



Photo: Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

## Global Groundswell for Agroecology

by Dr. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman

On a cool October evening, as PAN friends gathered in Northern California to celebrate our 35th anniversary, I left for Rome, where I joined hundreds of civil society movement leaders from around the world in making the case for agroecology as the most promising way to nourish people and planet.

The next morning, walking down ancient streets towards the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), I recalled making the same journey 23 years earlier to participate in the first World Food Summit. That was in my very first year as a newly hired scientist at PAN. A lot has changed since then.

### Pesticides, corporations & climate change

In countries around the world, the devastating effects of highly hazardous pesticides on people's health persist. Corporate consolidation has enabled three mega-pesticide companies to capture over 70% of the global pesticide market and 60% of commercial seed sales. In the U.S., this corporate power translates directly into political power, and has led to the unraveling of critical health and environment protections.

Meanwhile, widespread use of pesticides is increasingly understood to be driving major biodiversity and population losses among insects, birds and other pollinators, threatening ecosystem integrity.

And then there's climate change. The same three mega-pesticide companies are major contributors to today's climate chaos. The production and distribution of their petroleum-based chemical products release greenhouse gases, their promotion of GMO soybean production drives deforestation in the Amazon, while their

herbicides destroy the soil biology that would otherwise be capable of sequestering carbon and helping mitigate climate change.

### Global support for agroecology

And yet, here I was, walking into a UN plenary hall filled with government delegates from 126 countries and 172 civil society organizations representing farmers, laborers, Indigenous people, women and youth, plus over 250 other institutions and observers. The majority of participants were there not to discuss "business as usual," but to welcome a new expert report highlighting the ability of *agroecology* to transform the world's food systems, enable productive, climate-resilient farming and fulfill people's rights to food, good health and a safe working environment.

The growing focus on agroecology in recent years by the FAO and governments represents a tremendous victory for peasant,

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# How We “Catch” Pesticide Drift

## Doing Science with the People

by Dr. Emily Marquez

For over a decade, PAN has worked with partner groups in our key states to test the air for pesticide drift using a device called the Drift Catcher. We launched the latest round of drift-catching in California a little over a year ago, and are now reflecting on lessons learned and awaiting results.

Our partners already know pesticide drift is a problem. The data collected by drift-catching often supports advocacy work we do together, and helps bring about policy changes that protect farmers, communities and workers.

### Collaborative, community science

What I like best about drift-catching is that it's an opportunity to do science with people who aren't formally trained as scientists. Partners learn about taking observations and how to record data. If we collect evidence of drift, it means they've gotten some information that answers questions they've lived with for years.

One of the constant challenges with this work is the difficulty of knowing when to monitor, because we don't know which pesticide is being applied, or when. Drift-catching partners may be familiar with what pesticide spray looks like, but knowing the specifics can get complicated if neighbors and/or pesticide applicators don't want to share information freely. In addition, other kinds of agrichemicals may be applied that just *look* like pesticide spray.

### This year's California drift-catching

PAN Grassroots Science Fellow Jibril Kyser and I spent the past several months traveling around California with the Drift Catcher with the goal of doing drift-catching at 10 sites in California communities over the course of the three-year project.

For this round of drift-catching, we had the chance to work with primarily Spanish-speaking partners in coordination with Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR). Conducting a training via interpreters was challenging, but I'm grateful that we have Drift Catcher materials and instructions available in Spanish. This language barrier was a humbling reminder of what it was like for my grandparents on both sides when they immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and Hong Kong.

Another common challenge we faced was that our community partners don't have much spare time to do this work. Sample tubes in the Drift Catcher need to be changed about every 12 hours, and it can be difficult to do this while managing other life duties.

### Grassroots science wish list

Doing this work with Jibril was particularly enlightening, as he is a lot younger than me, and his surprise and dismay over seeing huge swaths of monoculture in the Central Valley let me look at our home state's agricultural landscape with fresh eyes.

I wish we had even more opportunities to do science with community members, as people across the country often reach out to PAN asking for Drift Catchers. But we've learned over the



Staff scientist Emily Marquez joins organizer Jesus Mendoza at a recent Drift Catcher training.

years that for staff to best support these projects, we have to do drift-catching in states where we have ongoing campaigns and partnerships.

I also wish we were always able to bring about change using the data we collect through these projects. Yet at PAN we know that data alone aren't always sufficient to win the policy changes we want to see. That's exactly why doing grassroots science with our community partners is so important. More often than not, the people we do drift-catching with become more deeply engaged in advocacy efforts for the long haul—whether or not we collect evidence of drift. —E

### The Science

*for your conversations about pesticides*

#### How does drift happen?

Even the most careful pesticide sprayer can't control what happens to pesticide droplets once they are released from a plane or tractor. Too often, these droplets end up settling in someone's yard, mixing with dust in someone's house, landing on another farmer's crops, or coating the skin of someone who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

This type of drift is called spray drift. Another common kind of drift that is also dangerous, but largely ignored, is volatilization drift. This happens when pesticides slowly evaporate into the air from the soil or plants after application—and it can take place over the course of many days.



# Meet PAN Asia Pacific's Sarojeni V. Rengam

As PAN North America celebrates our 35th anniversary, Executive Director Kristin Schafer recently had a conversation with PAN Asia Pacific Executive Director Sarojeni V. Rengam about PAN's work throughout the years.

## When and for how long have you been involved with PAN?

I was hired to be the coordinator for PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) in 1985, under the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU). I had just missed the original PAN meeting but then in 1985, PAN North America founders Monica Moore and Gretta Goldenman came and met with us to discuss how to launch the global Dirty Dozen campaign. PANAP officially got our registration as our own organization in January 1992 and I've been the director ever since.

## What brought you to your work with PAN?

I did my degree in biology and had always been interested in either doing something for the environment or social work. In 1988–89, I visited women plantation workers in Perak, Malaysia, and saw the conditions of their work, how they were exploited, how they were spraying pesticides without protective equipment, and that they were undernourished and had other health problems. There was also a lot of violence in the workplace and domestic violence.

Following that, we started a project on women and pesticides, documenting working conditions and doing training workshops. I realized that you can't just tackle the issue of pesticides without taking on other aspects of the struggles of farmers, workers, and women. We are rooted at the grassroots with our partners, and that's how we get involved in their struggle.

## What aspect of PAN's work makes you excited to work with the network?

When we see women on the ground who have been part of our trainings developing their capacity to lobby, and campaigning on pesticide issues, that is inspiring. Also, seeing the bans we've worked on for years, like chlorpyrifos, paraquat and endosulfan, starting to happen in other countries is exciting.

**ABOUT PAN** PAN works to create a just, thriving food system, working with those on the frontlines to tackle the pesticide problem — and reclaim the future of food and farming. One of five regional centers worldwide, PAN North America links local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. Together, we challenge the global proliferation of pesticides, defend basic rights to health and environmental quality, and work to ensure the transition to a just and viable food system.



**You keep going because the farmers haven't given up, the people haven't given up, women and Indigenous peoples haven't given up. So you can't give up.**

These are a result of our campaigning, and all of us as an international network are contributing to this. We are eroding industry's efforts to keep their pesticides on the market.

## What current PAN work or campaigns are you excited about?

I'm excited about the No Land No Life campaign, working on the issue of land grabbing. There's so much struggle on the ground in terms of people losing land, especially in authoritarian governments. Communities in rural areas, remote places, and Indigenous peoples often don't have papers that say "we've been here for hundreds of years," so they get pushed out.

This kind of work is some of the hardest to manage emotionally, as you see the violence on the ground. But you keep going because the farmers haven't given up, the people haven't given up, women and Indigenous peoples haven't given up. So you can't give up.

## What does your vision of a healthy, just food and farming system look like?

We need a system where the landless get control of the land, and agrarian reform becomes an integral part of the change we're working towards. We need a system where agroecology is widespread, and not industry-backed agroecology but a people-to-people kind of movement building.

In this future, people have access to food that is healthy, and not expensive. People grow their own food or are part of cooperatives. All subsidies for industrial farming are removed, which puts everyone on the same playing field. I see farming that is really people- and farmer-led, agroecologically based, supports the environment and supports the economy. —

To read the full interview, visit [www.panna.org/InternationalProfile](http://www.panna.org/InternationalProfile).

Indigenous and family farmers who have been developing this ecological approach to farming over millennia. It's also a victory for PAN and the social movements that have been fighting for decades for farmers' rights to do so.

Throughout the week, stacks of materials I had brought were quickly taken up by government delegates, including hundreds of copies of PAN International's "Position Paper on Agroecology: Solution to Highly Hazardous Pesticides," which we provided in six languages.

### Confronting corporate power

In contrast to the support for agroecology expressed by many governments, the U.S. remained an outlier, vigorously defending the pesticide/seed industry in plenary and at side events. One such panel featured large-scale growers—and Bayer CropScience—presenting their operations as "climate-friendly," despite their heavy reliance on glyphosate.

In the Q&A session that followed, I asked the Bayer representative to explain how the corporation could claim to support

agroecology, when it continues to produce neonicotinoid insecticides known to harm pollinators, when its Round-up-based soybean systems have contributed to the destruction of Brazil's rainforest, and when its drift-prone herbicide, dicamba, is damaging millions of acres of American cropland. Before the Bayer representative could reply, the facilitator quickly ended the session, turning to the U.S. Ambassador for closing comments. His contribution? "Bayer has a lot of good guys."

I'm not surprised that the U.S. government continues to defend the pesticide industry. To be honest, I'm more interested in the powerful solutions happening on the ground, and the animated conversations between youth organizers from Mozambique and Sri Lanka, women leaders from Fiji and Pakistan, family farmers from Iowa and Brazil, NGO allies and more.

Back home now, I remain deeply inspired by the indomitable spirit, energy, joy and wisdom of the amazing movement leaders I met in Rome. —

## Celebrating 35 Years!

A fun and busy fall saw PAN celebrating our 35th anniversary with partners, supporters and friends in Iowa and California. PAN founders and board alumni also hosted house parties in California, Boston, MA, and Washington, DC.



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