

# the Equality in the Field Tour

A solidarity tour to  
raise awareness about  
gender equality and  
agroecology




# Introduction

**From September 20 to 30, 2024, Inter Pares accompanied a West African delegation to meet with farming communities and feminist activists in Quebec and Canada—the *Equality in the Field Tour*.**

The delegation consisted of seven counterparts from Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Togo, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, currently implementing the project *Gender Equality through Women-led Agroecology in West Africa (WLA)*. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada. In West Africa, rural women face patriarchal discrimination and the climate crisis, which limits their rights and makes them more vulnerable. This project, launched in 2022, has improved the lives of rural women in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Togo by building their capacities, supporting sustainable agricultural systems and facilitating access to local markets.

The *Equality in the Field Tour* aimed to share the realities of rural women, promote gender equality and learn about agroecological practices. The tour raised awareness of feminist and agro-ecological approaches among the Quebec public, forged new bonds of solidarity and discussed current challenges such as inequality, the climate crisis and gender-based violence. Conversations throughout the tour highlighted the efforts of rural women to transform their communities despite the obstacles and underlined the importance of international solidarity in the struggle for food sovereignty and gender equality.

This report presents some of the major highlights of the tour. 

# A look back at the tour's activities

Meeting with farmers, elected officials and staff from the Centre local de développement de Brome-Missisquoi.

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares



## › Meeting with the *Centre local de développement de Brome-Missisquoi*

On September 23, 2024, the West African delegation met with elected officials from the Eastern Townships (*Estrie*) region and members of the *Centre local de développement de Brome-Missisquoi* team at their offices. The meeting, punctuated by a round-table discussion, highlighted the issues facing farmers both in the region and in West Africa, notably climate change, women's limited access to land and agricultural property, and the vulnerability of small-scale producers in a market dominated by monocultures and large distribution chains. The meeting also addressed the role of municipalities and elected representatives in promoting local organic farming and supporting women in agriculture.



### READ:

L'accès des femmes à la terre, un combat de l'Afrique à l'Estrie,  
a press article on the meeting,  
published in the regional  
newspaper *La Voix de l'Est*.  
Available in French only.

Maude-Hélène Desroches shares organic farming tips with the delegation.

Photo credit: Fernande Abanda/Inter Pares



### › Farm visit : *Les jardins de la grelinette*

A visit to *Les Jardins de la grelinette* in St-Armand was an eye-opening and inspiring experience. Maude-Hélène Desroches and her husband Jean-Martin Fortier own the micro-farm *Les Jardins de la grelinette* in St-Armand. This small organic vegetable farm has become a model for those who aspire to organic farming. The farm has proved its worth and continues to be the subject of TV documentaries and articles in the press. “The Market Gardener”, a book presenting the farm’s production model, has been translated into nine languages and has become a bestseller. Today, Maude-Hélène manages 100% of the farm’s operations.

Previously, Maude-Hélène had traveled with Inter Pares to India for an exchange between women farmers from West Africa and India. On the day of our visit, she warmly welcomed the delegation with open arms and shared her organic farming practices. This included explanations on diversification of crops, the use of green manures to fertilize the soil, as well as techniques to protect crops from important weather variations and pests. The counterparts were particularly interested in the farming tools she uses, which seem to be more conducive to reducing the drudgery and effort involved in agricultural work.

Maude-Hélène explains how green compost is used to nourish the soil.

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares





The delegation at Maude-Hélène Desroches and Jean-Martin Fortier's *Les Jardins de la grelinette*.

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares

After touring the gardens, the delegation gathered around the table with Maude-Hélène and two members of her team to sample the farm's produce while discussing marketing aspects and farm operations. The discussion made it clear that the secret to the farm's success lies in reducing expenses and maximizing efficiency. The farm produces enough to supply 100 families, sell to farmers' markets, a few local restaurants and the village grocery store, all on less than a hectare of cultivated land. The house and equipment are located in the center of the plot, surrounded by the gardens, reducing distances to and from the fields. The use of hand tools makes sowing and weeding easier and the work can be done quickly. The farm uses only a rototiller for mechanized machinery, which helps to keep costs down.

### › Public forum with Vigilance OGM

In the evening, the delegation headed to Sutton to take part in the round table "Agroecology, feminist approaches and the fight against agrochemicals" co-organized with Vigilance OGM. Moderated by Lise-Anne Léveillée of *CLD Brome Missisquoi* and an Inter Pares member, the panel featured members of the WLA delegation and Vigilance OGM coordinator Thibault Rehn.

The panel addressed the following themes:

- Agroecology and feminism: How these approaches respond to current challenges linked to inequalities, the climate and biodiversity crisis and systemic violence.
- Resistance to multinationals: A look at resistance to agrochemical lobbies in Canada and West Africa.
- Myths about GMOs: Deconstructing the false solutions being promoted to feed the world.

The dialogue strengthened the links between feminist and ecological struggles across continents and highlighted the importance of local initiatives for global change. Our counterparts from Senegal, Togo, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau shared their experiences and strategies of resistance in the face of inequalities and environmental crises exacerbated by the climate crisis. There were 30 people in the room and 45 online. If you missed the event or would like to watch it again, the recording is available on [YouTube](#).



The panel for the public event:  
*Agroecology, feminist approaches  
and struggles against agrochemicals.*

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares





## › *Les Agricoles* tour podcast

The delegation met with Enora Cordier to record a series of podcast episodes for *Les Agricoles*, a podcast that gives voice to the women who make up the world of agriculture. The episodes focus on the women of the delegation and their organization's actions in promoting gender equality and food sovereignty. This podcast shares more about the work of Pauline N'Diaye (Enda Pronat, Senegal), Leodililde Pinto and Rugui Baldé (Tiniguenta, Guinea-Bissau), Sélome Adoussi Houetognon (Inades-Formation, Togo) and Mariamé Ouatarra (Gender expert for the WLA project, Burkina Faso).

The podcast will be available on the Inter Pares website and social media soon.

A call for the recognition of women in agriculture.

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares



Pauline Ndiaye of ENDA Pronat, interviewed by Enora Cordier of *Les Agricoles* podcast.

Photo credit: Thelma Grundisch/Inter Pares



Tasting local produce from the *Les Cocagnes*.

Photo credit: Fernande Abanda/Inter Pares

### › Learning circle discussion at *Les Cocagnes* collective farm

Another highlight of the *Equality in the Field Tour* was a visit to *Les Cocagnes* in Frelighsburg where the delegation participated in a learning circle with local women farmers and activists. *Les Cocagnes* collective farm is an agro-ecological initiative run by a non-profit organization, offering young agro-ecological entrepreneurs access to land and a range of agrotourism and educational activities.

This learning circle was a real opportunity to exchange views on the challenges faced by women in agriculture, the issues at stake in food sovereignty and the actions put in place to overcome them. United in the struggle, participants shared strategies and initiatives to strengthen gender equality and improve conditions for women farmers.

Participants from the Eastern Townships—mainly women farmers, activists (members of *Mères au Front*) and former elected representatives—unanimously stressed the difficulty of access to land in the region. This constraint is exacerbated by the patriarchal tradition of handing down land from father to son, the high cost of farmland and the obsolescence of Quebec’s farmland law, which does not adequately protect agricultural land from development.



Learning circle, *Les Cocagnes*.

Photo credit: Fernande Abanda/Inter Pares





Stéphanie Wang poses with her crops at the Rizen farm in Les Cocagnes gardens.

Photo credit: Fernande Abanda/Inter Pares

To overcome these obstacles, alternatives such as the social economy, land trusts and collective gardens were presented. Another major issue is the triple workday of women farmers, who have to juggle farm management, family responsibilities and their commitment to advocacy. The discussion also touched on advocacy actions, with a striking intervention by a member of *Mères au Front*, who described the impact of the “Chair of generations” (an actual chair placed adjacent to town / city council tables) as a visual reminder for elected officials to consider future generations when making policy decisions.

Once again, participants noted the similarities between these issues in West Africa and in Quebec.

### › Dialogue on agroecology and women’s rights with *Association québécoise des organisations de coopération internationale (AQOCI)*

As part of the *États généraux québécois de la solidarité internationale*, marked on Wednesday September 25 in Montreal, the delegation met with members of the *Association québécoise des organisations de coopération internationale (AQOCI)* to discuss agroecology and women’s rights. The conversation highlighted the challenges linked to gender equality and food sovereignty, while underlining the importance for organizations in the global North and South to work in solidarity to tackle these issues, which concern West Africa as much as Quebec.



**LEARN MORE:**  
[Notes du dialogue sur l’agroécologie](#)  
 (in French only)



The delegation with Michèle Asselin, director of AQOCI and Éric Normand Thibeault, coordinator of the *États généraux québécois de la solidarité internationale*, in Montreal.

Photo credit: AQOCI

### › Meeting with the Inter Pares team and Global Affairs Canada

Back in Ottawa, the delegation had the pleasure of meeting with members of the Inter Pares team and several members of the Board of Directors. The delegation then met with Global Affairs Canada to present the progress and impact of the WLA project, and to discuss a range of issues. The meeting was attended by Edna Civil Blanc, Michel Marleau, Tania Mackinnon and Christine Roy.

### › Farm visit: Roots and Shoots farm

Roots and Shoots is an organic horticultural farm located in Sainte-Cécile de Masham, in the Outaouais region. This farm was chosen for several reasons. Jessica and her mother, Colleen Ross, are farmers renowned for their know-how and commitment. Colleen is a former women's president of the National Farmers Union and an active member of Via Campesina. She has collaborated with Inter Pares in several important struggles to safeguard seeds and farmers' rights. An outstanding activist, she now works alongside her daughter and family at Roots and Shoots. Pat Mooney and Susie Walsh, two Inter Pares collaborators who have worked in solidarity on many fronts, such as the fight against GMOs and the promotion of agroecology, were also invited.

The visit took place in three stages: (1) a tour of the processing and marketing operations; (2) a visit to the fields and greenhouses; and (3) a country-style dinner and discussion on agricultural issues, particularly for women. Two highlights marked the discussion. Colleen explained that for her, organic farming is not only a way of living her values, but also a form of resistance to the pressures of agribusiness. She stressed the importance of standing up to lobbies and the strong pressure to conform to the agro-industrial model. For her and her daughter, running an agro-ecological farm and demonstrating that you can make a good living from it is paramount. Organic farming is a viable model within the reach of new generations.

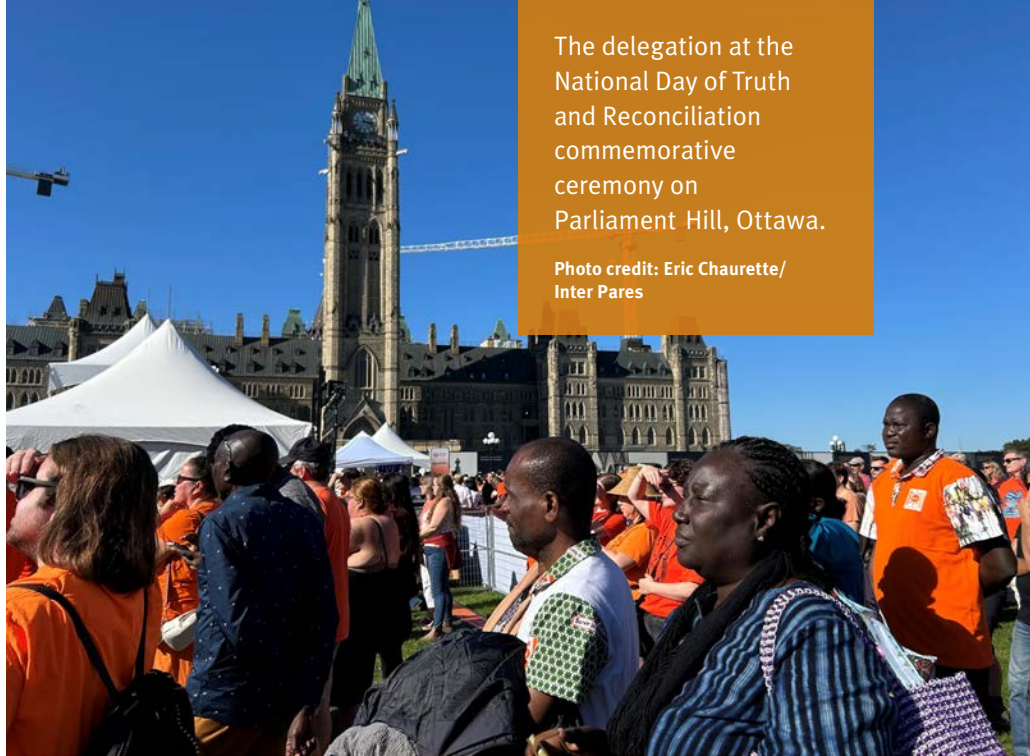


Together for  
agroecology and  
the defense of  
peasants' rights.

Photo credit: Marie Dulude/  
Seed Change

Another highlight was Pat Mooney's testimony on the fight against so-called Terminator seeds, a genetic engineering technology that renders seeds sterile after the first harvest, preventing farmers from picking and replanting them. It was thanks to the worldwide mobilization of civil society organizations and the courage of a delegation of Indigenous women at the Biodiversity Convention negotiations in March 2006 in Curitiba, Brazil, that the moratorium on these technologies was maintained and strengthened.

Both testimonies underlined the crucial role played by women not only in healthy and ecological production, but also in the protection of biodiversity and peasant rights. The Roots and Shoots visit ended with renewed determination to continue "the good fight", and the conviction that these new friendships will strengthen our collective struggles.



The delegation at the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation commemorative ceremony on Parliament Hill, Ottawa.  
Photo credit: Eric Chaurrette/ Inter Pares

### › Participation in the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, 2024

On the afternoon of September 30, the delegation took part in the multilingual commemorative gathering organized by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation on Parliament Hill, to mark the third National Day of Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR). This emotionally charged event was an opportunity for counterparts to better understand Canada’s colonial history and the realities of Indigenous peoples, including the impacts of residential schools.

**On behalf of Inter Pares and the West African delegation, we would like to thank**

our partners and allies ([Vigilance OGM](#), [AQOCI](#), *CLD Brome-Missisquoi*, *Les Jardins de la grelinette*, *Les Cocagnes*, [fermeRoots & Shoots](#) and Global Affairs Canada) who took the time to meet with us, welcome us and lend us an ear and a hand, so that together we can continue to promote greater

**equality  
in  
the field!**