



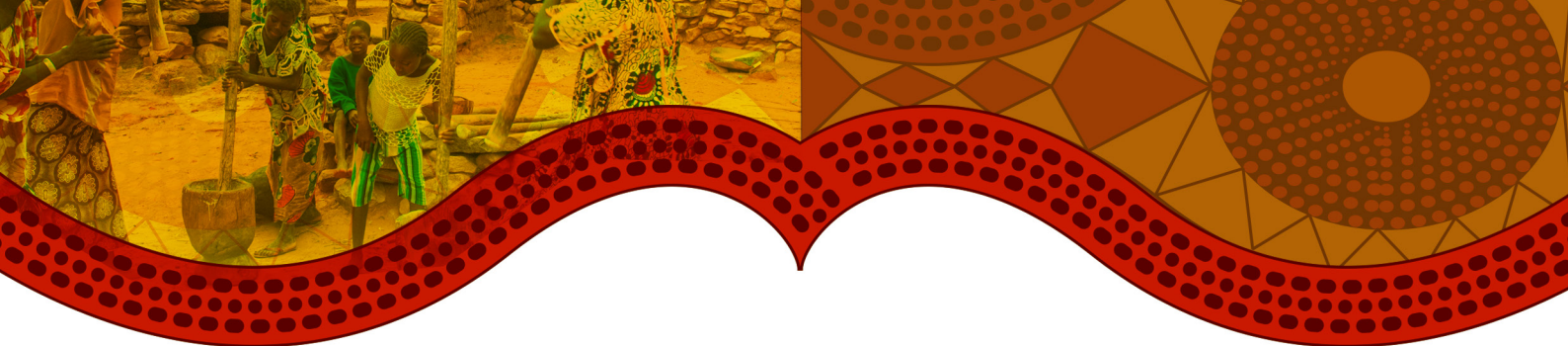
African Union endorses draconian, undemocratic and corporate-captured policy guidelines for seed and biotechnology for the continent



**AFRICAN CENTRE
FOR BIODIVERSITY**

ALERT

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The African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) is a research and advocacy organisation working towards food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa, with a focus on biosafety, seed systems and agricultural biodiversity. The organisation is committed to dismantling inequalities and resisting corporate industrial expansion in Africa's food and agriculture systems.

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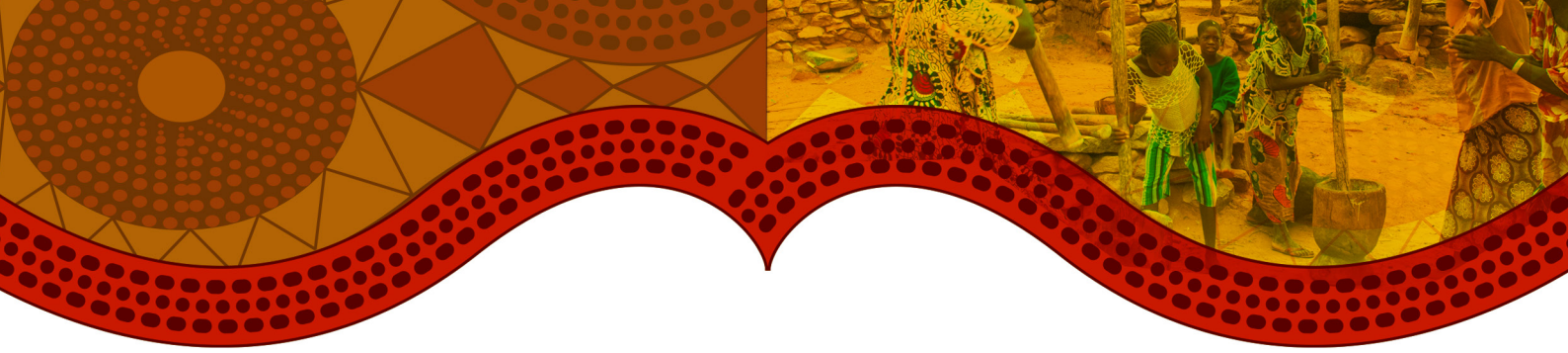
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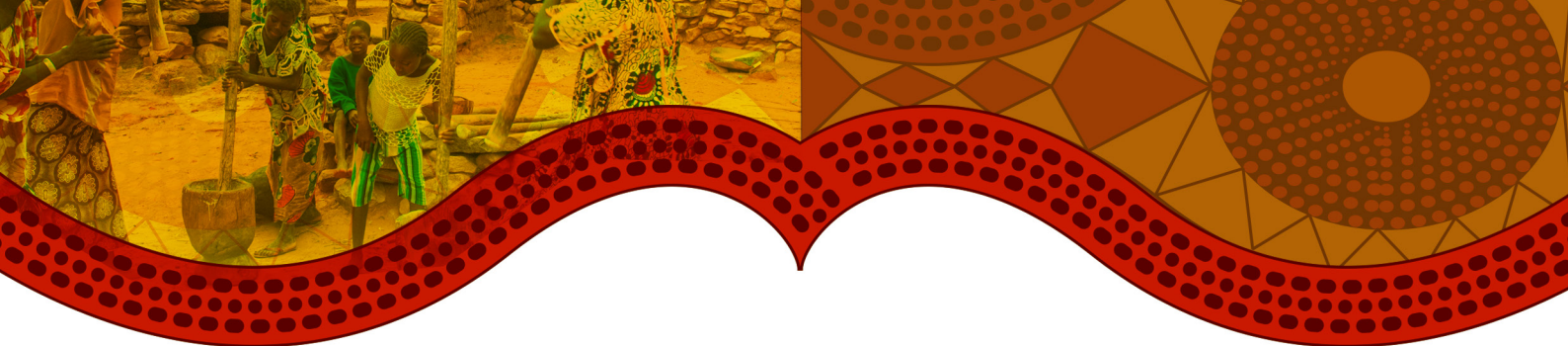
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The African Union (AU) has endorsed the continental guidelines for the harmonisation of seed and regulatory frameworks and the continental guidelines for the use of biotechnology in food and agriculture in Africa, despite fierce resistance from African civil society.





On 16 February 2022, we found out that these two set of guidelines had been endorsed by the “AU policy organs.” This was according to an email communication sent from the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (DARBE), of the African Union Commission (AUC). And, despite requests in writing for access to these documents, they are yet to be put in the public domain.

We are utterly dismayed and outraged at the manner in which decisions are made by the AU, and in particular the AUC. Not only are the decisions totally untransparent and undemocratic, but they are also illustrative of a wholly corporate-captured institution.

This also calls into question the legitimacy and credibility of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), a body that is supposed to ensure that the voices of African civil society organisations (CSOs) are taken into account in regard to the principles, policies and programmes of the AU – particularly those affecting food, seed and agriculture – which are fundamental to the livelihoods of millions of African smallholder food producers.

African farmer and civil society organisations have denounced the process involved in the development of these guidelines as being fundamentally and fatally flawed, untransparent and undemocratic, as far back as 23 August 2021,¹ when we demanded that it be suspended until relevant constituencies are meaningfully consulted and their concerns taken into account.

Critiques of these documents were meticulously prepared, led by the ACB and supported by African CSOs across the continent, and these were submitted to the

AUC on 27 April 2021,² with a follow up letter in July,³ where we tentatively welcomed the establishment of a Task Force to integrate farmer managed seed systems (FMSS) into the continental harmonisation. However, we also strongly cautioned against the commercial orientation of FMSS and appealed for the recognition and safeguarding of these systems as integral elements of any Continental Regulatory Framework.

In addition to these initiatives, a letter was addressed to the AUC, and specifically to the African Seed and Biotechnology Platform (ASBP) Technical Working Group on farmer managed seed systems, regarding the Ecological Organic Agriculture – Farmer Managed Seed (EOA-FMS) Cluster Group,⁴ when we continued to express our rejection of the undemocratic and corporate captured process.

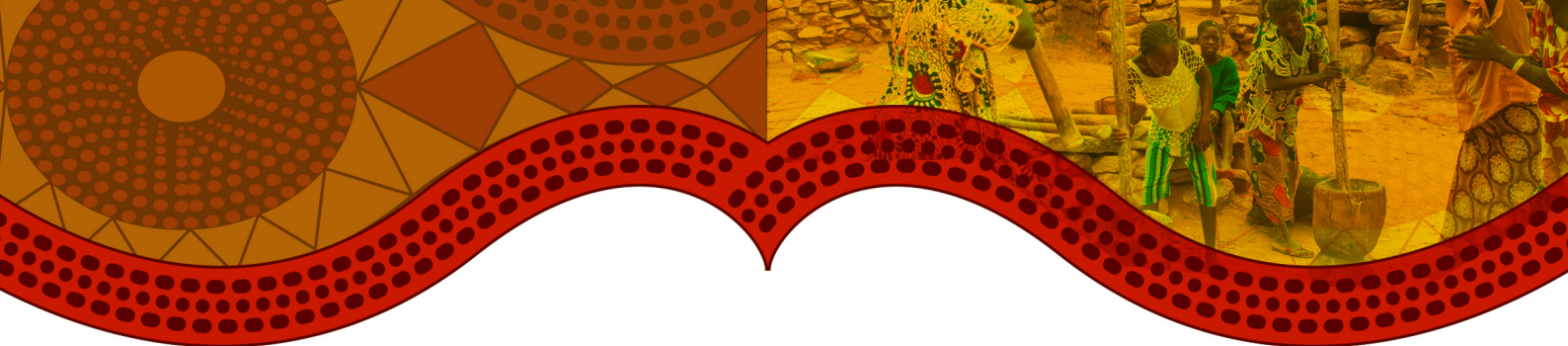
We also made our positions crystal clear through two online meetings organised by the AUC, on 9 April and 23 August 2021, where African CSOs showed up in numbers and made substantive comments and concerns.

¹ <https://www.acbio.org.za/african-social-movements-demand-au-suspends-undemocratic-and-pro-industry-seed-and-gmo-guidelines>

² <https://www.acbio.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/202105/submission-regional-and-continental-integration-under-african-continental-seed-harmonisation-acsh.pdf>

³ <https://www.acbio.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/202108/response-draft-report-development-continental-guidelines-harmonisation-seed-regulatory-frameworks.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.acbio.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/202109/letter-asbp-technical-working-group-farmer-managed-seed-systems-regarding-eoa-fms-cluster-group.pdf>



Central to our concerns, as outlined in our latest call to reject the validation⁵ of the guidelines – particularly the seed harmonisation guidelines – include the following:

- Lack of sufficient time for adequate consultations, particularly in the light that the guidelines are linked to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other efforts seeking to harmonise corporate-centred laws on the continent for the facilitation of risky trade and investment,
- Dangerously situating FMSS and farmers' rights within the context of a commercial seed sector agenda,
- Supporting a formal seed sector value chain that seeks to monopolise seed for the private sector, locking out farmers' seed – with a clear focus on private seed sector expansion and emphasis on private seed development and production over the public sector, for the benefit of the seed industry and industrial agriculture,
- Promoting continental-wide adoption of the authoritarian and unsuitable draconian International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) 1991 as a means and benchmark for harmonising plant variety protection (PVP),
- Capturing of peasant struggles by some interest groups, thereby misrepresenting FMSS and hijacking the struggles of small-scale food producers of Farmers' Rights, by incorporating the farmers' rights discourse within an extractive, industrial and commercial agriculture paradigm,
- Rushing with indecent haste, a hugely problematic and illegitimate process, which speaks to larger issue of democracy on the continent and a betrayal of the democratic rights of the African people.
- In addition, the draft document on the biotechnology guidelines has gone ahead to promote modern biotechnology through biased and distorted narratives, even problematising the precautionary approach as a barrier to wider diffusion of genetically modified (GM) products on the continent.

GM-based technologies and interventions have proven to be typical development interventions that have further entrenched industrial agriculture, reinforcing indebtedness, inequalities and social exclusion for the majority of smallholder farmers, in particular women – the very people it is supposed to benefit.

With this, we are deeply concerned that the AU is playing an active role in coordinating and actively promoting the corporate takeover of our seed, food and agricultural systems on the continent.

We are yet to see what the new guidelines entail and will continue demanding that the AU become accountable to the African people and ecologies, rather than to corporations that promote their interests.



⁵ <https://www.acbio.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/202109/block-validation-meeting-guidelines-harmonisation-seed-regulatory-frameworks-africa.pdf>