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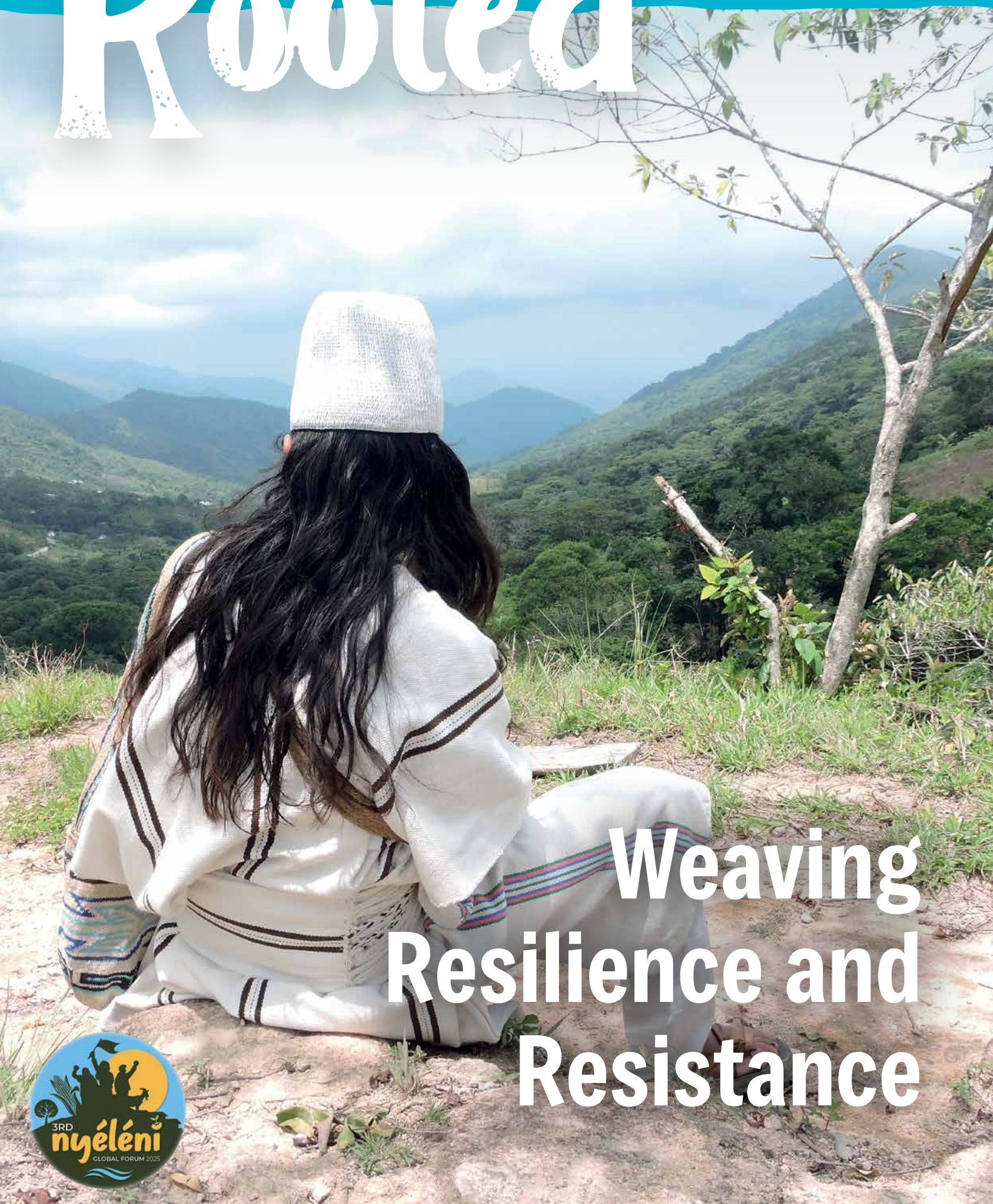
Rooted

in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty



Weaving Resilience and Resistance

3RD nyéléni GLOBAL FORUM 2025

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This is Rooted Magazine

This is the third issue of Rooted in Agroecology and Food Sovereignty, produced in collaboration with the 3rd Global Nyéléni Forum.

Rooted Magazine is a platform for the exchange of voices, perspectives and knowledge of food producers and others at the forefront of action to transform food systems. A flagship global publication, it connects science, practice and movement, shifting narratives and strengthening agroecology for food sovereignty.

Rooted is a collaboration between Cultivate!, the Latin American Association for Agroecology (SOCLA), the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), Agroecology Now! and the Institute for Agroecology at the University of Vermont (UVM-IfA). Rooted Magazine also works closely with two regional agroecology magazines in Latin America: LEISA Revista de Agroecología and Agriculturas.

We welcome your contributions, comments, questions and ideas: rooted@cultivatecollective.org

See our website for longer versions of the articles in this issue, the Spanish language edition and the Call for Contributions for upcoming issues: www.rooted-magazine.org

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Colophon

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Cover photo: Synawiku Izquierdo Torres, an Iku (Arhuaco) Indigenous man from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, known by Indigenous people as Gonawindúa, the heart of the world. Photo by Natalia Giraldo-Jaramillo, 2025
Back cover illustration: Weaving Intergenerational Resilience by Shomira Sanyal

The March 2026 issue of Rooted will highlight the voices, role and perspectives of youth in agroecology.

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Weaving resilience and resistance for systemic transformation

This edition of Rooted Magazine is published in conjunction with the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum, a landmark convergence of grassroots movements and organisations from around the world, happening in September 2025 in Sri Lanka.

As the Forum takes place, civil society organisations are also preparing a People's Summit leading up to COP30 in Brazil, while the High-Level Panel of Experts in Food Security and Nutrition is launching a key report on building resilient food systems. This issue of Rooted, launched on the eve of the Nyéléni Forum, complements these three processes. We share insights from people weaving resilience and resistance every day through grounded experiences in agroecology and food sovereignty.

Memory Mateveke, one of over 300 small-scale farmers from across Bikita district in southeast Zimbabwe, exhibiting seed at Gangare Village.

Our planting, harvesting, cooking, and eating are political. Especially in a world where most people don't know where the food they eat comes from, who produces it, or how it is distributed, and where – despite the industrial agriculture promises – hunger and undernutrition are increasing. In these times of civilisational crises – when the commons (water, land, biodiversity, food, basic human rights, etc.) are being seized and exploited by authoritarian states and corporations, and systems of racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity are weaponised to dispossess and divide – our grassroots initiatives that build community resistance and resilience often get dismissed. Even potential allies may see our work as too small, too slow, or too localised in the face of such vast, interlocking crises. Meanwhile, significant funding – including harmful subsidies with taxpayer and other public sources – and attention are directed toward false solutions like green- and pinkwashing that do not support our planet, either socially or ecologically, but instead fill the pockets of corporate actors driving destruction.

That is why Rooted Magazine presents insights from grassroots agroecology initiatives, through which people fulfill their basic food needs in a socially and ecologically just way, and also ignite broader societal change. While it is now common to say that reimagining and rebuilding systems like food and energy has great potential for systemic change, it is far less acknowledged that this transformation must be driven by the diversity of local actions, alternatives and processes rooted in people's bodies and territories. Our movements' experience and the stories in this magazine tell us that this can happen only when people reclaim control over their land, seeds and water and when they build local knowledge, relations and skills to create pathways for healthy, thriving communities – in contrast to the precarious living situations imposed by profit-seeking, market-driven models. And while this work is rooted locally, it is deeply interconnected globally. There is no ethics in so-called 'food security' when struggles for food sovereignty are not taken up everywhere. Such is the significance, potential, and hope of our initiatives!

The Nyéléni movement for food sovereignty

For us to further realise this potential, we are not only building just alternatives on the ground, but also organising to defend our territories and rights, and to raise political demands at all levels.

Almost 30 years ago, La Via Campesina introduced the concept of food sovereignty during the World Food Summit of the United Nations in 1996. The food sovereignty movement then further organised globally into the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), which has played a significant role not only in democratising institutional processes and defending peasant rights globally, but also organising action on the ground. In 2007 the 1st Nyéléni Global Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali brought together nearly 500 delegates from all continents and constituencies to strengthen and deepen the concept of food sovereignty.

During that process, Nana Aïcha Cissé from Mali, and one of the founders of the World March of Women, shared this consensual definition of food sovereignty, elaborated on by peasant movements: "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It means consuming only what we produce and producing what we consume."

Who was Nyéléni?

In Africa there is a story that has been passed down through generations about a woman from Mali named Nyéléni, who challenged patriarchal power by excelling at something that was considered men's work: agriculture. As well as defeating her male opponents in farming competitions, she also managed to overcome the arid climate and to domesticate crops like fonio and samio, which were crucial for sustaining her people. The first international Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in the town of Sélingué in the Sikasso region of Mali in 2007, was named in her honour, after which the Nyéléni Centre and movement were established.

Following the first forum, the 2nd Nyéléni Global Forum took place in 2015 in Mali to deepen movement consensus around agroecology as a pathway to food sovereignty. This year's 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum in Sri Lanka will build on this shared understanding of food sovereignty and agroecology to serve as a space for political convergence of struggles towards systemic transformation – recognising that no struggle stands alone, to ensure that all the values of our diverse movements shape the change, and to strengthen our collective voice.

Shaping a joint political voice

Through this process of convergence among diverse constituencies, including fisherpeople, feminism movements, solidarity economy groups and 'health for all' advocates, important considerations are being brought to the table. For instance, peasant feminist movements at the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum highlight the importance of re-centering life around care and emphasise that we are eco- and interdependent. Women are made responsible for daily practices that sustain life, such as growing, preparing and sharing food and taking care of families and communities, which forces us to rethink how we organise domestic and care work. This essential work, which can take place in community kitchens, gardens and laundries, is often invisibilised by capitalism and not recognised as work at all, yet people exploit and profit from it around the world. Similarly, women farmers, pastoralists, fishers and gatherers do most of the work but lack access to wages or rights and consequently to health, education, decent work and opportunities to decide for a life worth living.

Shaping a joint political voice is a defining feature of the Nyéléni process, setting it apart from other global forums calling for a convergence of movements, in particular the World Social Forum (WSF). Although the WSF has supported the convergence of movements, the Forum itself did not establish a unified political position. In contrast, the Nyéléni Global Forum process goes beyond simply providing an open space; it shapes a collective political voice and shared direction. Over the past two years, this has occurred through a series of regional meetings with representations organised geographically, intersectionally and according to constituency criteria, which will culminate in the release of a unified political agenda during the 3rd Global Forum in September.

The Nyéléni process brings together a balanced range of constituencies. Beyond its traditional social base of small-scale producers, there will be groups from climate justice, feminism, social and solidarity economy, human rights, peace, health and other rights movements, as well as committed and critical artists, and scholars. Some of these actors share their experiences and insights in this issue of Rooted, demonstrating their efforts to weave resistance and resilience.

A break out session on agroecology at the 2nd Global Nyéléni Forum in Mali.

Photo: Colin Anderson

Resilience and resistance

The two indeed go hand in hand. As the dominant powers in the world seem to be losing their moral compass and we witness distressing acts of genocide and starvation, this issue leads with a contribution from Palestine (page 8). Youth-led agricultural cooperatives are rooting Palestinian identity, mobilising popular action, and building a solidarity economy, ultimately aiming to nurture social fabric and dismantle oppressive economic hierarchies. In an interview (page 12), Anuka DeSilva (La Via Campesina) and Hemantha Withanage (Friends of the Earth) set the stage in Sri Lanka where the 3rd Global Nyéléni Forum takes place, sharing how they are working to revive the great diversity of traditional seeds of the island while resisting destructive mega development projects. Along the same lines, small-scale fishworkers in India (page 26) are reclaiming their rights to water as they build their movement through a creative boating campaign.

Building relationships of care and collective learning emerge as central threads in the weaving work between resilience and resistance. The development of a regional Participatory Guarantee System in Mexico (page 29) fosters trust and resilience and teaches "that agroecology isn't just something to be certified: it's something to be lived, built collectively, and defended as a shared and contested territory". In Pakistan (page 44), farmers are resisting 'green grabbing' and land dispossession for corporate agriculture, while building a dynamic grassroots movement in which women learning circles hold an important place. The transborder coffee networks between Mexico, Nicaragua and the United States (page 40) are building a solidarity economy through knowledge exchange and creating bonds of trust. The experience of the Piçarreira community garden in northern Brazil (page 48) teaches how acting collectively can make the difference between losing and preserving a space to cultivate. Authors in Latin America and the Caribbean (page 15) reflect on how care, spirituality, and justice are key to agroecology for transformative resilience.

We received various submissions that explore how Indigenous peoples around the world are leading the way in building resilience, often reframed as cultural survival under oppression. Maasai pastoralist communities in Kenya (page 32) are building a mosaic of governance, ecology, and empowerment across 30 villages, as "homegrown resistance to systemic injustice and an invitation to rethink how resilience is built". The Dene in Canada (page 36) are growing food in a way that reframes agriculture from a colonial activity to a practice rooted in cultural revitalisation, collectivism, food sovereignty, and climate resilience. This resonates with the reflections of Method Gudzindwa from Zimbabwe (page 42), where communities are reviving robust Indigenous crops and, at the same time, tapping into their cultural memory. The Tuareg in Mali (page 18) today proudly uphold their history as a people who have survived for centuries by relying on local wisdom as they cultivate crops in the desert. In the Sierra Nevada of Colombia (page 22), the Indigenous *mamʉs* are seeking dialogue after centuries of isolation, and restoring balance in the territories to ensure the continuity of all of life.

These experiences serve as urgent reminders of the need for cultural revitalisation as an act of both resistance and resilience in a world deeply defined by the violence and erasure of colonisation. Keeping this in mind, we extend an invitation to the Rooted community to continue visualising, supporting, and participating in grassroots initiatives. Because it is through everyday acts of care, cultivation, and community that resistance and resilience for systemic change truly nurture and grow. ■

Authors: This editorial is written jointly by members of the Communications Group of the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum and the Rooted editorial board.
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Reclaiming land, restoring power in Palestine: A grassroots path to a solidarity economy

In the shadow of prolonged colonisation, fragmentation, systemic marginalisation, and ethnic cleansing, Palestinian communities continue to resist erasure through the daily act of rebuilding life from the ground up. The Partnership Youth Forum is rooting Palestinian identity, mobilising popular action, and building a solidarity economy that embraces egalitarian, democratic, locally grounded, and ecologically sustainable values.

LINA ISMA'IL

The so-called Oslo Accords 'peace agreement' in the mid-1990s sidelined liberation and popular organising in favour of institutional development and foreign aid dependency. Grassroots action – particularly among youth – was often depoliticised or marginalised.

In response to this vacuum emerged the 'Partnership Youth Forum' (Multaqa Al-Sharaka Al-Shababi), a youth-led, community-driven network in Palestine. It seeks to build resilient alternatives to dominant political and economic systems. It is crucial to note that while the Partnership Youth Forum and its collectives have found some space to grow in the West Bank despite immense and increasing challenges, the reality in Gaza has become catastrophically different. The Israeli settler-colonial project has escalated its assault on all forms of life, committing one of the most atrocious crimes against humanity: the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. This includes the destruction of farmland and agricultural infrastructure, the targeting of farmers and fishermen, and the systematic use of starvation as a weapon of war, aiming to eliminate 2.2 million Palestinians from existence.

Fava bean harvest at the Ritaj women's cooperative.

Reclaiming agency: The birth of the Partnership Youth Forum

The Partnership Youth Forum was founded on the realisation among Palestinian youth that real change could not happen without an emancipatory framework for Palestinians' goals of freedom and liberation. Over the years, it grew into an independent youth-led network that connects with over 40 youth centers and community-based organisations across the West Bank and Gaza, and maintains strong ties with Palestinian groups in the '1948 lands' (the Palestinian land colonised by Zionist militias in 1948, which established the Israeli state) and refugee camps in Lebanon.

The Forum focuses on three main areas of work:

- Rooting Palestinian identity by fostering direct connections and collective dialogue among Palestinians across the West Bank, Gaza, the 1948 lands, and the diaspora;
- Mobilising popular action by organising volunteering initiatives in marginalised areas, supporting emergency responses, and promoting broad-based community engagement;
- Building a solidarity economy by supporting youth-led agricultural cooperatives and collectives that embrace egalitarian, democratic, locally grounded, and ecologically sustainable values, ultimately aiming to dismantle oppressive economic hierarchies and nurture social fabric.

Youth-led cooperatives as tools for systemic transformation

The cooperatives have adapted in response to shifting priorities and lived realities under a volatile geopolitical landscape, resulting in a diversity of setups. For instance, some cooperatives are located in areas like the villages of Madama and Burin, where youth are working to protect and cultivate lands under constant threat of settler violence. Others are composed of formerly incarcerated youth, freed political prisoners who, upon their release from Israeli prisons, found little to no official support to help them reintegrate into society and instead built new livelihoods through cooperative farming.

Over a period of more than two years, the Forum engaged youth groups in deep dialogue and reflection on the values of social and solidarity economies, drawing linkages to

A diversity of youth-led cooperatives

The Forum's youth-led cooperatives are not just economic ventures – they are grassroots spaces where collective action intersects with land, food, and identity. The idea to establish cooperatives originated from the youth themselves. Some were motivated by a desire to reconnect with the land, recognising agriculture and collective labour as tools to strengthen Palestinian steadfastness and to live with dignity. Others were looking for alternatives to mainstream employment, rejecting roles in profit-driven entities or other forms of institutions that they saw as reinforcing unjust systems. Others believed in reclaiming the role of producers rather than remaining consumers, actively shaping their communities rather than passively relying on external structures. And others were driven by the conviction that collective work is the pathway to collective liberation.

Among the 25 cooperatives of the Partnership Youth Forum are: Ard Al Ya's (Saffa village/ Ramallah), which produces seasonal vegetables and herbs and recently introduced fruit trees; Ard Al Fallahin (Kufur Ni'ma village, Ramallah), a goat farm producing milk and cheese; Doma Women Cooperative (Doma village, Nablus), a recently started sheep and cow farm; Al Ard Lana (Aarrabeh village, Jenin), which produces seasonal vegetables in addition to its chicken farm; Ritaj women's cooperative (Aseerah al Qibleyyeh village, Nablus), which produces honey and seasonal vegetables; and Ard Al Amal (Madama, Nablus), which produces seasonal vegetables and wheat.

Indigenous Palestinian systems of mutual support, or *Al-'Ounah*, where community members collaboratively support each other during harvesting, house building, or emergencies. These learning spaces also explore the global and local history of cooperatives, their guiding principles, and agroecology as a liberatory agricultural practice rooted in food sovereignty. They laid the groundwork for a distinct Palestinian community organising model that is simultaneously rooted in history and responsive to present challenges.

The cooperatives emphasise self-reliance, collective welfare, and resilience through community-rooted partnerships and mutual aid. Consequently, a solid ideological foundation was built leading to the emergence of 25 youth and women-led agricultural cooperatives and collectives in the West Bank and two in Gaza that embody these shared values and aspirations. Sadly, with the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the two cooperatives and their farmland have been completely destroyed.

With technical, financial and social support by the Forum and their communities, youth collectives have been able to reclaim land, grow local crops in healthy soil, and develop internal governance systems that reflect their commitment to horizontal leadership. For the Forum, producing local food using agroecological methods is a political act that challenges dependence on Israeli-controlled food systems and global agribusiness. It is also a cultural act that revitalises traditional knowledge, heirloom seeds, and communal farming practices.

School students visit the Ritaj women's cooperative on land day.

Photo: Partnership Youth Forum

As these cooperatives took root and began producing local crops, a new challenge emerged: how to distribute this food in a way that aligned with the same values of justice and solidarity. In response to this need, the Forum initiated Hisbet al Ta'awoniyat (Cooperatives Market) in 2020, a farmers' market held biweekly in front of the Popular Arts Center in Ramallah in the West Bank.

For cooperatives, Hisbet Al-Ta'awoniyat is more than a place for economic transactions. It became a communal space where they exchange stories, knowledge, and engage in concrete acts of solidarity. After each market day, cooperative members exchange produce and contribute part of their harvest to food baskets for families in need. This spirit of mutual aid extends beyond the cooperatives, as many 'friends' or regular consumers of the market not only purchase produce but also contribute financially to help distribute food to vulnerable families, reinforcing a shared commitment to community care and collective responsibility.

Facing crises with collective strength

Operating in Palestine means the constant navigation of crisis, from Israeli army attacks, settler violence and movement restrictions to climate shocks and funding cuts. The Forum has developed a unique capacity to respond to these challenges. When cooperatives face hardship, the Forum mobilises its community to raise funds, share labour, or offer emotional support.

The Forum led solidarity campaigns that promoted direct group purchasing of produce from Palestinian farmers, particularly those at risk of losing their harvest due to Israel's deliberate influx of Israeli agricultural products into local markets just before the harvest season. This tactic, commonly used to flood the market and crash prices, has especially impacted seasonal crops of Palestinian farmers like melons and faqous (Cucumis melo), threatening the livelihoods of small-scale farmers.

One of the persistent challenges confronting cooperatives is the deliberate targeting and destruction of farmland and agricultural infrastructure by Israeli occupation forces. Incidents include the demolition of a cow shed belonging to the Doma Women Association in Doma village, the destruction of an irrigation network of the Kan'an Women Cooperative in Nassaria, and the restriction of farmers in Burin from harvesting their crops. In response, the Forum has mobilised community-based funding to support these cooperatives. This collective strength is deeply rooted in a millennia-old culture of mutual aid.

Inspired by the work of the Youth Partnership Forum, Palestinian youth in the diaspora, including in Canada, Jordan, and the USA, began exploring how they could meaningfully become part of this social and solidarity economy model. Recognising that a crucial element was missing, namely community-based, responsive funding mechanisms, they established the 'Palestinian Social Fund' in Canada. This fund offers grassroots financial support to Palestinian cooperatives without any conditionalities.

Vision for a liberated future

The Partnership Youth Forum represents an organically rooted awareness that emerges from the lived realities, needs, and struggles of the people. It seeks to explore and articulate what a liberatory vision of a social and solidarity economy might look like within a colonial-capitalist context that actively works to fragment Palestinians, severing their connection to land, identity, and collective existence.

It envisions a future where Palestinian youth are not merely integrated into existing systems, but are empowered to transform them entirely. Their work with cooperatives and markets is just the beginning, a step toward a broader movement for liberation, justice, and resilience.

> *The Forum opposes the logic of capitalist extraction and settler dispossession, while sowing the seeds of autonomy*

Despite these steadfast efforts, it is crucial to recognise that Israeli colonisation persists in its systematic campaign to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from all parts of Palestine, employing varying strategies and intensities

As a result of the current genocide, grassroots organising and food sovereignty efforts in Gaza face complete annihilation, further exposing the violent extremes of colonial domination. For us, this intensifies the urgency of collective mobilisation at all levels (grassroots, national, international, formal and non-formal) to first and foremost put an end to the colonisation of the Palestinian people. ■

*Author: **Lina Isma'il** is an environmental and community activist, and co-founder of the Palestinian Agroecological Forum, which is concerned with spreading the philosophy and practice of agroecology as a basis for achieving food sovereignty and preserving nature. Lina is a co-author of the book "Conscious Choices: A Guide to Ethical Shopping in Palestine" and has overseen the production of several publications, as well as the documentary "Untold Revolution: Food Sovereignty in Palestine." Contact: Lina.w.ismail@gmail.com*

Photo: Darshika Sewwandi, CEJ

Learning about agroecological practices that are appropriate for the community.

"In Sri Lanka, seed diversity is resilience"

In early September 2025, grassroots movements from around the world are gathering in Sri Lanka to build "a world beyond capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and fascism". Two of the main organisers of the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum, and icons in the Sri Lankan food sovereignty movement, are Anuka DeSilva and Hemantha Withanage. In this interview, they walk us through Sri Lanka's history and reflect on the concepts of resilience and resistance. "The home garden is the smallest unit of resilience."

What comes to mind when you consider weaving resistance and resilience in Sri Lanka?

Anuka: To understand resistance in the context of Sri Lanka, we must start with history. In the 1970s, agrarian reform, hybrid seeds, and fertiliser were introduced to Sri Lanka, and several large hydropower projects were initiated. The 1972 Land Reform Act led to the redistribution of land to boost productivity and create jobs. It made land available to investors, resulting in a rise in export-focused agriculture, particularly rice and banana monocultures, as well as contract farming, but negatively impacted farmers' livelihoods.

Hemantha: When I think about resilience, I think of the home garden – the smallest unit of resilience in Sri Lanka. Almost every house has a garden. They feature layered systems: big trees like breadfruit, coconut and jackfruit form a canopy, lemon and other fruit trees are the second layer, and annual vegetables such as green leaves at ground level. Many also raise cows and chickens. People save and share seeds. They also have paddy fields where they use manure from gardens. This sustainable agroecological system in Sri Lanka has supported us through crises, from the 1972 food import ban to COVID, and land division. Without them, crises would be worse.

Why is the struggle for food sovereignty so important in Sri Lanka?

Anuka: Our economy collapsed after the 'open economy' began in 1977 and particularly with the free trade agreements. We have become dependent on imported foods, even for essentials like dal (lentils), fish, sugar, and main staples like rice. People's attitudes are also shifting; they no longer want to eat the crops we grow in Sri Lanka. For example, people say jackfruit is too hard to prepare.

About 70 percent of people in Sri Lanka live in rural areas and on farms, but malnutrition rates are high, sometimes as high as 34% in big agrarian settlement districts. They grow some crops to sell, such as rice, bananas, and maize, but they do not grow their own food. So you could say we have food security, but not food sovereignty. For this reason, MONLAR is engaging with food sovereignty and is not just focused on changing farming practices.

Hemantha: Challenges to food sovereignty in Sri Lanka include corruption, labour shortages, and expensive machinery. But perhaps the biggest issue is access to farmland. As an island nation, we must balance forest and agricultural land. However, there is simply no additional fertile land available for conversion into agriculture. The human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka involves elephants living outside parks in farming areas where half the harvest

Photo: Janneke Bruil

Anuka DeSilva

Anuka DeSilva is a small-scale agroecological farmer, growing rice, fruits, vegetables and spices, including banana, coconut, turmeric and ginger. She is a gender advisor at MONLAR, the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform in Sri Lanka. Anuka is part of the International Coordination Committee of La Via Campesina, the world's largest international peasant organisation.

Hemantha Withanage

Hemantha Withanage is the founder and chairperson of the Centre for Environmental Justice in Sri Lanka. He is the chair of the grassroots environmental justice federation Friends of the Earth International. Hemantha is also the international convener of the NGO Forum on the Asian Development Bank and part of the Executive Committee of the International Pollution Elimination Network.

is destroyed. Farmers often kill elephants to protect crops, causing 400 elephant and 200 human deaths yearly. To reduce conflict, we can expand farmland access into abandoned and wastelands to make them fertile through agroecology.

What happened when the government banned chemical inputs in 2021?

Hemantha: In 2021, the government suddenly banned all chemical imports and announced an overnight shift to organic farming, shocking everyone. Farmers, accustomed to chemicals since the 1970s Green Revolution, protested as production dropped and food prices soared, causing a crisis. A phased approach would have been better.

The government aimed to address foreign currency shortages for buying agricultural chemicals, not agriculture itself. The transition involved corruption. After five months, the ban was lifted for some export crops, such as tea. However, subsidies for fertilisers were not fully restored, and the ban's effects persist.

Anuka: Agroecology emerged as a solution. People realise that alternatives are needed because of the high cost of chemical inputs. Women understand that beyond farming, this also affects debt issues. In Sri Lanka, around 2.4 billion women are affected by microfinance loans, and 200 women have committed suicide, many due to the large debts they owe.

MONLAR works to support microfinance and agroecology. Women are replacing commercial crops with local ones such as green gram, cowpea, and native bananas in an agroforestry system. They are forming their own cooperatives. Collective capital is the key: women's groups pooling money, seeds, and labour. So-called 'master farmers', mostly women, are training communities on technical and political aspects of agroecology. Women are the guardians of ancestral knowledge, and they are taking on roles in decision-making spaces within farmer unions. This is our strategy to overcome the crises.

Sri Lanka is known as a hotspot of seed diversity. How is this playing a role in the movements?

Hemantha: The traditional seed bank of Sri Lanka has disappeared. Hybrid seeds are now imported from Malaysia and other countries. The seed diversity necessary to adapt to climate change and drought has been lost. In 1992, more than 750 rice varieties were available. Today, only 60 remain. Previously, Sri Lanka had 3,000 rice varieties – we were known as the rice bowl. There were also over 750 banana varieties and more than 300 maize varieties. All these have been replaced by imported banana and maize varieties. We need a strong national seed bank and healthy soils, along with considerable courage and mobilisation efforts.

Anuka: Seed diversity is resilience. I am also a seed saver. I have 58 varieties of rice, 12 varieties of banana, and six varieties of maize. In Sri Lanka, many people don't believe in agroecology because they are addicted to conventional farming. But we found that young people and women like being seed keepers, they understand the value. MONLAR now works with 5,000 farmers to increase seed diversity. Together, we aim to revive the diversity we once had.

What are your hopes for the outcomes for Sri Lanka of the Third Nyéléni Forum?

Anuka: The Forum can help the government better understand agriculture and trade. They plan to sign trade agreements leading to food imports. We hope they will sign and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants. La Via Campesina will propose an alternative trade framework for adoption. It's vital to unite diverse movements beyond food sovereignty to support these political changes in Sri Lanka and worldwide.

Hemantha: We expect about 600 people from around the world to visit during this period, and we look forward to welcoming everyone to Sri Lanka. We are also inviting local farmers and politicians to the event, and we are doing extensive media outreach to amplify the impact of the Nyéléni Forum. In Sri Lanka, many people are dying from toxic foods, and we face an unidentified chronic kidney disease in agricultural areas of the dry zones – some believe it is caused by pesticides or heavy metals in fertilisers. Cancer rates are also rising. People need clean, safe food and are learning about the importance of agroecology. The Nyéléni Forum can serve as a wake-up call for this mindset. ■

*Interview by **Janneke Bruil**, member of the editorial Board of Rooted and co-founder of Cultivate! Contact: janneke@cultivatecollective.org*

Photo: Gisela Illescas Palma

Care at the centre for transformative resilience

Opening ceremony, World Social Forum of Transformative Economies, Cali, Colombia 2024.

The emotional and communal care work that sustains the movement for agroecology, carried out especially by women, is often overlooked. Drawing from regional experience in Latin America and the Caribbean, this article explores how care, spirituality, and justice intertwine in agroecology to nourish transformative resilience.

ENRIQUETA TELLO GARCÍA, GISELLA ILLESCAS PALMA, MARÍA ANTONIA PÉREZ OLVERA AND LAURA VANESA REYES

Social movements advocating for food sovereignty in Latin America and the Caribbean have positioned agroecology not just as an agricultural production model but as a social and political force that drives socio-ecological transformation. These movements, including the Latin American and Caribbean Agroecological Movement (MAELA), promote resilience through both technical and political strategies. However, care and collective care networks, though essential for resilience, often remain invisible.

In this article, we share a perspective developed within MAELA, through the work of organisations such as the Mexican coffee producers association VIDA A.C. and women's groups. We promote a form of agroecology that integrates spirituality, feminism, and collective care as pillars for profound, decolonial transformation.

Care as the backbone

Care, understood as affective, community-based and life sustaining work, is essential for the resilience of agroecological movements. It highlights the need for self-care for both activists and those working on the ground and fosters collective care spaces that help communities overcome adversity by turning hardship into opportunity. Care supports us in developing processes of self-management and self-worth, helping us understand that our beliefs drive our actions, and giving us the opportunity to relearn and reinvent ourselves.

> *Spirituality is the invisible thread that unites agroecology, ancestral wisdom, and community*

From an ecofeminist perspective, care is recognised as the backbone of resistance efforts, even though the burden of care work often disproportionately falls on women and other marginalised identities. In an academic paper, Trevilla et al. highlight how, from the standpoint of the feminisms of Abya Yala – the name used by various Indigenous peoples for the continent prior to colonisation – women have always centered care as a key principle in agroecology, both in theory and in practice. They balance care responsibilities within their families with active participation in community, organisational, and territorial work.

A spiral of awareness

MAELA has advanced the concept of 'agroecology and spirituality' by emphasising ancestral knowledge, community rituals, and collective organisation. This vision transcends technical aspects of agroecology to include a holistic way of life by proposing a spiral of awareness that weaves together the spiritual and the material, nourished by emotional and spiritual intelligence: listening to the body, intuition, and the heart.

The following key insights have emerged from collective experiences led by MAELA between 2021 and 2025. They are grounded in regional gatherings, women's circles, territorial assemblies, and community dialogues held in nine countries. These reflections aim to propose practices to strengthen agroecology for transformative resilience, rooting it in spirituality, collective care, and social justice.

Community health festival, April 2025.

Photo: Ma. Laura Vanesa Reyes

Three keys to agroecology for transformative resilience

1. Spirituality as the political care of life: mechanisms for resilience

We propose integrating practices such as ancestral medicine, ceremonies, dialogue circles, and other forms of collective ritual as resilience mechanisms in territorial struggles. Participants from nine countries shared experiences of how spirituality serves as an antidote to activist burnout. Rituals such as lunar ceremonies, collective meditations, breathing exercises, and dance help regenerate energy in prolonged struggles.

Spirituality dismantles the internal-external divide, as proposed by the People's Health Movement, which challenges the separation between 'fighting out there' and 'healing in here'. Instead, it integrates the personal and collective through the spiral, an ancestral symbol that intertwines both realms. Seeds, wind, earth, water, and fire are viewed as teachers.

During the roundtable 'Air: Freedom and Integration in Our Movements' (May 2025), held within MAELA's 'Agroecology and Spirituality' working axis, participants reaffirmed that these ancestral practices are technologies of resistance. As Laura Vanesa Reyes expressed, "Air invites us to feel freedom" – a form of spirituality that fuels our rhythmic heartbeat and reconnects us with the joy and grace of life. For MAELA, spirituality is the invisible thread that unites agroecology, ancestral wisdom, and community on a shared path toward harmony.

2. Women's circles as spaces of healing and community power

Despite being guardians of both spiritual and agroecological knowledge, women still bear the brunt of care work. Dialogue circles for women, as promoted by VIDA A.C., have become key tools for resilience among rural women. These spaces are conceived as rituals of emotional, physical, and spiritual self-care, fostering active and empathetic listening, dance, meditation, and exchange. According to facilitators, women's circles build empathy, self-esteem, and empowerment, breaking through silence and isolation in rural contexts. Grounded in principles like respect, non-judgment, and shared voice, these circles foster trust networks that allow women to support and accompany one another in their daily lives and struggles.

3. Toward a full and harmonious agroecology: care as a strategic axis

Through initiatives such as women's circles and masculinity workshops, MAELA seeks to challenge entrenched gender hierarchies. At the 2024 Mesoamerican Regional Assembly, a collective analysis of care in agroecological movements was carried out. Women and men reflected separately and then shared their insights and challenges. While women focused on sisterhood, men explored self-care and responsible fatherhood. Tensions persist: men reported discomfort with expressing affection among themselves, and women emphasised the need for explicit policies, as the burden of care continues to fall on them.

For this reason, social movements must acknowledge care as a strategic axis of political action, with clear allocation of resources and time. Only then can they avoid reproducing the very inequalities they seek to dismantle.

Care as a visible, living and collective root

In a context of systemic crises affecting food systems, it is urgent to place care at the center of transformative strategies. Spirituality, when understood as a political practice of care, helps restore the physical and emotional strength of those defending their territories, and counters the exhaustion caused by prolonged activism.

> *In a context of systemic crises, it is urgent to place care at the center of transformative strategies*

At the same time, strengthening empathy, self-esteem, and both individual and collective empowerment contributes to building caring networks of trust and solidarity.

The ethics of care must move us to action. Only then will care cease to be the invisible foundation of resilience and resistance, and become its visible, living, and collective root. ■

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Photo: Hamadi Ag Mohamed Abba

The invisible oasis of Mali:

Where agroecology meets peaceful resistance

Thanks to a solar-powered water pumping system, farmers in Tassadja-Farach managed to harvest more than 500 kilograms of corn in 2024.

We are in northern Mali, on the dry bed of Lake Kamango in the Timbouktou region. An agroecological oasis stretches over three hectares reclaimed from the desert: invisible to the world, but very much alive under the feet of its inhabitants. Men, women, and children grow millet, tomatoes, potatoes, courgettes, onions, cowpeas, and even wheat. It is a way to contribute to the nutrition of nearly 150 families while also generating income. Moreover, the garden is a source of hope and resilience in an otherwise tense political situation of structural oppression and racism.

HAMADI AG MOHAMED ABBA

"There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born."

- Franz Fanon in 'Black Skin, White Masks' (1952)

The first bird to sing is the turtle dove. Its cooing heralds dawn in Tassadja-Farach, in the middle of the Sahara, some sixty kilometres from Timbuktu. The dunes, still tinged with pink, stretch out like a herd returning from a mirage. The children climb onto their donkeys and race through the acacia forest towards the well.

Some minutes later, the men arrive at the well to water their animals and load the donkeys with jerricans. The children then leave to bring the water to the camps within a two-kilometre radius. Greetings are exchanged, and news circulates between the camps. Then, the farmers adjust their Tagelmust veils and each one heads to their plot. For several years, the local Tuareg community, which traditionally focused on livestock farming, has now shifted towards agroecology.

The choice of staying

It is here, in this land without 5G or tarmac roads, that I, Hamadi Ag Mohamed Abba, was born in the early sixties. I belong to the Kel Ansar people, who have been present on this land since the 15th century and who hold the customary land rights in this vast municipality covering almost 10,000 km2.

Like many in this community, I had to endure exile. In 1990, when the Tuareg rebellion broke out in northern Mali, I was forced to flee. The crackdown by the Malian armed forces was brutal. I took refuge in Mauritania, but a decade later, decided to return to Tassadja-Farach.

I descend from a lineage of semi-nomadic men and women who are deeply anchored in their territory. In my family, stories are passed down about the camel riders of the 20th century, the resistance against the raids in the north, and the diplomas hanging on the walls of the mud-brick houses. The local history is proudly upheld: that of a community that has survived for centuries by relying on knowledge, solidarity, adaptation, and the precise control of the climate, grazing cycles, and water management. For us resilience means to cultivate, nurture, transmit knowledge, and spread the cultural riches of the Tuareg identity.

Agroecology in the desert

In 2021, facing a prolonged drought and food insecurity, with a group of inhabitants of Tassadja-Farach, we launched a gardening project on three hectares of the dry bed of Lake Kamango, part of the Faguibine lake system in the Goundam district. As young and able-bodied community members, we secured the perimeter with a wire fence and drilled a well equipped with a water pumping system. In addition to ensuring food security and sovereignty for local residents, our very concrete goal was to counter population exodus.

Despite insufficient water flow, we now successfully grow a variety of crops: tomatoes, chillies, potatoes, beetroot, onions, aubergines, courgettes, carrots, peppers, cabbage, millet, cowpeas, cotton, and peanuts. Hard cereal crops such as wheat and maize are also thriving.

The cultivation is carried out without chemical fertilisers or pesticides. This is agroecology in its most direct form: rural, collective, modest, and adapted. We manage as we can, despite the lack of water. Mohamed Assaleh Ag Moctar, head of the fraction, explains: "There is a real enthusiasm for gardening, but the lack of water is a constraint for the population." Farmers also face sandstorms, sand encroachment on crops, and seasonal pests. These phenomena are becoming increasi"""ngly frequent, exacerbated by climate change.

In this worldview, working the land means remaining in one's rightful place in the world order

The perimeter also provides water for passing animals (around 550 heads). During the dry season, from January to April, families come every morning to harvest what will go straight into the pot. Thus, market gardening has become firmly established in the habits of the inhabitants of Tassadja-Farach. Although livestock farming remains the primary source of income and the main focus of economic development, vegetables are now consumed with rice, pasta, or in soups accompanied by takoula, the traditional bread. This also has the health benefit that it limits the harmful effects of the increasingly widespread consumption of processed products with high salt or sugar content.

The triple scourge of violence, climatic deregulation, and hunger

This fight for food sovereignty takes on its full meaning when we consider the geopolitical context in which it takes place: that of peripheral regions sacrificed to the extractivist and military logic of globalised capitalism. Northern Mali, like the Sahel, is today the scene of violence ignored by the international community: ethnic cleansing, mass forced displacement, militarisation, and resource grabbing.

The Tuareg populations have suffered from structural oppression and racism since French colonisation. Control of the territory goes hand in hand with control of the subsoil: in the past it was salt, today it is uranium, lithium, and oil. Since the withdrawal of UN forces from Mali at the end of 2023, the vacuum left by international institutions has been filled by the Malian army and Russian Wagner militias. Officially, there to 'fight terrorism', their presence is now synonymous with the killing of civilians, drone strikes on markets and other civilian infrastructure, the burning of food stocks, and sexual violence against women and girls. Fear reigns as violence continues with impunity and goes undocumented due to the absence of journalists on the ground.

Roadways are regularly blocked for months at a time, paralysing the supply of food, medicine, and fuel. Humanitarian convoys are regularly attacked, and food distribution in rural areas becomes sporadic or even impossible. Prices have skyrocketed for basic necessities such as potatoes, fruit, vegetables, tea, and powdered milk, with the cost of half a kilo rising from 1,000 to 3,000 CFA francs (almost 5€) in 2024. As for the Tuareg herders, most of them have been forced to migrate to other areas to ensure the survival of their livestock.

According to the Cadre Harmonisé, a tool for analysing food and nutrition insecurity in the Sahel and West Africa, in the period June-August 2025, approximately 140,000 people in the Timbuktu region were facing severe food insecurity (phase 4, designated as emergency). Several NGOs have reported that hunger is being used as a means of territorial control and collective punishment. Although they remain cautious in their wording on this subject, their reports describe tactics such as blockades, destruction of crops, and obstruction of humanitarian aid. They suggest that hunger is being exploited for military and political ends.

The drone strikes on the Zouera market and near Tinaicha in July 2025 leave no doubt: they are trying to empty

A child harvests aubergines for the home kitchen.

the region of its Indigenous population. These practices constitute a violation of the human right to food as defined by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Yet protection mechanisms are ineffective, and the international response remains extremely limited.

The Mbera refugee camp, across the border in Mauritania, where some 180,000 Malian refugees are crowded together, has become the second most populous settlement in the country after the capital. Among them is my family.

Sovereignty and resilience

Far from being an imported or technical practice, agroecology here is rooted in ancient cosmology and practices. It perpetuates Indigenous knowledge and seeds passed down from generation to generation. For example, on some plots of the Tassadja-Farach community garden, you can see rows of small, evenly spaced holes dug by hand. These are filled with manure before the rainy season: this is a local technique directly inspired by the Sahelian zaï, which concentrates moisture and nutrients around each seed.

But this technique is only one facet of a deeper relationship with the land. In Tuareg culture, the earth is perceived as a pious angel, full of mercy. Cultivating it is a virtuous act that goes beyond immediate needs: it is an offering to all living creatures. In our tradition, we say that a farmer is never alone in enjoying the fruits of his labour. Birds, insects, humans, all benefit from it. Even if the harvest fails, divine reward is assured, because the intention is good. In my worldview, working the land means remaining in one's rightful place in the world order.

Photo: Hamadi Ag Mohamed Abba

> *Resilience for us means to cultivate, nurture and transmit knowledge, and spread the cultural riches of the Tuareg identity*

The community garden has become both a source of healthy food and a reason to stay or return. Since the launch of the garden, we have seen new faces: young farmers, families who have returned from Mbera and settled not far from the crops. Agroecology is therefore much more than an agricultural practice: farming here is a way of reaffirming the sovereignty of the Tuareg people. For the inhabitants of Tassadja-Farach, staying on the land is a dignified and courageous choice.

To put an end to violence, food and nutritional insecurity in Mali requires long-term investment in social protection systems and conflict resolution mechanisms. We also need to protect and encourage small-scale and family-based agro-sylvo-pastoral activities, which are essential for feeding the population in a sustainable, healthy and resilient way in the face of multiple and multifaceted shocks.

Epilogue

Evening falls on Tassadja-Farach, as the wind dies down and the sky gradually lights up with stars. The children, having returned to camp with the donkeys, give way to a calm punctuated by the intermittent cooing of the turtledove. Some prepare the seeds for the next day. They watch over the land, as if it were a promise.

Northern Mali is a vast territory, largely unknown and obscured from the eyes of the world. It is a place associated with hunger and war, but rarely with beauty, resilience, and even less so with success. In this spirit of philosopher Fanon, this oasis truly is an 'authentic upheaval' in a 'zone of nonbeing.' ■

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If we heal the territory, we heal everyone: Returning to sacred spaces

To ensure the continuity of all that exists, Indigenous spiritual authorities in the Sierra Nevada of Colombia (mamʉs) and their families care for, spiritually cleanse, and defend sacred sites. By healing sacred sites, they heal the land and, in turn, all of humanity.

NATALIA GIRALDO-JARAMILLO

In northern Colombia, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta – known to the Indigenous peoples as Gonawindúa – live the Kággaba (Kogui), Ikʉ (Arhuaco), Wiwa, and Kankuamo peoples as well as the coastal base peoples Taganga, Wayuú, and Ette Ennaka (Chimila). This area, also known as the Ancestral Territory of the Black Line, is regarded by these communities as the heart of the world, a point of connection between different levels of existence.

Here, the *mamʉs* (traditional spiritual authorities) hold the ancestral responsibility of maintaining cosmic balance. Their role is not only spiritual but deeply political and ecological. They care for sacred sites, sustain the web of life, and uphold harmony among humanity, nature, and the universe.

Today, the Ikʉ people face a series of structural and persistent threats, understood as manifestations of ongoing colonisation. These include: extractivism (in the form of megaprojects and monoculture farming), armed conflict, evangelisation, unregulated tourism, religious and academic colonisation, and the loss of traditional foods. In the words of Mamʉ Aruawiku:

> They took away all our traditional foods *(zʉmu kia)*. They realised they could use that to weaken us, because before, we only ate native food. So even though *zʉmu* kia still exists in many places, it's no longer complete. (*Translated by Seynawiku, 2025*)

Mamʉ Aruawiku Izquierdo visiting sacred dolmen sites in the Netherlands in 2024.

Territorial recovery: the case of Kwarte Umuke

Since 2004, *mamʉ* Aruawiku Izquierdo Torres and his family have been living in Kwarte Umuke, known as the 'land recovery zone'. They are recovering colonised lands in the Ariguaní River basin, near the city of Valledupar and in the municipality of Pueblo Bello (close to its urban center). This movement back to colonised lands is no coincidence: it represents an act of return and re-existence, reclaiming dispossessed spaces and exercising self-government. It is also a way to protect the entirety of the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa (SNG), whose integrity is vital for the balance of life.

The mamʉ and the community built *kankurwas* (ceremonial houses) to continue their work as spiritual guides, giving advice to the community and political authorities, and carrying out their own justice processes and rites of passage in all cycles of Ikʉ social life (baptisms, marriages, funerals). They also plant *zʉmu kia* (native foods) and care for the sacred places found in this area.

In response to the threats mentioned above, they fulfill their ancestral duties by engaging in dialogue with other cultures, including the western world, in defense of Mother Earth. In Kwarte Umuke, spiritual work is carried out in *ka'dukwus* (places of reflection) and *kankurwas*: places that have spiritual and social functions, including traditional education.

- The *kankurwas*, built from wood and straw, represent the mountains at a spiritual level. There are masculine and feminine *kankurwas*, where sacred conversations take place around the fire.
- The *ka'dukwus* are natural spaces for council and connection with the Mother (the universal creator), where the *gakanamu* (knowledge) is shared. These spaces often feature large rocks and native plants.

Here, *pagamento* practices take place – offerings made to maintain reciprocity with water, food, sacred places, and spiritual fathers and mothers. These practices restore balance between opposing forces: creation and destruction, health and illness, life and death.

Photo: Natalia Giraldo-Jaramillo

Mamʉ Arwawiku Izquierdo Torres and Seynawiku Izquierdo Torres in conversation about writing this article.

Who are the *mamʉs*?

The *mamʉ* is the spiritual authority and guide for the Indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada in Colombia: the Kággaba (Kogui), Ikʉ (Arhuaco), Wiwa, and Kankuamo peoples, all of them connected to Tayrona.

Their home, the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, is a mountain system isolated from the Andes range, rising from sea level to 5,775 meters – making it the highest coastal mountain range in the world. Characterised by majestic peaks, rivers, and exceptional biodiversity, it embodies the sacred web that connects human beings with nature and the cosmos. Declared a Biosphere Reserve in 1979, it hosts a remarkable range of ecosystems, from mangroves and tropical rainforests to páramos and perpetual snow, in a way a microcosm of the planet.

The *mamʉ* is a wise figure who, through ancestral knowledge and spiritual practices, watches over the balance of the territory, collective health, and cosmic order. Chosen through a spiritual process from childhood (although in special cases this may occur later), and subjected to extensive training in ancestral knowledge that can last several years and involves special diets, their role is to protect and ensure compliance with the Law of Origin, the set of principles that governs the order of the universe. Due to their traditional practices and the geography of the Sierra, they remained relatively isolated from western colonisation until the arrival of the Capuchin religious mission in 1916 to Nabusímake, their ancestral capital.

Note: the Ikʉn language includes a sixth vowel with specific phonetic value, the broken ʉ, shown in this article as a strikethrough "ʉ".

Ancestral wisdom in the face of colonial threats

For the Ikʉ people, harm to the territory is neither new nor merely contemporary: it is part of an ancestral tension between opposing forces that dates back to the beginning of the world. This understanding is embedded in the Law of Origin, the set of principles that governs the order of the universe and guides all spiritual work of the people.

> *They remind us that the possibility of healing and protecting life still exists*

According to the Law of Origin, from the moment of creation there have always been wise beings who competed to measure their knowledge, and this competition generated imbalance. Even the arrival of Christopher Columbus is understood as part of a much older process – one in which knowledge was used without harmony, leading to destructive consequences.

> Based on the Law of Origin, [the harm] didn't start with Columbus; it goes back millennia, to the creation of the world. The Law of Origin comes from there. […] There were wise beings who always competed, trying to measure their wisdom. So one would loosen something, another would pull something else, and there was conflict between types of knowledge: who knows more, who knows less? That mentality of struggle has always existed, from far back […] And so [Columbus] arrived… and the thing is, if he was coming, there should have been some kind of warning, a message for the *mamʉ* to know what to do. But it happened that the *mamʉ* was elsewhere, and when [Columbus] came, he brought many mirrors, luxury items, and since this place was full of gold, the exchange began (…). (*Mamʉ Aruawiku, translated by Seynawiku, 2025*)

This account teaches us that any crisis affecting the territory is not new: it is inscribed in the spiritual history of the world. In response, the *mamʉs* continue to practice their ancestral wisdom, guided by the Law of Origin, to restore balance.

Defending the territory: a spiritual and collective commitment

The fulfillment of the Law of Origin ensures the continuity of everything that exists. For this reason, *mamʉs* and their families uphold this law by caring for, spiritually cleansing, and defending sacred places. In this sense, spirituality and ancestral knowledge are essential to sustaining life.

To heal sacred sites is to heal the territory; and to heal the territory is, in turn, to heal all of humanity. This is a commitment that traditional authorities constantly remind us of, wherever we may be in the world, and for all people. In the words of *mamʉ* Aruawiku:

> We are talking about defending the territory. That's the resistance, defending water. But anyone who has weakened in that [traditional] part is already lost, even if they seem to be alive, because they no longer have the mindset.
>
> […] We're not talking about programs. We're beyond that. From the beginning, it was set this way, and we have to defend [the territory]. If we don't defend it, we'll end up in war ourselves.
>
> […] What's the point of having so much money, if in the end there's no water, no food, nothing? Money becomes worthless. […] Many billionaires have believed that having money means they can buy everything: the people, the territory. But in the end, that's extermination.
>
> […] What we're doing is for the good of future generations, so they can continue to live well and enjoy what our grandparents and ancestors once enjoyed. (*Translated by Seynawiku, 2025*)

The natural ways of life that still endure in the Sierra Nevada stand in contrast to the artificial modern world. They remind us that the possibility of healing and protecting life still exists. Rooted actions, thoughts, and practices are key to confronting the many crises that threaten our shared home: the Earth. ■

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This article was co-authored collectively with Umunukunu Kwarte Umuke-Umunukunu Nawaku, Walking the Pluriversity of the Mother, a process that is woven and weaving itself in the Sierra Nevada of Colombia, especially in the ka'dukwus of Kuarte Umuke and Nawaku, of which Natalia is a part. This article was written specifically in conversation with mamʉ Aruawiku Izquierdo Torres, Seynawiku Izquierdo Torres, Aldo Esparza Ramos, Eduardo Ignacio Cáceres Salgado, Ismael Reyes Payan, and Rolando Vásquez Melken.

Those who wield the net:

Small-scale fishworkers build momentum in India

In India, a movement of small-scale fishworkers is building to reclaim their rights to water. A recent boat campaign in West Bengal aimed to raise awareness about the rights of small-scale fishworkers to water, fish, and land. Traveling along a 500km stretch of the Hooghly River, organisations mobilised community power to raise awareness, foster connections, and drive action.

AMITRAJIT CHAKRABORTY

In India, millions of workers support resilient food systems by conserving aquatic resources with traditional knowledge and offering affordable, high-quality food. Despite their vital role in ecosystems, including reducing bycatch and preserving culture, small-scale fishworkers lack legal rights over water and land they've used for generations. Without legal protection, they face social, political, and environmental threats. The National Federation of Small-Scale Fishworkers (NFSF) is leading efforts to advocate for their legal rights.

Since its 2016 inception, NFSF has promoted a national 'Small-Scale Fishworkers' Right to Water' movement. It advocates for small-scale fishworkers' access to waterbodies and fish resources for sustainable fishing, and the protection of these resources from harmful activities. The movement also demands social security, gender equity, and climate justice, aiming to reaffirm fishworkers as custodians of water bodies and strengthen community resilience.

Legal recognition will give small-scale fishers rightful influence in decisions about aquatic resource use. For years, bottom trawling has depleted marine resources, but small-scale fishers lack power to enforce change. The same applies to water pollution from chemical agriculture, industrial aquaculture, and other industries. Recognising small-scale fishers as waterbody custodians can increase their inclusion in policy discussions, strengthening local food systems and fostering community resilience.

The boat campaign in West Bengal

In 2024, the national movement grew with local support from state-level small-scale fishworkers' organisations – the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) in West Bengal and

Photo: Amitrajit Chakraborty

Campaigners hold banners calling for the protection of fishworkers to draw the attention of trawler workers, wholesale traders and the public at Namkhana harbour.

the Swatanthra Matsyathozilai Federation (SMTF) in Kerala.

In West Bengal, DMF community leadership led a month-long boat campaign from November 26 to December 23, 2024, traveling 500 km upstream from the Hooghly River's mouth in the Bay of Bengal to the Farakka Barrage in the Gangetic plains, visiting fishing hubs and villages in nine districts.

The campaign targeted fishing community hubs to raise fishworkers' awareness of their rights, draw government attention to small-scale fishworkers' demands and threats to livelihoods, and sensitise civil society and the public to the role of small-scale fisheries in food sovereignty and resource protection.

Draped in banners and blue flags of local fishworkers' organisations, the boat traveled from village to village, inspiring great enthusiasm among the fishing communities. They warmly welcomed the campaign with drumming and songs of resistance. Processions and rallies led by women fishworkers echoed slogans in unison - *Jol Bachao, Maach Bachao, Matsyajibi Bachao* (Save Water, Save Fish, Save Fisher People) and *Jaal Jar Jol Tar* (Those Who Wield the Net, Have the Right to Water Bodies). Local fishing communities spoke out against the increasing occupation of coastlines for tourism, ports, harbours, and other commercial projects, which have led to their displacement and reduced access to resources.

They also condemned declining fish stocks caused by destructive fishing practices, such as bottom trawling by large-scale, mechanised vessels. At a notable gathering at Namkhana fishing harbour, small-scale fishers raised slogans such as "*Trawling Hatao, Matsyajibi Bachao*" (Abolish Trawling, Save Fishworkers), highlighting the presence of trawlers docked at the harbour. Women fishworkers shared how the depletion of natural resources added to women's ongoing struggles."Hundreds of women fish processors and fish dryers are struggling to make ends meet because there is no fish in the sea," said Tapasi Dolui, Vice-President of DMF.

Fishers from the Sundarbans shared the historical injustices caused by exclusionary forest conservation practices, which still marginalise fishing communities. Fishworkers also discussed issues related to industrial aquaculture and the growing hardships caused by climate variability.

> *The boat campaign in West Bengal exhibited the indomitable spirit and resilience of a community fighting for survival*

The DMF leadership connected the concerns raised by the fishing communities to the larger issue of a lack of rights. They urged communities to collectively fight social injustices through public deputations, sit-in protests, and

Tribal fishworkers from different parts of South 24 Parganas district perform traditional dance forms and enact plays at a public gathering in Kakdwip.

demonstrations. Inspired by these events, a local fishing community joined the campaigners to present demands to the West Bengal Department of Fisheries. The campaign also conducted press conferences along the way.

At a powerful press conference in Diamond Harbour, DMF General Secretary Milan Das delivered a passionate speech, linking the rights of small-scale fishworkers to the well-being of society as a whole: "Small-scale fishworkers are the only non-consumptive stakeholders of the waterbodies. Without small-scale fishworkers there are no healthy water bodies, and without healthy water bodies there is no future in agriculture, no access to healthy drinking water, and no healthy fish on the plate."

The boat then traveled upstream along the Hooghly River into inland waters. Departing from Kolkata, as the boat reached riverine fishing communities, campaigners quickly noticed that community participation was lower than that of their coastal counterparts. This indicated that these communities were less aware and less organised.

In the Nadia district, the campaign achieved a notable milestone when the police inspector announced new, strict penalties for all destructive fishing. The statement was welcomed with applause by the fishing community, who readily volunteered to monitor rivers and wetlands and report such activity. While this was the outcome in just one district, it indicated that change is possible.

Learning and resiliency

Establishing small-scale fishworkers' rights requires ongoing, collective efforts. The main challenge is drafting legislation and ensuring its enactment by the government. It is notable that, after years of NFSF efforts – community engagement, protests, press – both the Indian central government and West Bengal acknowledged the need for legislation protecting traditional fishing communities. Though not yet policy, this shows the movement's growing strength.

Politically, the campaign aimed to link fishworkers' marginalisation and rights over water, fish, and land. It highlighted the need for grassroots leadership and initiatives to address these issues, emphasising the connection between their struggles and lack of rights. Unlike peasants' land rights movements, fishworkers' fights for water rights are less visible and harder to organise, as small-scale fisheries are mostly subsistence family enterprises with open access to water and fish stock. These livelihoods, key to food sovereignty, have been disrupted by modern development, prompting the water rights movement.

The worsening socio-economic conditions in small-scale fishing communities also cause large-scale migration, challenging the unity of fishworkers, crucial for addressing their issues. The campaign insights have helped develop a future plan focused on building inland fishworkers' organisational capacity and mobilising local issue-based campaigns to strengthen their rights.

Reflecting on the campaign's challenges and successes, it is noteworthy that the recognition of water rights for small-scale fishworkers marked an important step forward. It suggests that with additional campaigns, targeting further stretches of the coastline and more deeply engaging inland communities, progress is achievable. The campaign faced time and money constraints, which are significant factors for future planning. It was clear from the community responses along the campaign trail that fishworkers are ready to organise and get involved.

Developing additional ways to communicate with community leaders to identify specific needs and demands could greatly help the campaign better understand how to support localised, self-organising efforts and strengthen the broader movement's fabric. Building a diverse base of civil society and other natural resource-dependent communities in support of fishworkers is a challenge, but it is a necessary step for future success. Looking ahead, finding ways to connect small farmers, forest workers, and Indigenous communities with small-scale fishers to unite and strengthen community movements with a shared goal of protecting natural resources and local food systems will contribute to building a more resilient community, India, and the world.

Despite the challenges, these efforts exhibited the indomitable spirit and resilience of a community fighting for survival. It sent a strong and clear message – small-scale fishworkers are natural custodians of waterbodies, and fishing communities should have the primary right to these waterbodies. This is critical to weaving resilient food systems. ■

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Photo: Anabell Rosas Domínguez

Participatory Guarantee Systems in action:

Building a resilient region in Mexico

Agroecological gathering to connect, share, and move forward in building the regional PGS.

In the central region of Veracruz in Mexico, a diverse network of producers, consumers, and grassroots organisations has come together to build a locally rooted, regional Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). More than a certification tool, this system fosters trust, collective learning, and agroecological resilience – reshaping how food is grown, shared, and valued.

MIGUEL ÁNGEL ESCALONA AGUILAR, ANABELL ROSAS DOMÍNGUEZ, GEORGINA VIDRIALES CHAN AND VÍCTOR HUGO PALACIOS PÉREZ

In the early 21st century, organic markets, known locally as *Tianguis Orgánicos*, began to emerge across different regions of Mexico. Their purpose was to offer healthy, locally sourced food while fostering connections between producers and consumers grounded in principles of social and solidarity economy. The goal was simple yet profound: to "put a face to our food."

A bioregional alliance

The Ocelotl Ecological Market in the city of Xalapa, capital of the Mexican state of Veracruz, which is now known as the **Xalapa Agroecological Market** (TAX, by its initials in Spanish), was born in this context. From the start, it embraced the idea that organic integrity should be ensured through collaboration among all participants. At TAX and other organic markets in Mexico, participatory processes were promoted from the start, involving both growers and consumers. Visits to farms and projects were called accompaniment visits, rather than inspections, since the

intention was to foster continuous improvement through peer-to-peer feedback. This vision forms the foundation of its Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), which aim to strengthen local systems of food production and consumption from an agroecological perspective.

Aware that these efforts could not stand alone, they sought to connect with other organisations already working in the region, using a hydrosocial watershed approach: going beyond the physical aspects of water to include social, cultural, and economic dimensions – thus fostering community involvement and the protection of territory and common goods. This led to an alliance with the Coalition of Organisations of the Jamapa-Antigua Bioregion (COBIJA), a group of seven organisations in the region that promote sustainable production alternatives. From that collaboration, the regional Participatory Guarantee System (SGPr) was born.

What we've built together

The formal construction of the SPGr began in 2021. Members of various alternative food networks, consumer collectives, markets, and producer cooperatives came together with the Xalapa Metropolitan Agroecology Training Platform (PMFAX) to reflect on the system's purpose and design. We were a part of this and asked ourselves key questions: Why build it? What role should each actor play? What criteria should guide us, considering the many dimensions of agroecology?

> *When trust is cultivated, networks grow stronger, creativity flourishes, and profound changes become possible*

From the start, trust was a core value. Over four years, we maintained this collective effort through 21 workshops and gatherings. The SPGr gradually took shape, formed by each group's principles and practices, and inspired by experiences such as the El Jilote PGS (in Jalisco) and collectives in Mexico City. We worked in stages. First, we defined the twelve guiding principles of our system. Then we developed regulatory elements, a self-assessment questionnaire, and the framework for accompaniment visits. This tool includes technical criteria for assessing agricultural, livestock, and processed food production, along with specific sections for mushroom and beekeeping activities. It also recognises the families behind each project and the ecological, social, cultural, and economic values they uphold.

We designed the procedure for granting the agro-ecological PGS label, based on three levels of assurance represented by the colors of the *Platanus mexicana* (Mexican sycamore) leaf, an iconic tree of the cloud forest. Pilot visits to farms in three municipalities provided more than just data; they sparked valuable conversations and learning, helping us to refine the questionnaire and enhance its practical application. At the same time, we developed outreach materials and built a digital repository as a living memory of our collective process.

Why we continue

Today, as we start the first full trials of the SGPr, we observe genuine enthusiasm among participants. For many producers, this mechanism offers a broader and more formal recognition of their efforts and the care they invest in growing, processing, and distributing food through the alternative food networks in the region. This strengthens relationships with consumers, helps position their products, and expands market opportunities.

We believe that as more collectives earn the SPGr label, recognition and re-appropriation of agroecological food in our region, and in the spaces where it's made available, will continue to grow. More than just a label, the SPGr is a tool to highlight what we're already doing well, to share what we've learned, to strengthen networks, access fair markets, and ensure food that is fresh, healthy, and culturally meaningful.

Our collective learnings for agroecological resilience

The SPGr process aims to build a legitimate, locally grounded agroecological certification system tailored to our context. Over the years, we have learnt a great deal, and we'd like to share some of these lessons, which have helped guide us and may also serve others walking similar paths.

- One key insight has been the importance of respecting each group's internal pace and dynamics. Organisational autonomy is a strength, and aligning it within a collective process requires attentive listening, flexibility, and care.
- We also realised the value of identifying common ground and building shared language to facilitate collaboration across people, collectives, and territories. Agreeing on principles, defining concepts, regulating processes, and designing tools has been essential for moving forward.
- Working through committees, despite its challenges, has helped us organise the processes of evaluation, decision making, and follow-up. It has also enabled us to build collective capacities that support the sustainability of the organisation. At times, low participation in certain committees reminded us that maintaining structure requires ongoing energy and shared commitment.
- Participatory workshops have been crucial spaces for building relationships, exchanging knowledge, creating our own indicators, and reinforcing the territorial grounding of the process. There, we also learned that diversity is not an obstacle but a strength. When trust

is cultivated and the process is guided by shared goals, networks grow stronger, collective creativity flourishes, and profound changes in how we produce and consume food become possible.

This is why we believe in nurturing communities of learning and practice – spaces where each group's experience contributes to collective reflection and empowers grassroots action. We are convinced that agroecology isn't just something to be certified: it's something to be lived, built collectively, and defended as a shared and contested territory.

This is just the beginning

The path ahead continues. We face challenges like time management within committees, internal communication, and the follow-up of observations. But we keep moving forward, together.

The SPGr is on its way to becoming a reliable and sustainable model, one that is socially rooted and strengthened through relationships, shared knowledge, and peer support. In a time of multiple crises, this system stands out as a living practice of transformative resilience: offering local alternatives grounded in trust, reciprocity, and care for life.

Meeting of producers and consumers at the Kaná Agroforest.

Photo: César Gustavo Priego Salas

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Survival as strength: Maasai organise for resilience and justice

In Kajiado West, a semi-arid region of Kenya where erratic rains, drought, and decades of marginalisation intersect, Maasai pastoralist communities are charting their own path to resilience. Their response is neither driven by aid agencies nor imposed through top-down policies. Instead, it grows from within: solidarity groups, agroecology, and communal governance are turning crisis into opportunity and survival into strength.

STELLAMARIS MULAEH

In Oloika, Kajiado County, women in the community gather for a solidarity group meeting that helps them save money for their daily needs.

What emerges here is a web of resilience – interwoven with ancestral knowledge, gendered leadership, ecological practices, and political determination. It is a living resistance to exclusion and a reimagining of what justice can look like from the drylands.

From solidarity to savings

The Shompole, Torosei, and Oldony Nyokie areas, bordering Kenya's Lake Magadi and Tanzania, are 99% Maasai. After a 2017 community needs assessment, the first solidarity groups were formed, led by women who have long faced food insecurity, climate change, and household challenges, with a tradition of collective labor. These groups, founded on Maasai values like respect, honesty, mutual aid, community, solidarity, and 'I am because you are,' started with pooled savings, farming, and support. By 2024, they grew to 87 groups, with over 85% women.

Each group established bylaws for savings, loans, and conduct, with rotating leadership. Weekly meetings in *manyattas* cover agroecology, financial literacy, recordkeeping, and conflict resolution. A Makatai group resolved a loan default through traditional mediation, allowing repayment after the next livestock sale instead of punishment. These practices boost trust and women's leadership, with many speaking publicly for the first time.

The Maasai: semi-nomadic pastoralists

The Maasai (or Maa) are a pastoralist community native to southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, known for their distinctive culture, deep communal bonds, and strong connection to livestock – especially cattle, which are central to their economy, identity, and spirituality. Traditionally semi-nomadic, the Maasai live in extended family homesteads called *manyattas*, with social organisation structured around age-sets that assign roles to elders, warriors (*morans*), and women. Polygamy is common, and women play a key role in ensuring household food security, though they often have limited decision-making power. At the heart of Maasai belief is a spiritual relationship with the land and livestock, based on the conviction that Enkai (God) entrusted all cattle to them.

Today, Maasai communities – such as those in the group ranches of Oldoinyo-nyokie, Torosei, and Shompole in Kajiado West Sub-County where the experience narrated here is located – face mounting challenges. Climate change has disrupted rainfall patterns and worsened droughts, threatening the sustainability of traditional pastoralism. Increasing population pressure, land subdivision, and unresolved tenure disputes have intensified competition over natural resources, sparking both internal and cross-boundary conflicts.

While local governance structures exist (such as group ranch committees), issues of exclusion, elite capture, and weak enforcement persist. Education levels remain low, especially for women and girls, and youth are increasingly torn between cultural expectations and modern socio-economic demands. Despite these pressures, the Maasai continue to adapt, drawing on both traditional knowledge and emerging resilience strategies.

In Oloika, Kajiado County, a community member is caught by community members grazing his cows in a non grazing zone.

Agroecology as resistance

In the arid landscapes of Torosei and Shompole in the Great Rift Valley, agroecology has become both a livelihood strategy and a cultural revival for Maasai. Women, wanting diverse diets, selected community animators to teach them to establish kitchen gardens. These gardens now thrive beside livestock corrals, with women growing vegetables using greywater and compost from enclosures.

Communal cooking was introduced to promote nutritional diversity using both traditional meals of meat, milk, and new crops. One woman from Olkarar shared how her family, previously reliant on relief food, now eats vegetables grown just steps from their home. And this is the story of many families.

Grazing committees and community scouts were also established to coordinate rotational herding to prevent land degradation and ensure grass regeneration even in periods of declining rainfall. Youths, including *morans* (young warriors) and community scouts, were trained by elders and technical experts to map grazing zones and monitor ecological boundaries. In overgrazed areas, communities planted drought-resistant grasses and established local seed banks.

Agroecology here is not a technical package. It is a form of care – for the land, for culture, and for each other.

Mediating the politics of water

Water remains a daily challenge, as impacts of climate change are felt across the three communities in Shompole, Torosei and Oldony Nyokie. But even here, communities are reclaiming power. After negotiations led by community land committees and the Indigenous group Dupoto-e-Maa (Olkejuado Pastoralists Development Organization), the Tata Chemicals Magadi company, Africa's leading mining company for soda ash, supported the improvement of key water points. This included reparations and continuous management of the water pipeline and water supply to schools and remote villages.

What was once a source of conflict has become a point of collaboration, demonstrating how grassroots diplomacy can shift corporate-community dynamics.

Grassroots governance: a new social architecture

Small weekly contributions to solidarity savings groups, sometimes as little as 20 Kenyan shillings (about USD 0,12), have grown into life-changing capital. By 2023, some groups saved over Ksh 700,000 (USD 5,400). Members use rotating loans for school fees, medical care, and livestock feed during droughts. In Enchuti, a widow used a group loan for her son's malaria treatment, repaying later from milk sales. In Kona Maziwa, groups lend at 5% interest – much lower than market rates.

These groups have become local banks, crisis safety nets, and empowerment engines, with publicly reviewed ledgers, elected treasurers, and collective dispute resolution, building trust.

Beyond economics, solidarity groups, followed by community land, peace, grazing committees, and forums, have transformed local governance. Community Land Committees, established under the 2016 Community Land Act, aim to secure community land rights, including women's, by recognising customary rights and creating management structures. Community elects the committees, trained by Dupoto-e-Maa on conflict analysis, peace negotiations, resolution, benefit sharing, and mediation.

> *The savings groups have grown into local banks, crisis safety nets, and engines of empowerment*

Gender representation is no longer an afterthought. In Shompole, the land committee now includes three women out of 15 members – a milestone in a context where land decisions were historically reserved for men. Awareness raising, dialogue and training were crucial in fostering this cultural and political change.

Women stand their ground. In October and November 2024, women protested and blocked Tata Chemicals' road, then met with the Board to negotiate job access for qualified Maasai graduates. In Oldoinyo-nyokie, a land subdivision was halted after protests. Residents, via the group ranch committee, demanded revisions and held open forums until reaching consensus.

Managing commons and investing in futures

Shompole's community-managed conservancy generates over USD 250,000 annually through eco-tourism and carbon credit schemes. Following capacity-building sessions, the community land committee now convenes annual general meetings to decide on the use of these resources. Investments are made in teacher salaries, community scouts, bursaries for students, and school feeding programs.

These feeding programs have increased school attendance and retention, especially among girls. Education is now seen not as a privilege but as a right – and a shared community duty.

The land committees of Shompole, Torosei, and Oldoinyo-nyokie have also secured funding in community benefit-sharing agreements over mining concessional areas. Each community received USD 178,000 from Tata Chemicals Magadi for local community development, reinforcing the principle that resources must serve people – not exploit them.

When crisis hits, communities are resilient

No system is immune to shocks. In Torosei, a 2016 court-led land subdivision triggered violence when government-directed group ranches transitioned into community land management, resulting in several hospitalisations. Other shocks included flooding that destroyed seedbeds in Pakase and Senta. Bureaucratic delays in boundary mapping increased tensions in Oldoinyo-nyokie. Wildlife raids destroyed vegetables across villages. But the resilience web held.

Peace committees stepped in to mediate. Solidarity groups offered emergency loans. Community scouts organised patrols to deter elephants. With support from organisations such as Dupoto-e-Maa and Fastenaktion, communities replanted seedbeds and restored lost gardens. The response wasn't outsourced – it was local, coordinated, and grounded in mutual aid.

This grassroots model for resilience is deeply intergenerational. Elders pass on ecological knowledge, *morans* and youth lead patrols, women steward finances, and children are kept in school. Each actor plays a role in strengthening the fabric of resilience.

And it is intersectoral. Agroecology, education, health, land rights, and governance are addressed holistically – not in silos. As the experience above shows, Dupoto-e-Maa, as a trusted local partner founded by Maasai themselves, has played a crucial role in accompaniment – not as a provider of solutions, but as a facilitator of community-led transformation. Dupoto-e-Maa assembles elders, women leaders, and *morans*. Occasionally, it brings on board professionals with a particular expertise to dialogue with the communities.

This approach defies the development industry's tendency to isolate sectors and fund short-term projects. Instead, it offers a living example of systemic transformation rooted in solidarity.

A radical redefinition of resilience

Mainstream interpretations of resilience often emphasise "bouncing back." But for communities like those in Kajiado West, bouncing back to the status quo is neither desirable nor just. That notion was built on inequality, exclusion, and ecological collapse.

Here, resilience means refusing to return to that unjust past. It is about creating new norms – where women lead, youth organise, elders advise, and communities govern. Where ecological health is a shared responsibility, and financial autonomy begins with 20 shillings a week. This is a radical, collective, and political understanding of resilience.

What began with 17 solidarity groups has grown into a mosaic of governance, ecology, and empowerment across 30 villages – from Empaash and Nolesenja to Oloosaen and Oloiri. This is not an imported model. It is a homegrown resistance to systemic injustice and an invitation to rethink how resilience is built.

This deeply rooted model of collective governance and ecological stewardship is a natural outgrowth of Maasai values and social norms, which prioritise communal ownership, mutual responsibility, and respect for elders and land. The age-set system, the centrality of cattle, and the importance of oral negotiation have long reinforced a culture where decisions are made collectively and social cohesion is paramount. In a landscape defined by scarcity – of water, pasture, and state services – solidarity is not optional; it is survival.

The people of Kajiado West remind us that real transformation doesn't come from boardrooms or manuals – it is grown in drylands, sung in traditional songs, negotiated in *manyattas*, and defended by collective will. They do not merely survive – they design, adapt, and lead.

Their message is clear: resilience is not about bouncing back. It's about moving forward – together. ■

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Photo: Narayan Subramoniam

Harvest table.

Growing climate resilience: Dene-led agroecology in Denendeh

Indigenous communities in Denendeh (Northwest Territories, Canada) are working towards community-led visions of growing food that reframe agriculture from a colonial activity to a practice rooted in cultural revitalisation, collectivism, food sovereignty, and climate resilience. To do so, these Nations are embracing holistic agroecological frameworks and adapting them to their values of relationship, reciprocity, and care for the Land and people.

JENNIFER TEMMER, CARLA JOHNSTON AND MEGAN COOPER

In the Dene Zhatié language, *Dehcho* means "Big River" – a name that reflects the preeminent role the river plays in this nearly 195,000-square-kilometre sub-arctic region of Denendeh. Renamed by settlers as the Mackenzie River, the Dehcho and its tributaries that cut through dense boreal forest are the traditional territories of many Dene

communities, including Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation (KTFN) and Sambaa K'e First Nation (SKFN), who have hunted, trapped, fished, and gathered from these lands, skies, and waters for millennia. However, rapid social, economic, and environmental changes connected to colonisation, resource extraction, and, more recently, climate change – including record low Dehcho water levels that threaten the entire ecosystem – are significantly impacting Dene foodways and food sovereignty.

Despite these pressures, SKFN and KTFN draw on their *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* (Dene Laws), an enduring source of Dene resilience, to nurture their traditional foodways and reaffirm their relationship with the Land through adopting agroecological gardening as a new practice. *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* are value-based teachings passed down across generations that offer guidance on how to respect and live in balance with the Land, oneself, and others. Today, the Laws are foundational for adapting to environmental changes that threaten to disrupt sacred relationships with the Land, and resisting dependency on expensive, imported, ultra-processed foods.

Reframing agriculture

Although climate change has limited access to some traditional foods, it has also opened up opportunities for growing food, and SKFN and KTFN are exploring how to do so on their terms. As hunters and fisherfolk return from the Land along riverbanks filled with wild berries, they now wave to gardeners tending to fields and greenhouses filled with vegetables, including potatoes and carrots for a hearty moose stew. Elders from both communities view gardening as significant to the future generations' food system. As Elder Margaret Jumbo from SKFN explains:

"That's why I told young people and young kids, I said, you kids need to start training your minds and training yourself to become gardeners because one of these days after we're gone... it's going to get to the point where we won't be going out in the bush and shooting a moose, a healthy moose, making dry meat, and eating the meat because there's all kinds of things happening up there... If we don't keep our planet clean, it's going to happen whether we want it or not."

KTFN and SKFN are working towards community-led visions of growing food that reframe agriculture from a colonial activity to a practice rooted in cultural revitalisation, collectivism, food sovereignty, and climate resilience. To do so, these Nations are embracing holistic agroecological frameworks and adapting them to be centered around Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı, and the values of relationship, reciprocity, and care for the Land and people.

To develop and realise their food growing visions, KTFN and SKFN partner with Wilfrid Laurier University's Northern

They draw on their Dene Laws, an enduring source of resilience, to nurture their traditional foodways and reaffirm their relationship with the Land

The territories of Ka'a'gee Tu First Nation and Sambaa K'e First Nation

KTFN and SKFN members live in small, remote communities in the Dehcho region in the Northwest Territories of Canada, with its boreal forests that are richly biodiverse, supporting key food and medicine species and traditional lifestyles vital to cultural identity and self-sufficiency. These Nations share social, cultural, and familial bonds that continue to nurture Dene ways of life.

With only 40 people, Kakisa, the home of KTFN, is the smallest community in the region. KTFN's territory includes K'ágee Tue (Kakisa Lake) and Tatı̨' ą¡lı¡ Tue (Tathlina Lake), two large lakes close to 675 square km combined. Etaáhdlı̂ı̂ (Kakisa River), with its cascading waterfalls, connects these lakes to the Dehcho (Mackenzie River). Although Kakisa is connected to the road network, the nearest grocery store is a 3-hour round trip away.

Sambaa K'e is a community of 90 people that is primarily fly-in only, with access to an ice road for 3 months each year. The town is located on the shores of the over 500 square km Sambaa Tue (Trout Lake), which has white sand beaches and tannin-rich water set against boreal spruce and billowy caribou lichen carpeting the forest floor. A community-owned store provides groceries, but transportation logistics and broader economic forces continue to raise prices.

Together, KTFN and SKFN are leading dialogue and action for northern agroecology, collaborating with regional governments, grassroots organisations, and research groups to grow and share food according to their Dene values.

Sustainable Food Systems Research Group (NSFSRG). Together, they advance discussions of how to embed *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* and other Dene values into the practice of growing food and use Participatory Action Research to bring these visions to life.

Foodways based on Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı

Following these discussions, both Nations created action plans. KTFN created a food system framework that informs KTFN's Community Food Action Plan, identifying seven food system pillars: Economies, Land and Water Stewardship, Governance, Supportive Infrastructure, Relationships, Traditional Knowledge and Culture, and Skills and Capacities. KTFN's Chief Lloyd Chicot explains, "It is important to have a framework that has been created with our community and represents our values and beliefs alongside our vision for what we want our food system to look like in the future." KTFN's action plan helps ensure that food projects – namely, a community-run garden, a proposed food hub/store, fuel break berry transplanting, and composting – all contribute to community self-sufficiency goals and build resilience across each of the framework's dimensions.

Similarly, SKFN created an Agroecology Action Plan, which weaves *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* into community garden practices to maintain respect for the Land and reflect the protocols they follow to care for the Land when gathering wild foods. For example, protocols for minimally disturbing the Land involve not expanding the garden beyond what is necessary for the community, protecting the land and river near the garden from contamination risks, and rejecting the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. Some gathering protocols – such as ensuring future regrowth by not harvesting everything from a single plant – do not only apply to gardening. Working with *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* is not about forcing a fit, but honouring SKFN's relationships with the Land and one another and applying this worldview to guide new practices.

T'ahsíi gots'ę́h ełeghaets'dendih (Share what you have)

Since 2015, KTFN's garden has grown to include two greenhouses, a 0.25-acre garden, a berry orchard, and raised beds. Seasonally, weekly food boxes are shared with all households, filled with vegetables and traditional foods such as berries and dried fish. Following the Dene Law, *t'ahsíi*

Vegetable signs in a Denendeh garden.

Photo: Pat Kane

gots'ẹh ełeghaets'dendih, all garden and traditional foods are shared amongst families. Ruby Simba, KTFN's manager, explains that: "Sharing is a big part of our lives because it is part of our Dene culture or Dene principles and values." Prioritising these values in the garden's operations helps community members connect with the new practice of growing food, as their culture and identity are reflected in daily activities. This increases engagement across all aspects of the garden, from decision making to harvesting.

In Sambaa K'e, conversations about *t'ahsíi gots'ẹh ełeghaets'dendih* revealed tension with the capitalist concept of food as a commodity. SKFN members are clear: they prefer not to sell produce from the garden within the community but instead share it freely so everyone benefits. Some believe it's acceptable to sell produce outside the community, but only to cover operating costs – never for profit – and only until renewable and self-sufficient practices, like seed saving, are achieved.

Both Nations believe food security is essential for Indigenous self-determination, so selling outside the community can also help demonstrate to others in the region that it is possible to grow food in northern Indigenous contexts. However, these values are not well reflected in mainstream agricultural funding models. The Government of the Northwest Territories' programs for agriculture, for example, require business plans for intermediate levels of funding, which necessitate some level of commercialisation.

These conversations highlight the pressures of the capitalist food system and the importance of decolonising agricultural economics at the policy level, ensuring that First Nations can maintain their cultural autonomy and food sovereignty. Moving forward, KTFN and SKFN will explore more alternative economies that honour *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı*.

Climate resilience through agroecology with Dene Laws

For KTFN and SKFN, agroecology offers a pathway into growing food that increases resilience to climate change and colonial pressures while maintaining the Dene Laws that have always sustained them. As an example, in 2023, when wildfires engulfed the region, SKFN members were evacuated for a month. However, the SKFN Garden coordinator chose to remain in the community as the garden was considered an essential service to ensure the availability of fresh food upon community members' return. Similarly, KTFN members were required to shelter in place. Without a store in town, they were cut off from much of their food supply but accessed traditional foods such as fish, berries, and moose meat, supplemented with garden foods.

In July 2025, KTFN hosted a community gardening gathering for other communities in the region to learn new gardening and composting skills and discuss how agroecology and *Mek'éé Dene Ts'ı́lı* can guide each community's vision for a sustainable food future. In the spirit of the Dene Law of *T'ahsıı ots'edı hshǫ́ gogháts'ıʔáh* (pass on the teachings),

> *This highlights the pressures of the capitalist food system and the importance of decolonising agricultural economics*

Elders and youth worked together and swapped stories as Dene Zhatıé speakers shared translations for paintings of *nehsheh* (potatoes), *tthah* (carrots), *sa* (the sun), and more. Elders discussed possible ways of describing English words, such as "compost", for which there is currently no Dene Zhatıé equivalent, while relating the importance of consulting their communities on such decisions to protect the vitality of their language.

These conversations serve as a valuable reminder that lasting solutions grow from the ground up and are shaped by those who hold and honour cultural knowledge and carry it forward. As climate change impacts the Land, the First Nations are introducing new foods and practices through agroecology to weather these changes, all while working to protect their sovereignty and the Dene Laws that have enabled their resilience for millennia. ■

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Photo: VIDA AC

Resisting global markets through solidarity coffee economies

Three Generations at the Ixtlahuaca del Café Agroecological Coffee Plantation.

In the face of global trade injustices and corporate control, a cross-border network has emerged to sustain agroecological coffee production through solidarity-based economies. Rooted in long-term relationships and mutual care, this initiative connects smallholder farmers in Latin America with conscious consumers in the U.S. For over two decades, it has woven an alternative model that defends territory, food sovereignty, and community resilience.

MEMBERS OF CAN AND COMPAS

It was in the context of worldwide mobilisations against free trade agreements that a group of student activists at the University of California, Santa Cruz, protested the presence of agribusiness corporations in their campus dining halls. They joined the Community Agroecology Network (CAN) to explore more just and direct ways of trading coffee.

At the time, CAN had already built relationships with students, academics, and smallholder farming communities in Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, and that's how an idea was born: to bring agroecologically grown coffee from the Global South to students' mugs in the Global North. In 2004, the first purchase of Café AgroEco®

became a reality, made possible by a broad, solidarity-based network.

Since then, students and other activists in CAN have continued weaving this cross-border network that challenges corporate coffee chains and promotes just, community-rooted systems of agroecological coffee production, distribution, and consumption. Their direct-trade model is grounded in long-term relationships, mutual trust, and fairer conditions for farming families. It strengthens agroecological practices and food sovereignty, offering an alternative to extractive, profit-driven capitalist systems. Over the past 20 years, they have built a direct-trade structure (cutting out intermediaries and ensuring that the benefits reach smallholder cooperatives). Local decision-making processes are respected. As a result, communities are not dependent on the whims of the global market.

The solidarity network is made up of farming communities in Mexico and Nicaragua, Ético (The Ethical Trading Company, Ltd), which coordinates export and import operations, the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company & Honeymoon Coffee, consumers (students and local community members) and CAN, which promotes communication, mutual learning, fair negotiations, logistical coordination, and fosters collective decision making.

Strategies for care and dignified livelihoods

Four key tools bring the values of solidarity, mutual commitment, and dignified livelihoods to life in the Café AgroEco® model:

1. **Risk Redistribution:** Responsibilities are shared across the entire solidarity network, so farming families do not bear the full burden of price volatility, crop diseases, or droughts.
2. **Knowledge Exchange:** Farmers from Mexico and Nicaragua share agroecological knowledge and strategies. Exchanges also take place between producers, consumers, students, and workers in the United States.
3. **Gender and Generational Justice:** The network fosters equity in decision making, shared caregiving responsibilities, and recognition of women's labour – both productive and reproductive. It also promotes leadership development and intergenerational knowledge sharing.
4. **Solidarity Funds:** These funds are created using a percentage of the agreed price of the coffee and are allocated to agroecological practices, promoting food sovereignty, and improving infrastructure in coffee-growing areas.

Resisting the death economy

This solidarity network stands in opposition to the dominant economic model, and is rooted instead in community care, agroecology, and collective organising. The challenges remain vast however: pressure to increase production volumes, efforts by big corporations to lower prices, new U.S. trade policies, and the combined impact of rising neofascism and the pandemic on student organising. Universities are becoming increasingly corporatised, weakening spaces for student activism. In farming territories, mega-projects like Nestlé's new coffee plant in Veracruz (Mexico) threaten the social fabric of rural communities. Within the network itself, the full inclusion of women and youth remains a challenge. Aging populations and youth migration to the U.S. also place pressure on community continuity.

In response to these challenges, we've built direct communication channels that have helped strengthen bonds of trust and shared commitment from production and processing to distribution and consumption. International exchanges bring together youth from partner organisations across the Global South and North, deepening the cooperatives' engagement and encouraging students to get directly involved.

Weaving collective resilience

We foster a conscious and critical approach to consumption by creating spaces for reflection on shifting political landscapes and systemic contexts. These spaces invite us to challenge capitalist models of production and explore real, tangible alternatives rooted in community.

Despite the challenges, the network's ties remain active, confronting corporate logics and building new alliances. Agroecology endures as the path forward. It is what binds this network together – a foundation for defending land, securing food sovereignty, ensuring dignified work, and sustaining community life. Collective resilience is woven, pointing toward a future where *Buen Vivir* – a good life for all – is not a distant dream, but a concrete possibility built through organisation, solidarity, and deep-rooted connection to the land. ■

*Authors: This article was collectively authored by members of **CAN** and **COMPAS**. **CAN** (Community Agroecology Network) is an international organisation committed to building alternatives from and with local communities; agroecology allows us to support processes that care for life and rural territories. **COMPAS** (Communication for Sovereignty) is a collective that works from a popular communication approach, combining graphic expression with research processes to strengthen different forms of sovereignty in rural territories. Contact: communications@canunite.org*

Restoring cultural memory

Photo: Sara Davies

Method Gundidza with Elders from Bikita.

My name is Method Gundidza. I was born in a small farming village in Bikita, near the old Great Zimbabwe city ruins. When I reflect on the journey I have been on, I am filled with gratitude. Drawing on agroecology to nurture resilience in the face of climate shocks, I work with Elders to rekindle relationships with land, seed, spirit, and one another.

METHOD GUNDIDZA

At the heart of this work is a deep understanding that the web of life is spun according to the lores and laws of Mother Earth. Special places, like the majestic bouldered mountains rising from the Bikita savannah, the cool dark forests, or our streams, rivers and springs, have always been sacred. Tragically, Indigenous Peoples' reverence for these lands and waters was demonised by the church and colonialists. It has been further suppressed by industrial agriculture, which imposes hybrid seeds, spreads chemicals that kill the soil, pollutes the groundwater, silts up our rivers, and clears Indigenous trees for large monocrop fields. We didn't realise how precious our grandmothers' seeds were when we carelessly discarded them, influenced by government agencies promoting hybrid maize as the miracle crop for southern Africa. Hybrid maize and other imported seeds failed year after year, causing hunger and despair to everyone who had come to rely on them.

This was the violated Bikita I returned to in 2015: a very different place from where I grew up. A heaviness had settled over the denuded mountains who no longer replied with joy-filled echoes when people called to each other across the valleys. Instead, the mountains' voice had turned

thunderous and roared at us when the rains came. Torrents of water carried enormous boulders down eroded slopes and we feared for our lives.

With a group of women farmers, we decided that robust Indigenous crops – millet, sorghum, traditional maize – were the place to start restoring our cultural memory. These seeds remembered the soil and were adapted to the climate. They thrived in harsh conditions. One by one, I accompanied Bikita's farmers in their rediscovery of traditional seeds that we had lost. Many seeds came from seed and food fairs in other regions of Zimbabwe and South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, and Kenya, where farmers came together to share their seeds, food, and knowledge.

At the heart of this work is a deep understanding that the web of life is spun according to the lores and laws of Mother Earth

The seeds we have revived are not only better for land and people, but some are also used to make a sacred beer that connects us with our ancestors. Brewing this beer once again opened the way for us and other communities in Zimbabwe and South Africa to revive rituals linked to the agricultural calendar, from seed blessing ceremonies and rituals asking for rain, to festivals of thanks for first fruits and bountiful harvests. Rituals take place in Sacred Natural Sites and include everybody. Elders, spirit mediums, traditional leaders, women farmers, youth, children: all are needed to play their unique parts in reweaving the baskets of life.

We ground this work in Earth Jurisprudence, a legal philosophy that recognises the Earth as a living community with rights. It is the lodestar of a growing continental movement to heal destroyed diversities and strengthen resilience to climate disruption.

We hold space for cultural memory to return, and for African worldviews to shape regenerative futures grounded in justice for human and more-than-human beings. Together with Earth Jurisprudence practitioners across the continent, we are reviving Indigenous knowledge, practicing agroecology, growing traditional seeds to strengthen food sovereignty, and protecting Sacred Natural Sites: holistically enhancing resilience to the crises of our time.

This approach strengthens confidence in African ways of seeing and being that mirror the abundance and generosity so often witnessed in nature. From this perspective, it is right and just to share seeds, food, one's hearth, and one's home. There are customary laws that support these acts, which are the foundations of responsibility, justice, and respect that nourish biocultural diversity.

Once again, I see people coming together through traditional practices such as *Jangano* and *Lilima*, to share work in the fields, and to celebrate with nutritious home-grown food and home-brewed beer. Now, when I walk from one village to another, I feel the broader landscape healing around me. I feel my heart swell with love, and I am immensely grateful that life returned me to my roots in rural Bikita. ■

Method Gundidza.

Author: ***Method Gundidza*** *is co-director of EarthLore Foundation. He is a founding member of the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective, an expanding network of Earth-centred practitioners across the continent, supported by The Gaia Foundation's Trainings for Transformation.*
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Peasant movements in Pakistan resist the green grab with resilience

From Arifwala to Cholistan, Okara to the banks of the Indus, Pakistan's peasant struggle is a fight for life itself. In a dynamic, multi-front movement, it pits two visions of agriculture against each other — one of extraction and control, and one of justice, dignity, and resilience. What's at stake is not only land, but the future of food, communities, and sovereignty.

QAMMAR ABBAS

As the morning sun rose over Ehsan Pur Seed Farm in Kot Addu, Punjab, on April 10, 2025, peasant farmers were quietly harvesting wheat in their fields – land they and their families have farmed for generations without a formal title. But now, the government is attempting to displace them for corporate investors and agribusiness transnational corporations, and the peasants push back. A court-issued stay order barred authorities from carrying out evictions while the case remained under litigation. Yet that sunny April morning, local officials, accompanied by police, stormed the fields. Without warning or formal charges, two farmers were arrested and their tractors seized – retaliation for resisting displacement.

Word spread quickly. By midday, a wave of resistance swept through the region. Families, elders, and youth flooded the roads in protest, forming a blockade and demanding the immediate release of farmers and the return of their essential harvest equipment. Faced with public outrage and mounting pressure, the authorities were forced to retreat. The farmers were released. The machinery was returned. It was a rare, if small, victory – but one that symbolised a much larger and intensifying struggle for land, dignity, and survival in the Pakistani countryside.

This moment captures a key part of a growing conflict in rural and urban Pakistan, where control over land, water, seeds, and resources fuels large-scale monoculture. Peasants, women, and rural youth resist with resilience, united by agroecology and seed sovereignty.

Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the national peasant organisation Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC, a member of La Via Campesina), stated: "The government is reinforcing a new feudal system – where land remains concentrated in a few elite hands and peasants are reduced to precarious labour – by promoting military-backed corporate farming. Instead of empowering landless peasants through genuine land reforms and redistribution, this model displaces peasants and cultivators and replaces them with contracted farm workers under exploitative conditions. It entrenches control, while stripping rural communities of autonomy and land-based livelihoods."

Photo: Awami Tahreek Sindh (People's Movement Sindh)

Rural women lead a powerful demonstration in Badin, Sindh, demanding an end to water grabbing and large-scale canal and dam projects. They call for equitable water access for small farmers and peasants to sustain cultivation.

The green grab disguised as development and food security

Across the fertile plains of Punjab and Sindh, a new wave of state-sanctioned land dispossession is underway. Under the banner of the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) – a project launched in July 2023 to promote the corporatisation of agriculture – the government and military are facilitating the takeover of millions of hectares of farmland. The land grab centers on the Land Information & Management System (LIMS), which uses GIS, drones, and satellite imagery to classify communal and peasant lands as 'barren' or 'unused.' This technocratic approach transfers ancestral lands to corporate entities for industrial agriculture, seen as more 'productive' and in the 'national interest'. Under GPI, 4.8 million acres are designated for corporate farming, but lack of transparency raises concerns about accountability and military expansion over civilian resources. Additionally, the proposed construction of six new canals along the Indus River threatens to divert vital water resources, further exacerbating water scarcity for small farmers in downstream provinces such as Sindh and southern Punjab. Peasant groups denounce these projects as extractive and anti-people.

> *Peasants stand in solidarity with defiance in their eyes and resistance in their bodies*

Vasand Thari, president of Awami Tahreek Sindh (People's Movement Sindh), remarked: "This is not just about canals. It's about saving Sindh's land, water, and minerals from exploitative entities like the Green Corporate Initiative Pvt. Ltd. – a modern-day East India Company. These canals will serve export-oriented industrial farming. Food will be shipped to the Gulf and Global North countries, while increasing hunger and deprivation at home."

These takeovers are based on colonial-era laws, such as the Colonization of Lands Act (1912) and the Land Acquisition Act

Photo: Awami Tahreek Sindh (People's Movement Sindh)

Peasant women march at the forefront of a mobilisation in Sujawal, Sindh, holding banners and flags to protest canal projects on the Indus River and the expansion of corporate farming.

(1894), which permit governments to displace communities in the name of 'public interest'. Even after decades of cultivation, peasants are denied land titles.

Today, 51% of rural households are landless. Just five percent of landlords control 64% of farmland, while 65% of farmers own only 15% of land. Corporate farming threatens to accelerate this inequality, rendering even more small farmers landless, adding to the 30 million already without land. Women are doubly marginalised, owning only three percent of land and facing systemic exclusion from land rights, credit, and recognition.

Peasant resistance and grassroots resilience

Peasant resistance in Pakistan is not only growing – it is evolving into a dynamic, multi-front movement that includes legal battles, grassroots organising, direct action, and global solidarity. On April 13, 2025, peasant and small farmers' movements, along with workers and trade unions, launched a nationwide day of mobilisation across Punjab and Sindh. From village assemblies to town hall meetings, these coordinated actions openly rejected the Green Pakistan Initiative's corporate farmland leases and canal construction projects. One of the most significant expressions of this resistance occurred at the Bhakkar Convention on May 6, 2025, where hundreds of landless peasants – including women and youth – gathered with peasant movements, agricultural workers, and allied trade unions to denounce corporate land grabs and demand structural and popular agrarian reform.

Peasants are engaging in bold, direct actions. In Sindh's Babarloi region, peasant movements, lawyers, and community groups staged a nearly two-week sit-in (April 18 – 29, 2025), blocking major highways to stop canal construction tied to the Green Pakistan Initiative. Their pressure led to the suspension of the project by the Council of Common Interests. Meanwhile, in Arifwala and Hasilpur, thousands of peasants physically resisted police attempts to seize farmlands, chanting "We will not leave," as they defended land cultivated for generations. These are not isolated acts of defiance – they represent a growing strategy of civil disobedience rooted in land justice.

Muhammad Ikhlaq, a peasant from Arifwala and local organiser of the Punjab Landless Peasants Association, declared: "For over a century, we have cultivated this land with our blood and toil – yet we are denied ownership. The state now wants to hand over our homes and fields to corporations. We resisted their police, and we will continue to resist their oppression. This land is ours, and we will not surrender it. Peasants and small farmers' movements condemn corporate farming as a 'scheme of economic genocide against peasants' and vow to intensify resistance."

Resilience-building education

Equally important is the resilience-building grassroots educational work unfolding across rural communities. Women and youth are increasingly taking leadership roles through agroecology and political education programmes

coordinated by small-scale food producer organisations and community networks. Together, they are cultivating a new generation of politically aware food producers, deeply grounded in agroecology, climate justice, and peasant feminism.

Women and community networks are leading workshops and village learning circles, promoting agroecological farming techniques – such as natural pest management, soil regeneration, and kitchen gardening – while simultaneously raising awareness about the politics of agriculture: women's unpaid contributions to farm labour, the health and ecological dangers of chemical pesticides, and the right to safe, chemical-free food.

Agroecology and seed sovereignty are central pillars of resistance and resilience. Peasant and small farmers' movements promote natural, non-corporate farming methods, rejecting chemical inputs, hybrid GMO seeds, and monoculture. Women-led networks are reviving ancestral seed varieties, preserving agro-biodiversity, and reclaiming food systems from corporate biotech monopolies. These efforts aim not only to protect the land but to redefine the very model of development imposed on rural communities, enhancing community autonomy and resilience.

In rural Pakistan, women play a crucial role in dairy farming. As agribusiness increasingly dominates the sector, small and landless farmers are organising women through local networks. Some women partner with men to run agroecological farms and lead in collecting and regenerating traditional seeds. They maintain community seed banks for wheat, rice, maize, and vegetables, for local use and exchange. While few women own land outright, many work on family farms, vital to seed sovereignty and local food systems.

Legal resistance remains a critical tool. Peasant movements and farmer groups have secured court-ordered stays from the Lahore High Court against illegal land seizures, forced evictions, and machinery confiscations. Even in the face of state efforts to override these rulings, peasants have stood firm. Popular rural assemblies continue to call for the repeal of colonial-era land acquisition laws and for comprehensive agrarian reform that centers the rights of the landless.

Land, life, and liberation

The movement against corporate farming and the canal projects is bolstered by solidarity across sectors. Peasants have forged strong ties with progressive political parties, labour rights groups, journalists, lawyers, and international allies – but these relationships didn't emerge overnight – they were forged through years of consistent engagement, mutual support in moments of crisis, and a clear articulation of shared struggles. When peasants faced arrests or violent evictions, they reached out to lawyers' groups for legal defense and injunctions; in return, these lawyers became embedded allies, shaping legal arguments for land rights. Journalists were invited to on-site visits and people's tribunals, ensuring that stories of dispossession were documented and made visible in mainstream and alternative media.

Women and youth are increasingly taking leadership roles through agroecology and political education programmes

Progressive political parties and labour unions engaged through joint mobilisations, co-signed statements, and common struggles – recognising that land grabs, wage exploitation, and privatisation are all facets of the same system of dispossession. Internationally, groups like Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC) leveraged their involvement in La Via Campesina to link local struggles to the global food sovereignty movement, creating reciprocal solidarity.

These actions are strengthening community resilience in profound ways. Organising for resistance and resilience has unified previously disconnected rural communities, fostering solidarity and social cohesion that are vital for withstanding state repression and negotiating with authorities.

By defending land rights and resisting forced contract changes or evictions while simultaneously building autonomous agroecological production systems, peasants are increasing their resource security, leading to more stable access to livelihoods and food, and reducing their vulnerability to poverty and climate shocks. This ongoing struggle is also raising political awareness among rural populations, allowing for broader and more confident participation in governance, advocacy, and rights-based organising. Peasant actions also promote ecological resilience. Secure tenure and collective ownership encourage small farmers to adopt agroecological land use practices, investing in long-term soil health and biodiversity instead of short-term profits, which is often driven by insecure tenancy.

In resisting externally imposed policies – such as forced crop changes, monocultures, or GMO seed imports – peasants are defending both traditional farming systems and ecological diversity, contributing to healthier ecosystems and a more climate-resilient rural landscape. ■

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Photo: Luiz Wagner Jr

Community gardener Isaura Servil.

Collective resilience in black women-led community gardens in Brazil

Since the late 1980s, the municipality of Teresina, located in the state of Piaui in Brazil's semi-arid Northeast, has supported urban and peri-urban farming through its Municipal Community Gardens Programme. Facing threats ranging from climate change and inequality to occupation of their land for housing construction, gardeners are defending their lands. The experience of the Piçarreira garden demonstrates how acting quickly and collectively can make the difference between losing and preserving a space.

MARIANA FIUZA, KALIL LUZ, CRISTIANE LOPES, NAYLA GABRIELLE AND FABIANO SANTOS

Over the past decades, the past decades, the municipality has allocated more than 100 hectares of public land for 42 community gardens. Products grown in these gardens, which are divided into individual plots, are also sold on site by the gardeners, allowing people from surrounding neighbourhoods to buy fresh vegetables. However, despite the great number of community gardens in Teresina, the city remains heavily dependent on food brought in from other regions of Brazil.

These gardens are at the frontline of the climate crisis. The combination of rising temperatures, intense heat, and irregular rainfall has made cultivation increasingly difficult and has reduced yields of once-reliable crops. These environmental changes have also compounded existing inequalities.

Black women, who make up 78% of Teresina's gardeners, shoulder agricultural labour alongside domestic responsibilities, childcare, and elder care. Many walk long distances between home and garden, often in extreme heat. At this intersection of climate and social pressures, the garden has become both a source of livelihood and a site of endurance.

In January 2021, one of the gardens – the Fraternidade Community Garden – was occupied by people seeking to construct houses and other buildings that they could later rent out for profit. This is a common event in large cities in Brazil, where there are high levels of land speculation. Local administrations have a difficult time regulating this trend, as the instruments for monitoring and regulation are weak. Even though the gardeners had registered with local authorities to cultivate their plots and had legal rights to the land, there were no repercussions following the occupation.

The women working at Fraternidade that day were violently evicted from the public land they had been cultivating for their own subsistence. Four years later, little remains to show that a garden once stood here: only mature banana trees in backyards and a few brick planting beds are still visible amidst the new construction.

The Piçarreira garden under threat

Just 200 meters from the Fraternidade site lies the Piçarreira Community Garden. During this same period it too was partially occupied, but unlike Fraternidade, most of Piçarreira's land remains dedicated to cultivation today. This was only possible because of the gardeners' rapid and coordinated mobilisation.

The day of the attempted takeover is still vivid in the gardeners' memories. It happened at midday, during their lunch break, when they were sheltering from the worst of the heat. On returning, they found part of the garden destroyed. Maria do Socorro, aged 66, recalls:

"My husband has health problems and got very sick. It was as if he was dead, he collapsed right by the manilha [a concrete storage structure for irrigation water]. He got so nervous when he saw they had pulled everything out, only empty beds were left. The beans, squash, so many okra plants, everything had been growing so nicely – lettuce, arugula, kale, all sorts of things. When we got there at noon, it had all been destroyed."

Once the gardeners realised neighbouring areas had been taken, they set up a rotating watch – women during the day, men at night – to prevent the same from happening to them. This quick and collective response stopped the invasion from advancing. Yet the threat remained, with invaders sending messages that Piçarreira's land would be next because of its location along a busy avenue with high commercial value.

After defending their plots from eviction, they took the step of legally formalising their group

From that moment on, the need to act as a collective grew stronger. The garden began to welcome displaced gardeners from other invaded sites, with long-standing members splitting their plots to make room for newcomers. The

Our research on challenges to gardening

In 2024, as part of a participatory action research, we visited all 42 community gardens in Teresina to listen to the life stories of gardeners and ask them about the main challenges they face in keeping their work alive. We also conducted surveys with 346 gardeners – over 10% of the total gardening population.

The results were clear: 79% reported losing crops due to climate-related events, such as extreme heat and drought. A frequently cited example was coriander (Coriandrum sativum), a key ingredient in local cuisine, which no longer grows as productively under rising temperatures. In addition to evictions because of housing development (the topic of this article) and climate challenges, gardeners pointed to other obstacles, including theft and the precarious state of infrastructure, such as a lack of public lighting and irrigation systems.

Three women gardeners were interviewed for this story: Ms. Isaura Servil (67 years old, 13 years in the garden), Ms. Maria do Socorro Rodrigues (66 years old, 14 years in the garden), and Ms. Maria Barroso de Morais Sousa (68 years old, 15 years in the garden).

Community gardener Maria Barrosso.

demand was sudden, and this solidarity was crucial. Even four years later, there is still a waiting list for access to land.

From defense to organisation

The Piçarreira gardeners turned a moment of crisis into a foundation for long-term action. After defending their plots from eviction, they took the step of legally formalising their group as an association, a move that allows them to participate in political processes, access funding, and secure resources.

Reaching this milestone was not straightforward. More than 30% of the gardeners reported not being able to read or write, making the bureaucratic process challenging. With the guidance of a municipal technical assistant, they navigated the paperwork and secured official recognition.

Yet even with a formal status, the underlying pressures remain. Local authorities have taken little action to remove illegal occupiers or prevent future invasions. Gardeners who lost their spaces have not been relocated by the local municipality officials. However, some of them got new plots in Piçarreira thanks to the solidarity of other gardeners.

Lessons from Piçarreira

The experience of Piçarreira underscores the fact that resilience is built through collective organisation. When the gardens were under threat, swift mobilisation and mutual support were decisive for protecting the space. Solidarity proved not to be a burden but a strength; welcoming displaced gardeners reinforced the group's unity and sense of purpose.

Still, the collective process revealed limits. While the association provides a platform for shared decision making, day-to-day practices in procurement and sales often remain individual. Most gardeners buy agricultural inputs such as tools and manure for their own plots and sell their produce independently. This coexistence of collective structures with individualist habits shows that resilience is not a permanent state but a dynamic balance between cooperation and autonomy.

Looking ahead

The experience described here is part of a larger picture. Teresina, like many other cities, is grappling with a housing crisis, rural migration driven by the expansion of agribusiness and 'green' energy projects, and an absence of integrated urban planning. Without stronger public measures, the displacement of small-scale food producers is likely to continue.

Today, the Piçarreira gardeners are turning to storytelling as a form of resistance. We are working with them to develop a co-created map that documents the history and presence of Black women in Teresina's urban and peri-urban agriculture. This work reframes the gardens: not as charitable projects, as they are often portrayed in municipal and academic narratives, but as autonomous, emancipatory spaces and climate refuges.

For other communities facing similar threats, Piçarreira offers a set of profound lessons. Acting quickly and collectively can make the difference between losing and preserving a space. Keeping the land visibly cultivated deters opportunistic occupation. Formalising a collective structure strengthens political legitimacy. Above all, recognising the histories and leadership of those who maintain these spaces transforms the gardens from plots of cultivated soil into defended territories of belonging, work, and dignity. ■

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Sneak previews from Rooted online

The digital version of Rooted Magazine offers more articles than could fit in this paper copy. Read the following pieces in full at www.rooted-magazine.org.

Organisational resilience as movement practice: lessons from the German CSA Network

We share lessons to strengthen the resilience of food sovereignty actors, in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and beyond. Even with community financing in place, organisational challenges in CSAs often don't get the attention they need. To root organisational resilience, we must recognise and address such possible organisational tensions. To support CSAs at every stage of development, the German CSA Network has built a rich toolbox inspired by learning models rooted in global practice. A key learning from the German CSA Network, is that only through ongoing collective learning will organizational resilience become a stronger movement practice. ■

Authors: ***Matthias Middendorf*** *and* ***Simon Scholl***

Reimagining resilience: building just and equitable food systems

The dominant approach to resilience tends to focus on restoring supply chains or bouncing back to pre-crisis conditions. But the status quo is already unjust and unsustainable. This tension was central to my recent experience co-authoring the "Building Resilient Food Systems" report of the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). I believe discussions on 'building resilient food systems' need to shift focus. First, towards how to ensure people, communities, and ecosystems are more resilient in the face of multiple crises. Then we should consider how to build food systems that can support that, even in the face of shocks and stressors. A broken and unjust food system does not need to be made more resilient – it needs to be transformed to support resilient societies. ■

Author: ***Colin Anderson***

Sowing autonomy in contradictory times in Yucatán, Mexico

Today, we live in a time of contradiction. While Indigenous and local communities are praised for their conservation and sustainable production efforts, their territories face growing pressure from corporate interests. Recognition can be a double-edged sword: it may lead to legal dispossession and epistemic extractivism – the co-opting or erasing of community-based knowledge systems. Truly valuing our ability to feed the world requires building critical education that empowers us to defend ourselves and propose alternatives. Agroecology school U Kuchil Tóoj Óolal in Yucatan, Mexico is an example. It is a return to ancestral forms of communal life: rebuilding trust, valuing oral knowledge, sharing labour, reconnecting with nature, speaking the Mayan language. At the same time, it's urgent that we dismantle the networks that co-opt the language of human rights for profit. ■

Author: ***Albert M. Chan-Dzul***

Learning about our land rights.

Photo: Alejandra Ek Chan

Rooted
in Agroecology and
Food Sovereignty

Weaving Intergenerational Resilience
The illustration (mixed-medium on paper) depicts three generations of women farmers, collectively holding a vine, symbolising the transfer of knowledge and resources from one generation to another. A small sapling, near the oldest woman's feet and planted by her, goes on to eventually grow into a tree for the youngest woman. This is meant to symbolise that the seeds sown today will eventually grow and evolve into something much bigger and resilient in the future - much like resistance movements for people's rights. **Artist**: Shomira Sanyal, 2025

www.rooted-magazine.org