

AFRICA MUST NOT USE BIOTECHNOLOGY IN FOOD PRODUCTION

Re: AFRICA MUST USE BIOTECHNOLOGY TO MAXIMISE FOOD PRODUCTION

We the undersigned representing civil society groups are concerned about recent statements that emanated from the **first Pan African Biotechnology Stewardship Conference** held in Accra, Ghana on the 1st of December 2011, which called on Africans to use biotechnology to provide “**poor farmers with healthier, more bountiful crops to reduce hunger and poverty in Africa**”.

The high profile conference which was on the theme “***Africa In Search Of Safe and High Quality Biotech Crops***” was graced by experts in Biotechnology from around the world, who unanimously endorsed the use of gm crops for providing “**poor farmers with healthier, more bountiful crops to reduce hunger and poverty in Africa.**”

At the said meeting, Deputy Executive Director of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, Ramadjita Tabo, was quoted as saying that the sole aim of of the Agricultural Biotechnology Biosafety Policy Platform was to build the capacity of Africans “**for the deployment of biotechnology**”, and that “**This capacity strengthening covers both genetically modified and non-GM approaches.**”¹

Professor Adewale Adekunle, Director of Forum for Agriculture Research in Africa (FARA) Unit, which deals with partnership, in his closing remarks stated that, **to meet the food security needs, African countries need to rely on biotechnology and stewardship.**²

We are disappointed that an unproven and unsafe technology is being foisted on Africa simply because of the unfortunate continual characterization of Africa as a chronically hungry continent.

It is important to understand that, the agricultural fortunes of the continent have been adversely impacted mainly by externally generated neoliberal policies. Our agricultural systems are threatened by industries that seek to control our food and our livelihoods by destroying our agricultural systems. The move towards intensified, chemical based agriculture is set to undermine the predominant family based agro-ecological food production on the continent. The promotion and introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) with intellectual property rights over seeds represents a serious threat to African farmers rights to reproduce,

¹ **AFRICA MUST USE BIOTECHNOLOGY TO MAXIMISE FOOD PRODUCTION**

SOURCE: Ghana News Agency, Ghana (GNA), DATE: 01.12.2011

URL: http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9459:africa-must-use-biotechnology-to-maximise-food-production-&catid=28:general-news&Itemid=162

² *ibid*

save and share seeds. It also threatens to erode seed diversity represents new forms of stealing, as all industrial seeds are taken from seeds cultivated, developed and preserved through thousands of years of selection and breeding by our people.

We express total disgust at the manner by which the burden for solutions to every crisis faced by the North is shifted unto Africa. For example, with the climate change and energy crises the burden has been inequitably placed on the continent through land grabs for agrofuels production as well as the unfair sentencing of Africa to adapt to climate impacts that she did not create.

While the world is advancing towards stricter control of GMOs, it is a different situation in Africa where our leaders are covertly or ignorantly colluding with multinational agribusinesses to colonize our food systems as well as give out our arable lands through dubious land grabbing agreements.

We note that recently many countries have been taking steps to secure their agriculture from pollution through modern biotechnology and to secure the safety of national food systems. We give examples here.

1. Benin Republic has maintained a moratorium on GMOs over the past 10 years.
2. **Peru** approved the law banning GM production for 10 years.³
3. The **Mexican States** of Tlaxcala and Michoacán each passed legislation banning the planting of genetically modified corn to protect natural plants from further contamination of transgenes.⁴
4. **China** said GMO is not a priority, stemming from public debate and outcry over the safety of GMO food⁵.
5. In the **United States**: California counties of Mendocino, Trinity and Marin have successfully banned GM crops.
6. **In New Zealand**: No GM foods are grown.
7. **In Germany**: There is a ban on the cultivation or sale of GMO maize.

³ **Peru approves law banning GM production for 10 years**
<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2011/11/perus-congress-approves-10-year-gmo-ban/>

⁴ **Two Mexican States ban GM corn!** <http://foodfreedom.wordpress.com/2011/03/0>

⁵ **GM in China 'not a priority'** <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/23/china-agriculture-idUSTOE71M04V20110223>

8. **In Ireland:** All GM crops were banned for cultivation in 2009, and there is a labeling system for foods containing GM to ensure that such foods are identified as such.
9. **In Austria, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Luxembourg** there are bans on the cultivation and sale of GMOs.
10. **In France:** Monsanto's MON810 GM corn had been approved but its cultivation was forbidden in 2008. There is widespread public mistrust of GMOs that has been successful in keeping GM crops out of the country.
11. **Madeira** the autonomous Portuguese island requested a country-wide ban on genetically modified crops last year and was permitted to do so by the European Union (EU).
12. **Switzerland** banned all GM crops, animals, and plants on its fields and farms in a public referendum in 2005, but the initial ban was for only five years. The ban has since been extended through 2013.

There are several other examples.

It is clear that the Genetic engineering is a technology in search of a market. “**Experts in Biotechnology from around the world**” and lobbyists from the genetic engineering (GE) industry are pushing the notion that Africa’s only choice is between hunger and GE crops. This is patently false and is merely an arm-twisting effort that African farmers and peoples’ must resist. Hunger can be avoided without growing and eating GE crops. Studies have shown that the claim that genetically engineered (GE) crops have a higher yield than natural varieties is virtually a myth. It is also not true that GE crops lead to reduction in the use of pesticides and other agro chemicals. Neither is it true that the way to overcome nutritional deficiencies must be through techno fixes.⁶ The so-called nutritional fortification of crops is simply market grabbing exercises as better quality and more nutritious traditional varieties exist.

For these reasons we ask our governments and peoples as a matter of urgency to support ecological-friendly farming which nurtures our soil, cultivates diversity and supplies our families with safe and nutritious food. Ecological agriculture also helps to combat climate change.

We therefore resolve as follows:

1. That there are no successes stories to tell about GMOs other than tales of woes. Africans must not be used as guinea pigs for unverified technologies and the continent must no longer be used as a dumping ground for the products of the biotech companies.

⁶ Nnimmo Bassey: **Playing politics with genetically modified organisms**
http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Money/Business/Energy/5635474-183/oil_politics_playing_politics_with_genetically.csp

2. That production of GMOs is not only a threat to biosafety; it also poses great danger to biodiversity which is at the base of sustainability of life.

3. We call for a local and global paradigm-shift towards Food Sovereignty: food production and consumption that are fundamentally based upon local contextual considerations. Small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and others have defined a food system based on the human Right to adequate Food and food production policies that increase democracy in localised food systems and ensure maximisation of sustainable natural resource use.

In 2008, after three years of solid work, over 400 scientists, 30 governments from developed and developing countries, as well as 30 civil society organizations, concluded work under the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). About 60 countries endorsed the report at a meeting in Johannesburg in April of that year. The report concluded that modern biotechnology would have very limited contribution to the feeding of the world in the foreseeable future. That report is an excellent blue print for action by African governments rather than getting tied to the apron-strings of speculators and neo-colonial powers whose objective is to exploit, subjugate and destroy food production systems on the African continent