

# bulletin

## Feeding Resistance: Local struggles for food justice

Around the world, food is deeply political—controlled, denied, defended and reclaimed. In this *Bulletin*, we highlight counterparts' local solutions to the impacts that conflict, climate change and corporate control have on food systems. From addressing hunger as a weapon of war in Sudan and Burma, to safeguarding ancestral farming knowledge in West Africa and challenging corporate control of seeds in Canada, these are the stories of a long-standing commitment to food sovereignty so that communities can thrive.



A woman returns from shellfish gathering on Formosa Island in the Bijagós Archipelago in Guinea-Bissau. | Photo: Emmanuel Luce

## Protecting land through local ecological knowledge

When local shellfish gatherers in the Bijagós Archipelago of Guinea-Bissau noticed declining stocks of the mollusks, they knew what to do. The all-women group collectively imposed longer no-harvest periods, adapting traditional practices to meet today's environmental realities. >>>



These conservation practices are not externally imposed rules; they are the result of generations of observation, experience and collective memory. Among the Bijagós people, the environment is sacred: forests and water are not resources to exploit but living beings. Women play a central role as knowledge guardians and guide young people to use traditional practices that generations of women have passed down to them.

In Guinea-Bissau, Inter Pares' counterpart Tiniguena works with communities to protect and revitalize the way farming is done, and how food is cultivated by using wisdom born from the land, shaped by community and passed down through generations. This deep knowledge fosters a tight bond between communities and their environments. These are not simply traditions. They are living, evolving practices that protect ecosystems, guide sustainable resource use and preserve cultural identity.



In Amou, Togo, members of a women-led fonio cooperative use traditional processing methods to carefully sift the grain. | Photo: Mariétou Diallo/Inter Pares



In Kodjo Adja village, Togo, members of the Enoul cooperative harvest and winnow fonio. | Photo: Fernande Abanda/Inter Pares

Across West Africa, similar connections between culture and conservation influence how communities protect at-risk environments. In Togo, Inter Pares' counterpart Inades-Formation supports community-led responses to defend sacred spaces like the Adjamé forest, which is at risk of deforestation. The forest hosts altars used for ancestral rituals. Outside of ceremonial times, communities strictly forbid access to the forest—a rule that has preserved its biodiversity and ecological balance.

By supporting local leadership and traditional governance, our counterparts help ensure that these cultural practices remain strong in the face of deforestation, land grabbing and climate change. They help ensure that local rules and ecological rhythms are recognized and respected.

Inter Pares is committed to valuing the people who hold ancestral knowledge—women, elders, youth, healers and farmers—and to ensuring that their leadership remains at the heart of climate and food justice.



"If we hadn't protected our environment, there would be nothing left to conserve today," the Bijagós women reflect.





## INTERVIEW: Working in coalition for food sovereignty



Lucy Sharratt (CBAN) with Bernadette Ouattara, an agroecological researcher from Burkina Faso in Andhra Pradesh, India. | Photo: Eric Chaurette/Inter Pares

Lucy Sharratt is the founding coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN). CBAN is a national network of farmer associations, regional coalitions and environmental and social justice groups concerned about genetic engineering in food and farming. Inter Pares has been an active member of CBAN since the network's creation in 2006.

"When we're informed, we don't just make different food choices, we also act politically, together."

Interview edited for clarity and length.

### 🕒 How did you start collaborating with Inter Pares?

In the mid-2000s, Inter Pares was working with farmer movements in Africa and Asia and was looking for allies to oppose the [Canadian government's promotion of GMOs](#) in the Global South.

Inter Pares was critical in pulling together a series of national meetings where groups decided to pool resources and form what would become CBAN. Civil society in Canada needed to be present for farmers, who were—and are—being confronted with genetic engineering. Because of Inter Pares' connections with communities in the Global South, we were able to flag important global issues of concern and act on them. Our first success was to work together to strengthen the global moratorium on genetically engineered sterile seeds.

### 🕒 How is CBAN resisting corporate control in agriculture?

There is a global fight over the future of food. Companies want control over everything—every organism, every system, every piece of farmland. Genetic engineering is a tool of control. It exposes how far companies will go.

CBAN is a diverse and vibrant network, so we can really dig into the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of genetic engineering. The corporate, profit-driven power behind the technology has no interest in what this technology really means for farmers and their livelihoods.

Thanks to the analysis we share as a community in CBAN, we have better information about what's happening on the ground, what the impacts of genetic engineering are and what governments and companies are doing. Local knowledge, and relationships of respect and trust are essential.

### 🕒 How have you seen the food sovereignty movement evolve over the past decade, and where do you think it's headed?

Every one of us participates in food sovereignty when we grow, eat or make food choices. We all have limitations. For example, not everyone can buy all their food from a local organic farmer. But even choosing one or two local or organic products supports alternatives. When we're informed, we don't just make different food choices, we also act politically, together. There's a lot of work and resistance still needed, but the longevity of Inter Pares—50 years—and almost 20 years of CBAN shows how tenacious people are. We have a shared vision for the future and that's very powerful.



Lucy Sharratt (CBAN) at the 2012 Biodiversity Festival in Andhra Pradesh, India, part of a learning exchange organized by Inter Pares and hosted by the Deccan Development Society. | Photo: Eric Chaurette/Inter Pares



TO LEARN MORE about Inter Pares' work on food sovereignty for the last 50 years, go to <https://interpares.ca/50years>

# When food is a weapon of war: Local food resistance and mutual aid

“It’s a deliberate way to wear people down, by starving them into giving up,” shared Ghadeer from our Sudanese counterpart SWRC.



In Karen State Burma, the Karen Agricultural Department supports organic farming to strengthen local food systems. | Photo: KAD

In a war zone, food is yet another weapon of the powerful. In places like Gaza, Sudan and Burma, armed actors use food to control, punish or displace people. Warring parties block food aid, destroy farms and disrupt local food systems. These deliberate strategies deepen suffering, kill civilians and violate international law.

In Sudan, the [war that began in 2023](#) has triggered the worst hunger crisis in the world. Across the country, both warring parties leverage food to gain control over increasingly starving populations. Combatants have cut entire regions off from food aid, using food access as a bargaining chip to force submission. It’s famine by design.

As international aid for Sudan crumbles—especially following the sudden halt of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding—community-led efforts have become even more vital. Inter Pares’ counterpart the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD) is among those responding, offering emergency food support to people forced to flee their homes, and supporting women farmers with seeds, tools and training to grow food locally. These initiatives offer lifelines amid a collapsing state.

In Burma, decades of armed conflict and military repression have displaced millions of people. The military junta has deliberately restricted food transport to Indigenous

areas, worsening hunger and dependency on the junta. But here too, communities resist.

Our counterparts in Burma bring together farmers and community leaders to share strategies for protecting food systems in the face of war. Together, they develop plans to strengthen local control over food and farming across their regions. In Kachin State, counterparts work with farmers to revive Indigenous seed-saving practices and expand organic farming. Village-led projects are now growing food for local communities to eat, helping them build self-determined food systems and rely less on outside aid.

While food can be weaponized, it can also be a tool of resistance. Our counterparts show that even in the most difficult conditions, people come together to care for each other and assert their right to food. Food sovereignty is not just about agriculture—it’s about power, dignity and community care.

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequalities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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