

GRAIN in 2023

Highlights
of our activities



Contents

About GRAIN	3
Year in review	4
Corporations, power and the global food system	5
Land grabbing and the struggle for land	7
People’s control over seeds	9
Food sovereignty to fight the climate crisis.....	11
Communications and outreach.....	13
Cultivating GRAIN	15
GRAIN’s team in 2023: on the world map	16
Annex: GRAIN publications in 2023	18

Cover photo: ‘Decontee’ says she faced retaliation from her manager at the Salala rubber plantation (Liberia) when she refused his sexual advances. Credit: Ashoka Mukpo for Mongabay. Published under CC BY-ND 4.0 licence.

Back cover illustration: Pilar Emixin

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. Since 1990, GRAIN has been active in the global movement challenging corporate power over people's food and livelihoods. Our work is carried out both globally and on the ground with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The objectives of GRAIN are to deepen public understanding of the forces shaping the global and local food systems and their impact on farming and food systems, and to support social movements and civil society organisations in advancing towards food sovereignty.

GRAIN specialises in identifying, monitoring and analysing trends that affect peasant farmers' and rural communities' livelihoods, with a focus on the corporate sector. Parallel and interconnected to our research and information work, our movement support work actively supports and links partners and allies through networking, strategy development and capacity sharing.

This report highlights our research and information work and movement building support across four programme areas:

- ✓ Corporations, power and the global food system
 - Confronting corporate control and global trade's impact on small-scale food producers.
- ✓ Land grabbing and the struggle for land
 - Exposing and building alliances to stop land, water and territory grabbing.
- ✓ People's control over seeds
 - Resisting the privatisation of seeds and the push for GMOs.
- ✓ Food sovereignty to fight the climate crisis
 - Calling out agribusiness greenwashing and positioning food sovereignty and agroecology as important climate solutions.

We also reflect on our communications, outreach and organisational development and share a bit about the internal structure of GRAIN. For more information, please visit our website, follow us on social media, subscribe to our mailing lists or contact us directly. Please also consider donating to GRAIN to help sustain our work.

Year in review:

The year 2023 was a watershed for GRAIN, as our co-founder and coordinator of the last 30+ years retired. It was a major process and a moving moment, as it set a passage point for GRAIN's evolution in the years ahead.

Politically, 2023 was a turbulent year, with wars in Palestine, Sudan and Ukraine and certain governments creating difficult if not disastrous situations for many. It also saw corporations and states failing to seriously address the real causes of climate change despite the growing urgency.

In the context of these challenges, GRAIN continued in its work of supporting peoples' struggles for food sovereignty across the world. We released new research to unmask corporate power in the food sector, joined forces with groups to denounce land grabs and privatisation of seeds and co-organised gatherings to strengthen agroecological alternatives. The bright note for us this year was coalition building with peasant organisations, local collectives and NGO support groups.

Corporate concentration of power in the food system continued to be a formidable challenge in 2023, but GRAIN along with partners and allies persist to stand up for food sovereignty as the true alternative. The activities shared here represent our humble contribution to this collective process.

The GRAIN team



*GRAIN annual staff meeting in Santandercito, Colombia.
Not pictured: Larissa Packer.*

Corporations, power and the global food system

In 2023, GRAIN exposed key actors driving the expansion of industrial agriculture and worked with partners on the ground to stop it. This included collaborating on shared access to corporate databases. The data - otherwise almost impossible to get - helped us compile critical and impactful materials as well as feed daily intelligence to partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

For example, we integrated this data into our critique of public development banks, especially the African Development Bank, which was presented at the global counter-summit of social movements parallel to the World Bank / IMF annual meetings in October 2023 in Marrakesh. We also prepared a fact sheet on the AfCFTA with bilaterals.org and participated in panels at the counter-summit on free trade and debt.

In Latin America, we looked at how companies are using “inflationary times” to raise their profit margins and into the case of avocado orchard expansion in Mexico to analyse how corporations and financial players profit from increased concentration, displacement of local production and global trade.

Another area of growing corporate control is industrial animal farming. This past year, we got more involved in the Stop Financing Factory Farming (S3F) campaign in Latin America as well as an informal regional collective of communities affected by intensive livestock. We published an article on Asia’s pig pandemic, contributed to cases in Ecuador and featured this topic in the issue of the Nyeleni newsletter on emerging diseases and factory farming.



GRAIN staff speaking at the National conference on food and nutritional security, Brazil

Finally, corporate concentration shows up in agri-digitalisation. In July 2023, GRAIN co-organised an online farmer dialogue with ETC Group on what digitalisation means for peasants in Asia. Digitalisation in food distribution was highlighted in our [Supermarket Watch Asia](#) bulletin.

Throughout the year, a common thread was how local communities are maintaining their autonomy and resisting the encroachment of factory farms, industrial greenhouses, digital technology and impacts of free trade.

Working with farmer movements in Tanzania

GRAIN worked with farmers' organisations in Tanzania to explore how agricultural investment – and the land grabbing that so often comes with it – is unfolding across the country.

In March, several GRAIN staff travelled to do field research for a report co-authored by GRAIN and La Via Campesina Southern and Eastern Africa. GRAIN met with MVIWATA, the national small farmers federation, on farmers' control over land and seeds, the rise of digital farming and the impacts of climate change and trade. We also visited their cooperative bank, wholesale market and seed bank. This gave rise to a [joint article](#) about the push to introduce GM rice in East Africa.



In September, we co-organised a press conference online with African allies to bring small scale farmers' concerns to the annual forum of the Gates-funded Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (now just called AGRA) held in Tanzania.

Finally, in December, GRAIN staff participated in MVIWATA's annual meeting and 30th anniversary with over 1500

farmers. Together they called for strengthening peasant solidarity in Tanzania to protect peasant seeds and organise against climate change, land grabs and industrial agriculture.



Members of MVIWATA participating in procession towards conference in Njombe, Tanzania by Fiola Seruba / Pan Africanism Today.

Land grabbing and the struggle for land

GRAIN's work to expose land grabbers in the agricultural sector, and support the affected local communities, has turned into a steadfast and long term commitment. Day by day, we conducted research on the companies behind farm land grabs, tracked emerging trends and worked with groups directly impacted by land deals to try to get their land back.

GRAIN worked actively with the informal alliance against industrial plantations in West and Central Africa, made up of two dozen grassroots organisations. The informal alliance carried out several exchanges including a gathering in Uganda with over 400 participants. Now actively expanding our work on this in Latin America, GRAIN co-wrote an [article](#) as a way of seeking support for Afro-Colombian communities in Ecuador criminalised by an oil palm company.

Oil palm is also spreading into [India](#) where the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is playing a role to strengthen the foothold of oil palm corporations there. Finally, GRAIN attended the International conference on just transition in the palm oil industry in Indonesia at the end of November, to engage further with labour networks and deepen the understanding and strategy on connecting with peasant movements.



GRAIN contributed to investigative reports on allegations of abuse at Socfin plantations, resulting in an article on Socfin's greenwashing and another on the case of Nigeria. Shortly after, the Swiss pension funds industry advised its members to divest from Bolloré on grounds of long-standing community complaints. GRAIN also provided background information and interviews to journalists looking into African Agriculture Inc., which has amassed 2.9mn hectares of land in West Africa for alfalfa and carbon credit farming. This resulted in major articles in The Sunday Times / Times of London (March 2023), Mongabay (April 2023) and Bloomberg which gave further ammunition to the communities.

Throughout these processes, farmlandgrab.org played a central role. In 2023, we received gratitude from the International alliance of local communities around Socfin plantations that is using articles posted on the site as part of a body of proof of on-the-ground abuses.

Struggles over territory in Latin America

The tapestry of land, water, geographic features, sacred sites, biodiversity, natural cycles, memory and relations with nature all come together in the concept of "territory" in Latin America.

In August, several GRAIN staff visited communities impacted by agro-industry in Jalisco and Yucatán, Mexico. One

such community, the Mexican ejido community of San Isidro, continues their complex case against the US corporation Amway. The case was incorporated into the recent issue of Revista Biodiversidad and the monthly magazine Ojarasca of the Mexican newspaper La Jornada. Seeing the centrality of water in the integral view of territory in the region, we dug into the financial players behind water grabbing.



Finally, GRAIN participated in the Alianza Biodiversidad coordination meeting and held our annual staff and board meetings in Colombia. This provided the opportunity to visit the Sumapaz Peasant Reserve Zone of the María Cano Latin America Agroecology Institute (IALA). Together with Alianza member FENSUAGRO, the Colombian national farmer's union federation, we wrote an article explaining how land reform is being addressed by the current government.

People's control over seeds

The focus of GRAIN's work to strengthen peasants' control over seeds in 2023 centred on resisting GMOs and stopping the advance of UPOV and other seed laws that facilitated the privatisation of seeds.

GRAIN participated in campaigns against the approval of GM wheat. We helped draft letters to ministries taking the decisions in Brazil, and helped build public campaigns to denounce the crop's release. We also published an [article](#) on how communities in Bolivia are resisting GM wheat, despite strong corporate pressure.

GRAIN's article on [GM mustard](#) in India was spread widely on social media and picked up by partners in China who translated it. GRAIN was also asked to speak on this topic in several venues as the case went to the Supreme Court where arguments for a moratorium are now being heard.

GRAIN tried to untangle the arguments and accusations of the complicated [conflict over GM maize](#) between the US and Mexico. We supported efforts to keep the ban on importations of GM maize for food use in Mexico, despite threats of a trade dispute from the US.

9



GRAIN staff presents at the MONLAR National agroecology forum, Sri Lanka

Trade agreements are also used to force countries to adopt laws that privatise seeds, as we analysed in the leaked intellectual property rights protocol of the African Continental FTA that will push countries across the continent to conform to UPOV. We were invited to present these findings at the Pan African Seed Conference in Tanzania in August where 100 participants gathered from 27 countries from Africa and beyond.

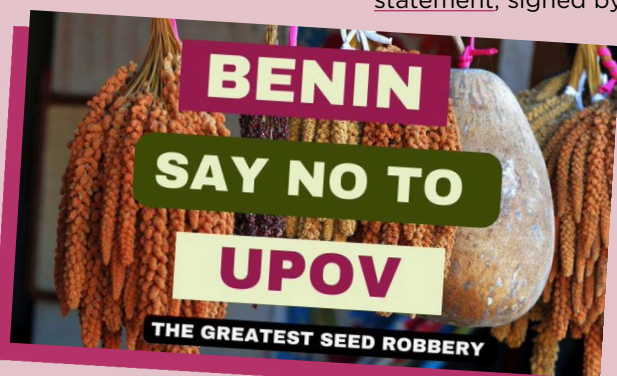
Finally, good news came when the Philippines Supreme Court announced a judicial mechanism to stop the commercialisation of Golden rice and Bt eggplant. This case was amplified on social media by Stop Golden Rice! Network members. GRAIN participated in an online event of the Stop Golden Rice Network as part of the annual campaign against IRRI.

Preventing corporate control of seeds: Benin and UPOV campaign

In April 2023, the parliament of Benin opened session with a proposal from the president to join UPOV. Groups led by Jinukun and the Federation of Agroecological Farmers of Benin reached out to GRAIN for support as they informed the public and mobilised debate with a public conference, a national peasant consultation and a training for journalists. We also produced a collective press release and together with AFSA organised an international statement of support for the Benin people's resistance. Thanks to this pressure from social movements, by the close of the parliamentary session in July, the proposal had gone nowhere. A Parliamentary aid told the groups that the deputies were stunned by the public outcry and did not dare address the proposal.



In December, GRAIN worked with several partners to co-organise the annual global week of action against UPOV. The campaign produced a collective statement, signed by over 260 organisations, calling for civil disobedience against the privatisation of peasant seeds. The case of Benin was cited as one example of successful resistance to corporate attacks on seeds, along with Guatemala, Thailand and others.



Food sovereignty to fight the climate crisis

Targeting the fertiliser industry and false solutions, GRAIN worked with partners to produce compelling arguments for food sovereignty and peasant agroecology to tackle the climate crisis.

One article looked at the consumption side of the equation, focusing on livestock, the biggest source of emissions. We analysed false solutions: for example, carbon rice farming projects that seek to reduce corporate emissions, with few guarantees that small rice farmers will reap any benefits and regenerative agriculture, once seen as an alternative to industrial farming, now championed by agribusiness at the UN climate conference (COP28) in Dubai in December. GRAIN and others demanded Stop carbon offsetting now! to the governments gathered there. We also wrote a short piece focused on the context in Africa, where many climate projects are pushed.

Fertiliser use is increasingly pushed in Africa, where it is clear that the high prices really reflect obscene profit margins of the fertiliser companies. In early 2023, we published updated profit data on the fertiliser industry showing an even higher level of profiteering than in previous years. We also participated in a global strategy meeting on agrochemicals and fossil fuels in Berlin.

11



Field visit by ACJC members in Taboth, Ivory Coast by ACJC /Wale

Coming together around food, agriculture, energy and climate with shared analysis is key to confronting the climate crisis and corporate profiteering collectively. This past year, we participated in the Africa Climate Justice collective, attended Agroecology Days in Senegal, and helped organise agroecology trainings for young farmers in Cote d'Ivoire and co-facilitated an [agroecology school](#) for journalists in Uganda.

Young farmers' agroecology exchange in the Mekong Delta

In the Mekong Delta region, smallholder farmers' livelihoods have established a close tie to land and nature for centuries. Despite immense capitalisation, mega-projects, trade expansion and the climate crisis eroding food sovereignty, rural communities are still largely self-sufficient, and agriculture is still a major working sector for the young population of the Mekong region.

While rural youth out-migration is occurring, there is also a concurrent trend of young people in the Mekong region returning to rural areas and practising farming.

12 Very often, young farmers are leading innovative initiatives with agroecological practices, education and marketing models. They still have significant challenges, and can benefit from network development and mutual support systems to advance in agroecological analysis and practices.

This August, GRAIN along with two Thai-based organisations, Towards Organic Asia and Project SEVANA, held a Mekong region young farmers' agroecology exchange in Thailand. In total, there were over 30 participants, including five translators to facilitate communication among the participants from six Mekong delta countries covering Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, China, Thailand and Cambodia. Sharing common struggles, connections to land and farming and political

analysis over the three-day gathering, the participants began to weave a network of support and exchange. The group is keen on fostering regional networks for mutual learning, internships, local markets and exchange of experiences.



Communications and outreach

Communications and outreach are crucial for GRAIN's goals to provide allies with updated information, to deepen public understanding of key developments in the fight for food sovereignty and to build political change. In 2023, we published 42 articles on our website, which had nearly 300,000 unique visitors. We launched half the reports on our New from GRAIN mailing lists in English, French and Spanish. And we posted our publication releases as well as news, partner communications and more on our social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram) with a total of 50,000 followers. GRAIN publications were also shared in print across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America at events throughout the year.

Our materials got picked up and reported on by diverse outlets, organisations and influencers. Germany's former agriculture minister, Renate Kunast, reshared our article on regenerative agriculture, agreeing with our analysis. Research professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, Raj Patel, shared our piece on how corporations are making record profits in Latin America by further entrenching impoverished food systems. GRAIN materials were referenced by diverse media platforms such as El País, the BBC, Mongabay, The Times of London, The Guardian, Common Dreams, The Harvard Crimson and The Nation, among hundreds of other local media outlets. Besides this, GRAIN staff provided background information, contacts and interviews for investigative reports on [land grabs in Africa](#), [GM wheat in Brazil](#) and [chemical fertilisers](#), among others.

13

Partners and allies also shared our work with their networks via blogs, newsletters, mailing lists and social media, translated and adapted it to other languages and audiences and used it in their own reports. We were also cited in several academic articles and books.

The book [Scholar-Activism and Land Struggles](#) released in 2023 reflects on the impact of 'scholar-activists' like GRAIN who, in their words, "not only produced high-impact publications... but many of these publications have also set strategic research agendas. GRAIN's trailblazing work on global land grabs that started with a report in 2008... is a good example"



GRAIN materials were translated, adapted and shared across social media platforms by partners, allies and public officials. We also shared resources and analysis at meetings across the globe, like the Brazilian Congress of Agroecology, the LVC youth articulation in Indonesia, the 8th International Congress of LVC in Colombia, the Africa Climate Justice meeting in Cote d'Ivoire, farmers meetings in Cambodia, the counter-summit to the World Bank and IMF in Morocco and many other spaces throughout the year.

Cultivating GRAIN

GRAIN went through an important transition when our co-founder and coordinator of more than 30 years retired at the end of April and a new coordinator stepped up. We also integrated a new Latin America staff mid-year before one of our staff from the region retired at the end of 2023.

As a result of all this, most staff saw their roles change in 2023, taking on new responsibilities and adjusting to new configurations. Working extensively in teams, the new arrangement truly requires that each of us is well organised and communicates with the others.

Through our transition process, GRAIN met virtually with all funders to introduce new staff roles and visited several funders and organisations in person in Switzerland and Germany. We collectively discussed our programme work and political strategy in our annual staff and board meetings in Colombia in October. This included clarifying our role and confirming our commitment to collective efforts including the Latin America Alianza Biodiversidad and the informal alliance against industrial plantations in West and Central Africa.

15

GRAIN is privileged to have financial stability and good governance. We are truly thankful to all who support our work.



Co-founder and coordinator of GRAIN, Henk Hobbelink, retired in April 2023, handing over the role to Kartini Samon, long time programme staffer in Indonesia.



GRAIN's Board members at the Instituto Agroecológico Latinoamericano María Cano in Colombia.

GRAIN's team



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am in 2023



Annex: GRAIN publications in 2023

Corporations, power and the global food system

- China and Vietnam's questionable strategy to control Asia's pig pandemic
- Hunger profiteers in Latin America
- Will more sovereign wealth funds mean less food sovereignty?
- The AfDB strategy to agro-industrialise Africa
- The summit of public development banks in Cartagena cannot greenwash their financing of destructive agriculture
- AfCFTA: More free trade? For whose benefit?

Land grabbing and the struggle for land

- The corporate agenda behind carbon farming
- The avocados of wrath
- Persecution against rights defenders of the Afro-Ecuadorian commune of Barranquilla de San Javier
- Squeezing communities dry: water grabbing by the global food industry
- San Isidro vs Amway
- The Palestinian people have a right to their lives, land and sovereignty
- India's oil palm grand plan: at what cost?
- Agrarian reform and land tenure in Colombia

People's control over seeds

- IGM mustard in India: Thousands of years of cultural heritage under threat
- Why Benin should not join UPOV
- The corn conflict between Mexico and the USA: smoke and mirrors
- What future for seeds under the African Free Trade Area?
- Transgenic rice once again proposed as solution to bacterial blight outbreaks, this time in Africa
- A call for civil disobedience against the privatisation of peasant seeds
- Bolivia: yet another testing ground for GMOs?

Food sovereignty to fight the climate crisis

- The well is running dry on irrigated agriculture
- Insights into the evolution of China's agri-food system

- A corporate cartel fertilises food inflation
- Carbon rice farming: A license to pollute at the expense of small farmers
- Tackling the climate crisis by addressing food consumption
- Regenerative agriculture was a good idea, until corporations got hold of it
- Stop carbon offsetting now!
- Let's bury false solutions at COP28

Communications and organisational development

- Grateful respects to the “millet man” of India, PV Satheesh
- Rest well, Tewelde
- GRAIN's 2022 activity report
- New leadership in GRAIN
- Rest in peace, Dr. Melaku
- The 8th conference of La Via Campesina: A call for inclusion of women, youth, diversity, struggles against patriarchy, solidarity and the recognition of peasants' rights

Supermarket Watch Asia bulletin

- The need for regulations that protect street vendors from extortion, harassment and evictions
- Beyond the ‘informal economy’ of food distribution
- Social protection for market traders and street vendors in an era of pension fund capitalism
- Challenging e-commerce monopolisation in food distribution

19

Revista Biodiversidad, sustento y cultura

- La soberanía alimentaria no es un mito
- Fuego
- Hacinamiento, virulencia y crisis multidimensionales
- Territorio: lugares de encuentro y sentido

Revista Soberanía Alimentaria, biodiversidad y culturas

- 46. Cambio cultural
- 47. Sequía y nuevo modelo alimentario
- 48. Una mirada crítica a la transición ecológica

- English ● French ● Spanish ● Portuguese
- Hindi ● Chinese ○ Arabic

DEFEND LIFE

STOP UPOV



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