



PRESS STATEMENT

9 March 2023

Agroecology is the transformation needed for LDC food sovereignty

Doha, Qatar—Meeting in Doha for the 5th United Nations Least Developed Countries (LDC) Conference 4-9 March, civil society organizations (CSOs) from around the world organized a panel to present and discuss the challenges that face LDC agriculture, the promise of agroecology and the importance of investing in agroecological practices to build food sovereignty. Four working groups discussed women’s empowerment, farmer seed systems, national experiences of agroecology and the international shocks that undermine food system resilience.

The gathered CSOs welcome the Doha Program of Action’s (DPoA) commitment to move from potential to prosperity by investing in people. We want to see this public investment include supporting the capacity of rural communities to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Where most governments and private sector focus on the lacks that LDCs have somehow to fill, CSOs promoting agroecology see LDCs as having wealth that needs cultivating, including in knowledge and natural resources. We emphasize the importance of protecting that wealth and promoting resilient communities of small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisher folks, consumer groups, territorial markets and agri-food related small and medium enterprises.

We challenge the notion that LDCs are “left behind” by the global economy. In fact, they are much more heavily integrated into world markets than any other group of countries, but on deeply unequal terms. Those terms reflect patterns of colonial exploitation that date back hundreds of years, but also new and updated systems of exploitation, including deeply unfair rules around both public and private debt servicing and very high levels of corporate concentration in global commodity trade. Global finance rules trap LDCs in a vicious cycle of having to find foreign exchange to pay for imported food, fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, which pushes ever more land into cash crop production for export at the cost of biodiverse, resilient ecosystems. The cycle diverts resources away from diverse local food production and distribution systems, from public investment on social programs, including education and health, from tools to support adaptation to climate change, and from tools to reduce risk and vulnerability to international market shocks.

There is compelling evidence that through techniques such as agroforestry, green manures, vermi-composting, cover crops, minimum tillage and other regenerative techniques, agroecology improves the carbon content of soils, dramatically increases water holding capacity of the soil and resistance to drought and tempers the effect of high temperatures. Inter-cropping techniques reduce insect damage. Increases in the production, processing and consumption of diverse locally produced food fosters nutritious diets and reverses the erosion of food cultures and ensures the right to food. This in turn strengthens people’s immune systems against infectious diseases, including COVID-19 and overcomes micronutrient deficiencies. Moreover, reducing dependence on external inputs reduces farmers’ costs and is better for long-term soil health than reliance on synthetic fertilizers. Public procurement programs are another important tool to create markets for smallholders practicing agroecology while supporting school feeding and nutrition initiatives.

We are deeply concerned about the proposed significant increase of African land under industrial agriculture. Wherever large-scale land acquisitions occur, we see failure to gain community consent, failure to compensate, forced evictions of indigenous people, women's loss of access to productive land and other natural resources, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and land degradation, all leading to starvation, hunger and increased malnutrition.

We denounce the reliance on a top-down, Public-Private Partnership approach to agricultural development. We denounce the imposition of genetically modified crops in Asia and Africa. We lament the failure of many government leaders to see beyond the colonial narrative that agriculture in LDCs can only be modernized by adopting the practices of the Global North. LDCs have their own resources and know-how to produce and distribute healthy food using effective, low-cost, chemical free inputs, regenerating the soil sustainably and fostering farmer control of localized seed systems.

"This conference propagates the idea that African farmers don't produce enough food because they don't use enough chemical fertilisers," said AFSA General Coordinator Million Belay.

"The implication is that only if we pump our farms full of agrochemicals, we will grow more food. In the end that means polluting the soil, endangering the health of farmers and consumers, robbing people of their right to healthy, culturally appropriate and nutritious food, and increasing vulnerability to climate change. It also ignores the many ways in which innovative farmers and researchers have developed soil amendments that are safe for environment and for those working in farm sector."

We call on LDC governments and donors to redirect funding away from failed "green revolution" approaches and false solutions, such as carbon markets and biodiversity offsets for agriculture, and instead, support agroecological transitions to ensure food sovereignty through proven alternatives that reduce the need to import expensive, fossil fuel-based agrochemicals, to help meet the sustainable development goals (SDG 2030) of LDCs. Combining indigenous knowledge, farmer-driven and science-based innovations, our knowledge of ecosystems' natural processes and infrastructures that support territorial markets, agroecological food systems are the best way to build adaptive capacity and reduce climate harm, while ensuring food and nutrition security in our communities.

We call upon the governments to engage with the CSOs and incorporate the farmers voices into the agricultural policies so that agroecological practices can be enhanced in the LDC countries.

Signed (in alphabetical order)

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

Cultivate!

Civil Society Agrarian Partnership (CSAP)

Food Information Action Network (FIAN) International

Groundswell International

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)

Partenariat pour le développement locale (Partnership for local development, PDL)

Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA)

Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE)

UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternative)