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Why are the FAO and the EBRD promoting the destruction of peasant and family farming?

We are shocked and offended by an article co-signed by Jose Graziano da Silva, Director General of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and Suma Chakrabarti, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), that was published in the Wall Street Journal on September 6, 2012.¹ In the article, they call on governments and social organisations to embrace the private sector as the main engine for global food production.

While referring specifically to Eastern Europe and North Africa, the heads of these two influential international agencies make a clear call for a world wide increase in private sector investment and land grabbing. They say that the private sector is efficient and dynamic and call on companies to "double investment in the land itself". Meanwhile, they dismiss peasants and those few remaining policies that protect them as burdens "holding back" agricultural development that should be eliminated. To do so, they urge governments to facilitate the growth of big agribusiness. Their article was published in the context of a joint FAO and EBRD conference in Istanbul on September 13th, which they describe as the [largest and most important gathering](#) of companies and decision-makers in agribusiness.

Graziano da Silva and Chakrabarti make a number of biased claims in the article that obscure the reality when it comes to agriculture and food. They point to Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan as successful examples of agribusiness that have transformed these countries from "the agricultural wastelands of the 1990s" into "leading grain exporters." But at no time do they mention that the official statistics from all three countries show that small farmers and peasants are more productive than big agribusiness.

Peasants and small farmers, especially women, account for over half of Russia's agricultural production but occupy only a quarter of the agricultural lands. In the Ukraine, they produce 55% of the agricultural output on only 16% of the land, while in Kazakhstan, where they occupy half of the land, they account for 73% of agricultural production. The fact is that these countries are fed by their peasants and small farmers. And this is true the world over. Wherever official data are available, as in the EU, Colombia and Brazil, or in the studies undertaken in Asia, Africa and Latin America, peasant farming is shown to be more efficient than large-scale agribusiness.

Contrary to what is claimed by the Director General of the FAO, those who really have the capacity to feed the world are the world's men and women farmers and peasants. The expansion of agribusiness has only exacerbated poverty, destroyed the potential for dignified rural livelihoods, increased pollution and environmental destruction, and brought back the scourge of slave labor and a series of recent food and climate crises.

For social movements and the peasants and small farmers of the world, it is unacceptable and even incomprehensible for a Director General of the FAO to be promoting the destruction of peasant farming and an increase in land grabbing. It is particularly troubling for this to occur after three years of careful, hard work by La Via Campesina and other organisations in constructing the FAO's voluntary guidelines to protect communities against land grabs and after Graziano da Silva had repeatedly assured farmers' organisations during his campaign for Director General of the FAO that he would promote and validate the importance of peasant agriculture and the critical role small farmers must play in food production.

¹ <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443686004577633080190871456.html>.

The language used by Graziano da Silva and Chakrabarti is offensive. Phrases like "fertilize this land with money" or "make life easier for the world's hungry" call into question the FAO's ability to do its job with the necessary rigor and independence from large agribusiness companies and fulfill the UN mandate to eradicate hunger and improve the living conditions of rural people.

We wonder what the FAO means by the "International Year of Family Farming" when its Director General says that the obstacles to improving agricultural production are "relatively high levels of protection, lack of proper irrigation, [and] small and uneconomically sized farms." This vision and the FAO's subservience to the demands and interests of greedy investors undermines all the work at conciliation that has taken place in recent years between farmers' organisations and the FAO. And it raises questions about why the FAO has not developed a proposal for concrete and effective action to promote peasant agriculture and family farming as a fundamental response to a global food crisis that is once again enriching transnational banks and corporations.² Where, we wonder, will peasant families go if these plans to transform their lands into industrial megafarms are successful?

Beyond the issue of the FAO abandoning its mission, it is also of deep concern that the EBRD is playing such an active role in profitting from and promoting investments in land grabbing and the take over of agriculture by big agribusiness. The EBRD's stance is all the more dangerous now that its area of operation is expanding in North Africa.

What is needed for agriculture and the planet is just the opposite of what Chakrabarti and Graziano da Silva propose. Humanity and those suffering from hunger need the *agro-cultures* of rural areas, which represent half the world's population and make peasant farming possible, to be protected and promoted-- because peasant farming is more efficient and productive, because it produces at least half of the global food supply and most of the employment in rural areas, and because it can cool the planet.

The livelihoods of peasants and indigenous peoples and their food production systems cannot be destroyed to create a new source of mega profits for a tiny group of elites. We need comprehensive and effective agrarian reforms that put lands and territories back into the hands of rural peoples. The commodification and grabbing of lands must be stopped and reversed. We do not need agribusiness; we need more communities and more peasant and indigenous families farming with dignity and respect.

Farmers feed the world Agribusiness grabs it

LVC – La Via Campesina

Grain

ETC – group

MMM - World March of Women

CLOC - Latin American Coordination of Countryside Organizations

FoEI- Friends of the Earth International

Latin American Articulation of Movements Toward ALBA

RE: Cammon

² See, for example, James Cusick, "We'll make a killing out of food crisis, Glencore trading boss Chris Mahoney boasts", The Independent, Londres, 23 August 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/well-make-a-killing-out-of-food-crisis-glencore-trading-boss-chris-mahoney-boasts-8073806.html>; Tom Bawden, "Barclays makes £500m betting on food crisis", The Independent, Londres, 1 September 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/barclays-makes-500m-betting-on-food-crisis-8100011.html>; and Peter Greste, "Rising food prices hit Nairobi slums", Al Jazeera, Doha, 6 September 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/africa/2012/09/201296195748591887.html>.