



Why an Alliance for
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?



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Why an Alliance for Food Sovereignty?

CONTEXT

More than 65 per cent of the population of Africa depends on agriculture for labour and livelihoods¹. This agriculture is almost completely rain-fed, with only about 4 per cent of arable land under irrigation. Most farmers struggle mightily with the high variability in rainfall and soils low in nutrients. As a result of the market and production risks of small scale farming, farmers keep a diversity of seeds that, individually, do not meet all their needs, but together ensure food security. Most African farmers farm on less than two hectares of arable land. In order to feed their families, they need to maximize productivity, which entails much more than yield. It requires them to grow a diversity of crops for different growing seasons, using intercropping systems and adapting planting to climatic conditions. This is only possible if they have easy access to locally adapted seed and agro ecology approaches suitable to their particular cropping systems. As highlighted by numerous studies and reviews, for Africa to feed itself, it is these farming systems that need support and strengthening. The corporate and donor led initiatives now being pushed upon Africa, are oriented to exactly the opposite.

The G8 New Alliance for food Security and Nutrition in Africa

The “New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa” was initiated by Barak Obama at the G8 summit at Camp David in May 2012². It is phase two of the G8’s coordinated response to the global food crisis. The first was the L’Aquila Food Security Initiative, launched by G8 leaders in 2009. They committed to mobilise \$22 billion in donor funding to support national agricultural plans in developing countries. Their aim is to create reliable conditions for private investments in the agricultural sector. The initiative embraces 50 corporations. They arm twist African governments to change their land and seed laws to maximize profits for private corporations. And they expect to lift 50 million people out of poverty within the next 10 years.

The Grow Africa Partnership

The World Economic Forum’s Grow Africa Partnership’s mandate is to bring business executives from companies like Monsanto and Yara together with African governments to convert the CAADP national plans “into increased flows of private sector investment.”

The G8 tasked Grow Africa to identify the private sector investments that are included in the Cooperation Frameworks. Many of these investments and the government policy commitments in the frameworks target the specific geographic areas for farmland investment that Grow Africa is focussing on, such as the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor in Tanzania and Burkina Faso’s Bagré Growth Pole for private investment.

AGRA: Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

In September 2006, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation teamed up to launch “AGRA” a multi million Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. Echoing the claim that Africa’s last Green Revolution had “bypassed” the continent, Gates and Rockefeller promised that AGRA would improve the lives of the continent’s impoverished farmers by investing in appropriate technology, efficient farm practices, and a network of small shopkeepers to sell mini-packets of improved seeds and fertilizers. Since its launch, AGRA’s reach has gone far beyond the many millions that Gates and Rockefeller injected into it. They have become a central force in the shaping of the commercialization of Africa’s agriculture, and in convincing governments to adopt corporate friendly technology and IPR policies. They are involved in all of the initiatives outlined above.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and the enclosure of Africa’s genetic wealth

In addition to all the above initiatives to ‘help’ Africa to grow more food, the last few years have seen a tremendous push on African states to allow for IPRs on seeds and crops. The international seed lobby has rapidly created a vast network of well-funded initiatives, institutions and agreements rushing African governments into adopting IPR laws based on the UPOV 1991 plant breeders rights convention. The players that are involved are numerous and include: African regional trade blocs such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), seed trade organisations, international development agencies, and the global seed and biotechnology corporations themselves. It is already resulting in draft protocols and laws being discussed at regional and national levels in various parts for Africa. Their adoption seems imminent.

Why AFSA?

These initiatives are taking place without there being any consultation with farmers in Africa. The combined effect of these initiatives is to hand over Africa’s food and seed sovereignty to foreign corporations, reducing the availability of local plant varieties, weakening Africa’s rich biodiversity, and denying millions of farmers the right to breed and share crops needed to feed their families. The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), thus, justifies its existence in the burning need of collaboration among African farmer organizations and civil societies to loudly voice the needs of indigenous people, farmers, fishers, gatherers and hunters for a sustainable food production system where food security is ensured through food sovereignty.

Time to Meet AFSA

We are excited! Excited because this first edition will take us beyond our members and reach millions of people through our member networks, supporters and friends. It is indeed time to meet AFSA!

We are a fast growing Pan-Africa network of farmer networks and civil society organizations working to become a strong and unified voice advocating for food sovereignty. We work to influence policies in favor of African smallholder farmers, gatherers, fishers and indigenous people; their knowledge and culture. We believe that food sovereignty is the key to food security where local people remain owners of their land, seed and other natural resources.

The year 2014 had been declared as the International Year of Family Farming. And we are pleased to continue to pay our respects and celebrate smallholders and family farmers

who provide 75 percent of the food the world consume. They are at the heart of our cause. They are who we champion in this and in all the coming editions. The year 2015 has also been declared as the International Year of Soils (IYS). We strongly advocate for healthy soils free from poisonous fertilizers and pesticides to enable small scale farmers use their precious resource - the soil - sustainably to pass it to the coming generations.

We would like to welcome our members, supporters and friends on behalf of African smallholder and family farmers whose rights we stand for. We also would like to recognize that the contents of this edition are not precisely within the quarter. As a first edition we have taken the liberty to include important events from the previous year.



AFSA Timeline

Over the years AFSA has come to be an influential network across the continent. The milestones that shaped its development include the following:

2008

ABN partners and associated friends met in Port Elizabeth, South Africa to discuss movement building with other African networks. ABN and COPAGEN met in Bonn, Germany at the Convention on Biodiversity Conference and agreed to hold a regional meeting in Ethiopia. .

2010

AFSA held a workshop in Lusaka, Zambia on documentation of indigenous agriculture in Africa. A guide and strategy were developed.

2012

Members met in Techiman, Ghana to further clarify issues around structure and systems of the network. Memorandum of Understanding and Operational Plan 2012-2013 were developed.

2014

2014 - Members met in Lome, Togo to further strategize the way forward. Applications for membership were reviewed and new members were admitted in. AFSA has now 21 active member networks.

2009

ABN, COPAGEN, PELUM, IPACC, ACB, COMPAS, ESAFF met in Addis Ababa. Agreed to launch AFSA, a network of pan-African networks.

2011

Members met in Nairobi to craft vision and objectives aiming to strengthen existing food sovereignty networks across Africa. AFSA was launched in Durban at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 17. AFSA released a report titled, 'Food Sovereignty Systems: Feeding the World, Regenerating Ecosystems, Rebuilding Local Economies, and Cooling the Planet – all at the same time'.

2013

Strategy meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Secretariat was set up. AFSA mapped organizations working on related issues to enhance collaboration, avoid duplication, and mobilize technical expertise and resources.

2015

Members met in Entebbe, Uganda in January 2015 and come up with activities of the working groups for the years 2015 and 2016. Communication personnel of AFSA member networks met in Nairobi, Kenya in March 2015 to develop a communication strategy against GMOs.

News Highlights

In June 2014, AFSA launched its agroecology case studies in Tanzania with Dr. Vandana Shiva. She travelled to Zimbabwe, Ghana and Tanzania with AFSA's coordinator Dr. Million Belay.

In July 2014, AFSA submitted a document on 'Urgent Intervention in Respect to Draft ARIPO Plant Variety Protection Protocol (PVP) and Subsequent Regulations' to the Secretary General of ARIPO, the African Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the member states of ARIPO.

In August 2014, AFSA submitted a statement titled, 'Towards an Inclusive and Transparent COMESA Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy Development and Implementation Process' to COMESA.

Nine agroecology case studies have been published and uploaded to the website. 30 more are expected to come out soon.

In December 2014, AFSA Submitted an Open Letter to the Iowa State University and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation opposing the human feeding trial of GM banana. The letter was signed by over 120 organizations and more than 20 prominent individuals around the world. The letter received a huge amount of social media coverage and went viral.



Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is 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. - Declaration of Nyéléni – Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007)

Core Purpose of AFSA

The core purpose of AFSA is to influence policies and to promote African solutions for food sovereignty. AFSA serves as a continental platform marshaling a single and louder voice on issues concerning farmers, consumers and nature and tabling clear workable solutions.

Visions of AFSA

Africa developing just and equitable ways of life for her people living in harmony with Nature.

Africa continually harnessing and enhancing her traditional knowledge systems.

African peoples controlling their territories, livelihoods and governance systems and related decision making processes.

African people holding their governments and the corporate powers to account for their legacy to the future generations.



Press Releases

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) has been releasing a number of statements and media advisories along with accompanying reports and evidences. The latest one is republished here. It details who attacks Africa's land and seed laws and how they do it. An excerpt from our Open Letter to Iowa State University and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) opposing human feeding trials of GM banana follows it.

[Africa's land and seed laws under attack: who's pushing for changes in Africa?](#)

The lobby to industrialise food production in Africa is not only pouring money into plantation projects on the ground, it is changing African laws to serve foreign agribusiness as well. This is the main finding of a new report from the civil society organisations Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and GRAIN.

The report, "Land and seed laws under attack", documents who is pushing what changes in these two battlegrounds across Africa. Washington DC, home to the World Bank, the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the US Agency for International Development, stands out the biggest source of pressure to privatise African farm resources right now. But Europe, through the European Union and various donor mechanisms, is also deeply involved, providing funds and legal frameworks like the plant patenting scheme known as UPOV.

Privatising land and seeds is essential for the corporate model to flourish in Africa. With regard to agricultural land, this means pushing for the official demarcation, registration and titling of farms. It also means making it possible for foreign investors to lease or own land on a long-term basis. With regard to seeds, it means having governments require that seeds be registered in an official catalogue in order to circulate. It also means introducing intellectual property rights over plant varieties and criminalising farmers who disregard them. In all cases, the



end goal is to turn what has long been a commons in Africa into a marketable commodity that the private sector can control and profit from at the expense of small farmers and rural communities.“ More than 80% of all seed in Africa is produced and disseminated through informal seed systems, that is, on-farm seed saving and exchange between farmers,” points out Bridget Mugambe of AFSA. “Marginalising and criminalising farmers’ seeds through UPOV and by introducing strict marketing regimes will be great for multinational seed companies but a disaster for our small family farmers,” she says.

The land privatisation agenda is also quite threatening. “In the name of land securitisation, which may sound great to vulnerable rural communities, donors and African governments are actually pushing to create Western-type land markets based on formal instruments like titles and leases that can be traded in one way or another,” explains Ange David Baimey of GRAIN. In fact, the explicit aim of many initiatives, such as the G8 New Alliance, is to secure investors’ rights to land.

The thinking is to make Africa more attractive to business. But this will only erode the rights of rural communities prevent them from continuing to serve as the backbone of the region’s food and farming systems.

Excerpt from the Open Letter Submitted to Iowa State University and the BMGF Opposing Human Feeding Trials of GM Banana

This so-called ‘Super-banana’, has been genetically modified to contain extra beta-carotene, a nutrient the human body uses to produce vitamin A. Unlike current GM crops in commercial production where agronomic traits have been altered, scientists have spliced genes into the GM banana to produce substances for humans to digest (extra beta carotene). The GM banana is a whole different ballgame, raising serious concerns about the risks to African communities who would be expected to consume it. Production of vitamin A in the body is complex and not fully understood. This raises important questions including inter alia, whether high levels of beta- carotene or vitamin A may carry risks and what the nature of those risks might be. While a risk assessment is a pre-requisite for GM foods under many national jurisdictions, the need for specific and additional food safety assessment for nutritionally enhanced GM crops such as the GM banana is acknowledged by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, as genetic modifications result in a composition that

may be significantly different from their conventional counterparts.

We question what firm conclusions can be drawn from feeding trials of young people residing in the United States for poor rural farmers and consumers in Africa, given all the differences in lifestyle and diets between these two populations?

What other foods will these students be eating with the GM bananas, and how will these be eaten? Will the participants in the USA be eating this in the same way? Will it have the same color and same levels of water composition? Would cooking the GM bananas result in a loss of beta-carotene? Will participants be given portions of fats and oils (such as butter) to supplement the banana, as was the case in feeding trials with Golden Rice to facilitate the absorption of beta-carotene? If so, then the GM banana feeding studies may be of little relevance to rural Ugandans and other East Africans who prepare the Matooke variety simply by steaming and mashing.

Dr. Vandana’s Trip to Africa: A Digest

In June 2014, AFSA organized a food sovereignty tour to Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Ghana. Dr. Vandana Shiva and Dr. Million Belay with support from civil society organizations in the three countries held discussions with government officials, gave public lectures and organized media briefs and public events on the issues of Green Revolution and the negative impacts of the introduction of Genetically Engineered crops. AFSA also launched its new initiative called, ‘Making the Case for Agroecology’.

Activities during the trip are highlighted here:

TANZANIA

Dr. Shiva, as a guest speaker, shared a worldwide and Indian experience on a workshop on ‘Harnessing the contribution of agroecology and family farming to food security and rural livelihoods in Tanzania’. Including government officials, academia and researchers, private sector, farmer organizations, civil societies non-governmental organizations both local and foreign and UN bodies and development partners, over 200 participants attended the workshop.



ZIMBABWE

Dr. Shiva discussed and shared powerful experiences from India to illustrate the agroecological perspective on agriculture. She met and discussed a number of issues including Genetic Engineering (GE) with Zimbabwe’s Minister of Agriculture Dr. Joseph Made. She then made an hour’s presentation to a group of 17 senior officials in the Ministry of Agriculture. The presentation was followed by intense question and answer session. A 20-minute radio interview with Dr. Shiva was aired on 10th of June by the popular radio station Star FM.

GHANA

Dr. Shiva’s first event on arrival in Ghana with Dr. Million Belay was a public forum. She shared the Indian experience on the subject of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the prospects of more sustainable agroecological alternatives.

The forum was attended by the media, politicians, civil servants, researchers, policy makers, farmer groups and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This was followed the next day by a press conference at the International Press Centre in Accra. Dr. Shiva granted further interviews at Hit FM, Multi - TV, and appeared on TV3’s Hot Issues; where she delivered an insightful expose on the dynamics of current global agriculture.



MAKING THE CASE FOR AGROECOLOGY

Key findings are that agroecology works to ensure food and livelihood security, with substantial income increases, higher yields and productivity. Other benefits include improved nutrition and family health, increased soil fertility and crop diversity, lower risk and reduced input costs.

AFSA is working to make an evidence-based, coherent case for agroecology as the sustainable long-term solution for farming in Africa. The Agroecology Working Group is gathering case studies from around Africa, showing the many benefits in terms of food security, nutrition, poverty reduction, climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, cultural sensitivity, democracy and justice. So far nine case studies have been documented and are available on the AFSA website at <http://afsafira.org/case-studies>.

The case studies include: Shashe Agroecology school in Zimbabwe; Community-led approaches in Ethiopia; Orange-fleshed sweet potato in Ghana; African leafy vegetables, Sand dams and Soil fertility in Kenya; and Ending the ‘hungry season’ in Malawi.

Agroecology works in harmony with nature, using cultivation techniques and breeding programmes that do not rely on chemical fertilisers, pesticides, or artificial genetic modifications. It builds on traditional agricultural practices using research, technology and existing indigenous knowledge, while at the same time ensuring that farmers are in control of all aspects of food production. Using ecological agriculture, farmers produce abundant, healthy food sustainably.

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ALLIANCE MEMBERS

