

Cotonou appeal on traditional knowledge in agriculture

Conscious of the present state of degradation and the reduction in the biological resources of our continent,

Acknowledging that biological resources are a valuable heritage and that the challenges are scientific, economic political and cultural,

Reminding everyone that models of the prevalent development (economic liberalism, globalisation) are a cause of the deterioration of the biological diversity and reinforce social inequalities throughout the world,

Conscious of the fundamental role of traditional knowledge and its relevance to the management of biological diversity within any sustainable development,

Stressing that multinational firms get richer by securing patents and other intellectual property rights over our biological resources that they exploit at the expense of the inalienable rights of our local communities,

Noting that the genetically modified organisms that are at present being produced and sold on the market as seedlings and food are associated with real or potential dangers to the health of people and to agricultural biodiversity, and therefore rejected by social and scientific opinion throughout the world, including Africa,

We, the representatives of farmers, fishermen, hunters, herders, local communities, managers of sacred sites and NGO from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo gathered in Cotonou (Republic of Benin) from the 16th to the 19th of October 2001 to take part in the workshop of the West African Project "*Growing Diversity*", in agriculture,

are launching an appeal :

to the governments of each country of West Africa so that they :

1. involve local communities, professional agricultural organisations and NGOs in the decision making of the biological resources management at the local, national and sub-regional levels, whilst respecting their rights,
2. keep and put into practice the international decisions agreed when they signed treaties such as the conventions on biodiversity, desertification, humid areas, climatic changes, and ratify the Carthagena treaty on biotechnological threats,
3. reinforce the capabilities of local communities and professional organisations to manage biological resources in a sustainable way,
4. inform populations of the OAU/AU model law on the introduction of the new intellectual property rights on plant varieties and start a public discussion on the revised Bangui Agreement,
5. apply the precautionary principal by declaring a five-year moratorium on the importation of GMO, while putting into place a mechanism for the study in depth of GMOs and the threats they pose to health and environment.

*** to regional and sub-regional organisations (OAU/AU, CEDEAO, UEMOA, Conseil de l'Entente,...) so that they :**

1. Involve civil society in their decision making in relation to agriculture,
2. integrate local communities' interests into political life and agricultural biodiversity management programmes
3. encourage ecotourism by involving local communities through the visits of national sites in relation to the local management of biodiversity in West African countries,
4. support a wide ranging information campaign and start a public debate on the model legislations of the OAU on access to genetic resources and the rights of local communities on one hand and the safety of biotechnology on the other hand.

Cotonou, 19 October 2001,

The participants