

Shashe Declaration - “Africans! We Can Feed Ourselves with Agroecology and Food Sovereignty!”

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1st Encounter of Agroecology Trainers in Africa Region 1 of La Via Campesina, 12-20 June 2011.

We are 47 people from 22 organizations in 18 countries (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Angola, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Central African Republic, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Portugal, USA, France, and Germany). We are farmers and staff representing member organizations of La Via Campesina, along with allies from other farmer organizations and networks, NGOs, academics, researchers, interpreters and others.

We have been meeting at the Shashe Endogenous Development Training Centre in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe to plan how to promote agroecology in our Region (Southern, Eastern & Central Africa). Here we have been privileged to witness firsthand the successful combination of agrarian reform with organic farming and agroecology carried out by local small holder farming families. In what were once large cattle ranches owned by three large farmers who owned 800 head of cattle and produced no grain or anything else, there are now more than 365 small holder peasant farming families with more than 3,400 head of cattle, who also produce a yearly average of 1 to 2 tonnes of grain per family plus vegetables and other products, in many cases using agroecological methods and local peasant seeds. This experience strengthens our commitment to and belief in agroecology and agrarian reform as fundamental pillars in the construction of Food Sovereignty.

Threats and Challenges to Small Holder Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

Our region of Africa is currently facing challenges and threats that together undermine the food security and well-being of our communities, displace small holder farmers and undercut their livelihoods, undermine our collective ability to feed our nations, and cause grave damage to the soil, the environment and the Mother Earth.

These include local and regional manifestations of the global food price crisis and the climate crisis that have been produced by runaway neoliberal policies and the greed and profit-taking of Transnational Corporations (TNCs). Cheap subsidized food imports brought by TNCs, made possible by misguided free trade agreements, lowers the prices we receive for our farm products, forcing families to abandon farming and migrate to cities, while undermining local and national food production. Foreign investors, invited in by some of our governments, grab the best farm land, displacing food producing local farmers, and redirecting that land toward environmentally devastating mining, agrofuel plantations that feed cars instead of people, and other export plantations that do nothing to build Food Sovereignty for our peoples, and only enrich a few.

At the same time, uncontrolled greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution from Developed

Countries and from the global corporate food system based on long distance transport and industrial agriculture are changing the climate in ways that directly affect farmers. Our lands become more arid, with water ever more scarce, we face rising temperatures, and increased extreme weather conditions like severe storms, floods and droughts. The dates of the rainy season have become completely unpredictable, so that nobody knows when to plant anymore. The changing climate is also implicated in epidemics of communicable diseases of humans, crops and livestock. All of this hurts farming families and affects food production.

We face TNCs who want to force GMO seeds into our countries, whether or not we currently have GMO bans, and agencies like the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) who conspire with TNCs like Cargill and Monsanto and with our governments to buy off national research and seed systems in order to sell GMO seeds. These seeds threaten the integrity of our local varieties and the health of our consumers. The same companies even manipulate regional farmer organizations to push GMOs, and we call on such organizations to resist being used in such ways.

While our soils, agroecosystems and forests are ever more degraded by industrial agriculture and plantations, and local seed biodiversity is lost, the costs of production under the conventional "Green Revolution" model are more expensive and out of the reach of small holder farmers. The price of chemical fertilizer on the world market, for example, has risen more than 300% in the last few years.

Faced with this bleak situation for small holder agriculture and Food Sovereignty in our region, as members of organizations belonging to La Via Campesina we take the following positions:

Positions of La Via Campesina in Africa Region 1

We believe that...

* Agroecological farming as practiced by small holder farmers, and Food Sovereignty policies, offer the only reasonable and feasible solutions to these multiple challenges facing our Region.

* Only agroecological methods (also called sustainable agriculture, organic farming, ecological agriculture, etc.) can restore soils and agroecosystems that have been degraded by industrial agriculture. Even chemicals do not work after severe degradation, but with agroecology we can restore soil organic matter and fertility, along with functional agroecosystem processes and services like nutrient recycling, soil biology, natural pest control, etc. We have seen that small holder agroecological systems have much greater total productivity than industrial monocultures, with little or no purchased inputs, reducing the dependency and increasing the autonomy and well-being of rural families while producing abundant and healthy food for our peoples. Global research by La Via Campesina demonstrates that Sustainable Peasant Agriculture Can Feed the World, based on endogenous knowledge and agroecology.

* The global food system currently generates between 44 and 57% of global greenhouse gas emissions, almost all of which could be eliminated by transforming the food system based on the principles of agroecology, agrarian reform and Food Sovereignty. Sustainable Peasant Agriculture Cools the Planet, and this is our best solution to climate change.

* In order to adapt to a changing climate we need the greater resiliency of diversified agroecological systems (and water conservation and harvesting, watershed management, agroforestry, ground cover, etc.) and the genetic diversity of local peasant seeds and peasant seed systems. We demand that our governments withdraw support from the corporate seed industry with its standardized and often genetically modified seeds, and instead support peasant seed systems based on recovering, saving, multiplying, storing, breeding and exchanging seeds at the local level.

- * Our national education and research systems are heavily biased toward the very industrial agriculture practices that are killing our planet and contributing to the failure of Africans to feed ourselves. We demand the reorientation of research toward farmer-led methods and agroecology, and the transformation of curricula at primary and secondary schools levels, and in higher education, to focus on agroecology.
- * We call for an end to trade liberalization and the renewed protection of domestic markets so that African farmers can receive the fair prices that will enable us to boost production and feed our peoples.
- * We call on governments to create comprehensive programs to support agroecological farming by small holders and to rebuild Food Sovereignty, including genuine agrarian reform and the defense of peasant lands from land grabbing, the reorientation of government food procurement from agribusiness toward purchasing ecological food at fair prices from small holders to supply schools, hospitals, institutional cafeterias, etc., as a way to support farmers and to provide healthy food to children, sick people and government employees, and programs of production credit for small holders engaged in ecological farming instead of subsidies tied to chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- * At the COP-16 in Cancun, Mexico, the governments of the world (except Bolivia) met to conduct business with TNCs who traffic in false solutions to climate changes like agrofuels, GMOs, carbon markets, REDD+, etc., instead of meeting to seriously and effectively reverse global warming through real emission reductions by Developed Countries and the transformation of our global food, energy and transport systems. We demand that our governments behave more responsibly at COP-17 in Durban, South Africa, refusing to sign agreements imposed by the North and by TNCs, instead supporting the Cochabamba Principles on the Climate and the Rights of the Mother Earth.

Commitments of La Via Campesina

While we demand that our governments act in all the ways mentioned above, and will turn up the pressure on them to do so, we will not wait for them. Instead we pledge to continue to build agroecology and Food Sovereignty from below. We pledge to take the following practical steps:

- * We will build organizational structures in La Via Campesina at the regional level to support our national member organizations in their work to promote agroecology among their member families. This includes regional training programs, exchange visits, the production and sharing of educational materials, and the identification and documentation of successful cases in the region so that all can learn the lessons they offer. Among the structures we will build is a network of agroecology trainers and practitioners in La Via Campesina in our Region.
- * We will promote the creation of agroecology training programs and schools in our organizations, and farmer-to-farmer and community-to-community agroecology promotion programs.
- * Through our own organizations we will promote the creation and strengthening of local peasant seed systems.
- * We will document the experience in Zimbabwe of agrarian reform and organic farming by beneficiary families, as successful steps toward Food Sovereignty that we who are in other countries can learn from.
- * We will work to “keep carbon in the ground and in trees” in the areas under our control, by promoting agroforestry, tree planting, agroecology, energy conservation, and by fighting land grabs for mining and industrial plantations.

* We will engage and pressure governments at all levels (local, traditional provincial, national and regional) to adopt Public Policies that favor agroecology and Food Sovereignty.

* We will build a powerful small holder farmer and peasant voice to be present with other sectors of civil society at COP-17 in Durban, and at Rio +20 in Brazil, with the message that we oppose false solutions to climate change and demand the adoption of the Cochabamba Principles. We will insist on Small Holder Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty as the most important true solutions to climate change.

Africans! We Can Feed Ourselves with Agroecology and Food Sovereignty!

Sustainable Agriculture by Small Holder Farmers Cools the Planet!

No to the Corporate Food System, GMOs and Land Grabbing!

Yes to Agrarian Reform and an Agroecological Food System!

Globalize Struggle! Globalize Hope!

Masvingo District, Zimbabwe, 20 June 2011
