



# LA VIA CAMPESINA: PEASANT RIGHTS DECLARATION

Lush Spring Prize 2017: **Influence Award**

Global organisation

Organisation founded: 1993

## What Is LVC?

La Via Campesina (LVC) brings together and represents about 200 million peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers around the world. Founded in 1993, LVC involves 182 member organisations in 81 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.



LVC campaigning is linked to basic and in-depth agroecology, as well as education that increases food sovereignty and self-governance.

## Key Project Information (at 2018):

Climate: all African, Asian, American & European climates.

Key words: peasant farmers; youth; women; training centre; demonstration farms; farmer-to-farmer training; agroecology.

Primary Beneficiaries: peasant farmers, small farmers, and their families and communities; rural workers; youth.

Size: 182 member organisations, 200+million people.

## LVC's Education Lessons

LVC's work towards the goal of a Declaration of Peasant Rights wouldn't be possible without their agroecological and food sovereignty education work. Some examples of this are:

The 'Winditan Agroecology Training Centre' run by LVC member organisation Plateforme Paysanne du Niger (PPN) since 2010. With 15 hectares of arable land and facilities for up to 150 trainees, its priority is training women, youth and others in agroecological, post production and facilitation skills to contribute to food sovereignty across Niger. The Centre has trained some 3,000 people, many of which have become active promoters of peasant agroecology across rural Niger.

Mozambique's 'Peasant School' developed by União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC) applies its own horizontal peasant-to-peasant learning and exchange methodology and training manual, with over 1,200 agroecology promoters trained to promote peasant agroecology so far. The school's 6.5 hectares are organized into four parcels - (i) farm and garden, (ii) forest, (iii) facilities, (iv) leisure areas.

Amrita Bhoomi, LVC's South Asia agroecology school in Karnataka state, India (see separate Case Study for more detail) - a 66 acre centre for training peasant farmers in agroecology and Zero Budget Natural Farming - and an established pioneer in the seed and food sovereignty movements, based on self-reliance and self-governance.

## High Level Outputs & Outcomes:

- On a local level LVC has supported peasants to strengthen their production methods through training and exchange of experiences at international level.
- In 2007, creating the declaration of and steps for achieving Food Sovereignty.
- Globally, LVC has worked collectively for over 16 years for better outcomes for peasants - on 28 September 2018, member nations of UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution concluding the UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, with 33 votes in favour, 11 abstentions and 3 against.

## The Gloria Quintanilla Womens' Coop, a Beneficiary Story

A member of LVC's Association of Rural Workers (ATC), run by about 22 women and involving 79 village families, this is one of the most successful peasant cooperatives in Nicaragua. It is nationally recognised for its agroecological production practices.

Before Nicaragua's agrarian reform, the privately-owned farm grew only coffee with intensive chemical inputs. Now, the women have transformed the community owned land and diversified crop production using agroecology. Organic coffee crops are complimented with bananas, plantains, cassava, yam, vegetables, maize etc. Rain water storage for the dry season is a feature, as is training and integration of seed sovereignty, value-adding on crop production, marketing and book-keeping.

The rooms built for training are also used as school classrooms.



## An IPEN Case Study

International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

Case Study date:

September 2018



Vincent Delobel, a young Belgian peasant farmer

## A European Young Peasant's Story – an LVC Member

*"[I] speak on behalf of young European peasant men and women, to convey our message. As an organic goat herder in Belgium, I grow the feed for the goats and make their milk into different cheeses. Today, in Europe, our profession as farmers, and especially as breeders, is under threat. Only ten per cent of us are farmers under forty years of age ... many ... produce at a loss ... [and] are trapped in a development trajectory which is not only very risky in financial terms, but which also ... does not correspond to our values. The declaration on the rights of peasants will support us, by giving us the legal framework for this repeasantisation of agriculture, for this type of rural development led proactively and tirelessly by peasants in Europe and around the world. ... [it] is vital to guarantee our inventiveness and innovations ... it recognizes our existence, our distinctiveness ... the role we play in the food sovereignty of our communities, in the economic development of the countryside, and the importance we play in our very future, to overcome the global challenges of climate change, international security and, quite simply, to ensure the viable existence of human life on this planet."* Vincent Delobel, member of La Via Campesina, speaking to the intergovernmental working group on a UN declaration, May 2016, Geneva, Palais des Nations.



The Gloria Quintanilla Women's Coop, Nicaragua

## The many peasants' stories & the Declaration:

*"Madame Chair-Rapporteur, Delegates of the Council, I am from Palestine ... I represent UAWC a member of La Via Campesina in Palestine ... the working group for the UN Declaration ... is very fundamental to address the discrimination against and towards peasants and other people working in rural areas, and to set the world free from hunger and displacement ... The declaration clearly emphasises the protection of the land and seed. These Rights are fundamental to the lives of peasants and rural population who feed and contribute to the world. ... Land and seeds are fundamental – but these are subject to competition for speculation. The obligation of the state is absent and the domination of the market replaces the State's obligation. The UN Draft Declaration set out the obligation of the state on land, as well as recognition of the contribution of peasant agriculture and other rural livelihoods towards the global food system."* - from Al Abudi Ubai Fahmi's speech to the UNHR Council, on why the Declaration is urgent and important.

## LVC's Goals

LVC work globally, in many fields, from on the ground training and support, through to the Peasant Rights Declaration in negotiation at the UN Human Rights Council.

The goals of this declaration are to promote food sovereignty and support the development and implementation of socio-economic policies that improve our food and agriculture systems.

It aims to support the creation of public policies in favour of peasants and rural workers in countries where such policies do not exist, to improve existing policies further and give millions of rural peasant communities and workers an international voice.

The Declaration includes:

- Rights to natural resources and the right to development
- Right to food & food sovereignty
- Right to land
- Right to seeds
- Right to biological diversity
- Right of peasant women

## Good Practise: What LVC Has Done

Important work towards achieving the declaration includes:

1. Strengthening the lobby work in Geneva and national capitals to get more member states to commit to adoption. The resolution on peasant's rights was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on its 36th session in September 2017. LVC are continuing with negotiations to finalise the process in 2018.
2. LVC have consulted widely with the local organisations of LVC and at regional events, which was key for both the negotiating process and to build knowledge and capacity on how to use this new UN instrument.
3. In Colombia, LVC is listed in the peace agreements along with the FAO as an official monitor of the peace process. LVC have set up specific staff capacity in Colombia for this. All of which supports the UN process.
4. LVC's annual reports, newsletters and publications summarise and highlight LVC's campaigns and activities, and are vital for building the evidence base for change such as the Food Sovereignty Guide, various agroecology guides and much more. For example, [Peasants Fighting for Justice](#) (July 2017), documents cases of violations of peasants' human rights from LVC members around the world, and the *People's Manual for Peasant Rights*, which reviews the core elements of the Declaration, clarifies what the rights consist of, and provides a historical vision and strategic perspective for future work. See these publications at: [LVC publications](#) including their [2018 Food Sovereignty Guide](#)
5. To strengthen the work on the UN Declaration, LVC and its allies FIAN and CETIM have been updating the on line repository [www.defendingpeasantrights.org](http://www.defendingpeasantrights.org), now available in 3 languages (English, French and Spanish) to support engagements and consultations on contentious topics such as seeds and land.

La Via Campesina & the Peasant Rights Declaration contributes to these SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) being achieved:





## LVC's Ways of Working: How It Is Done

Progress towards the goal of a Declaration of Peasant Rights, is a result of a huge volume of work and an enthusiasm to build and grow the organisation, their capacity and their connections.

**Lobbying:** concerted lobbying work gives LVC the capacity to change the position of governments, to support or abstain instead of opposing the declaration. This was especially important in Europe. LVC actively participate in the Intergovernmental Working Group and have deepened the commitment to protect and promote of the rights of peasants and rural workers between governments, organisations and various UN agencies.

**Working with like-minded organisations:** LVC work with many partners to make their work as effective and impactful as possible, including: International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF); World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP); Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movement (FIMARC); International Indian Treaty Council (IITC); Association Centre Europe-Tiers Monde (CETIM); FIAN International; International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL); Bread for All; and many more.

**A grassroots approach to all work:** LVC's focus and goals are always based around their members and peasant farmers and communities. The work on the ground provides the evidence base that is vital for the case for the Declaration - keeping it cheap and relevant too. LVC have also undertaken a regional consultation process, which has been key for both the negotiating process and for after the declaration is adopted by the UN, to disseminate knowledge and capacity in LVC organisations on how to use it.

**A decentralised autonomous structure:** LVC is a grassroots mass movement based on the decentralisation of power between all its regions, with its vitality and legitimacy coming from grassroots peasants' organisations. Since 1993, the international secretariat has been located in Belgium (1993-1996), Honduras (1997-2004), Indonesia (2005-2013), and Zimbabwe since 2013, according to decisions made at LVC's four-yearly International Conference, which also defines LVC's future agenda and actions.

**LVC is an autonomous, pluralist, multicultural and multilingual movement:** political in its demand for social justice while independent from any political party, economic or other affiliation. LVC connected a global Peasants Rights Declaration with the day-to-day issues facing peasants. Contributions from members, private donations and financial support of some NGOs, foundations and public authorities make this possible.

**Documenting and sharing work through many types of publications:** these resources are a vital part of LVC's regional consultation process for building support for the Declaration. They also build and present the evidence base upon which the Declaration is based - see [LVC publications](#)

**Patience and dedication!** To achieve their goal, LVC have had to be patient and persistent. Skeptisism and opposition from many governments, multi-nationals and lobbyists "... *has made our movement stronger than ever. After sixteen years of effort and dedication, throughout the world, our communities' expectations of this Declaration keep rising, expecting our demands to be recognised in the intergovernmental negotiations.*" Henry Saragih (of LVC), in the closing session of the working group.

Participants of an LVC conference in 2017 in Mali, compiled the following summary:

**STRENGTHS:** Richness of traditional knowledge and agricultural biodiversity; community-control over many seeds and animal landraces; territorial reach of peasant organisations; access to land in countries where agrarian reform has advanced (e.g. Zimbabwe); peasant agroecology embraced by communities, families, women and youth.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lack of resources to support exchange between peasant organisations in and between regions, and globally; lack of systematised experiences to share virtually in appropriate languages; lack of academic and institutional allies committed to peasant organisations and agroecology; and lack of youth involvement in peasant organisations.

**OPPORTUNITIES:** African majorities in rural areas; social, economic, and ecological destruction caused by 'Green Revolution'; climate crisis linked to industrial agriculture; adaptability of peasant agroecology principles and practices; membership in LVC for greater peasant-to-peasant exchange.

**THREATS:** Corporate control of government policies, especially as it relates to agroexport plantations for international investment; land-grabbing by transnational corporations (TNCs); corruption of local and national leaders; many NGOs that speak on behalf of peasants and other rural people without being truly representative; exodus of rural youth to urban areas and/or emigration.

## OUTCOMES Achieved

LVC's outcomes for peasant farmers and communities who are often neglected, under-educated, given no rights or treated illegally and are often the indigenous land occupants:

- On a local level LVC has helped organise communities to help themselves – through training and development work community members have grown knowledge on seed saving, agroecology, post-harvest opportunities, cooperative development and social strength, with physical outputs naturally following and spreading from this through 183 organisations and 200+ million members.
- Globally, LVC has worked collectively for over 16 years towards better outcomes for peasants and the approval of the Declaration of Peasant Rights.
- In 2007 creating the [declaration of and steps to achieving Food Sovereignty](#)
- In September 2017 the Resolution on Peasant Rights was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on its 36th session with 34 votes for, 11 abstentions and 2 against.
- 28 September 2018 the 5th open-ended intergovernmental working group (OEIWG) report, including the revised declaration and the resolution on the 'Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas' was presented by Bolivia and approved by the UN Human Rights Council - thereafter it will be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council member states for the adoption of the final text.

LVC is continually working with local organisations on how best to use the Declaration to support and expand their work and defend their rights.



## Permaculture Ethics & Principles in Action

Whilst LVC is not directly involved currently in permaculture education, it absolutely embodies the ethics of Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share, from local to global levels.

Permaculture principles in action in LVC's work include:

**Small and slow solutions** - building on each step and on small successes, both locally and globally.

**Design from pattern to detail** - understanding the need for global recognition and frameworks that enable the local communities to achieve much more.

**Use and value diversity** - LVC celebrates and works inclusively with all its local organisations from 81 countries.

**Integrate rather than segregate** - to achieve the Declaration of Peasant Rights LVC works together with many different organisations and sectors of society.

**Make the smallest change for largest effects** - whilst the UN Declaration on Peasant Rights is 'no small feat', as a single change in a global system it will bring potentially huge benefits.

## From Inspiration to Action

LVC should be a fantastic example and inspiration to the permaculture world, inspiring us to learn from its example. We can be inspired and seek to emulate in our own projects and movement:

- an organisation and movement built on a strong sense of unity and solidarity, from local to global levels;
- local centres providing practical agroecology training based on a peer-to-peer education model together with society building;
- connecting with other like-minded organisations to achieve more.

What experience from LVC could help your project, community or network:

- a) Linking permaculture education more directly to practical training in agroecology methods?
- b) Training young people and small farmers to be teachers, alongside the creation of demonstration sites that relate to local and social needs?
- c) Project development and evolution, and scaling-up practical training?
- d) Being willing to take on a big vision and big challenges, whether globally like LVC, or nationally, regionally or locally?

## The Difference arising from the Lush Spring Prize

The Influence Award from the 2017 Lush Spring Prize has been targeted at supporting LVC's tireless, passionate and highly committed works toward the successful declaration and adoption of the UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Crucially, both financially and in terms of the wider sense of recognition and support, the Prize helps LVC in its continual work with local organisations on how best to use the Declaration to support and expand their work and defend their rights. This includes the work to ensure member states of the UN Human Rights Council adopt the final text of the declaration, and put in place measures to support and protect the full range of rights that it covers.

## Legal Status, Structure & Size: Project start date: 2013

Founded in 1993 in Belgium, La Via Campesina is a coalition of 182 local and national organisations in 81 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether it represents about 200 million farmers. The International Coordinating Committee is represented by one man and one woman per region and one youth per continent, each elected by their respective region's member organisations. It is an autonomous, pluralist, multicultural movement, political in its demand for social justice while being independent from any political party, economic or other type of affiliation.

## Funding, Finance, Resources

Contributions from members, private donations and financial support of some NGOs, foundations and public authorities make LVC's work possible. The £25,000 Lush Spring Prize Influence Award was received in 2017.

## Potential Areas for Collaboration with Project (Local, Regional, National or International)

**Project Needs:** donations to support LVC's work at: <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/viacampesina>

**Project Offers:** See [LVC publications](#) including the [LVC 2018 Food Sovereignty Guide](#); videos, photos and audios at: [tv.viacampesina.org](http://tv.viacampesina.org)

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### International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

Increasing the effectiveness and coherence of permaculture education internationally

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