WAR ON WANT

SIXTY YEARS FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

Food Sovereignty

Reclaiming the global food system

War on Want is a movement of people committed to global justice.

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Our mission is to fight against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation, as part of the worldwide movement for global justice.

We do this by:

- working in partnership with grassroots social movements, trade unions and workers' organisations to empower people to fight for their rights
- running hard-hitting popular campaigns against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation
- mobilising support and building alliances for political action in support of human rights, especially workers' rights
- raising public awareness of the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice and empowering people to take action for change

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Preface

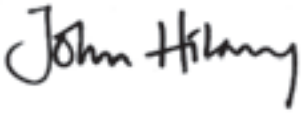
The scandal of global hunger stands as a rebuke to humanity. The fact that record numbers of people are classified as hungry, at a time when there is unprecedented wealth in the world, challenges the very concept of human progress. Moreover, there is a growing consensus that the crisis in the global food system results from deliberate political choices that favour corporate interests while they condemn hundreds of millions to despair. That system is bankrupt, and must be changed.

War on Want has engaged with the fight against global hunger ever since the organisation's founding 60 years ago. Our work has focused on challenging the root causes of the crisis, especially at the political level, and on supporting moves towards positive solutions that are socially just as well as environmentally sustainable. War on Want has formed longstanding partnerships with farmers' movements across the world to promote the model of food sovereignty, as a positive alternative to a food system that condemns hundreds of millions to despair.

The model of food sovereignty stands in marked contrast to the approach of 'food security' that has dominated official reactions to the crisis of world hunger. The UK government, in particular, has championed an extreme variant of the food security approach, based on the myth that free trade and global markets will meet the needs of populations who are no longer able to produce their own food. The price spikes, food riots and record hunger levels of recent years show the urgent need for a paradigm to replace this failed approach.

This report introduces the basic principles that underpin food sovereignty. It also presents a number of case studies to show how farmers are already implementing those principles successfully in their own communities around the world. War on Want's partners in the farmers' movements of Brazil, Sri Lanka and Mozambique have pioneered the use of organic, community-centred agroecology in order to offer practical solutions to the threat of hunger. In addition, this report profiles a parallel example of resistance to corporate agriculture from the UK's first community-owned farm.

As well as working in partnership with farmers' movements in the global South, War on Want is committed to building the movement for food sovereignty in Europe. We were proud to coordinate the British delegation to the first ever European Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Krems, Austria in August 2011, and we will continue to work with all those who seek positive, sustainable alternatives in the global North as well as the South. The scandal of global hunger is testament to the failure of the capitalist food system. The time for food sovereignty has come.



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Executive summary

In 2009, for the first time in human history, over a billion people were officially classified as living in hunger. As the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed, this record total was not a consequence of poor harvests or natural disasters. Hunger on this scale is the result of a global economy in which hundreds of millions of small farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and indigenous people have faced ruin through the hijacking of the food system by large agribusiness and food retailers.

The crisis in the world food system has its origin in the expansion of corporate capitalism. This expansion has not only led to the eviction of millions of peasant families from their land, but is also transforming the very way in which countries farm. Many national systems have been converted to export-oriented agriculture, at the same time as the countries have been forced to open their own markets to food imports, including imports dumped on them by US and EU companies at less than the cost of production. As a result, millions of small farmers have seen their livelihoods destroyed.

The main vehicle for achieving the transformation of agriculture in the global South was the Green Revolution, which brought huge profits to the multinational corporations involved. Yet levels of hunger actually rose during the Green Revolution, despite increased production. Per capita food production increased by 8% in South America and 9% in South Asia between 1970 and 1990, but the number of hungry people rose by 19% and 9% respectively in those regions, both key targets of the new technologies. The same story was replayed in countries across the world.

The root cause of the global food crisis is to be found in a system designed to sustain corporate profits rather than meeting people's needs. Yet there is a positive alternative: the model of food sovereignty – "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems".

Food sovereignty requires agrarian reform in favour of small producers and the landless; the reorganisation of global food trade to prioritise local markets and self-sufficiency; much greater controls over corporations in the global food chain; and the democratisation of international financial institutions. It is a vision of a world in which the decisions on how food is cultivated, processed and traded are reclaimed from capital and handed back to the people.

The dominant framework through which the international community has chosen to address the scandal of global hunger is that of 'food security'. This is a woefully inadequate response to the iniquities of the present food system, relegating the issue of hunger to a social welfare problem that can be resolved by simply handing out more food. It fails to recognise that hunger is essentially a political problem that must be resolved by changes in the balance of power. The food security approach is ultimately a defence of the status quo.

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has long championed a model of food security that is based on free trade, corporate-owned technology and greater private sector control of food production and distribution. DFID's 2009 White Paper sought to take those policies further by means of a new partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, which would deepen farmers' reliance on

seed and agrochemicals controlled by a few powerful corporations. The UK government was also a central player in the G8 leaders' response to the crisis of escalating food prices in 2008, which called for removal of export restrictions and strengthening of the role of free markets in the food system, despite the acknowledged damage this would cause.

In pursuit of the positive alternative of food sovereignty, peasant farmers across the world are developing their own forms of sustainable farming, or agroecology. These can be significantly more productive than industrial agriculture – as well as offering a ready solution to the mounting disaster of greenhouse gas emissions caused by intensive farming. In Brazil, Sri Lanka and Mozambique – as this report documents – War on Want partners are helping communities realise the principles of food sovereignty in their own food production so as to reclaim control over their livelihoods.

Yet food sovereignty involves far more than producing food. It entails a radical change in the way society is organised so that power is taken away from local elites, who are so often aligned with corporate capital, and restored to the people. It means peasant communities gaining control over their land and deciding what they will grow and how they will grow it. It means pushing through changes in macroeconomic policy so that national food production can be protected from competition from cheap food imported from abroad. In this way, food sovereignty is an integral part of the process of constructing participatory democracy, and of demonstrating that another world is possible.

Photo: War on Want

1 A food system in crisis

In 2009, for the first time in human history, over a billion people were officially classified as living in hunger. As the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed, this record total was not a consequence of poor harvests or natural disasters.[1] Hunger on this scale is the result of a global economy in which hundreds of millions of small farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and indigenous people have faced ruin through the hijacking of the food system by large agribusiness and food retailers.

- Today, despite unprecedented wealth existing in the world, one in seven people go to bed hungry.[2]

- In 2010 the world's four largest agrochemical companies and three largest grain traders together chalked up profits of around US$20 billion.[3] The same sum would be enough to settle 20 million families each on their own plot of land, permanently resolving their problem of hunger.[4]

- The industrial food system discards (in the journey from farms to traders, food processors, stores and supermarkets) between a third and a half of all the food that it produces. This is enough to feed the world's hungry six times over.[5]

- The industrial food system is responsible for the eviction of millions of smallholders from their land, exacerbating rural poverty.

- Some 150,000 farmers in India, overwhelmed by debts accrued by adopting unsustainable and expensive chemical farming techniques, have committed suicide.[6]

- Worldwide, up to 10 million hectares of agricultural land are lost annually as a result of severe degradation, largely the result of unsustainable farming practices.[7]

- The industrial food system is responsible for approximately a third of all man-made greenhouse gas emissions destroying our planet.[8]

The affluent have never before known such choice. Every conceivable foodstuff is available all year round in supermarkets around the world. People feel irritated if they cannot find the particular food they seek, even when they are looking for fruit or vegetables that do not grow in their own country. Yet this abundance comes amid clear signs that the industrial food system is politically, socially and ecologically bankrupt. It is a system in crisis.

Around 2.5 billion people – men, women and children – live off the land worldwide, cultivating crops, rearing livestock and catching fish.[9] Many of these farmers are small-scale producers, who are building on the valuable knowledge acquired by their forebears over hundreds of years. But increasingly they are being driven off the land by an agro-industrial system, headed by huge corporations, that views food production as just another economic frontier to be conquered in the pursuit of profit.

Corporations seek to make money all the way along the food chain, from the marketing of seeds, pesticides and fertilisers to the retailing of food in supermarkets.[10] Even agricultural research, which used to be geared to helping farmers become more productive, has been privatised, and its focus has shifted to producing technology that can make profits for corporations. The main

reason why genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were developed was not to increase crop yields, as the corporations tell us, but to bring farmers more closely under their control. With GMOs, farmers generally have to purchase from the same corporation a package of seeds, herbicides and credit.

This expansion of industrial farming has been facilitated by free trade policies, often imposed on a country by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These make it extremely difficult for governments to protect their local farmers and to prevent the foreign takeover of their land. In some cases multinational corporations grab the land for themselves, evicting the original inhabitants and creating huge, highly mechanised monoculture plantations. More frequently, however, the corporations get the local farmers to produce the crops or to rear the livestock for them, turning them into a new army of contract labourers. This means that the corporations obtain the commodities they need while transferring all the risk of production to the local farmers.

Financial institutions are also benefiting from the expansion of industrial farming and the increase in world commodity trade. Banks, hedge funds, pension funds and other investors have discovered that the unregulated nature of the financial markets means that they can make huge profits from speculating on future food prices. Like the food corporations themselves, their overriding desire is to maximise profits, with little regard for the impact of their activities on people, communities, biodiversity and the health of the planet.

The expansion of industrial farming is leading to a frightening loss of biodiversity. Launching the third edition of the UN's *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, stated: "The news is not good. We continue to lose biodiversity at a rate never before seen in history – extinction rates may be up to 1,000 times higher than the historical background rate." The report confirms that habitat loss due to agriculture and unsustainable forest management is the greatest cause of species extinction, and warns that further massive loss of biodiversity is increasingly likely as important ecosystems such as the Amazon forest and freshwater lakes are pushed over 'tipping points' from which it may be difficult or impossible to recover. The continued loss of biodiversity, it warns, can no longer be seen as a separate issue, but one that is intrinsically linked to the security of present and future generations.[11]

One of the commonest claims made by the corporations is that the world needs their expertise and new technologies such as GMOs to feed itself. Yet the assumption behind this contention is false. The reality is that we already produce more than enough food to feed nine billion people – two billion more than the current global population – and probably enough to feed 15 billion, for we eat, at most, only half of the food crops that we grow. Some food is lost as it is transported long distances, and then – in Western countries at least – the biggest waste occurs with the consumer. About a quarter of the food people buy ends up being thrown away.[12]

Over and above this, vast quantities of crops such as soya and maize are fed to livestock for meat production. This has long been known to be a most inefficient way of producing food for human consumption, as it takes at least seven kilograms of grain (and enormous quantities of water) to produce just

Photo: Elcio Carriço

a single kilogram of beef.[13] Fully 70% of the world's agricultural land is already devoted to livestock production, and the global production of meat is projected to double from its total of 229 million tonnes in 2000 to 465 million tonnes in 2050. Expansion of livestock is a key factor in deforestation, especially in Latin America: 70% of previously forested land in the Amazon has been taken over for pasture, while feed crops cover a large part of the remainder. Livestock farming is responsible for 18% of world greenhouse gas emissions – more than all forms of transport put together.[14]

The main reason why people go hungry is that they do not have enough land on which to cultivate food, or they do not earn enough to buy enough food. Yet alternatives exist. Over the last few years, a new global movement has emerged to challenge the corporate food system by means of the model of food sovereignty.

This War on Want report examines, first, how the industrial food system emerged and works in practice. It then introduces the framework of food sovereignty more fully, and contrasts it with the failed model of 'food security' that has up to now been the preferred option of most Northern governments (and some NGOs). Finally, the report showcases a number of grassroots initiatives being undertaken by War on Want's partner organisations in Brazil, Sri Lanka and Mozambique – as well as a parallel example from the UK – to show that food sovereignty is a real and practicable alternative for adoption across the world.

2 Corporate capitalism

The crisis in the world food system has its origin, like so many of the world's ills, in the expansion of corporate capitalism. In the 1970s many corporations in the USA and Western Europe found themselves with a serious problem of overproduction. The growth in consumption in the post-war period, although large, had proved insufficient to absorb everything the corporations could produce. If they were to continue growing, they needed to expand far more aggressively into the rest of the world.

At the same time many countries in the global South had become trapped in a foreign debt crisis, caused, in part, by excessive lending to these countries by US and European banks. The 'solution' devised by international financial institutions was for developing countries to open up their markets to foreign imports and foreign investment in return for financial bailouts. Multinational corporations would gain new markets, and developing countries would increase their exports so as to pay off the loans and avoid default, which would have proved costly to the world financial system. The prime instrument for imposing these policies was the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) structural adjustment programmes, which forced countries to reduce the role of the state through privatisation and deregulation; to liberalise trade through the dismantling of trade 'barriers' such as import quotas and tariffs; and to reorient their national economies towards the global economy.[15]

As a result of the increasing emphasis on what was dubbed 'export-led development', governments introduced tax breaks to encourage companies to move into special agri-export zones, where production would be channelled exclusively towards the world market. For instance, in 2001 alone the Indian government set up 60 agri-export zones, producing 40 agricultural commodities from mangoes and lychees to basmati rice and

MEXICO: AN UNFOLDING CRISIS

In January 2003, peasant organisations, supported by trade unions, universities and civil society groups, marched to the Zócalo, the central square in Mexico City. The protestors, numbering almost 100,000, were demanding two actions from the government: that it renegotiate the agricultural chapter of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); and that it agree to a new, far-reaching programme of rural development. The protestors' slogan was "El campo no aguanta más" ("The countryside can't take it any more"). The mobilisation was indicative of a serious crisis in the country's rural sector, with farmers rejecting the idea that production of food for the local market should be subjected to the rules of free trade.[18]

The giant demonstration did not persuade the government to change policy. Although NAFTA has greatly enriched a few, it has been a disaster for peasant farmers and the rural poor. Employment in agriculture fell from 8.1 million in the early 1990s to 6 million in 2006: a loss of 2.1 million jobs that was primarily caused by NAFTA.[19] The exodus and destruction of many old rural communities have contributed to the widespread social and

cumin.[16] These zones have been bitterly criticised by farmers' leaders in India, who say that the government should have used barren land for the zones rather than taking over fertile areas that were being used to produce food for the domestic market. They were also angry at the number of small farmers who were expelled from their plots to make way for the agri-export zones.[17]

The changes imposed on individual countries by the IMF's structural adjustment programmes were exacerbated by changes in the rules governing the global economy. A far-reaching Agreement on Agriculture, negotiated as part of the Uruguay Round of world trade negotiations and to be overseen by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), came into force at the beginning of 1995. It committed countries to the progressive opening of their agricultural markets through tariff reductions on food imports and the abolition of subsidies to farming communities. These policy prescriptions were reinforced by a barrage of bilateral free trade agreements, which have also forced countries to open up their agricultural markets to imports. One of the earliest such agreements was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the USA, Canada and Mexico, which came into force in 1994. As social movements had warned in their campaign to stop the Mexican government signing up to NAFTA, the exposure of Mexico's peasant farmers to imports from the world's richest and most powerful agricultural companies has been catastrophic (see box).

This flurry of agreements and policies promoted a massive increase in world trade, which was bad news for the vast majority of small-scale and medium-sized farmers throughout the world, who were generally producing staple foods for their domestic markets. Cheap imported food, such as US rice and US maize, was dumped on these markets at below production costs. All over the world, millions of small farmers saw their livelihoods destroyed.

political disintegration of Mexico in recent years.

US farmers benefit from billions of dollars in subsidies which make up as much as 40% of US net farm income. This means that US farmers can afford to export their crops at well below production cost and still make a profit. The name for this practice is dumping, and it is supposedly illegal under WTO rules. At the same time, Mexico had been forced by the IMF to cut almost all of its farm support programmes and to keep domestic interest rates at a much higher level than in the USA.

Mexico, once self-sufficient in food, now imports 40% of the food it consumes.[20] Some of the maize imported from the USA is genetically modified, and it has started to contaminate the native varieties.[21] This has alarming practical consequences, because it means that the world may be losing varieties with characteristics such as resistance to drought which may well be needed as the planet warms.

Mexico was the first country to produce maize. Maize has always been the staple food, and lies at the heart of the country's rich indigenous cultural traditions. For this reason, it was a savage blow not only to thousands of campesinos (peasant farmers) but also to the country's cultural identity when it seemed that US maize, dumped on the domestic market, would wipe out national production.

HAITI: A FAILED STATE

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, with a per capita income of less than a dollar a day. Until the 1980s, Haiti was self-sufficient in food, growing enough rice, beans, maize, sweet potato and cassava to feed the local population. But then, after the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, Haiti began to liberalise its economy.

"The IMF and the World Bank decreed that we apply structural adjustment," said Camille Chalmers of PAPDA (Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif). "They told us that we're right next to the biggest agricultural producer in the world, so there was no reason to produce our own food because we could buy it cheaply. Instead of farming, peasants should go to the city to sell their labour to US assembly plants that make textiles and electronics for export."

Rice farmers were badly hurt. Until the 1980s Haiti produced enough rice to feed its population. But by the end of the 1990s, rice imports had overtaken domestic rice production. Many rice farmers were driven out of business, and with them local traders and millers.

Others were affected too. Before trade liberalisation, Haiti had a thriving poultry industry. Some six million eggs a year were hatched, and chicken farmers bought thousands of tonnes of local maize. But suddenly the market was flooded with extremely cheap dark chicken and turkey meat, the leftovers from US production, as US consumers will eat only light-coloured breasts and thighs. "Directly and indirectly, when the chicken industry shut down, we lost 10,000 jobs," a member of Haiti's now defunct Agricultural Producers' Association told a journalist. "By 1998, it was all over."

In the wake of the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, PAPDA is calling for radical new policies. They want a "rupture with the neoliberal model of development; rupture with exclusion; rupture with imperialism; and rupture with the centralising state". Reconstruction, they say, should mobilise four important social forces: women; the peasantry; youth; artists and artisans.

Doudou Pierre, a member of the Mouvement National des Paysans de Congrès de Papaye (MPNKP), fleshes out the alternative model. He says that agriculture in Haiti should be "relaunched" around two guiding principles. One is food sovereignty, which means producing most of Haiti's food at home: "We could produce here at least 80% of what we eat." And the second is integrated land reform. "We can't talk about food sovereignty if people don't have land. Our plan is take the land from the big landowners and give it to peasants to work." And, once they have land, the farmers will need support from the authorities: "The state has to give us credit and technical support and help us store and manage water."

Once these structural changes have been implemented, proposals abound as to how peasant farming could be supported. One idea is for international donors to guarantee to purchase at pre-arranged prices Haiti's entire rice crop for the next two years. With this incentive, local farmers would greatly increase their production, and the devastated peasant sector would be put on the road to recovery. Another group is calling for the government to buy all the food for school meals from local small producers. None of this is happening. Haiti, more dependent than ever on charity hand-outs, is fast becoming a 'failed state', with all the chaos, violence and lawlessness that this implies.[22]

What lies behind the model of free trade and export-oriented agriculture is the naked self-interest of multinational corporations driven by their obsession with maximising profit. This becomes glaringly obvious when one examines the brutal way in which these policies are implemented in the world's weakest countries. Haiti is a shocking example of how these policies can destroy a country's bedrock – its peasant farmers – and reduce it to a failed state (see box).

2.1 The Green Revolution

The expansion of corporate capitalism into the global South has not only led to the eviction of millions of peasant families from their land, but is also transforming the very way in which countries farm. In a process that is far from complete, multinational corporations are seeking to wrest control of food production away from local communities and national governments and turn it into a mechanism for yielding profits to them and their shareholders.

The main vehicle for achieving this takeover was the much vaunted Green Revolution. The genesis of this revolution is, in itself, an interesting example of the way in which, even half a century ago, national geopolitical interests and the corporate agenda were closely enmeshed. In the early years after the Second World War, the USA had distributed some of its crop surpluses, particularly wheat, as food aid to countries in the global South. This was part of its Cold War strategy for keeping poorer countries within its sphere of influence and stopping them from developing close relationships with the Soviet Union. But in the 1970s the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) increased the price of oil on the world market, and the USA discovered a new – and, from its perspective, far more rewarding – use for its surplus wheat: to swap it for oil with the Soviet Union.[23]

This meant that another way had to be found to boost food supplies in the global South. This agenda coincided neatly with the needs of the agrochemical corporations, which had been formed in the middle of the 20th century at a time of great technological change in the farming sector. Corporations had discovered that the chemical processes used during the Second World War to produce explosives and nerve gases could be reoriented to manufacture synthetic fertilisers and pesticides that would greatly increase agricultural productivity. At the same time, manufacturers were starting to produce large and efficient farm machinery, which meant that farmers could reduce their costs by cultivating huge fields of single crops (monoculture) with few labourers.

There were also new developments in seed technology. Farmers had selectively bred plants for centuries by seeking out the seeds of the plants with the most desirable characteristics and planting them the following year, but in the 1930s breeders discovered how to crossbreed two varieties artificially so as to create hybrids, something that was found to boost yields. This was an exciting discovery, but for farmers there was a downside: hybrids lose their 'vigour' in the second year, with yields falling heavily. Instead of saving seed from one harvest to plant in the following year, as they had done for millennia (and still do in many countries in the global South), farmers now had to buy new hybrid seeds each planting season.

This drawback for the farmers was a great commercial opportunity for the agrochemical corporations, for it enabled them to extend their control over farming. Hybridisation was not the only agronomic development at the time – and not even perhaps the most

promising – but it was the one that most clearly benefited the corporations. Pioneer Hi-bred, the first company to market hybrid corn (maize), enjoyed runaway success. Since then, the corporations have pressed home their advantage, carefully guiding agricultural research away from the provision of free, public services into the development of products that they can patent and sell to farmers.

By the 1970s the corporations had saturated the market in the USA and Western Europe and were keen to expand into the rest of the world. This required a favourable climate for the expansion of the new technology, by now reassuringly named the Green Revolution, to the global South. The corporations swarmed in, working with the local elites, and persuaded thousands of farmers (generally the bigger producers) to take up 'packages' of credit, fertilisers and pesticides. It all seemed a remarkable success. From 1970 to 1990, the two decades of most rapid Green Revolution expansion, the total food available per person in the world rose by 11%. The estimated number of hungry people fell from 942 million to 786 million, a decline of 16%.

Profits rocketed for the corporations – particularly pesticide manufacturers such as Bayer, Syngenta, Monsanto and Dupont (which eventually bought Pioneer Hi-bred). Yet levels of hunger actually rose during the Green Revolution. Per capita food production increased by 8% in South America and 9% in South Asia between 1970 and 1990, but the number of hungry people rose by 19% and 9% respectively in those regions, both key targets of the new technologies. And while the global figures show an overall drop in the total number of hungry people during this period, that decrease was actually due to the achievements of China, which had not pursued Green Revolution policies. Taking China out of the equation, the number of hungry people in the world increased by 11%.[24]

If it had not been for the increase in productivity made possible by the Green Revolution, many countries (such as Brazil) would have been forced to redistribute land away from large unproductive estates to smallholders, because this would have been the only way to ensure a regular supply of food for the expanding urban populations.[25] In other words, the very dynamic of capitalist development would have required agrarian reform. This changed with the Green Revolution, as the theory was that relatively few big farmers could now produce enough to feed the cities. Smallholders, who could not produce cash crops as cheaply, began to move in their droves to the cities.

Even in the early years, there were signs that industrial farming was neither socially nor environmentally viable. Land and resources were becoming more concentrated, with a growth in inequality in rural incomes.[26] Pesticides were poisoning large numbers of farm workers. Fertilisers were polluting rivers and groundwater. Wildlife and biodiversity were being decimated. Fragile tropical soils were being eroded.[27] Crops grown in monoculture were proving an easy target for pests. But instead of questioning the long-term viability of the technology they were introducing, the corporations were quick to blame farmers for applying the new techniques incorrectly. For problems that could not be dismissed so readily, the corporations came up with a technical fix – a response that they have repeated time and again. For instance, they maintained that the proliferation of pests in monocultures could be resolved by the use of more toxic pesticides, ignoring the fact that pests will develop resistance to these new pesticides too.[28]

Photo: Jon Spaull

2.2 Changes in the global diet

The corporations realised that, in order to keep demand for their products growing, it was not enough to change the way farmers farmed; it was also necessary to change what people eat. One of the first products to be promoted in this food offensive was soya beans. The Chinese have been consuming this oilseed in a fermented form for 5,000 years, but its use was to be transformed by industrial farming.

Soya was first introduced into the USA in response to an ecological and agricultural crisis – a savage irony, in view of the damage that industrial plantations of soya were later to do to precious ecosystems such as the Amazon basin. In the 1930s, US prairies were ravaged by severe dust storms caused by drought, extensive farming without crop rotation, and deep ploughing of the topsoils, which had displaced the natural deep-rooted grasses that had kept the soil in place. Soya was useful because it is a legume, which means that it captures nitrogen from the air and thus helps to regenerate soils.

Farmers were then faced with the problem of what to do with the soya beans. Their first efforts to sell soya meal as animal feed were unsuccessful, largely because chickens and pigs found it indigestible and disliked its taste and smell. After the Second World War, however, manufacturers took advantage of Nazi technology to improve the meal sufficiently for animals to tolerate it. The local market was soon saturated and, under the reconstruction programme known as the Marshall Plan, heavily subsidised soya meal exports to Europe were strongly promoted.[29] Indeed, soya soon became the dominant animal feed in Europe. It was then discovered that another soya product – lecithin – could be used as an emulsifier; that is, it allows fats and water to mix. This is an extremely useful

function for food manufacturers, and lecithin soon became a key ingredient in many vegetable oils and margarines.

Not surprisingly, soya production has increased enormously: from 30 million tonnes in 1965 to 250 million tonnes in 2010.[30] Its cultivation has spread globally, particularly into South America. Today the USA remains the biggest soya bean producer, with an output of 80.7 million tonnes in the 2009-10 harvest, but Brazil (57 million tonnes) and Argentina (32 million tonnes) are catching up.[31] Although we may not know it, most of us are eating a lot of soya, as it is a component in nearly three quarters of the products on our supermarket shelves.[32]

This silent revolution in eating habits has been accompanied by a much more visible advertising campaign to encourage consumers to switch from traditional foodstuffs to more 'modern' and (it was often implied) healthier alternatives. As a result, people whose staple diet just a few decades earlier consisted of crops grown by local farmers such as cassava, maize, yam, millet and sorghum have changed their diet so that they now eat more bread, pasta and meat (mainly chicken). World poultry production increased from 8.9 million tonnes in 1961 to 70.3 million tonnes in 2001.[33]

Another change, facilitated by the development of techniques such as canning, spray drying, freeze drying and the introduction of colouring agents and preservatives, has been a rapid increase in the consumption of processed foods. Food processing is a boon to the food industry, for it means that it can cheaply buy up large quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables, process them in giant factories and then distribute the canned or frozen food all over the world. Supermarkets benefit greatly, for they can often sell processed foodstuffs more cheaply than the equivalent fresh food in the street markets outside.

Once again, advertising, with its seductive images of healthy children playing in the countryside, has lulled many consumers into believing that these foods are actually superior to fresh food, and governments have repeatedly failed to inform consumers of the loss of nutritional content inherent in the process of preserving. Cuba, in particular, has had a problem. When, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Cuba suddenly found itself without the large quantities of tinned food it had imported at highly subsidised prices from the USSR, it was forced to revert to traditional techniques of non-chemical farming and to establish organic market gardens all over Havana. At first, consumer rejection of this fresh food was so virulent that the government had to run special programmes on television promoting the virtue of organic vegetables.

These interlinked changes – which have been dubbed the wheat, livestock and durable food "complexes"[34] – amounted to a veritable revolution in eating habits in many parts of the world, with a global shift towards a more standardised diet. As a result, the world today relies on just three crops – maize, wheat and rice – for half of its food. This has frightening implications, because it has left the world vulnerable to diseases that could devastate a great swathe of global food production.

The change in eating habits in many parts of the world clearly benefited the USA, the world's largest exporter of both soya and wheat, but to see the present struggle for market dominance as essentially a battle between different nations would be misleading. Behind the scenes are the

corporations that control the food system, and these now operate fully on the global level.

Take the example of soya. Although the USA and Brazil are presented as fierce competitors battling for dominance in the world market, trade is in fact controlled in both countries by agricultural giants Cargill, Bunge and ADM. As well as dominating US soya trade, these three companies also finance 60% of the soya produced in Brazil. They are the undisputed winners in the big soya boom.[35]

The battle for control of the world's meat exports tells a different story. With funding from Brazil's state-owned development bank, BNDES (which provides more loans each year than the combined lending of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and US-Eximbank), Brazil is constructing some of the most powerful agro-industrial corporations in the world. After buying out its rival Sadia in May 2009, the Brazilian company Perdigão overtook US giant Tyson Foods to become the world's largest poultry company. Through a similar history of mergers, including the takeover of a number of US companies, the Brazilian company JBS has become the world's largest exporter of beef. [36]

Corporations compete with each other, but their executives all belong to a rich and powerful global elite and adhere to the same values. With mergers and fusions occurring every year, corporations from different countries are increasingly working together. The joint venture recently announced between Royal Dutch Shell and Brazil's Cosan, the world's largest sugar and ethanol producer, is the latest example of this new trend.

The main victims are the Guarani Indians of Mato Grosso do Sul state, Brazil, who have been dispossessed of their land. While Cosan continues to purchase sugar cane from farmers illegally occupying the Indians' traditional lands, Guarani children are starving, leaders have been assassinated and hundreds have committed suicide.[37] In today's world, the main division today is no longer between nation states but between the globalised elite and the rest of us.

2.3 Genetically modified crops

The huge profits made by the agrochemical companies during the Green Revolution allowed them to fund the next big step in their bid to control world farming: the development of genetically modified (GM) crops. Over 20 years ago, when the corporations began to test GM crops in laboratories and in field sites, they realised that, even more than with hybrid crops, genetic modification would turn the humble seed into the linchpin of world farming. If corporations could monopolise the seed market, they would leave farmers with no option but to buy their GM seeds and all the other products associated with their cultivation. Overnight they would create a captive market.

So the corporations began to buy up seed companies. Over the last two decades they have taken control of more than 1,000 once independent seed companies, so that the top 10 seed companies now account for 73% of the world's commercial seed market (the top three companies alone account for over half). US-based Monsanto has been particularly aggressive in its targeting of small seed manufacturers in key countries such as Brazil. In 1996 Monsanto was not even

among the top 10 global seed companies, but by 2009 it was secure in first place, responsible for 27% of the global commercial seed market on its own (see Table 1).

The first genetically modified crop, put on the market by Monsanto in 1996, was Round-up Ready (RR) soya, a variety of soya into which a gene had been introduced to make it resistant to Round-Up, a herbicide also made by Monsanto. At first, this advance seemed to be a real boon for farmers. They no longer needed to plough fields, just douse them with pesticides to kill the weeds. And it allowed them to spray their fields early in the growing cycle as their crop, although still vulnerable seedlings, would not be affected. Shortly afterwards, Bt maize, Bt potato and Bt cotton, all of which had had a Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) toxin gene introduced into them to make them resistant to common pests, were put on the market, also by Monsanto. The main advantage of these new crops for the big farmers was that they facilitated monoculture and helped reduce labour costs – both key elements in the agricultural 'race to the bottom'.

It did not take long, however, for problems to emerge. 'Super weeds' soon developed resistance to the Round-Up herbicide, and 'super bugs' began to munch their way into the Bt crops. The corporations have repeatedly told farmers that all their problems will be solved by the second generation of GM crops, engineered to

Table 1 World's top 10 seed companies, 2009

	sales (US$ millions)	market share (%)
1. Monsanto (USA)	7,297	27
2. DuPont (USA)	4,641	17
3. Syngenta (Switzerland)	2,564	9
4. Groupe Limagrain (France)	1,252	5
5. Land O' Lakes (USA)	1,100	4
6. KWS AG (Germany)	997	4
7. Bayer CropScience (Germany)	700	3
8. Dow AgroSciences (USA)	635	2
9. Sakata (Japan)	491	2
10. DLF-Trifolium (Denmark)	385	1
Top 10 Total	**20,062**	**73**

Source: ETC Group

Woman farmer spraying crops, China

Photo: Julio Etchart

be more toxic or more pest-resistant, and some of these crops are now on the market. While they may work for a time, pests and weeds will undoubtedly find their way in to the new crops. So another generation of GM crops will be needed: the techno-fixes go on and on.

2.4 Pulling in the profits

Even though there has been considerable resistance from farmers in many parts of the world to genetically modified crops, the agrochemical corporations continue to increase their sales not just of GM crops but of agrochemical products in general. The global South has become increasingly important to the companies, with industry figures suggesting that the combined sales of agrochemical products in Latin America and Asia have now for the first time surpassed combined sales in North America and Europe.[38]

In the dog-eat-dog world of corporate competition, companies either buy up their rivals or are bought up themselves. The agrochemicals sector has been going through – and is still going through – an intense process of concentration. By the end of 2007, the top 10 companies were responsible for 89% of agrochemical sales (see Table 2).

These companies have become so powerful that they can push new and potentially harmful farming techniques on to farmers, who in poorer countries are often illiterate and ill-prepared to assess the risks of the

technology they are offered. One of the most shocking cases involves India's cotton farmers. They were strongly 'encouraged' to use expensive hybrid and GM seeds, which eventually trapped them in an escalating debt spiral. Some 150,000 farmers have committed suicide as a result (see box).

While peasant farmers, smallholders and indigenous people struggle to stay on the land, the corporations are tightening their grip and producing multibillion-dollar profits for their shareholders. Although distinctions between sectors are blurring as technology changes and the corporations move into new areas, there are still clearly two groups: the biotech companies, which provide inputs for farmers from seeds and pesticides to veterinary products (see Table 3); and the food merchants, who buy the produce and transport it around the world (see Table 4). Both have continued to chalk up billions of dollars in profit each year, even during the financial crisis.

Now that the world is entering a phase of climatic uncertainty, with increased droughts, flooding and other kinds of extreme weather, the corporations would like us to believe that only their GM crops, which will be specially engineered to resist drought or salinisation, can save the world from hunger. This completely ignores the fact that hunger is essentially a political problem, caused by poverty and landlessness. The proliferation of further GM crops will simply increase farmers' dependence on the agrochemical corporations themselves.

Until recently the corporations were careful not to buy up land or get involved in the actual work of growing crops or raising livestock, clearly deterred by the very real but unpredictable risk of losing crops or livestock as a result of bad weather, natural disasters or disease. But, as we shall see in the next section, this is changing. With the stock of fertile land around the world declining, investors are now viewing land itself as the next investment opportunity.

FARMER SUICIDES IN INDIA

In the 1980s, the state government of Andhra Pradesh in southern India promised local farmers untold wealth if they moved away from their traditional cultivation of staple food crops, particularly millet and rice, and instead embraced cash crops, particularly hybrid cotton. The farmers were encouraged to buy on credit a 'package' of high-yielding varieties of hybrid cotton, fertilisers and pesticides supplied by big corporations.

At first many of the farmers were hesitant, because it meant that they would start the farming year in debt, something they had always tried to avoid. But the government officials and the salesmen assured them that their yields would be much higher and their enhanced earnings would easily cover all of their costs. For a few years the farmers felt as if they had won the lottery – yields rose and, after paying back their loans, they ended the year with much more disposable income.

But then things started to go wrong. The soil began to lose the fertility that the farmers had built up over decades through traditional methods of non-chemical farming, and more chemical fertiliser was required. Pests became rife, as they often do in monoculture, and so farmers had to spend more on pesticides. And then a single freak

Table 2 **World's top 10 agrochemical companies, 2007**

	sales (US$ millions)	market share (%)
1. Bayer (Germany)	7,458	19
2. Syngenta (Switzerland)	7,285	19
3. BASF (Germany)	4,297	11
4. Dow AgroSciences (USA)	3,779	10
5. Monsanto (USA)	3,599	9
6. DuPont (USA)	2,369	6
7. Makhteshim Agan (Israel)	1,895	5
8. Nufarm (Australia)	1,470	4
9. Sumitomo Chemical (Japan)	1,209	3
10. Arysta Lifescience (Japan)	1,035	3
Total	**34,396**	**89**

Source: Agrow World Crop Protection News, August 2008

weather event might wreck the crops, leaving them with the debts they had incurred at the beginning of the year and no income from their harvest with which to pay them off. The only way out was to borrow money from the local money-lenders, who charged high interest rates. The slide into the debt trap began.

By the turn of the century, almost every rural household in the region was forced to sell cattle and land in a desperate bid to fend off bankruptcy. Overwhelmed by the ignominy of having reduced their families to penury, farmers began to kill themselves, often swallowing the pesticide they had bought on credit from the corporation. As well as being the pesticide capital of the world, Andhra Pradesh became a state with one of the highest rates of suicide.

Around 150,000 farmers committed suicide in India between 1997 and 2005, many of them driven to this desperate act by indebtedness.[39] Letters left by farmers show that what had fed their despair more than anything else was a feeling of powerlessness, an awareness that they had lost the capacity to manage their own livelihoods. It was wholly irresponsible of the government and the corporations to have pressed on poor farmers such an expensive, risky and unsustainable 'technological package' without explaining the dangers involved.

2.5 The great land grab

Land grabbing has occurred throughout history. One only has to think of Christopher Columbus 'discovering' America and the brutal impact this had on indigenous societies, or colonists taking over territories occupied by the Maori in New Zealand or indigenous peoples throughout Africa. It is a violent process very much alive today.

Take Cambodia. More than half of the country's arable land was recently granted to private companies so that they can develop agro-industrial plantations and mining projects. Over the last five years, dozens of rural and indigenous communities have been evicted. Many more have lost access to land that they have long used for subsistence farming or for grazing their animals. Others have found that forests where they used to collect food and firewood have been felled. Much of this land is being given to private companies to grow sugar cane, as sugar is supposed to be one of the products in which Cambodia has a comparative advantage. As well as contributing to the sugar glut that periodically affects the world market and brings down prices, these companies are causing widespread human rights abuses and serious environmental damage, with more than 12,000 people affected.[40]

Table 3 **Annual profits of the biotech giants (US$ millions)**

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Bayer	3,778	3,745	4,855	4,903	4,255
Dow	3,160	1,408	1,182	3,691	5,403
Syngenta	1,857	1,804	1,841	1,553	939
Monsanto	1,656	3,092	3,039	1,511	1,317

Sources: company annual reports; figures refer to profits from all sectors

Table 4 **Annual profits of the largest grain traders (US$ millions)**

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Bunge	3,348	428	1,898	1,554	802
Cargill	2,603	3,334	3,951	2,343	1,537
ADM	2,585	2,500	2,594	3,154	1,855

Sources: company annual reports

In recent years new factors are fuelling the land grab. One is biofuels, which are being promoted as a way of reducing the emissions of harmful greenhouse gases from transport. The European Union has passed legislation that requires 10% of transport fuels to come from biofuels by 2020, while the USA spends more than US$6 billion annually subsidising biofuels.[41] Today some of the most rapacious multinationals have their headquarters in the global South, particularly China and Brazil, and they are as quick as their rivals in the North to take advantage of the biofuel boom. Brazil, which has acquired extensive knowhow about producing ethanol from sugar cane, is actively seeking to become Africa's main partner in its quest for greater renewable energy.[42]

Mozambique is a case in point. In July 2010 the European Commission and the Mozambican and Brazilian governments announced a tripartite agreement by which they would work together to develop the bioenergy sector. The agreement was vehemently attacked by campaigners inside Mozambique, many of them led by War on Want's partner the National Union of Peasant Farmers (UNAC), and protests made it difficult for the Mozambican government to press ahead with biofuel production as it had hoped. In December 2009, the government was forced to cancel the contract signed two years earlier with the British-owned Procana company to produce ethanol from a proposed 30,000 hectare sugar plantation in Gaza province.[43]

Another new element to have emerged in the land grab story is the possibility that countries that have failed to protect their local farmers or have problems of soil erosion may face food shortages in the future. Countries such as India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which either currently rely on imported food or fear that they will become reliant on imported food in the future, are searching for land in other countries where they can produce food for their home market. Even China, which is still largely self-sufficient in food, is thinking about the future and has been gradually outsourcing its food production. Some 30 agricultural cooperation deals have been sealed in recent years to give Chinese firms access to 'friendly country' farmland in exchange for Chinese technologies, training and infrastructure development funds.[44]

As well as the governments of food-hungry countries, financial institutions such as Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley have also been involved in buying up large tracts of land in the global South, as they see land as an asset that will appreciate strongly in future decades. The result has been a land grab on an unprecedented scale, with huge areas being bought or leased in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The land grab greatly concerns Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food: "Most of these investments occur with a complete lack of transparency, without proper consultation of the local communities concerned. They will benefit investors and perhaps some of the local elites – but they will create much less employment, and contribute much less to rural development than would policies supporting small farmers and ensuring their access to land," he said. "There are considerable dangers with the current situation", he added. "Land is becoming a speculative asset, and the rush to secure farmland often is done by investors, whether public or private, that have little concern either for the overall welfare of the local communities or for the long-term impacts."[45]

FOOD SPECULATION

Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, has also voiced his concern over the impact of hedge funds, pension funds and investment banks speculating on food commodity markets, which he calculates played a "significant role" in the global food price crisis of 2008. In their pursuit of new asset classes after the successive crashes of the dotcom and US housing markets, a large number of such speculators entered food derivatives markets, creating an asset bubble that in turn resulted in severe price spikes for staples such as maize, rice and wheat. As a consequence of the food price crisis, up to 150 million more people were driven into extreme poverty, and hunger levels reached record highs.[46]

The very action that the rich countries are taking to ensure their own food supplies will increase the likelihood of global hunger in the longer term. Even though governments say that they are only selling or leasing 'empty' or 'marginal' land, such a concept simply does not exist for many traditional peasant and indigenous societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Much of the land being grabbed is used, at least for part of the year, by local people. An estimated 50 million livestock producers practise itinerant pastoral farming in Africa, supporting their families, their communities and a massive meat, skins and hides industry. They increasingly find that grasslands on which their cattle graze for a few months of the years are being fenced off. Depriving them of their livelihoods will greatly add to Africa's already serious problem of rural malnutrition. Converting these pastures to arable farms will also add to greenhouse gas emissions, as grasslands store about one third of the world's stock of carbon.[47]

In the longer term, too, the land grab is closing off options for dealing with climate change. For 7,000 years, pastoralists and peasant farmers in Africa have responded quickly to variations in climate, moving to new areas or cultivating different crops. With adequate financial support, African farmers could link together in a vast network of seed markets stretching across the whole continent, and these markets could help plants to 'migrate' as climatic conditions change. They are perhaps Africa's greatest hope of coping with the climatic uncertainties that lie ahead. Yet the great African land grab is driving many of these communities off their land.

2.6 A planet under siege

As well as causing misery for millions of people around the world, the industrial food system is also jeopardising the future of the planet. Soils contain enormous numbers of living organisms, ranging from a vast variety of invisible microbes, bacteria and fungi to the more familiar earthworms, beetles and termites. These soil organisms, which form complex and varied ecosystems, carry out many useful functions, including the absorption of some of the greenhouse gases that are heating the planet.

The large amounts of chemical pesticides and fertilisers used in industrial farming are killing these living organisms in the soil. Once these natural processes are disrupted, fertility can be maintained artificially for some years, but eventually the land has to be abandoned. The UN estimates that 30 million hectares of cultivated land (an area the size of Italy) are lost every year to environmental degradation, industrialisation and urbanisation.[48] With the world's population continuing to rise, this is land that we cannot afford to lose.

Photo: War on Want

Another associated problem is the loss in crop diversity. Right across the global food system, uniformity means greater profits for the corporations. The agrochemical corporations want to provide the same 'technological package' all over the world. Traders want to buy the same mange-tout, whether they are getting them from Egypt, Kenya or Guatemala. Supermarket chains want to provide the same range of foodstuffs in all their stores. The result is uniformity, turning into a mirage the apparent diversity in our supermarkets. Over the last century, about 90% of the genetic diversity of crops found in farmers' fields has disappeared.[49]

In marked contrast with traditional systems of farming, which tend to absorb carbon emissions, the industrial food system has become one of the main engines of climate change. Part of the problem is caused by the chemicals. For instance, the nitrogen found in chemical fertilisers is readily transformed in the soil, so that nitrous oxide is emitted into the air. Nitrous oxide emissions are 300 times as potent as those of carbon dioxide.

Moreover, farming itself is responsible for only about a quarter of the energy used in the industrial system to get food to our tables. The real waste of energy takes place

APPLES AND PEARS

Apples were among the first fruit to be cultivated by humans; in Britain, there were once as many as 6,000 varieties of dessert and cooking apples, and hundreds more cider varieties.[50] But since 1970, half of all pear orchards and two third of apple orchards in the UK have disappeared.[51]

The big supermarkets have played a significant role in the decline of locally grown apples because of the importance they place on the cosmetic appearance, size and even symmetry of the fruit. As a result they reject perfectly good eating apples because of skin colour, blemishes and shape. Today the two most dominant UK varieties, Cox and Bramley, together account for 70% of the UK's eating-apple orchards. Increasingly, even these are being pushed out by imported varieties from South Africa, Chile, USA, New Zealand and even France, which has basically the same growing season as the UK.

A survey of apples sold in UK supermarkets in 2005 showed that only about a third of the apples came from the UK (although greengrocers managed a half).[52] Some supermarkets such as Tesco were sourcing as little as 28% of their apples locally, while claiming to promote UK produce. It is a similar story in other countries. This remarkable reduction in genetic diversity leaves the world very vulnerable to plant diseases.

in the processing, packaging, freezing, cooking and transporting of food. The globalisation of production chains has taken this waste to ludicrous extremes. Dawnfresh, a Scottish seafood company, ships its scampi more than 5,000 miles to China to be shelled by hand before shipping it back to Scotland to be breaded for sale in British supermarkets. UK market leader Young's ships 600 tons of langoustines a year to Thailand for Thai workers to shell them and send them back to Britain for sale.[53]

Transporting food consumes huge amounts of energy. If we add the fuel used by lorries to transport inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides to farms, and plastic and paper to the packaging industries, and the journeys made by consumers to increasingly distant supermarkets, we get a sense of the tremendous volume of greenhouse gases produced by the industrial food system. It is estimated that altogether – including cropping, livestock, transport, fertiliser and land use change – agriculture is responsible for 30% of the global emissions that cause climate change.[54]

Tim Lang, one of the world's leading authorities on food policy, says that corporations and big farmers have been obsessed with 'productionism', that is: producing more and more food whatever the environmental cost. "From a 'productionist' point of view, the food system is remarkably successful," he says. "The shops are full. There are 26,000 items on supermarket shelves in developed countries. But from a sustainable development perspective, the food system appears to be taking us toward planetary collapse."[55] Sooner or later, Professor Lang says, the system will have to be radically rethought: "Food's environmental footprint means we have to go back to the drawing board and start thinking about what a sustainable food system would look like. We've got to design it around what the earth can deliver and what human bodies need."

THE RISE OF THE SUPERMARKET

Photo: War on Want

Supermarkets in the UK have grown at an astonishing rate since the 1950s. It is easy to see why. They offer a wide range of cheap foods, with the added convenience for shoppers of allowing them to buy almost all they need for the home in a single place. Few can resist this seductive combination.

Yet it is becoming increasingly clear that supermarkets do great harm to farmers, workers and shops across the UK – not to mention the damage they do to millions of workers in developing countries, who are paid poverty wages at the same time as the supermarkets continue to rake in record profits.

In the UK, the Big Four – Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrison and Asda – control more than three quarters of the grocery market. One in four shoppers go regularly to the market leader, Tesco, which alone controls over 30% of the UK's groceries market. Local shops have been unable to compete. Over the last three years, one new supermarket store has been given planning approval on average every day. Some 1,000 independent shops a month were forced to close in 2009.[56]

An extensive two-year investigation into supermarkets by the Competition Commission, published in 2008, found that action was needed to address the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers.[57] Among other abuses, suppliers were being forced to adapt to late changes in agreements and were at times being paid below the cost price for their produce, so that many farmers were not earning enough to invest adequately in their farms and were finding it difficult to survive. The Competition Commission noted that the supermarkets' voluntary code of conduct had failed to prevent these abuses, and recommended the introduction of an independent ombudsman to police the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers. In May 2011, the UK government published a draft parliamentary bill in order to establish an adjudicator with powers to enforce and oversee the Groceries Code – a move that supermarkets are determined to undermine.[58]

3 The positive alternative

The present food system is clearly unsustainable. A number of extremely powerful corporations have transformed the production of food – something as essential to human survival as air and water – into a money-making activity, in which the only goal is to produce profit for shareholders. Spreading out across the globe, these corporations are taking advantage of trade liberalisation to dump their crops on foreign markets, often ruining local farmers in the process. They are enticing local farmers to use their 'technology packages', knowing that in this way they will make the farmers forever dependent on them. And they are using massive advertising campaigns to change eating habits so that target populations consume more of the foods that they control, particularly processed food, with its heavy use of wheat and soya.

As a result, millions of smallholders, landless workers, pastoralists and fisherfolk are being increasingly marginalised, with scant regard for the precious knowledge they have acquired over millennia about the ecosystems they inhabit. Neglected by the authorities, they are being deliberately impoverished. Many have no option but to move to the towns or cities. Indeed, policy makers have uncritically accepted the view dominant in the multilateral institutions that this rural exodus is inevitable, and that the very process of development determines that only a tiny percentage of the population will work on the land. At an official level, there has been no discussion of whether this way of organising society benefits the majority of people or even, given the use of chemically intensive monoculture that it entails, whether it is compatible with the survival of the planet.

Food sovereignty is the positive alternative to this failed system. Food sovereignty was defined at the groundbreaking Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Nyéléni, Mali, in February 2007 as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and

MST encampment, Brazil

Photo: War on Want

sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems".[59] The international community echoed the definition when 58 governments meeting in Johannesburg in April 2008 approved the executive summary of the synthesis report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), which defined food sovereignty as "the right of peoples and sovereign states to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies".[60] In August 2011, the first ever European Forum for Food Sovereignty made explicit its connection to the Nyéléni declaration in its call to take back control of the food system and establish food sovereignty in Europe.[61]

One of the main organisations promoting the framework of food sovereignty is La Vía Campesina, which expounded the seven principles underpinning the framework at the World Food Summit organised by the FAO in 1996. La Vía Campesina is an umbrella movement bringing together organisations of peasants, small producers, landless people, indigenous people and rural workers from many different parts of the world. With its support, peasant organisations are encouraging their members to turn their backs on chemical-intensive farming and to develop their own agroecological alternatives, generally based on their indigenous forms of farming. Given adequate support, farming based on the principles of food sovereignty can be significantly more productive than industrial agriculture.[62]

Yet food sovereignty involves far more than producing food. It entails a radical change in the way society is organised so that power is taken away from local elites, who are so often aligned with corporate capital, and restored to the people. It means peasant communities gaining control over their land and deciding what they will grow and how they will grow it. It means pushing through changes in macroeconomic policy so that national food production can be protected from competition from cheap food imported from abroad. In this way, food sovereignty is an integral part of the process of constructing participatory democracy and demonstrating that another world is possible.[63]

3.1 Food security vs food sovereignty

The dominant framework through which the international community has chosen to address the scandal of global hunger is that of 'food security'. According to the working definition developed by the FAO in the years following the 1996 World Food Summit, "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."[64]

This is a woefully inadequate response to the iniquities of the present food system. It relegates the issue of hunger to a social welfare problem, one that can be resolved by simply handing out more food. It fails to recognise that hunger is essentially a political problem that can be resolved only by changes in the balance of power. By focusing exclusively on the consumption rather than the distribution and production of food, the food security approach fails to address any of the structural problems that threaten the long-term sustainability of the global food system. Indeed, by relying on inherently unstable commodity markets and filling the gaps with charity, the approach fosters extreme insecurity. In the words of agroecology expert Michel Pimbert:

The mainstream definition of food security, endorsed at food summits and other high level conferences, talks about everybody having enough good food to eat each day. But it doesn't talk about where the food comes from, who

produced it, or the conditions under which it was grown. This allows the food exporters to argue that the best way for poor countries to achieve food security is to import cheap food from them or to receive it free as 'food aid', rather than trying to produce it themselves. This makes those countries more dependent on the international market, drives peasant farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples who can't compete with the subsidised imports off their land and into the cities, and ultimately worsens people's food security.[65]

Some international institutions have finally begun to recognise the limitations of this model of development, in view of the persistently high levels of malnutrition and hunger that it causes worldwide. Following the World Food Summit of 2002, the FAO began to incorporate the 'right to food' in its operations, and in November 2004 adopted a set of guidelines to support the realisation of this right.[66] The guidelines are purely voluntary, however, and still framed "in the context of national food security", with no consideration of the key issues surrounding the production of food. Food security has remained the principal framework through which the international community perpetuates the iniquities of the global food system.

The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has long championed a model of food security that is based on free trade, corporate-owned technology and greater private sector control of food production and distribution. DFID's 2009 White Paper, *Building Our Common Future*, sought to take those policies further by means of a new partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, which would deepen farmers' reliance on seed and agrochemicals controlled by a few powerful corporations. In a sinister assault on the right to food, the White Paper pressed developing country governments to remove social protections for their populations, insisting that political leaders must make "tough choices about agricultural price controls, land policy and the agricultural business environment".[67] The UK government was also a central player in the G8 leaders' response to the crisis of escalating food prices in 2008, which called for removal of export restrictions and strengthening of the role of free markets in the food system, despite the acknowledged damage this would cause.[68]

Since the new government took office in the UK in 2010, the Secretary of State for Development, Andrew Mitchell, has prioritised the role of the private sector in international development still further, including by strengthening DFID's commitment to helping corporations develop new crop breeds.[69] As an example, DFID is supporting the African Agricultural Technology Foundation in expanding use of a weed-resistant strain of maize patented by agrochemical company BASF.[70] This will make farmers reliant on the company and vulnerable to escalating prices of inputs, threatening centuries-old systems of seed preservation.

The food sovereignty model goes much further than the social welfare concept defended by DFID and other champions of the food security approach. As understood by La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty requires agrarian reform in favour of small producers and the landless; the reorganisation of global food trade to prioritise local markets and self-sufficiency; much greater controls over corporations in the global food chain; and the democratisation of international financial institutions. It is a vision of a world in which the decisions on how food is cultivated, processed and traded are handed back to the people, by means of a transformative process that seeks to "regenerate a diversity of autonomous food systems based on equity, social justice and ecological sustainability".[71]

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

(as advanced by La Vía Campesina)

1. Food: A Basic Human Right.
Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realisation of this fundamental right.

2. Agrarian Reform.
A genuine agrarian reform is necessary, which gives landless and farming people – especially women – ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it.

3. Protecting Natural Resources.
Food sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practise sustainable management of natural resources and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agrochemicals.

4. Reorganising Food Trade.
Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritise production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.

5. Ending the Globalisation of Hunger.
Food Sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations (MNCs) over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organisations such as the WTO, World Bank and the IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for MNCs is therefore needed.

6. Social Peace.
Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalisation in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanisation, oppression of smallholder farmers and increasing incidence of racism against them cannot be tolerated.

7. Democratic control.
Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organisations will have to undergo a process of democratisation to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.

3.2 Agroecology in action

In addition to building the food sovereignty movement worldwide, virtually every organisation in La Vía Campesina has now attempted to implement its own practical programme for the transition to agroecology, the model of farming carried out according to the principles of food sovereignty. Agroecology itself is gaining increasing international support. Olivier De Schutter, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, submitted the most authoritative report yet on the issue at the end of 2010.[72] He began with a clear explanation of what it is and how it works:

Agroecology is both a science and a set of practices. It was created by the convergence of two scientific disciplines: agronomy and ecology. As a science, agroecology is the "application of ecological science to the study, design and management of sustainable agroecosystems". As a set of agricultural practices, agroecology seeks ways to enhance agricultural systems by mimicking natural processes, thus creating beneficial biological interactions and synergies among the components of the agroecosystem. It provides the most favourable soil conditions for plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and by raising soil biotic activity. The core principles of agroecology include recycling nutrients and energy on the farm, rather than introducing external inputs; integrating crops and livestock; diversifying species and genetic resources in agroecosystems over time and space; and focusing on interactions and productivity across the agricultural system, rather than focusing on individual species. Agroecology is highly knowledge-intensive, based on techniques that are not delivered top-down but developed on the basis of farmers' knowledge and experimentation.

De Schutter then looked at scientific studies into the effectiveness of agroecology. The most systematic study yet, carried out by Jules Pretty and others, compared the impacts of 286 projects in 57 developing countries.[73] It found that productivity increased by 79% on average under the agroecology system, while 'environmental services' (for example, insect pollination, fish stocks, water supply and crop pollination) also improved. Citing additional evidence from other studies, De Schutter affirmed that agroecology reduces rural poverty, improves nutrition, increases resilience to climate change and improves gender equality. He concluded by calling on all states to include agroecology in their plans to reduce poverty and to mitigate climate change.

Other studies have found that agroecology has a startling potential with respect to global warming. The Rodale Institute in Pennsylvania carried out a 10-year study comparing organic agriculture (comparable with agroecology in that no chemical inputs are used) with fields under standard tillage using chemical fertilisers. It found that the organically farmed fields could sequester (capture) up to 2,000lb of carbon per acre per year from the atmosphere. By contrast, fields relying on chemical fertilisers lost into the atmosphere almost 300lb of carbon per acre per year.[74]

These findings are extraordinary. In 2006, US carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion were estimated at nearly 6.5 billion tons. If organic agriculture were practised on all 434 million acres of cropland in the USA, the study concluded, nearly 1.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide would be sequestered per year, mitigating close to one quarter of the country's total fossil fuel emissions. At the global level, according to similar calculations by non-governmental organisation GRAIN, if traditional systems of mixed farming were adopted throughout the world, about two thirds of the current

excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would be captured in 50 years.[75]

As noted above, food sovereignty and agroecology are more than theoretical constructs. Farmers' movements across the world are now implementing their own programmes to introduce agroecology in local communities. The following sections present the positive experiences of three War on Want partner organisations from Brazil, Sri Lanka and Mozambique – and a parallel example from Britain – in introducing the principles of food sovereignty into their own farming practices.

Photo: War on Want

4 Agroecology in Brazil

In many ways Brazil's agriculture has been a remarkable success story. Output has been increasing steadily, and the country not only produces enough food to feed its 190 million inhabitants, but has also become one of the world's leading exporters of agricultural produce. Yet this success has come at considerable cost. Despite protests from social movements and environmentalists, successive governments have decided that only large-scale industrial agriculture can deliver the kind of growth they want, and they have provided big landowners with subsidised loans – many of which are never repaid but eventually written off in debt amnesties – to set up large plantations of soya, sugar, cotton and other commodities. Agribusiness is the name of the game, and with it come the big agro-industrial corporations with their 'packages' of credit, seed, pesticides and fertilisers, as well as the big trading companies such as Cargill and ADM that dominate global trade in agricultural commodities.

These companies have gained great influence in Brazil. The most egregious case is Monsanto, which fought a long, dirty and ultimately successful campaign to get Congress to give the go-ahead for its genetically modified soya, against the opposition of a small but determined group of environmentalists and consumers. Since it got its way in 2005, Monsanto has gone from strength to strength: Brazil has overtaken Argentina as the country with the second largest area planted with GM crops (after the USA); and, with this, Brazil has become the second largest market in the world for Monsanto (again after the USA).[76]

Other corporations have boomed as well. Brazil has become the world's largest consumer of agricultural pesticides. Moreover, pesticides banned in many other countries – such as acephate (an organophosphate) – are permitted.[77] The uncontrolled expansion of agribusiness is doing great harm. Huge plantations of soya, sugar cane and other crops are extending into vulnerable ecosystems such as the *cerrado* (savannah) in the centre-west of Brazil and the Amazon basin. Industrial farming is contaminating the country's food, its ecosystems and the nation's health, as well as taking away farmers' autonomy by making them dependent on multinational corporations.[78]

Agribusiness has not had everything its own way, however. Brazil has a total of 5.2 million farms, and 4.4 million of these are less than 10 hectares in size. These smaller establishments occupy only 24% of the total farmland, yet they produce more than half of Brazil's food. Their contribution to the national production of two staple foods – cassava (87%) and *feijão* (beans: 70%) – is impressive. They are also responsible for a considerable share of produce usually associated with agribusiness, such as coffee (38%), rice (34%), poultry (50%), wheat (21%) and soya (16%). It is largely because of the crops produced by small family farmers that Brazil is self-sufficient in food and, unlike many countries in the global South, was scarcely affected by the world food crisis in 2008. Moreover, the smaller farms employ far more labour than agribusiness, being responsible for 75% of jobs in agriculture.[79]

When the former trade unionist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected president of Brazil in 2002, many hoped that he would carry out the radical programme of agrarian reform that he had promised during his electoral

campaign. However, once in power Lula never seriously considered such a step, convinced that his government needed to work closely with agribusiness, which provides most of the country's exports. Yet President Lula did not completely abandon small farmers. He ensured that they received more funding than in the past (although agribusiness got almost 10 times as much) and he carried out a modest programme of agrarian reform. He also made sure that people sympathetic to the demands of small farmers, rural workers and the landless held positions within his administration.

Yet it is becoming more evident every year that Brazil's model of farming is unsustainable. Despite the advances made under Lula, poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are still very serious problems, all of them linked to the lack of agrarian reform. Brazil, which is already suffering from more of what used to be called 'extreme weather' – that is: torrential storms, droughts and heat waves – will be seriously affected by climate change. One of Brazil's leading research institutes is already predicting heavy declines in crop output as a result.[80]

One of the key movements calling for change has been the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers' Movement – MST). Since it was created in the early 1980s, the MST has become a powerful force, winning land through the occupation of unproductive estates and organising marches and demonstrations to press the government to implement a new radical project for Brazil, including a far reaching programme of agrarian reform. Every five years the movement brings together thousands of activists for its National Congress, at which it establishes its policies for the next five-year period. At its Congress in 2000, the MST recommended agroecology as the main farming method to be used on its settlements. Even so, progress has been uneven. The main difficulty has been the lack of government support. Official credits, the government's technical assistance programmes and the agro-industrial corporations promote only the 'technological packages' of the Green Revolution.

Despite this, the MST is succeeding in getting more and more settlements to practise agroecology. In recent years the MST has been training students, many of them sons and daughters of settlers, in university level agroecology courses. In November 2010, it produced its first graduates – 120 of them – from its three-year agroecology courses in the state of São Paulo. These courses were funded by PRONERA, the federal government's National Programme for Land Reform Education, with contributions from War on Want and other non-governmental organisations. One of these courses was held in Itapeva, near the Fazenda Pirituba settlement, where many families are beginning to practise agroecology.

4.1 The cooperatives of Fazenda Pirituba[81]

About 400 families live in the settlement, which is made up of six *agrovilas* (hamlets). It is located in a fertile, grain-growing area some 380km south-west of Brazil's industrial heartland, the huge city of São Paulo. In the 1980s, groups of landless families from the region – sharecroppers, labourers, sugar cane cutters and tenant farmers – found that Fazenda Pirituba, which was owned by the state, had been illegally taken over in the 1960s by prosperous dairy farmers. So the families began to occupy the land and demand its expropriation. Soon they were receiving the support of the MST, which helped them to organise their makeshift camps and

to regroup for further occupations after they had been evicted by the police, which happened frequently.

Finally, in 1992, the land was expropriated and given to the families as part of the government's agrarian reform programme. Each family was allocated a house in one of the *agrovilas*. At first, the families practised conventional agriculture, planting beans, wheat and maize. They bought their seeds, fertilisers and pesticides from the company salesmen who travelled around the *agrovilas*, and, because they had no alternative, they sold their crops to middlemen, who paid them less than the market price. Their dream of owning a piece of land had come true, but they were just as poor as before.

A process of discussion began throughout the settlements in the region, culminating in a Forum in 2003. With the support of MST agronomists and advisers, the settlers analysed their situation and decided to make fundamental changes to the way they farmed. They took a number of decisions: to diversify production; to reduce and eventually to eliminate the use of pesticides; to set up training courses in agroecological farming; and to begin a programme to improve the environment, which included reinvigorating the natural water sources (as many springs had dried up) and planting trees.

After the Forum, the farmers met to work out how they would implement the changes. While they all accepted, in theory, that it would be good to become ecological farmers, they could not agree on the speed of transition. Faced with this impasse, the cooperative finally decided in 2007 that the collective land should be divided into individual plots, and each family would decide what to do with its plot.

Agrovila 3 is almost like a village, with a bakery, a mechanical workshop, a bar, the headquarters of the cooperative and a well tended soccer field. There is also a large communal vegetable garden (*horta*), a communal herb and flower garden, a piggery, two biodigestors and a mini-distillery.

José Aparecido Ramos (known as Zezinho), is 47, has four children, and was one of the first settlers to arrive. He was a sharecropper, and joined the occupation in 1986. His wife works in the bakery. Their house, one in a row near the centre of the *agrovila*, is a solid brick building surrounded by trees. Behind the house a profusion of mango, banana, papaya, avocado trees and coffee bushes grow. Chickens run around.

Like everyone else, Zezinho began growing cereals and using chemicals. After the Forum he formed a collective with like-minded people and began the change. Today there are people everywhere, working the land, trundling wheelbarrows, mucking out pigs, mending fences. A dozen or so women are weeding the vegetable garden. Zezinho says that, like the families in other *agrovilas*, they have revitalised a spring that had been dry since 2005 by planting native trees. Altogether they have planted 6,000–7,000 trees, all native species, including a windbreak to protect the *agrovila* from the region's strong winds. They have planted another four hectares with eucalyptus to provide wood for the bakery and the biodigestor, and for fencing. The women have also planted 120 species of herbs and flowers on a patch of ground protected by a high wire fence. The women's group, which began producing herbal remedies 15 years ago, branched out a few years later to make soap as well.

In the centre of Agrovila 5 lives Ana Terra, an enthusiastic young agronomist who came to

Photo: Elcio Carriço

live at the settlement with her partner two years ago, after graduating from an agricultural college and becoming an MST militant. She is part of the support team from the MST, which helps the cooperative to negotiate with different government agencies and organisations. Clearly impressed by everything the families have achieved, Ana Terra declares that Itapeva is a place where "land reform has worked".

Ana Terra lists the problems they had to overcome. The first was the local agricultural practice of planting only grain, which began during the 1970s Green Revolution. Then there was the way in which this kind of agriculture involved forcing the land to produce three harvests a year of beans, maize and wheat, demanding more chemicals at a higher and higher cost. The soil had become completely exhausted, and yet the farmers weren't even paid a fair price for allowing their soils to be worn out. Ana Terra says that the programmes for small producers, introduced during President Lula's government, have made a huge difference, as they have enabled MST settlements to ignore the middlemen, sell their produce directly, and earn a small but growing income.

Almost all the vegetables that the settlers produce are organic. In contrast, they still grow most of their cereals with chemical inputs, but here too they have started the difficult transition to organic production. They are receiving a great deal of support for this from the MST, which held one of its agroecology courses in Agrovila 5, but they all agree that the changeover would be much quicker if there were more technical and financial assistance from the government.

5 'Nature farming' in Sri Lanka[82]

Sri Lankan society is recovering from two deeply traumatic events. One was the Indian Ocean tsunami which hit the country on 26 December 2004, killing 36,000 people and directly affecting another 800,000. The other was the long civil war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, popularly known as the Tamil Tigers. Apart from the death toll and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, these traumas did a great deal of damage to the country's social fabric.

Even before these events Sri Lanka was a poor country, with 45% of its citizens living on less than US$2 a day. Poverty is particularly concentrated in rural areas, where 72% of the population lives. Yet successive governments have done little to help subsistence farmers, instead promoting manufacturing, exports and tourism. The share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in total economic output halved from 38.8% in 1960 to 19.4% in 2000.[83]

There are two clearly differentiated farming sectors. One is composed of large plantations, producing tea, rubber and coconuts for export. These plantations, which cover almost a quarter of the country's arable land, are today owned by the state (foreign-owned plantations were nationalised in 1975), which has handed over their management to 23 private companies. The plantations are labour-intensive, employing just over half of the country's labour force, and productive, with the plantations contributing about one fifth of the country's total economic output.[84] But wages for the workers, most of whom are women, are lower than in any other sector.

The other farming sector is made up of impoverished farmers, who cultivate paddy rice, maize, soya, vegetables and perennial crops, and who sell their small surpluses on the domestic market. This sector occupies 76% of the total arable land, and employs two million farmers, 70% of whom own less than one hectare of land. These farmers face serious problems. For decades their already small plots have been further divided up between sons after the death of the head of the family.[85] They have also been seriously harmed by the uncontrolled and chaotic arrival of modern farming.

The farmers were also particularly badly hit by the economic liberalisation programme that began in the late 1970s. Until then the country had an entrenched tradition of social welfare.[86] In 1977, however, the country faced a serious balance of payments crisis, partly caused by deteriorating terms of trade and successive hikes in the world oil price. The right-wing United National Party won the elections, and began a process of economic liberalisation which included a partial dismantling of the state sector. Among other measures, it decided to scale down radically the Guaranteed Price Scheme (GPS), by which farmers had been guaranteed a minimum price for their paddy rice. In a single year, the quantity purchased under GPS dropped sharply, from 30% of the paddy crop to just 5%. Middlemen moved in, buying up the harvest for much lower prices, and farmers' incomes declined heavily. Some farmers even committed suicide.[87]

The neoliberal transformation of the economy provoked waves of protest. The first campaign came in 1980, when six farmers' organisations, led by the All Lanka Peasants Congress, collected a petition of 60,000 signatures against the neoliberal reforms. What particularly angered farmers were changes in the land regularisation process. Up until this time, when landless farmers settled on public land the government waited until it was satisfied that the settlements had developed into a village, and then set up a land *kachcheri* (magistrate's office)

to distribute land titles to the settlers. The government put an end to this, hoping to hand over land to big private investors. Settling without authorisation on unoccupied land was made a punishable offence. It was an enormous blow to landless farmers, as it blocked their main way of obtaining a land title, but the protestors failed to overturn the new legislation.

5.1 The threat of tourism

Sri Lanka is not a large country, but being an island its coastline is extensive, covering 1,700km. The government believes that this coastline offers the country the perfect opportunity to develop tourism for foreign visitors. The government's national tourism plan was drawn up in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami; as the Sri Lanka Tourist Board's website said at the time: "In a cruel twist of fate, nature has presented Sri Lanka with a unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world-class tourism destination." New tourism zones are being created in which long stretches of the best beaches are handed over to the tourism industry.

Within a month of the tsunami, the government had developed a plan to transform 15 coastal towns all around the island into tourist resorts. The first project was for the redevelopment of Arugam Bay, a small town which nestles on the edge of a 300-hectare lagoon on the country's east coast. Along with beautiful beaches, it has one of the best surfing spots in the world.[88]

The Arugam Bay Resource Development Plan envisages the transformation of the area – which until recently was home to fishing and agricultural families who supplemented their income with seasonal guesthouses – into a large complex of hotels, with a floating plane pier and a helipad. Some 5,000 families are being displaced to five separate inland locations, behind areas zoned off for tourism. Both the sea and the lagoon are now practically inaccessible to the families. There are indications that the development here will serve as a model for the other areas.

The Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR), which was formed in 1990 as a network of farmers' organisations and NGOs in response to the country's socio-political and economic crises, has long been critical of the way tourism is being developed in Sri Lanka. Commenting on how the government was taking advantage of the tsunami to promote tourism, it said: "This 'unique opportunity' seems to be reserved solely for developers and those who can afford a world-class tourist destination, but for the majority of tsunami survivors, the opportunity for rebuilding their lives with dignity and sustainability will be lost. For them, the 'cruel twist of fate' was not in the tsunami, but lies in the government's tourist- and business-oriented rebuilding plan."[89]

5.2 Community-based autonomy

Sri Lanka has a proud history of protest and mobilisation, but it has been less successful in building alternatives. This is now changing. MONLAR is collaborating with an organisation called New Environment Resources Alliances (New Era) in several alternative farming projects. New Era works with communities in promoting participation and in teaching eco-agriculture and agroforestry. It is currently working to develop alternatives to *Chena* (slash-and-burn) cultivation, where farmers go into the forest, clear one or two hectares of virgin trees, burn the vegetation and plant seeds. They can use the same plot of land for another harvest, but then they have to move on to a new site, as the fertility of the soil is exhausted.

New Era and MONLAR are jointly running a project in southern Sri Lanka that encompasses 43 villages and involves 1,225 farmers. One of the villages in the project is Katuwanayaya, in Monaragala District. The village has 42 families, most of whom were until recently practising *Chena* cultivation. The farmers said that their lives had been getting increasingly difficult. The weather patterns were changing, so they could have only one harvest a year compared with the two they had managed in the past. Shifting agriculture was increasingly difficult to practise because of the government's concerns about forest destruction, and soil erosion had become a very serious problem. While their income was falling, the prices of agrochemical inputs and farm machinery were rising. As a result the village was becoming steadily poorer, and some of the families were open to the new ideas.

AA Priyanthi and her husband, Indika Nishantha, are one such family. While Indika mainly looks after the livestock (cows and goats) on their farm, Priyanthi tends to the crops. Priyanthi tells their story:

My father first came to this village in 1968. It was then thick forest. My father-in-law came a bit later. Both of our families were practising Chena cultivation. I got married to Indika, we had two children and we carried on with Chena, using my father-in-law's plot. Though we worked very hard, we were getting few benefits from our labour. We were falling into an ever deepening debt trap. We had to spend lots of money on chemical inputs and seeds. And every year we had to increase the amount of chemicals we used in order to get a decent harvest. We felt that we were becoming slaves. We really became very depressed and helpless. And we couldn't see any alternative but to continue with Chena cultivation.

One of the first things New Era and MONLAR did was to encourage the families to form a community-based organisation (CBO) where they could discuss their problems and possible alternatives. Slowly a plan emerged. Just over half (26) of the 42 families decided to switch to 'nature farming'. Priyanthi was one of them: "We decided to get away completely from chemical use and to adopt natural farming principles. We developed soil conservation, water management, compost-making and usage, and mixed crop farming." They started to save seeds for the following year's sowing, just as farmers had done in the past. And they took measures to regenerate the soil and the biodiversity. Priyanthi continues the story:

Earlier we used to grow only one crop and sell our harvest. The income was not sufficient even to settle the debts we had taken on. So we had a problem with getting enough food. We were really starving and malnourished. But with nature farming, as you can see, there are hundreds of varieties in our garden. We can now go to the garden and pick anything and cook it. There is something the whole year round. Even though they are still at school and only 13 and 9 years old, my daughter and son have their own separate vegetable beds. They are very proud to contribute to the family meal with their crops. We learned how to have a homestead with various crops which satisfy all the nutritional requirements.

Our house was a very basic one without any furniture. We have now overcome that agony, and were able to buy furniture. When I get home late after going to other villages to promote nature farming, my husband cooks for us. He is very supportive of my involvement with other farmers. My two children also help me with cleaning, washing, cooking and even with farming. We are proof that one can lead a decent life with nature farming. So we are a happy family.

Home gardener Matilda Peries in front of her crops

Photo: War on Want

Priyanthi says that many factors have contributed to their improved financial situation. When they were practising *Chena*, they had to buy almost all their food from stores. Now she has to buy much less – just sugar, salt, dry fish and a few other things, and their weekly expenditure has gone down by two thirds. She also saves a lot of money from not having to buy chemical inputs, as she herself prepares all the green manures and pest controls she needs. Productivity has increased too: with her mixed farming, Priyanthi is now getting as much from half an acre as she got in the past from one acre.

Gender roles have changed too. Because of their dominant role in crop farming, women are usually the majority in the training programmes and have gained confidence. As Priyanthi affirms: "We participated in gender training programmes. We have learned that people can have different roles, whether they are male or female. We now share all the work at home. In our CBO there are also more women than men. Earlier, women were confined to the home and the farm, taking a back seat in meetings. That has all changed."

Priyanthi enthusiastically supports the demonstrations organised by New Era and MONLAR against the intervention of agrochemical multinationals in Sri Lankan farming. She not only participates herself, but also organises people in other villages to join in. She has realised that nature farming cannot be sustained in isolation but needs to be part of a collective effort, from the grassroots right up to international levels. MONLAR is part of La Vía Campesina, and through it Priyanthi visited India under an exchange programme. There she learned a lot and is now sharing her experience with farmers in Sri Lanka.

In her work, Priyanthi has learned about the concept of food sovereignty. She comments: "It is not, in fact, a new idea, but something we had earlier. Now many farmers all over the world are trying to revive it, and we feel happy about that and also proud to be part of this movement." Priyanthi supports nature farming for many reasons, but her main motivation goes to the heart of the food sovereignty approach: "For me, the most important part of food sovereignty is that it allows us to feel free once more."

6 Collective farming in Mozambique[90]

Land has long been a contentious issue in Mozambique. In 1964, as part of the broad African liberation movement, Frelimo (the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) began a guerrilla campaign to end four centuries of Portuguese colonisation. Frelimo's slogan was "to free the land and to free men". Mozambique gained independence in 1975, but the new left-wing president, Samora Machel, had little time to carry out the promised reforms, including land reform. Anti-communist opposition forces, brought together in Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance) and backed by apartheid South Africa and the USA, launched a war to oust Frelimo, which was supported in turn by the USSR. A long, violent and costly civil war ensued.

Joaquim Chissano succeeded Samora Machel after the latter died in a plane crash in 1986. In 1987, with the country virtually bankrupt, Chissano turned to the IMF for assistance. Along with the economic bailout came the IMF's insistence on economic liberalisation: even while war still raged, the IMF demanded harsh cuts in government spending, and credit restrictions. The war finally ended in 1992, but by then the country was in dire straits. Schools and hospitals had been destroyed, and the country had run up a huge foreign debt.

Since then, reconstruction has proceeded well. Much of the foreign debt was eventually forgiven, and the country has over the last 20 years enjoyed almost uninterrupted growth of around 8% a year. Even so, Mozambique is still one of the poorest countries in the world, with 45% of the population living on less than US$1 a day. According to the Mozambican Technical Secretariat of Food and Nutrition Security, approximately 35% of families go hungry.[91] Many do not have access to basic services such as safe water, schools and medical facilities. In its 2010 human development index, the UN Development Programme ranked Mozambique 165th out of 169 countries.[92]

The subsistence agricultural sector, where the vast majority of the rural population works, has been largely neglected. The government has concentrated on building up the export sector, mainly prawns, cotton, cashew nuts, sugar, citrus, coconuts and timber. Even so, some advances have been made to improve the lot of the rural poor. Because land was such a key issue in the liberation struggle and the civil war, an Inter-Ministerial Land Commission was created in 1995, with a mandate to develop a new policy and to draft a new land law. The Commission decided that Western-style individual land titles, which ignore the importance of communal ownership in traditional African communities, should not be the only legal form of access to land. It started, instead, to develop alternatives that were better suited to the Mozambican reality.

A draft law was drawn up, and working teams were sent to all 10 provinces to hear the views of the local communities. A National Land Conference was convened in May 1996 at which more than 200 representatives from government, civil society organisations, political parties, traditional authorities, the private sector, national and foreign academic institutions, religious groups, donor agencies and the United Nations discussed the revised draft.[93] The debates were intense. Some were worried that a situation could be created where there would be little free land because most land would belong, in one way or another, to a community. Others were concerned that the legal recognition of

customary rights would 'freeze' the rural population in systems which perpetuate gender discrimination.

Finally, a compromise was reached. The five main points in the law were:[94]

1. that the right to possession of land should be recognised without the need for a title;
2. that the State should be obliged to consult rural dwellers before assigning to someone else the right to use a piece of land;
3. that it is more important to prevent conflicts from emerging than to resolve them later;
4. that the larger the area, the higher the taxes paid to the State;
5. that customary rights should be recognised as long as they do not infringe constitutional principles.[95]

In July 1997, the Land Act was approved. It is one of the most progressive pieces of land legislation in Africa. Even so, this legislation has not translated into real advances for the rural population. Farming continues to be neglected by the government. Even though agriculture employs 81% of the country's population, it contributes only 21% to the country's total economic output. Partly because the road network is so poor, it is difficult for families to sell their crops and they are heavily exploited by middlemen. Many families still go short of food in the period before the harvest (January to March). Women are particularly vulnerable, with many dying in childbirth. Although men and women have equal rights under the constitution and equal access to land under the Land Act, women are widely treated as second-class citizens.[96]

Much of Mozambique's agricultural capacity is under-utilised; in 2002, the FAO estimated that only 12% of the country's 36 million hectares of potential farmland was under cultivation. This may change now, however, as foreign companies eye up land opportunities either to produce food to send back to their countries of origin or to grow biofuels. Mozambique's land law should protect local communities but, according to environmental activist João Nogeiro, this is not assured: "The communities don't understand that by giving away such amounts of forest, they're destroying their own livelihoods, because that's where they go hunting and collect fruit, traditional plants and building materials."[97]

6.1 Mobilising for food sovereignty

The União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC: the National Union of Peasant Farmers) has long been struggling to improve the lot of small farmers and the landless. Founded in 1987, when small farmers felt the need to create their own organisation to combat the neoliberal economic policies being imposed by the IMF, UNAC currently has over 65,000 members organised in 58 unions, as well as 1,243 farmers' associations and cooperatives in addition to its individual members. UNAC, which is a member of La Vía Campesina, believes that small farmers, with their environmentally friendly systems of mixed farming and crop diversity, must be given much more support by the authorities if the country is to feed itself and tackle the growing problem of climate change.

Following an increase in the price of bread, riots erupted in Maputo in late August 2010, causing several deaths. UNAC issued a press release in which it called on the government to rethink its food policies radically:

The government should give high priority to domestic food production to minimise dependence on the international market. Peasants and small farmers should be encouraged through better prices for their products to produce food for themselves, their communities and cities. This means increased investment in peasant agriculture, as well as taking measures to control imports of cheap food. In contrast with large-scale export agriculture, peasant agriculture means building on the age-old experience of peasant communities to produce high-quality organic food, which respects local habits and customs and is free from the harmful impact of speculation.

Unless this is done, we will see more and more serious food riots of the kind we experienced last week. Food is not a commodity like any other. It is unacceptable that a population, mostly poor, is at the mercy of the world markets to decide whether it eats or not, particularly in a country like Mozambique, which has enough land and natural resources to ensure food for all, whether they live in the countryside or the cities. Instead of leaving the country vulnerable to food speculation, we call on the government to adopt a policy of food sovereignty.[98]

UNAC is starting to help rural communities to develop projects in the area of food sovereignty. It often works in association with the General Union of Cooperatives (UGC) of Maputo, which was founded by impoverished women during the worst years of the civil war. Many of its founding members were widows or had been left behind by husbands who were working in South Africa as migrant labourers.[99] Today the UGC has become a successful business, supplying Maputo with much of its fruit, vegetables and chickens, and it is extending its influence in the countryside.

6.2 Reclaiming traditional knowledge

One of the communities where UNAC and UGC have been working is Muezia in the district of Monapo, in the central province of Nampula, not far from the coast. The community's only link with the rest of the country is an earth road, which becomes practically impassable at times during the rainy season. Muezia is a very old community: according to the village chief, Armando Vireque, it was founded well before the colonial era. It was evacuated during the civil war, but the people returned when the conflict ended. Today the community has nearly 4,000 inhabitants.

The community has a small store, which sells a few manufactured goods. Apart from a local market, which operates only on Saturdays, the main outlet for their crops is the bigger market in the district of Meconta, which is 35km away. The only way to get there is by cycling or walking. During the harvest, middlemen appear in the area, but they pay very low prices. The community has, theoretically, two schools, but most of the children do not go to school because of a lack of teachers. In many ways it is a typical rural community, suffering from the same problems as thousands of others.

As well as cultivating their individual plots, members of the association work on the *machamba*: the plot of collective land. The farmers cultivate maize, groundnuts, cassava, *mapira* (a fruit), sesame, rice, beans, banana and sugar cane. They decide collectively what to plant on the *machamba*. The work to promote food sovereignty is being carried

Food riots in Maputo, Mozambique, September 2010

Photo: Reuters

out through the associations that have been set up in the community. A few members, known as facilitators, have been trained in agroecological techniques, and they in turn train the other members. The system works well because the techniques are easy to learn and clearly beneficial. They include the production of green manure, made from the leaves of groundnut and bean plants, goat droppings and other ingredients, and the production of pest repellents made from soap, tobacco, pepper and regional plants. The farmers are also being trained to combat soil erosion.

The farmers are in reality recuperating traditional knowledge, which in some cases has been improved by agroecological agronomists. Most of them clearly feel happy with what they are doing. Just as in the old days, they are saving seeds from harvest to plant in the following year. Keen to expand their 'bank' of traditional seeds, as suggested by UNAC and UGC, they are exchanging seeds with peasant families in other zones. They have also moved into livestock, rearing chicken, ducks, goats and cattle. The members of the associations would like to train other communities in agroecological techniques, but

it is difficult to do this, they say, as they have no vehicles and can reach other communities only by walking or cycling.

Amina Vachaneque, a 65-year-old woman, says that the associations have brought them benefits both individual and collective. She cites, in particular, the purchase of farm machinery, the construction of a sugar mill, the supply of goats for breeding, and the training courses. She says that the ecological methods for controlling pests are working: her crops are no longer attacked. Her most profitable crop is sesame, which provides her with a cash income. Their main problems, she says, come from the exploitative middlemen, who flood into the region during the harvest: "They set the prices and we have no alternative but to sell to them."

Another woman, Atija Almeida, says that their situation has improved but they still face difficult times: "February is the worst month, because our crops, which we have planted in December, are not ready for harvesting, and we need cash to send the children to school, to pay for hospital treatment if someone is ill, and to buy clothes and other goods."

Ana Achandre, UNAC community leader in Inhambane province, Mozambique

Photo: War on Want

7 Community farming in Britain

The history of farming in Britain is a history of dispossession and impoverishment, but also one of resistance and defiance. As early as the 13th century, landowners in England began to fence off what had until then been common land used by serfs to grow crops and rear livestock. The process, known as the enclosures, intensified in the following centuries as landowners sought to appropriate more land for the lucrative practice of sheep farming. In the Scottish Highlands, a similar process – the 'clearances' – drove tens of thousands off their land in waves of brutal evictions. Many were forced to emigrate, even when this involved a risky journey to an unknown land.

Peasants and labourers fought back across the centuries, combating both the enclosures and the impoverishment of the peasantry. In June 1381 a national insurrection gathered behind Wat Tyler, John Ball and Jack Straw and marched on London in the Peasants' Revolt. Although the Revolt failed and its leaders were beheaded, it heralded the end of feudalism and established a radical tradition in British politics. That tradition was carried forward in the 17th century by groups such as the Diggers, who called on the poor to organise themselves for practical action to take back the land. Gerrard Winstanley, the best known Digger leader, claimed that one third of England was "barren waste, which lords of manor will not permit the poor to cultivate". If this land was used properly, he said, it could feed the population 10 times over, so that begging and crime would end. The Diggers were eventually defeated, but their legacy too has lived on in later rebellions and demonstrations up to the present day.[100]

Despite the resistance, Britain became the first country in the world in which a majority of the population lost contact with the land. Today only 1.5% of the working population is engaged in agriculture, and farming, strictly speaking, contributes only 1% to the country's gross domestic product (although many more people are employed in the food processing and retail sector). Largely because the urban population became even more distant from farming in the second half of the 20th century, with the development of large capital-intensive monocultures, Britain became a nation of passive consumers in a top-down system.[101]

In such a climate, it is scarcely surprising that supermarkets were able to grow at such an astonishing rate, facing little of the resistance they encountered in France, for example, where peasant culture remains alive and well. Supermarkets are able to offer consumers a one-stop store where they can buy almost everything they need. Few can resist the beguiling offer of cheap and convenient food, and most turn a blind eye to the harm that these chains are doing to local farmers and local shops – not to mention the millions of workers in the global South who are paid poverty wages as a result of the downward pressure on costs exerted by the supermarkets on their suppliers.[102]

Supermarkets wield considerable power over the supply chain. The Big Four – Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrison and Asda – control more than three quarters of the grocery market, with one in four shoppers going to Tesco alone. Although few suppliers have the courage to speak out openly for fear of losing their contracts, they complain about the way the supermarkets treat them, with late changes to their agreements and low prices which often fail to cover even the cost of production. Local shops have been severely

affected: planning permission for a new supermarket is approved, on average, every day and 12,000 independent shops were forced to close in 2009 alone.

As noted earlier, the UK government's Competition Commission held a two-year investigation into the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers, the results of which were published in 2008.[103] The report found that the supermarkets were, indeed, abusing their power with respect to suppliers, and recommended the introduction of an independent ombudsman to police the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers. In May 2011, the UK government published a draft parliamentary bill in order to establish an adjudicator with powers to enforce and oversee the Groceries Code. While this will not reduce supermarkets' overall control of the food system, the prospect of a strong adjudicator represents an opportunity to call the largest retailers to account for the worst abuses of their power.

Alternative forms of farming and production are beginning to take root throughout Britain, as a means to challenge the dominance of the supermarkets. Local food networks have been created, the most successful of which is perhaps the Making Local Food Work initiative, a gateway to a number of farmers' markets (where farmers sell their produce directly to consumers), community shops, cooperatives and buying groups.[104] The partners work together to support local food distribution, sharing information and helping each other to understand relevant regulations and legislation. Some 600 enterprises are involved, with an estimated 1.4 million people participating in one way or another. Other producers, particularly organic farmers, are selling directly in farm shops and setting up online mailing schemes.

The only British member of La Vía Campesina is the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), which works with crofters in the Scottish Highlands. Announcing the decision to join La Vía Campesina in 2009, SCF representative Norman Leask said:

The struggle for the rights of the small-scale food producers, or peasants, is something going on all around the world and is something everyone should be concerned about. Crofters are part of this struggle, striving to get a fair deal for their efforts and way of life. Peasants throughout the world are the backbone of rural economies and communities, and today is their day.[105]

7.1 Fordhall Farm, Shropshire

Perhaps because the industrial revolution was born in Britain, the country's agriculture today is heavily industrialised. Production is mechanised, and farmland is driven relentlessly to produce greater yields at ever lower cost. The country's once fertile soil has been systematically stripped of its crucial minerals, leaving its fruit and vegetables tasteless.

One of the most remarkable attempts to develop a healthier and more environmentally friendly way of farming has been occurring in a 140-acre farm just outside the town of Market Drayton in Shropshire. Arthur Hollins was a tenant farmer who rented Fordhall Farm from a landowner, having left school at 14 to run the farm when his father died. The land was intensively farmed, with a mixture of livestock and horticulture. The dairy at Fordhall produced not only milk but also yoghurt, one of the first farms in the UK to do so.

"My father always thought for himself," said his daughter Charlotte, 28, who today runs

Volunteers harvesting the potato crop at Fordhall Farm, August 2011

Photo: Fordhall Farm

the farm with her brother Ben, 26. "He noticed how full of life the soil was in the woods, which were left alone, compared to the fields to which chemical fertilisers were applied," said Charlotte. "He wondered why the plants grew so well there while the crops were doing so badly. He realised that not only was he letting chemicals destroy the fertility of the soil on his farm, but he was paying the companies that manufactured them a lot of money to do it!"

Hollins got little help in his search for an alternative way of farming. After the Second World War he worked out a system, which he called foggage, for keeping his pastures fertile and reducing his reliance on costly inputs from outside. The quality of his grass was the key to it all, he decided. He started to grow a diversity of grasses and herbs on his pastures – there are now 45 kinds – and to rotate his cattle to prevent overgrazing. The variety of plants provided a healthy diet for

the livestock, and the tight root structure meant that the animals could be wintered outdoors without ruining the ground. Arthur worked at his pastures for more than half a century and, according to his daughter, it was only shortly before he died in January 2006 that he finally thought he'd got it right.

Even so, the last few years of his life were not happy. The landowner wanted to evict him so the land could be sold to developers. Arthur had to fight off a succession of eviction notices in the courts. He kept winning the cases, but by the time he died the farm was run down and on the verge of bankruptcy. There were only 11 cows left.

Because of the delays, the landowner had lost his buyer, although he had managed to sell 10 acres of the farm to Müller Dairies, a large German company that makes yoghurt. The company's state-of-the-art production facility is clearly visible from the farm. "Ironic, isn't it," commented Charlotte: "Our dairy, which pioneered yoghurt making in the UK, was forced to close and now we see this huge yoghurt factory across the hedge each day."

The fight seemed lost, but Charlotte and Ben thought differently. They decided to mount a rearguard action to save the farm. They managed to persuade the landowner to give them a year to raise the £800,000 needed to buy the farm and, with the help of Stroud Common Wealth, a Gloucestershire-based consultancy that advises on community land deals, they set up the Fordhall Community Land Initiative. They started to publicise their efforts in the press and to issue cooperative shares, each costing £50. Sufficient people responded to their appeal and just before the deadline of 1 July 2006 the money was raised. Ben now leases the land as a tenant farmer from the Fordhall Community Land Initiative, which also employs Charlotte. It is the UK's first community-owned farm.

Today Ben is in charge of the livestock: cattle, sheep and pigs. Because even in winter his 90 sheep and 75 cows feed outside on pasture, he does not have to buy fodder and is sheltered from increases in the world price of feed. He is, however, still buying corn for his 30 Gloucester Old Spot pigs. His cattle never calve in the autumn, only in the spring, so that through the winter no cow is trying to feed young stock as well as herself. Similarly, the sheep lamb in the second half of March, just as the fresh grass is beginning to sprout, which allows the ewes to develop plenty of milk to feed their newborn. Even though productivity is lower than on industrial farms, Ben, who sells most of his meat directly to consumers, is managing to turn a profit. There is, however, no prospect of them reopening the dairy, as milk prices have fallen so low in the UK.

Charlotte runs the other activities. She edits the newsletter that goes out to all shareholders and supporters, as well as being in charge of the farm shop and the education centre. She keeps in contact with many local groups and helps to coordinate the scores of volunteers who come throughout the year to help develop the project. The old dairy has been converted into a community centre, which will house their office and their courses, and enable them to receive more school visits and to open a café.

Other initiatives of this kind have opened in other regions of Britain. "The tide is turning", says Charlotte. "People are beginning to realise that good quality food, produced in a truly sustainable way, is essential for our health and the health of the planet."

8 Conclusions

The communities we have described in Brazil, Sri Lanka, Mozambique and Britain are showing the way towards a sustainable food system based on food sovereignty. Despite the differences in the ways of life in the four countries, the similarities in their stories are striking. All the families know from their own experience the harm that chemical inputs do to the land and to people's health; they know how tempting the technological 'packages' can seem and how readily they lead to debt entrapment; and they know how disempowering it feels to live in hock to multinational corporations.

The experiences we have described are exciting and inspiring, but they are also fragmented and isolated. All the families involved told us that they receive little support from the authorities, and that they could achieve far more if they had access to adequate funding and appropriate technical assistance. This lack of government backing makes no sense. With agrochemical farming one of the principal forces pushing the world over the tipping point into widespread hunger and environmental disaster, governments need to incorporate the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty into their national policies as an urgent priority.

Food sovereignty offers a political solution to a political crisis – the crisis of the global food system. For such a solution to take root and be effective, it requires both awareness and action on the part of all social actors. War on Want has produced the current report in order to develop this awareness and to help build the global movement for food sovereignty. Ultimately, however, structural changes will be needed in the world economic order in order to transform the food system and end the scandal of global hunger.

War on Want believes that:

- all governments, social movements and civil society organisations throughout the world should unequivocally support initiatives to build food sovereignty;
- governments, social movements and civil society organisations throughout the world should support La Vía Campesina in its efforts to create agroecological alternatives to chemically intensive monoculture;
- international financial institutions should publicly back the call of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food for countries to incorporate agroecology into their national plans, along with adequate funding and research support;
- agriculture should be removed from the remit of the World Trade Organisation immediately so that countries are fully able to protect domestic farmers from the volatility of world food markets;
- speculation by hedge funds and other financial institutions on food commodities should be outlawed;
- governments should take urgent measures to stop the speculative purchase or leasing of land in poorer countries by other governments or financial institutions (the 'land grab');
- strong measures should be taken to prevent supermarkets from monopolising food retail, driving out local shops and exploiting suppliers.

La Vía Campesina organising meeting, Cochabamba, Bolivia, April 2010

Photo: Kris Krug

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War on Want
War on Want fights poverty in developing countries in partnership and solidarity with people affected by globalisation. We campaign for human rights, especially workers' rights, and against the root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice.

Cover picture: La Vía Campesina protest march at the COP-16 climate summit in Cancún, Mexico, December 2010. Photo: © Archivo de Proyectos

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SIXTY YEARS FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY