

# up front

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## food justice

**For over a billion people across the developing world, farming is a way of life, providing food, income and a sense of community rooted in generations of tradition.**

**Yet in recent years this way of life has come under attack. Unfair trade rules and the rise of corporate farming have displaced whole communities and pushed millions of people into poverty and hunger. As food prices continue to escalate and the global recession cuts deeper into the real economy, the plight of small farmers is set to grow worse.**

**War on Want believes that the current approach to global food production must be replaced. Alongside our partners across the world – from Brazil to South Africa, Sri Lanka to Mozambique – we are fighting for a new system built on sustainability, local ownership and workers' rights. August 2009**



## War on Want supports grassroots alternatives to corporate farming practices.

This year the number of people worldwide living in hunger reached a record one billion. Shockingly, many of those who actually produce the food have been hit hardest. Three quarters of the world's hungry reside in rural areas, of whom the overwhelming majority are farmers in poor countries.

### Unable to compete

While environmental catastrophes like drought play a role in the plight of the rural poor, the main causes of poverty and hunger in the developing world are man-made. The economic hardship facing many farmers in poor countries is a direct consequence of the free trade policy prescriptions championed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Even though they are unaccountable to the broader international community, these institutions wield enormous influence over the policy decisions of developing nations.

To drive forward their strategy of 'trade-based food security', the IMF and WTO have forced developing nations to open up their markets and reorient their economies towards an export-based system. Exposed to direct competition from giant agribusinesses, small farmers in the global South have struggled to stay afloat. Moreover, under the trade terms set by the WTO, agribusiness firms are increasingly able to sell their products to consumers in developing nations at a low price,

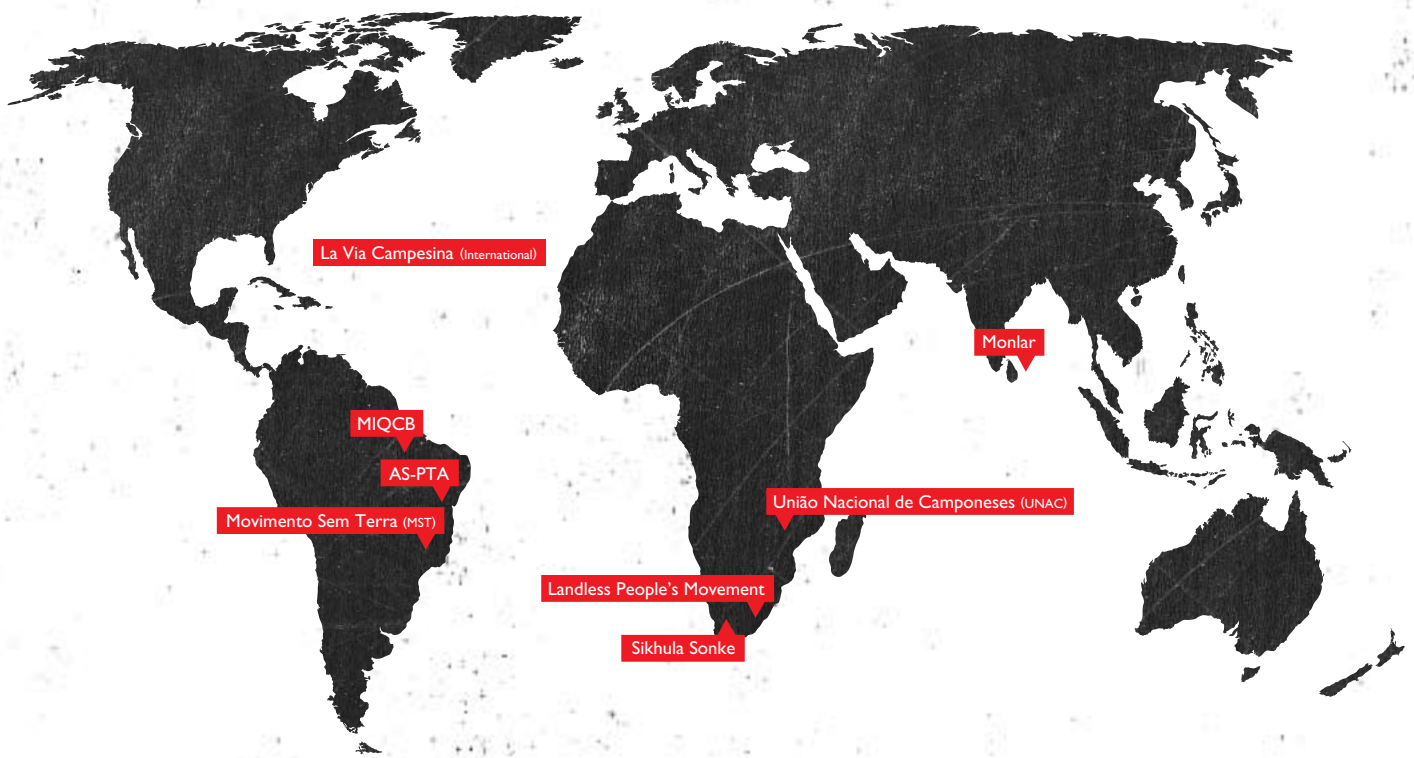
further undermining the role of small-scale farmers once dependent on income from domestic markets.

In addition to being thrust into competition with large agribusiness, poor farmers have been squeezed by corporate sales practices. For instance, when farmers in the global South purchase seeds produced by corporations, they are often forced to sign a contract obliging them to buy fertiliser from the same firm, often at an inflated price.

Many of the seeds and other crop products being sold by corporations are protected under intellectual property rules written by the WTO. Western firms own 98% of the patents covering vital inputs used for farming. Armed with patents for a vast array of seeds, livestock breeds and other essential organisms, many of which were initially developed by small growers themselves, agribusinesses can dictate the terms under which local communities in developing countries grow their food.

### Driven off the land

Farming communities must also contend with massive land grabs by agribusiness firms. After seizing the most productive land, these corporate farms cultivate large amounts of a single food crop or farm product as cheaply as possible to maximise output for sale on the open market. The result of such intensive farming has been soil depletion, land erosion and environmental degradation – as well as the displacement of millions of people.



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**War on Want has partners around the world fighting to win food justice for local communities**

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**A controlling stake**

A worldwide movement for a new system of food production has emerged to challenge the rise of the corporate farm. Based on the principle of local control over resources and the production process itself, the food sovereignty movement prioritises the needs of small-scale farmers over the profits of big business. This new paradigm recognises that the key to fighting global poverty lies in community empowerment and sustainable agricultural policies that guarantee local access to resources, the most precious of which is land.

The movement for food sovereignty is founded on the idea that everyone has a right to food. This right must be understood as ensuring community involvement in all aspects of the farming process, including agricultural policy-making at the highest levels.

It is also vital that the human right to food be paired with a commitment to localised food systems. By promoting self-sufficiency and community markets, small farmers will be able to protect themselves from the impossible pressures of a world market whose rules are stacked against them. By the same token, it is essential to promote biodiversity as an alternative to the destructive corporate practice of intensive single-crop farming. Taken together, these measures will serve to redefine food as a resource to be owned and shared locally, and not as a commodity to be traded and profited from on the global market.

**From the ground up**

In response to harmful corporate agricultural practices, War on Want's grassroots partners have been leading the fight for food justice. Rejecting expensive and harmful pesticides, the Sri Lankan movement Monlar teaches families to grow healthy foods in home-gardens using organic methods developed over generations. In Brazil the MST, the largest social movement in Latin America, fights to ensure poor farmers have access to land. And in Mozambique the farmers' movement UNAC mobilises local communities against evictions, land grabs and other rights violations committed by corporate farms.

Each of these groups is a member of the international peasant movement La Via Campesina, itself a War on Want partner. As the leading voice of the food sovereignty movement, La Via Campesina coordinates the efforts of farmers' groups across 56 countries on five continents. Thanks to the growth of this movement, millions of small farmers have become engaged politically and are now directly challenging the corporate model of agricultural development.

War on Want's partners share the common goal of revolutionising the way the world makes, distributes and sells food. In support of these groups, we campaign in the UK for a world in which farms are no longer run by multinational companies but instead serve and feed the very communities who live and work on the land.

**Our partners are on the front line of the food sovereignty movement, fighting corporate farms to take back control of their land and resources.**



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## Waging the war against GM crops

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The Brazilian rights' group AS-PTA works directly with local farmers to challenge the rise of GM crops

On their land in Paraná, a state in the south of Brazil, Ademir Ferronato and his wife Wilma have long practised sustainable farming. The couple earn a living by cultivating organic maize and soya, while also keeping an orchard and vegetable garden for personal use.

But two years ago disaster struck their farm. A sample of their organic soya was found to have been contaminated by genetically modified (GM) soya from a neighbouring farm. Due to the contamination, the Ferronatos' organic vendor refused to buy the couple's soya crop.

Crop contamination is now a grim fact of life for Brazilian farmers. Faced with intense lobbying from Western agribusiness firms, the Brazilian government has recently dropped its ban on GM crops. Since 2008 the Brazilian government has legalised GM maize and soybean.

For Brazilian farmers like Ademir Ferronato, the corporate-led GM revolution has been devastating. Because GM seeds require costly fertiliser, the resulting crops are more expensive to grow – despite generating poorer yields than traditional farming methods. Yet for all the

problems GM crops can cause, firms like Syngenta and Monsanto have cornered the lucrative GM seed market, seizing huge swathes of fertile land in the process.

The corporate takeover of Brazil's farming sector has been met with fierce grassroots resistance. One of the groups in Brazil leading the fight against GM seeds is AS-PTA, a War on Want partner organisation that has been campaigning on food sovereignty issues for over two decades. At a national level, the group campaigns to expose the harmful effects of GM-based products. AS-PTA also works directly with farming communities, advising small farmers on organic methods and assisting those growers who have seen their livelihoods suffer due to the rise of agribusiness.

After discovering that his soya had been contaminated, Ademir contacted AS-PTA's partner Terra de Direitos, which reported the case to the Brazilian government agency that regulates GM crops. Ademir now participates in a programme that monitors crop contamination in his home state of Paraná. War on Want is proud to support the efforts of AS-PTA and small farmers like Ademir fighting for food justice in Brazil.



© João Zinca/MST

Members of the MST, which is part of La Via Campesina's global network, hold a rally against corporate land seizures in Brazil

War on Want relies on the generosity of its supporters to continue its work empowering poor people around the world. Every pound counts in our fight against injustice and inequality and we are grateful for your support. Please fill in the whole form clearly and send to:

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A Sri Lankan women's collective sells organic food as part of a community project run by Monlar, a War on Want partner organisation

**Gift Aid declaration**

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NB: To qualify for Gift Aid, what you pay in income tax or capital gains tax must be at least equal to the amount we will claim in the next tax year (currently 25p for each £1 you give with a further 3p contribution from HMRC until 2011).

[www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org)

# NEWS

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Ahead of the recent European elections, hundreds of War on Want supporters asked their MEP candidates to sign a pledge committing them to fair trade policies. Because of your emails, letters and postcards, more than a quarter of the MEPs elected from the UK have now pledged to oppose unjust trade rules, which have driven millions around the world into poverty. War on Want thanks its members and supporters for taking part in this crucial campaign and proving that your voice matters.

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War on Want recently released a new research briefing on labour rights violations occurring in Bangladeshi garment factories. *Ignoring the Law* reveals how labour laws in Bangladesh are not being enforced, leaving thousands of workers vulnerable to appalling conditions, poverty wages and verbal and physical harassment. The briefing highlights the role of the National Garment Workers' Federation, a Bangladeshi trade union and War on Want partner organisation, in leading the struggle for workers' rights. You can download the report at [www.waronwant.org/ignoringthelaw](http://www.waronwant.org/ignoringthelaw)

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The Honduran women's collective Codemuh, a War on Want partner organisation, has condemned the recent military coup in which President Manuel Zelaya was forced out of office by the country's armed forces. A leading labour rights group, Codemuh has also spoken out against the recent crackdown on protestors who have been critical of the military's actions. War on Want supports Codemuh's call for the peaceful restoration of civilian rule and an end to the violent repression of dissent inside Honduras.

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Around one hundred people attended the War on Want launch for *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide*, a new book by Ben White that traces the history of Israel's Occupation of Palestine to the present day. Following presentations by War on Want staff on the human rights situation in Palestine, there was an open forum where participants shared ideas for UK-based activism to win justice for the Palestinian people.

The book launch also commemorated the fifth anniversary of the International Court of Justice's landmark ruling that declared Israel's Separation Wall to be illegal. In solidarity with the Stop the Wall Campaign – our partner on the ground in the West Bank, where the Wall is being built – War on Want has called for increased international pressure on Israel to respect the human rights of Palestinians. A new report by Stop the Wall detailing the violent tactics used by Israel to suppress Palestinian demonstrations against the Wall can be downloaded at [www.stopthewall.org](http://www.stopthewall.org)

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With a series of G20 meetings set to take place over the next few months, War on Want will be stepping up its campaign on the financial crisis. An action will take place in London on 4 September ahead of the G20 finance ministers meeting, and counter summits will be held in London and St Andrews when the G20 reconvenes on 7 November in Scotland. Be sure to visit our website regularly for details on these upcoming events and other actions which will target the institutions and policies that have led to the global meltdown.

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Dawood Hamoudeh of the Stop the Wall Campaign with War on Want's John Hilary at the Separation Wall in Jerusalem

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