

Statement from African civil society organisations at the World Social Forum
2007

Nairobi, Kenya
25 January 2007

Africa is the source of much of the world's agricultural knowledge and biodiversity. African farming represents a wealth of innovation: for example, Canada's main export wheat is derived from a Kenyan variety called "Kenyan farmer"; the US and Canada grow barley bred from Ethiopian farmers' varieties; and the Zera Zera sorghum grown in Texas originated in Ethiopia and the Sudan. This rich basis of biodiversity still exists in Africa today, thanks to the 80% of farmers in Africa that continue to save seed in a range of diverse eco-systems across the continent.

The future of agriculture for Africa and the world will have to build on this biodiversity and farmers' knowledge, especially in the current context of climate change. The diversity of seed varieties continually developed by African farmers will be vital to ensure that they have the flexibility to respond to changing weather patterns. With the challenges that climate change will bring, only a wealth of seed diversity maintained by farmers in Africa can offer a response to prevent severe food crises.

However, new external initiatives are putting pressure on these agricultural systems. A new initiative from the Bill Gates/ Rockefeller Foundation partnership, called the "Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa" (AGRA) is putting over \$150 million towards shifting African agriculture to a system dependent on expensive, harmful chemicals, monocultures of hybrid seeds, and ultimately genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Another initiative funded by the G8 is pushing biotechnology in agriculture through four new major Biosciences research centres in Africa. And GM companies such as Monsanto and Syngenta are entering into public-private-partnership agreements with national agricultural research centres in Africa, in order to direct agricultural research and policy towards GMOs. These initiatives under-represent the real achievements in productivity through traditional methods, and will fail to address the real causes of hunger in Africa.

This comes at a time when the world is realising the need for organic agriculture; however these initiatives would promote the use of more chemicals, and less seed diversity in the hands of farmers. These initiatives will destroy the bases of biodiversity, knowledge and adaptive capacity – at a time when it is needed most.

This push for a so-called "green revolution" or "gene revolution" is being done once again under the guise of solving hunger in Africa. Chemical-intensive agriculture is, however, already known to be outmoded. We have seen how fertilisers have killed the soil, creating erosion, vulnerable plants and loss of water from the soil. We have seen how pesticides and herbicides have harmed our environment and made us sick. We know that hybrid and GM seed monocultures have pulled farmers into poverty by preventing them from saving seed, and preventing traditional methods of intercropping which provide food security. We vow to learn from our brothers and sisters in India, where this chemical and genetically modified system of agriculture has

left them in so much debt and hunger that 150,000 farmers have committed suicide.

The push for a corporate-controlled chemical system of agriculture is parasitic on Africa's biodiversity, food sovereignty, seed and small-scale farmers. Farmers in Africa cannot afford these expensive agricultural inputs. But these new infrastructures seek to make farmers dependent on chemicals and hybrid seeds, and will open the door to GMOs and Terminator crops.

Industrial breeding has in fact been driven by the industry's demand for new markets – not to meet the needs of farmers.

We know, however, that the agroecological approach to farming, using traditional and organic methods, provides the real solutions to the crises that we face. Studies show that a biodiversity-based organic agriculture, working with nature and not against it, and using a diversity of mixed crops, produces higher overall yields at far lower costs than chemical agriculture. A 2002 study by the International Centre for Research on Agroforestry (ICRAF) showed that Southern African farms using traditional agroforestry techniques did not suffer from the drought that hit the region so severely that year.

We reject these new foreign systems that will encourage Africa's land and water to be privatised for growing inappropriate export crops, biofuels and carbon sinks, instead of food for our own people. We pledge to intensify our work for food sovereignty by conserving our own seed and enhancing our traditional organic systems of agriculture, in order to meet the uncertainties and challenges that will be faced by present and future generations.

Agricultural innovation must be farmer-led, responding to local needs and sustainability. We celebrate Africa's wealth and heritage of seed, knowledge and innovation. We will resist these misguided, top-down but heavily-funded initiatives from the North, which show little or no understanding or respect for our complex systems. We ask that we be allowed to define our own path forward.

Signed by African civil society organisations at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, 2007.

- 70 organisations from 12 African countries