

Civil Society Statement to the EU-Conference on Rural Development

Rural Life is Key- Don't trade it away to a corporate agenda

- I. **The rediscovery of rural development – is it an opportunity or a cause for alarm?**
- Civil society groups have been demanding for decades that rural development receive new emphasis in national and international development policies.** More than 75 percent of the hungry and malnourished live in rural areas. Half of them are marginalized smallholder farmers and more than two thirds are women. They are hardly able to survive under the present circumstances. **National agricultural policies both in the North and in the South are marginalising them without directing any meaningful support to their needs. They have been forgotten in international agricultural policies – not only have their local markets been traded away, but corporately controlled input and output groups are now dominating and controlling their markets.** These policies force food producers either to be *competitive* in the face of subsidised imports or quit. How can rural development policy be called “pro-poor”, if the poor are glossed over and if policies that are biased against their own development are put in place? They are confronted with an international development agenda that is strongly biased towards the privatisation of natural resources and basic services as a guarantee for the so-called efficient use of such resources. These national and international trends are threatening the economic and cultural survival of many rural producers.
 - Normally, civil society groups and social movements would welcome the new interest in rural development. But after a careful analysis of the background documents to this conference we have become alarmed about where this renewed interest will lead us to.** After decades of failed support to rural development, there is a serious risk that intensifying the same recipes that have maintained poverty would lead to a further neglect of those who should be the focus of any new strategy for rural development. Any new rural development interest that is not directed at serving the interests of small-scale family farmers will fail, since they form the economic basis of these countries. An agenda focusing only on high potential areas and on so called “viable competitive producers” will increase hunger and will destroy sustainable rural development.
 - We fear that the current mainstream agenda on rural development is dominated by commercial private interests.** A new green revolution is now being promoted, which neglects the inherited knowledge of seeds and plant breeds of farmers and indigenous communities – especially women. We are concerned about the privatization of rural resources, such as land, water, genetic resources and minerals and the concentration of ownership in those who can afford these resources. This will compel the production of goods to fit into the logic dictated by globalised supermarkets and those who do not subscribe to this logic and sport different skills, knowledge and values that can nourish vibrant local markets will be condemned as “non-viable” producers.

4. **We call for genuinely new thinking on rural development, thinking that will put people first.** The current collapse of rural communities is the most important cause of distress migration. More aid does not necessarily equate to more assistance to such communities. We would accept more aid only if it is a better aid. More important than “more aid” is the development of national and international development policies that do not harm those living their lives autonomously as peasant food producers.

II. The mainstream vision that will not help to combat hunger and foster rural development

Green Revolution – old and new

5. We believe that the new Green Revolution held as a talisman for African development is a sure recipe for disaster. On the one hand, it is a sheer travesty of truth that the first Green Revolution which was based on high cost, high technology and high risk, and therefore was pro-rich in its approach bypassed Africa as is being made out by its proponents. On the other hand it is a historical fact that it simply failed in Africa despite the USD200 million invested annually in it for the past 20 years. Therefore we are convinced that the proposed second Green Revolution advocating the same approach is bound to meet with similar failure. Agricultural research in Africa has been allowed to be taken over by the private sector with its priorities of profit and intellectual property rights. This runs counter to the interests of smallholder farmers. GMOs, which are a cornerstone of this research agenda, have failed to deliver benefits to smallholder farmers everywhere in the world. They also pose a threat to biodiversity, the environment and health and therefore should not be promoted, but banned.

Agrarian reform and access to resources

6. International Development Agencies treat land exclusively as an economic factor in their broader defence of neoliberalism - including free trade, land privatization and formalization of inequality, whereas we treat land as a territory which includes seeds, water, forests, ocean, minerals and fauna. Therefore we demand a rights-based approach to land policies linking land to the right to adequate food and a genuine agrarian reform based on food sovereignty. Market-led agrarian reforms have failed to deliver pro-poor reform. Land markets and land rental markets can only benefit the rich and criminalise land struggles. In its extreme form it has also led to the assassination of people fighting for their land.

Trade and markets

7. We are of the strong view that the world market is not the solution to feeding people. On the contrary, local production systems and local markets play a key role in rural development and can meet the majority of the needs of local communities.

8. Countries should protect their agricultural markets. Protection, regulation and state intervention are needed to ensure community food sovereignty. By promoting high market concentration in agri-business, free trade agreements such as EPAs spell destruction for small scale family farmers all over the world. EPAs in their current form are worse than WTO agreements. Negotiations must stop immediately. Such international trade policies jeopardise smallholder farmers globally and therefore must be stopped. In addition, all subsidies that lead to dumping must end. However, we recognize the legitimate need for support to domestic peasant producers.

Biofuels and climate change

9. It is our conviction that agro-fuels are not the solution to climate change and to the global environmental crisis. Sustainable ecological agriculture, however, can minimize energy consumption and promote the use of renewable energy. Therefore the use of agrarian resources must prioritise food production over energy production. It will be a crime to endanger community access to natural resources in the name of biofuels. We reiterate the fact that the main cause of climate change is the unsustainable production and consumption patterns in industrialized and industrializing countries.

Rural development aid

10. Recognising that badly focused development aid can do more harm than good, we demand that priority is given to good aid, which is defined by communities and national governments and without macro-economic conditionalities enforced by the World Bank and IMF. Aid must respect and promote human rights and prioritise support to autonomous small scale farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers. Such aid needs close monitoring and evaluation from civil society organisations and international bodies such as FAO and IFAD. More resources need to be allocated to this. This also brings us to the fact that to make the Global Donor Platform function in a democratic and participatory manner it would be necessary to move it into the UN system. Funding flows from the European Union and other donors should not be used as a means to corrupt national policies.

III. Our vision of rural development

11. There is a need to have a comprehensive vision for rural development. Rural development policies need to be socially and environmentally sustainable. We need systems of production that keep soils fertile, respect available quantities of water and accept local varieties of seed. Rural development should try to foster the creation of non-agricultural jobs by supporting the local processing of raw materials. Successful rural development also has to integrate important basic social services such as education, sanitation, health as well as infrastructure. Fostering a vibrant rural based economy will constitute the single most effective way of supporting the overall economic development of poorer countries.

12. We also emphasise the need to recognize and foster the multifunctional role of agriculture in the Global South. The EU, which champions multi-functionality to defend its system of subsidies to European agriculture, has failed to apply the same yardstick to African farming. This anomaly should go and the Global Donor Platform should clearly recognize this multi-functionality as the pivot on which African agriculture rests and not repeat the sterile argument about productivity. It is time to recognise that rural areas in Africa are the repositories of African culture. African farming and food production systems are integral to the cultural process. It is therefore mandatory that the EU, alongside African governments, acknowledge, respect and protect the cultural nature of rural areas in their development plans.
13. Our vision is based on the human dignity of people living in rural areas. It is based on the recognition of their right to adequate food, which includes the ability to access productive resources with dignity. Governments must respect, protect and guarantee the right to adequate food to all people living in their territory and use the maximum resources available to them in that respect. They must also provide food to people who are unable to earn their living from their own resources or labour, giving priority to local and regional procurement. National and international policies must provide positive livelihood support to people in rural areas, who have been neglected in many countries by their own governments. Governments must respect and protect existing access to productive resources, especially that of vulnerable groups, and monitor the impact of their actions. They must also guarantee access to effective judicial or extrajudicial remedies. People should not be forcibly evicted to make space for mining sites, large scale plantations, dams, protected areas, conversion of agricultural land for industrial use, capital intensive agriculture, and so on.
14. In order to implement the right to adequate food states have to recognize that for the majority of the rural population access to productive resources is key to earning a living. Securing their right to produce is the single most important action required from governments, while implementing the right to adequate food. The ability to feed oneself requires that states, along with social movements, have the right to regulate at the same time international framework conditions such as trade policies, investment policies, food standards, and so on. Without community sovereignty over food, seeds, pastures and fishing, small holder farmers, pastoralists and artisanal fishers cannot be protected adequately. States should not privatise or trade land, water, biodiversity, genetical resources, or traditional knowledge. Food sovereignty implies that those living in rural areas must have a say in the development of all policies directed to rural development. Organisations of those living in rural areas, such as organisations representing women, farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous communities, and rural youth have to be the key players that must be involved in all policies directed to rural development. Their right to organise needs to be protected and actively promoted.

15. Rural development must be based on local food and artisanal production and those who sustain their lives from such activities. National agricultural policies should fully support small scale agriculture and make sure that producers – particularly women - have secure access to their productive resources and appropriate production credits that are controlled and managed by the communities. Governments have to invest in the foundation of sustainable and farmer controlled transaction channels for agricultural commercialisation and for rural credits and savings to enhance social cohesion. Agricultural research that is built on local knowledge with participatory methods and whose results are available and accessible to local producers has to be fostered.

IV. No donor driven agenda

16. It is still surprising to see that donors meet in order to harmonize their policy approaches to rural development in the name of creating ownership, but that most of the concepts discussed here are developed without substantive dialogue with or involvement from those living in rural areas, particularly representatives from farmers, fisherfolk and pastoralist organisations as well as rural trade unions. The new rural development concept is being delivered to the targeted beneficiaries with a waiving flag and with the slogan of “ownership”. We do not see that NEPAD or the process that led to the adoption of the “Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme” are built around any meaningful process of involving people in rural areas. They are not developed in a participatory manner. The claim by the African governments and the donors that they have secured ownership for these processes from the rural population in African countries is false.
17. There is need for a new agenda for fostering rural development. This agenda should be different, not based on neo-liberal simplifications but one that is complex enough to foster a vibrant and sustainable rural development in harmony with those living and earning their livelihood in rural areas. It must be complex enough to understand the values and principles of biodiversity alive there. We are strongly convinced that only such a sustainable rural livelihoods strategy that is in tune with strong or strengthened rural populations will be able to stand up to the problems of climate change. Industrialized agriculture on the other hand, is already missing the diversity, the water and the people to manage such a change.