



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2017

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Agroecology, Food Sovereignty—The pathway to True Development

Introduction

“Food is culture, food is life and food is ritual.” These were the words of Nnimmo Bassey at a public event on the side-lines of a recent conference hosted by the Canadian Council of Churches in Toronto, Canada, under the theme Redesigning the Tree of Life. The statement is steeped in our belief that food is central to sustainable all around human development.

Poverty has been meted on majority of indigenous peoples especially in Africa through the acts of commercialization of the food system and environment for corporate and government gains at the expense of the poor. The poverty indices have been further increased and are still increasing due to the consequences of the activities of the extractive industries operating in vulnerable communities. As has always been the case in contexts where “the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer,” livelihoods of small scale farmers and fisher folks are drastically affected and are often completely destroyed.

Objectives and Purpose of the Statement

In line with the theme of the 56th commission for social development: “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all” the objective and purpose of this statement is to support and underscore the role that agroecology can play in providing livelihood for small holder farmers in sustaining food systems devoid of toxic inputs, recognizing local knowledge, practices and technologies as well as providing adequate food for the present and ever-increasing global population. This does not only cover farmers but also fisher folks in our coastal and inland marine ecosystems whose livelihood has been increasingly threatened by the extractive industries operating in their territories poisoning land and water with toxic wastes. A people fed by self-sustaining farming and food production system are people on the pathway to true development.

Overview of the issue as it relates to the work of the NGO

As an environmental/ecological think tank and advocacy organization, rooted in solidarity and in the building and protection of human and collective dignity, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) believes in the development and preservation of agricultural and food systems that respects Nature and preserves the sovereignty of the peoples. We particularly believe that the intensification of the push for the introduction of modern agricultural biotechnology in Africa poses special risks to the continent and could lock in Hunger and malnutrition rather than ameliorating these. In addition, these could lead to the erosion of biodiversity, colonization of food systems and promote false solutions to climate change by projection so-called smart agriculture.

The politics of food is deeply entwined in the dominant neoliberal agendas driven by globalization of exploitation of the weak, despoliation of ecosystems and lack of respect for Mother Earth. Our work aims to expose and break the linkages and reverse the ascendancy of enforced creed of “might is right” — an ethic that permits the powerful to pollute, grab resources and degrade/destroy the rest simply because they can do so. We believe that by promoting agroecology, we contribute to the

building of movements for recovery of memory, dignity and harmonious living with full respect of natural cycles of Mother Earth.

Specific examples of accomplishments by the NGO and challenges

As an organization based in Nigeria and having an office in South Sudan, Africa we have successfully elevated the need for strict compliance with the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD) especially with regard to challenging the entry of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into Nigeria. Our work with farmers' groups, consumers and local communities have also contributed immensely to higher levels of protection of Nigeria's biosafety, including through higher vigilance by responsible authorities. A case in point is a recent repatriation of 70,000 tonnes of GMO Maize illegally shipped into Nigeria. Our work has also contributed to the movement that ensured that government commences the clean-up of the highly-polluted waters and lands of the Niger Delta.

Despite these advances, we note that our governments tend to take the words of for-profit entities (corporations) above that of struggling farmers and fisher communities. We still face a great task of achieving more supportive position of governments towards small scale farmers, who the International Assessment of Agriculture Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) clearly said hold the key to feeding the world into the future. The IAASTD factsheet states, "The IAASTD reports concluded that chemical-intensive industrial agriculture has degraded the natural resource base on which human survival depends and now threatens water, energy and climate security." The full factsheet can be seen here: <https://www.globalonenessproject.org/sites/default/files/downloads/IAASTD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

A way forward: expectations, specific recommendations

To eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all,

- Governments should make serious effort at including indigenous knowledge and practices in the preservation of seeds and food systems.
- Small scale farmers should be empowered and provided extension services and support infrastructure to raise their levels of productivity and incomes
- Knowing that farmers are highly affected by climate change and that agroecology helps to cool the planet, governments should draw up policies and regulations to phase out dependence on fossil fuels and chemical based food production systems
- In order to fight the global threat of malnutrition and hunger, there should be more efforts at creating higher awareness on the necessity for integrated food and agricultural systems that are based on just socioeconomic conditions, build resilience and preserve local biodiversity,

Closing sentence

Poverty in a nation is partly a consequence of poor governance both at natural resources and human level. There is need to tackle poverty from the grassroots level by supporting communities of family farmers and fishers faced with a series of environmental pollutions and land grabbing. Infrastructural projects that are in sync with sustainable environmental practices should be initiated and executed in rural areas, polluted environment should be cleaned and restored.