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Inter Pares
globalize equality

bulletin

Investing in the human right to food

Around the world, making ends meet is getting harder every day.

But communities are finding creative ways to respond. In this *Bulletin*, you'll discover how people are building stronger local economies and more resilient communities through collective action. From small-scale farmers in Bangladesh saving seeds, to community groups in Mexico investing in local livelihoods, to public grocery stores in Canada, these stories show that lasting solutions begin with communities themselves.

We're proud to play a supporting role.



Heavy rain can wipe out entire harvests in Nayapara, Bangladesh. Communities can rely on their local seed banks to help them replant their fields. | Photo: Amani Khalfan/Inter Pares

Banking on seeds in Bangladesh

"Save seeds, ensure future harvests," says a sign in a small building in Nayapara, a village in northern Bangladesh.

In a world where everything seems to cost more by the day, saving is something we're all thinking more about.

For farmers in rural Bangladesh on tight budgets, saving seeds is money in the bank. It's the difference between planting next year's crops and falling into debt buying commercial seeds season after season. ▸▸▸

Community seed banks, like this one in Nayapara, are places where farmers can save seeds from one harvest to ensure those of the future. A newly formed group of 17 locals—mostly Indigenous women—run this seed bank, with support from our new counterpart, Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK).

We started working with BARCIK in January 2026 to support small-scale farmers. Since 1997, BARCIK has promoted sustainable farming that relies on local resources instead of purchased inputs, helping farmers spend less on seeds, fertilizers and pesticides.

One way they do this is by supporting seed saving and community seed banks, giving farmers access to locally adapted seeds without having to buy new ones every season.



Supti Dawa (left) and Benuka Goreng (right) two of the community members who run the seed bank in Nayapara, Bangladesh, with support from Inter Pares and our new counterpart BARCIK. | Photo: Amani Khalfan/Inter Pares

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The diverse seeds housed in local seed banks also act as insurance policies. This region of Bangladesh is prone to intense rains, flooding and landslides—disasters that can wipe out entire harvests. The climate crisis and international conflicts only magnify the costs of these disasters. When they happen, local farmers can rely on seeds from their local seed bank to replant their fields.

Though less than a year old, the Nayapara community seed bank is part of Inter Pares' long history of working with small-scale farmers to reclaim control over their food systems from corporations.

In West Africa and India, we've supported small-scale farmers to preserve their seeds for decades. In Peru, we support rural survivors of forced sterilization to start small farms, helping them earn income and diversify their diets.

In Burma, war is making daily life more expensive and food harder to access. Our work with local counterparts is evolving to meet these challenges. We're supporting Indigenous community partners in several states to produce food locally, reducing dependence on imports and improving access to nutritious food. This work includes protecting treasured local seed varieties, as conflict puts them—and the people who steward them—in danger.

In Chin State, a community seed bank dedicated to preserving local rice varieties provides a source of income for surrounding communities. These funds pay for a local medic and basic medicines.

The sign on the Nayapara seed bank wall is just the beginning of the story. For small-scale farmers—whether from Bangladesh, Burma or Canada—rising costs, climate shocks and conflict make seed saving about more than future harvests. It's about strong communities, self-reliance and having one less expense to worry about in an increasingly uncertain world.

Beyond the grocery bill

An interview with Aaron Vansintjan, Food Secure Canada

Canada produces more than enough food to feed everyone in the country. Still, nearly one in four people live in food-insecure households. Through our work with Food Secure Canada, we support public policy solutions that tackle the root causes of food insecurity. We spoke with policy lead Aaron Vansintjan about why so many people in Canada struggle to afford groceries and what solutions could help.

Why is food insecurity rising in Canada?

The most direct cause of food insecurity in Canada is lack of sufficient income. People who do not have enough money can't afford food, so we advocate for income solutions as the primary solution.

There are also deeper issues: access to land, especially for Indigenous people, and the lack of food sovereignty for certain marginalized groups. Black, Indigenous and migrant communities experience much higher rates of food insecurity because of structural racism and barriers to practicing their cultural foodways, which includes accessing culturally appropriate food.

How does the concentration of power in Canada's grocery sector affect the food people buy?

The food industry in Canada is highly concentrated. Distribution is one of the biggest issues. In many regions, farmers have only one or two large distributors they can sell through, and they're often owned by these same food retailers.

I spoke with a farmer in Quebec who couldn't sell to established grocery retailers because of distribution costs. He now exports his organic vegetables to Kentucky because he finds better prices there.

That concentration exists throughout the food supply chain. It makes it harder for farmers to sell food at affordable prices and harder for people to access Canadian-grown products.

Food Secure Canada is exploring public grocery stores as one possible solution. What would that look like?

For housing, education and health care, society has acknowledged that we need non-market alternatives because markets alone don't guarantee everyone access. In the food system, we don't seem to acknowledge that, even though food is a human right.

The idea of public grocery stores is that it's a supermarket that has some kind of public ownership.

For example, New York City plans to open a city-owned grocery store where the city covers the costs of the building. That will allow some goods to be sold for as much as 30 per cent less. We're looking at different models for Canada but one thing that's becoming very clear is that if you want it to work, you do have to subsidize it.

In many remote communities in the North, the federal government already subsidizes private companies who have been found not to pass those on to consumers. In those cases, you might as well have a public grocery store—or a nonprofit or community-owned supermarket—that can guarantee people the right to food rather than making profit the priority.

What gives you hope for the future?

People recognize that there is a crisis and that the government needs to invest heavily to address it.

Now we need to go further by strengthening income-based solutions and nonprofit alternatives that guarantee everyone the right to food. That's the next step if we want to protect against further corporate concentration.



Photo: Food Secure Canada

Community investing for the future



Women members of community savings banks in Chiapas, Mexico, supported by CIMICH, use their savings to reinvest in local initiatives—like this community garden. | Photo: CIMICH

Isabela Cruz sells threads and yarn in San Juan Cancuc, a town in Chiapas, Mexico. Women in her community use her goods to embroider bags, handkerchiefs and *huipiles*, traditional Indigenous blouses. Living in a remote community makes it difficult to find work or access goods. Isabela's shop is how she supports herself and keeps traditional embroidery alive in her community.

Over time, Isabela has grown her shop—but it hasn't been easy.

"I wanted to learn how to save because I didn't know how to balance my budget," shares Isabela.

"I would end up with nothing."

So in 2019, she helped form a *caja de ahorros*—a community savings bank where members can access low-interest loans if needed.

Coalición Indígena de Migrantes de Chiapas (CIMICH), a network of Indigenous communities in the region and an Inter Pares counterpart, works with people like Isabela to form these savings groups. They support seven groups with more than 100 members. The groups are part of CIMICH's broader work to strengthen Indigenous autonomy.

Isabela's savings have helped her regain stability in her life.

"The *caja* means a lot to me. When someone in the family falls ill, we can request a loan from our own savings... We no longer have to ask for loans from the bank."

Nearly 70 per cent of people in Chiapas live below the poverty line. Financial literacy is low, particularly among Indigenous people and women, and interest rates can reach 20 per cent. The lack of economic opportunities in the region forces many Indigenous people to leave.

"When people migrate, it's out of necessity and the lack of jobs in their communities," explains Diego López, from CIMICH. "Every year, the cost of basic needs rises."

CIMICH works alongside the community savings groups to strengthen local initiatives so people can build futures in their communities. Members use their savings to buy and sell goods locally, like Isabela, and to grow and sell their own food, so that they can remain rooted on their ancestral land, instead of risking the perils of migration.

In Colonia Puebla, a small community west of San Juan Canuc, women in a community savings group have planted a small plot of organic coffee. They tend to the land without synthetic pesticides as the trees grow, dreaming of selling coffee locally in the years to come.

Like Isabela's business, the coffee plot began with people choosing to invest in one another. Together, these small investments are helping communities imagine and build a future on their own terms.

"The *caja* means a lot to me. When someone in the family falls ill, we can request a loan from our own savings... We no longer have to ask for loans from the bank."

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