

GRAIN

in 2012

Towards community-controlled
and biodiversity-based food systems

About GRAIN



GRAIN is a small international non-profit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. Our support takes the form of independent research and analysis, networking at the local, regional and international levels, and active cooperation and alliance-building with social movements.

For more than 20 years, GRAIN has been an active player in the global movement to challenge corporate power over people's food and livelihoods. Governments around the world focus their attention on industrial agriculture and corporate-run food supply chains. Sadly, this model ignores small-scale producers and their complex farming and food distribution systems which have nourished humankind for more than 12,000 years. Today, almost one billion people live in hunger partly due to an industrial food system that

favours global markets above feeding people. Seventy percent of those living in hunger are small-scale food producers—a stark testament to how dysfunctional this system is.

GRAIN monitors, investigates and exposes food and farming issues in partnership with a range of local groups, social movements and global networks. From Indonesia to Benin to Mexico, GRAIN staff work in many time zones and languages, tracking new developments globally and on the ground and sharing this information and analysis with partners, policy-makers and the public. By providing reliable research and analysis enriched by a history of struggle and collaboration, GRAIN works to support the international movement to protect biodiversity and promote democratic, just and community-controlled food systems.

In addition to conducting and sharing research, GRAIN helps link together social movements and groups that are working to create more diverse food and farming systems and supports them to achieve their objectives. GRAIN believes it is essential to partner with local groups to develop strategies and generate viable support mechanisms for community-controlled food systems. As a small organisation, GRAIN leverages its impact through active collaborations with regional and international networks worldwide.

GRAIN's work is currently organised around four interconnected themes:

- **Corporations, power and the global food system**
- **Land grabbing**
- **People's control over seeds**
- **The climate crisis and agriculture**

This publication reviews and reports on GRAIN's activities and achievements in 2012. We highlight examples of some of our most significant work, as well as reflections on our activities and impact.

This document is also available from GRAIN's website:

<http://www.grain.org/pages/programme>

Corporations, power and the global food system

Green economy or more of the same?

In the run up to the 20th anniversary of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20 summit”) in June 2012, there was a flood of new promises about how the “green economy” is the answer to many of the environmental and economic problems we face. But beneath the surface, green economy thinking amounts to little more than giving the green light to corporations to further privatise nature.

Together with the Latin American Alianza Biodiversidad, the World Rainforest Movement and Friends of the Earth, we drafted an analysis of what was on the table. [“Behind the ‘Green Economy’: Profiting from environmental and climate crisis”](#) spells out how climate change and the global environmental crisis is seen as an opportunity for corporate profit. This is guiding the agenda of manufactured scarcity that underpins the green economy - land grabs, the patenting and protection of seed varieties, the privatisation of subsoil, of parks and oceans, all serves to deplete and enclose the natural commons while leaving corporations free to extract profits.

At the same time, we worked with partners in Latin America to draw up the materials for a full-length book on the issue: [*Economía verde: el asalto final a los bienes comunes*](#). Both were widely distributed by the social movements gathering parallel to the the Rio+20 summit, and helped to focus people’s attention on what green economy is all about.

GRAIN also took part in an April 2012 meeting in Grand-Popo, Benin, organised by Young Volunteers for the Environment to set out an African civil society position on the Green Economy ahead of the Rio conference.

“Today, almost one billion people live in hunger due to an industrial food system that places corporate interests and global markets ahead of feeding people.”



Who will feed China: global agribusiness or local farmers?

When China began importing soybeans as animal feed in the late 1990s, it ushered in one of the most dramatic agricultural transformations the world has ever seen. On the other side of the world, 30 million hectares of farms, forests, savannahs and pastures in the Southern Cone of Latin America were converted to soy plantations to provide China's new factory farms with a cheap source of livestock feed.

GRAIN's report, "[Who will feed China: agribusiness or its own farmers?](#)" looked at the potential impact if the same were to happen with other feed crops such as maize. Transnational agribusiness companies are eager for the profits to be made from unregulated imports of maize into China. They are eyeing up fertile land in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa to supply this enormous market – land that is presently farmed by small producers.

But replaying the devastation that industrial soy production wreaked in the Southern Cone is not the only alternative, argues the report – which was [translated it into Mandarin](#) and circulated it widely within China.

Who will feed India: Global supermarkets or local shops?

Corporations are also trying to take over the food system in India, where Walmart and other retail giants are desperate for a bigger slice of the country's \$400 billion food market, but local retailers are fiercely resisting the government's plans to let them in.

It is easy to see why India's small retailers and workers are upset: for every job a foreign retailer creates, around 18 will be lost. Many others elsewhere along the food chain will be hit hard too. GRAIN's article, "[Can India turn the tide on the supermarket tsunami?](#)" made clear that the corporate agenda is not about increasing production, but about stealing control of the market from the poor. It is a situation that is being repeated around the world, from Colombia to Kenya.

India's 44 million small shop owners and retail workers staged protests forcing the government to retreat from opening the country's \$400 billion retail market to Walmart and other giants.




Land grabbing

Five years ago, GRAIN [raised the alarm](#) over a new and massive trend of land grabbing in which rich countries and corporations snap up land used by farmers and pastoralists in poor countries, and in the process often throw them off their land and destroy their livelihoods. This has since become a major issue for debate at international, regional and national levels.

As we documented with [a new dataset](#) in the early part of 2012, land grabbing is a widespread reality across the world. The reactions from governments and mainstream agencies are not encouraging. As shown in [another report](#) on the issue, they mostly limit themselves to window-dressing and public relations efforts, rather than dealing with the issue at the source. Meanwhile, the signing away of land rights to foreign and domestic investors continues unabated.

But 2012 also witnessed a tremendous increase in public opposition to land grabbing, and a broader public awareness that this is a practice that has to be stopped. NGOs and social movements across the world have incorporated the issue into their campaigns and information work, and are making the links with other forms of land grabbing, such as those for mining, tourism or water. GRAIN played a key role in facilitating cooperation, linking people together, helping to build capacity and strategy, and sharing our analysis and information with all. The 2012 [external evaluation](#) of our work in this area encouraged us to continue on this path (see box on page 17).



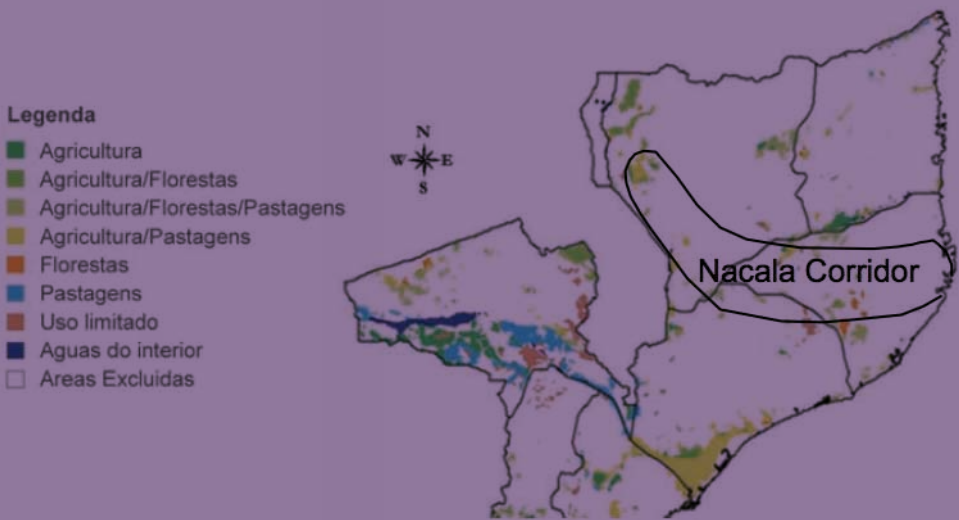
Soldiers in the Polochic Valley, Guatemala, where 800 families were evicted to make way for a sugar cane plantation.

Putting watergrabbing on the map

Often forgotten in the debate on land grabbing is the question of control over fresh water resources that accompanies the rush to acquire fertile farmland. GRAIN started initial research on this issue in early 2012, and in March, we presented our initial findings to the **Alternative World Water Forum** in Marseille.

After intensive consultation and debate with water experts and activists from around the world, we published *“Squeezing Africa dry”*, a major report focusing on the impacts the widespread establishment of industrial plantations will have on the continent’s water resources. The huge expansion of irrigation infrastructure being built by foreign investors will further undermine soil fertility, and cause other problems due to salinisation, waterlogging and desertification. It is also damaging indigenous soil and water management strategies as bulldozers are brought in to level the land. It amounts to the ‘hydrological suicide’ of the continent.





ProSavana and the recolonisation of Mozambique

Imagine 14 million hectares – bigger than Switzerland and Austria combined – home to millions of Mozambican farmers practising shifting cultivation. Now imagine a foreign consultant saying that all of this is empty land. Foreign companies preparing to come to farm it. And the country's president agreeing to this, offering up the land for a dollar per hectare. Can't be true? It's happening in Mozambique. Brazil and Japan are preparing to colonise a big chunk of the country. It's called the ProSavana programme.

We worked with farmers' organisations in Mozambique to uncover the threat to their land, livelihoods and environment being planned behind closed doors. UNAC, Mozambique's small farmers' union, began spreading the word to those who will be affected and issued a public statement on the matter. The farmers' union also worked with GRAIN and La Via Campesina to co-publish an [article on the programme](#) in one of Brazil's major newspapers. Mozambique's minister of agriculture and officials of both the Japanese and Brazilian governments were forced to respond to the resulting outcry.

“Brazil and Japan are preparing to colonise a big chunk of Mozambique. It’s called the ProSavana programme.”



People's control over seeds

Seeds are the key to resisting the industrial food system. They are the first link in the food chain, strongly anchored in local cultures that depend on traditions of seed saving and sharing to survive. Not surprisingly, seed fairs, trainings, exchanges and workshops are multiplying across the globe as a concrete way to say no to corporate control over our livelihoods and yes to people's food sovereignty.

The defence of maize in Mexico

2012 marked the tenth anniversary of Mexico's "Red en Defensa del Maíz" (Network in Defence of Maize). This remarkable network is an alliance of more than 1,200 communities from across the country who are working alongside numerous organisations, scientists and individuals with the core objective of defending maize – Mexico's sacred crop – in its birthplace.

GRAIN has been part of this network since its birth, and in 2012 we took part in several strategy sessions to work out how to avoid the loss of local varieties while countering the contamination of local varieties by genetically engineered maize from the US. GRAIN was also one of the key organisations behind the research, writing and publishing of the book "El maíz no es una cosa – es un centro de origen" ('Maize is not a thing, it is a centre of origin'), which brought together a wealth of materials, perspectives and experiences from the network's decade of struggle.

In December, the Mexican government announced plans to allow the planting of 2.4 million hectares of genetically engineered maize. Mexico is the centre of diversity of maize, and this totally irresponsible action was quickly denounced by civil society groups across the country and internationally. We contributed to this resistance by publishing and widely distributing "[Red alert! GMO avalanche in Mexico](#)" and "[Hands off our maize!](#)"

[Resistance to GMOs in Mexico](#)”, and co-publishing [“GM maize in Mexico: An irreversible path”](#).

For the moment, this strong public opposition has stopped the government from going ahead with its plans, but extreme vigilance is needed as corporate pressure continues.

Fighting corporate seed legislation around the world

Throughout the year, GRAIN was actively involved in debates over the impact of legislation designed to protect corporate ownership of seed varieties and curtail farmers’ rights to save, breed and exchange their own seeds.

For example, in Argentina the government was about to give in to corporate pressure and strengthen intellectual property rights over seed, but public outcry and opposition prevented this from happening. GRAIN supported the process by drafting a ten point declaration, [“No to the privatisation of seeds in Argentina”](#), which clearly explained how the new law would pave the way for the entry of new genetically-modified crops and strengthen the hand of a few transnational seed companies, harming the development of local varieties, weakening the fundamental right to food, and failing to protect collective knowledge and heritage, particularly of rural and indigenous people. The declaration was turned into a campaign document signed by over 400 institutions and almost 1,500 individuals.

In Benin, GRAIN supported civil society organisations evaluating the country’s second moratorium on GMOs as it came to an end. At a regional level, GRAIN debated a representative of the African Intellectual Property Organization over seed law, and contributed to the response from the regional Coalition for the Protection of Africa’s Genetic Heritage to a World Bank-backed project on bioasafety in West Africa.

Climate crisis & agriculture

The climate crisis is one of the most formidable challenges that humanity faces today. It is driven by the expansive and destructive exploitation of natural resources by an industrial society that knows no limits. Our capacity to produce food is already being severely affected by this crisis, and projections for the future are alarming. But the global industrial food system is also one of the main drivers behind the climate crisis. GRAIN's analysis shows that the current industrial food system is responsible for around half of all global greenhouse gas emissions.

During 2012, we carried out an intensive outreach effort with our 2011 report "[Food and climate change: the forgotten link](#)", in which we argue that soil improvement strategies can make a substantial contribution to solving the climate crisis. The report was translated into [French](#) and [Spanish](#), and widely distributed in Latin America and Francophone Africa. In addition, partners translated the report into [Italian](#) and [Greek](#) (and perhaps other languages that we don't know of) for use in their own advocacy work.

We worked with UNCTAD to publish a contribution from GRAIN on climate and the food system for their [2013 Trade and Environment Review](#). The book was finally launched in September 2013, and we expect that through this collaboration with UNCTAD, we will be able to reach a much broader audience to get our message across.

We also started work on a popular version of our climate report in 2012, working together with farmers' organisations in Spain and *Soberanía Alimentaria y Biodiversidad* Magazine (of which GRAIN is one of the editors). We helped the editors of the magazine to draw up a 60 page booklet on the issue for distribution to farmers' organisations and other civil society organisations. It was published as "[Asfixia en el supermercado](#)" in early 2013, and is now being widely distributed amongst our partners and others in Latin America.



Durian farmer Chatree Sowantrakul
in Thailand - GRAIN works to
support peasant farmers and peasant
organisations around the world



External evaluation

Three of our major donors, Oxfam-Novib, Swedbio and Misereor, commissioned an **external evaluation** to analyse the impact of GRAIN's work on land grabbing, as well as GRAIN's sustainability. From April to June, the two evaluators travelled across the globe to interview activists, policy makers and academics about the quality, effectiveness and impact of GRAIN's work. In addition, they carried out desk reviews of how our outputs are being used and whom they reach. The overall results of the evaluation were quite positive.

"The impacts of GRAIN's work have been felt in several fields and at various levels, generating many new research programs focussing on the trend and also drawing attention to the gender dimensions of land grabbing," the evaluators wrote. "Through the information and analysis that GRAIN provides, and with its direct support to international social movements, regional networks and national organisations, GRAIN has helped strengthen capacity for resistance and mobilisation against land grabbing".

They especially highlighted how our approach to building partnerships has been highly successful: *"According to its partners, GRAIN has played an important role of bridging its research on land grabbing with movements and on-the-ground resistance. Using its research and analysis, GRAIN has helped local organisations and movements directly affected by the trends to understand the global character of the problem and put local and national issues into perspective."*

Information & outreach

the core of our work



The great food robbery

In 2012, GRAIN published a major book that brought together all of our research and information work of the previous two years. [“The great food robbery: how corporations control food, grab land and destroy the climate”](#) was warmly received by activists, researchers and policymakers alike. In a special arrangement with the publishers, Pambazuka Press, bulk copies were mailed to many of our partners across the world, including the African Biodiversity Network and all the regional Via Campesina offices. The book also came out in Spanish - [“El gran robo de los alimentos”](#) - and French - [“Hold-up sur l'alimentation”](#). Throughout the year, book launches were organised in various parts of the world, including Nairobi, Cape Town, Buenos Aires, Cotonou, Geneva and Barcelona. The book received numerous reviews, and was widely covered in the media.

Other publications

In 2012, GRAIN published two in-depth reports, one about [water grabbing](#), and one about the [situation with genetically engineered maize in Mexico](#). We published four issues in our [‘Against the grain’](#) series, and a dozen [other publications](#) in various languages.

Together with 10 other organisations and movements in Latin America, GRAIN co-publishes the magazine [‘Biodiversidad, sustento y culturas’](#). Four issues were produced in 2012, reaching a readership of over 30,000 people in the region. GRAIN also participates in the production of the [Soberanía Alimentaria Magazine](#) together with farmers’ organisations and a network of NGOs in Spain, and on the [Nyeleni Bulletin](#), a newsletter for the global food sovereignty movement



Websites

All of our output and much more is posted on our trilingual website, grain.org. After a complete overhaul in 2011, the site is now simpler, lighter and easier to use. On average, it is accessed by some 500-600 people per day, but sometimes many more when new content is made available.

Farmlandgrab.org is a site we launched five years ago to share information and discussion on land grabbing. It is updated daily, and contains a wealth of materials, articles and studies on the issue. For many researchers, activists and policy makers, it is the place to go to find information on the phenomenon. Its readership remained stable in 2012 at around 700 unique visitors per day.

For almost a decade, we have also maintained bilaterals.org, a major reference point for those interested in bilateral and regional trade and investment deals, their impacts, and how people are fighting back. It is run and updated as a collaborative partnership. In terms of visitors, it is the busiest site that we are involved in: during 2012, it received over 3,000 visitors per day.

The organisation and how to support us

Staff & Board

GRAIN is a small group with a big agenda. In 2012, our [staff team](#) was composed of a coordinator, seven programme staff and one finance & administration staff. In addition, we work with two consultants who help us with web development and fundraising, and several volunteers. Rich in our diversity, GRAIN functions as a collective, with a horizontal management system and participatory methods of decision-making.

GRAIN is governed by a **Board** composed of dedicated individuals acting in their personal capacity. The Board liaises with the staff over the development and implementation of the programme, as well as in the administration of the organisation. There is a regular rotation and renewal of Board members.

Finances

GRAIN is financed by grants from NGOs, foundations, and - occasionally - governments and intergovernmental organisations, in addition to own income from publications, services, fees and donations. Donors support either our overall strategy and programme or specific parts of our work. Our autonomy is essential to us, and we strive to have a diversified base of support. Below is a snapshot of our income situation in 2012.

GRAIN 2012 INCOME BY SOURCE (All figures in Euros)

Oxfam-Novib (NL)	195,000
SwedBio (S)	109,194
Misereor / KZE (D)	75,000
Brot für Alle (CH)	70,000
EED (D)	50,000
Dutch government (NL)	49,755
Swift Foundation (USA)	34,749
CS Fund (USA)	30,412
New Field (USA)	30,000
Isvara	27,676
Swissaid (CH)	25,000
CFH Foundation (USA)	15,206
European Commission (EU)	10,000
Own income (publications, donations, etc.)	30,131
Total	752,123

Supporting GRAIN

To keep GRAIN strong, independent and ahead of the curve, we need your support. You can do this with a financial contribution, by sharing your materials, and by sharing your time and skills, as explained on our website. If you value our efforts to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems, please consider **making a donation to GRAIN through our [website](#), or by contacting us at grain@grain.org**

GRAIN's team in 2012

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Montreal:
research, global

Ramón Vera Herrera

Mexico City:
Biodiversidad magazine
& programmes,
Latin America

Camila Montecinos

Santiago:
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programmes,
Latin America

Carlos Vicente

Buenos Aires:
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GRAIN board members and donors at the 2012 external evaluation meeting





GRAIN

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