

African Civil Society Declaration on the African-European Union Partnership

CONTEXT

We, members of a broad alliance of civil society and faith-based organisations across Africa, take this opportunity to voice our concerns and recommendations towards the upcoming EU-AU Summit.

African civil society has been following recent EU-driven processes including the 2019 Task Force Rural Africa - An Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation (TFRA), the AU EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference and the EU's proposed Strategy with Africa.

African civil society participated in the consultations around TFRA, on one hand broadly welcoming progressive aspects such as the recognition that the rural economy is the driver of poverty reduction, the shift in emphasis towards family farming, Africa's huge diversity and consequent need for context-specific locally driven solutions, and the adoption of a food systems approach. On the other hand, concerns were raised about the failure to address the big issues facing Africa, primarily the corporate capture of food systems, and the damage this is doing to our environment, our soils, lands and water, our biodiversity, our nutrition and health.

A year later, the 2020 EU Strategy with Africa seems to have lost touch with this agenda altogether, failing to address agriculture and food systems but rather concentrating on creating a conducive environment for large scale private sector business interests. While the stated aim is to "build a more prosperous, more peaceful and more sustainable future for all", the five proposed partnerships on energy, digitalisation, inward investment, peace and migration are largely silent on the needs of the >60% of African households who depend upon family farming and small-scale food production for their livelihoods.

While smallholder farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk and forest communities dominate the demographics of rural Africa, the policy spaces are crowded by external actors: philanthropists, businesses, multilateral and bilateral aid agencies. As a result, most countries across the continent have been induced – often by Northern initiatives based on private investment and public private partnerships – to subsidise an external-input based, export-oriented, commodity monocrop model of agricultural development, and to rely heavily on the transfer of land for timber, oil, gas and mineral exploitation to generate foreign exchange, often without or despite environmental impact assessment. Internal rates of return trump true cost accounting as the social and environmental impacts are externalised. Africa's rainforests, earth's second lungs, surrender their riches while the price of forest carbon is negotiated in World Bank and IMF boardrooms. Most of the dispossession involves peasant owned 'communal' lands, putting African food systems at risk of complete collapse. FAO's 2020 Africa food security report¹ finds that 256 million people remain hungry in Africa, with rural women -the main producers of food- the poorest and least well nourished.²

THE AFRICAN VISION

Land and agriculture are viewed differently in Africa and cannot be treated the same as in Europe. For the 60% of Africans who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, land is neither a commodity nor an individual possession; it is a gift from God and our ancestors.³ For Africans, land determines our identity as human beings, our dignity, our sense of belonging. In Africa, food is a basic human right, not a commodity in the hands of a select few who determine prices through their food industries. Food defines our culture and heritage: a source of nutrition and health, a medicine, a ritual, a celebration.

¹ FAO, ECA and AUC. 2020. *Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2019* <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7343en/CA7343EN.pdf>

² https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter8_t.pdf

³ <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/echoes-16-05.html>

In Africa, like much of the global south, agriculture⁴ is a mainstay of the economy and provides a livelihood and living space for the majority of its people. Agriculture is an important entry point for interventions that can potentially deliver an array of benefits, including improved food and nutrition security, environmental benefits and resilience to climate change. Agriculture also plays an important role in community cohesion and culture. The way that agriculture is considered through policy, funding and implementation has a profound impact on the economy, food systems, nutrition, social justice and the environment. We call upon European and African policymakers to enshrine the following imperatives in EU-AU strategy development:

- Ensure space for civil society actors both inside and outside decision-making spaces. Civil society actors are struggling to take their rightful seat at the table, while others may opt to remain ‘outside’. Both must also be able to freely and safely make their voices heard, and to influence decisions.
- Recognize, value and support the huge potential of agroecology* to sustainably increase food security and food sovereignty, reducing poverty and hunger while conserving biodiversity and respecting indigenous knowledge and innovation. This requires a shift in the ways development programmes are funded as the trend clearly shows that such transformative approach is largely ignored by public funders⁵
- Recognize small-scale family farming as a viable structural model for the development of the agricultural sector.⁶
- Respect the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Resolution 431 on the Right to Food and Nutrition which calls on States to “Strictly regulate the importation of foreign food items as well as the promotion and marketing of industrialised and highly processed foods.”
- Accelerate the transformation to sustainable food systems through supportive policies and financial incentives that protect and enhance food producers’ access to land, seeds, water, credit, and local markets.
- Urgently rethink the approach to agricultural development in Africa, reverse the attachment to industrial farming systems and refocus on a holistic, sustainable and culturally appropriate model.
- Redouble efforts to support the African Union’s peace and security agenda and reduce violent conflicts on the continent, recognising that often woman, children and youth are the first to suffer.
- Support and develop the concept of territorial food systems,⁷ decentralising value addition, stimulating the rural economy, localizing governance and strengthening the value chains where so much food is currently wasted.
- Stop the commoditization of Africa’s natural resources, bought and sold by multinational corporations and local elites. Future generations need enough productive land and living soil to nourish and provide livelihoods for their families and descendants, and maintain their cultural integrity.
- Protect and promote women’s rights to land. While they are recognized as the main contributors of labour in small scale farming systems, women represent a tiny fraction of agricultural land holders across Africa. Women must be guaranteed a strong voice on land governance and large-scale land acquisitions.
- Ensure that all large-scale land acquisitions must be preceded by transparent environmental, social and cultural impact assessment, and the prior informed consent of indigenous and peasant communities. Communities must decide what happens on their land and have the right to say no!
- Promote access to land for youth in order to reduce waves of migration and the unemployment gap in African countries.
- Move to adopt a legally binding UN treaty to ensure that transnational corporations are fully

⁴ In this paper the term ‘agriculture’ is used to encompass pastoralism, fishing, wild harvest, hunting and communal use and management of natural resources and ecosystems (wetlands, forests, savannahs etc.)

⁵ <https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CIDSE-Agroecology-and-Finance-Briefing-Sept-2020-1.pdf>

⁶ R. Neudert & L. Voget-Kleschin, What Are the Effects of Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Africa On Selected Economic and Social Indicators? MISEREOR.

⁷ https://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/Watch_2016_Article_4_eng_Territorial%20Food%20Systems.pdf

accountable for their human rights violations and environmental crimes.⁸

- Work together – EU, AU and civil society - to ensure the land remains in the hands of its legitimate users, and its management respects nature and reflects the needs and aspirations of the communities who live off the land.



European and International CSOs support this African declaration.



*Note on Agroecology

Agroecology is an integrative discipline that recognises the relationship between plants, animals, humans and the environment – the ecology of food systems.⁹ The European Commission's Knowledge Centre on Global Food and Nutrition Security¹⁰ recognises that agroecology can play a key role in enhancing resilience and illustrates the interlinks between agroecology and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, citing the 13 principles of agroecology developed by the HLPE 2019 report on Agroecology¹¹ and other innovations. Agroecology provides a transformative set of principles that farmers apply at any scale to reboot the land's ecosystem to make it work efficiently and self-sufficiently.¹² The High Level Panel of Experts of the UNCFS have shown that agroecological approaches are superior to others in terms of food and nutrition security.¹³ An analysis¹⁴ of 50 case studies of agroecology in Africa¹⁵ showed their strong contribution to meeting the ambition of the SDGs, with increased access to safe and nutritious food, higher productivity and incomes, sustainable production systems, and increased biodiversity.

⁸ <https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CIDSE-Submission-Feb-28.pdf> Also see RECOWA, 2020, Message des Eveques Membres du 8eme Conseil Permanent

⁹ <https://afsafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/know-agroecology-a-media-guide-for-journalists-and-communicators.pdf>

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/sites/knowledge4policy/files/agroecology_brief_final_10102019.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

¹² <https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/EN-The-Principles-of-Agroecology-CIDSE-2018.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.ileia.org/2016/09/22/agroecology-contributes-sustainable-development-goals/>

¹⁵ <https://afsafrica.org/case-studies-agroecology/>