



Africa's reaction to the AU's 'African common position to the UN Food Systems Summit'

A blueprint for corporate capture and industrial agriculture

Please click [here](#) to sign onto this open letter and civil society's [Africa Common Position](#).

16 September 2021

During a powerful and extremely well-attended and inclusive counter mobilisation by global social movements, from 25 to 28 July 2021, small-scale African producers of all kinds – fisherfolk, pastoralists, women, young people, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples and the urban food insecure – resoundingly responded to the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), captured by multinational corporations. They launched a powerful, democratic and genuine Common African Statement to reclaim Africa's food sovereignty and transform the industrial food system. To date, this statement has been supported by more than 60 organisations from social movements across the continent. We utterly condemn the UNFSS as entrenching corporate hegemony of our food systems, especially by multinational companies, and where our food systems are depicted as being in need of saviour western technology, productivity and competitive enhancement. We also unequivocally denounce the UNFSS for reinforcing gross power imbalances that such corporations hold over food systems, its abject failure to address the legitimate concerns raised by civil society and its attack on the spaces and responsibilities of the public sphere, both globally and at national level.

In 7 July 2021 a draft of the 'African Common Position to the UN Food Systems Summit' was leaked¹. Developed by the African Union's Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), the so-called Common position makes an attempt at providing an analysis of some of the key problems and challenges confronting Africa's food systems. This includes the vulnerable position of women as key food producers, nutrition trends, dependency on food and imported inputs, inequitable trade relationships, the devastating impacts of climate change, land tenure rights and so forth. However, this position dismally fails to consider critically key drivers for the current crises. Corporate power, the pillaging of the public purse through systemic and endemic corruption, the human, economic and environmental devastation caused by ongoing and new armed conflicts, and the role that extractivist development plays in fomenting such destruction are worryingly absent from the AU's analysis. More than that, the position promotes a blueprint for industrialising Africa's food systems based on the Green Revolution model. This failure has caused great disquiet amongst civil society and is not coherent with other positions taken by African governments, highlighting the absence of democracy, accountability and transparency that has taken root in the AU's machinery.

So who decides what goes into an AU Common Position and what stays out? This so-called common position promotes a blueprint for industrialising Africa's food systems based on the Green Revolution model. This position has not sought out pluralistic approaches to protecting and enhancing the practices of the continent's food producers and consumers. It does not respect and enhance the right to food and generally, human rights and the ecological well-being of our continent, and placing these at the centre. This Position is at odds with and undermines the forward-thinking work developed in regard to the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), for which African governments voted overwhelmingly in favour.

Instead, this undemocratic "AU common" position recycles a development consensus that promotes technical, corporate and market-based approaches that are inherently exploitative in nature, as these ignore the vast array of complex historical, political, social and environmental issues, and privileges the privatisation of resources and public goods.

The so-called "common" position claims that it emerges from an inclusive process of country and regional dialogues, which incorporated a "diversity of voices from the grassroots".² We vehemently challenge the veracity of this claim to be true across the continent. Most of these

¹ Several attempts were made to obtain a copy of the position through official channels but the reply was that the position will only be available after it has been made public.

² Point 4.

so-called independent dialogues were organised by national governments with indecent haste, with little effort being made to include the wide array of constituencies, and which typically involved pre-defined agendas developed.³ In some countries where there is a strong peasant movement their platforms were involved in the national level dialogues, but the concerns they expressed do not appear to be reflected in the AU Common Position.

If all the dialogues really were inclusive of a plurality of grassroots voices, perspectives and priorities, this would be reflected in a more considered, deep and transformative Common Position based on agroecology, family farming and territorially-embedded food systems in which markets perform a range of social and cultural functions as well as economic. The so-called AU common position is unsurprisingly and ominously silent on agroecology and other truly ecologically sustainable and socially just approaches to food production.

The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of these dialogues simply repackage the discourse and interventions promoted by dominant development institutions that simply fixate on the same failed and hopelessly dated recipes that will deepen industrial food production and systems. These will undoubtedly intensify the same inequalities of an imperialist world order. Most of these dialogues mischievously excluded the most important constituencies who produce the largest share of food in Africa, which is astoundingly at 80%,⁴ as also identified in the Position itself.

Consequently, the so called common position of a captured AU⁵ and hence those of its collaborators, reflects a significant lack of analysis and understanding of the political economy underpinning African food systems, and therefore the real problems (and opportunities) that need to be addressed. It totally fails to consider how the existing agricultural industrialisation efforts are in fact deepening inequality, poverty and environmental degradation, food import dependency and how these are failing to meet even their own flawed targets. The so-called common position views regional and global integration and the promotion of large scale farming as central to food systems transformation,⁶ yet it completely ignores the evidence that the confluence of financialisation and large-scale land investments have and will continue to result in land and resource grabbing from communities. This captured position is utterly blind

³ Such as International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), RUFORUM, African Development Bank (AfDB) and the like.

⁴ <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/72086>

⁵ Points 8-20.

⁶ Pg 11, paragraph 2.

to the global industrial food system, and its inherent extractive logic, being among the key drivers of the biodiversity and climate crises. Rather, it has embraced ecocide for Africa and its peoples and is foreclosing our futures and those of future generations. The single paragraph of the 19-page document that discusses the food-related implications of COVID-19 – the overwhelming priority challenge that Africa’s people are facing⁷ – is totally silent on making meaningful recommendations in relation to addressing the structural weaknesses and inequalities of the global market – as illustrated by the unequal and unfair distribution of medicine – and the resilience of our own territorially-based food systems, including those of indigenous peoples.

This so-called common position portrays a captured AU, tying our futures to the global economy for cheap labour and raw materials, gained through low-wage factories, destructive mining, as well as plantation and industrial, corporatised monocrop farming. Alarmingly, a plethora of continental policies are being steam-rolled from within the AU machinery, targeting seed, (such as the Draft Continental Guidelines for the use of biotechnology, Draft Guidelines for the Harmonisation of Seed Regulatory Frameworks in Africa and Africa's Green Recovery Action Plan). These unashamedly promote large-scale private-sector driven ‘improved’ seed and genetic engineering, bio and industrial food fortification, ‘blue growth’ initiatives and digitalisation,⁸ as silver bullets to addressing hunger. However, these are nothing less than the use of false solutions as a means of creating exploitative markets and extracting profits by mostly Northern corporations at the expense of African food producers, ecologies and citizens.

These processes are essential scaffolding for stimulating trade within and beyond the African continent, linked to the bigger industrialising agenda forged by African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – also a product dressed up as emanating from the African Union and African society. Taken together, these represent key nodes through which the corporate takeover of African food and agriculture systems are being orchestrated and anchored. Cases such as the imminent cultivation of 12.5 million hectares of genetically modified (GM) cowpea in Nigeria, in

a centre of origin and diversity of the crop, is an unforgivable betrayal of Africa’s common heritage and of women in West Africa, as cowpea is a woman’s crop. This will expand the market for GM seed developers and agrochemical corporations hugely, by the creation of artificial markets for GM cowpea seed and products in West Africa. Disguised as addressing the urgent need for coherent seed sector regulation systems in Africa, International Union for the

⁷ Featuring ‘digital solutions’ and ‘innovative financing through public-private partnerships’ – pg. 5, para. 20.

⁸ Points 27-28; 31-34, 35-36, 37-40, 53.

Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) 1991 style intellectual property laws are being pushed through the AU. These laws, which protect the corporate interests of multinational seed companies, are being pushed through the AU, to entrench corporate control across borders and industrial food value chains. All of this while processes to protect and recognise farmers' rights and farmer/peasant managed seed systems are consistently undermined. This will most certainly contribute towards dispossessing peasant/small-scale farmers of their seed, land, knowledge systems and genetic heritage.

Essentially, African industrial food systems are characterised by widespread hunger; malnutrition; non-communicable diseases and high food imports; and the exponential growth of the retail/supermarket sector, which are destroying and displacing local food systems and local markets, and are inherently and shamefully extractive. This system results in environmental injustices, widespread evictions and land grabbing, and the destruction of fragile and ecologically important ecosystems and landscapes, which are all cumulatively causing severe hardships for small-scale food producers on the continent.

The industrial agriculture project has deep social and political roots, embedded in imperial power relations between Africa and the world, and between African people and their governments. We must face the uncomfortable yet painful truth: authoritarian regimes do exist on the continent, with whom some Western countries are more than happy to collaborate. In this regard, we are extremely concerned by the unilateral decision taken in the name of the AU, in granting Israel observer status to the AU, a decision which is vehemently opposed by many African countries. Israel's advanced surveillance and military technology will hugely contribute towards further repressing resistance and the perpetration of gross human rights violations. It will exacerbate political instability and conflicts on the continent. Conflicts and insurrections force smallholder farmers into abandoning their fields, production and social systems and networks, which in turn has multiple negative knock on effects, including food displacement of peoples, breaking down of social systems and widespread starvation.

We say, categorically, that when this so-called common position is presented to the UNFSS as either a common position of all member states of the AU and or that of small-scale African producers of all kinds, the world must know this to be an unprincipled approach since the position has not been shared with the actors of African food production and food systems.

We further say that the so-called common position appears to represent a vision merely of a cabal within the AU and its corporate collaborators and imperialist institutions. Such a vision weds Africa's future to market-based solutions, in which corporate interests are dressed up as being compatible with the needs of African people, ecologies and food systems. Nevertheless,

we remain hopeful that the many good African governments reading this open letter will hear us and engage meaningfully and honestly with us, so that we may together embark upon a collaborative journey towards transforming our food systems for the benefit of all Africans, our food systems, ecologies and future generations.

As we have already stated in the common [African civil society statement](#), to reclaim Africa's food sovereignty and transform the industrial food system:

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS, ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL COMMISSIONS AND THE AFRICAN UNION SHOULD:

1. Support the vision of food sovereignty and the right to food, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 experience;
2. Decouple development from the extraction of our resources, biodiversity, water, minerals and soil fertility. Decouple development from the power of capital and the narrow demands of economic elites, and place our ecosystems and communities at the centre of democratic thinking for a sustainable future.
3. Disassociate themselves from the UNFSS and its agenda of corporate takeover of our food systems and governance. Oppose corporate takeover of decision-making spaces at all levels, as these are public sector domains and must serve the interests of African peoples.
4. Support the UN Committee on World Food Security and the vision of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism. Support the implementation of its policy outcomes, as well as the UNDROP, and all other commitments made in democratic spaces that support food sovereignty, the preservation and promotion of biodiversity, and the inclusion and empowerment of women and youth.
5. Reject the new science-policy interface promoted by the UNFSS, which aims to usurp the functions of the CFS High Level Panel and weaken the production of sound and valid knowledge, based on a plurality of voices, which is essential for the formulation of policies that effectively promote sustainable food systems and the rights of indigenous and local communities;
6. Adapt agricultural strategies to the terms of the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDIFF).

7. Support the adoption of the binding International Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights.

8. Fight for global regulation to prohibit illicit financial flows, rogue capital and tax evasion by companies and individuals operating in the Global South.

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Organisations that endorse the declaration



A Growing Culture

ACTU

Agroecology Research-Action Collective



African Centre for Biodiversity

AEMAPRI asbl

AEFJN

ADJMOR, Mali

AJEVODI/ ASBL

Alternative Espaces Citoyens

ASSOCIATION DOUNIA DES PROTECTEURS DE
L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Association Nourrir Sans Détruire (ANSO)



AFSA

ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

ALTERNACTIVA - Acção Pela Emancipação Social

Asali Society



Association des jeunes de la commune d'Essakane
(ANMATAF)



Association pour le développement du monde rural
ADMR



Association pour la Promotion des Arbres Fertilitaires, de
l'Agroforesterie et de la Foresterie



Association for Farmers Rights Defense, AFRD

APPUI SOLIDAIRE POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DE L'AIDE AU
DEVELOPPEMENT

Bergen County Green Party

BioFarmers for Sustainable Agriculture

Biowatch



Cadre de Concertation de la Société civile de l'Ituri sur les
Ressources Naturelles



Centre congolais pour le droit du développement durable,
CODED

CDA/ ASBL

CCPSC/ Kasai Central

Children's Environmental Health Foundation

CIRAD



Collectif culturel des jeunes pour le progrès social (CCJPS)

Collectif National des pêcheurs du Sénégal (CNPS)

Conseil National de l'Agriculture Biologique



COASP-Mali



Community Alliance for Global Justice/AGRA Watch



The Development Institute

Daani Youth Development Organization

DeepAgroecology.net

Disability Action Research Team (DART)

Dr Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFOUND)

DSAP

Ecological organic agriculture Initiative



Eco-hope

El Colegio de La Frontera Sur (ECOSUR)





Edinnov



ENDA PRONAT

Equity Health Consultants

ETC group



Fahamu Africa



Farmworker Association of Florida

Fammily Farm Defenders

FACHIG Trust



FENEV

Fédération des Coopératives Maraichères du Niger



FENOP



Fédération Nationale pour l'Agriculture Biologique



Fédération des Coopératives Maraichères du Niger

Food,Environment and Enterprise Trust (FEET)

Food Sovereignty Ghana



Friends of the MST (US)



Fian Zambia



FIAN Burkina Faso

FIAN Uganda



Global Environmental Trust

Good Health Community Programmes, Kenya

Groundswell International (West Africa network)



Hamisi Social & Wellness GBV Community Center

Habitat International Coalition

IDEL



Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development



Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee



Initiative Tchad Emergent (ITE)

INITIATIVE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT LOCAL



Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique
et Social: Inades-Formation Burkina

Justica Ambiental

JVE-Côte d'Ivoire



Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre



Kenyan Peasants League



Kenya Small Scale Farmers Forum

"Konyana" (centre de formation en agroécologie paysanne
(CFAP))



La Federation Nationale du Secteur Agricole, Maroc



La Via Campesina

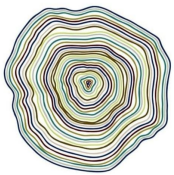


Masifundise/WFFP

Mau Community Forest Association



Mazingira Institute



The Movement in Africa



MVIWAKI



Mzuzu Young Voices organization



Navdanya International

National Family Farm Coalition



Never Ending Food, Malawi

Njeremoto Biodiversity Institute NBI-Zim

Nkhabele Marumo Psychologists

Nous Sommes la Solution



Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies



Indigenous Strategy & Institution for Development (ISID)



Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)



Organic World



ONG CHIGATA

ORAM

Pesticide Action Network North America

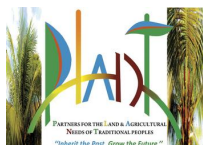




PGS South Africa



The PHA Food & Farming Campaign



PLANT (Partners for the Land & Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples)

Plateforme Paysanne du Niger

Rastafari Cultural Collective

Right to Food South Asia



Rikolto

Reseau Nigerien des Defenseurs des Droits Humains (RNDDH)

Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest



Rucore



Rural Women Assembly Zambia



SEATINI Uganda



Slow Food International

SHIWAKUTA

Social Action Committee, Central Unitarian Universalist Church



Tlholego Ecovillage



Tropical Sustainable Foundatin

Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community



US Food Sovereignty Alliance



Ukuvuna

Who ever feed you control you.



Women on Farms Project



World Forum of Fisher Peoples



World March of Women

Women with Vision of South Africa

Youth Volunteers for Environment Ghana



Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity

Zemljane staze

