

Association of Concerned Africa Scholars: Statement on Food Sovereignty

Statement by the ACAS Food Sovereignty Taskforce

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ACAS members are highly concerned about policies from the U.S. government, corporations and philanthropies, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum (Davos) that foster high tech as the answer to African food deficits during climate change. These powerful agencies are advancing three strategic interventions in African food systems: expansion through research and marketing of seed technologies; opening up of African food markets and integrating the most prosperous smallholders into the singular global market; and coordination of food policies within regions of Africa.

Each one of these interventions attempts to link African food production and consumption into the global food chain, controlled by a cartel of very few corporations. Only three grain traders/processors (Cargill, ADM, Bunge) handle over 50 percent of grain moving internationally, while four corporations control 58 percent of the global seed market (Monsanto, DuPont/Pioneer Seed, Syngenta, Groupe Limagrain). To gain profits via biotech seed breeding, corporations access unique African seed varieties, freely shared in public seed banks, without recognition nor benefit-sharing back to farmers who bred the parent genetic materials for centuries.

The U.S. government (Feed the Future), Gates Foundation (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – AGRA), World Bank (Global Agriculture and Food Security Program – GAFSP), and World Economic Forum (New Vision for Agriculture) all speak of food security, rather than the goal of food sovereignty, promoted by smallholder farmers across the world. Originating from Via campesina in 1996, food sovereignty refers to “the right of peoples to healthy and

culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (Nyéléni 2007, Forum for Food Sovereignty).

A major path toward food sovereignty is via farmers’ rights, enshrined in the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, but not recognized by any of the powerful in their programs above. Farmers’ rights recognize the right of farmers to exchange, save, plant, and breed any seed, honoring their historic role as breeders providing current food biodiversity. Instead, all of the above promote the privatization of genetic wealth via patenting (plant breeders’ rights).

Food sovereignty allows farmers and communities to choose their seeds and their food production systems. Collaborating with the food movement in the U.S. as well as with farmers’ organizations in Africa, ACAS scholars work to expose attempts to destroy food sovereignty, under the guise of high tech ‘solutions’ for food production and as important, we work to share the lessons from African farmers about alternatives to fossil-fuel addicted monoculture.

Reference

Declaration of Nyéléni (2007). Forum for Food Sovereignty. Available online at:

<http://www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

<http://concernedafricascholars.org/bulletin/issue88/statement/>