



9<sup>th</sup> December 2022

## PRESS STATEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here as over 100 civil society organizations representing smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, consumer networks, faith groups and indigenous seed savers from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to reiterate our reservations regarding the apparent push to commercialize Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the East African region.

Our concern particularly is informed by the recent move by the government of Kenya to introduce GMOs in the region through lifting of a 10 year ban on importation of genetically modified products despite the many uncertainties on the socio economic, environmental, food sovereignty, safety, trade and health impacts that GMOs pose.

We unanimously re-affirm the remarkable value of our farmer managed seed systems, indigenous seed and agroecological food system in assuring food security, community nutrition and resilience as well as in maintenance of a common heritage that connects the past, present and future generations.

This joint call comes in the wake of a tenacious push to commercialize Genetically Modified Organisms into the region with Kenya being used as the entry point to the East African region.

As representatives of small-scale farmers in East African Community, we call upon the Kenyan government and other African governments to tread carefully before embracing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), particularly in food and agriculture as the effects are irreversible. These include loss of our rich biodiversity through crops, animal contamination, total dependence on seed and synthetic fertilizers from few multinational companies and multiple possible health risks and an eminent trade loss of our organic produce to the EU market and other international markets.

GMO commercialization in the region threatens the rights and livelihoods to smallholder farming and consumers at large through cheap and subsidized GMO imports. With Kenya being strategic in the East African Community, we anticipate a ripple effect in both Tanzania and Uganda and other EAC Partner States.

We demand that the EAC governments defend and support our rich diversity of indigenous seed and food regimes, by resisting the growing continental push by the private seed industry especially in the sub-Saharan Africa to restructure and 'commercially take over' our seed and food systems.





Under what is seen as a semblance of a failed ‘Green Revolution’ narrative, being orchestrated through numerous private and public, national and regional legislative interventions to popularize the commercial seed regime, it is now apparent that the survival of the centuries old Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) which have supported food production systems amongst our communities in Africa for hundreds of years stand threatened.

We stand as a lobby group to warn that, if not reversed, the trend presents untold potential to derail the attainment of farmers’ seed sovereignty, region’s food sovereignty and resilience of smallholder and rural communities to climate shocks.

In Kenya, the national seed policy 2010 recognizes two seed systems; the formal and informal. Even though the informal sector supplies 80% of planting seed to 75% of the farming community, the country’s seed laws and regulations neither recognize nor support the informal seed sector. This is a contradiction of Section 11(3)b of the Kenyan Constitution which recognizes the protection of indigenous seeds.

By large, Kenya Seed laws emphasize on organized seed production systems that assures quality to the consumer as opposed to non-controlled seed production and the old culture of seed saving and sharing. These laws promote commercialization of improved plant varieties in the seed sector through seed certification of released varieties. Further, the Kenyan Seed and Plant Varieties Act allow breeders to register and secure Plant Breeders Rights based on UPOV 91 Convention if they discover and develop any new variety.

In Tanzania, the Seed Act of 2003 does not recognize farmer managed seed and it is a criminal offence to trade seed which is not certified. The National Agricultural Census of 2019/2020 indicated that despite the government's efforts to promote the use of improved seeds, more than 76% of the total cultivated area (13.8 million hectares) was planted with farm saved seeds.

On the other hand, the National seed policy of Uganda (2016), recognizes both the formal and informal sectors and the crucial role played by the informal sector to supply over 75% of seed to the farmers. The policy provides an avenue for farmers to engage in seed business and introduced Quality Declared Seed (QDS) as a new seed class. Guidelines for QDS were also developed and currently in operation. Community Gene Banks are also provided for to support community efforts to sustainably manage agro-biodiversity.

Genetic resources including indigenous plants are utilized by breeders with minimal benefits to the farmers responsible for conserving those genetic resources for generations. Policies are being modelled to promote commercial seeds through adoption of a universally accepted seed development criteria of variety release, quality control and certification, seed production, seed distribution and marketing.

These standards indirectly lower the amount of genetically diverse seed available to smallholder farmers and consequently threaten agrobiodiversity and food security.





Indigenous traditional knowledge and innovations are vital for the sustainability of agrobiodiversity. However, the continuity across generations is being eroded.

Smallholder farmers do not follow these sequencing in their seed and food production, they have developed their practices and customs for seed distribution among their networks and communities based on their rich bio-cultural diversity. This has no benefit of the official recognition of the law and is termed “informal seed system”, whereas it deserves its own legal regime.

Genetically Modified Organisms in Africa cannot not end hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the continent. South Africa despite massive acceptance of GM crops, this year (2022) is reported to have 14.4 million people faced with food shortage.

Globally, and elsewhere in the continent, we are witnessing an impressive shift and extensive calls for rapid reorientation of the agricultural and food systems, towards agrobiodiversity.

**We therefore demand and recommend the following;**

- ✓ That, food security starts with food safety, we ask that the EA governments exhaust all other known safe food options before they can think of GMOs. The UN Synthesis Report (IAASTD) clearly stated that GMO is not a solution to chronic hunger or poverty and the EAC governments need to address the structural issues including rural development, water, storage, market linkages and general infrastructure challenges faced by our smallholder farmers.
- ✓ East Africa member states must invest more in the agriculture sector to support smallholder farmers who are the majority, enhance water harvesting and irrigation schemes, rural development and financing to small crop farmers, livestock keepers, forestry and fisher folks.
- ✓ East African Government should put in place robust institutional capacity to carry out risk and food safety assessments before introduction of GMO and any other related questionable technologies.
- ✓ That EA partner states should ensure inclusivity in the composition of National Biosafety Committees to include; representatives of civil society, independent researchers, consumer associations, academia and the private sector.
- ✓ The EA partner states in the national budget should allocate adequate funds to enable proper functioning of the national biosafety committees.



- ✓ The EA governments sets up a monitoring mechanism to aid in redress, should this technology cause harm to both human health and environment (polluter pay principle).
- ✓ We commend the government of the United Republic of Tanzania for cancellation of the research on GM Transgenic Maize MON 87460 x MON 810 variety.
- ✓ We commend the Ugandan president HE president Museveni for embracing the spirit of smallholder farmer in Africa through rejecting a draconian Genetic Engineering and Regulatory Bill. We recommend that the Bill is further reviewed to protect seed and food sovereignty in Uganda.
- ✓ The Kenyan government should uphold the ban on GMO maize and consider a non-GMO food importation arrangement from neighboring countries.
- ✓ As espoused in the Kenyan Constitution 2010, the government should be in the forefront in safeguarding our local food and seeds systems through embracing safe and sustainable food production methods like agro ecology including promotion of Farmer Managed Seed System (FMSS).

-----THANKYOU-----

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