



**SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
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**Defending Resource Rights: Innovative Strategies from Brazil, India and Beyond**

Tuesday, January 24, 2012  
1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

***Session Organizer:***

- Jonathan Leaning, Institutional Giving and Communications Coordinator, Grassroots International

***Facilitator:***

- Yeshica Weerasekera, Director of Program Partnerships, International Development Exchange (IDEX)

***Panelists:***

- Maria-Luisa Mendonça, Director, Social Network for Justice and Human Rights (*Rede Social*, Brazil)
- Sara Mersha, Director of Grantmaking and Advocacy, Grassroots International
- Prakash Tyagi, Director, Gravis (India)

***Sponsors:***

- International Development Exchange (IDEX)
  - Grassroots International
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This session provided two examples, from India and Brazil respectively, on how communities are defending their resource rights.

Prakash Tyagi began by explaining the work of GRAVIS, an organization based in the Thar Desert working on food and water security, healthcare and education. Since its founding in 1983, GRAVIS' work has reached over one million people.

**Important considerations:**

- Continuous dialogue with communities
- Views from different communities are different, create space for consensus building
- Equity among caste, gender, religion, age.
- Local wisdom - blend with new science

**Tools:**

- Participatory rural appraisal
- Focus group discussions
- Baseline surveys
- Informal dialogues

- Community based researchers

Lessons:

- How create greater roles for community participation?
- Build local capacity and collective strength at grassroots levels
- Educate communities on significant new priorities – climate change, ageing, HIV
- Obtain local input in long-term and strategy planning

In conclusion:

- Communities are keen to participate actively rather than just receive grants
- M&E needs to be more participatory
- Exchange is crucial

Maria Luisa Mendonça, creator of the documentary “Sugar Slaves” and Director of *Rede Social* then spoke about the Brazilian context. *Rede Social* is network that engages in research, education, advocacy, communications and legal work.

She started by discussing the link between the economic crisis and resource rights:

- Speculative investments “migrate” to commodity and land markets
- Raising land and food prices, increasing hunger
- Increasing private monopoly of land, natural resources, food population and distribution
- Multiple crisis: economic, environmental, and food crisis
- Economic crisis leads to development that causes environmental destruction
- “Development” creates greater land and wealth concentration
- Transnational corporations advance control over natural resources, especially energy and agriculture
- 30% of Brazilian homes don’t have regular and permanent access to food
- Small and medium farmers responsible for 70% of food production, for 87% of jobs in the countryside, but occupy only 20% of agricultural land
- Myth of mono-cropping: efficiency will lead to greater food production.
- Production model based on unsustainable agricultural practices

Impact on rural communities:

- Expansion into indigenous lands
- Land conflicts: killing of peasants
- Impact on women rural workers: longer working hours and less pay
- Labor exploitation of indigenous youth

Impacts of land monopoly:

- Slave labor: 6000 “rescued” per year by Ministry of Labor
- State subsidies for large landowners and corporations
- Cuts on social programs in support of small farmers

Strategies:

- Focus on legal cases of killings and arrest
- Aim to build jurisdiction

- Over the years a number of important legal cases were won and now Supreme Court does not consider land occupation a crime
- Annual publication “Human rights in Brazil” resulted from partnership of over 120 orgs

Sara Mersha of Grassroots International then stressed the importance of supporting movement building, sustainable livelihoods and human rights defense. Grassroots International’s grantee partner model is based on five principles:

- Shared vision and values
- Walking together for the long haul – history and long-term connection
- Reciprocity
- Transparency
- Trust

Grassroots also acts as an advocate in solidarity with grantee partners. One example: in 2011 Grassroots’ partners in Palestine identified the wall in the West Bank as a major barrier to their rights to land, water and food sovereignty. Grassroots’ signed onto a campaign by Jewish Voice for Peace advocating for divestment from companies who profit from the occupation.

### **Comments, insights and questions**

- Many Northern funders are constrained in the amount of grassroots giving they can do and focus on policy change on a higher level. What efforts you know of that directly engage in filling the gap between policy and grassroots work?
- Shared appreciation on need for trust building and alliance building. The process can be as valuable as the outcomes. Agree with the long haul approach.
- One participant agreed with the importance of grassroots funding but also recognized that larger economic infrastructures need to be tackled, such as the IFC and development agencies. If the ultimate goal of sustainable and equitable is to be achieved, how do we do this? These institutions seem impenetrable.

Prakash: A lot of change has taken place in last 10-15 years. Assessments should be done consistently to assess the changing nature of needs. If assessments are done for specific time only, the programs will not be as effective. One example: Rural employment guarantee program. This program provides attempts to provide employment to entire rural population of India (800 million). It is a positive step, but could be improved by continually assessing and addressing needs.

Maria: It is essential to link local with international work. Research on the impact of World Bank policies and land is important. Working at the UN level with the Rapporteur on the right to food is important. Brazilian government only acts if there is international attention.

Sara concluded the session by emphasizing the importance of funding groups that have connections to all levels.