Land Grabbing
a Mexican Presidium
Under Threat
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Around the world, huge tracts of fertile land are being sold or rented for extremely low prices. Tens of millions of hectares have been surrendered in recent years to produce food crops for export or biofuels, to extract resources or to resell the land on the financial market, like any other commodity. This so-called land grabbing is severely threatening the environment, the food sovereignty and the very lives of local communities.

The example we are about to discover refers to an episode that is threatening a Slow Food Presidium.

The Presidium of the Puebla Sierra Norte Native Bees’ Honey is one of 400 projects created by Slow Food to encourage and promote traditional local food production.
The indigenous Náhuat and Totonacos people live at the foot of the Sierra Norte di Puebla. The mountains, the water and the flora and fauna are all part of their cosmovision.

In harmony with the wild forest vegetation, these communities cultivate coffee, pepper, vanilla and cinnamon. This traditional system is called *koujatkiloyan*, “the forest that produces.”
The indigenous peoples also collect the honey from the native bees, that since 2012 has been a Slow Food Presidium. This spicy-flavored, fermented honey is produced by the tiny and docile *Scaptotrigona mexicana* bees.
The bees live in curious traditional hives called *mancuernas*. The beekeepers glue terracotta vessels together with an ash-based paste, which are separated during the harvest with a machete. It is a tradition that has always been passed from father to son!
One day, two well-dressed strangers suddenly appear...
These foreigners explain that a hydroelectric power plant would be built nearby. “It will produce energy for the new mines,” they say. “It is a unique opportunity for progress and development!”

Some people are scared. Several developments are already threatening the environment. Others are happy. Their situation is difficult. There are few services, and some investments are necessary!
Officials immediately welcome the foreigners. Governments often promote these agreements, even if they are deeply unfair: the prices are low (especially if we consider the potential profits!), and not much importance is given to the potential environmental damage.
Work starts immediately. A part of the forest is cut down.

In a few weeks, the rivers and streams, the air and the land are poisoned.
A few of the local people can work for the power plant.

The others are forced to leave in silence the land where their culture is rooted, relocating to crowded and anonymous ciudades rurales.
But there could be another option. It can be very difficult, but local communities can inform themselves, organize and protest, with the participation of associations and the press.
After strong protests, this time the project is suspended. The foreigners are forced to take their bulldozers away.
Little by little, the forest is reborn.
It would be wonderful if all the cases of land grabbing could end like this! We need regulations, more attention from institutions and the public and real investments for local development: let's stop land grabbing!

The children and the elders celebrate.
Slow Food is an association with more than 100,000 members in 150 countries. It works to defend food biodiversity, spread taste education and link producers and consumers. It promotes sustainable agriculture and a better awareness of where our food comes from, because food choices have a strong impact on the planet.

Slow Food supports an international campaign against land grabbing.

Visit the site www.slowfood.com/landgrabbing
Tell us your experiences and send us your comments at landgrabbing@slowfood.com