

# **A CALL TO AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS TO RECLAIM AFRICA'S FOOD SOVEREIGNTY TO GUARANTEE THE CONTINENT'S AND WOMEN'S FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY**

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**To:** The African Union Heads of States and the East African Community

## **Introduction**

As African women, food and nutrition security advocates and gender justice activists, our organizing and autonomy will be the strongest propeller of African people's political, economic, and social liberation, and the attainment of social justice. Without a doubt, society has required that women are responsible for half of the world's food production, and in most countries they produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food. This thus validates our conviction to call on African governments to reclaim Africa's food sovereignty and ensure gender just food-systems and agro-ecological governance.

In the context of this year's theme "*Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent*", we see Africa's ability to have full governance of our agriculture sector as the first step to, and an indispensable component of guaranteeing not just our food and nutrition security, but most importantly, our food sovereignty. However, decision-making spaces that influence the ways in which the agriculture sector is governed have mostly been closed from African people and African women in particular. This deeply political approach to the governance of Africa's agriculture development is influenced by existing power structures, with the rights of indigenous farmers and communities continually contested at various fronts.

Within the continent and individual African communities, the colonization, privatization and commoditization of the agriculture sector remains the biggest threat to the continent's food and nutrition security as they have worked to transform Africa's seed, food, and food systems from one oriented to guaranteeing the right to food for all, to centering profit maximization. These processes, which are anchored in neoliberal capitalism, are working to reap Africa of its control over the sector from which its people draw their livelihood and hand it over to corporate driven and corporate controlled systems.

We recognize that the African Union theme for the year 2022 echoes legal instruments dedicated to food and nutrition insecurity at household, national and regional level. These instruments include the Africa Health Strategy 2016 – 2030; The Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy 2015 –

2025 (ARNS); The Declaration on Nutrition Security for Inclusive Economic Growth and Sustainable Development in Africa; The Resolution on the Establishment of an OAU Inter-African Center for Food Science, Technology and Nutrition; the African Union Continental Scorecard for Nutrition. However the most recent estimates show that 281.6 million people on the continent, over one-fifth of the population, faced hunger in 2020, which is 46.3 million more than in 2019.

Africa's food and nutrition security can only be achieved through gender just and Pan-African policies and solutions that protect indigenous farmers and the African peoples' from the commoditization of food systems, climate change and multinational corporation regimes. Africa's food sovereignty entails the full protection of the right of the people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Across the continent, African governments have adopted neoliberal capitalist policies and laws that put the control of food production systems in the hands of a few profit driven multinational corporations. This includes the control of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. It should be noted, that while the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (also known as ITPGRFA, International Seed Treaty or Plant Treaty), to which African states are signatory, explicitly aims at guaranteeing food security through the conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA); the fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from its use; as well as the recognition of farmers' rights. African governments are increasingly developing plant and seed related legal and policy frameworks that grant exclusive rights of private plant breeders and improved plant and seed varieties at the expense of indigenous seeds and farmers' rights.

Agroecology is the most sustainable solution to our food and nutrition security needs, and the climate crisis. Yet, more attention is often given to so-called market solutions, technology, such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides; improved seed varieties, among others. African governments must unite in investing in agroecological transition domestically and in demanding the increased recognition and support for agroecology within the UNFCCC, Committee on World Food Security (CFS), Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), and other international fora as the best solution for the climate and food system crises. It is especially critical since it guarantees our food and nutrition sovereignty.

## **KEY DEMANDS**

- 1) Emphasis should be on food sovereignty rather than food security because only the former can guarantee the sustainable realization of the latter for all.
- 2) Domestically finance the agriculture sector – In 2003, the heads of state and government of the African Union recognised that greater public spending on agriculture was needed to

eradicate hunger and poverty across the continent. This prompted them to make a political commitment — the Maputo Declaration — to allocate at least 10 percent of their national budget to food and agriculture. Almost 20 years later, many countries have not yet reached the objective pledged in Maputo. The Maputo declaration calls on states to increase annual national budgetary allocations for agriculture to at least 10%. Domestically financing the agriculture sector is the first step to determining how it is governed, what is protected/preserved, what is promoted and whose interests are centered. It is the single most important step to guaranteeing full control of the sector especially through research, which has now increasingly been taken over by the global North, and especially their foreign corporations.

- 3) Rethink the pervasive private sector influence, control and dominance in Africa's agriculture sector which has proved to be detrimental to the continent's food sovereignty while creating deep gender inequality in terms of access to food and nutrition.
- 4) Private sector investment for the realization of agriculture, food and nutrition security should not replace public investment. Since private sector investment foregrounds profits through maximization of their return on investments in monetary terms, meeting public welfare needs in the face of the climate crisis risks being undermined. Privatization of responses to the climate crisis will only work to breed the commoditization of climate action, reinforce neocolonialism against those disproportionately affected, and promote neoliberal capitalism whose pervasiveness in the health sector revealed its inability to foster just and inclusive responses amidst a disaster.
- 5) Consider reviewing international trading systems, national policy and legislation that challenge rather than foreground the protection and preservation of indigenous farmers' rights in food production systems.
- 6) Develop, fund and enforce gender transformative policies aimed at addressing gender inequality in access to productive resources and ensuring women's access and control to land and other agro-food systems.
- 7) Responses to the Covid-19 and climate change must include sustainable and long-term social protection measures and indigenous knowledge which should be accompanied by immediate attention to human security needs especially for indigenous women farmers.