to live in shanty towns? What system of production and food supply can allow the local communities to prosper and to develop? Because the thorough question is: which kind of agriculture do we want?

### The power to the farmers and to the communities

Land grabbing can only aggravate the food crisis. Because it facilitates an agricultural system turned to the large-scale monocultures, with GMO, the replacement of the farmers by machines, the use of chemicals and non renewable energies. This agriculture for the benefit of few people cannot feed the local population. It feeds the profits of some persons and increases the poverty of the others.



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What we have to do: invest for the local food sovereignty, for the local markets, in small family farms which produce the main part of the current food in the world.

By joining the fights against land grabbing, we act for the defence of the resources: land, water, biodiversity, environment, etc. Natural resources must be available for those who need it to feed and feed the local populations, in a long-lasting way and be able to live as communities and individuals.

To invest in food sovereignty, it is to ensure that the land remains in the hands of the farmers, whether it is source of subsistence for a lot and not means of speculation for about some. It is a question of developing local markets for the local products, in short circuits, directed to the local communities. It is a question of defending an agricultural system of future and defending the local know-how. Agricultural policies must be decided by the peoples, by giving the power to the farmers and to the communities.

### **Filipino farmers defend their organic agriculture**

"When we asked them if they would welcome favourably a transfer of foreign agricultural technologies «superiors " to compensate for the acquisitions of Philippine lands, the farmers of Western Negros answered with a certain tiredness, but very clearly, that they were perfectly satisfied by their own knowledge and practices allowing a sustainable and diversified subsistence farming. Their experiment of the varieties with top-return and technologies dependent on the chemistry appeared with the green revolution made them understand that it was more interesting for them to turn to a diversified organic farming, with the support of organizations of farmers and scientists or associations such MASIPAG and GEO INC. "

Theodora Tsentas, " Foreign state-led land acquisitions and neo-colonialism: in qualitative study of foreign agricultural development compartment in the Philippines", September 2009 (*Text published by the international « GRAIN » organisation - October 2009 : « The new land owners»*)

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## To organize and mobilize the populations

In numerous countries and regions, farmers' associations raise their voice: defense of the sovereignty of the farmers on seeds, production, processing and marketing of foodstuffs; call to the political leaders to stop their support for the industrial agriculture; questioning of public authorities to realize the infrastructures which will allow the farmers to reach the local markets; refusal of the imports of foodstuffs at dumping price; trainings adapted to the local agricultural realities; elaboration of community regulations of administration of the lands which refuse the sale by plots of land; demand of a fair agrarian reform for the benefit of the small farmers.

Wide alliances build up themselves with the aim of denouncing this land market for the benefit of the rich, to forbid the peasant and family agricultur, to make succeed the rights of the farmers to live on their work on their lands, to widen the debate by discussions, by organizing and by mobilizing the populations. What is at stake: save an agricultural model based on the person and the human communities and not on the profit.

*Questions proposed to the movements and groups :*

- *What are the actions you are leading against the market of agricultural land?*
- *With whom are you in alliance for those actions?*
- *What are the obstacles you are meeting in those actions?*
- *What are the concrete results that you have obtained?*

**MIJARC**



**Stop Land grabbing!**

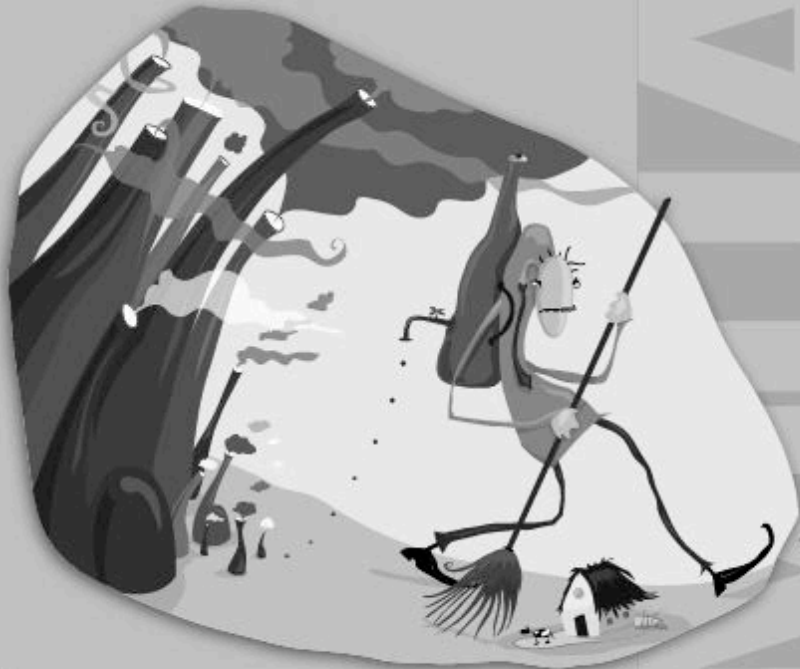
**This soil is our future!**

**Stop à l'accaparement  
des terres !**

**Ce sol est notre avenir!**

**¡No más acaparamientos de tierra!**

**¡Esta tierra es nuestro futuro!**



**JOURNÉE MONDIALE DE L'ALIMENTATION 2010  
DÍA MUNDIAL DE LA ALIMENTACIÓN 2010 • WORLD FOOD DAY 2010**



Public meeting and rally on  
 “Land grabbing : Stop land grabbing- this sol is our future”  
 Chalakkudi (Kerala / India) - July, 2010



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