

Right to Food and Nutrition: Building a Pan-African and Decolonial Recovery Plan for Southern African Region

Introduction

The world is facing a systemic collapse and business cannot continue as usual. Food is particularly central to the multiple crises we are facing in southern Africa. Unsustainable food production and trade are the primary drivers of climate change, increasing social inequity and poor health. Current policies, practices and programmes of the political and economic regimes in the region offer short-term relief at best, but false solutions and embedding injustice as a norm.

Regional countries have all committed to human rights and regional and international instruments aimed at redressing ecological degradation and improving human wellbeing. We however continue to witness political disregard for their realization and have instead increased power inequity, disenfranchisement of citizen's voices, and neo-colonial corporate and elite control over public and private life and the regions natural systems.

Reclaiming Africa's food sovereignty is imperative to addressing current trends and challenging growing power asymmetries that are at the roots of the systematic crisis. We identify the need to strengthen the food sovereignty agenda in southern Africa and collectively push for the deliberate realisation of core human rights, particularly right to food and nutrition.

Context

We are witnessing the continuous degradation of socio-ecological systems under the guise of development loans and aid, deepening dependency on destructive, short-sighted and short-lived carbon and capital-intensive projects. This, with the focus on global agricultural and forest value chains, all contribute to creating conditions of extreme vulnerability and an incapacity to respond to shocks such as the climate disasters, fall armyworm and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ecological degradation is principally driven by multinational corporations and agribusiness which behave like predators, exploiting tax evasion and illicit financial flows. This neo-liberal development paradigm has resulted in dispossessing smallholder farmers as traditional foraging grounds are usurped for mining, clear-cut logging, and industrial agriculture. This is entrenching the unequal relations between Africa and the rest of the world, not just the Global North. Our foundations for life, the rich natural and human resources are being continuously, systematically and rapaciously extracted and destroyed. There are also around 25 conflicts on the continent, inextricably linked to resource extraction, undemocratic governments and broader geo-political ambitions entrenching Africa's resource poorness, dependency, disease ridden and generally in disarray and its peoples highly traumatized and oppressed.

Consequently, small-scale farmers end up turning to paid work on mines in the region. Many smallholder farmers are either encouraged to opt for monoculture production or to work as poorly paid and exploited labourers on farms and end up also as refugees in neighbouring countries and or in cities where they become part of the invisible and surplus peoples. These trends towards greater conversion of land

for monocrops, including tree monocultures, contribute hugely to eroding and undermining local food security and livelihoods. The extreme pressures on livelihoods as a result of armed conflict, the extractives sector, and the absence of support for small-scale farmers is forcing more and more people into ever more precarious conditions.

We are clearly seeing the interconnections between extractivism, ecological collapse, precarious livelihoods, and, the relationship between ecological disturbance and human health being shaped by the distorted logics of austerity, profiteering and financialisation of all life.

Addressing pandemics, land degradation and deforestation cannot be de-linked from building economies and food systems that are grounded in the needs of people, particularly smallholder farmers, and thriving ecosystems. To achieve this, we must utterly reject and resist against the eco-cidal logics of commodification, financialisation and extractivism for human and ecological liberation of the continent - otherwise Africa is destined to become an economic and ecological wasteland, feeding the insatiable appetite of developed countries and economies in the south such as Brazil, India and China.

Despite the intersectional and systemic challenges being faced, the so-called “solutions” being offered do little more than allow for the continuation of business as usual. Importantly, many African countries live under authoritarian dictatorships, where human rights are incessantly violated, leaving little space for political engagement and civic participation. Internationally, in negotiations towards a post-2020 global framework on biodiversity under the Convention of Biological Diversity we see increasing threats to the peoples of Africa and our natural resources. Intersecting with the climate negotiations, discussions of the highly contentious and misleading Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and the 30x30 target, seek to exploit African landscapes under the guise of its protection, and offset the insatiable and indefinite growth of especially developed countries and middle-income developing countries, at the expense of African livelihoods, ecosystems and the future of our children, including the unborn.

As the African continent continues to experience a common pattern of extraction, and facilitating neo-colonial trade agreements that have long-term regional implications, we require a new framing towards a Pan-African, agroecological resistance, due to our intricately interlinked economies and ecological systems. To deal with the changing nature of geopolitics and geo-economics in light of the new threats to the continent, we need to building on the historical work already in flow, and come together to support collective efforts nationally and regionally, enhance South-South collaboration and North-South solidarity.

Weak social and political, Economic policies frameworks are a predominant feature in Southern African countries, despite abundant resources and a good climate and various instruments such as International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), African Charter on Human Rights. The poverty and hunger being experienced is also: - a reflection of the absence of a strong socio-economic and political framework and policies that are people centered,

- Decades of neoliberal policies and practices and absence of public policies that fundamentally change the way in which our society is organized and the economic system operates, - And changes climatic conditions, which have impacted on people's livelihoods.

In this way, we aim to come together to build this pan-African agenda to work with movements across sectors/ areas, to move towards the decolonization of Southern African Regional economies and ecologies, and hold multinational corporations, local elites, and systemic racism, classism and institutional colonialism accountable for the ecological crisis we are in.

Objective

This meeting aims to build on previous discussions and bring together key actors across different areas of expertise/movements (i.e., RtFN, agro-ecology, food sovereignty, tax justice, extractives, climate, and deforestation) in the Southern Africa region to share experiences, lessons learnt and work out national and regional advocacy strategies

Specific objectives are:

1. To discuss the crisis we are in: including *inter alia* rampant deforestation; extraction; industrialisation; vulnerability; unequal geopolitical and geo-economic relationships; socio-economic and political inequalities; elitism; investment and trade; governance; democracy, and neo-colonialism - tied to the ecological and climate crisis.
2. To understand the myths and neo-colonial policies that are related to international trade and investment and are implicit in national policies around land use, tenure systems and concession models.
3. To Understand farmers' rights and agriculturally biodiversity farmers' seed systems
4. To situate agroecology within a decolonization and pan-African agenda, understanding that food sovereignty is an inextricable part of a decolonization agenda.
5. To link the food sovereignty movement with movements from other linked struggles, and find ways to converge and work together, encouraging diversity and cooperation, and respect for each other's individual work, but also to find deeper understandings across issues, and to explore how we can strengthen and support struggles across the movements.
6. To develop a set of demands for Northern (and other- China, India, Brazil, South Africa) partners/countries
7. To develop strategies nationally and regionally towards
 - a. Building back political power on the ground;
 - b. A pan-African political education/visioning process;
 - c. Regional, South-South and North-South collaboration; and
 - d. Lobbying and advocating at national, regional and international levels

Expected outcomes

- The false narrative of treating smallholders as inefficient, unproductive and driving deforestation is debunked.

- A strategy and Joint work plan on how to push forward the steps towards recognition, legalisation and implementation of peasant seed systems as central components to ensure agro-ecology, food sovereignty and resilient food systems is discussed

Participants

The meeting is expected to bring together a small group of people due to COVID-19 regulations and considerations, from across the Southern African Countries including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Namibia and Eswatini and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The meeting will accommodate both physical and virtual participants, please confirm your availability for either Virtual or Physical participation.

Date: 20- 21-22 May 2021

Venue: Fringila Lodge, Chisamba

Email: fianzambia@gmail.com