

Communique

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Inefficiency of the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) in Addressing Food and Nutritional Insecurity.

Adopted at the Regional Meeting on 21st May 2020, Fringilla Lodge, Lusaka.

Recognizing that in 2002, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) adopted the Farmer Input Support programme (FISP), initially known as the Fertilizer support programme (FSP), which provides subsidized inputs to the small-scale farmers. FISP aims to improve access of smallholder farmers to inputs, promote private delivery of inputs, ensure timely, effective, and adequate supply of agricultural inputs, increase maize production and improve farm incomes and food security.

We are concerned that despite the FISP being implemented 19 years ago as a poverty reduction tool, the Programme has done little to address food sovereignty, improve nutrition and address poverty.

We therefore note that while maize production at the national level routinely exceeds domestic requirements, the availability of and access to adequate nutritious food remains a challenge for many poor households. Seasonal hunger still affects many families; a significant proportion of children still suffer from stunted growth, and overweight and attendant diseases are increasing in adults.

The current high level of Malnutrition is caused by lack of diverse foods and nutritious diets.

We have observed that implementation of FISP has failed to secure adequate food and nutrition. Further, we note that FISP only accommodates poor but viable farmers, leaving out the poorest groupings. The poor and most vulnerable, who are mostly women are often left out as beneficiaries as they cannot afford to pay the required amounts.

Further FISP promotes the interest of large corporations including the interest of multi-nationals through the distribution of certified seed, fertilizer and other chemicals. Most of the seeds under FISP are hybrid seed and closed pollinated seed, which cannot be recycled/replanted. This causes a financial burden on farmers who have to procure seed every year.

We note that some farmers cannot afford expensive seed and therefore they fail to produce food for domestic consumption.

The lack of inclusion of local varieties in FISP has led to erosion of indigenous seed. Unlike most conventional seed varieties, our indigenous varieties are very nutritious, have medicinal purposes, are adaptable to local climates, do not require use of chemicals, can

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be recycled/replanted yet give tremendous yields and are our very own treasured cultural heritage.

We therefore call upon the government, policy-makers, legislatures and non-state actors to;

1. Promote Biodiversity, which is crucial to human and planetary health. FISP is negatively associated with smallholder crop diversification as it encourages monocropping. This loss of diversification is a contributing factor to malnutrition and is an infringement on human rights to diverse food and nutrition. This loss of genetic diversity also makes food production less resilient to threats, including pests, pathogens, pandemics (for example Covid-19), extreme weather and climate change, thereby threatening global food security.
2. Guarantee farmers' rights to save, exchange and sell seed as outlined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). FISP in its current form does not promote farmers' rights to own, save, exchange and sell seed. FISP encourages strengthening of plant breeders who are only motivated by profits
3. To redress the current happening of small-scale farmers that are slowly being pushed away from seed breeding and forced to become consumers of non-renewable, patented seed sold by industries, who are increasingly monopolizing the seed system. Small-scale farmers thus remain vulnerable to hikes in seed prices and are not able to cultivate on large pieces of land. This causes an increase in food and nutritional insecurity.
4. To consider community-led initiatives that encourage the community to control and manage all the factors that contribute to sustainable food systems. Food sovereignty encompasses the right of people to determine their own policies relative to food and agriculture as opposed to having their food supply subject to market forces.
5. Government should consider efficient utilization of resources given to FISP and redirect them to projects that will alleviate malnutrition and promote food sovereignty noting that FISP largely accounts for close to 80% of Agriculture Programme budget currently.
6. Government should Consider other approaches to malnutrition reduction that are likely to be more cost-effective than FISP, such as investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and development, extension services, health, and education.
7. Encourage and promote agroecology through capacity building, use of indigenous seed, which is sustainable, eco-friendly and resilient to climate shocks and diseases, increases biodiversity.
8. Discourage the irresponsible use of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.