

CSO STATEMENT TO THE 33rd FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

**Honourable Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We, the 42 representatives of peasant farmers, rural women and youth, fisherfolk, agricultural and food system workers, livestock keepers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, cooperatives, consumers, and NGOs, representing national, regional and international CSOs coming from 20 countries met in Casablanca, Morocco from 21st to 22nd of February 2024 for the Civil Society Consultation in line with the 33rd FAO Regional Conference for Africa to be held on 24th to 28th April 2024 in Morocco.

We recognize and welcome the efforts of FAO and those of the Moroccan Government to support this opportunity for civil society to collectively debate on our relationship, challenges and our demands and proposals to FAO and our countries, as well as the opportunity to discuss the pertinent issues in the Regional Conference Agenda.

We rejoice to see the progress in the application of our recommendations to FAO, and welcome once again this important space to build a collective understanding of the current African context and perspectives in a moment of global and its effects on African food systems, assess the progress regarding the recommendations from African civil society to FAO, and in the context of this year's consultation, discuss how to harness science and innovation to increase productivity and competitiveness in the context of the African continental Free Trade area, promoting local food to improve nutrition, health and food security, how to fight against food loss and waste, building resilience through agri-food systems transformation, issues and challenges related to the pastoral crisis in the face of climate change, and how to strengthen the roles of women and youth in building inclusive agri-food systems.

CONTEXT

The new global shifts in power continue to threaten the sovereignty of our countries. With the global crisis affecting local food systems, the issue of food sovereignty is now more than ever at the heart of the debate. Forecasts indicate that food prices continue to rise, and most African countries will not have enough food to nourish their communities. Many farmers and food producers are threatened by armed conflicts, and more and more young people are leaving rural areas for the big cities or elsewhere in search of a better life. While there is a dire continued need for endogenous policies that are adapted to the local African reality and that respond to the aspirations of the populations and their well-being, agricultural production in Africa is still focused on a few export products, and we import most of our basic products when these can be produced locally. We regret to see that many of our governments tend to implement policies interests other than those of the general population. We are dismayed to continue to observe that big business continues to capture the attention of many governments at the expense of the people.

Africans are strong and work hard to feed their families and communities, and struggle against the idea that they are without prospects as an immensely rich continent. Endogenous development is everyone's responsibility. And there are plenty of good examples of this as well, including policies that prioritise land for women and youth, public purchasing programmes, programs of direct sales to consumers that are developing rapidly in some countries, and provide very important opportunities.

We also note the persistence or emergence of some challenges that threatens the hopes engaged by ongoing initiatives:

- Governments continue to say that agriculture is a priority, but do not allocate significant shares of their budgets to agriculture. Furthermore, much of the money spent on agriculture is focused on public assets and operations, not on investment at the farm level.¹
- In various countries we are observing a misdirected focus on policies supporting conventional destructive agriculture, and unequal prioritisation of agricultural space in detriment of herders, and the refusal to respect their right for pasture in forest areas. Additionally, some countries are refusing to adhere to regional accords regarding the free movement of herders and their animals.
- Beyond the impacts of impending shocks such as climate change, extreme weather events, pandemics, wars and others, the resilience of African food system face serious threats arising from the lack of marine protection, industrial agriculture, and large and uncontrolled importing of seeds and animals that are not adapted to the African reality, and require massive investments which produce little benefit.
- The African food system suffers from important limitations that lead among other to significant food loss and waste, caused by pests and diseases, illegal fishing, overexploitation, natural disasters and post-harvest losses, inadequate or insufficient knowledge, equipment and infrastructure (including electricity) for processing, storage and packaging of food goods, as well as weak planning and anticipation of production, transformation and commercialization.
- Small scale food producers are left to fend for themselves in a free market economy, without safeguards or protection, without the capacity to build dignity and create conditions for the integration of young people, including the strengthening of their capacities linked to food systems in practice.
- We regret that commitments made by our governments at a global and continental levels are not sufficiently taken into account at national level, such as the Malabo commitment to agriculture (10% to agriculture), or CAADP which was developed, but is not funded.
- There is a renewed wave of land and resource grabbing in Africa, which needs special attention of all actors to be reverted.
- We remain with an important challenge in the relationship of CSOs with FAO offices at national levels, with whom there are still important limitations.

¹ 2nd biennial report on progress in implementing the Malabo Declaration, African Union, 2020

As such, and following our discussions during the 2 days of the Civil Society consultation, **we strongly urge the following from our governments:**

- Support small-scale producers by improving financial and technical support to production, storage, distribution (including transport and infrastructure), access to inputs, technologies and markets, and integrating isolated high production areas, as well as building capacity in food preservation techniques, thereby reducing post-harvest losses and guaranteeing the ample availability of local foodstuffs. There should also be dedicated lines of support for women and for youth.
- Invest in research and development to improve yields and the quality of local foods in a way that protects the interest of local food producers and consumers, and guarantees the local ownership of genetic material and information. Additionally, food system enterprises and other food system actors should be engaged to curb food loss and waste.
- Putting in place a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to deal with the needs, priorities, threats, and realities of agriculture and food in Africa in each country in order improve the profitability of small-scale food production, and favour of circular and solidarity economies
- Implementation of inclusive biosafety policies to prevent contamination of non-GMO crops by GMOs and other novel technologies.
- Enact and improve regulations and infrastructure to control and protect local fishing grounds from illegal fishing, improve articulation of fishing agreements among neighbour countries, and massify the scaling out of agroecology in each country.
- Build capacity and encourage youth and women entrepreneurs to invest in the food system, and enact laws to protect women against abuse, including by local traditions and culture
- Ensure that land reforms integrate short-, medium- and long term visions, and that they protect the interest and priorities of small scale food producers
- Setting up insurance mechanisms for food producers against climatic risks
- Improve and establish adequate communication infrastructures to facilitate access to ICTs in rural areas

Furthermore, **we strongly call for the following from the FAO to:**

- Persuade and encourage national governments to take into account the recommendations developed in the consultations.
- Include local private sector in the implementation of recommendations regarding food loss and waste
- Collaborate and partner with CSOs by supporting local initiatives and public-private partnerships to invest and promote the production and consumption of local food.
- Provide technical and financial support for the production, processing, storage and distribution of local food, as well as crop management, soil conservation and rational use of inputs.
- Develop transparent social tools for the country-level inclusion of CSOs and peasant organizations in development, implementation and monitoring of FAO consultations, implementation programs, Performance Frameworks and other

multi sectoral spaces, in a conscious effort not to leave anyone or any group behind.

- Support learning exchange visits among CSOs and peasant organizations at national and regional levels

We call on the FAO and our governments to:

- Support the implementation of participatory guarantee systems for product certification
- Support the modernization of the means of production, transformation, packaging and distribution of peasant products.
- Develop and implement continental level mechanisms for food distribution
- Implement appropriate credit facilities for the operation of women's activities;
- Include women and youth organisations, in development strategies and in all participation, monitoring, and decision-making processes relating to the agricultural sector/ food system, respecting the rights of children at all stages;
- Provide adequate input subsidies for small scale food producers, with a vision towards building autonomy and self-sufficiency.
- Put in place appropriate, visible, and effective food system related early warning systems

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We call for the FAO, our governments, and African Civil Society to collaborate to:

- Take special attention to the link between pastoralism and climate change and its bearing on herder-farmer conflicts, and enact policies, programs and initiatives to develop the resilience of pastoralist systems.
- Develop mechanisms to measure the implementation of the Malabo Declaration (Malabo-meter), the Decade of Family Farming, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), including the effectiveness of these investments. It is also important to protect and support the Committee on World Food Security, and to develop good governance of resources, in order to change the perceptions and views that people have of their governments.
- Preserve and protect indigenous and peasant seeds, and create local and national seed banks, and networks of innovation and research laboratories focused on peasant seeds in each country.
- roll out programs of integration of innovative and/or digital technologies to enhance food production and distribution, including digital platforms that ensure data access is open but maintain ownership at source, drone technology, etc, and promote the massification of production and use of natural pesticides and herbicides.
- Dedicate special focus to increasing and enhancing the production of quality food through the use of agroecological and organic practices and principles (including micro gardening techniques and others) in urban and peri-urban areas, including protecting and maintaining agricultural land.
- Prioritise investment in inclusive and sustainable food value chains based on the practices and principles of agroecology, organic farming, and sustainable pastoralism and fishing that are resilient to shocks such as climate change and

pandemic, while preserving natural resources (water, soil, seeds, biodiversity, etc.) and the food sovereignty of the African people.

- Promote the diversification of livelihoods of farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolk in order to increase the resilience of their livelihoods.
- Support for independent and investigative journalism on agricultural and food issues, and improve research into the formulation of educational and investigative media

Finally, as CSOs we commit ourselves to:

- Raise awareness and educate the population through campaigns on the nutritional and cultural benefits of local African foods, culinary workshops and demonstrations to showcase the diversity of African recipes and food culture.
- Promote, lobby and advocate ourselves, our communities, and our authorities to reduce food loss and waste, and add value to our excess production
- Promote collective sale schemes through cooperatives and farmers' organisations.
- Be a constant, active, and coordinated voice in national concerns and to foster direct contacts between CSOs and governments, as well as the FAO.
- Strengthen communication and unity among CSOs and producer organisations in the food system at the national level, and articulate African movements on their own in order to have strong and effective advocacy pressure on governments to act.
- Improve the follow up of our recommendations to ourselves as civil society
- Create consultation and participation frameworks dedicated to women and youth.
- Mentor young people as future leaders;

The Africa CSO consultation is following with great interest the recent and important mobilizations of food producers across Europe demanding fair prices and revenue. We affirm our solidarity with our European peasant colleagues in this noble struggle. The consultation invites African political authorities at all levels to provide constructive reflections for fair prices and dignified incomes, and decent employment for all food producers in order to create the conditions for the true resilience of African food systems.

On behalf of the organisations represented in the CSO Consultation, we trust and hope that our sincere analysis, demands, and proposals are well received by you and your teams, and we look forward to more concrete collaborations with you in the coming period.

Casablanca, Morocco, 22nd February 2024