

## Women in West Africa Cry Out “Enough! We Are The Solution”

A new colonization is afoot in Africa. It’s a violent usurpation of lands and livelihoods, being perpetrated under the guise of agricultural development.

Nations eager for international investment are bending to the agendas of the IMF, World Bank, and even international aid organizations such as the Gates Foundation, who see industrial agricultural as the only way to address hunger and promote development goals.

Yet the people of these nations know otherwise – that industrial agriculture intensifies local hunger, depletes the soil and steals land from small farmers. That’s why they stand firm to advance sustainable farming practices like agroecology.



The stakes are incredibly high for small farmers who risk losing control of their seed stocks – and worse, being uprooted from their fields and replaced by multinational corporations hoping to take control of food production.

But women across West Africa are saying “Enough!” through We Are the Solution, a grassroots campaign made up of a growing number of women-led rural agricultural associations across five African nations – Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal.

They include women like Mariama Sonko, who are passionately promoting agroecology and local control of food systems as an alternative to the corporate takeover of agriculture.

“We reject agriculture that pollutes with chemicals, pesticides, GMOs,” explains Mariama. “Our vision is to truly promote ancestral knowledge and put pressure on our government to take seriously the preservation of our peasant agriculture.”



Women have traditionally done the bulk of small scale agricultural work in Africa, so they are deeply invested in protecting their lands, their ability to feed their families, and traditional knowledge that has been passed down for generations.

And thanks to your partnership through Grassroots International, the We Are the Solution campaign continues to scale up its

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## From the Executive Director

Our work to protect the human right to land, water, and food has never been more urgent.

Today this struggle is about far more than the well-being of individuals and communities. It's about protecting the future of our world, and all the people in it.

Right now we have the opportunity to change course; but someday soon, it will be too late.

The assault on people – and the resources on which we all depend – is aggressive and unrelenting. People who stand up for food sovereignty and resource rights face increasing violence. As corporate power grows, inequality is deepening around the world. And meanwhile, the weather is becoming more extreme, and the environment is being devastated.

To work for resource rights is to be on the frontlines of these struggles. To stand up for the human right to land, water, and food is to stand up to inequality, violence, and the exploitation of our natural world.

As you'll see in this issue of *Insights*, the stakes are incredibly high. But with your support, people are making progress and achieving victories around the globe.

From Central America to West Africa, grassroots movements are often the only thing standing between vital resources and the greed that would swallow them up, and doom our world in the process.

Your support is critical, and it's making a crucial difference.

Thank you for standing up, for taking responsibility, and for demonstrating a commitment to global change – and global justice.

In West Africa, Honduras, Brazil, Palestine, and beyond, your support is helping to create hope, and brighter futures – for us all!

Chung-Wha Hong  
Executive Director

## Women Struggle for Resource Rights in Central America

Throughout Central America women are at the epicenter of a fierce struggle for resource and human rights.

For rural women, fighting for their right to land, water, and food is fundamental, and deeply personal. It is essential for their livelihoods, the health and well-being of their families, and the preservation of deep-rooted cultural traditions.

Yet efforts by women to lead the struggle for resource rights also involve an even more basic campaign to secure women's rights – as inequality, political disenfranchisement, and violence against women continue to be rampant across Central America.

Operating as a national coordinator for the Council for the Development of the Peasant Woman (CODIMCA), the lead organization for the Women's Regional Commission of La Via Campesina (LVC), Yasmin Lopez is one of the women at the forefront of this struggle.

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## Women in West Africa...

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efforts to teach, to advocate, and to organize.

As Mariama emphasizes, the challenges are great as African farmers with few resources go head to head with powerful, wealthy corporations. Yet the women – and men – of the We Are the Solution campaign hold steady in their determination.

“Women are taking leadership roles in the countries in which We Are the Solution is active, promoting agroecology and seed and food sovereignty as the only viable system for the long-term. This way we can have healthy lives and protect the environment.” ■





# Organizing Resistance in the Amazon

Perhaps one of the most violent – and visible – assaults on resource rights is the act of building a mega-dam.

These projects forever alter the course of rivers, and the lives of all those who depend on this life-giving water. They flood family-owned lands and ancestral territories, often displacing hundreds of thousands of people.

Once built, they also pose incredible dangers if not properly maintained, as a recent catastrophe in Brazil so tragically illustrated. Two dams owned by transnational mining companies burst, flooding the region with toxic mud and wastewater. People, homes, and cars were swept away. At least 2,000 people were affected – displaced, left homeless, or feared dead.

And it's all in the interest of feeding far-away demands – and generating profits. “Green” energy for growing cities is one rationale, yet dams are also part of paving the way for other extractive industries like mining and agricultural export.

While dams concentrate wealth in the hands of people far away, the consequences for local people and the environment are catastrophic. That's why your continued support for Grassroots partner, the Movement for People Affected by Dams (MAB) is so critical.

Luzia, pictured below, is one of the 10,000 people impacted by the Belo Monte mega-dam, now under construction. For many like Luzia, the river is part of their cultural identity, and how they sustain themselves and their families.

“The situation is difficult for us. The river is going to dry up [as it is diverted from its natural course] and we don't have conditions to stay here during the drought. We live from the river, it's our life. We can't live without water and that is why we are demanding our rights.”

With your support, MAB continues to organize resistance to Belo Monte and other mega-dam projects so that communities can stand up for their rights, and for the rivers they love – and rely on for life. ■



## Women Struggle for Resource...

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Yasmin points out that barriers to women owning land and accessing credit are two significant sources of resource inequality.

Currently only 8% of the two million rural women have legal titles to land – and, without that, women are denied access to financial capital that would facilitate training, agricultural improvement projects, and entrepreneurship.

But Yasmin also emphasizes that as large developers set their sights on land for agribusiness, dams, and mining projects, women who stand up are, increasingly, becoming targets of physical violence.

In the last five years alone, over 2,000 women activists have been killed in Honduras. But activists like Yasmin refuse to give up.

As Yasmin cautions, the fate of these women is closely tied to the fate of our planet. Devoted to agricultural production that works in harmony with the environment, their work – and activism – are critical to combating climate change.

Yasmin has witnessed great progress, and with your help, hopes for more: “The hope for the future is to continue seeing the fruits of the women's efforts ... stopping the criminalization of women who defend their rights, and gaining equity, dignity and respect for all.” ■

# MAKE A GIFT TO THE FUTURE!

Across the globe, grassroots organizations are steadfastly defending the ability for rural women and youth, family farmers and indigenous people to decide how to share and steward land, food and water. Yet the forces seeking to concentrate control of the world's land, water and food work voraciously.

Our solidarity and support for their movements for human rights and dignity must grow as well.

That is why, as Grassroots International approaches its fourth decade, we invite you to consider creative gift planning to make a larger and more lasting impact in the struggle for a just and sustainable world.

You don't need great wealth to make a major contribution to the movements you support through Grassroots International. With creative gift planning, you can make a truly significant gift to the future, one that can transform lives and help lead to lasting social justice for years to come.

There are many ways, some very simple to provide for the future through Grassroots International:

- 1 Gifts from your will or trust**
- 2 Gifts from a retirement plan**
- 3 Gifts of stock and appreciated assets**
- 4 Naming Grassroots International as a future beneficiary of your life insurance, bank account or other asset.**



Carol Schachet, our Director of Development and Communications, can help answer any of your questions about gift planning. Please call Carol at (617) 524-1400 or e-mail her at [Carol@GrassrootsOnline.org](mailto:Carol@GrassrootsOnline.org)

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Grassroots International works in partnership with social movements to create a just and sustainable world by advancing human rights to land, water, and food through global grantmaking, building solidarity across organizations and movements, and advocacy in the US. 