

Press release

Rethinking agricultural research for food sovereignty

The objective the Government and people of Mali have set themselves with the adoption of the framework agricultural law is achieving food sovereignty. In order to do this, they will have to develop sustainable agriculture, organise their agricultural markets more fairly and, crucially, generate new scientific knowledge and develop innovations based on diversity, equity and democracy.

Everyone gathered in Bamako today from the world of agriculture and civil society agrees on the paramount importance of having national agricultural research that is compatible with the political objective of food sovereignty. Therefore, comprehensive changes in scientific knowledge and research methods seem increasingly necessary to address the social and environmental crises associated with the current model of agricultural development.

In order to meet this challenge, representatives from civil society groups, farmer organisations and universities have launched a series of citizens deliberations on the future of agricultural research and its role in achieving food sovereignty. This initiative is part of an international project on the governance of agricultural research currently under way in West Africa, Asia and the Andean region of Latin America.

Mali is at the heart of proceedings in West Africa, where the CNOP, Centre Djoliba, IRPAD, Kene Conseils and International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) are working on the policy aspects of citizens deliberations on agricultural research. IIED, which is based in London (UK), is responsible for international coordination and methodological support for this multi-regional process funded by the Dutch and Swiss development agencies, Novib-Oxfam and the Christensen Fund.

Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of the CNOP, believes that “Farmers are the key to food sovereignty. They need to be able to talk freely with researchers to find solutions and technologies that fit their needs and contexts. Therefore, we need to build a plural and credible mechanism that will enable researchers and the farming community to talk to and listen to each other”.

It is not a matter of rejecting scientific progress, but of completely rethinking agricultural research in order to secure food sovereignty. For Dr. Michel Pimbert of IIED, “This international initiative works on the principle that research can help solve problems like hunger, poverty and environmental degradation. But for this to happen, scientific and technical innovations must be based on local analysis, knowledge and priorities, and must respond to the diverse realities and needs of farmers and other citizens. More fundamentally, this means giving farmers and other previously marginalized groups key roles in the governance of food and agricultural research. In short, it means democratising research”.

Today sees the official launch of this citizens' initiative in Mali and the sub-region. Over the next two years, it will be taken forward by the steering committee, using the methodology developed at *The Citizen Space for Democratic Deliberation (CSDD) on Genetically Modified Organisms and the future of farming in Mali*, held under the auspices of the Regional Assembly of Sikasso in January 2006. This new process of deliberation and democratic inclusion will open up opportunities for farmers and citizens to become more directly and deeply involved in decisions about the main orientations of scientific and technological research, in framing public policies on research, in resource allocation, and in institutional choices aimed at increasing food sovereignty.

The press conference will be held in the Maison de la Presse, Bamako, on 17th December 2008 at 2.00pm.

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