

War on Want International Partners:

War on Want works in solidarity with some of the most inspiring grassroots organisations in the world, fighting on the front line of the struggle against global poverty and injustice.



Food Justice

MST

Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)

Since 2003 War on Want has been a proud supporter of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the leading campaign group for the progressive redistribution of land in Brazil. The largest social movement in Latin America, the MST runs education programmes to help farmers lower their costs and reduce their dependence on food imports while increasing yields. The MST also defends the rights of farmers to use their own seeds and resist the rise of genetically modified (GM) crops.

Land and poverty in Brazil

Brazil has the highest GDP in Latin America and is set to become the fifth largest economy in the world by 2014. Despite the country's rapid growth, over 35 million Brazilians earn less than \$2 a day. The majority of the country's poor live in rural areas, where they scrape out a living as small-scale farmers on plots rented from wealthy landowners. Rural poverty is primarily the result of a lack of access to land. The landholding elite of Brazil, which makes up 3% of the population, currently owns two thirds of the country's land, of which 42% remains unused. This uneven distribution is the legacy of colonial times when land was divided into



War on Want primarily supports MST's work in São Paulo state



MST members and supporters march for their rights

latifundios, which are large tracts of land owned by the rich and used to grow a single crop primarily for export. Brazil's constitution stipulates that unused land can be redistributed, and the current government led by President Lula da Silva pledged to allocate to the poor privately-owned land that has been left idle. However, government has failed to deliver on its promise, and the vast majority of farmland remains inaccessible to the poor.

"Thanks to the MST project we are able to plan what we farm, reduce the costs and produce better quality food, free from chemicals, at a price that the poorest people can afford."

35-year-old farmer from an MST settlement in Apiaí, São Paulo state

The rural poor also face new challenges posed by national agricultural policies that favour plantation farming for export. Monoculture farming, or the intensive cultivation of a single crop, has led to the displacement of thousands of small-scale farmers. Traditional farming practices are being undermined by international trade agreements which give ownership of seeds patents to multinational companies and have paved the way for the use of harmful agrochemicals. GM seeds, whose effects on both the environment and humans are considered dangerous by many leading scientists, now play a major role in Brazil's agriculture. With the ability to sell GM seeds to farmers at exorbitant prices, multinational companies wield even greater power in Brazil.

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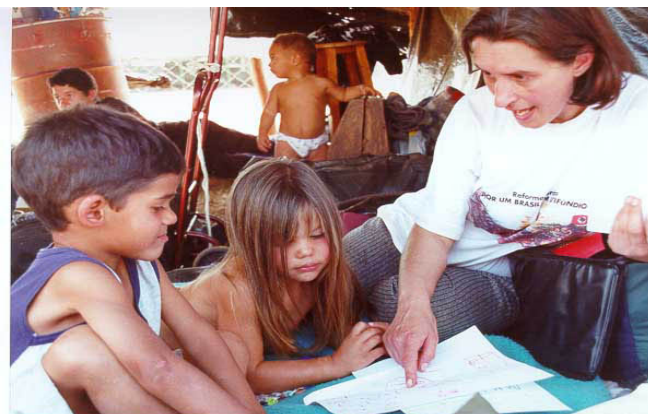
MST

Founded in 1985, the MST now has an estimated 1.5 million members active in 23 states across Brazil. One of the MST's most successful tactics in its fight for comprehensive land reform has been the peaceful mass occupations of uncultivated land, a right guaranteed under the Brazilian constitution. The MST also helps establish cooperative farms and provides education and medical attention for adults and children on its encampments. Over the course of its history the MST has won land titles for over 350,000 families across more than 2,000 settlements, with an additional 180,000 encamped families currently petitioning for land ownership.

The MST also seeks to guarantee the long-term future of poor rural farmers through training in sustainable farming. By applying agro-ecological techniques and learning to produce, use and exchange their own seeds, farmers are able to reduce their dependence on expensive chemical fertilisers and commercial seeds while increasing the productivity and diversity of the crops they grow. As well as meeting their food needs, families trained by the MST also earn extra income by selling some of their produce locally. At a broader level, the MST campaigns against the rise of the GM-based commercial seed industry, which has boosted corporate profits at the expense of the rural poor.



MST farmers showing the fruits of their labour



MST activist teaches children in an encampment

War on Want supports the work of MST in São Paulo state. Through this partnership the following has been achieved:

- Over two thousand small farmers now use sustainable farming techniques, growing up to 70% of their own food from their own seeds.
- Roughly 2,300 families across São Paulo state are now involved in the Food Acquisition Programme, a government project which buys produce from small farmers to use in schools and hospitals. This programme guarantees an annual income of £2,200 per participating family. It is estimated that 53,000 people, many of them children, have already benefitted from the project, reducing malnutrition levels and providing secure income for families.
- The MST's outreach activities, including the publication of bulletins and the organisation of debates and seminars, have educated both small-scale farmers and the general public about the environmental and health impacts of GM crops, empowering them to make informed choices about food.
- The MST collaborates with local universities that run agro-ecology schools by providing training for visiting students, who then pass on their skills and learning to members of their communities.

For more information please see:
www.mst.br.org (in Portuguese) and **www.waronwant.org**