

**CSO STATEMENT TO THE 29th FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA, 1
- 2 APRIL 2016**

ABIDJAN, IVORY COAST APRIL 2, 2016

Honourable Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen

We, the 40 representatives of small and medium-scale farmers, rural women and youth, fisherfolk, agricultural workers, livestock keepers, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, consumers, and NGOs representing national, regional and international CSOs coming from 24 countries met in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on the 1st and 2nd of April 2016 in the frame of the 29th FAO Regional Conference for Africa.

We recognize that the FAO has done a lot to implement some of the recommendations made in the last consultations in Tunis in 2014, mainly on supporting projects for youth and women, and as well as some CSOs' initiatives in a number countries. However, many recommendations made so far have not been taken into consideration at national and regional levels. This situation is mainly due to the lack of specific monitoring and evaluation systems with clear indicators on these recommendations. We urge the FAO to put into place such instruments with the involvement of CSOs in order to ensure that all the recommendations have accompanying action plans and monitoring and evaluation systems.

We recognize the efforts of FAO to support this opportunity for civil society to collectively debate on our relationship, challenges and demands towards FAO and its members countries, as well as the opportunity to tell you our stories.

We appreciate that FAO has conducted Regional Symposiums on Agroecology in order to emphasise that agroecology is able to meet diverse goals such as reducing rural poverty, eradicating hunger and malnutrition; achieving sustainable agriculture and development, increasing climate resilience, reducing dependency on external agro-chemicals and the increasing involvement of local communities and indigenous peoples, especially in the areas of community-level water conservation and women's knowledge of seed-saving and exchange. We also appreciate the commitment by FAO to exchange letters and engage more actively with several global and African CSOs and social movements.

We would like to underscore that, in our vision, there is a distinction between stakeholders and rights holders. We engage in this space with the understanding that stakeholders are those who merely have an interest in any form of agriculture. We, as rights-holders, have a livelihood dependency on the right to produce food, which is protected as a Human Right.

We commend and salute the official adoption of the 2016-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As CSOs representing communities across the continent, and engaged in this consultation, we are committed to continue the partnership with the FAO at national, regional, and international level towards the achievement of the objectives of the struggle against climate change, the struggle to end poverty in all forms, and the struggle to end hunger.

Nevertheless, we regret that:

- Our governments have been contradictory in their actions by actively sponsoring spaces for the promotion of the destructive industrial agriculture model, which has already been evidenced as a significant contributor to climate change, the grabbing and destruction of land and other resources, as well as the livelihood of our constituencies.
- the exclusion of CSOs in the elaboration and implementation of public policies and projects, including Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), noting that the design and business logic of these partnerships do not see CSOs and grassroots organizations as necessary parts of the equation. The inclusion of CSOs and producer organizations as private partners puts us in an unfairly-balanced negotiation space, considering the overwhelming power of the private sector to influence and guide negotiations.
- Although there are noble intentions by our governments to achieve the SDGs, there aren't any binding commitments to do so. Public accountability mechanisms must be put in place to monitor the progress (or lack thereof) in the achievement of the SDGs. We further denounce the counter-productive posture of our governments. Their economic and agricultural policy directions allow (and some cases promote) the grabbing of natural resources, destruction of the environment, and flooding of national markets with cheap imported goods. This ultimately undermines theirs, and our own efforts to achieve the SDGs.
- Agroecology is still regarded as being “backwards” and “stuck in the past” due to the fact that it is based on indigenous and local knowledge. Furthermore, there is a significant gap on public policies and financial support to Agroecology, as well as effective dissemination of information on it in Africa. This is aggravated by lack of meaningful consultation and participation of our constituencies in agricultural and rural development policies. There is also limited access to markets for small scale farmers and producers. We denounce the co-optation and misappropriation of concept of agroecology, by multi-national corporations. We understand agroecology as that described in Nyeleni Declaration, Mali, 2015¹.

¹ We understand agroecology, and defend it, as a key form of resistance to an economic system which prioritizes profits over life. Our various forms of small-scale food production based on agroecology, generate local knowledge and promote social justice, as well as nourish identity and culture and reinforce the economic viability of rural areas.

- Our governments are not taking the urgent, sustainable and proactive steps necessary to curb and mitigate CC. On the contrary, they are lethargic, and often counter-productive by subscribing and adopting false solutions to climate change. These include but are not restricted to carbon-markets, climate-smart agriculture, blue-growth and the endless rounds of meaningless climate negotiations. The already harsh living and working conditions in our constituencies are being hard hit by human-caused climate change, and further aggravated by the current posture of our governments and institutions.

As such, and following our discussions during the 2 days of the Civil Society consultation, **we strongly call for the following from our governments:**

1. A legislative framework for the regulation of PPPs must be created, which includes inclusive and transparent spaces for the engagement of CSOs, governments and private sector in the elaboration and monitoring of PPPs. The active transparency and sharing of information on such partnerships is paramount.
2. The immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Multi-stakeholder Consultation on Agroecology for Africa.
3. The protection of consumers by ensuring that food is safe, nutritious, diverse and sustainably-produced, free of pesticides, antibiotics, and GMOs.
4. The prioritization and encouragement of the use of innovative renewable technologies and practices (such as agroecology, biogas, solar and wind energy, etc.). These should be accompanied by the promotion of innovative information systems and technologies. It is crucial that local communities are put at the center of the development, implementation and evaluation of such solutions.

Furthermore, **we strongly call for the following from the FAO:**

5. The development of regular reports and statistics on the involvement of CSOs in the negotiations and implementation of PPPs must be supported. The FAO should support producers in taking stock and potentializing the successful experiences in climate resilience.
6. The use of its strategic position to encourage the opening of spaces for CSOs in the elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of its processes, as well as continue the involvement of CSOs in the various FAO initiatives.

Finally, we call for the FAO and our governments to:

7. Ensure the continued meaningful participation of social movements and CSOs in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies, legally binding agreements, strategic programs and FAO-developed guidelines, especially at national and regional level.
8. Rigorously pursue of human rights violations in the food and agriculture sector, with serious efforts to ensure corporate accountability, including punitive measures for violators. Relevant existing instruments include,

but are not restricted to: the UN Declaration on Human Rights, International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), the UN Draft Declaration on Peasant Rights and Other People Working in Rural Areas, the Voluntary Guidelines on Governance of Land Tenure, Voluntary Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries, the UN Draft Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights.

Given the significant role of family farming in the food security of nations, in the creation of employment and in the fight against poverty, we call our governments and FAO to express their recognition for this global contribution supporting the call for a declaration for an International Decade of Family Farming by the UN.

Ladies and gentlemen, rural areas are not attractive to young people. They are fleeing to look for jobs and a better life. They want to come back, but they cannot without any livelihood opportunities. To attract the young people back to agriculture we must provide integrated rural development and opportunities, which include access to land, control of value chains, access to markets and innovation. We must join together and fight corporate control of what must be democratic food systems.

Thank you for your attention and to listen to the concerns of civil society. We hope that our governments and FAO heed our call and recommendations in the regional program priorities and implementation.

Our future depends on it.