

Participatory Evaluation of La Via Campesina

PUBLIC VERSION
[APPENDICES AVAILABLE ONLY UPON REQUEST]

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1 About this Report: A Participatory Evaluation

This is an atypical evaluation. The goal of this report on La Via Campesina is to weave together a “participatory” process of evaluation of this transnational social movement. There is a shared understanding (among the Norwegian Development Fund, La Via Campesina, and the ‘evaluator’) that donors must evaluate the results of their grants to their grantees. Yet as we shall see below, a social movement is very different from a typical grantee, which is most commonly a project-implementing non-governmental organization (NGO). Projects usually have easily quantifiable, concrete goals. Because a social movement, in contrast to an NGO, is mass based, and has political rather than strictly technical goals, it is more difficult to evaluate in the typical style of evaluation, as the goals are less quantifiable, being more qualitative in nature.

Furthermore, because of the comparatively democratic nature and *raison d’etre* of a social movement, the most valid and important evaluation is by its own members. Quantifiable indicators are not very useful (even if they are measurable), because the question is, “how well does the movement, or its coordinating body, meet the needs and political goals of its participants.” Only the participants themselves can answer that.

An ally of La Via Campesina, interviewed for this report, put it this way, in fairly harsh words:

I think it is impossible to evaluate a social movement, except by its own members. I think it is an erroneous notion on the part of any donor to try to fit the activities of the Via Campesina into a preconceived box, as though they were the activities of an NGO that must present “results.” The Via Campesina is a social movement, and such can only be “evaluated” by its members, and not by the possible criteria that might be established by any donor.

In this sense the solidarity, flexibility and broad-mindedness of the Norwegian Development Fund has been exemplary, in allowing La Via Campesina to propose the purpose, terms of reference, and methodology of the evaluation, in such a way that the exercise best serves the needs of La Via Campesina itself.

1.1 What the Norwegian Development Fund has Supported¹

The program funded by the Development Fund with Via Campesina has as its main objective “to strengthen and to consolidate the work of Via Campesina, through improving their institutional, organizational, political and mobilization capacity for their continued incidence at the national and international levels, with particular emphasis on the African region.”

¹ Development Fund, 2004.

“The intermediate objectives are:

- Regarding institutional development: to strengthen the articulation and unit of action of Via Campesina at any level, in order to obtain greater identification and representation, greater incidence, and alternative proposal formulation capabilities.
- Regarding food sovereignty and trade: strengthen La Via Campesina’s own focus on food sovereignty; understood as the right that peasants have to produce and consume their own food.
- Regarding Agrarian Reform: all rural peoples should have to right to access productive resources (land, forest, water, etc.).”

1.2 The Questions Addressed in this Report²

Based on this, and on their own needs, La Via Campesina decided, in consultation with the Development Fund, that the focus of this evaluation process would be on elucidating the strengths or achievements of La Via Campesina in terms of meeting the needs of its members, and the weaknesses or challenges (as identified by the same members) to be addressed. This will support La Via Campesina in its planning, and serve as an internal discussion document.

Note that the evaluation is of La Via Campesina, and *not* of its member organizations. In this sense, the process was not concerned with the effectiveness of national and regional organizations, but rather with how effectively La Via Campesina addresses the needs of those organizations. The question is not, “does a peasant women on her farm in the mountains of Honduras know she is member of the Via Campesina?,” nor is it, “does she know the details of Via Campesina’s campaigns and positions?,” but rather, “is her organization more effective because it is a member of Via Campesina?,” and, “how could this relationship be improved?.”

Thus, the overall “questions” addressed in the evaluation are:

1. In which ways do the actions and campaigns of La Via Campesina strengthen the work of the member organizations?
2. How well is Via Campesina able to effectively promote and defend peasant interests at the international level?
3. How do the grassroots member organizations and their networks give legitimacy and accountability to Via Campesina’s work and struggles at the national and global levels?

² Development Fund, 2005; Via Campesina. 2004. Criterios para un análisis externo como contribución al proceso evaluativo de Via Campesina.

4. What do member organizations need from Via Campesina in the future?

Because of the specific nature of the Development Fund funding, it was decided additionally to do “case studies” of two of Via Campesina’s campaigns, the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, and the more informal campaign for Food Sovereignty and its related call for “WTO Out of Food and Agriculture.” Two region/country case studies were also included, one on the Africa region, and the other on Honduras (the former location of the International Operative Secretariat, or IOS, of Via Campesina). The purpose of the Africa case study is to address the progress and potential future strategies for La Via Campesina in the Africa region, an area of very recent growth for it. The purpose of the Honduras case study is to see how the IOS related to local organizations. Finally, during the course of the evaluation process, the evaluator became concerned about participation by member organizations that do not speak the four dominant languages of La Via Campesina (Spanish, English, French and Portuguese), and added a special additional case study of South Korea and Thailand to address that issue.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology of this evaluation, agreed upon with Via Campesina and the Development Fund, has been based on accompaniment of Via Campesina at its meetings over a relatively long period of time, and an attempt to let the participants speak in their own words. This report is full of direct comments by representatives of the organizations that are the members of La Via Campesina. In agreement with the Via Campesina, it also includes the words of its allies, of officials of international agencies that are ‘targeted’ in the political work of the Via Campesina, and of some academics and researchers who follow the Via Campesina closely.

The main tasks of the “evaluator” have been to stimulate people to speak, to record their words, to organize their answers, and then to summarize and synthesize from them the overall conclusions and recommendations. In order to interview members of La Via Campesina, the evaluator traveled to and attended the meeting of the International Coordinating Commission (ICC) in Mozambique, visited South Africa, Honduras (former headquarters of the IOS) and Thailand, and attended the meeting of the Food Sovereignty Commission of La Via Campesina in the Basque Country.³ About 40 in-person interviews were carried out with members of La Via Campesina from all regions. In addition, the input of a sample of 24 allies of La Via Campesina (mostly from NGOs), and of 5 academics and researchers who follow La Via Campesina, was obtained via questionnaires emailed to each of them. Finally, officials of FAO, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were interviewed by telephone concerning the possible impact of La Via Campesina on the agencies.

A list of the people who were interviewed is provided at the end of this report. However, the individual identities of the persons making specific comments not been provided in the text itself, in order to preserve confidentiality. Via Campesina members, however,

³ The trip to Thailand was funded separately, yet contributed to this report.

have been identified by the region from which they come, in case regional differences might emerge.

The vast majority of the comments made by Via Campesina members have been preserved in this report, while only representative comments from allies have been used, to illustrate common perceptions.

The evaluator also reviewed a number of documents by and about La Via Campesina, which are listed at the end of this report.

2 What is La Via Campesina?

2.1 A Transnational Social Movement

La Via Campesina is an international alliance or ‘coordination’ of peasant and family farmer organizations. It has members in the Americas (North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean), Asia (Southeast and South), Europe, and Africa. It currently has 116 member organizations in 54 countries, with a substantial number of additional organizations in the “getting to know you” stage of the process prior to becoming formal members. The members come from the ranks of organizations of peasant farmers, family farmers, rural workers, the landless, indigenous people, artisanal fisherfolk, and rural women and youth.

A key point for understanding the nature of La Via Campesina is that it is a transnational ‘social movement,’ in distinction to an NGO, another common type of actor on rural development issues. What does that mean? Because funders are far more accustomed to dealing with project implementation NGOs, than with social movements fighting to radically change policies, it is crucial that we begin this report by delving into the key differences between the two.

Academics say that social movements are one of the key ways by which social change occurs.⁴ Social movements are a type of collective action aimed either at achieving reforms or radical change. Unlike other kinds of social activities, their moments of emergence and ending, and their constituent parts, often cannot be precisely identified or comprehensively enumerated. Movements may begin with small, cultural acts of rebellion which gain meaning and force over time, and they may cohere from diverse social groups and activities which eventually take on a shared ‘frame’ and organizational structure (such as La Via Campesina). Movement participants may never recognize themselves as such, or may only recognize that they were ‘part of’ a movement well after the fact. In other words, individual peasant farmers, involved in their day to day struggles, and perhaps also in local and even national struggles as part of their organizations, may not recognize that they are part of a transnational social movement – yet this does not mean that they are not a part of it.

⁴ I thank Dr. Amory Starr for sharing her ideas about social movements with me.

Social movements may include a range of types of organizations (and non-organizations) and activities, ranging from formal institutions to spontaneous actions. According to Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward,⁵ the classic theorists of this topic, social movements are not limited to the activities of formal organizations, yet formal organizations “tend to emerge on the crest of the movement.” In that sense, we can say that La Via Campesina emerged as the wave of peasant dissatisfaction and movements ‘crested’ into the international sphere. Piven and Cloward argue that the “key and distinguishing feature” of a social movement is “collective defiance.” This is important because more formal organizations generally do not engage in it. We see this in the more defiant positions that La Via Campesina takes toward the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank, for example, when compared to the typically more ambiguous positions of NGOs, political parties, and trade unions.

Piven and Cloward find that social movements usually emerge following a three-part process. First comes the loss of legitimacy of the system: “Large numbers of men and women who ordinarily accept the authority of their rules and the legitimacy of institutional arrangements come to believe in some measure that those rulers and these arrangements are unjust and wrong.” This clearly began to happen over the past 20-30 years in rural areas of the world as neoliberal economic policies began cutting back and in many cases eliminating the institutions that supported peasant and family agriculture, eroding the legitimacy, in the eyes of peasants and family farmers, of government policies, political parties, and international financial institutions. Then, say Piven and Cloward, people shift from ordinary fatalism to the assertion of “rights” and other demands for change. In the case of rural peoples, examples might include the assertion of the right to land, the right of rural peoples to produce (part of the Via Campesina concept of food sovereignty), and the right to continue to exist as such. Finally, they say, “people who ordinarily consider themselves helpless come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot.” As a new movement grows, then, the empowerment of its members becomes a clear factor in its continued growth, as we shall see in this report.

While in some cases political parties may be part of social movements, social movements are much broader and are more defiant. Political parties are often not defiant (or they try to channel or “structure” mass defiance). Despite their efforts, parties typically cannot restrain movements. NGOs may in some cases be part of social movements, through educational or networking activities (i.e. there are NGOs who are part of the international anti-globalization movement), but they are rarely defiant, and also often try to channel social movement defiance into to more moderate, reform-oriented pathways. NGOs can also be (and often are) highly disconnected from popular perceptions of system legitimacy, fatalism, and efficacy. Piven and Cloward also note that the funding and tolerance of NGOs (as opposed to social movements) is often a part of the ‘management’ of social movements by the elites in power (what they call “the structuring of protest”). NGOs provide formal (less disruptive) channels for the expression of dissent, they hire off the activists (a type of ‘brain drain’), and busy them with establishing the

⁵ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. 1978: Vintage Books, New York.

“legitimacy” of dissent, while diverting their energy into institutional maintenance. Throughout this report we will see examples of the differences, antagonisms and complementarities between the Via Campesina and NGOs.

Outside of the academic world, however, ‘social movement’ is still a bit of a nebulous term, yet it is commonly understood to mean that the entity in question is grassroots-based, sometimes but not always membership-based, and involves a large number of people fighting together on an issue or set of related issues. From a funding perspective, their goals are relatively hard to measure, political goals (ie. achieving radical changes in government policies). The accountability of leaders in a social movement is downward to the membership or base, and decisions are typically taken by consensus or at least democratically. Social movements have few staff (if any) relative to their membership base, which typically is huge. Social movements most often have relatively little external funding compared to their size and impact. Perhaps their most important feature is that social movements have mobilization capacity: that is, they can put people in the streets for a protest, a march, or fill large halls for a convention or congress.

In contrast, NGOs are small, finite organizations, generally composed only of staff (and a Board of Trustees, and in some rare cases a non-active “membership”). They are upwardly accountable to their Board and external funders, but not downward to a membership or even to the constituency whose interests they ‘serve.’ Typically they are heavily funded from external sources, relative to their staff size and impact. NGOs are usually project-based, and their goals are typically easily-measurable technical goals (ie. delivering potable water to x number of villagers), rather than political goals. NGOs typically do not have mobilization capacity—to achieve that, they must ally themselves with social movements.

In the present case, La Via Campesina is a higher-level, transnational social movement,⁶ in that it groups nationally- or regionally-based organizations to struggle together on common issues at the international level, and the autonomy of these member organizations is carefully respected. La Via Campesina can be thought of as ‘the international peasant movement,’ analogous to the ‘the international environmental movement,’ or ‘the international women’s movement,’ though Via Campesina has a tighter, more formal coordination than either of those two examples. It is also an autonomous (independent from political parties, governments, religious institutions or NGOs) and pluralistic movement.

We can identify at least two components within the international peasant movement in La Via Campesina. The International Coordinating Committee (ICC), and the regional structure of representatives, are the democratically-elected coordination of the transnational social movement (see section below on the structure of the Via Campesina). The International Operative Secretariat (IOS) and associated technical support staff is probably closest to what theorists call a “social movement organization” (SMO), with democratically elected leadership. SMOs enhance movement effectiveness by: providing

⁶ For discussion of *transnational* social movements, see the works of Annette Desmarais and Saturnino Borras in the *Documents Consulted* section of this report.

a formal voice, “representing” the movement, helping to frame issues and discussions, coordinating efforts, networking and developing alliances, building skills, doing (or providing material for) outreach, gathering resources and distributing them, “leading”, marginalizing unwanted elements, doing political education within the movement, negotiating with elites, and a myriad of other potential tasks, many of which the IOS does indeed carry out.

An excellent description of what La Via Campesina is was provided in the response to a questionnaire for this report by Ana de Ita, a researcher and director of the Center for the Study of the Mexican Countryside (CECCAM), an NGO allied with Via Campesina:

1. The Via Campesina is currently the most important international social movement in the world. No other sector—not unions, professionals, women, environmentalists, or any other—has been able to build such a structured, representative, and legitimate movement, with a real identity, that cross-links social struggles on five continents, and in a large number of countries, who even though they confront different realities, share the same global problems. The Via Campesina is a social movement made up of organizations—not individuals, nor NGOs. Each peasant organization that is a member has its own social base or constituency, which participates in its internal decisions and actions, and to whom the organization is accountable. Thus this construction of a global movement, an umbrella for a great diversity of peasant organizations, is a very complex task, yet this gives it great legitimacy, legitimacy which has been ratified again and again through its effective inter-locution with states and society. The Via Campesina brings together the most combative peasant organizations from each country, and thus has radical proposals.
2. The Via Campesina is a social movement that has been built from the bottom up, and is independent of governments, funders, political parties, NGOs and non-peasant special interests. The agenda of Via Campesina is defined by Via Campesina, and not by any other type of actor.
3. The Via Campesina has built up and shown its strength in mobilizations and non-violent but radical direct actions, opposing the real powers in the world as an alternative, democratic, and mass-based peasant power base.
4. The proposals put forth by Via Campesina have summoned forth a broad spectrum of peasant organizations, and mobilized the solidarity of other sectors and actors. The proposals are clear and simple, yet show theoretical depth. They are the product of the observation and analysis of agricultural and trade policies, of the actions of multilateral agencies, of the governments of different countries, and of the corporations that control global markets for farm products. The proposals are rigorous and theoretically consistent, and have been built upon a broad and deep knowledge of diverse peasant realities around the world.
5. The Via Campesina is a movement that clearly defines its position as opposition or rejection, while also putting forth consistent and polished alternative proposals. Both the “NO” and the proposals result from peasant reality, and are shared by organizations from the great variety of situations in which peasants from different countries find themselves. These global proposals have created a peasant internationalism rather than a discourse of North-South confrontation.
6. Today the Via Campesina is an international reference point for rural issues and problems, for social movements, for the construction of proposals, mediated by the legitimacy and trust forged through its years of struggle.

7. The Via Campesina has been able to create an international peasant discourse and identity in tune with the times, without trying to build a political party structure.

8. The Via Campesina has clearly staked out its differences from NGOs, and doesn't allow the membership of organizations that are not true, grassroots-based peasant organizations. It has also staked out its differences from foundations and aid agencies, refusing to accept resources that come with compromising conditions attached, nor permitting any kind of external intromission in its internal decisions, thus guaranteeing the independence and autonomy which is so critical to maintain.

9. The Via Campesina has also staked out its independent criteria and points of view with regard to organizations that might be close to it, such as the FAO, so that it is able to vary its distance from such institutions depending on the situation, yet always maintain its independence.

2.2 Brief History of La Via Campesina

The Vía Campesina was formed in 1993, partly as a direct result of the fact that the interests of peasants and small to medium-sized farmers were not represented in the GATT negotiations on agriculture. Peasant and farm organizations from around the world felt the need to work collectively to defend their rights in the context of trade liberalization, as producers of the world's food.

The historical roots of La Via Campesina date back to 1992, when peasant and family farmer organizations from Central America, the Caribbean, North America and Europe met in Managua, Nicaragua, during the Second Congress of the Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG). They analyzed and discussed the impact of so-called "neoliberal" policies on agriculture and rural communities. Farm leaders agreed that the brutal consequences of this model based on free trade, low prices and industrial agriculture—greater impoverishment and marginalization in the countryside—were totally unacceptable. An alternative model was desperately needed, and peasants themselves, they felt, must be at the heart of developing the rural and food policies which invariably impact rural communities.

As a follow-up to the Managua initiative, more than 70 peasant and farm leaders from around the world met in Mons, Belgium, in May of 1993. It was at this conference, the First International Conference of the Vía Campesina, that the global movement was formally created. Participants agreed on a mission statement and organizational structure and they defined a very general policy framework to protect the rights and interests of farming families.

The dynamism and political significance of the Vía Campesina were demonstrated at the Second and Third Conferences, held respectively in Tlaxcala, Mexico (April 1996), and Bangalore, India (September/October 2000). Representatives of farm organizations gathered together to articulate policy positions on the key issues: food sovereignty and trade, agrarian reform, human rights, bio-diversity and genetic resources, , gender parity and sustainable peasant based agriculture. These policy positions are important lobbying

and action tools that have since been used in the Via Campesina's struggle for change at the community, national, regional and international levels. At the Fourth Conference (which this evaluator attended) held near Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004, additional emphasis was placed on working on the internal mechanisms of the movement, and on strengthening its member organizations.

La Via Campesina offers a broad range of rural social actors and progressive organizations the opportunity for engagement in analysis, policy development, advocacy and in some cases direct action on key areas related to food sovereignty and food security. The Via Campesina coalesced in the North and South around common objectives: an explicit rejection of the neoliberal model of rural development, an outright refusal to be excluded from agricultural policy development, and a firm determination to work together to empower a peasant voice and to establish an alternative model of agriculture.

Over the years La Via Campesina has developed global positions and carried out various activities on issues ranging from agrarian reform, bio-diversity and genetic resources and sustainable farming practices to the need to integrate a gender perspective and build strategic alliances. To date La Via Campesina has organized a large number of regional meetings and women's workshops in different parts of the world, an international Women's Assembly, four international congresses, numerous exchanges among peasant and farm organizations in the North and South, and together with the human rights organization FIAN, it has launched a Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform. Via Campesina delegations represented a significant presence and force at a number of international forums such as the World Food Summits in Rome (1996 and 2002), events surrounding the WTO Ministerial Meetings in Geneva (1998), Seattle (1999), Doha (2001) and Cancun (2003), the Agriculture Forum in Quebec (2001), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations in Quito (2002), and the World Social Forum (WSF) (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005). The Via Campesina has also held discussions with representatives of various international institutions such as the IFAD, FAO, UNDP and GFAR to discuss rural development issues.⁷

According to Paul Nicholson of the Basque Farmers' Union (EHNE), one of the founders of the Via Campesina, one can identify the key directions that emerged at or after each International Conference, as follows:

- Mons, Belgium. La Via Campesina defines itself as a *peasant movement* and as a *political space* for peasant organizations, chooses its name, and makes the critical decision to be *autonomous of the NGOs* that in the past had so often "managed" peasant organizations.
- Tlaxcala, Mexico. La Via Campesina ratifies itself as a *movement*, not just a mere "coordination," consolidates its *regional structure*, identifies the *gender* issue as critical to its internal functioning, and develops the seminal concept of *food sovereignty*.

⁷ Based on edited material from Desmarais, 2003, Backgrounder.

- Bangalore, India. La Via Campesina launches a strategy of building *alliances* with other actors, to pressure international institutions like the World Bank, the WTO, IMF and the United Nations, especially FAO. Following up on the gender issue, a rule is adopted requiring *gender parity* of representation at all levels of La Via Campesina.
- Sao Paulo, Brazil. Many *new members* are added, especially in *Asia*, but also notably in *Africa*. The already existing *ICC* is further consolidated, the decision is made *to rotate the IOS* from Honduras to Indonesia, a qualitative step forward is taken with the role of the *mística* (shared ceremonies or performances that build cross-cultural peasant solidarity) as a sort of social glue inside the Via Campesina, and the decision is taken to emphasize internal political and leadership *training to strengthen the member organizations*.

A different, but compatible periodization could be also constructed, as:

- Phase One (1990s): *Taking their place at the table*. Through the vehicle of the Via Campesina, peasants “muscle” their way to the table wherever key debates or negotiations take place that affect the future of rural communities, whether at international summits, trade negotiations, civil society gatherings, etc. They take their seat at the table in their own name, pushing aside NGOs and other who had previously “spoken on behalf” of rural peoples, with the clear message that: “We are here and we can speak for ourselves.” In this period few alliances are made, as the Via Campesina is young and thus weak, while NGOs are old and thus strong, and the most critical step is to assert one’s existence and most basic right to a voice of one’s own.
- Phase Two (2000-2004): *Taking on a Leadership Role*. As the strength of the Via Campesina grows in leaps and bounds, actors ranging from the NGOs to the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the UN, and governments, come to recognize their leadership on rural issues. Now the Via Campesina is stronger than most other civil society actors like the NGOs, and begins to build alliances from a position of leadership and strength. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the lead role played by the Via Campesina in the civil society forums, lobbying and protest that helped lead to the collapse of the WTO Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico, in 2003.
- Phase Three (Contemporary): *Catching-Up*. The Via Campesina realizes that the external political space it has “occupied” at the international level is disproportionately large compared to its own degree of internal political and organizational development, that in some sense it has been more successful than expected, and has “gotten ahead of itself.” Thus the decision is made to focus on “catching up” internally, deciding to give an extra effort on internal training for member organizations, on strengthening operational mechanisms, and on building regional secretariats to insure sustained regional and local engagement.

2.3 *Structure of La Via Campesina*

La Via Campesina is autonomous, pluralist and independent of any political, economic, or other type of affiliation. It is organized in eight regions: Western and Eastern Europe, Northeast and Southeast Asia, South Asia, North America, South America, Central America, the Caribbean and Africa. Only recently has the Via Campesina begun to add more organizations in Africa; for several years, there was only one. The structure of the Via Campesina is defined in a participatory and democratic way during the Via Campesina International Conferences. The International Conference is Via Campesina's highest decision-making entity, where representative of the member organizations engage in collective analysis and policy development. The International Conference takes place every three or four years, and defines the political direction and strategies of the Via Campesina, as well as the internal functioning of the movement

The International Coordinating Commission (ICC) is made up the International Operative Secretariat (IOS) and two regional coordinators (one man and one woman) from each of the eight regions. The ICC meets two times a year. It is in such meetings that compliance with the International Conference agreements is evaluated, and analysis is made of the situation in the individual regions. In addition, the ICC engages in a collective analysis of what is occurring in agriculture at the global level, and defines plans for joint action and advocacy at the international level. The IOS, which is currently based in Jakarta, Indonesia, is in charge of coordinating actions and implementing the agreements reached at the Conference and at the ICC meetings.

The main goal of La Via Campesina is to build an alternative model of agriculture and rural life. To reach this goal, member organizations from around the world work together to develop and implement farmer-based policies for food sovereignty, multiplication and use of local seed varieties, agrarian reform, etc. For the Via Campesina, working together means:

- Building solidarity and unity among peasant organizations
- Strengthening the participation of women at all levels of peasant organizations
- Organizing exchanges of information and experiences of organizing in the countryside
- Developing linkages among peasant organizations
- Engaging in collective action⁸

The core issues that Via Campesina is now working on are:

- Agrarian Reform
- Food Sovereignty and Trade
- Biodiversity and genetic resources
- Human Rights
- Sustainable Peasant-based Agriculture

⁸ Based on edited material from Desmarais, 2003, Backgrounder.

- Migration and Waged workers
- Women and gender parity
- Youth
- Training
- Communication

A working committee or commission, with representatives from each region coordinates the work of the Via Campesina on each of these issues except for training and communication (this is being set up). In addition, the Via Campesina has two formal campaigns that address some of them: : 1) the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, coordinated out of the former IOS office in Honduras, and carried out in collaboration with the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) and the Land Research Action Network (LRAN), and 2) Seeds: Heritage of Rural Peoples in the Service of Humanity, coordinated by the Via Campesina member organization ANAMURI, in Chile. According to Nico Verhagen, technical support staff member of the IOS, “the difference between a Commission (i.e. genetic resources) and a campaign (i.e. agrarian reform) is that the former is an institutional space to develop our analysis, and the latter is a political instrument to carry out actions around an issue.”

In addition, three other campaigns are currently being created: the Campaign for the Charter of Peasant Rights, the Campaign to change the CAP and the Farm Bill, and a Campaign against Violence against Women.

2.4 Process and Political Style and Tactics

The decision-making process of the Via Campesina is by consultation and consensus, which is very respectful of the autonomy of member organizations. Positions are created by articulating the concerns of the base within each national organization, bringing them to table in the VC, and having a dialog to reach common positions. This a slow process, especially as peasant organizations, in contrast to NGOs, do not respond quickly, yet time has shown that this method builds the strong basis of trust that is so important for collective action.

The political style is that of a poor peoples’ movement: people who have been pushed to the edge of extinction by dominant power in their countries and in the world, of people who have usually not been taken into account, who have been “fooled too many times” by smooth-talking politicians and NGOs, people who were never invited to sit at the table and had to “elbow their way” into the seat they now occupy. Like most social movements, they have a deep distrust, based on bitter experience, of methods that channel and “calm” dissent: that is, of “conflict resolution,” “stakeholder dialog,” World Bank “consultations” and “participation,” etc. The typical story in the typical country is that when rural people reach a certain level of anger, protest and mass mobilization, the authorities offer to negotiate, to form joint study commissions, and in general to engage in other forms of conflict resolution. The usual result is that the moment of mobilization passes, the momentum is lost, and the demands are never met nor the promises kept. In

fact, Piven and Cloward find, in general, that poor peoples' organizations are most effective at achieving their demands when they are most confrontational, and least effective when they take more conciliatory positions and invest their energies in dialog. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Via Campesina tends to be more confrontational than other international actors on rural issues, and tends to engage in protest and aggressive debate. On the other hand, the Via Campesina has also showed great intellectual leadership in developing and popularizing new concepts. Food sovereignty, for example, has become the key alternative vision capable of mobilizing and building a broad alliance in favor of fundamental changes in the global food system.

The political tactics of the Via Campesina are more "outside" than "inside," and more protest than lobby, though the Via Campesina does sometimes engage in coordinated inside-outside strategies with its allies, and does lobby. When the Via Campesina addresses an issue or "takes on" an institution (like FAO, for example), the strategy is typically to occupy and defend political space, and then rapidly move the debate out of the merely "technical" realm and onto a moral terrain of "right and wrong." This has proven to be an effective strategy for shifting the terms of the debate on many of the issues that the Via Campesina addresses.

3 Overall Summary of Interviews and Conclusions

3.1 Members of La Via Campesina

From the comments made by members of the La Via Campesina (see Appendix 1 for complete comments), there seems to be a good deal of agreement across international boundaries in terms of the significant overall benefits that members feel they have received from being part of La Via Campesina. Overall, La Via Campesina has been remarkably successful. Highlights include the exchange of experiences and learning about organizations in other countries, giving rise to feelings of sharing the same problems and of not being alone. There is a distinct sense of empowerment from being part of an international movement, from being able to participate and contribute. The strength of La Via Campesina comes from the member organizations, but the existence of La Via Campesina at the international level gives presence, voice, and cohesiveness to the defense of peasant rights. The Via Campesina has made it possible to develop a common understanding and analysis of the dominant model and its effects on rural peoples. The campaigns have helped put key issues back on the table, and new ideas and concepts have challenged the "there is no alternative" kind of thinking. There is a clear sense that the Via Campesina is a social movement, with all that implies, and that only such a movement can hope to change dominant policies.

Overall, there is a sense among members that La Via Campesina now needs to emphasize and build greater social mobilization capacity, must focus on strengthening the capacity of its member organizations, develop more consistency between concepts and action, live up to the leadership role being thrust upon by social movements around the world,

become less Latin American (which it is), and look towards the medium range future in some sort of envisioning exercise to help with long-term planning. More specifically:

3.1.1 Internal Structure & Functioning

3.1.1.1 Functioning of the ICC

There is work to be done in terms of improving the functioning of the ICC. Many times ICC members don't follow up on the tasks they have taken on at ICC meetings. Better mechanisms are needed to ensure adequate follow-up, and it is hoped that the consolidation of regional secretariats over the next year will provide ICC members with the backup they need to more efficiently follow up on their ICC tasks. This will also require that ICC members themselves assume more responsibility for their actions (or lack thereof), and that their home organizations "liberate" them from enough other responsibilities so they have time to do their ICC tasks.

3.1.1.2 Strengthening the Regions

There is a clear call for [and plan for] strengthening the regional structure of the Via Campesina. La Via Campesina is becoming too large to manage without this sort of decentralization of work and responsibility, and the plan is to create regional (staffed) secretariats to help with this endeavor. While these Secretariats will be supported financially in the short-term, it is hoped that they will become self-sufficient over time in terms of doing their own fundraising. This regional structure should emphasize articulation between organizations and countries within each region, supporting exchanges, translation/interpretation, and building regional identities (like "Via Campesina Africa.")

3.1.1.3 Commissions

The commissions or working committees of the Via Campesina are spaces for horizontal dialog and for deepening the collectively analysis of key issues. However, they have not always functioned optimally: many times people come unprepared, or a different person comes each time, there are language problems, and overall, a lack of continuity. The work of the commissions needs to be more structured, while not falling into the trap of bureaucratization. Regions must take on more responsibility for preparing their representatives, the future regional secretariats must provide support and language skills, and the possibility of designated substitutes who are also trained should be considered. Overall, it is hoped that the regional secretariats will make it possible for the commissions to function more effectively.

3.1.1.4 Internal Systems

La Via Campesina needs to have systems in place to ensure having a clear follow-up plan for every event, delegation or other activity. It must also invest in building and

strengthening its internal management systems, including financial management systems. The task of finalizing and approving the internal by-laws is overdue.

3.1.1.5 Funding

La Via Campesina currently depends too much on a small number of funders, and should develop a strategy to diversify its funding base for future sustainability. A variety of potential income sources, ranging from membership dues to direct mail and internet fundraising, can be considered and assessed in devising this strategy. A financial reserve fund should be considered, and cost-effective, efficient financial management should be the norm at all times.

3.1.1.6 Mentor New, Weak Member Organizations

There are a number of cases where La Via Campesina has very new and/or weak member organizations, and in some of these cases, these organizations are in strategically important countries like Venezuela and South Africa. The former is important because the Chavez government is the only government in the world presently carrying out a “genuine” agrarian reform—yet the reform is floundering due in part to the lack of strong national peasant movement—but the success of this reform is very important for agrarian reform everywhere; and South Africa is the principle “beachhead” in Africa for the neoliberal policies of the World Bank and the United States, and thus effective opposition to these policies inside South Africa is critical for all of Africa. These organizations want the accompaniment and mentoring of the Via Campesina and/or of member organizations like the MST, and the Via Campesina should consider developing a strategy for such situations.

3.1.1.7 Mediation, Divisionism and Vetoes

La Via Campesina faces two related, and recurrent problems in certain countries. One is divisionism, where member organizations cannot get along with one another, and the other is “vetoes,” where the “first organization in” then vetoes the membership petitions of other organizations, even though these other organizations may be very logical potential members. There is somewhat of a difference of opinion as to how or whether to address these problems. Some feel that La Via Campesina can and should mediate, and note that informal mediation by international VC leaders has been very helpful in some cases, while other feels that the VC should not or cannot intervene at the national level. There is a similar difference of opinion with regard to vetoes. Fortunately it seems that the Via Campesina is in the process of developing a solution, by moving the membership issue from the national level to the regional level, and there is hope that the newly strengthened regions will also be able to play a more appropriate and subtle mediation role when needed. This seems to be a satisfactory solution for both points of view. The remaining question is that of expulsions, as there is currently no mechanism for such an action should it be warranted. This is a very delicate matter that will require careful analysis and discussion.

3.1.1.8 *Gender*

Women have made significant contributions to La Via Campesina, notably in the Seeds Campaign. The Via Campesina can be more proactive in providing training to member organizations on how to strengthen the role of women inside those organizations.

3.1.1.9 *Indigenous People*

There are many indigenous people, and organizations of indigenous people, inside the Via Campesina. While they are often affected by neoliberal policies in the same way as peasants, sometimes their viewpoints differ, as with the conception of land versus territory.⁹ The Agrarian reform campaign should take this into account. And as momentum grows on indigenous issues inside of the Via Campesina, it may become appropriate to create an Indigenous Peoples' Commission.

3.1.2 *Strengthening the Member Organizations*

3.1.2.1 *Internal Training & Exchanges*

There is an overwhelming call from the membership for the Via Campesina to organize training for all levels of leadership (local, mid-level, national) of member organizations. They want training in political analysis, in organizing (land occupation, for example) and in organizational processes, and to acquire the skills and capacity to intervene in the reality they are confronted with. Proposals include international, regional, and national courses, workshops and seminars, duplicating the experiences of some member organizations with schools for the formation of cadre, expanding the number of exchange visits, and making sure that Via Campesina members arrive early (for training) to all international events and maintain the custom of evening meetings during the events. Educational materials of all kinds (videos, pamphlets, etc.) are also needed. The Via Campesina could also take advantage of specialists in group dynamics and methodology in some member organizations, to help make its own makings more dynamic, participatory and educational. The MST has presented a proposal to the ICC for a comprehensive training plan that incorporates a number of these ideas.

3.1.3 *The Outside World*

3.1.3.1 *Communications, Outreach and Public Education*

⁹ Though it is was not mentioned in the interviews, it is worth noting that indigenous people and peasants often have diametrically opposed attitudes toward the State. While peasants typically clamor for more state programs in their communities (credit, roads, schools, etc.), indigenous people often demand autonomy from such programs, and sometimes call for their expulsion. At some point the Via Campesina may have to develop flexible positions that allow for both viewpoints. It should also be noted that indigenous leaders have earlier expressed to this evaluator that they do not feel entirely comfortable inside the Via Campesina. They say it “feels like a peasant space, not an indigenous peoples’ space.”

The current Via Campesina is of poor quality, and real resources should be invested in making it into a more useful tool. The Via Campesina should begin systemizing their experiences and collective knowledge, and use this together with Via Campesina's analysis and positions to create more publications, videos, manuals, brochures, fliers, etc. targeted for different purposes, like internal training, and external outreach and campaigning.

3.1.3.2 External relations (Allies & Institutions/Governments)

Alliances will play a critical role in the ability of La Via Campesina to achieve its objectives. La Via Campesina needs to have clear strategies regarding different kinds of allies and how to relate to them, as alliances can work for or against you; for example, the Via Campesina discourse could be coopted. If relations with friends are managed poorly, they can be turned into rivals, and vice versa. Via Campesina must live up to the leadership role that its allies expect of it, and this is particularly true of the "social movements" process. Taking on a leadership role also means "caring for" ones allies when they have problems. There seems to be consensus that the Via Campesina needs to cultivate allies among other social movements and appropriate NGOs. In the case of governments (progressive and otherwise), political parties, and international agencies like the FAO, there is less consensus. There is some concern in the Via Campesina as to the appropriate kind of relationship to have with governments, even "friendly" ones like that of Venezuela, and an internal discussion is needed on this topic. In the case of Via Campesina leaders who are part of political parties and run for elected office, this can create a situation of divided loyalties. A discussion is also needed on this topic. In terms of relationships with agencies like the FAO, it seems that some members, particularly those in Africa, want a closer relationship, while others favor keeping them more at arm's length. This yet another topic that will require internal analysis and debate. Finally, the Via Campesina needs a strategy, that incorporates its allies, against the criminalization of peasant movements that is taking place under the guise of the war on terrorism.

3.1.4 Special Topics

3.1.4.1 Food Sovereignty

In terms of the work of the Via Campesina on Food Sovereignty, members feel that while work still needs to be done on refining the food sovereignty concept, making it more clear, and keeping it from being coopted, it is also clear that food sovereignty has had a very significant impact on the thinking and actions of member organizations, and on other actors as well. Food sovereignty helps make the critical argument that there is an alternative to dominant WTO policies.

3.1.4.2 Agrarian Reform

With regard to agrarian reform, members feel that the main achievement of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform to date has been to put this critical issue "back on the table," the importance of which cannot be overestimated. Beyond this, the missions,

while criticized for lack of planning and follow-up, have helped address situations of severe human rights violations. Compared to the work on food sovereignty, a lot more criticism was expressed concerning this campaign. Among the criticisms are that it has been too focused on Latin America, too focused on just ending latifundios (large land-holdings), and too focused on peasants (versus indigenous people). Some feel it has also been too limited to the kind of (less militant) actions favored by its NGO partner, FIAN. In the case of Honduras, there was also a call for an open discussion of the positions *viz-a-viz* dialog with the World Bank. Many suggestions were made, including calls to broaden the focus to include counter-agrarian reforms, concerns over access to land in the North, the issues of indigenous peoples, the need for more militant actions and greater agility, the need for identifiable symbols and *mística*, and the suggestion of a yearbook of land issues. According to those who coordinate the campaign, they now have plans to address these criticisms and suggestions, among others. Thus the awareness of the problems is there, as well as plans to address them. The key here will be implementation and follow-up.

3.1.4.3 Africa

The benefits that African members have received from being part of La Via Campesina closely mirror those reported by the overall Via Campesina membership: empowerment, exchange, ideas and concepts, international solidarity, etc. Additionally, it is worth noting the potential of internal mediation that was mentioned in the South Africa case. African members want the Via Campesina to offer more international training and exchanges of experiences to member organizations, and for the Via Campesina to be more present with visits of international leaders. They want the Via Campesina to help them address gender issues, and, more so than in other continents, some want the Via Campesina to develop strategies to relate better to governments and international organizations. The Via Campesina faces some particular problems in Africa, which include the diversity of languages spoken, poor communications infrastructure, and a particularly heavy dependence of African peasant organizations on NGOs and governments. Nevertheless, the Via Campesina has a clear strategy for expansion in the African region, and there are good reasons to believe that quite a few new organizations will be joining from Africa.

3.1.4.4 Honduras

COCOCH in Honduras hosted the IOS of the Via Campesina for quite a few years, and the COCOCH received many benefits in terms of participation in international events, training, mobilization of key issues, and were strengthened in their ability to influence national policy. The example of the Via Campesina also led them to create national commissions on women and on youth. On the other hand, some resentment was created by seeing so much money pass through COCOCH for the IOS – more they said, than the entire COCOCH budget – while little or none ended up as financing for COCOCH itself. This leads them to want to have greater transparency and more input into decisions over budget allocation. They generally think that the Via Campesina needs to focus more on internal process, including finishing and ratifying its by-laws, having debate on delicate

issues, and that member organizations need to take on more responsibility inside the Via Campesina. It is worth noting that when the IOS was earlier hosted by the CPE in Europe, certain friction and resentment was also generated. This may to a certain extent be inevitable with any organization that hosts the IOC, as there will always be a lot of funds flowing through, and more international attention may be paid to the Via Campesina than to the host organization. It will be interesting to see if something similar occurs with FSPI in Indonesia, the new host of the IOS. Perhaps the Via Campesina should develop a strategy to minimize this type of problem.

3.1.4.5 Countries with Severe Language Problems

While the member organizations in countries with severe language problems that impede communication with the Via Campesina (South Korea, Thailand) have gained many of the same benefits from the Via Campesina as listed by other organizations, and want many of the same things in the future, their participation has been greatly hampered by language. If these organizations are to more fully benefit from their membership, and the Via Campesina as a whole is to more fully benefit from them, new ways to deal with the language barrier must be found. A clear suggestion is to create national Via Campesina secretariats with English-speaking staff. This may or may not prove to be the solution, as it raises the issues of raising funds (perhaps this can be done by the national organizations on their own, with the “blessing,” and perhaps guidance, of the IOS), and of the danger that these secretariats might metamorphose into NGOs that are divorced from their base organizations. Strategies will have to be developed to avoid falling into the latter “trap.”

3.2 Allies of La Via Campesina

The allies of La Via Campesina share a view of the accomplishments of the Via that is very similar to that of the Via’s member organizations (see sample comments in Appendix 2). Both feel that the Via has successfully “conquered” space at the global level for peasant demands and viewpoints, that member organizations have been empowered and given a voice, and that the Via has put forth critical new concepts like food sovereignty. Among other successes mentioned by allies are the stalling of the agriculture negotiations at the WTO, the mobilization capacity of the VC, the respect shown the VC by international agencies like the FAO, the construction of a global movement, and breaking the hegemony of the World Bank in the discourse over land reform.

The allies share a view of the internal challenges the Via faces that is also very similar to that of the Via’s member organizations. Both feel that the Via has to deal with the problem by which old members sometimes prevent new ones from joining, that weak organizations need to be mentored and supported, that the special language problems of certain countries must be addressed, that leadership training and strengthening of member organizations is critical, as must the needs of indigenous peoples, and that the Via must work to overcome divisionism among its members. The allies also agree that the internal culture has sometimes been too Latin American, but that this will improve with

the move of the IOS to Indonesia. There are concerns about the extent which more marginalized peoples are represented in the Via, and a caution to watch for North-South differences. The allies seem much more concerned about the “male-dominated” internal culture of La Via Campesina, and the need to work to make gender parity more than just a superficial reality.

In terms of the external challenges La Via Campesina must face, the allies of the Via stress the need to more effectively reach the news media, to develop capacity to influence governments and international agencies, to develop more concrete proposals for alternative frameworks, to do more public education and outreach to other sectors of society, to increase the number of its members who are able to represent the movement at the international level, and to improve the work of the Global campaign for Agrarian Reform.

Finally, the allies of La Via Campesina share a generally favorable evaluation of the how the Via works with its allies. Overall, they feel that the Via is respectful, uses allies effectively to strengthen the struggle, and has a nuanced approach that sees different allies differently. There are some concerns with regard to how allies are chosen, about the WSF process, the extent to which the Via may be a bit “sectarian” in its selection of allies, and the Via’s generally long response time, due to being a grassroots organization. The allies believe that the Via urgently needs to build alliances with other sectors, such as workers’ groups, farm labor groups, indigenous peoples’ groups, women’s organizations, peace/anti-war groups, peoples’ health networks, anti-dam movements, anti-debt networks, etc.

3.3 Organizations Targeted by La Via Campesina

La Via Campesina has had an impact on the principle international agencies it is has targeted in it’s lobbying, protests, dialogs, debates and pressure tactics, as acknowledged by representatives of the WTO, the World Bank, and the FAO, and as shown in the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Commission on the Right to Food (see Appendix 3). The impact that they report varies. In the case of the WTO, they are very aware of the VC and it’s positions, and were personally affected by the self-immolation of the Korean peasant leader Lee Kyung-Hae in Cancun, but are reluctant to measure the overall impact of the VC on the negotiations. However, the representative feels that the Via Campesina positions may have been adopted by some countries as their negotiating positions. The representative from the World bank states in quite strong terms that the Bank has been affected, even “hurt,” by the Via Campesina critique of it’s market-based land policies. He is anxious to “seduce” the Via Campesina into dialog and into becoming an ally of the Bank, arguing that both the Via and the Bank are in favor of land reform and workers rights (something which many might dispute, in the case of the Bank). It almost seems that the Via is so effective that the Bank feels the need to neutralize it by turning it into an ally. The representative from the FAO frankly recognizes the impact inside FAO of the food sovereignty concept and of the Via’s positions on agrarian reform, though he cautions that there are those inside who oppose the positions of the Via. He urges the Via to moderate some of it’s position in order to

become an ally of those within the FAO who share similar viewpoints. Finally, the Special Rapporteur on the Right To Food has completely adopted the Via Campesina's positions on a number of issues, ranging from food sovereignty and agrarian reform, to biodiversity gender, and sustainable peasant farming systems. His reports are virtually indistinguishable from Via Campesina documents, revealing an enormous impact of the Via on his thinking. Overall, it is clear that the Via Campesina is having significant impact on these institutions, though it is equally clear that real change in their policies and impacts still remains elusive.

Overall, we can say that the Via Campesina has been extremely effective at putting peasant demands on the international map, and at giving peasant organizations a real voice in international debates. La Via Campesina is the premier international social movement at this point in world history. Over the next few years, there are clear issues that the Via Campesina must address in terms of its internal working and structure, particularly with regard to gender and perhaps indigenous peoples, in terms of strengthening its member organizations, and in terms of its work with external allies and targeted international agencies and issues. The Via Campesina seems to be on a good track for growth in the critical Asian and African regions, and in terms of re-launching the Global Campaign for Agrarian reform. There is work to be done in refining the food sovereignty concept, and in developing a more concrete alternative framework for agricultural trade. However, in order to achieve the kind of real structural change that rural populations need and demand, it will have to continue both to strengthen itself, and to build alliances toward an ever broader and stronger international movement.

4 People Interviewed for this Report

Interviews

Name	Organization	Country	Interviewed in-person (IP), by Telephone (T) or by email (E)
Africa			
Representatives of Via Campesina Member Organizations			
Ismael Ossemame	UNAC	Mozambique	IP
Renaldo Chingore João	UNAC	Mozambique	IP
Diamantino Nhampossa*	UNAC	Mozambique	IP
Mangaliso Kubheka	LPM	South Africa	IP
Ibrahim Coulibaly	CNOP	Mali	IP
Latin America			
Nemesia Achacollo*	FNMCB	Bolivia	IP
Juana Ferrer*	CONAMUCA	Dominican Republic	IP
Egidio Brunetto*	MST	Brazil	IP
Rafael Alegria*	VIA CAMPESINA	Honduras	IP
Felix Vasquez	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Alicia Calles	Fed. Peasant Women	Honduras	IP
Marvin Ponce	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Santos Aquileo Alvarez	ASOCODE	Honduras	IP
Rigoberto Perez	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Carlos Mencias	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Dinorah Ruiz	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Several others	COCOCH	Honduras	IP
Fausto Torres	ATC	Nicaragua	IP
Ramiro Tellez	VIA CAMPESINA	Nicaragua	IP
Leonardo Chirrinno	ANAP	Cuba	IP
Northern Countries			
Ingeborg Tangeraa*	NBS, CPE	Norway	IP
Paul Nicholson*	EHNE, CPE	Basque Country	IP
Dena Hoff*	NFFC	USA	IP
George Naylor	NFFC	USA	IP
Asia			
Henry Saragih*	FSPI	Indonesia	IP
Badrul Alam*	BKF	Bangladesh	IP
Mr. Park	KPL	South Korea	IP
Vanida Tantivitayapitak	AOP	Thailand	IP
Watcharee Paoleungthong	AOP	Thailand	IP
Baramee Chaiyarat	AOP	Thailand	IP
Pratin Wakayanon	AOP	Thailand	IP
Prayong Doklamyai	NPA	Thailand	IP
Bamrung Kayotha	AOP	Thailand	IP
Veerapon Sopa	AOP	Thailand	IP
Vattana Narokpradit	AOP	Thailand	IP
Several others	AOP	Thailand	IP
Technical Support Staff			
Nico Verhagen	VIA CAMPESINA	Germany/Netherlands	IP

* = ICC member

Allies of Via Campesina

Sarojeni Rengam	PANAP	Malaysia	E
Raj Patel	LRAN	South Africa	E
Sofia Monsalve	FIAN	Germany	E
Luis Hernandez	La Jornada	Mexico	E
Nicola Bullard	Focus	Thailand	E
Andrianna Natsoulas	Public Citizen	USA	E
Gustavo Duch	VSF	Spain	E
Sohi Jeon	KOPA	South Korea	E
Isabelle Delforge	Freelance	Belgium	E
Aksel Nærstad	NDF	Norway	E
Sérgio Sauer	Senate aide	Brazil	E
Shalmali Guttal	Focus	India	E
Pongtip Samranjit	RRAFA	Thailand	E
Alberto Villareal	REDES	Uruguay	E
Héctor Mondragón	LRAN	Colombia	E
Patrick Mulvany	ITDG	UK	E
Ana de Ita	CECCAM	Mexico	E
Silvia Ribeiro	ETC	Mexico	E
Ana Lucía Bravo	Acción Ecológica	Ecuador	E
Maria Elena Martinez	CENSA	USA/Mexico	E
Beatrice Gasco	IPC	Italy/Spain	E
Stephen Bartlett	Ag-Missions	USA	E
Kingkorn Narintarakul	FTA Watch/LRAN	Thailand	E
Eric Holt-Gimenez	BIC	USA	E

Academics Familiar with Via Campesina

Bernardo Mançano	UNESP	Brazil	E
James Petras	SUNY	USA	E
Jonathan Fox	UCSC	USA	E
Amory Starr	Chapman U.	USA	E
Andrés Barreda	UNAM	Mexico	E

Representatives of Organizations “Targeted” by Via Campesina

Anonymous Official	FAO	Italy	T
Anonymous Official	WTO	Geneva	T
John Garrison	World Bank	USA	T, E

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6 APPENDIX 1. Interviews with Via Campesina Members

6.1 *What have our organizations gained from being Via Campesina members?*

According to representatives of VC member organizations:

In today's world, an isolated organization could never see all the factors that impact it's members. It is so useful to see what similar organizations in other countries are doing about similar problems. The exchanges of experiences are very helpful. It isn't that one can copy what others do, but it gives us very good ideas and inputs for internal discussions. It is very good training. The campaigns have helped our organizations identify external allies, and have helped us differentiate among NGOs who are our potential allies and those who are not.[Latin America]

The VC is an example of unity and a guide to the national organizations.[Latin America]

The most important feature for us of the VC is to be able to articulate international campaigns around key issues. For example, in the Seeds Campaign, we have been able to appropriate knowledge, and recognize it's importance, thanks to the campaign. The VC has helped recover the culture of struggle.[Latin America]

The strength of the VC comes from the national organizations. The member organizations have contributed greatly to what the VC is, we have made sacrifices to strengthen the VC. The seeds campaign had a significant impact, in terms of pushing us toward the recovery of our peasant culture, strengthen our conviction that we must struggle against the entire dominant model, and gave us a new method of struggle: recuperating and multiplying our own local seed varieties. We came to understand that everything begins with the seed.[Latin America]

The campaigns are a tactical tool to elevate the debate on certain key issues, and to provide key contents to our struggle. They have been designed to bring forth a fresh debate on issues that many had considered passé or even taboo. They put an end to the "there is no alternative [to the dominant model] kind of thinking." The campaigns serve to raise the self-esteem of groups that "still" struggle around these issues, and give us a new dose of energy. The campaigns arose as part of the encounter between organizations from different countries and continents, including North-South. As we reached common positions and defined common priorities, the campaigns were formed. The campaigns have helped strengthen the VC by giving us a forceful presence at the international level. They have helped us gain the support, respect and even affection of other movements and other sectors. [Latin America]

In 1993 there was no communication among the world's peasant organizations, little knowledge of larger realities, little reflection, and much less any common strategies. Yet, in the first 10 years, we have achieved a good understanding of the global terrain for peasant struggle, we now have the basis for forward progress, and the principle leaders of our organizations know what is going on in the world. There must be some 300 leaders around the world that know each other well and know the issues. Not just 10, but at least 300. This is a real accumulation of forces. [Northern Country]

We have cohesiveness among a diversity of national origins and cultures. [Northern Country]

The basis for our future work is there, in that we now have:

- A common analysis, based on the problematic of the dominant economic and social model.
- A common political understanding.
- A “voice” of the peasants and the poor of the world.
- The Via Campesina is a clear reference point, not just for the rural world, but for the excluded of the world.
- We have been able to articulate local struggles and connect them with each other.

We have accomplished this through a bottom up, not a top down, process. The local struggles already existed (thousands of them), what the VC has done is give them a body of common analysis, and linked them with each other. What all this adds up to is the strengthening of universal demands and struggle.[Northern Country]

The VC has managed to identify the common problems that peasants face around the world, and has put coherent proposals on the table, on issues like:

- Genetic resources
- Seeds
- Land
- Human rights
- Food sovereignty
- Trade
- And more recently, migration and labor rights

All of these proposals share an anti-neoliberal logic, they all fit together coherently, and the same central thread runs through all of them.[Northern Country]

The Via Campesina has managed to make food and agriculture into the principle axis and stumbling block of international negotiations, as the result of protests, critique, proposal and struggle. The labor movement, in contrast, has not managed to achieve a similar level of prominence for labor issues. They are too isolated in their local struggles, and have not been able to come together in the same way. The Via Campesina was able to do this with a message that calls out to the entire society, that is not merely corporatist; we are a social movement and not a “classical” top-down kind of organization.[Northern Country]

11 years ago, “we had no voice.” Now, we have our own voice, and our issues are on the table. What real change have we achieved? Without the VC, things would be even worse. [Northern Country]

The VC is based on national voices... Our legitimacy comes from being a grassroots movement. It should be clear that the VC is bottom-up in its structure. Sometimes it takes people a long time to understand that we are not just another NGO. [Northern Country]

No national organization is strong without international engagement, this also gives legitimacy. We realize that farmers face the same problems everywhere, not just us, so even a small organization feels part of something bigger, like part of a family. It has helped position us as the alternative. [Northern Country]

VC put food and agriculture on the negotiating table, not as a market issue but as a human rights issue. The labor movement failed to really get their issues on the table, in contrast. The VC has influenced public opinion on food and agriculture. It has given a visible profile to these issues at the international level.[Northern Country]

The VC has strengthened it's member organizations on issues like GMOs, access to land, and food and trade, by giving them an international perspective. [Northern Country]

Being a part of VC gives US farmers hope, we are so few, but we don't feel alone. It gives us a voice as an alternative to the big commodity groups and the Farm Bureau. Before the media just called the commodity groups for comments on international trade, now they call us, because we have a visible presence at international events. The VC is not bureaucratic, so has a fast response.[Northern Country]

As a member of VC, my organization has been able to:

- Enter the international political process on issues that concern us
- Get information on, and learn about, movements and struggles in other countries, and we have been to communicate what we have learned inside our own organization.[Asia]

The concepts and slogans of the VC have really strengthened the member organizations, concepts like food sovereignty, concepts are that run counter to the dominant model. [Asia]

The VC has provided a space, and allies who are our peers, to form a network and jointly analyze our issues and problems, and develop new concepts like food sovereignty. [Asia]

Our organization was able to make key inputs to the debate that produced the food sovereignty concept, like the issue of production for export, the problems of food aid undercutting self-sufficiency, and the issues around the IMF, WTO and privatization. [Asia]

The most important contributions of the VC have been ideas and concepts, the most influential of which has been food sovereignty. The VC and the Global Campaign also did play a central role in getting agrarian reform "back on the table." [Asia]

Via Campesina has really strengthened our struggle against the WTO and on trade issues. At KPL we have gotten a lot of solidarity from the VC. [Asia]

We feel that we cannot fight the WTO alone, and thus our alliances through the VC are central for us. We absolutely need to be part of this international network. [Asia]

The most important thing we gained from the VC was learning how to be a peasant organization, how to be a "movement" as opposed to an "NGO that helps peasants." Before we new about the VC it felt like something wasn't right, but the only examples we had were the State and the NGOs, we had no other models. We had a lot of internal debate, but we were lost. We were emulating NGOs, writing project proposals and administering them, but that just couldn't be what we were all about. It wasn't until we received a visit from Egidio Brunetto of the MST that we began to glimpse another role for UNAC, we began to realize that to defend peasant interests as the government turned neoliberal, we had to position ourselves politically as a movement. It started to become more clear to us what we had to do. OK, so now we knew what we had to do, but still none of us knew how. Then around the year 2000 we began to participate in VC meetings, and in 2002 we went to the VC peasant forum at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre. It was a revelation to us to participate in the nightly VC meetings during the WSF, as all the VC representatives there would discuss and debrief the day, and plan our collective strategy for the following day. What was at stake? What did want to achieve? How would we do it? Who would do what? Wow! This is what it meant to be a movement, to be an international movement! [Africa]

The mística and use of our symbols (hats, bandannas, flags, bags, etc) are very important to create a sense of cohesiveness among people from such diverse and

different cultures who do not speak common languages. It makes us feel part of the same family [Northern Country].

Before the VC came along, many organizations who were on the front lines of struggle in their countries were not recognized or respected. The VC has provided them with a space where they gain international (and national) respect, respect from other social movements, from institutions, and where they have greatly increased their self-esteem. [Technical Staff]

Through the VC, organizations have come to see that they are not alone, that they share the same problems as people in other countries, that rather than being in competition, they can come up with joint strategies. [Technical Staff]

The opportunity for leaders to travel abroad opens their eyes, as they feel they “are in the same house” when they visit similar movements in other countries, and this gives them strength, energy, and the feeling of belonging to one large family. [Technical Staff]

The VC creates space at the international level on issues like agrarian reform and food sovereignty, that then comes around and has impact and influence in national debates and struggles, creating space at the national level. [Technical Staff]

Summary: From these comments, there seems to be a good deal of agreement across international boundaries in terms of the significant overall benefits that members feel they have received from being part of the Via Campesina. Overall, the Via Campesina has been remarkably successful. Highlights include the exchange of experiences and learning about organizations in other countries, giving rise to feelings of sharing the same problems and of not being alone. There is a distinct sense of empowerment from being part of an international movement, from being able to participate and contribute. The strength of the Via Campesina comes from the member organizations, but the existence of the Via Campesina at the international level gives presence, voice, and cohesiveness to the defense of peasant rights. The Via Campesina has made it possible to develop a common understanding and analysis of the dominant model and its effects on rural peoples. The campaigns have helped put key issues back on the table, and new ideas and concepts have challenged the “there is no alternative” kind of thinking. There is a clear sense that the Via Campesina is a social movement, with all that implies, and that only such a movement can hope to change dominant policies.

6.2 *What Weaknesses, Problems and Challenges do we need to address? What do we want from the VC in the future?*

We need to build social mobilization in order to be effective on international issues. Cancun gave people hope. We need more and bigger mobilizations. [Northern Country]

The VC needs to first of all depend on and develop the internal capacity of its members, and then go to allies. [Asia]

Bring in more organizations as members (as was recently done in South Korea and Japan), to build a stronger movement. Recent new members who joined were attracted by concepts and by a platform that “rings true” for them. [Asia]

We need to keep being consistent between concepts ⇔ goals ⇔ strategy, and we must keep up the radical, militant demands. [Asia]

We should try to envison what we will be like, and what we would like to be like, in 20 years. We should be self-critical. We don't want to end up like the trade union movement, outflanked on the left, and with IFAP on the right, or coopted, or bureaucratized. [Technical Staff]

We need to live up to the role of leadership in the global movement. [Asia]

In the past I have felt that the VC was very Latin American, although we are starting to overcome that. The VC is now much more open to the inclusion of movements from other regions. The seed campaign started out as very Latino-centric, but we have been able to successfully adapt it here. The election of Henry Saragih as IOS of VC was a key step, and having the food sovereignty conference in Africa will also help a lot. In fact, it is an understandable organizational life cycle issue. The VC began in Latin America, so it was very Latin American at the beginning. But as it grows and matures, it is becoming less Latin American. This is normal. [Africa]

6.2.1 *Internal Structure & Functioning*

6.2.1.1 *Functioning of the ICC*

At the level of the ICC it has been difficult to get the members to really follow-up on their responsibilities. We need to develop better mechanisms for this. Decentralization and functioning regional secretariats will be a very positive step. [Northern Country]

In terms of the functioning of the ICC, we need to have ICC members assume greater responsibility. This is critical. People are taking things on and then not doing them, and we need new members to grow into leadership roles to "relieve" the older members over time. Part of this responsibility falls on the national organizations. They must understand and accept that designating somebody to the ICC means that person must be freed up from some of their responsibilities at home, or they cannot do a good job. Every member of the ICC should learn about and understand not only the topic of the Commission they are responsible for, but the topics of the other commissions as well. The ICC members have to travel more to the countries. They have to be present in, and work on, key areas, like LPM-South Africa, India, China., Africa. China is a real challenge for the VC. [Northern Country]

6.2.1.2 *Strengthening the Regions*

We need funding for regional coordination, work, and international exchanges (language, translation, interpreters). [Northern Country]

The VC should emphasize strengthening the work of the regions. We need to create and fund regional secretariats. [Asia]

The VC should move toward having self-sufficient (in terms of fundraising) regional secretariats. [Asia]

Some regions urgently need work to improve their regional articulation, for example, Africa, which has no equivalent to the CLOC (Coordinator of Latin American Rural Organizations, essentially “VC-Latin America”).[Latin America]

I am not so worried about money. As we grow, we need to strengthen our regional and national coordinations/secretariats so that they have their own fundraising capacity. Whether these will be called “Via Campesina” as in “Via Campesina-Brazil” or something else like CLOC or CPE, will depend. But when the names are of the latter type, we will have to watch for jealousies, as have occasionally arisen, as with the cases of CLOC and CPE toward the VC.[Northern Country]

6.2.1.3 Commissions

The idea of the VC commissions is to have spaces in which to develop issues. They are spaces for horizontal dialog between representatives from different regions (at least 1 from each region on each commission, though they are not closed to additional participants from the VC). Expertise on each issue is accumulated in its commission, the representatives are trained on the issue, and we develop our analysis. Each commission maintains an email list to the whole VC on their topic. Now, in practice, there are of course problems. One is language, which leads to communication problems and uneven participation. It is also hard for each region to have a single person committed to each commission over time, and for different reasons there seem to be some new representatives at each meeting, which affects continuity. We need to have designated substitutes who are prepared on the issues. Of course right now we are in the process of starting up the commissions again, with the new members that were named at the IV Conference. We need to establish more capacity in the commissions, in part by devoting more energy to preparation before the meetings. There is both a lack of information and of process. The differences in experience and knowledge pose dilemmas. We need to develop a good methodology, information sharing mechanisms, and discussion process to make the commissions more effective. We also have structural problems, in that one region is responsible for each commission, and sometimes they don't live up to their responsibilities. But this will improve greatly once we have the regional secretariats up and running, which will happen this year. The secretariat in each region will support and provide backstopping for the commission that region has responsibility for. It looks like we do have funding now for the regional secretariat staff, but we will have to be careful about competition between national and regional work, taking care that the secretariat staff – which will exist above all for international work, do not get sucked into national work. The regional secretariat staff should have good language skills, and if possible master the main VC languages (English, Spanish, French). [Technical Staff]

At this last meeting of the Food Sovereignty Commission, we had some problems. There were many new people, because this was the first meeting after the VI Congress, were new members were elected. This is probably true for all the Commissions right now, think about it, there are 7 commissions with 8 people, one from each of 8 regions, that is 56 people, most of whom are new right now. Partially as a result of this turnover, we have not yet consolidated clear leadership on the commission, but we have managed to socialize the debate. However, even in the debate inside the commission, our methodology could have been better:

- There was a lack of preparation
- The regions didn't assume the responsibility to train their representatives, or to send people already up on the topics

But on the positive side, all of the regions were present, though India and Indonesia couldn't come because of visa problems.[Northern Country]

We have a delicate dialectic in the commissions: their good functioning requires well prepared people with technical support staff, but the risk is that of becoming bureaucratic and losing the collectiveness. We must live with this dialectic, and balance the trade-off between the short and long terms.[Northern Country]

6.2.1.4 Internal Systems

The VC needs to have a clear follow-up plan for all events/activities, like the fact-finding missions. It's too expensive to do things on a one time basis. Perhaps things like missions should be organized at the regional rather than the global level, to reduce costs and improve follow-up. But above all, the VC needs systems that ensure follow-up. [Asia]

The VC needs to build and strengthen its management systems. They are improving, and the four-year plans have proven to be a useful tool for this. [Asia]

UNAC loaned funds to VC for the IV Congress in Brazil and they have taken a long time in paying us back. That puts us in a risky situation, and measures should be in place so we don't get hurt by that. This is not a big deal, because I think we are resolving it now, but I mention to point out that will be good to have strong financial management systems in place in the VC. [Africa]

We need to finish developing the VC by-laws, to balance power and participation inside the VC. [Africa]

6.2.1.5 Funding

The VC depends too much on funding from a small number of international donor NGOs. How can our dependency be reduced? Can the richer VC member organizations pay some of the costs? [Asia]

It will be hard for most member organizations to contribute much financially. The VC needs a financial strategy to, if not stand on our own feet, at least diversify and manage our dependency so it doesn't weaken our actions. [Asia]

We need to develop a strategy to achieve more sustainable financial resources. What would that look like? Part of it may be finding cheaper ways to function, another may be to at some point ask for greater political commitment from our members in the form of member dues. Can we sell materials? Can we raise money through direct mail? On the internet? We must diversify the funding base for our minimum (core) budget, and we may want to think about a financial reserve. It is important to manage resources well even during times when they are more readily available, i.e. how to avoid the trap of more money and lower effectiveness that many groups fall into. [Technical Staff]

6.2.1.6 Mentor New, Weak Member Organizations

There are situations with young, inexperienced organizations in the VC, like the case of the LPM in South Africa, and others. Can the VC play some sort of mentoring and training role? If we don't, it is likely that such organizations will be captured by donors or NGOs, so it is important that the VC offer them something worthwhile in this sense. We can try to strengthen the national actors, and we can create a strong joint presence. That means we can offer training programs for their leadership, and we can have a older VC organization, perhaps from the same region, act as a "mentor" organization (i.e. UNAC for LPM). The fact that nobody from the ICC nor technical support staff or IOS visited LPM after the ICC meeting in Maputo was an error. We need to have a strategic

understanding, for example, of why South Africa is important, and the role and problems of the LPM, so we can put a higher priority on this kind of accompaniment. [Technical Staff]

CANEZ (the Venezuelan member of the VC), born in the heat of the revolutionary process via a complex articulation of 13 organizations, still has low visibility and little intermediation with public institutions, still lacks recognition by public institutions and society in general as the voice of peasants, and, finally, is plagued by diverse contradictions which are probably resolvable in the short to medium term. The experience of other revolutions clearly shows that a well organized peasant sector, whose needs are well attended to by the State, can be the base and sustenance of the revolutionary process, but, if poorly attended to and poorly organized, it can quickly become the fertile and favorite ground for provocations, imperialism and counter-revolution. The process being lived by Venezuela is passing through a period of political euphoria, the people have high expectations that their lives will be improved, and they have placed their hopes in the Bolivarian ideal personified by Hugo Chavez. There is real transformative potential, because it provides an alternative to the discourse of fatalism imposed by globalization and neoliberalism. Nevertheless, there is a crying need for greater coherency between the Bolivarian proposal and the organizational behavior of the Venezuelan social movements, particularly the peasant movement. The Via Campesina has sufficient moral authority and accumulated experience to effectively accompany this process, which has transcendental potential for the peoples of the South. The basic idea is to promote formation (training) alternatives for the peasant organizations, via agreements like the Tapes Protocol, which was signed by the VC, the government of Parana, the MST, and President Chavez. We urgently need a strategy of accompaniment of the Venezuelan peasant movement. [Via Campesina Mission to Venezuela, April 2005]

6.2.1.7 *Mediation, Divisionism and Vetoes*

We have a recurring problem at the national level that we need to address. That is when current members of the VC veto and block other organizations who are otherwise appropriate and want to join. This is delicate, because if we force them in, it can produce an explosion, but if we don't accept them it can also create problems. Another issue, though not so urgent, but that eventually will need to be addressed, is that of expulsions, as there are currently no criteria or mechanisms. Though in general it is better to create conditions for "self-expulsion" (leaving), rather than outright expulsion. We have to be careful here as well, as the debate itself could be counter-productive. [Northern Country]

The VC could do more to mediate in countries where the national organizations are divided, could do more to combat divisionism. We need to refine the methodology of how to manage these situations. In some cases, visits by Rafael Alegria and ICC members have helped a lot. We need to do this more. Already the VC is a reference point on the value of unity, a good example. We should keep it up: "If the father behaves himself, then the kids will too." Strong language on unity helps, as with the case of FENSUAGRO in Colombia; they calmed down when the VC delegation arrived. The VC needs to maintain its presence in certain countries and keep working to reduce divisions and strengthen member organizations. In the case of Bolivia, the VC has helped relations among the peasant, indigenous and landless movements. A VC leader will have more impact, in these situations, than a national leader, as "nobody is a prophet in their own homeland." In Mexico, the VC has helped relations between the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the peasant movement, and now they are respectful of each other's spaces. [Latin America]

Response to above: It is crucial to keep respecting the autonomy of the national organizations [by non-interventionism]. In the case of Bolivia, they actively sought the help of the VC.[Latin America]

About the “veto” issue. The idea of the VC is to bring people together on the basis of a common “peasant agenda.” The VC provides the context and long-term perspective for collaboration on this agenda. The VC cannot “solve” conflicts at the national level, but it can help by putting forth an agenda that all can agree to. The “veto problem” should not exist if there is agreement on the peasant agenda. However, when it does exist, the ICC should intervene and create a process. We need a skillful way to move these decisions from the national arena to the regional level, where it will be a lot easier to have a good process.[Technical Staff]

6.2.1.8 *Gender*

Women have played a key role in the Via Campesina, especially via the seeds campaign, which is coordinated by women. The seeds campaign has greatly strengthened the “mística” in the VC, with its themes of life and reproduction.[Latin America]

We need help in our organization from the VC on the topic of gender and rural women. Traditionally, women have played a key part on rural society, but we need training on how to improve the role of women in the movement.[Africa]

6.2.1.9 *Indigenous people*

Concerning the issue of the demands of indigenous people versus peasants: the starting point is that the system is the enemy of both of them. The indigenous issue has not yet accumulated enough internal momentum to create a new commission, but that may happen.[Latin America]

We need to broaden our concept of agrarian reform to encompass the point of view of indigenous peoples’ organizations, for example, taking into account the difference between land and territory.[Latin America]

6.2.2 Strengthening the Member Organizations

6.2.2.1 Internal Training & Exchanges

The training currently offered within the VC is not enough. For example, it is great to go to the WSF, meet organizations from other regions, present our own program and get feedback, give good speeches, but we need more. We need to acquire analytical skills, we need to work on our shared vision, in order to avoid future contradictions. We clearly need international spaces of political formation, we need international debates, and we need more international exchanges. We need it at the global level, and we need it at the regional level. [Africa]

We need to emphasize internal training now. We must create the conditions under which there are ever more people (cadre) with the skills and capacity to intervene in the reality they are confronted with. We need to strengthen our organizations at the local level. We need to promote organizational processes. We need to develop a plan to strengthen the organizing capacity of our member organizations. We already have training schools, schools of political “formation,” as with the MST, Central America, and the Latin American women’s school. We need to spread this. To develop our capacity to mobilize. This effort should build an internal culture of mobilization. We need to train cadre at all levels of our organizations. Right now many of organizations are weak because they have few skilled cadre at the local and regional levels, they have few “batters” who can step to the plate. [Latin America]

We need to strengthen the political skills and capacities of the national and local leaders of our member organizations. [Latin America]

Need more training on issues of globalization for national level leadership of member organizations. [Northern Country]

We need to place more emphasis on training of leaders, and it must a very humanistic type of training. [Northern Country]

We need more educational materials for internal training, we need videos, and collections of writings, to inform and to form. [Northern Country]

We must put a high priority on the training of mid-level cadre at international and national levels. The proposal of Egidio and the MST for a training program is a good start. [Northern Country]

We need to make an effort to always have the VC representatives arrive a few days before international meetings with other sectors, to do internal training and preparation. This has always been a goal, but sometimes we fail to do it, yet it is so important for building our movement. [Northern Country]

The VC should provide more information, courses, and exchanges, about international issues. [Asia]

We need to focus on building internal strength and capacity. [Asia]

Need to better organize information flow, communications, and put in systems of leadership education and training for member organizations [Asia]

A key weakness of our national member organizations is that there are few capable, skilled leaders, they lack technical capacity, and too often end up depending on non-peasant technical assistants and advisors. Thus a global MST-style training program is a MUST. We need to train leadership every level, politically, and also technically (i.e. in computers).[Asia]

We need to broaden our leadership through a training effort, and through the commissions where new leaders can emerge as people grow.[Technical Staff]

We still have a methodology gap on how to run forums, and/or how to manage our participation, in forums. First, we should always try to have VC representatives come two days early to major events, for internal process, training, and preparation of positions and strategy. We probably need to offer more support, and more translation capacity, for those who attend. And in terms of making our own forums and events more participatory and more effective, we should probably try to take advantage of the "methodologists" in many of our member organizations, who are specialists in planning and guiding group dynamics. We need to think more about this kind of internal process.[Technical Staff]

We need more training, cross-visits, seminars. It was great when Mexican farmers came to the US for one week to speak on trade issues, but we can do a lot more of this type of exchange... The NFFC needs help to pressure the US government. We could use the strength of all to influence decision-makers at home; i.e. farmer visits from other countries to the US.[Northern Country]

Proposal to the ICC by Egidio Brunetto, MST-Brazil, ICC member:

There is a crucial need to form more militants and cadre in all the member organizations of Via Campesina. This is a clear goal set for the next four years by the IV Conference of the VC.

One problem is that in most countries (except Europe, Cuba, USA and a few others), many leaders and base members of our organizations are illiterate, or have limited reading skills. We believe that our training must start with that, promoting the idea to the national organizations that all leaders should be in school, should be studying. In the MST our policy is that every militant must spend the equivalent of 2 months per year studying, and that goes for militants at all educational levels (they must study at their appropriate level).

The principals we propose for the VC training and formation are:

- Formation in accordance with the needs of each organization
- It should be a permanent and systematic process
- The point of training and formation is to develop the ability to intervene in the realities in which we live
- The training should strengthen the organizations and their actions (not be separate from the struggle and/or the organization)
- The starting point is social practice (organizing skills).

We propose that we facilitate the setting up of schools for the formation of cadre/militants inside each member movement, that we offer continental courses, courses for the "formation of formers" (training of trainers), for 1-2 people from each movement that would last about 15 days, the publication of a series of notebooks/pamphlets of the VC on study topics (issues), and language training.

6.2.3 *The Outside World*

6.2.3.1 *Communications, Outreach and Public Education*

We need good brochures on issues like food sovereignty, etc. [Northern Country]

We need a better home page on the web. It needs to have information on all the member organizations and what they are doing. It should have links to the pages of members, and vice versa. We need a full-time dedicated coordinator of the web site. [Northern Country]

The VC needs to start systemizing our experiences and collective knowledge. We need to make, or to organize already existing, publications, videos, manuals, brochures, fliers, etc. We need them designed for different purposes, like internal training, and external outreach and campaigning. [Latin America]

We are weak in our communications, Our web page is terrible. We have to have a better web site. [Northern Country]

6.2.3.2 *External relations (Allies & Institutions/Governments)*

We need to sharpen our ability to influence international negotiations, emphasizing the construction of, and defense of, values. [Latin America]

We need to strengthen our alliances, with other sectors and other social movements, and with progressive governments. [Latin America]

The VC is experiencing growing pains, which can sometimes bring too many friends and enemies. For example there is no other international alliance like the VC, except IFAP—which is politically very different—so everyone wants to join the VC, even the “problem organizations,” and they can bring problems with them. In the future the VC may not be able to accommodate everyone, and this may lead to a problem where some try to form a “third space.” We will have to keep trying to articulate a vision for everyone, but may not be able to. [Asia]

The “dynamic” that the VC is immersed in at the international level is big, sometime beyond the scale of the ability of the VC leadership to control it. It is like “having a tiger by the tail.” As the VC gets “big enemies” (WTO, WB, IMF, etc.), it increasingly needs bigger activities to confront them. Here it is critical to construct and put forth concrete alternatives (i.e. UNCTAD on trade issues). [Asia]

There are recurring problems with some NGOs who feel threatened by, or envious of, the rise and strengthening of farmers’ organizations. In the past NGOs “used” farmer organizations to gain funding and legitimacy, but the growth and strength of the VC is making this increasingly difficult. They can spread disinformation and provoke splits. We need a strategy for dealing with them. [Asia]

On the work of the VC with FAO: we want to change FAO, but it is a big task. Is it worth it? We should be sure it is before we invest a lot of effort in something that may not make that much difference. [Asia]

We need to constantly build our capacity both on the inside and with our “friends.” To augment our capacity we need to not make friends into rivals, but find ways to

incorporate them as we did with FIAN and with FOE. They may then not see the VC as a rival, but rather as a natural social movement ally. If we are not up to this task, then frustration with us will grow.[Asia]

We need to take seriously “caring” for our allies, when they need our help or our support. This is part of movement building, whether they be other social movements, NGOs, or particular activists.[Northern Country]

The topic of alliances is very important. We have to work on alliance building, and of course this is also delicate as personal contacts and relations play such a large role in trust. Also, the VC must live up to its leadership role when that is expected of us. A bad example is how in Porto Alegre we didn't do a good job of providing leadership to the social movements assembly, when that was clearly expected of us. The problem is that the demand for VC leadership grows faster than our capacity to provide it. That is an overall weakness of the social movements in general.[Northern Country]

Another questions that is open is our relationships to political parties and governments. There is a potential problem of Via Campesina leaders who run for political office, and may have divided loyalties. [Northern Country]

The relationship with the Venezuelan government that was created in Tapes was done without a previous discussion inside the VC as to what our appropriate relationship to governments should be. We urgently need to have that discussion. [Asia]

As a growing movement that has achieved a certain space, the VC becomes a bigger threat to vested interests, among governments, donors, NGOs, international agencies, and others. This can generate an interest in trying to divide and/or attack (politically, or via finances) the VC, or to try to coopt the discourse (i.e. food sovereignty). We need to guard against this, and rely on our strengths of consultation, participation and political formation. [Technical Staff]

The “war on terrorism” is a threat to us, because it is leading to the criminalization of legitimate, non-violent movements, especially in the Islamic world. We must defend our basic values, that we use non-violent political instruments. And we need better mechanisms to defend peasant leaders facing repression. Ideally, when someone is jailed we will have rapid response mechanisms, email, perhaps fax, perhaps peasant organizations in many countries protesting at the embassy of the guilty government. We must develop a methodology. [Technical Staff]

The challenge is to develop alternative frameworks for key issues like trade, and like the peasant charter. But there is bottleneck, in that we don't have the in-house capacity to do it. Do we have the capacity to do it? Can we work with allies to do it? [Asia]

Summary: Overall, there is a sense among members that the Via Campesina needs to emphasize and build social mobilization capacity, must focus on strengthening the capacity of its member organizations, develop more consistency between concepts and action, live up to the leadership role being thrust upon by social movements around the world, become less Latin American (which it is), and look towards the medium range future in some sort of envisioning exercise to help with long-term planning. More specifically:

Internal Structure & Functioning

- Functioning of the ICC: There is work to be done in terms of improving the functioning of the ICC. Many times ICC members don't follow up on the tasks they have taken on at ICC meetings. Better mechanisms are needed to ensure adequate follow-up, and it is hoped that the consolidation of regional secretariats over the next year will provide ICC members with the backup they need to more efficiently follow up on their ICC tasks. This will also require that ICC members themselves assume more responsibility for their actions (or lack thereof), and that their home organizations "liberate" them from enough other responsibilities so they have time to do their ICC tasks.
- Strengthening the Regions: There is a clear call for [and plan for] strengthening the regional structure of the Via Campesina. The Via Campesina is becoming too large to manage without this sort of decentralization of work and responsibility, and the plan is to create regional (staffed) secretariats to help with this endeavor. While these Secretariats will be supported financially in the short-term, it is hoped that they will become self-sufficient over time in terms of doing their own fundraising. This regional structure should emphasize articulation between organizations and countries within each region, supporting exchanges, translation/interpretation, and building regional identities (like "Via Campesina Africa.")
- Commissions: The commissions or working committees of the Via Campesina are spaces for horizontal dialog and for deepening the collectively analysis of key issues. However, they have often not functioned optimally: many times people come unprepared, or a different person comes each time, there are language problems, and overall, a lack of continuity. The work of the commissions needs to be more structured, while not falling into the trap of bureaucratization. Regions must take on more responsibility for preparing their representatives, the future regional secretariats must provide support and language skills, and the possibility of designated substitutes who are also trained should be considered. Overall, it is hoped that the regional secretariats will make it possible for the commissions to function more effectively.
- Internal Systems: The Via Campesina needs to have systems in place to ensure having a clear follow-up plan for every event, delegation or other activity. It must also invest in building and strengthening it's internal management systems,

- including financial management systems. The task of finalizing and approving the internal by-laws is overdue.
- Funding: The Via Campesina currently depends too much on a small number of funders, and should develop a strategy to diversify its funding base for future sustainability. A variety of potential income sources, ranging from membership dues to direct mail and internet fundraising, can be considered and assessed in devising this strategy. A financial reserve fund should be considered, and cost-effective, efficient financial management should be the norm at all times.
 - Mentor New, Weak Member Organizations: There are a number of cases where the Via Campesina has very new and/or weak member organizations, and in some of these cases, these organizations are in strategically important countries like Venezuela and South Africa. The former is important because the Chavez government is the only government in the world presently carrying out a “genuine” agrarian reform—yet the reform is floundering due in part to the lack of strong national peasant movement—but the success of this reform is very important for agrarian reform everywhere; and South Africa is the principle “beachhead” in Africa for the neoliberal policies of the World Bank and the United States, and thus effective opposition to these policies inside South Africa is critical for all of Africa. These organizations want the accompaniment and mentoring of the Via Campesina and/or of member organizations like the MST, and the Via Campesina should consider developing a strategy for such situations.
 - Mediation, Divisionism and Vetoes: The Via Campesina faces two related, and recurrent problems in certain countries. One is divisionism, where member organizations cannot get along with one another, and the other is “vetoes,” where the “first organization in” then vetoes the membership petitions of other organizations, even though these other organizations may be very logical potential members. There is somewhat of a difference of opinion as to how or whether to address these problems. Some feel that the Via Campesina can and should mediate, and note that informal mediation by international VC leaders has been very helpful in some cases, while other feels that the VC should not or cannot intervene at the national level. There is a similar difference of opinion with regard to vetoes. Fortunately it seems that the Via Campesina is in the process of developing a solution, by moving the membership issue from the national level to the regional level, and there is hope that the newly strengthened regions will also be able to play a more appropriate and subtle mediation role when needed. This seems to be a satisfactory solution for both points of view. The remaining question is that of expulsions, as there is currently no mechanism for such an action should it be warranted. This is a very delicate matter that will require careful analysis and discussion.
 - Gender: Women have made significant contributions to the Via Campesina, notably in the Seeds Campaign. The Via Campesina can be more proactive in

providing training to member organizations on how to strengthen the role of women inside those organizations.

- Indigenous People: There are many indigenous people, and organizations of indigenous people, inside the Via Campesina. While they are often affected by neoliberal policies in the same way as peasants, sometimes their viewpoints differ, as with the conception of land versus territory.¹⁰ The Agrarian reform campaign should take this into account. And as momentum grows on indigenous issues inside of the Via Campesina, it may become appropriate to create an Indigenous Peoples' Commission.

Strengthening the Member Organizations

- Internal Training & Exchanges: There is an overwhelming call from the membership for the Via Campesina to organize training for all levels of leadership (local, mid-level, national) of member organizations. They want training in political analysis, in organizing (land occupation, for example) and in organizational processes, and to acquire the skills and capacity to intervene in the reality they are confronted with. Proposals include international, regional, and national courses, workshops and seminars, duplicating the experiences of some member organizations with schools for the formation of cadre, expanding the number of exchange visits, and making sure that Via Campesina members arrive early (for training) to all international events and maintain the custom of evening meetings during the events. Educational materials of all kinds (videos, pamphlets, etc.) are also needed. The Via Campesina could also take advantage of specialists in group dynamics and methodology in some member organizations, to help make its own makings more dynamic, participatory and educational. The MST has presented a proposal to the ICC for a comprehensive training plan that incorporates a number of these ideas.

The Outside World

- Communications, Outreach and Pubic Education: The current Via Campesina web site is of poor quality, and real resources should be invested in making it into a more useful tool. The Vi a Campesina should begin systemizing their experiences and collective knowledge, and use this togeteher with Via Campesina's analysis and positions to create more publications, videos, manuals, brochures, fliers, etc. targeted for different purposes, like internal training, and external outreach and campaigning.

¹⁰ Though it is was not mentioned in the interviews, it is worth noting that indigenous people and peasants often have diametrically opposed attitudes toward the State. While peasants typically clamor for more state programs in their communities (credit, roads, schools, etc.), indigenous people often demand autonomy from such programs, and sometimes call for their expulsion. At some point the Via Campesina may have to develop flexible positions that allow for both viewpoints. It should also be noted that indigenous leaders have earlier expressed to this evaluator that they do not feel entirely comfortable inside the Via Campesina. They say it "feels like a peasant space, not an indigenous peoples' space."

- External relations (Allies & Institutions/Governments): Alliances will play a critical role in the ability of the Via Campesina to achieve its objectives. The Via Campesina needs to have clear strategies regarding different kinds of allies and how to relate to them, as alliances can work for or against you; for example, the Via Campesina discourse could be coopted. If relations with friends are managed poorly, they can be turned into rivals, and vice versa. Via Campesina must live up to the leadership role that its allies expect of it, and this is particularly true of the “social movements” process. Taking on a leadership role also means “caring for” ones allies when they have problems. There seems to be consensus that the Via Campesina needs to cultivate allies among other social movements and appropriate NGOs. In the case of governments (progressive and otherwise), political parties, and international agencies like the FAO, there is less consensus. There is some concern in the Via Campesina as to the appropriate kind of relationship to have with governments, even “friendly” ones like that of Venezuela, and an internal discussion is needed on this topic. In the case of Via Campesina leaders who are part of political parties and run for elected office, this can create a situation of divided loyalties. A discussion is also needed on this topic. In terms of relationships with agencies like the FAO, it seems that some members, particularly those in Africa, want a closer relationship, while others favor keeping them more at arm’s length. This yet another topic that will require internal analysis and debate. Finally, the Via Campesina needs a strategy, that incorporates its allies, against the criminalization of peasant movements that is taking place under the guise of the war on terrorism.

6.3 *Food Sovereignty Case Study*

Peoples’ food sovereignty is perhaps the most important new concept that has been developed and put forth by the Via Campesina. Arguing that the older concept of “food security” is weak in that it fails to address where the food comes from, who produces it, and how, Food Sovereignty centers upon the right of rural peoples to be able to produce food, on the right of all people have access to food, and on the right of people’s and nations to determine their own food and agriculture policies. It is a quite comprehensive concept, touching upon a range of issues, including, trade, dumping, national markets, agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, seeds, safe and nutritious food, etc. Food sovereignty is a positive alternative, and in terms of steps to achieve it, is closely related to Via Campesina’s call for “WTO out of food and agriculture.” Together, food sovereignty, and the critique and protest of the WTO, make up an sort of informal campaign of the Via Campesina on agriculture and trade.

The Food Sovereignty campaign has worked very well in terms of making the concept known both inside and outside the country. It is really useful to be able to propose a coherent alternative to the dominant model that we are criticizing. People are really beginning to take up the concept.[Latin America]

It has helped reach a lot of institutions and organizations, like NGOs, and consumers groups. It has given us a position of strength, people see the VC as a powerful force against the dominant model. It has really raised the profile of the VC.[Latin America]

This concept helped us advance rapidly. Looking back, we can see that it was a watershed concept. You can now speak of the “food security” era, versus the “food sovereignty” era. It is really a conceptual advance. [Latin America]

This conceptual clarity has truly changed the internal practices of the member organizations, for example, pushing us to move from a chemical type of farming technology toward sustainable agriculture. The food sovereignty concept drove this change inside the MST. It has taken our political struggles to another level, from theory through mobilization, to practical on-the-ground changes. We need a permanent process of progress on theoretical issues that can advance our political and our practical work. Food sovereignty has functioned as a call to return to our most basic values, and to struggle against mercantilism. [Latin America]

A few years after the founding of the VC, we had already developed the concept of food sovereignty, starting in Tlaxcala in 1996, based on accumulated experiences with struggles and impacts of the dominant model. At the beginning the concept was not so much “sovereign-tist” in the political sense of the word, but rather the idea was to stress the importance of food and of the right to produce food. But today, with the impacts of globalization so much clearer to everyone, yes, “food sovereignty” is also taken as a demand of people everywhere for their political rights, though it did not start out that way. [Northern Country]

The food sovereignty campaign has had a positive impact. Many local organizations now defend local food sovereignty. This has meant a focus on food quality, on marketing from local farms, and has sparked interest from FAO. It has generated local debate in many places, and gotten local farmers engaged. Given the impacts of the WTO, food sovereignty is the only clear alternative. Even though the WTO is still far off for American farmers, we are coming to understand food sovereignty. [Northern Country]

In terms of food sovereignty, we are pretty clear on the trade aspects. But we need to develop some of the other angles more, like local development, and consumers. I spoke a lot with the African consumers organization in Porto Alegre, and I think we can do a lot there. Food sovereignty can become a broad-based economic project, based on local markets, diversification of production, and access for consumers to healthy and cultural appropriate food. Our focus on the WTO is important and strong, but we also need to focus on local initiatives, and on alliances with other sectors in building broader movements. [Northern Country]

Before joining VC, our organization was just fighting for land. Through the VC we saw that food sovereignty was intimately connected to the land issue, that land reform is part of food sovereignty, and that we also have to fight to decide what we grow once we have land. This has given a big impulse to our organization. [Asia]

The Food Sovereignty concept has been very useful for us to help persuade people and policy makers that there is an alternative to WTO policies on food and agriculture. [Asia]

In Mozambique we are just now starting to work on the food sovereignty theme, so I can't say there has been a big impact so far. Until recently we had been “stuck” on the “food security” concept. But it is already clear to us that this has to be the alternative for peasants. Food security is a trap, because it doesn't address issues like cheap imports. We now believe that we can't have a clear strategy without basing it on the food sovereignty concept. It makes it clear that the struggle is much broader than to just achieve food security. For us, food sovereignty means “not just to have enough to eat, but it also means development that addresses the needs of rural people.” Because

“nobody is a prophet in their own land.” we are using the visits of VC leaders to have them speak in public about the concept of food sovereignty, to publicize it.[Africa]

The food sovereignty concept has helped us understand better what is happening in Mozambique, why we peasants cannot sell our surplus production any more. We learned how the big farmers introduced monoculture, and how we have been falling into the trap of contract farming. Under contract farming for export, which is the fashion in Mozambique today, what we are really doing is selling cheap labor, since we no longer produce food. We need an educational campaign in Mozambique about this.[Africa]

Food sovereignty implies economic policies, implies protection for domestic producers, implies putting a priority on self-sufficiency. I think we need to work on refining the concept in meetings and working groups, we need to make it more clear, more detailed, more understandable.[Africa]

Right since the beginning of the concept of Food Sovereignty, COCOCH has had a food sovereignty program. We have trained what we call “food sovereignty promoters.” They work in peasant communities on the production of local seed varieties; the promotion of local commerce and local markets; organizing against food imports and in favor of consuming Honduran food products; promoting the production of food; and working with farmers on organic and ecological farming practices. We also did a study of food aid in Honduras – which was very critical – and critiqued food aid as a way to get GMOs in, and to do dumping. We also did studies of GMOs and toxic farm chemicals. [Honduras group interview]

On the issue of CAP and the Farm Bill in the Food Sovereignty Commission, we have to get away from the situation where the main actors are the CPE and the NFFC. The problem is make the CAP/Farm Bill relevant to actors in the South, and that requires South participation in formulating the campaign on this issue. On the subsidy issue, we need a good comparison of what different countries do.[Technical Staff]

We need to think ahead and deepen our analysis for the next 10-20 years. That means operationalizing food sovereignty and thinking up the next concepts, who our allies will be, and what kind of relationships we will have with them. We must keep the food sovereignty concept from being coopted; to do this, we should try to concretize it more at the national and local levels.[Technical Staff]

Summary: While work still needs to be done on refining the food sovereignty concept, making it more clear, and keeping it from being coopted, it is also clear that food sovereignty has had a very significant impact on the thinking and actions of member organizations, and on other actors as well. Food sovereignty helps make the critical argument that there is an alternative to dominant WTO policies.

6.4 Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform Case Study

The Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform has, until now, been a joint effort of Via Campesina and the FoodFirst Information & Action Network (FIAN). The campaign seeks to confront the dominant, World Bank policies of market-led agrarian reform, while putting put the alternative of “genuine” agrarian reform. It also has a significant component based on rapid response to violations of the human rights of agrarian reform

activists, and frequently sends fact-finding missions to study the agrarian situations of different countries.

People now are saying: "Agrarian reform is making a comeback. It's back on the table." This is thanks to the VC and the MST.[Latin America]

The agrarian reform campaign has been very important for grassroots organizations, it has had a huge influence on our member organizations, on non-member peasant organizations, and on allies. [Latin America]

The agrarian reform campaign has been an important mechanism, by sending the missions or delegations, by which we lend real support to those of our members who are in really tough situations. It is a way to fight repression and the criminalization of rural struggle: groups now don't feel alone, they feel they "now have a place to go." [Latin America]

The exchanges on this issue have been very useful, as with Thailand, South Africa and Bolivia with the MST.[Latin America]

The exchanges have been fundamental on these issues.[Latin America]

The MST has been an inspiration to VC member organizations on all continents.[Latin America]

The agrarian reform campaign needs it's own symbols and mística, like the seeds campaign has.[Latin America]

We need to broaden our concept of agrarian reform to encompass the point of view of indigenous peoples' organizations, for example, taking into the difference between land and territory.[Latin America]

Thanks to the Global Campaign and FIAN we were able to get a meeting with the Supreme Court. We also gained more influence with government institutions. And managed to get the land struggle and land occupations much more visible to society. Until now, however, the Campaign has not be focused enough on the concrete needs of the organizations on the ground. It needs to better address the needs of the organizations to improve their struggle, and this means training, among other things. So far it has strengthened FIAN and the VC-International more than the national organizations. We also need a debate on how to relate to the World Bank. The VC position is no negotiation, but sometimes in the national context that organizations face, that is not an option. For example, we really had no choice but to participate in the "board" of a World Bank land program here in Honduras, that we didn't like, but we used it as a platform to criticize the program and denounce it. Does that mean we are violating VC principles? We need a discussion of this. Sometimes the VC discourse is very radical compared to the concrete situations of some member organizations. On the other hand, a problem with the Global Campaign is that it has been limited to the "letter writing" and "investigative mission" style of an NGO, FIAN, and thus limited in its ability to act more as a social movement. We believe the Campaign should have more prevalence of a social movement style with more militant actions. The Campaign should create a database and publish some kind of yearbook of agrarian conflicts around the world.[Honduras group interview]

The Global Campaign has not addressed land issues in North. For example, the problem of land speculation, and issues of land use, not just access. It would be useful to have a

meeting between VC and land use organizations (something like thus just happened in Spain).[Northern Country]

On the positive side, the Global Campaign and the VC have placed the issue of agrarian reform back on the table. We have a common position, and made the issue much more visible. I have some criticisms, though: the Campaign has been too latino, has not been sufficiently mobilizing, and needs to be more agile. It also needs to incorporate the issue of access to land in Northern countries. Rural Platform, a VC member in Spain, is now taking on this issue, and their work should be integrated into the Campaign.

In Asia, the agrarian reform campaign has not had hardly any impact. It has been very Latin America-oriented. Even so, in the case of FSPI, contacts with FIAN and LRAN via the campaign were quite useful.[Asia]

One problem with the Global Campaign has been the lack of definition between VC and FIAN. An issue is that “FIAN has its own style,” which is based on fact-finding missions, which are generally very influenced by local NGOs in the countries that are visited. Sometimes these NGOs can shift the focus onto small minority groups, so that the mission can actually miss the larger problem of generalized landlessness. The key hosts of the missions should be VC member organizations, and not NGOs. [Asia]

In the case of Indonesia, there was no follow-up to the mission, after a lot of resources and energy were expended. This should not happen.[Asia]

All missions need to have a plan for follow-up, a VC plan, not just a plan from FIAN and the Campaign. The missions are very useful, but the impact must be extended beyond the actual time spent in the country.[Asia]

Through the agrarian reform campaign we learned that is not just about land, that being without other resources is just like being without land. They are taking land away from us today in Mozambique, and we need to fight for respect for customary law, for our ways to collectively manage land.[Africa]

In the case of Mozambique, we already had a thorough agrarian reform. In order for the Global Campaign to help us, it must focus more on the challenge we are facing: “counter-agrarian reform” under neoliberalism. If the campaign keeps focusing on just being “against latifundio” (large estates), then it is less relevant to us. But, if they take up the issue of counter-reforms, which are not unique just to Mozambique, then it will become very relevant. Here in Mozambique we at UNAC fought for a new Land Law, and we won, for us it was a great victory recently when it was passed. We thought it would preserve the revolutionary agrarian reform. But then the World Bank advisors came to work with the government. They started looking for loopholes in the law, and starting backing their kind of land policies, policies for delimiting terrains, parcelizing collective holdings, and granting individual titles. The worst of all, was they took advantage of an anti-latifundio clause in the land law, a clause that was supposed to make it possible to expropriate idle land. The original idea was that land left idle by large landholders could be expropriated by the State and used for other purposes, like giving land to landless peasants. But the Bank advisors were very smart, they suggested that the clause be applied to the collective landholdings of peasant communities. Since the low crop prices caused by dumping of cheap food from South Africa means that many peasants cannot make a decent living here in Mozambique, a great number of them migrate to South Africa to seek work there. That means that now a part of the community land is not presently being used, because so many able-bodied young men are away. The Bank advisors suggested that the State could then expropriate the unused community land and make it available for other uses: like concessions to transnational corporations! In fact, the World Bank is promoting a new wave of land privatization here, and that needs to be

denounced. We think the Global Campaign for Agrarian reform needs to broaden its mandate, it needs to also be a campaign “in defense of land.” In defense of the land that peasants already have, and against the privatization of land.[Africa]

There are several challenges for the Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform, which are: to get it to take into account the land issue in Northern countries as well, to make it less focused on just Latin America, and add components on defense of indigenous territories and against the counter-agrarian reforms of neoliberalism.[Technical Staff]

Summary: The main achievement of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform to date has been to put this critical issue “back on the table,” the importance of which cannot be overestimated. Beyond this, the missions, while criticized for lack of planning and follow-up, have helped address situations of severe human rights violations. Compared to the work on food sovereignty, a lot more criticism was expressed concerning this campaign. Among the criticisms are that it has been too focused on Latin America, too focused on just ending latifundios (large land-holdings), and too focused on peasants (versus indigenous people). Some feel it has also been too limited to the kind of (less militant) actions favored by its NGO partner, FIAN. In the case of Honduras, there was also a call for an open discussion of the positions viz-a-viz dialog with the World Bank. Many suggestions were made, including calls to broaden the focus to include counter-agrarian reforms, concerns over access to land in the North, the issues of indigenous peoples, the need for more militant actions and greater agility, the need for identifiable symbols and *mística*, and the suggestion of a yearbook of land issues.

The following section summarizes an interview with those who coordinate the campaign, in which they lay out their plans to address these criticisms and suggestions, among others. The awareness of the problems is there, as well as plans to address them. The key here will be implementation and follow-up.

How the Global Campaign facilitation team proposes to “re-launch the Campaign:

Rafael Alegria-VC-Honduras, CCI Member

Fausto Torres, ATC-Nicaragua

Ramiro Tellez, ASOCODE-Nicaragua

ASOCODE and MST have been responsible for the Campaign for the past 6 years (since 1999). During that time the Global campaign has had some success in some cases, such as:

- Has managed to disseminate widely the critique of World Bank land market policies, and has had some influence on the Bank itself.
- Has made fairly effective denunciations of repression, and has had influence at the Human Rights Commission of the UN
- The missions to several countries have had important impacts and provided accompaniment (Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Guatemala, etc.)

But, the Campaign has not been as successful as expected. Some of the problems have been:

- Low level of visibility

- Lack of symbols and “mística” (in contrast to the seeds campaign)
- Very focalized in just a few countries
- It hasn’t been truly “global” (“stuck” in Latin America, mostly)
- It has lacked a clear political framework (but draft political principles are being circulated now)

There are a number of explanations for these problems. Among them have been differences with FIAN on the style of the campaign. FIAN is a human rights organization, and as such has certain ways of working, methodologies, while the VC is a social movement, a political organization, that has a different style. This difference appears for example with the denunciation of cases of repression. While the “natural” style of the VC would/should be to make the denunciation right away, accompanied by pressure tactics, to try to save as many people as possible, the “human rights” mechanism of FIAN is to require at least two independent sources of verification for each case, and their mechanism takes a lot of time and is not capable of rapid response or a large number of denunciations. In general, the VC has been somewhat limited in what it can do in the campaign, because of this relationship.

Another problem has been the lack of regional coordinators for the campaign, leaving it all in the hands of the Honduras office. This is a big part of the reason why it has been so “Latin American.” Ideally, we will now have each region designate a contact person/coordinator/liaison for the campaign.

As a result of all of the above, we have decided to “re-launch” the Campaign, with a new process. It will begin with Rafael and Egidio at the ICC, who have been tasked with re-orienting this new version of the campaign. The re-launch will be with a “new shine,” and new methods. How do we visualize the new Campaign?

- Permanent presence
- A strong mística to make it dynamic and motivate people
- With a functioning agrarian reform commission, like the commissions that the seeds and food sovereignty campaigns have.
- Accompaniment of concrete on-the-ground process in the countries
- A Yearbook of human rights violations, agrarian conflicts and problems, and advances (good agrarian actions, successful land occupations, etc.), published every year with a big publicity splash.
- Reference people/Coordinators of the campaign in each region, they will facilitate communications, coordinate activities and actions, and encourage the national organizations. The Campaign will become truly global, including work on land issues in the North.
- In the case of countries in the North, it will focus on both issues of access to land and on land use (speculation, tourism, competition between different land uses like industry, agriculture, tourism, urbanization, etc.)
- Regional meetings of the Campaign
- More emphasis on issues of gender and land, and much greater participation by women in the Campaign.
- Until now the FIAN-VC partnership has been a strategic partnership. Other strategic partnerships in support of the campaign will be developed, to expand its scope. One will be with the Land Research Action Network (www.landaction.org), to support Campaign actions in publicity, research, internal training, publications, and the web page.
- The Campaign will focus more on concrete things, and it will focus more on mobilization
- The Campaign will coordinate events, like a second global meeting of landless movements

- We will step our denunciation of violence against peasant movements
- Formation/training for VC leaders, including course/events and educational materials—the most important thing is the build capacity at the national level in the struggle for land, we will also facilitate exchanges, and missions. And we will strive to do a better job of follow-up on the missions – the lack of follow-up has been a persistent complaint.
- Research and analysis of critical issues
- Expand the critique of World Bank land market land reforms (land banks) to include counter-agrarian reform programs to parcelize communal lands and privatize them with individual titles. This will open a new line of confrontation with the Bank.
- This will be accompanied by an expansion of the Campaign to address the land versus territory issue raised by indigenous people.
- Also, issues of how land is used, the role of the peasantry, the struggle for land, and the struggles of land-based resistance (against free trade, against neoliberalism etc).
- A lot more publicizing of the critique and everything else
- Advances in alliances at the local, regional and international levels
- The many documents on agrarian reform produced since Tlaxcala (Bangalore, IV Conference, Havana, PoA, etc.) will serve as starting points for Campaign position papers (i.e., what is genuine agrarian reform?)
- Will publish writings of critical and mobilizing thinkers on land issues, people like Plinio Sampaio, Jacques Chonchol, Orlando Nuñez, the Cubans, etc.

In terms of financing, the campaign will be self-financed in the sense that it will not draw on the core budget of the VC, but will do it's own independent fundraising, obviously in coordination with the central VC fundraising so as not to step on each other's toes with the same donors.

6.5 Africa Case Study

The Via Campesina had only 1 member organization in Africa until the IV Conference in 2004. Now it has 5, and plans to grow more. This case study addresses the current state, and prospects and plans for growth of the Via Campesina in the Africa region.

What have we gained from the VC?

Ismael Ossemame, Executive Director, UNAC, Mozambique

Just to see that we were part of a global struggle, with comrades from around the world, gave us energy. We were not alone. We began to develop our own discourse, we gained self-confidence, we took on stronger language, we felt more sure of ourselves, we began to make basic demands in defense of peasant livelihoods, we began to critique the new economic model, we began to develop and put forth alternative proposals, proposals that were “more than just a return to communism.” We still had basically socialist principles, but now not the “obligatory” soviet-style model! We began an internal dialog about what kind of Mozambique do we really want. As a result, we became more visible on the national political scene. Our morale grew stronger with the conviction that peasants *can* struggle for better world, that we are not alone, we are part of a global struggle.

Through VC we were able to exchange experiences with peasant organizations in other countries. We learned so much. If you compare us today to how we were just 2-3 years

ago, you will see a huge difference. Before we didn't know what movements do, we only knew what NGOs do. But especially from exchanges with the MST in Brazil, we learned that we have a double role: both as a political movement with the goal to fundamentally change policies, but also working on the ground for concrete improvements in the lives of our members. We learned from the MST how to do both things, how to integrate both in a more effective kind of organization.

These days we feel a sort of "grand euphoria" from being a part of the VC, it has been like an epiphany for us, the light bulb finally being switched on. It gives us strength, it makes us more dynamic.

The seeds campaign has been very useful for us in Mozambique. By taking it on here, we have learned how to carry out a campaign, how to combine learning and advocacy, we feel like our young leaders are growing through this campaign of the VC.

Renaldo Chingore João, President, UNAC. Mozambique

At UNAC we have learned a lot from participating in the VC. Our exchanges with the MST, and exchanges with other organizations, have helped us a lot. Before we thought we were alone. But we have learned that just to struggle is not enough, we need to be more driven, we need to bring much more pressure to bear to change government policies.

We also learned re-value our peasant traditions of production, our own ecological production methods, and it has encouraged us to try to recover our peasant culture.

The VC message is now being heard in Mozambique. Peasants are hearing it, and NGOs and other civil society organizations are starting to pay attention. As a result UNAC is having more impact. Many people now see clearly that the "VC is the best path forward for peasants." The VC gives us the courage to put more pressure on the government to change its programs.

Mangaliso Kubheka, National Director of Organizing, Landless People's Movement (LPM), South Africa

The LPM is a young, still weak movement, and we are under a lot of attacks from the government and NGOs. Our relationship to the VC has been crucial. The VC has been the only "disinterested" party we can trust in our complex and difficult situation in South Africa, given that we cannot trust the government, the NGOs, or the donors not to have their own agendas.

Through the VC we have been exposed to other social movements, and we have learned a lot about how to fight for our rights. We have also learned about what to do with land once you have it.

We have received a lot of encouragement from the VC, encouragement in the fight for land and for food sovereignty.

The most important thing has been the opportunity through the VC to learn from the MST. We have learned how the MST works, how they are organized internally, and above all, we learned that they are "working, and not playing around."

The international solidarity of the VC has been very important to the LPM. At the WSSD, we were holding our first national LPM congress, with many problems. The international VC who were there helped a lot in mediating our internal problems. Also at the WSSD,

the VC gave us courage, and encouraged us to do our march even though the government was threatening us. It was critical that the government see that the LPM had international support. It is crucial that we have international partners, because the South African government is terrified of being exposed if they do something bad. For example, they fear international solidarity actions when they arrest LPM leaders. Our Minister went to Brazil and asked the Brazilian government about the VC and the MST, and was told they were strong and that they support the LPM.

Our experience in attending the WSF in Brazil with the VC taught us a lot. The most useful part was the VC meeting each night to collectively review the day. We really learned a lot in those meetings.

Ibrahim Coulibaly, President, National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOP), Mali

At CNOP we were attracted to the VC by:

- The VC's mass mobilization capacity
- The fact that members of the VC are similar to CNOP
- They work on the same issues and problems as CNOP
- Being part of an international movement can strengthen our struggle at home

Despite being a new member of VC, we have received the same full respect and rights as older members of the VC. We were last organization to join, yet we will be the host of the VC's Food Sovereignty conference. This makes us feel very empowered.

The VC is very democratic internally, and that makes us feel comfortable.

Among the benefits we receive from VC membership are:

- Information on international trade issues
- Food Sovereignty is proving to be the most useful concept for small farmers, and it has helped CNOP negotiate with the government of Mali. As a matter of fact, both Mali and Senegal have been able to get laws proposed that incorporate aspects of food sovereignty, laws which guarantee policy participation by peasant organizations and create at least the possibility of blocking imports. As soon as the law in Mali is passed (it seems it will be), we plan to "put it to the test."
- Contact with organizations in other countries, helping us to learn new tactics, get ideas for new strategies, and learn about new methods for struggle.

What do we want from VC in the future?

Ismael Ossemame, Executive Director, UNAC

It is not enough to improve our theoretical analysis. Our cadre need to know how to make a transition in practical terms. A transition toward a model in agreement with our new principles. Therefore, the most important thing we can get from VC is training and formation in political/organization for our cadre. Unless our leaders at all levels learn how to build a movement, they will fall back on old habits, old "NGO-style" habits. NGO-style personnel only have "classical skills," that means one course in accounting, one course in English, etc. Of course we need those skills as well, but if those are the only kind of skills we have then we will be left frustrated. That is just not "formation of cadre." True formation of cadre is the integration of politics with practice, that is what we need. OK, so an important part of what we need our people to learn can best be learned through

exchanges of experiences. But here the key is to design the exchanges so they are not mere “technical tourism.”

Renaldo Chingore João, President, UNAC

We need help from the VC on the topic of gender and rural women. Traditionally, women have played a key part on rural society, but we need training on how to improve the role of women in the movement.

We also need political training in how to achieve changes in government policies. We understand that neoliberalism is not just a problem in Mozambique, so we need to be more incorporated into the international struggle against these policies. And we need more training about transnational corporations (TNCs), and more work (campaigning) by VC on this issue.

Mangaliso Kubheka, National Director of Organizing, Landless People’s Movement (LPM), South Africa

We would like the opportunity to learn from other movements in the VC about their struggle for land. We would like to learn how they do land occupations, how they organize them, and then how they farm the land once they get it. Basically, we want more exchanges of experiences.

We also would like to receive internal training from the VC. We need to train our cadre and militants.

We desperately need more visits to the LPM by international leaders of the VC. This has two purposes: one is to show a public face of international support for the LPM, and the other to give us advice on internal organizational issues.

Ibrahim Coulibaly, President, National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOP), Mali

The VC seems to be afraid to have contact with decision-makers, but they are the ones who make the policies. I think the VC needs to develop a methodology for working with governments, and to influence their decisions and policies. In Africa, food sovereignty is a good entry point for dialog with governments.

The VC needs to improve it's ability to influence international organizations like the UN agencies. We need to have formal relations with these agencies, we need to have space within the. How can it that others who are not as strong as the VC have more influence? This means strengthening the IPC (International Planning Committee, which relates to FAO). The IPC is still little known in Africa, but we are working on that.

The VC is the most democratic peasant movement in the world. But there is a proverb, “we can’t be afraid of dying or rotting.” The VC must lose it’s fear of dialog with decision-makers. For example, ROPPA has quickly got governments to recognize them as interlocutors.

The Future of the VC in Africa

Diamantino Nhampossa, Head of the Cooperation Department of UNAC, member of ICC of VC

In Africa, we have special problems, which are a result of:

- The different types of colonialism we were subjected to (British, Portuguese, French, etc.), with their different methods of domination.
- Language issues: for example, in Mozambique we speak Portuguese, but we are surrounded by English-speaking countries, plus we all have our own different local languages, and then there is Francophone Africa.
- Poor communications systems, and very expensive where they exist; most African peasant organizations do not have telephones, internet, or transportation. Our organizations are isolated.
- In order to pay for communications and transport, you can only do it you have a funder, typically an NGO, who inevitably turns out to be an “interested party,” with their own agenda, and this impedes the development of autonomous peasant organizations. And you need autonomy in order to function as an active movement. Thus NGO dependency is a principle, continent-wide problem.

There are attempts to reduce the isolation of African organizations. And there are a lot of organizations, thanks to the early socialist ideals of independence. But, most of these attempts at integration and organization are instrumentalized by sponsoring NGOs, to reflect NGO politics. Typically, when this happens, the “President” of the peasant organization becomes the “Executive Director,” and the local structures languish in neglect. In Africa, a peasant organization needs to be very critical of NGOs if it is to achieve a breakthrough. The critical stance of the VC toward NGOs can help a lot in Africa.

UNAC was clear from the very beginning that it was critical to maintain our autonomy viz a viz our donors. This gave us more space, and that is almost certainly why we were the first African organization to join the VC.

Now if we look at Africa, we have another problem, which is IFAP (the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, which tends to organize larger, more commercial farmers, while the VC tends to organize smaller farmers). In Africa, IFAP has a strong financial base among the large, commercial white farmers in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. IFAP has dollars, and they are everywhere, trying to buy organizations. We have felt the IFAP pressure here at UNAC. But even though they have dollars to buy leaders by offering them high per diems and fancy hotels for trips, many small organizations do not end joining IFAP because their membership fees are so high (at least USD \$1,000).

Also, many peasant organizations in Africa are linked to governments, and the governments are committed to the IMF, World Bank, and the corporations. That means that many organizations have limited space to operate, and many leaders even receive government salaries. But, on the positive side, in Africa governments are very aware of the VC, and they see the VC as legitimate, even if they don’t agree with all of its ideas. They typically say, “they have a message that makes sense.” This perception of the VC as legitimate can help ‘free’ local organizations from government control, it can help create some political space.

We need to have a revolution inside peasant organizations, and that will start to happen, I am quite sure. A strong presence of the VC will be very important, I think it will facilitate the emergence of a movement for the autonomy of peasant organizations. The VC and UNAC always put forth the autonomy issue.

In VC-Africa, we are currently planning our strategy for each region within Africa, according to their specificities. The idea is to get one or two initial organizations in each region, who will then spread the word, attracting others. In West Africa, we are working inside of ROPPA, and we now have CNOP from Mali and CNCR from Senegal in the VC. In East Africa, we are going to have a member soon from Uganda. In Central Africa, we will soon have a member from Rwanda, and we are still working on North Africa (which more like Middle East/Mediterranean).

We need to organize a VC “dynamic” in Africa, organize conferences and visits to many countries, and then we will attract organizations in all regions. I don’t visualize it as being difficult to recruit members in Africa, as global dynamics have made all the peasant organizations feel left out of the political process. They will see the VC as the fight for access to their own domestic markets—the food sovereignty concept has a strong appeal in Africa.

VC-International can help us a lot, and I think the forthcoming Food Sovereignty Conference in Mali will have a big effect. It will attract a lot of organizations to the VC. Given the situation of government control and IFAP in Africa, it will be important for the VC to have a clear face in Africa. Visits from international VC leadership can go a long way toward that.

Mangaliso Kubheka, National Director of Organizing, Landless People’s Movement (LPM), South Africa

We need the VC to put energy and resources into building the Africa region of the VC. African peasant organizations need the clarity and strength in numbers and alliances that the VC can give us. When we are part of the VC, then governments say, “these people mean business, these people know what they want,” and they take us more seriously.

Ibrahim Coulibaly, President, National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOP), Mali

The upcoming Food Sovereignty conference in Mali will help a lot with outreach in Africa. We are currently strengthening the Africa regional coordination – we have 5 members now, and there are 12 more interested candidates already. The Mali Conference will be the chance to get to know each other better.

The VC was weaker in Africa than in other continents. There was no mechanism for reaching African organizations. There was little information on the VC available in Africa. IFAP is strong in Africa, and many organizations had never heard of the VC and thought that IFAP was the only international farmer’s organization.

ROPPA has existed in West Africa since 2000. It is a young, regional network of heterogeneous organizations. It is too early to really know what character it will finally take on. ROPPA stills needs to create its own identity. But thanks to ROPPA, we found out about Via Campesina.

There are a number of difficulties inside ROPPA. There are problems with NGOs, and with governments. There are problems with non-democratic countries. There is work to do inside ROPPA, and it will not make sense for VC to try to bring in ROPPA a an entire network.

I believe the strategy for the VC should be to attract national organizations, rather than networks like ROPPA. Our best strategy will be to get at least one initial member of VC in each region, then they will spread the word in their regions.

Africa will soon be the continent with the most members of Via Campesina. I firmly believe that. The VC got a late start in Africa, but it is really so much exactly what African peasant organizations need. It is just a question of spreading the word that the VC exists, and what it stands for, and then give some time, but not that much time will be needed. It will happen pretty fast.

Nico Verhagen, VC Technical Staff

Right now many organizations in Africa do not have very clear political positions, but that can change. For example, in the case of ROPPA, the more they interact with the VC the more they are radicalizing, this is very clear. Our strategy in Africa should be to open up spaces for dialog with VC, and invite everyone in.

Summary: The benefits that African members have received from being part of the Via Campesina closely mirror those reported in the general section above: empowerment, exchange, ideas and concepts, international solidarity, etc. Additionally, it is worth noting the potential of internal mediation that was mentioned in the South Africa case. African members want the Via Campesina to offer more international training and exchanges of experiences to member organizations, and for the Via Campesina to be more present with visits of international leaders. They want the Via Campesina to help them address gender issues, and, more so than in other continents, some want the Via Campesina to develop strategies to relate better to governments and international organizations. The Via Campesina faces some particular problems in Africa, which include the diversity of languages spoken, poor communications infrastructure, and a particularly heavy dependence of African peasant organizations on NGOs and governments. Nevertheless, the Via Campesina has a clear strategy for expansion in the African region, and there are good reasons to believe that quite a few new organizations will be joining from Africa.

6.6 Honduras Case Study

Felix Vasquez, General Secretary, COCOCH; Alicia Calles, General Secretary, Federation of Peasant Women; Marvin Ponce, Technical Advisor, COCOCH; Santos Aquileo Alvarez, ASOCODE; Rigoberto Perez, Finance Secretary, COCOCH; Carlos Mencias, International Relations Secretary, COCOCH; Dinorah Ruiz, Education Secretary, COCOCH; and others from COCOCH and COCOCH member organizations

What has the COCOCH gained from the VC, and from hosting the IOS of the VC?

The headquarters (IOS) of the VC has been here in Honduras for some time, under the responsibility of Central America and ASOCODE. ASOCODE delegated it to Honduras, where COCOCH has been the host or fiscal sponsor. There is some discussion now if ASOCODE will change it's name to VC-Central America, or stay as ASOCODE

Some benefits were received for being the headquarters. For example, some 27 people from Honduras have participated in VC international events and activities outside the Central American region. Many Honduran peasant leaders learned a lot through the VC, and this strengthened their ability to analyze policies and made them more effective at the national level. The Landless Movements summit in Honduras in 2000 included a visit to a large land occupation here (CREM), and the international visit had a significant positive impact in their getting title to the land. The annual April 17 actions of the VC have always been carried out in Honduras, and have helped make the peasant struggle more visible, helped with denunciations of human rights abuses, and supported land occupations. The VC has given us economic support for protests, events, and for work to design a proposed new law.

The VC facilitated travel and exchanges in the region, building regional solidarity against repression and in support of peasant demands and land occupations. COCOCH has learned a lot and grown a lot through the crises of ASOCODE, and the hosting of the VC. The VC helped a lot in mobilizing action against GMOs in Honduras. And in building mobilization against free trade agreements. Thanks to the VC, in Honduras we created a women's commission, which has really helped promote the participation of women in peasant organizations. Also, the VC proposed more work to incorporate young people, and we have worked hard to do that, with positive impacts, including a youth commission.

Problems and Challenges

We had a problem recently when we sent a delegate to a women's meeting in Germany. There were many problems with the NGO that organized the meeting, the VC women felt seriously discriminated against, and the agenda was very unfavorable to participation by women from grassroots movements. The VC was aware of the likelihood of these problems, and should have taken action to insist on the problems being addressed ahead of time, or should have pulled out. It put the women in a difficult situation, and since they didn't arrive early to plan the VC strategy for the event it was even worse. This is a lesson about better preparation for events.

We have seen a lot of financial resources pass through the IOS of the VC. Sometimes we feel that so much more than the whole COCOCH budget moves right by us, but there is no, or very little, financial support for COCOCH. We need money for legal costs of leaders who have been arrested, for legalizing land occupations, for many things. We feel there should be more support for concrete things like lawyers at the national level. With so much money passing through, we would like to see more transparency in terms of the budgeting process. We want to know how decisions are made on how to allocate funds.

We need to focus more on internal process. For example, we need to push forward the work of discussing and ratifying the internal by-laws of the VC. Every leader should know the strategic plans in each country and region. We need to better socialize information and participation on plans and budgets. Part of the problem is that the ICC members don't take their responsibility seriously enough to share the contents of the ICC discussions in their regions, to socialize the process.

The VC needs to take more seriously how to influence real policies in each country, and in international agencies. The VC should cultivate strategic allies in the FAO, IFAD, the EU, and other important donors that have some potential for supporting peasant agendas. We need to be more strategic and more sophisticated. The same goes for our work with progressive governments, and with progressives within governments.

A self-criticism is that we members of the VC need to assume greater responsibility for participating in the commissions of the VC. We can make the VC into the VC that we want and need. We should not be afraid to have open discussions and debates in the VC on delicate and important issues.

Summary: COCOCH in Honduras hosted the IOS of the Via Campesina for quite a few years, and the COCOCH received many benefits in terms of participation in international events, training, mobilization of key issues, and were strengthened in their ability to influence national policy. The example of the Via Campesina also led them to create national commissions on women and on youth. On the other hand, some resentment was created by seeing so much money pass through COCOCH for the IOS – more they said, than the entire COCOCH budget – while little or none ended up as financing for COCOCH itself. This leads them to want to have greater transparency and more input into decisions over budget allocation. They generally think that the Via Campesina needs to focus more on internal process, including finishing and ratifying its by-laws, having debate on delicate issues, and that member organizations need to take on more responsibility inside the Via Campesina. It is worth noting that when the IOS was earlier hosted by the CPE in Europe, certain friction and resentment was also generated. This may to a certain extent be inevitable with any organization that hosts the IOC, as there will always be a lot of funds flowing through, and more international attention may be paid to the Via Campesina than to the host organization. It will interesting to see if something similar occurs with FSPI in Indonesia, the new host of the IOS. Perhaps the Via Campesina should develop a strategy to minimize this type of problem.

6.7 Case Study of Countries with Severe Language Problems: South Korea and Thailand

As the evaluator, I became concerned by what I observed as a particular difficulty in participating effectively in the Via Campesina for those members organization that lack members of staff who speak any of the “big 4” languages of the Via Campesina: English, Spanish, French or Portuguese. Therefore I decided to add this special case study.

Mr. Park, General Secretary, Korean Peasant’s League, South Korea:

Via Campesina has really strengthened our struggle against the WTO and on trade issues. At KPL we have gotten a lot of solidarity from the VC. We feel that we cannot fight the WTO alone, and thus our alliances through the VC are central for us. We absolutely need to be part of this international network.

The Food Sovereignty concept has been very useful for us to help persuade people and policy makers that there is an alternative to WTO policies on food and agriculture.

We are not really aware of any other issue that the VC works on. Perhaps they can help us on the GMO issue as well. At KPL we face a severe language problem for our participation in VC. That is part of our larger budget problem that we have. We often feel completely lost in VC meetings because of translation problems, and we are feel frustrated and unable to participate fully because of language.

Vanida Tantivitayapitak, currently top leader of Assembly of the Poor (AoP)-Thailand

It is hard to translate the name Via Campesina to Thai, because of language problems. We use the word Chaona, which means people who sow rice, but also more generally, people who produce food, including farmers, fisherfolk and gatherers. Because the AoP is broader than just peasants (fisherfolk, urban poor, etc.), not all of the network relates directly to the VC.

We have loose coordination with the VC. In reality, we have a low level of knowledge of the VC because of our language problems. Typically, only the top leaders of each member group of the AoP know of the VC. And of course the representatives that Thailand has sent to the VC are not the only grassroots activists in Thailand. But still we feel that we must be part of the VC in order to have impact on international issues.

The mutual support aspect of the VC is very important. Training for leaders could be very useful, but it must always be done in ways that are sensitive to cultural and political differences. We have learned a lot about other movements from the VC, from events attended through the VC. And from translating some VC documents into Thai. But it is hard to connect the international to grassroots struggles. However, these struggles do need international support, in terms of denunciation of repression, and coordinated international protests, like against the WTO and free trade areas (FTAs).

We must find a way to address the language issue, to break the isolation of movements in countries like Thailand where most activists do not speak VC languages at all. Of course, this is a budget problem, so we need to seek resources to overcome this.

We have had an internal problem with Thai activists who have been assigned by the movement to international networks, in that they often ended up getting "lost" to the national movement. We need more accountability, rotation, and sending of different people. We have to do it, because the international link is important. We have learned very important lessons through VC from other countries, how not to repeat errors, about the importance to have autonomy for social movements. And of course, Brazil and the MST have had a huge impact here. The delegation that spent one month with the MST in Brazil has given tremendous inputs into our internal discussion in the movement here. We need more such linkages and exchanges.

Because of the difficulties with language, we are thinking of creating a national VC secretariat, with English-speaking staff, among the many Thai organizations who are VC members or wish to join the VC.

Group interview: Veeraphon, AoP; Bamrung AoP; Watcharee, Aop, Alternative Energy group; Pratin Wakawakayanon, Slum Network, AoP; Baramce Chaiyanrat, AoP, Land Network; Vattana Narokpradit, AoP; and several others, AoP and non-members of AoP interested in VC, like Northern Farmers Alliance.

Thailand has gained a lot from the VC. In fact, the big movement of opposition to Free Trade Areas (FTAs) grew out of this. The trip to Brazil has also stimulated us to see land occupations as a central unifying strategy of the Thai movement. We are producing a book and CD from the delegation. When people from our Forest Dwellers Network in AoP went to Brazil, they were shocked to learn that poor people everywhere face the same problems. They came back energized by feeling part of a global struggle.

We have some internal problems for participation, like getting people from the base to travel, and especially the language barrier and the cost of sending interpreters to every event.

Food Sovereignty has been taken up in a big way by the Alternative Agriculture farmer's network within AoP.

We need more exchanges, to get information and knowledge. We need ideological formation for leaders.

The Northern Farmers Network which is not yet in VC, has still benefited a lot from VC events, and will likely soon join.

Of course, the Thai network has many internal problems and this sometimes affects our ability to take advantage of everything the VC has to offer. For example the representatives often don't get enough support from our organizations to participate, so we are left on our own to find interpreters and organize everything. This takes time and energy away from local work, and soon we feel isolated from our own organization. We must find ways to overcome this. For example, this was very hard for Bamrung when he was on the ICC of the VC.

We need better mechanisms for follow-up, so it is not just ad-hoc. This may come if we create a national VC secretariat, which we are discussing.

Summary: While the member organizations in countries with severe language problems that impede communication with the Via Campesina (South Korea, Thailand) have gained many of the same benefits from the Via Campesina as listed by other organizations, and want many of the same things in the future, their participation has been greatly hampered by language. If these organizations are to more fully benefit from their membership, and the Via Campesina as a whole is to more fully benefit from them, new ways to deal with the language barrier must be found. A clear suggestion is to create national Via Campesina secretariats with English-speaking staff. This may or may not prove to be the solution, as it raises the issues of raising funds (perhaps this can be done by the national organizations on their own, with the "blessing," and perhaps guidance, of the IOS), and of the danger that these secretariats might metamorphose into NGOs that are divorced from their base organizations. Strategies will have to be developed to avoid falling into the latter "trap."

7 APPENDIX 2. Representative Comments from Allies of La Via Campesina

7.1 *What are the major accomplishments of Via Campesina?*

Articulating, publicizing and promoting the demands and positions of small farmers and peasants at the international level and to institutions that are anti-peasant, and in countering the forces of corporate globalization.

The VC strengthened the morale and sense of being part of an international struggle. The VC broke down the sense of being "isolated" and gave militants the sense that they have allies and supporters around the world.

The AoA is completely stalled in the WTO. Via Campesina must take credit for this. It has been an unbelievable feat.

The VC has created a pioneering global/transnational platform for discussion and coordination between national rural social movement organizations in different regions of the world.

The Via Campesina has the ability to mobilize farmers from around the world, with diverse backgrounds and cultures, to come together and fight for their rights at a global level, while also offering local, national and regional support. The VC has also enabled member associations to coordinate with other members from around the world that share similar concerns, problems and campaigns. Via Campesina has grown and developed in such a way that the peasants cannot be ignored, for example, at Cancun, and the fact that the AoA is stalled at the WTO. In addition, now the FAO is asking the VC to meet with them, which indicates that these global institutions have been forced to recognize VC and their demands. Via Campesina has made the invisible visible on a global scale.

The VC has mobilized peasants on an international level, which is important when targeting neoliberalism. It has now risen to become the major global mass movement against globalization. Although there are many mass struggles on the national level, I think the VC is one of the main networks that has actually maintained this orientation towards mass struggle as well as its internationalism -- basically, VC has become a major agent in resistance against globalization.

The VC has been able to give voice to the problems facing farmers; valorizing the work of peasants and showing the centrality of agriculture to culture, ecology, life; providing an analysis of the failures of industrial agriculture, and providing an alternative and a vision.

The principal achievements of the Via Campesina have been:

1. Building a world-wide movement of peasants
2. Establishing a reputation for integrity and political consistency
3. Carving out and expanding an important political space in the networks and campaigns formerly dominated by NGOs
4. Giving legitimacy to a radical pole in key debates on trade, development and alternatives
5. Giving voice to farmers
6. Inspiring the global justice movement

Fighting for a space where the voice of *campesinos* can be heard, and through which ideas and actions around common struggles can be developed. The organization serves

as a model of a certain kind of non-imperial democratic process. They also provide an organized counter-point to NGOs working around trade and agriculture.

The construction of a global peasant movement that is in tune with the rest of the altermundist movement.

The VC has showed that is possible to resist. That the word "NO" has force.

The VC has demonstrated to society that the countryside is the hope of the future and not a relic from the past.

The major accomplishments of Vía Campesina are:

- 1) helping create a movement of rural organizations in 90 countries that stands up for the *campesino* way of life and that includes small scale farmers from both the global south and the global north,
- 2) creating substantial resistance in host countries and at international forums to neoliberal policies of international financial institutions such as the WTO,
- 3) specifically helping raise the profile of farmers and the impacts of the WTO on farmers, that helped lead to the collapse of the talks in Cancún, México,
- 4) raising awareness worldwide on the impacts of the WTO on farmers, from the talks in Seattle up until the present,
- 4) creating a democratic governance structure for that movement, that respects gender equity and cultural diversity,
- 5) popularizing the concept of 'food sovereignty.'

- Putting the needs and priorities of peasant agriculture firmly on the "international policy map";
- Moving forward proactively to claim the legitimate space that peasant organizations should occupy, from NGOs, so-called "experts" and lobbyists;
- Demonstrating that peoples' movements and local organizations can and DO have sophisticated analyses, and are not simply "marchers on the streets;"
- Building internal analytical capacity so that they can advance an alternative vision for food, agriculture, agrarian reform and rural development; the Peoples' Food Sovereignty concept and framework exemplifies this;
- Building sufficient credibility among regional and international organizations, networks and coalitions so that many of them look towards Via for guidance and political direction.

In a short time of about 10 years, Via has almost become a political and substantive reference point for many regional and international groups working on food, agriculture and trade, and I think this is a very positive development; it means that more non-representative organizations (such as NGOs) are looking to Via for political direction, rather than trying to tell movements what to do... (many--like our favorite int'l NGOs--still do this, but there is a big change over the past 10 years);

The Via Campesina has broken the hegemony of the World Bank in the discourse over land policy. The VC has been effective at articulating the critique of, and challenge to, the market-based policies of the Bank, through the exchange of experiences and evidence among peasant organizations. With this space that has been opened at the international level, the national organizations have been developing and putting forth alternative land reform policies. The Global Campaign for Agrarian reform has been successful in supporting specific cases of land occupations.

7.2 *What are the major internal and external challenges Via Campesina must address now and in the future, and what recommendations do you have in this context?*

Internal:

New Members: It seems that the system in place for new members to join is too influenced by those groups within that country that are already members of Via Campesina. This problem is quite apparent in Asia. For example, in India, a higher caste of farmers joined Via Campesina, and now the lowest castes are kept out of Via Campesina. How to fix this? Have regional input of new members. Have referrals from NGO's that work with Via Campesina in the region. In other countries, such as Eastern Europe, where there are no VC members, it may be useful to consult with NGO's that work in those countries and that work with VC. What will Via Campesina do as it continues to grow?

Precisely because of the initial structure, there are key members that hamper the organization's reach within key countries. There isn't an easy solution to this problem, but it does need to be explicitly and openly addressed.

Although gender issues are dealt in VC as an international network, it has to be 'fed' better into national organizations - so that gender sensitivity can be adopted by national organizations. Particularly in Asia, peasants are unable to break away from patriarchal practices due to their 'closeness' to 'traditional values'. Also, VC, as one of the leading global agents, need to become a 'model' for the dialectics between national movements and international movements.

Via's working culture is a bit too "male;" in many cases it is outright macho; there is a spoken and written commitment to women's issues and gender equality, but it seems as though there is little idea in Via how to implement these commitments.

There has to be MUCH greater emphasis on women's issues and priorities; more women need to be in leadership positions; the working culture of Via needs to become less "male;" maybe some old fashioned "gender sensitization" sessions with the Via leadership and all the working commissions won't hurt... And Via can also reach out to people who work on integrating a gender equitable analysis into their work, and get tips from them on what to do about this situation.

Language: VC has done an excellent job with a number of languages and is very lucky to have the Secretariat speak so many languages. It still seems that non-English, Spanish, Portuguese or French speakers are not given the opportunity to participate as much as the others. They need to have specific time to respond and participate, once they are able to fully understand the situation and prepare a response.

The differences of perspective among organizations must be overcome and principles of being a space for the most marginalized organizations from countries around the world must be maintained. Raising the kinds of funding necessary to hold the regional meetings and to fund the work of the taskforces will continue to be a challenge, being careful not to compromise the work should funders attach strings to their financial assistance!

Via needs to do lots more work to build internal cohesion across its members; this also means that there must be space for members to argue and fight; and that members can be hauled up for what they do, who they associate with, etc. Sure this is not easy, but if

differences are not brought out in the open and dealt with in a mature and constructive way, they can fester and cause problems later.

There seems to be a dominant Latino culture in Via's working culture; there are of course good reasons for this and I love the Latino culture; but this leaves out people from other regions and cultures and weakens Via's position and profile in non-Latino regions; Via is not known much in Asia at all, and therefore carries little weight among peoples' movements; hopefully, with the int'l secretariat in Indonesia, there will be more attention given to Asian cultures and situations; but again, this needs to be handled carefully because Asia is full of sensitive regions.

Regarding Via Campesina and national organizations, the greatest impact is among leaders, cadres and militants, providing them with a broader conception of the struggle. The great mass of peasants respond almost exclusively to local-national struggles – and relatively few engage in the common international actions convoked by VC.

- Having members who are from such different political, cultural, social and economic backgrounds, and who can't even communicate with each other because they don't speak the same language;
- The differing situations in different countries means that members are likely to propose and want different solutions to the problems they face; this would become a problem if these solutions contradict Via's overall vision, goals and strategies;
- A N-S difference between its members; I would not use the term "divide" because its too strong; but the fact is that Via members from the N move in different spaces from Via members in the S, and many are in quite different economic and political situations; it may not be a problem until now, but it could be in the future; Via can't be a club of members with more or less the same resources and endowments... So it is possible that there will be competing interests and priorities in terms of actions, policies to be promoted, strategies, etc.
- Not sure that Via has in its members the most marginalized peasant groups, who most need the support of a group like Via.

In South Africa, the organization [LPM] only exists because of initial VC intervention. Internal and external problems have undone this work, and although the MST will assist the LPM, it seems as if this may not be enough to salvage the organization. If the wheels do come off the LPM, though, it will not have been for shortage of goodwill or support from VC. I suspect that it might have been important to undertake some sort of formation process earlier on, but I also suspect that the movement in South Africa wasn't in a space to receive that. There's a lesson for the future in this.

Internally, the Via Campesina needs to focus on deepening democratic decision-making at the national level, have greater presence of women as national and regional spokespeople, less personalistic leadership, and more internal political education of activists and militants. A key problem for the Via Campesina is the competition and intervention of Euro-US –funded NGOs working for the empire.

The Via Campesina should:

- Build up the organizations in more countries and in some of the countries they are in.
- Link up with and get more member organizations in countries where VC only is linked to [political] party-led farmers' organizations.
- Link the policy work with the grassroots organizations and concrete work on the grassroots.
- Concretize and develop the concept of food sovereignty.
- Highlight more the fight against hunger and poverty - and the importance of food sovereignty in this context

The internal challenges are the dynamic among the members, how to strengthen and link even closer among the members, not just only on call activities, but on normal work and activities, at national and regional plans. So strengthening the members, build up supporting system and follow up activities in each countries and regional is important.

Internally, the Via should:

- Strengthen and increase the number of its cadre;
- Increase and strengthen it's presence in Asia and Africa;
- Develop a long-term financial strategy that makes it more independent of specific donors.

External:

A challenge is getting Via Campesina's message to the media. In some countries, they are very successful, others, they are not. Better coordination with NGO's media resources COULD help.

Externally, the Via should:

- Increase it's ability to pressure and influence key international institutions.
- Continue it's strategy of alliances to reinforce it's impact.
- Develop more concrete proposals for alternative frameworks.

The external challenges are more on alternative proposal from Via Campesina. Making the alternatives worldwide to work with and to make it clear with other sectors what is the proposal for the betterment of peasant sector and sustainable world for all sectors.

Recommendations:

- Much more public education among the "unconverted" about the agrarian crisis, privatization, neo-liberalism, impacts of war and assault on rights, criminalization of communities struggling for their rights, violence, etc.; the public has to be conscientized;
- Build legal support for peasant and indigenous communities fighting for their rights;
- More considered and elaborated policy proposals as alternatives to the current systems and regimes;
- Greater engagement with selected national, regional and international forums where Via's visions and policy proposals can be advanced;
- More on-the-ground work on alternatives that can serve as demonstrations that alternatives to the current regime and system exist, work and are very viable;

The Via Campesina should increase the number of its members who are able to represent the movement at the international level.

The Via Campesina should:

- Try to strengthen the regions so they can go to different countries to link up with more organizations, develop relationships etc,
- Put weight on the preparations for the Mali conference so the outcome will be as good as possible. Prepare national seminars, etc. ahead of time, involve scientists etc.
- Develop a "program" to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty
- Discuss if VC should establish some sort of support group for funding etc (not only for the Mali conference).
- Highlight examples of links between macro and micro levels in their work, and also in policies.

The Via Campesina should:

- Deepen the training, capacity for action and mobilization, and leadership among its member organizations.
- Develop leadership and capacity for direct interlocution with governments at the national and international levels, and with multilateral institutions, in order to avoid being "substituted for" or poorly represented by NGOs.
- Carry out campaigns of massive direct action and civil disobedience that carry the "hand to hand" dispute over territory directly to the transnational corporations.

The Via needs to manage to forge common alternative proposals that go beyond the slogan. VC could lose its credibility if it only says "WTO out of agriculture". More time should be spent on a real alternative agenda that would be drafted and supported by the bases.

For Korea, the activities of the VC strengthened the capacity of mobilization and resistance by peasant organizations and other sectors, since the Korean organization has made global links through the VC, which it lacked before. The VC has provided a broader perspective - internationalist and quite political - for national movements, which in turn as enabled them to mobilize better with a more clear view. The alternatives proposed by the VC have also stimulated other movements in the sense that the matter of food sovereignty is not merely an issue for peasants but an issue that has to be taken in as a universal one - right for people to access food, thus providing an important point of solidarity with other movements.

The VC has successfully created a body of critical thought concerning the experience of market-based land reform by the World Bank, but I don't know if they have gone any farther than that.

One of the main limitations I have observed is that the VC approach to the World Bank's land reform strategy was based, either implicitly or explicitly, on two assumptions: 1) the WB always does the same thing in all countries and 2) an MST-style approach/response makes sense in all countries. Both of these assumptions are open to question. More generally, I do not see enough clear definitions, in concrete, nationally-specific terms, of what "counts" as a "genuine land reform." The VC must do a better job of defining this.

7.3 What is your evaluation of how Via Campesina works with non-member organization allies, and what recommendations do you have in this context?

It depends a lot on who from Via Campesina, and which non-member organization! Sometimes VC can seem a bit sectarian and elitist (we ARE the movement!) and not very good at building alliances which could support and promote their positions. For example, there is an ongoing debate in the WSF international council about the frequency of the WSF. VC is strongly in favor of every 2 or 3 years, but has not (as far as I know) made any efforts to discuss its position with others who are politically in accord with VC, but who think, for other reasons, that the WSF should be every year. I am not taking a position on this but giving an example of a situation when VC comes across as being a bit isolated, arriving at the table with a position without discussing with possible allies beforehand, and so on. On the other hand, my experience of working with VC during the social movements assembly in Mexico in 2001 was fantastic; the experience of working with them during the WSSD in Johannesburg was also great; and they are very engaged and committed to the social movements assemblies during the WSF, and so on.

In OWINFS, VC plays a very important role in terms of maintaining a space for movements, holding the WTO out of agriculture position, and in limiting (through process and politics) domination by Northern NGOs. In sum, VC brings a tremendous legitimacy to the networks and processes in which it engages, however:

1. I would be happier if they were more engaged in the WSF processes
2. they need more people who can represent them at the international level.

The Via should stress building stronger coalitions in favor of food sovereignty at the national level, which include other sectors, such as consumer groups, trade unions, environmentalists, urban poor, etc. I think it's very important to start working with trade unions and others on some of these issues so that it's not seen as a "farmer's issues" but rather something that effects the whole society.

The Via Campesina appreciates the work of others, is reliable in its commitments, and, thanks to its frankness and political clarity, all of its allies know where they stand. The Via has a nuanced strategy of alliances, such that it distinguishes between different types of alliances, and knows what it can expect and ask of different allies. A suggestion is to strengthen the exchanges and alliances with indigenous peoples' movements, Dalits, and other ethnic and racial groups in the countryside. Relations with urban movements could also be strengthened. The coordination between the thematic commissions of the VC and different allies could be improved.

There is a lack of clarity in terms of what is the role and contribution of allies, why were these allies chosen? Is there a specific contribution that Via Campesina is seeking or is it because the allies have had similar viewpoints or positions on issues as Via Campesina or providing support?

- The Via often takes a long time to respond to campaigns and actions initiated by non-member allies; while the long time frame needed to respond may be a function of Via's internal organizational constraints, it nonetheless makes Via miss important moments in broader mobilizations; perhaps Via can streamline its internal decision making processes to respond more promptly to such campaigns and actions, and thereby also participate in them;
- I don't see the Via reaching out to workers' groups, farm labor groups, indigenous peoples' groups, women's organizations, peace/anti-war groups, peoples' health networks, anti-dam movements, anti-debt networks, etc.; all these types of movements and groups can be important allies for Via's struggles and visions;
- The Via needs to broaden the types of organizations, coalitions and movements it collaborates with, and also needs to act in solidarity with a number of other movements; sure, this will be difficult because the interests/demands of some struggles and Via members may clash, but efforts need to be made nonetheless to build bridges and engage in the struggles of other like-minded movements and coalitions.

As far as I've seen, the organization has a level-headed approach to working with organizations in certain key areas (especially trade). In other, broader food-sovereignty contexts, there seem to be weaker links, because V.C. is a peasant-based organization. Potential allies working on food systems, nutrition/health and local governance aren't aware of V.C. A more explicit demand from VC to its existing allies to broker appropriate connections might be an idea to pursue.

Unlike other organizations that have a strictly utilitarian view of alliances (for self-benefit), the VC builds alliances without any egotism, for the inherent value of the alliance and that which can be obtained through collective action. In this sense, the Via values its allies for who they are, for what they contribute to the struggle and to collective construction,

more than for what they contribute to the Via itself. The Via is generous with its allies, in every sense.

Summary: The allies of the Via Campesina share a view of the accomplishments of the Via that is very similar to that of the Via's member organizations. Both feel that the Via has successfully "conquered" space at the global level for peasant demands and viewpoints, that member organizations have been empowered and given a voice, and that the Via has put forth critical new concepts like food sovereignty. Among other success mentioned by allies are the stalling of the agriculture negotiations at the WTO, the mobilization capacity of the VC, the respect shown the VC by international agencies like the FAO, the construction of a global movement, and breaking the hegemony of the World Bank in the discourse over land reform.

The allies share a view of the internal challenges the Via faces that is also very similar to that of the Via's member organizations. Both feel that the Via has to deal with the problem by which old members sometimes prevent new ones from joining, that weak organizations need to be mentored and supported, that the special language problems of certain countries must be addressed, that leadership training and strengthening of member organizations is critical, as must the needs of indigenous peoples, and that the Via must work to overcome divisionism among its members. The allies also agree that the internal culture has sometimes been too Latin American, but that this will improve with the move of the IOS to Indonesia. There are concerns about the extent which more marginalized peoples are represented in the Via, and a caution to watch for North-South differences. The allies seem much more concerned about the "male-dominated" internal culture of the Via Campesina, and the need to work to make gender parity more than just a superficial reality.

In terms of the external challenges the Via Campesina must face, the allies of the Via stress the need to more effectively reach the news media, to develop capacity to influence governments and international agencies, to develop more concrete proposals for alternative frameworks, to do more public education and outreach to other sectors of society, to increase the number of its members who are able to represent the movement at the international level, and to improve the work of the Global campaign for Agrarian Reform.

The allies of the Via Campesina share a generally favorable evaluation of the how the Via works with its allies. Overall, they feel that the Via is respectful, uses allies effectively to strengthen the struggle, and has a nuanced approach that sees different allies differently. There are some concerns with regard to how allies are chosen, about the WSF process, the extent to which the Via may be a bit "sectarian" in its selection of allies, and the Via's generally long response time, due to being a grassroots organization. The allies believe that the Via urgently needs to build alliances with other sectors, such as workers' groups, farm labor groups, indigenous peoples' groups, women's organizations, peace/anti-war groups, peoples' health networks, anti-dam movements, anti-debt networks, etc.

8 APPENDIX 3. Comments by Organizations Targeted by the Via Campesina

According to the WTO representative, who asked to remain anonymous:

We know the VC, it is well known for its position in the world of trade and in the WTO. The VC is very present and very visible. I don't know if that translates into impact inside the WTO, but for individual countries and their negotiating positions, the VC does play a role. The VC does analysis on these issues and that is very visible.

In September of 2003, the VC led the protests against the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Cancún, Mexico, as part of its work on Food Sovereignty and trade. Many remember this ministerial for its spectacular collapse, and for the self-immolation of South Korean peasant leader Lee Kyung-Hae, who was part of the VC delegation. The official commented that:

We met Mr. Lee earlier in Geneva, for an hour, and he explained what he wanted, though it was difficult to understand without translation, as his English was limited. For us his readiness to take his life came as a shock. He had been here in this very hallway, and later he committed suicide, he stabbed himself and died. I don't see it as a Via Campesina act, but rather as an individual act. Obviously there are cultural differences, in my culture we cannot go as far as that.

When asked if the VC had any impact on the outcome of Cancun, the WTO official said:

Indirectly they may have. They have clear positions, and maybe some countries picked up some Via Campesina positions. In the agricultural arena, there was an influence, with a concerted effort by different NGOs, with specific positions, and some countries took them on. Whether specifically it was the VC or not that had the influence, I don't know, but they have been very active, and visible, and they have visible spokespeople. But of course their exact impact is very difficult to measure in my technical position.

An FAO official, who also asked to remain anonymous, was asked what, if any, have been the impacts on FAO of Via Campesina's efforts to promote the concept of "food sovereignty." The official responded:

This seems quite positive. The move from food security to food sovereignty is an important one and, although it is not yet completely "officialized" at FAO, but the fact that it is circulating in-house is a sign of "respect" upon which the international community, CSOs, and FAO can possibly build on.

The market-based land policies of the World Bank (WB) have been a key target of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform. We interviewed John Garrison, Senior Civil Society Specialist at the Bank, about the impact of the VC:

I think the VC and other civil society organizations (CSOs) have had a positive impact on the World Bank. The Bank did not support agrarian reform programs 10-15 years ago, and now it is doing it, because the Bank listens to groups like the VC, that say that without distribution of land and resources, there cannot be sustainable reduction in rural

poverty. The VC and other CSOs have helped governments and MDBs focus on rural poverty and show that land ownership is very important.

The VC is a legitimate and representative rural social movement. They seem to be very well organized. Some of the WB staff seem to think that the VC is too critical of Bank policies in the area of agrarian reform. I was in a debate on agrarian reform in Washington that was organized by VC and other CSOs, and the debate was quite intense with CSOs expressing many reservations about the Bank's work in rural development and with agrarian reform.

The VC critique of market based approaches, of giving poor people credit to buy land, is that it undermines the objectives of agrarian reform. They feel that land is a right, and it should be just distributed to small farmers. But our belief at the Bank is that somebody has to pay for the process of distributing land, either the small farmer through a loan, urban taxpayers through cross-subsidies, large landowners, or somebody else. The cost is not only the land, but the assessment, title, production investment, environmental protections, etc. There has to be a financing plan for that. Farmers who buy land have more ownership of that land.

We are aware of the alternatives being proposed by the VC, but there is a basic misunderstanding. There is a lack of agreement, but also a basic misunderstanding. For example, in Brazil land reform is a very high priority for the MST, and it has become a priority for the Bank which has financed a large loan of some \$150 million. I think the Bank and the MST should be allies to promote agrarian reform. But the MST approach to agrarian reform is to rely solely on expropriations, which many see as slow and cumbersome. The government has also opted to pilot a program which provides loans to small farmers, coupled with grants to promote agricultural production and community development, and for this it sought a loan from the World Bank. The MST has an ideological restriction against carrying out agrarian reform through this other approach of purchasing rather than expropriating land through loans to small farmers. It is a difficult and contentious debate which is occurring within the Lula government which promotes both approaches to agrarian reform.

In order to carry out the agrarian reform pilot, the Brazilian government and the Bank partnered with CONTAG [note: not a VC member]. Through interactions with CSOs such as CONTAG, the Bank has changed. It has become more grassroots-oriented, seeks more participation of local CSOs, and is more demand driven. In our multi-state rural development program we have been funding for two decades in the Northeast of the country, we used to give money to state governments and we found that the money got spent in the state capital via the bureaucracies. Now it goes more to the community, because we work at the municipal level and a government-citizens committee decides who is going to get the funds, be it for rural electrification, installing manioc processing houses -- "casas de farinha"--, service delivery, or community development. We learned that you have to have the beneficiary as part the decision making process concerning who and for what the money is going to be spent. I don't know how many VC-affiliated local groups are involved in these efforts in the Northeast, but there is a growing number of state-level and local CSOs which actively participate, from helping to manage the programs to receiving the funds, in these Bank-funded rural poverty reduction programs. Even the MST, while at the national level it won't dialogue with the Bank on agrarian reform, at the local level, MST-affiliated groups are working with local governments in a more dialectic way.

I would hope that the VC can see the Bank as an ally to promote agrarian reform rather than an opponent, since our ultimate objective is to promote agrarian reform and promote workers rights. I think that often the VC doesn't know in detail what the WB really does and the types of programs it supports around the world. While it is relatively easy to find

problems, or cases where things went wrong, the greater challenge is to try to find common ground and forge alliances in order to find ways to reduce rural poverty and promote sustainable agrarian reform.

I hope that the VC will have more dialogue with the Bank, because we could be allies while still maintaining our mutual independence and critical perspectives. The rural development strategy the Bank launched some 3 years ago, for instance, incorporates a lot of the ideas and vision of the VC. The idea that you have to empower the rural poor, that peasants need access to markets, these have been indirect influences from the VC. Maybe the VC doesn't share this perception, but we think our policies have changed. That doesn't mean that in every country, the Bank is consistently implementing this strategy, but if you look at our policies overall, we have indeed changed, and there are increasing opportunities for synergy.

The VC has had a number of exchanges with FAO in which agrarian reform issues have been addressed, and the FAO and the VC are presently in conversations about an upcoming ministerial meeting of governments, on agrarian reform, to be held in Brazil in 2006. The FAO official who was interviewed, had the following to say:

The VC is seen in FAO as an important, well organized institution, advocating very strongly in favor of agrarian reform. Sometimes it is too much Latin America oriented, with limited concerns for other regions. We feel that their lobbying activity is important to keep agrarian reform on the agenda, however, it is a bit too borderline when considering possible "convergences" between FAO and them. We think that more pragmatism is needed by the VC to allow us to join at least part of our efforts in this complex area. Frankly speaking, the impression is that the VC, more than being a lobby in favor of agrarian reform, it has been a lobby against the World Bank. It is a matter of balance in the way these issues are presented. Agrarian reform is such a complex issue, that limiting the discussion to one single "question" might be wrongly appreciated. The reason for that is obvious: there are persons within FAO who are in favor of a serious revitalization of this concept in our work, but, for institutional reasons, we can hardly criticize a sister agency, and the stronger the critique, the less the "options" we have to maneuver. So, redirecting the Campaign a little bit in order to identify a series of other potentially very strong issues, more in the pro-active sense, rather than only in the negative way, could be useful.

However, it should also be said that there are sectors of FAO who simply prefer to ignore the VC, because of their "strong" advocacy role. However, if a VC "partnership" with FAO is considered, with acceptable common objectives, there is still good room to maneuver and work together.

Has the VC had an impact on FAO policies? It is very difficult to answer this question. At least, there is mutual respect with diverse opinions, on the whole issue of agrarian reform in general. The limited results, from our side, are the product of forces (VC and some within FAO) who feel in a similar way, but are not able to find a minimum common platform of action. The intention to direct the future International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in this direction is a clear signal of our willingness to go in the direction of creation of a platform of dialog, mutual understanding and learning processes, and a serious revitalization of the agrarian reform issues in a system perspective, and to support more progressive methodologies, operations and policies within FAO and with our government and non-governmental partners.

Finally, though not interviewed directly for this evaluation, it is quite clear that the Via Campesina's positions on food sovereignty and agrarian reform have had a significant positive impact on the work of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights on the Right to Food, Mr. Jean Ziegler. Some representative excerpts from his report of the Right to Food at the Fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly (2002), follow:

...Free trade and biotechnology by themselves are unlikely to solve the problem of world hunger and can sometimes be obstacles to the realization of the right to food, as the Special Rapporteur has explained in previous reports. Free trade and biotechnology were both bitterly criticized by the non-governmental organizations and social movements from all around the world gathered at the civil society meeting NGO/CSO Forum on Food Sovereignty, which was held in parallel with the official 2002 Summit in Rome. These social movements and non-governmental organizations put forward alternative potential policy options, including small-scale farming, local production, agroecological methods and the concept of food sovereignty. The Special Rapporteur believes that these proposals must be given greater attention at the international level if the question of hunger in the world is to be seriously addressed. He advocates the concept of food sovereignty as defined by the NGO/CSO Forum on Food Sovereignty.

...The Forum defined the concept of food sovereignty with a focus on several key elements. These include promoting food production for domestic and local markets using agroecological peasant and family farming; ensuring fair prices; ensuring access to land and other vital resources; recognizing women's role in food production; access to resources; promoting community control over productive resources; protecting seeds from patenting; encouraging a moratorium on genetically modified crops, given the risk of affecting genetic diversity; and increasing public investment to support the empowerment and productive activities of families and communities.

...If hunger and chronic malnutrition in the world are really to be addressed, and States are to meet the commitments they have made, this alternative model provides important guidance. The Special Rapporteur will examine the concept of food sovereignty in greater detail in his upcoming reports. It is clear, however, that putting people's right to food and food production first will be fundamental if hunger is to be reduced. Access to land, one of the fundamental components of this model, is examined in the section III below.

...The Special Rapporteur believes that access to land is one of the key elements necessary for eradicating hunger in the world. This means that policy options such as agrarian reform must play a key part in countries' food security strategies, in which access to land is fundamental. Too often, agrarian reform is dismissed as an outdated and ineffective policy option, but the evidence does not bear this conclusion out.

...Hunger, like poverty, is still predominantly a rural problem. Of the 1.2 billion people who suffer from extreme poverty in the world today, 75 per cent live and work in rural areas.¹⁹ Many rural people suffer from hunger because either they are landless, they do not hold secure tenure or their properties are so small that they cannot grow enough food to feed themselves. Approximately 100 million agricultural households, or 500 million people, are landless in less developed countries. These 500 million landless people are among the poorest on earth. They constitute high proportions of the agricultural population of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, and several other countries. Most of these people work as tenant farmers or agricultural labourers, lacking ownership or owner-like tenure on the land that they farm. Tenant farmers usually have to pay high rents and have little security of possession from season to season. Agricultural labourers

usually work for extremely low wages and often have to migrate from one insecure, informal job to another.

...Rural poverty is often closely linked to extreme inequality in access to land. Access to land is often fundamental for ensuring access to food and to a livelihood, and therefore freedom from hunger. Yet in many countries, land ownership is highly concentrated. In some cases, part of this land may even be left unproductive. In Brazil, for example, 2 per cent of landowners own 56 per cent of all private land, and much of this land is unused, or used minimally as pastureland. Although land concentration is often the result of the historical legacies of colonialism, slavery and exploitation, these historically produced inequalities often persist today, given the resistance of landholding elites to redistribution and agrarian reform programmes. The persistence of extreme concentration of land ownership and high levels of inequality has particularly damaging effects in most of the developing countries, where land (together with labour) is the fundamental factor of production.

...Agrarian reform programmes, when they have contributed to genuinely transformative change, have been very successful in reducing poverty and inequality in many countries. Agrarian reforms in Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan Province of China, China and Cuba are recognized to have had a significant impact on reducing poverty and hunger and increasing economic growth. Agrarian reforms have proved most successful when land reform radically reduces inequalities in land distribution and is accompanied by sufficient access to other inputs, and when political obstacles to reform have been overcome. Secure property titles, accurately maintained land records, and efficient and fair land administration bureaucracies that are adequately funded and not corrupt have also been essential elements in successful reforms. It is also clear that in agrarian reform, land in itself is not enough. Often the quality of land is just as important for a viable livelihood as the quantity. Access to land must also always be accompanied by sufficient access to other inputs, including water, credit, transport, extension services and other infrastructure.

...While the “death” of agrarian reform was proclaimed in the 1970s, and few efforts were made to conduct land reform programmes in the 1980s and early 1990s, more recently land reform has come back onto the international agenda. Social movements have been a key force behind this re-emergence of land reform. As FAO points out, “first and foremost land reform is back on the agenda because rural populations have put it there”. Landless movements across the third world, and highly visible land conflicts in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Indonesia and elsewhere, have brought land reform back to centre stage. Non-governmental organizations fighting hunger, such as Food First and the Food First Information and Action Network, argue that “access to farm land is a fundamental human right for rural peoples, and that grossly inequitable distribution of land is one of the most common underlying causes of poverty and destitution in much of the world”. A report of FAO recognizes that there are now “new demands on the social contract between rural citizens and their government — the demand for rights. ... Indeed, most of the land reform movements generated at the grass roots are an assertion of the rights already guaranteed in national law and legislation, but never effectively applied.”

A close examination by this evaluator of the documents cited by the Special Rapporteur in this report revealed the central contributions of the Via Campesina to his thinking. In the 2003 Report submitted to the Human Rights Commission by the Special Rapporteur, we can see similar influences:

...FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD

...Believing that the inequities of the global agricultural trade system are a disaster for food security, particularly for poor countries and poor people, civil society organizations have questioned the whole paradigm of free trade in agriculture. Today, civil society organizations are calling for a new focus on “food sovereignty” that challenges the current model of agricultural trade, which they see as cultivating an export-oriented, industrial agriculture that is displacing peasant and family agriculture. In the light of the Cancún debacle, it is now imperative to examine and understand this emerging concept of food sovereignty. This chapter therefore examines the concept of food sovereignty, what it means and why it has emerged. The concept of food sovereignty is not the same as the concept of the right to food, but there are some close links between them.

... So what does food sovereignty mean? So far, there are few academic studies or systematic papers on the concept of food sovereignty. Rather, it is a concept still in the process of being conceptualized and iteratively debated amongst civil society organizations, after first being proposed by the global social movement of peasant and family farmers, Via Campesina.

For Via Campesina:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant; [and] to restrict the dumping of products in their markets.”

Via Campesina had originally developed and introduced the concept in 1996, introducing it into the discussions at a parallel meeting held by NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) during the 1996 World Food Summit. Since 1996, the concept has gained support from other farmers and civil society organizations, both in the South and in the North. During the World Food Summit: five years later in 2002, a NGO/CSO “Forum on food sovereignty”, attended by representatives of over 400 civil society and farmer organizations, defined the concept of food sovereignty as:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.

“Food sovereignty means the primacy of people’s and community’s rights to food and food production, over trade concerns. This entails the support and promotion of local markets and producers over production for export and food imports....

...Food sovereignty does not rule out subsidized protection, but explicitly establishes a corollary right of importing countries to impose protective tariffs to protect themselves against dumping of any subsidized exports. As has been noted “one of the goals is to stop the race to the bottom in terms of price and the resulting disintegration of rural communities” in both the North and the South. Subsidies are therefore permitted, but only to support small farmers producing for domestic markets and not for export. Under the logic of food sovereignty, subsidies should never be permitted to large-scale farming or the export sector.

... Food sovereignty emphasizes locally-oriented small-scale peasant agriculture producing for consumption inside the country, as opposed to the current model of export-oriented, industrialized agriculture. CSOs believe that the export-oriented model is

forcing the industrialization of the food chain, precipitating the decline of small farms and peasant farming, in the North as well as in the South, to the benefit of the large agribusiness corporations. Millions of farmers are losing their livelihoods in the developing countries, but small farmers in the northern countries are also suffering. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, 20,000 farm workers left agriculture in the year 1999, allowing ever-greater concentration of the land.²⁴ The same is happening around the rest of Europe and in the United States. Food sovereignty suggests that small-scale farmers have much in common, both in the North and the South. Food sovereignty is an attempt to find common ground and resolve the opposition that has been created through the issue of subsidies, by recognizing that subsidies have primarily benefited larger farmers and agribusiness corporations.

...Food sovereignty also embodies a call for greater access to resources by the poor, especially women, challenging what is perceived as a growing concentration of ownership of resources. Food insecurity, like poverty, is usually the result of a lack of access to productive resources, rather than the overall availability of food. Food sovereignty calls for equitable access to land, seeds, water, credit and other productive resources so that people can feed themselves. This implies challenging existing relations of power and distribution, through for example, engaging in agrarian reform. It also implies challenging the increasing concentration of ownership of agricultural trade, processing and marketing by transnational agribusiness corporations through, for example, improving competition law (anti-trust law) at a transnational level and through the prohibition of the appropriation of knowledge through intellectual property-rights regimes. It calls for recognition of communities' rights to their local, traditional resources, including plant genetic resources, and for protection of farmers' rights to exchange and reproduce seeds.

...Finally, the concept of food sovereignty also recognizes the right of countries to refuse technologies considered inappropriate, on the basis of the precautionary principle. It also recognizes the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced. This means that consumers should be able to choose food produced in their own countries, without this being seen as a restraint on trade. It also means that consumers should be able to choose whether they want to eat genetically modified organism (GMOs) products; labelling for genetically modified ingredients may be seen as an indirect trade barrier. Food sovereignty demands the protection of consumer interests, including regulation for food safety that embodies the precautionary principle and the accurate labelling of food and animal feed products for information about content and origins. It also demands the participation of consumers, as well as producers, in standard-setting, whether at national level or international.

Summary and Analysis: The Via Campesina has had an impact on the principle international agencies it is has targeted in it's lobbying, protests, dialogs, debates and pressure tactics, as acknowledged by representatives of the WTO, the World Bank, and the FAO, and as shown in the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Commission on the Right to Food. The impact that they report varies. In the case of the WTO, they are very aware of the VC and it's positions, and were personally affected by the self-immolation of the Korean peasant leader Lee Kyung-Hae in Cancun, but are reluctant to measure the overall impact of the VC on the negotiations. However, the representative feels that the Via Campesina positions may have been adopted by some countries as their negotiating positions. The representative from the World bank states in quite strong terms that the Bank has been affected, even "hurt," by the Via Campesina critique of it's market-based land policies. He is anxious to "seduce" the Via Campesina

into dialog and into becoming an ally of the Bank, arguing that both the Via and the Bank are in favor of land reform and workers rights (something which many might dispute, in the case of the Bank). It almost seems that the Via is so effective that the Bank feels the need to neutralize it by turning it into an ally. The representative from the FAO frankly recognizes the impact inside FAO of the food sovereignty concept and of the Via's positions on agrarian reform, though he cautions that there are those inside who oppose the positions of the Via. He urges the Via to moderate some of it's position in order to become an ally of those within the FAO who share similar viewpoints. Finally, the Special Rapporteur on the Right To Food has completely adopted the Via Campesina's positions on a number of issues, ranging from food sovereignty and agrarian reform, to biodiversity gender, and sustainable peasant farming systems. His reports are virtually indistinguishable from Via Campesina documents, revealing an enormous impact of the Via on his thinking. Overall, it is clear that the Via Campesina is having significant impact on these institutions, though it is equally clear that real change in their policies and impacts still remains elusive.