

# Addis Ababa Declaration on Agroecology, Ecological Organic Agriculture and Food Sovereignty: The Way Forward for Nutrition and Health in Africa November, 2016

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## Background

We, representatives of civil society organizations, farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, consumers, youth networks, women's networks, food processors, practitioners, government, academics and researchers, recognizing that food systems in Africa have dramatically changed over the last century, gathered in Addis Ababa in November 2016 to deliberate the theme, *"Changing Food Systems in Africa: Agroecology and Food Sovereignty and their Role in Nutrition and Health"*.

We call for collaborative and strategic action to create more momentum for change, and to emphasize the need for a multi-sectoral and holistic approach to nutrition and health.

We applaud the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), Mekelle University in Ethiopia, the Ecological Organic Agricultural Initiative (EOAI), IFOAM – Organics International, and the African Organic Network (AfrOnet) for jointly organizing the 3-day conference. This enabled us to fundamentally challenge the assumptions that have driven food, agriculture and trade policy for so long.

## The dominant narrative around food systems in Africa

The way we think about food systems is largely shaped by a dominant narrative that underpins the following myths:

*"We can only feed the growing world population by increasing agricultural productivity based largely on the use of industrial inputs. Only biotech science and the global food corporations can find effective solutions to feed the world. Innovation and useful knowledge come only from science and technology, driven by experts and protected by patents."*

The main problem with this narrative is that planning, action and assessment are based on short-term economic indicators. Social, ecological, cultural and spiritual indicators and rights are ignored. This bias leads to a food system that is only successful and efficient within the logic of short-term economics, but disastrous in the long-term to stable food production for nutrition and health.

Degraded and infertile soils deficient in essential nutrients are increasing, undermining current and future capability of food production. Major decision-making processes continue to discriminate against small-scale farmers and women. Farmers' seed systems are the basis of diverse, healthy food and farmer resilience in the face of climate change, yet seed laws and intellectual property rights legislation continue to weaken these systems, undermining social justice and good governance. Many people in Africa are still hungry and there are huge nutritional problems ranging from growth stunting to obesity, precursors to many chronic diseases.

Only when we change the beliefs and values of the current narrative can we place women producers in the centre, and shift our food systems towards effective production, nutrition and health.

Decisive and urgent action is now needed to change the dominant narrative surrounding food systems in Africa. The severe threat posed to people's food sovereignty and health is increasingly a barrier to sustainable development.

## **A new narrative of agroecology/ecological organic agriculture**

We, AFSA, EOAI, AfrOnet, IFOAM Organics International and the combined conference participants reject the ill-conceptualized myths and 'Feed the World' narrative, and urge the African continent leadership, development partners, donors and other actors to adopt and support a more compelling, appropriate and inclusive narrative for sustainable and equitable food systems in Africa.

The new narrative recognizes that the current global food system, extended to Africa, is not sustainable and that agroecology/ecological organic production systems are the true future of our continent's food systems. These systems are very knowledge intensive and take advantage of both traditional knowledge and modern science through collaboration between farmers and researchers based on mutual respect. They can deliver not only on economic objectives, but also on environmental, social, cultural, nutritional and health objectives. The new narrative acknowledges that small-scale farmers already produce 70% of the world's food, and that following agroecological and organic principles and practices, African small-scale farmers can produce adequate food to feed the continent sustainably, provided they have secure access to land, water, seeds/breeds and other natural resources.

## **The call for collaborative strategic action**

We call upon policymakers and decision makers to support food and agricultural systems and practices that are healthy, equitable, efficient, resilient, and culturally diverse, using renewable energy resources.

We urge policymakers to emphasize and strongly support women's role in the production of nutritious food, recognizing the importance of engaging the women, youth and communities as active partners in sustainable food systems.

We call upon governments to acknowledge and support farmer managed seed systems as the basis of diverse and nutritious diets, and to encourage joint farmer-scientist research.

We urge decision makers to take a multi-sectoral approach in the development of policies that relate to food, nutrition and health. A holistic understanding of the links between land security, food production, nutrition and health leads to appropriate choices and decisions.

We call upon policymakers to endorse the right of people, communities and countries to define their own food systems, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique contexts, and to empower producers and consumers to make better decisions and choices.

Moving forward boldly, we must influence policies, strategies and actions towards nutritious food systems in Africa that contribute to the vibrant health of its people. To this end, conference participants have produced a separate strategic framework document laying out the pathways for effective implementation of this Declaration.

We hereby call upon national governments and the international community to provide the political leadership and full support to establish policies, programmes and plans charting the journey to truly sustainable food systems in Africa based on agroecological principles, values and practices for the health and well-being of current and future generations.