

Press Release

15 August 2013

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

Africa's Food Sovereignty under Attack by Corporate Interests

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), a coalition of pan-African networks, with members in 50 African countries and representing smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples and civil society, met in Addis Ababa 12-16th August 2013 to formulate an action plan to safeguard Africa's sovereignty over its food, seeds and natural resources from the assault on Africa's food systems.

Africa's diversity and knowledge systems are being threatened by corporate and genetically modified (GM) seeds, agro-chemicals, resource grabs and laws that prevent farmers from freely using, sharing or selling their seed.

These threats come from amongst others, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the G8 "New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition" that strongly promote the interests of multinational seed, fertilizer and agro-chemical companies at the expense of the rights and interests of smallholder farmers.

Currently, 80% of seed in Africa is bred by smallholder farmers, who freely save and share seed, resulting in a wide diversity of agricultural crops and a safety-net for food security. "We are outraged at the way African governments are being strong-armed into adopting draconian seed laws that ensure the dominance of corporate seeds; giving private

breeders monopoly and exclusive marketing rights over seeds” said Elizabeth Mpofo, from La Via Campesina Africa.

The entry point for corporate agribusiness into Africa is through valuable cash crops such as cotton. Bt cotton is promoted as necessary for African farmers to compete on the global cotton market. "Bt cotton production in Burkina Faso and South Africa has failed to achieve its promise. Small farmers are finding that yields and quality of Bt cotton are extremely low. For this reason Bt cotton planting this year has plunged from 400,000 hectares to 200,000 hectares in Burkina Faso." FatouBatta, Association Nourrir Sans Détruire, Burkina Faso.

The G8 New Alliance places a heavy emphasis on nutrition that focuses almost exclusively on the bio-fortification of key staple crops. According to Bernard Guri from COMPAS Africa “Bio-fortification is a dangerous distraction from real solutions for nutrition such as increasing crop diversity. We cannot look to dependence on so-called ‘fortified’ crops, whilst ignoring the real socio-economic causes of malnutrition.”

The many pan-African networks belonging to AFSA all note with great concern the increasing acquisition of huge areas of African land by mining conglomerates and biofuel and export agribusiness. Smallholder farmers such as those displaced by these land grabs feed 70% of the world. Their model of agro-ecological family farming is the most efficient and productive in the world. We must support them instead of undermining their knowledge and practice." said Million Belay, Coordinator of AFSA

Notes to Editors

The ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA (AFSA) is a Pan African platform comprising networks and farmer organizations working in Africa including the African Biodiversity network (ABN), Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage (COPAGEN), Comparing and Supporting Endogenous Development (COMPAS) Africa, Friends of the Earth- Africa, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC), Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association, Eastern and Southern African Small Scale Farmers" Forum (ESSAFF), La Via Campesina Africa, FAHAMU, World Neighbors, Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations of West Africa (ROPPA), Community Knowledge Systems (CKS), Plate forme Sous Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC) and African Centre for Biosafety (ACB).

AFSA members represent small holder farmers, pastoralists, hunter/gatherers, indigenous peoples, citizens and environmentalists from Africa who possesses a strong voice that shapes policy on the continent in the area of community rights, family farming, promotion of traditional knowledge and knowledge systems, the environment and natural resource management. Thus, providing a forum to analyze, discuss issues, challenge policies and identify ways forward.

Member countries of COMESA in collaboration with the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and ACTESA (The Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa) have drafted seed registration law that will be considered by COMESA governments in September 2013. These draft Regulations create a compulsory regional registration system allowing only marketing of private sector seeds while criminalizing the sale

of smallholder farmer varieties that have evolved over centuries.

In addition, African regional institutions such as the African Regional Intellectual Property Office (ARIPO) and the South African Development Community (SADC) have also developed draft intellectual property frameworks that only grants proprietary rights to the private sector varieties, while preventing small-holder farmers from continuing their sustainable farming practices of freely using, exchanging and selling seeds. These frameworks enable corporate take-over of African seeds and undermine seed sovereignty.