



“Towards the G8 Agriculture: African Farmers’ Organizations take the Floor”

Rome, 15 April 2009

Background

On 15 April 2009 five African regional networks of farmers’ organizations will adopt a common Declaration addressed to the G8 Agriculture scheduled to take place in the province of Treviso from 18 to 20 April and to the G8 Development which will be held in Pescara from 21 to 23 May.

This initiative is situated in a context characterized by:

- the food crisis and its long-term causes (structural adjustment and market liberalization in particular, in the analysis of the African farmers), aggravated by the energy, climate and financial crises;
- a general consensus regarding the importance of the agricultural sector and the need to redesign the global governance of food and agriculture;
- a growing awareness that no sustainable responses to the food crisis can be found without listening to the food producers themselves.

In the case of Africa, a region on which the Italian G8 is focusing, the process of the continental structuring of the African farmers’ organizations currently underway facilitates consultation with these key actors. With the support of the ItaliAfrica-Terre Contadine network, five sub-regional farmers’ networks have taken the initiative of organizing the 15 April meeting: West Africa Network of Peasant and Agricultural Producers’ Organizations (ROPPA), East African Farmers’ Federation (EAFF) Regional Platform of Peasant Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC), Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) and Union Maghrébine des Agriculteurs (UMAGRI). In effect, over the past few years African farmers’ organizations have grouped themselves into regional networks which interact with the Regional Economic Communities in order to address the regional and international challenges of agricultural development and governance they face. Over the past year the regional networks have been working towards the establishment of a continental platform of farmers’ organizations in order to dialogue with the African Union and with the agricultural programme of the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD/CAADP). The networks’ primary advocacy targets are their own governments and the African regional and continental inter-governmental organizations. However, the policy orientations of the African institutions are strongly affected by decisions taken in global forums. This is particularly so in a moment in which the world community is dedicating considerable attention to food issues, with a special focus on Africa, opening up

both opportunities for and challenges to the agenda of family-based farming which the African farmers' networks defend.

For the first time in the history of the G8 a specific meeting is being dedicated to agriculture. The principal theme of the encounter is world food security. The objective is to develop a common strategy to put agricultural production back in the centre of political economy, block the phenomenon of speculation, improve productive commodity chains, stimulate investment and aid directed to zones of the world which have an agricultural vocation and low revenues. The G8 Agriculture is seen as an important step towards the establishment of a Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security. Even apart from the topic of food and agriculture, Africa has been elected a priority theme of the entire G8.

Important issues are on the table in terms both of strategies and of governance. There is now general agreement regarding the need to promote smallholder food production, particularly in food dependent developing countries. How to do so, however, is open to discussion and the strategies proposed by the African farmers themselves need to be publicized and defended. Regarding governance of food and agriculture, civil society organizations generally are advocating the establishment of a single global forum for policy decision-making under the auspices of the United Nations, with a participatory and transparent mode of functioning. What do the smallholder food producers of Africa have to say about their role in governance and the conditions that have to be met for them to fulfill it? The G8 Agriculture, coming after the High Level Meeting on Food Security held in Madrid in January 2009, will be an important step towards the meetings taking place in FAO this fall at which both strategy and governance will be discussed in a UN setting.

Preparation

For the organization of their workshop the African farmers' networks have sought the support of their Italian partners, the "ItaliAfrica-Terre Contadine" network which groups some 30 NGOs and farmers' organizations. In mid February Terra Nuova and Crocevia arranged a series of meetings between the facilitator of the Continental Platform of African sub-regional farmers' networks and the Italian authorities responsible for the G8: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. These encounters confirmed the interest of the Italian government and its commitment to ensure that the final Declaration of the meeting of African farmers' network would be transmitted to the G8 Agriculture meeting. Coldiretti, the largest European farmers' organization and a founding member of "ItaliAfrica-Terra Contadine", has agreed to host the meeting. Resources to cover the costs of the workshop have been mobilized from various sources.¹

Objective

¹ The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission through projects implemented in Italy by the ItaliAfrica network, Vredeleisanden (Belgium), Agriterra (Netherlands), Collective stratégies alimentaires (Belgium).

To enable the sub regional networks of African farmers' organizations to transmit to the G8-Agriculture, the G8-Development and the G8 Summit their analysis of the situation of African agriculture and food security and sovereignty and their proposals for the future, as well as their reflections on the role of farmers' organizations in the governance of food and agriculture.

Programme

The African networks will meet in closed session on 14 April to prepare their Declaration, which they will adopt on the morning of 15 April, followed by a press conference.

On the afternoon of 15 April the African networks will present their Declaration to the Italian Minister of Agriculture, Luca Zaia, and to the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in a workshop open to the public. The President of Colidretti, Sergio Marini, will present the Declaration adopted on 19 March by the G8 Farmers' Union Meeting. A dialogue will then take place between African and Italian farmers' organizations, with the participation of relevant international institutions, on two themes: "Can family farmers feed the world?" and "The role of farmers' organizations in the governance of food and agriculture". The workshop will close with communications on public awareness building on food and agriculture issues in the Italian regions and the Declaration directed to the G8 Agriculture adopted by the Italian Committee for Food Sovereignty.

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