

International Conference on Agrofuels

Theme:

Food is for People not Machines

organised by

Friends of the Earth Africa groups in Abuja

13th August 2008

Communique

Member groups of Friends of the Earth Africa (FoEA), farmers, civil society organisations, legal practitioners, media representatives, development experts, community representatives, government ministries and agencies, and the academia met in Abuja, on 13th August 2008 to deliberate on the challenges posed by the renewed scramble for Africa by the North and the wasteful use of food crops as fuel to feed cars and machines while people go hungry.

The conference provided stakeholders an opportunity to raise awareness, mobilize and build resistance against corporate-driven unsustainable production, consumption and trade in agricultural products for conversion to agrofuels, and threats to food sovereignty.

Mindful of the fact that agrofuels are being promoted by those who place their insatiable appetite for energy before the livelihoods of the global South, participants of the conference observed that:

- a. Hunger is a global phenomenon not because there is not enough food for people to eat but because people are denied access to it. Therefore, agrofuels expansion which robs people of their farmlands violate the rights of local communities to food
- b. Poor communities in Africa are induced into signing away their lands by agribusinesses aided by neoliberal organizations like the IMF and World Bank, working with collaborating governments.
- c. Agrofuels promotion is providing space for neocolonial manipulations with the aim of determining what local people should cultivate, where they should cultivate them; what they should eat and ultimately, the prices of such products
- d. The same transnational agribusinesses and oil companies that are promoters of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are also behind the clamor for adoption of agrofuels as a source of energy
- e. Africa has become a dumping ground for imported agricultural products that compete with local production and destroy local economies with women, children, rural folk, and pastoralists bearing the brunt
- f. Arable land is recklessly partitioned and exploited to fill gas tanks instead of hungry stomachs thereby increasing poverty and resource conflicts among local peoples
- g. Agrofuels threaten the existence of small and medium scale farmers who inevitably lose their farm lands and become farm hands
- h. African governments are not adequately funding local research to boost farm yields. Instead they pander to the dictates of neo-liberal research organizations that promote non African solutions to traditional African problems
- i. That agrofuels-induced hunger is a threat to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in countries of the global South
- j. Biodiesel creates more environmental harm than even fossil fuels with increased greenhouse



Day 1. Meeting of FoE, Africa at the Agrofuels workshop

emissions. Research findings show that it is neither clean nor sustainable rather it is a drain on water sources and diminishes biodiversity.

K. Farmers are offered false out-grower status which inevitably ties them into an irredeemable web of bankruptcy;

In the light of the above, the conference participants resolved as follows:

- a. African resources must be used to develop local communities rather than the status quo where Africa subsidizes world development;
- b. Africa must not be opened to contamination of GMOs through food aid and/ or agrofuels
- c. Participants demand to know what has happened to the draft Nigerian Bio-safety Bill and when it will be open for debate and public participation
- d. The present Nigerian National Biofuel Policy is a lopsided document that is heavily loaded against the interest of Nigerians and the environment and is slanted for wholesale benefit of agrofuels corporations who would not even need to pay taxes. Participants demanded that this policy be completely rewritten with stakeholders' inputs.
- e. Africans must reject the conversion of African lands into monoculture plantations and farms for agrofuels production in the guise that such lands are marginal lands because this concept is a cloak for marginalizing the poor who are dispossessed and dislocated from their territories.
- f. African governments must be responsible and ensure that they initiate, and implement, policies that guarantee the protection of farmers and provide them with requisite subsidies, inputs etc. to enhance pro-poor food production and general food sovereignty.
- g. African governments should build the capacity of local scientists and engineers with a view to strengthening indigenous approaches suitable for their environment and economy.
- h. Alternative energy sources, including, solar energy and wind should be supported while poor rural communities who use energy sparingly and efficiently should be rewarded.
- i. Civil Society Organizations should strengthen and support national and regional civil society networks working against the wholesale introduction of agrofuels plantations in Africa
- j. Mitigation measures should be considered within the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities where developing nations have a right to development. However, African governments should not allow energy-intensive industries which rob the people of land and livelihood. Therefore, African governments must judge "growth" in terms of human well being rather than gross domestic product.

In conclusion, we call on our governments to take responsibility for protecting African people from the destructive schemes that continue to create food crisis on the continent. In the short and long run, Africa will not benefit from agrofuels. We therefore demand that African governments speak and act with one voice in resisting the use of African lands as farms for fuel.



Day2 : cross section of speakers and participants at the Agrofuels conference

Signatories:

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria
Friends of the Earth, Sierra Leone
Centre for Environment and Development/Friends of the Earth, Cameroon
Committee on Vital Environmental Resources (COVER)
Women Environmental Programme, Nigeria
Federation of Urban Poor (FEDUP),
Nigeria Cassava Growers Association
Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)
Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)
Foundation for Rural/Urban Integration (FRUIT)
Centre for Gender Education
Equity Advocates
Human Orientation Movement for the Environment
Jatropha Producers and Marketers Association
Biofuels Society of Nigeria
United Small and Medium Scale Farmers Association of Nigeria (USMEFAN)

Abuja, 13th August 2008



Day 2 : a cross section of the conference working group