

Press statement

Jointly developed by BIBA Kenya, ABN and OAIC on March 29th, 2022

Biosafety and Biodiversity Association of Kenya (BIBA Kenya) and the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) held a two-day sensitization forum with religious leaders on toxic agricultural inputs to promote biological pest controls for sustainable food production In Kenya.

The joint sensitization ceremony took place in Nairobi, with the Chairman of (insert the name of the Chairman who made the opening remark-his title and the name) representing the position of the religious leaders in Kenya. More than ten churches had representatives at this meeting, including (insert the title of Fr. Mutie and his full names here) who moderated the discussions.

Kenya is a country blessed with abundant human, cultural and natural resources, offering immense potential for rapid growth. With a population of over 49 million revealed in the August 2019 census report and a rising urbanization trend, the country offers enormous opportunities for the regional market, including economic diversification, value-chain development and livelihoods improvement. Despite this, like most developing countries, Kenya finds itself amidst climate crises, faced with severe land degradation, drought, and desertification that have collectively contributed to the scarcity of arable land for agriculture, pastures, and water for animals' husbandry.

This sensitization meeting signals a firm commitment from the religious leaders, BIBA Kenya and ABN, to champion sustainable farming approaches to reclaim degraded land, restore biodiversity, and protect the ecosystem services for a healthy coexistence among all the organisms on earth for harmonious living with the nature. The sensitization meeting builds on the high ambitions and expectations of BIBA Kenya and ABN to advance the Conservation of Biocultural Diversity and Restoration of Healthy Ecosystems initiative in Kenya through knowledge enhancement, institutional capacity strengthening of the various stakeholders. Religious leaders play a pivotal role in this initiative to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

"Religious leaders are pivotal in achieving mindset change in promoting sustainable farming approaches to feed the current and the future generations. Religious leaders are a key stakeholder with whom such joint efforts support concretizing actions for scaling up, deepening and upsacaling of the Conservation of Bio-Cultural Diversity through Strengthening Community and Ecosystem Resilience Initiative led by ABN." Said Venter Mwongera, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator at ABN. "Through the formulation of the multi-state platform in the fourteen countries, which brings together all the continental initiative implementation partners of the project, religious leaders are a key stakeholder and play a crucial role in the realization of a conserved biodiversity, healthy ecosystems and a harmonious living amongst all the elements on mother earth." She added.

"Today, humanity is facing a severe crisis which if no one raises their voice, humanity will be at a great loss. Slowly our cultural heritage is being swept under the carpet in broad daylight. I am concerned about our lifestyle. No one seems to care about the processes that our food is taken through during planting, weeding, harvesting and even storing." Stated the Chairman of OAIC (Insert his name here). Adding, "Every moment, we are talking about fertilizers, pesticides and chemicals to increase production. Our food is no longer safe for consumption. We are more concerned about the volume and finances after harvest. The faster we grow the

food, the more money. We are no longer our brother's keeper as the Bible directs us. We are gathered here for a sensation meeting on the dangers of using toxic fertilizers."

Through this meeting, OAIC not only recognizes the necessity to restore land fertility and preserve biodiversity to face the impact of climate change but to contribute to the sustainable development and stability of the country by increasing the climate resilience of her populations, enhancing social cohesion, and creating sustainable income generation, improved nutrition and economic opportunities, especially for women and youth, at the local and national levels.

"OAIC is a key actor in holistic feeding of a human being not only in the spiritual matters with substantial contributions on the sustainable agricultural practices, championing for peace, healthy living and security nexus as the reinforcement of social cohesion," stated **(Insert the name of the Chairman of OAIC here)**. "It should be emphasized that with the collaboration with Christian bodies at the interreligious council of Kenya, OAIC has high hopes for collaboration between BIBA Kenya and ABN to strengthen the effectiveness of agricultural practices among our congregants in Kenya. Our strategic support will enable us to further engage with BIBA Kenya and ABN to implement the conserving biocultural diversity initiative in Kenya for healthy mother earth," he added.

"In Kenya, toxic pesticides affect the health of humans and the leaves the soil baren. This impacts biodiversity conservation because the toxic chemicals remain in the soil that is harmful to healthy micro-organisms important to the soil." Stated Anne Maina, the National Coordinator of BIBA Kenya. Adding, "The indigenous seeds under the farmer-managed seed system offer a ripe opportunity to the smallholder farmers, offer nutritious foods leading to improved livelihoods."

"The rising costs of fertilizer are a heavy burden for smallholder farmers. The government should support agroecology opportunities and improve soil health for food sovereignty. Kenyan soils are acidic and barren in some regions. The government should offer remedial measures to improve soil health for farmers to continue feeding the nation with healthy foods." Said Ms Maina.

"Toxic pesticides have a great impact on bees which are a major pollinator for food security. Wild bee pollinators for food production, nutrition, and human well-being need to address threats to pollinators and pollination while recognizing the contribution of pollinators to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goals 2, 3, 8 and 15." Stated Dr. Saliou Niassy, the Head of `technology Transfer at the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). Adding, "Pesticides used in agriculture, weak regulatory mechanisms, over-application of pesticides and use of harmful pesticides products and herbicides designed to kill weeds also affect bees which are key players in pollination and increased food production."

Dr. Saliou observed that some crops, such as avocados, need bees for pollination. "There is a nutritional value to bee-pollinated crops. Instead of using harmful pesticides, it's important to use approaches such as integrated pest management and biological pest controls as the alternatives that care for food production and protect biodiversity." He advised.

The partnership between the OAIC, BIBA Kenya and ABN will focus on sensitizing the various actors on the importance of conserving biocultural diversity and protecting ecosystem services for food security and mitigating the impact of Kenya's climate crises.