

## **The Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles**

### **Introduction**

Land and water are vital natural resources and are part of our common heritage. Therefore they must be secured, preserved and governed by each community for the common good of societies and the environment, now and for future generations. Access, control and security related to land, water, forests, fisheries and seeds are vital for communities and must be protected and enforced as rights. The realization of several human rights, including the right to adequate food and nutrition, the right to water and sanitation, the right to health, the right to culture, the right to housing, the right to work, and the right to self-determination of peoples, depends directly on secure access to and control over natural resources. Equal distribution of land and water as well as gender equality are central to the vision of food sovereignty, based on agro-ecology, local food systems, biodiversity, control of seeds, and respect for water cycles. This vision applies to rural, urban and peri-urban populations and includes relationships between producers and consumers based on mutual solidarity and cooperation.

However, the appropriation of natural resources by companies, governments, elites, and speculators, often supported by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the G7/G8 and other institutions and consortiums, continues to worsen. The grabbing of natural resources is done in the name of environmental protection, the prevention of climate change, the production of “clean” energy, mega-infrastructure projects, and/or so-called “development”, often promoted by public-private partnerships (such as the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa, among others). This leads to concentration of natural resources in the hand of a few, evictions, and the loss of peoples’ autonomy. Entire areas and territories are emptied of their communities, while the loss of identity and ecosystems makes life impossible. Trade and investment agreements, international development projects, and activities of transnational corporations (TNCs) have become increasingly important and harmful factors which reinforce injustice and existing unequal power structures at national and local level and contribute to the further marginalization of already disadvantaged population groups,

such as women, children, indigenous and tribal peoples, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, agricultural workers, poor city dwellers, and peasants. Land and water grabbing in all forms have become a global phenomenon and continue to affect people all over the world.

### **Uniting Land and Water Struggles: Towards a Global Convergence**

In response to these threats to their lives and well-being, communities and grassroots organizations around the world resist and struggle, asserting their rights and providing real solutions. An important step towards reinforcing existing struggles and broadening the food sovereignty movement is the process towards the construction of a Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, which gained momentum at the World Social Forum in Tunis, in March 2015. This process started in October 2014, as several social and grassroots movements from Africa as well as civil society organizations gathered at the African Social Forum in Dakar to protest against all forms of natural resource grabbing and the systematic human rights violations that accompany them. Sharing their ideas, they recognized the essential solidarity between their struggles and decided to meet again at the World Social Forum to continue this dialogue with movements and organizations from all over the world. The Declaration *Rights to Land and Water, a Common Struggle, of the African Social Forum, 2014, and the one of the WSF 2015, Dakar to Tunis: Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles*<sup>1</sup> set out the vision, principles and aspirations of the Convergence and is intended to serve the process of building a strong and united movement struggling for the enforcement of policies based on the human rights to food and nutrition, water, land and territories, seeds, and others.

The construction of a strong alliance based on the struggles of communities and grassroots organizations and anchored in human rights is a dynamic process that is currently unfolding in different parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> It aims to link and strengthen

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<sup>1</sup> Rights to Water and Land, a Common Struggle. Dakar to Tunis: Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, available at [http://viacampesina.org/en/images/stories/pdf/2015-04-Dakar%20to%20Tunis%20Declaration\\_EN\\_finalfinal.pdf](http://viacampesina.org/en/images/stories/pdf/2015-04-Dakar%20to%20Tunis%20Declaration_EN_finalfinal.pdf). The declaration can be signed here: <http://goo.gl/forms/yYhXa2Pb4c>.

<sup>2</sup> This process is facilitated by a steering committee which is currently composed of: Malian Coalition Against Land Grabbing (CMAT), La Via Campesina, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), African Social Forum/COCIDEAS (Senegal), Coalition for the Protection of the African Genetic Heritage (COPAGEN), Synergie Paysanne Bénin, ISODEC (Ghana), Habitat International

struggles by creating spaces for joint and coordinated activities. The signatories of the *Dakar to Tunis Declaration* have committed to pursue the process of shaping this Convergence, starting from the grassroots and with the Declaration as a common base of principles and actions. In this spirit, the Global Convergence organized another meeting during the COP 21 climate conference in Paris, in December 2015, in order to discuss issues of land and water in the context of climate destruction. The focus was put on the *real* solutions to the manmade climate crisis, which derive from diverse local livelihood strategies and practices, and require systemic changes and a fundamental shift away from *false* solutions developed by and for a minority elite.

Communities, social movements and grassroots organizations in different parts of the world have different ways of organizing and therefore the convergence process is unfolding in different ways in the regions. In West Africa, several movements and organizations decided to organize a sub-regional conference, which took place in Mali in June 2015 and brought together more than 40 participants from eleven African countries. At this conference, a sub-regional platform of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles was established and an action plan aimed at fostering solidarity and strengthening struggles for land, water and seeds in West Africa adopted. The platform's first action is a caravan through several West African countries in March 2016. Other regions have engaged in discussions on how to take up the convergence process as well. The secure access to and control over land, water and other natural resources remains crucial for the realization of human rights and particularly the human right to adequate food and nutrition. As an initiative started by social movements and communities struggling on the ground and with the objective of ensuring that they play a protagonist role in the shaping of their lives and of the policies that affect them, the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles is an important process towards achieving peoples' sovereignty, including food sovereignty.