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who we are

Every day hundreds of organisations and movements engage in struggles and activities to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the International Nyéléni Forum 2007 and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**. **Nyéléni is the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: AFSA, ETC Group, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Transnational Institute, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People, WAMIP.

editorial

against the tide of industrial aquaculture

At a time when governments and corporations increasingly position aquaculture as the cure for the food, economic and climate crises, it is worth asking whether any of these narratives hold. Research shows that shrimp and salmon farming take more food out of the mouths of the poor than they deliver to anyone's plate.

The volumes of monoculture-grown soy and wild-caught fish processed into fish feed are staggering. The overall climate impact of aquaculture with such a globalised value chain is almost impossible to assess. Yet, the Global Seafood Alliance promotes "aquaculture is uniquely positioned not only to withstand impacts of climate change, but to even help mitigate its effects" – even as one scientific study finds the climate footprint of farmed shrimp comparable, per kilogram of product, to that of beef.

A new UN report on fisheries and aquaculture (SOFIA, 2026) describes aquaculture as "greatly contributing to economic development", citing an estimated sectoral value of USD 391 billion. But it falls silent on the profits captured by a small number of corporations and on the millions of people whose economic base disappears through dispossession from their territories, or through severe environmental pollution.

In response to the havoc caused by industrial aquaculture and its threat to food sovereignty, the Nyéléni Global Forum in 2025 decided to launch a global campaign to resist corporate control, further destruction from this industry and the privatization of ocean and coastal areas. This edition of the Nyéléni newsletter captures some of the work of the campaign.

ETC Group, FIAN, GRAIN, TNI, WFFP

box 1

The fish that never reaches the plate

"Over half a million tons of pelagic fish that could feed over 33 million people... [is] extracted from the ocean along the coast of West Africa and converted to fishmeal and fish oil." – UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food¹

As the UN Special Rapporteur has stated, hunger is not caused by a lack of food; it is not a production problem. Rather, it results from a food system in which global feed companies exacerbate food insecurity by processing wild fish into fishmeal and oil². In 2024, more than 18 million tonnes of wild-caught fish—equivalent to 23% of total marine capture—was turned into fishmeal and oil. Peru and Chile account for the largest share of global production, though this is vulnerable to El Niño.

While precise data are difficult to obtain for all countries and regions, in India alone an estimated 1 million tonnes of wild fish reportedly ended up in some 50 fish-processing factories in 2018³. A further roughly 450 factories, spread across 62 countries⁴, account for the majority of the remainder. A significant share of this fish—if not most of it—could instead be used as food for people, rather than feeding a globalised system in which anchovies caught in one part of the world are fed to shrimp in another, only to be processed and sold to middle-income or wealthy consumers elsewhere.

1 - Fakhri, M. (2024). Fisheries and the right to food in the context of climate change: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, UNHRC. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/49>

2 - FAO. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2026 – Blue Transformation: turning vision into impact. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd8357en>

3 - Scholtens, Karuppiiah & Jyotishi(2020). A Twisted Trajectory. Samudra Report, 83, 38-42. <https://www.icsf.net/samudra-articles.php?id=5364>

4 - Lauren A. Shea et al. Spatial distribution of fishmeal and fish oil factories around the globe. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adr6921>

in the spotlight 1

Community-centred aquaculture: Supporting people, food, and ecosystems

Aquaculture (often called seafood or fish farming) is a system of management of aquatic plants and animals in coastal places. Many types of aquaculture have been practiced for millennia and were historically created through place-based observations of the land and water. When done in ecologically responsible ways, aquaculture can be a powerful bedrock for local communities, economies, and food systems.

A responsible aquaculture practice is guided by several principles that ensure good relationships with the environment and local communities. This includes operating a farm at a scale that is appropriate for the given species and in the context of the local ecology. A proper scale ensures that the farm is in harmony with the local ecology and allows for broad community access. The farm should also be owned and operated by the local community so that most of the benefits remain within the community. Being part of the community also means not competing for space or resources with other local harvesters, farmers, and fishers. These practices should also reflect that the waters are a public resource and that their ongoing management should be based on systems of participatory governance.

There still do exist some instances of sustainable aquaculture in modern times. There are practices that are operated at an appropriate scale, managed and operated by people embedded in the community, done in harmony with wild fish populations, and affirming of the waters being a shared, public resource. One traditional form of aquaculture that has been practiced globally is creating fish traps, often from stone and/or wood, in inter-tidal zones. Every community has their own unique traditions and formations they create, but many of these practices have existed for thousands of years.

One such example of ecologically responsible aquaculture are the clam gardens in the Pacific Northwest of Turtle Island (North America) which have been stewarded by several Indigenous Peoples including the Tlingit, Haida, Heiltsuk, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchah-nulth, and Northern, Central, and Southern Coast Salish, among others¹. The scale and ecological responsibility of these gardens are responsibly managed, but the issue of ownership is complex mostly due to impositions from colonial histories. Many of these gardens exist within several jurisdictional lines, between state waters, federal national park lands, country borders, and other situations. These communities have to navigate incredibly complex systems to continue these gardens in their historic locations and people of the waters continue to battle for recognition for their ages old way of life, in land and oceans, rivers, and mangroves across all watery environments in all regions of the world.

1 - Pacific Sea Garden Collective (2022). Sea Gardens Across the Pacific: Reawakening Ancestral Mariculture Innovations. Version 1. Washington Sea Grant at the University of Washington. <https://doi.org/10.6069/ZJB9-CG30>

in the spotlight 2

Breeding corporate control in industrial aquaculture

From the 1960s-80s, “Green Revolution” programmes in agriculture replaced hundreds of thousands of farmer varieties with a few high-yielding ones. These crops caused massive disease and pest outbreaks, creating dependence on corporate seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. A similar genetic “revolution” is rapidly spreading through aquaculture.

The expansion of industrial farms of marine species with huge commercial value is causing massive environmental damage and undermining traditional fisheries and aquaculture. These farms depend on new varieties that are increasingly controlled by corporations with interests in feed and livestock.

The mega salmon farms on the coasts of Norway, Chile, Canada, Scotland, and Australia, for example, use salmon derived from a Norwegian public breeding programme. The programme drew on dozens of salmon populations collected from rivers to breed fast-growing and docile fish. With the high-yielding and genetically uniform salmon, production boomed, but the farms spread diseases and parasites with catastrophic impacts on wild salmon. The fish also require huge amounts of feed made of wild-caught fish sourced from West Africa and other shores, with severe impacts on ecosystems and food security there. Today, salmon breeding and farming is dominated by a few companies and Norway's public breeding programme is owned by a German livestock genetics company, the EW Group.

Corporations also dominate the market for shrimp genetics in Asia, where industrial farming relies on uniform, high-yielding varieties grown in enclosed ponds in high densities and with lots of feed. These shrimp farms are highly vulnerable to disease and therefore require seed¹ certified as pathogen-free. Only a few companies from the livestock sector control this pathogen-free seed market. For instance, Hendrix Genetics of the Netherlands and Thailand's Charoen Pokphand (CP) have a monopoly in Sri Lanka, with CP also dominating the market for feed. The same two companies control about 90% of the market in Indonesia. In China, two animal feed companies, Haid Group and Evergreen, are the dominant players in its shrimp seed market and are rapidly expanding overseas.

In Ecuador, the world's top shrimp exporter, the situation is different. Big companies farm shrimp in large, open farms at low densities. To ensure disease-resistance, large populations of shrimp are exposed to pathogens and those that survive are selected for the next production cycle. Shrimp selection has become more intensive and high-tech over the years, and there are some specialist breeding companies, but breeding in Ecuador is still mainly done by the big shrimp farming companies for their own farms.

Industrial aquaculture is a young industry compared to industrial agriculture and livestock, but it follows the same logic of capitalism—either grow or “get eaten” by larger companies—and control over genes is the new frontier in this multi-billion dollar business.

1 - Young shrimp (post-larvae) used to stock farming ponds.

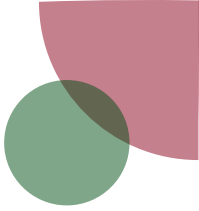
box 2

Seaweed and marine geoengineering

Just as REDD+ (“reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation”) allowed corporations to grab forests from Indigenous Peoples in the name of carbon offsetting, polluters now plan to turn the ocean into a carbon casino, using large-scale seaweed cultivation as a form of aquaculture, combined with marine geoengineering technologies to generate carbon credits.

Geoengineering refers to unproven, high-risk technologies supposedly intended to slow or reverse global heating. Marine geoengineering technologies dangerously threaten ocean integrity, altering the biogeochemistry of the ocean and irreversibly impacting marine communities and ecosystems. Techniques include ocean fertilization (adding nutrients such as minerals and biomass), ocean alkalinity enhancement (dumping masses of minerals to reduce acidification), and marine cloud brightening (spraying seawater to ‘brighten’ clouds). Techniques deployed in seaweed aquaculture include biomass sinking and artificial upwelling (placing pipes deep in the ocean, pumping cool water to the surface) to induce seaweed growth.

Natural and traditionally managed seaweed ecosystems are among the most biodiverse and productive areas in nature. Indigenous Peoples, coastal and fishing communities have rejected industrial seaweed monocultures because of the cultural, economic, environmental and human rights risks. Here, aquaculture meets geoengineering, ocean grabbing and the disruption of fisherfolks' livelihoods. Seaweed aquaculture combines false solutions which threaten livelihoods while reducing the immeasurable value of our oceans to saleable units, maximized for profit in the bogus business of ‘saving the planet’.



1

Fish cages on Lake Victoria and the Right to Food

Namakeba Village, Buvuma District, Uganda

I live in Namakeba Village and, like everyone here, my family survives because of Lake Victoria. We can't farm much as we are inside a forest reserve and not even supposed to collect firewood, and the little good land around us got taken over by a palm oil company. So, fishing isn't just something we do—it's how we eat, and how we buy the food we can't grow ourselves, brought in by small traders from Masese and Kiyindi.

Then the fish cages came. Now there are stretches of the lake we simply can't touch—some owned by one Chinese investor cover more than an acre of water. We used to fish there. Now we're chased off if we get too close, and every year the cages grow bigger, taking a bit more of the lake each time. Our nets come up lighter than they used to. Some of us go out a whole night and come back with barely enough to sell, let alone eat.

It's not only the fish—it's getting anywhere at all. The cages sit across our old routes, so boats now go the long way round. A trip that once took one night now eats up hours more, burns more fuel, costs more money. Fares to Masese have doubled. Since our food comes by boat, that cost lands on every bag of maize, every bottle of oil we buy.

We know exactly what's happening to us, and we're not willing to just watch it continue. Fishing is our livelihood and our source of food at once, so when the lake shrinks for us, our meals shrink too. We're raising our voices because we believe this can be fixed, with fair rules that protect space for people who've always depended on this lake. We want our children fishing these waters long after us.



2

We are Kottaimedu — This is our fight

Fisher families of Kottaimedu, India

We are the fisher families of Kottaimedu. For nearly twenty years, we have fought to protect our source of life—our waters and our coast.

After the tsunami took our homes in 2004, the government moved us here, near the Buckingham Canal—mudflats, mangroves, the waters we knew sustained us. We thought we were safe. Then, in 2007, an industrial shrimp farm arrived next door.

At first, it was just a smell. Then the canal that fed our families turned foul. Then our drinking water turned salty. Our children's school, barely 150 metres from the pond, couldn't use its own well. Our skin broke out in rashes. Our kidneys began to fail. We complained. Nobody listened. In 2019, our women walked out and protested. For that, thirteen of our leaders were dragged into criminal cases—false ones, as two of our people were not even in the country when the alleged "crime" happened, and still we were named. It took the courts until 2023 to throw the case out. Six years of our lives, stolen by fear and suspicion.

But we did not stop. We documented everything ourselves—every encroached drain, every missing treatment pond, every violation. We took our evidence to every office that would open its doors. Slowly, painfully, the walls began to move. An order here. A court direction there. Appeals, delays, more waiting.

On 16 February 2026, we finally won — all aquaculture activity at the farm was ordered stopped for good. We're now pushing to see it fully enforced, including removal of the encroachment on our land.

This was never about one pond. It was our life as a fisher community, our human rights to food and nutrition, to clean and healthy waters, and dignity. We didn't wait for justice. We won because we refused to go quiet and fought for what was ours.

voices from the field

3 When the mangrove disappears, we lose part of our lives

Fisher communities, Carapitanga Quilombo, Brazil

I am from the Carapitanga Quilombo, in the municipality of Brejo Grande, on the north coast of Sergipe State, in the São Francisco River estuary region.

In the past, everything here was healthy. There was no poison in the water; the mangrove was our wealth. We used to fish freely, catch crabs, oysters, sururu, aratu, siri and many kinds of fish. When we came back from fishing, we filled buckets with them and shared them with our neighbours—everyone took food home.

Everything changed after the mangroves began to be cleared for shrimp ponds. People cut down the mangroves, put poison in the ponds and, when they wash them, all that contaminated water goes back into the river. I have seen dead animals in the mud, and the mud smelled rotten. The fish, the crustaceans and many other species started to disappear. Every day there is less space for crabs, aratu, siri and fish to grow because the mangrove is being destroyed. Today we have to walk much farther, or go by boat, to find seafood. Sometimes we cast our nets and only catch enough food for one day. Fishing families are struggling. Before, our wealth came from the mangrove. Today many families depend on Bolsa Família and have to buy food because the mangrove can no longer provide what it once did.

I do not eat the shrimp produced in these ponds because it has poison. I prefer the shrimp and fish that come from nature.

The destruction has not stopped. New areas continue to be cleared, and every time another piece of mangrove disappears, we lose another part of our lives. Even so, I still believe that if they leave nature alone, it will recover. The mangrove can return, and with it the fish, crabs and shellfish. Maybe not for us, but for our children and grandchildren, because they also have the right to live from the wealth that the mangrove has always given us.

4 Long hours, low pay, no security: a shrimp farm worker speaks

A worker at a shrimp farm in the province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador

My name is Carlos and I work at a shrimp farm. The work here is very hard because I don't have a set schedule. I have to spend 24 hours a day here and work at night or in the early morning, rain or shine. My boss pays me 400 USD a month. To be honest, it's not enough because I have my wife and three children that I need to send to school. Sometimes, I don't have enough money for them to go to school. The work is very demanding and difficult, to the point that my wife and my oldest son often help me out.

I don't have any social security cover. My children are constantly having health problems. Sometimes when someone gets sick here, it's hard to leave because we don't have road access. We often have to wait for boats to take us to town.

My boss pays me in cash, and often I don't get paid every month. Sometimes it takes a month and a half or two months before I get paid. I just have to put up with it because there are no jobs in my town. That's why I came all the way here, so far from my town.

They use a variety of chemicals here that we aren't trained to safely handle so we're exposed to those as well. We often have to handle them with our bare hands without any safety equipment, and the work is very physically demanding. As I said, we have to constantly patrol the pool, especially at night.



box 3

Industrial aquaculture and public health: An urgent socio-environmental justice agenda

Industrial aquaculture is increasingly promoted as a solution to global food insecurity and as a key component of the “Blue Transformation.” Yet its rapid expansion raises important public health questions that remain insufficiently examined.

The People’s Health Movement affirms the right of all people to nutritious, healthy, and affordable food produced through dignified livelihoods and food systems that minimize harm to people, communities, and the environment. This rights-based perspective underscores the need to evaluate aquaculture not only by its production potential, but also by its impacts on health, equity, and ecological sustainability.

Intensive aquaculture systems often rely on antibiotics, pesticides, disinfectants, and other chemical inputs to maximize production. These practices may expose workers to hazardous substances, contribute to the contamination of surrounding water bodies, and potentially result in chemical residues in aquatic food products. The routine use of antibiotics also raises concerns about antimicrobial resistance, one of the most significant global public health challenges.

Public health considerations extend beyond chemical exposure. Industrial aquaculture may contribute to declining water quality, biodiversity loss, and the replacement of native species, with implications for ecosystem health, nutrition, and food sovereignty. Expansion of industrial production has also been associated with the displacement of small-scale fishing communities and the erosion of traditional livelihoods, affecting the broader social determinants of health.

Despite the sector’s rapid growth, significant research gaps remain regarding occupational health, consumer exposure, nutritional quality, environmental contamination, and the cumulative health impacts of intensive aquaculture systems.

As governments and international institutions continue to promote aquaculture expansion, independent, interdisciplinary research must keep pace. Public health evidence should inform policy alongside production and economic objectives. We call on researchers, health professionals, policymakers, and social movements to collaborate in building a stronger evidence base and to ensure that future aquatic food systems advance health, environmental sustainability, human rights, and food sovereignty.

voices from the field

5

How we took our sea back!

Fisher communities, Karimunjawa, Indonesia

I’m Jack, a fisher from Karimunjawa, and my family’s life has always been tied to the sea. We used to catch anchovies and sell seaweed, living in sync with the ocean’s rhythm. I recall the days when the waters provided us with everything we needed. But then, the shrimp ponds arrived and changed everything.

Our whole life was turned upside down in just a matter of days. Men from the company came in, bought up the land, and started ripping out the mangroves. They laid pipes right into the coral reef—pipes that sucked in water and spat out waste. The sea near our houses quickly turned into a brown, thick, and disgusting mess. My kids could no longer swim in the water just off the shore and my youngest was in so much pain when the polluted water gave her terrible itching and blisters all over her feet.

Our seaweed turned white and rotten because of disease. One night, all my fish in the cages died, and it was a huge loss—hundreds of groupers suffocated in the bad water. I had to go further out into the sea to find better water, which meant using more fuel and making less money. As a result, I got deeper into debt. I couldn’t even pay for my child’s school and my family started to fall apart because of the land that was sold to the company.

But we did not stay silent. We formed LINGKAR (“Karimunjawa Struggle Circle”)—fishers, seaweed farmers, tourism workers—determined to fight back. At night, we dove without proper gear to document the ghost pipes (inlet/outlet pipes) destroying our reefs. We faced hired thugs, threats, and intimidation, but we kept documenting, kept posting under #SaveKarimunjawa, until the whole country was watching.

The government thought they could quiet us down by throwing one of our leaders in jail, using a law that’s meant to stop cybercrime but really just gets used to shut people up online. But it backfired, and the whole country got angry. The courts even stepped in and overturned the conviction. We worked together with our friends and journalists who wouldn’t back down and we made the government listen. The ponds were shut down.

The operators went to prison for the pollution caused and slowly, our sea is healing—the water is clearing, the coral is breathing again, and seaweed farmers are daring to tie their ropes back into the water. We’re still rebuilding, but one thing is clear—when people come together, they can hold even the most powerful forces accountable for the harm they cause.

box 4

Chile for sale: the rise of the salmon industry

Pinochet's dictatorship paved the way for the salmon industry in Chile. Today, the country is the world's second-largest producer of farmed salmon—millions of tonnes are processed each year and exported to the world's major economies. It is marketed as a “sustainable” food, despite evidence of the intensive use of antibiotics and other chemicals, as well as the introduction of non-native species, which are responsible for the destruction of lake ecosystems, rivers, and inland seas.

The government is granting concessions in protected areas in southern Chile without taking into account that these form part of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). Marcela Ramos, a member of the Assembly of Island Women for the Waters (AMIPA), is a defender of Chiloé territory¹, where the salmon farming industry has been polluting the waters for decades. The industry now breeds juvenile salmon in freshwater lakes, transports them to reach maturity in protected areas in Patagonia that were granted concessions, and then returns them to Chiloé for processing. Groups such as AMIPA seek to raise awareness of conflicts and environmental neglect, and develop proposals for community solutions.

As well as causing environmental pollution, the salmon farming industry has claimed the lives of many people who have worked in the precarious conditions that are characteristic of the industry: Between 2003 and 2026, there have been 93 fatalities. The National Network of Women in Small-

Scale Fisheries has helped expose the dangers faced by workers in this industry, such as the divers in charge of cleaning the nets in aquaculture pens.

In 2010, the government passed a sea privatisation law which protects the salmon farming industry at the expense of small-scale. It allows the industry to privatise the concessions granted by the state and use them to apply for loans from private banks, resulting in the privatisation of a large part of the sea. All of this is causing conflicts between the people and the government.

The Werkén (messenger) Francisco Vera Millaquén lives in Pargua, just a few metres from salmon feed factories. The expansion of this industry has caused conflicts between families—those who work in it do not want to lose their jobs, whilst others are defending their land and their way of life as fisherfolk.

Werkén Francisco's community has been denouncing corruption and the influence of the salmon industry on government decisions for years. Today, this is reflected in attempts to amend the Lafkenche Law², which protects the rights of coastal communities and their food sovereignty.

1 - Chiloé is the name of both an archipelago and its largest island.

2 - Passed in 2008 following ten years of collective work, the law recognises and protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples over their traditional coastal areas through the creation of the Marine and Coastal Spaces for Indigenous Peoples (ECMPO).

box 5

Defending the commons is a feminist cause

Industrial aquaculture is a form of extractivism being driven by market-led motivations such as profit maximization at the expense of exceeding ecological limits. Methods of industrial aquaculture rely heavily on mass production and chemical treatment of the water body, leading to large amounts of waste. The local fisherfolk are dispossessed of their right to food sovereignty as corporate power commodifies fisheries.

The World March of Women defends life over profit and protects the commons for the sustainability of life. Ocean and aquatic environments are commons as well, that is why defending the oceans as commons is a feminist cause. As the World March of Women, we place our struggle against transnational corporations at the core of our movement. In our struggle to defend life over profit, we rise against industrial aquaculture and stand with the fisherwomen!

Women's labor in fisheries

In capitalism, women's labor remains unrecognized. So, as in industrial aquaculture, fisherwomen face legal and social obstacles. Although fisherwomen work long hours and contribute a large share of the income of the fisherfolk's family, their work remains unrecognized. Fisherwomen are perceived as ancillary workers. Unlike licensed fishermen, fisherwomen, whose labor is unrecognized¹, cannot access institutional credit or social security benefits.

Even in places where fisherwomen are recognized, they are still not part of the policy-making process, which limits their ability to effect change.

1 - In the fisheries economy, women work 17 hours every day, and they contribute 48% of the income in the fisherfolk's family - <https://youtu.be/GgZZ82ULku4?si=jL5teOlqUDfma8gx>

box 6

Nyeléni, solidarity and philanthropy

The Nyéléni Process, an internationalist expression of social movements, began out of necessity. So did the new framework of Solidarity Philanthropy launched by Grassroots International alongside several global social movements last year. This framework, or pathway, sets new parameters on how philanthropy should function to protect social movements' financial autonomy.

The 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum served as the starting point to establish Solidarity Philanthropy as a collective strategy between people in philanthropy and grassroots organizations. After decades of working in silos, allies saw the 3rd Global Forum as a chance to confront a key challenge for the sustainability of the Nyéléni Process together—the influence of philanthropy on social movements and how the institution was holding back communities that funders were supposed to support.

As a philanthropic model, Solidarity Philanthropy advocates for:

- **Reckoning with our relationships to wealth.** Understanding where money comes from helps us understand where it needs to go.
- **Aligning grantmaking with movements' goals of financial autonomy.** Grants must fit

movement priorities, not the other way around.

- **Going beyond funding to deep allyship.** Relationships must be grounded in learning and trust. Funders must speak up when movements are under attack.
- **Investing in infrastructure that sustains movements.** Physical infrastructure, language justice, secure communications, collective care, and more are essential to power social movements for the long haul.
- **Organizing people in philanthropy in synergy with social movements' priorities.** Solidarity develops through relationships and shared action. Like fishers who learn from the waters that sustain them, we practice solidarity by actively engaging with each other.

The organizing behind this model seeks to contest the institution of philanthropy. The wealth hoarded in the hands of the few must reach back to the communities it came from. The 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum was an opportunity for movements and allied funders to build a shared praxis together grounded in solidarity and internationalism.

