

## **BAMAKO DECLARATION, FEBRUARY 2007**

### **Peasant Seeds are the Way Forward for Africa's Food Sovereignty**

Having met in Bamako between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2007, we farmers, pastoralists, representatives of civil society groups, social movements, and environmentalists from 17 countries, mainly from West Africa with representatives from Africa, Asia, South America and Europe have extensively discussed and exchanged on:

- the issues of privatisation of seeds and genetic engineering,
- the principles and practices of ecological farming,
- seed conservation and the food & cultural sovereignty of our countries,- and the ability of traditional seeds to nurture and guide our food and farming future in ways that sustain nature and the livelihoods of the agrarian communities of our planet.

Our interaction has opened up new vistas on life-affirming agricultural practices based on seed and animal breed conservation, as well as on struggles for community food and seed sovereignty. It has reaffirmed our conviction in the strength of traditional knowledge systems and respectful intercultural dialogue. In the light of all these arguments and examples;

#### **We support the use of traditional seeds and animal breeds for food sovereignty**

- We call upon all our national governments, particularly in West Africa to actively support national and regional efforts to save and retrieve the rich patrimony of traditional seeds in this region. Our region is making a transition from the concept of food security to food sovereignty through the process of local food self-sufficiency. This is critical to the survival of our communities with dignity and self esteem.
- We call upon our leaders and governments to endorse these principles and incorporate the concept of Food Sovereignty in their national constitutions and Common Agricultural Policy, and vigorously pursue its implementation in their national and regional agricultural initiatives.
- We affirm our conviction that traditional seeds combined with farming systems based on a rich agro-biodiversity and agro-ecological principles as well as local markets can successfully and sustainably feed our populations.

#### **Stop the privatization of seeds and biopiracy**

- We strongly believe that the privatisation of seeds through research and intellectual property rights, and patents stand fundamentally opposed to food sovereignty. We have heard examples of the trap laid by arguments such as Access and Benefit Sharing systems which we believe drags us into a Faustian deal with corporations and snatches away our sovereign rights over our bioresources. Our governments must therefore do everything in their means to halt this privatisation.
- During this Workshop, we have heard a number of examples of the destruction wrought by the genetically modified crops in Asia and Latin America as well as in South Africa & Europe. We also learnt about many examples of biopiracy that have robbed the genetic wealth of our nations. We are absolutely convinced that these practices should be stopped in West African countries and ask that our governments put in place mechanisms to prevent such developments in this region of the world.
- In the West African context, the biggest danger that confronts us is privatisation of seeds through UPOV & Bangui agreements supporting plant breeder's rights to the detriment of farmers' rights over seeds and their knowledge. The same is true for other regional economic partnership agreements such as the ECOWAS, CILSS all of which are WTO-compliant. We demand that these agreements keep

agriculture and seed privatisation out of their orbit and protect farmers and their seeds.

#### Ban GMOs on the lands of Africa

- Another big threat to our food sovereignty is posed by the aggressive policies of the biotech industry in Africa, - and especially in West Africa. This industry is acting with the support of Northern governments and international bodies. In this context, we view with concern the multiple interventions of international bodies such as USAID, the World Food Program (WFP) and the Catholic Relief Service, in our national policies in the guise of food aid or building our capacity to frame bio-safety laws in our countries. We are certain that such bio-safety frameworks designed in the USA will be a trap to facilitate the free entry of GE crops.
- The recent actors in this game are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as NEPAD. We are certain that these are Trojan Horses for the entry of GMOs and corporate controlled biotechnology into Africa. They offer no solution for hunger and poverty in Africa. African governments must wake up to this danger and not sacrifice the safety of their people and lands because of the millions of dollars being poured in by these initiatives. All these initiatives are designed to pave the way for pro-biotech research that will work against the interests of our populations. We strongly demand that our governments wake up to this reality and use all possible means, diplomatic and otherwise, to ban the entry of Genetically Engineered crops from the lands of Africa.
- In a remarkably democratic Citizens' Jury held in January 2006 in Sikasso, our sisters and brothers from Mali have firmly said 'No to GMOs and Yes to Traditional Crops and peasant farming'. We endorse the recommendations of this Citizens' Jury and demand that our governments accord this vibrant call the deepest respect it deserves and vigorously implement the recommendations of Malian farmers in their national laws and actions.

#### Support farmer exchanges and innovations

- In terms of positive action, we urge all the West African nations to facilitate farmers' exchanges in the region through funding and support for regional networks such as ROPPA, COPAGEN, CNOP and such other farmers organizations. We believe that such exchanges will build a healthy network of farmers ideas and initiatives that can strengthen the farming communities of this region.
- Given that similar processes of privatization of farmer seeds and knowledge are at work on all continents, and that appropriate responses to these threats can be generated through farmer exchanges on all five continents. We recommend that international farmer exchanges on seed and food sovereignty be supported and organized on a regular basis.
- Village level, farmer led research, - and participatory plant and livestock breeding done in this context-, are other positive initiatives we strongly recommend to governments, farmers groups and civil society organizations. This has the potential to enhance the resilience of our agriculture without damaging our environment and livelihoods.
- We call upon all national and international funding agencies to support such efforts at the farmers and civil society level.

**Declaration of the Farmer Exchange on the Privatisation of Seeds, organized by the CNOP, BEDE and IIED. Preparatory process for the International Forum on Food Sovereignty of Nyeléni, Mali, Bamako, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2007.**