

Reaction by civil society organisations to:

Report by the Task Force Rural Africa - “An Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation”

June 2019

On 21 June 2019 Agricultural Ministers from the African Union and the European Union will meet in Rome to discuss how best to support an inclusive and sustainable agri-food sector in Africa. This is a major opportunity for the Ministers to publicly embrace diversified, ecologically and socially sustainable food systems and pledge political and financial support for existing African initiatives in this field. It could also be the right moment to establish the long-awaited mechanism for improving Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) by identifying and blocking potential negative impacts of EU trade, investment and agriculture policies on small-scale producers in Africa.

The AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference will consider an ‘Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation’ proposed by the [Task Force Rural Africa](#) appointed by the European Commission in 2018 to guide its work on rural development and agriculture in Africa. This Agenda suggests priorities to be funded under the next EU budget and in the framework of the [Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs](#), recently launched by the European Commission. The Conference will also benefit from considerations put forward by the AU/NEPAD regarding coherence with existing African policies and programmes.

We welcome the Task Force report’s focus on family, small-scale and women farmers as prioritised over industrial agriculture models characterised by employment-reducing mechanization, extensive monocultures and over-reliance on agrochemicals. We appreciate the report’s focus on local economic actors, local investors and intra-African trade rather than international trade. We value its recognition of the importance of context-specific, bottom-up and territorial approaches to rural development as opposed to imported and top-down solutions that do not correspond to the needs and aspirations of local communities. The call to make Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) supportive of locally driven climate adaptation and agri-food strategies, and to link them to African farmers’ and small and medium enterprises’ (SME) own investments is also welcome. It is a timely appeal given the current tendency of the EU and its member states to oversell the benefits of European investments in Africa, and draw on public funds to support EU domestic private companies’ search for new markets and investment opportunities in the African agri-food sector.

There is, however, a regrettable mismatch between the report’s narrative prioritising local actors and solutions, and its recommendations emphasising solutions imported from Europe. These recommendations risks allowing excessive room for European actors to shape African policies and sidelining existing democratic institutions and participatory processes.

We are also concerned that, although it recognizes the importance of providing targeted support to women and small-scale farmers, the report lacks a gender-transformative approach. Moreover, it fails to recognise and address power imbalances in decision-making processes and in agricultural value chains. This risks undermining meaningful participation by women and marginalised local actors on issues that directly affect their livelihoods and food security.

The report erroneously assumes that European and African objectives are aligned across the board. On the contrary, among the critical challenges that need to be addressed is that of reconciling the EU’s growing thirst for overseas markets for its agri-food industry with Africa’s aspirations for the structural

development of national agri-food sector. The proposed Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation largely ignores that contradiction.

Ahead of the Ministerial meeting in Rome, we make the following recommendations:

1. *Respect PCD commitments and a rights-based approach to agricultural development*

Ensure that trade and investment agreements are compatible with international commitments on human rights, including women's rights, sustainable development and climate change commitments. Set up an observatory to monitor and signal potential and actual negative impacts of EU agriculture, trade and investment policies on small-scale food producers in Africa.ⁱ In this context, extend existing monitoring frameworks and introduce a complaint mechanism.ⁱⁱ Involving African actors in PCD assessments and keeping human rights commitments at the centre is crucial, and is recommended by the Task Force. **Ensure a proactive and effective use of the revised EU Directive on Unfair Trading Practices (UTP)** and put in place procedures to signal, mediate and correct UTPs resulting from undue power imbalances between various actors in food chains. **Adopt a due diligence law at European level** to make operators importing food in the EU accountable for ensuring their supply chains are free from deforestation, land-grabs and human rights violations and respect measures to which the EU has adhered such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Land, Forestry and Fisheries (VGGT).ⁱⁱⁱ **Review trade and investment treaties and provisions** to make sure they enable the strengthening of the domestic and regional agri-food sector on the African continent, in particular Economic Partnership Agreements.

2. *Move towards ecologically and socially sustainable models that benefit smallholders*

Express robust support for diversified, ecologically and socially sustainable food systems, in particular those based on agroecology. This should involve **allocating sufficient funding** to local, national, regional and global efforts to scale out such practices in the context of territorial food systems, as demanded by tens of millions of small-scale farmers in Africa.^{iv} This effort can build on existing work by African small-scale producers' organizations, the African Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and others, including the African Union Decision on Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA).^v

Ensure that a significant part of EU funds, including under the European Investment Plan, supports public infrastructure and territorial market development to connect smallholders, women farmers and rural youth to markets and enables them to engage in activities whose value added remains in the region.^{vi} These activities can be combined with suggestions regarding Local Action Programmes and networks on territorial development proposed by the Task Force.

3. *Regulate business activities*

Commit to regulate companies investing in agriculture and other land-related investments, to prevent grabbing of land, water, forests and other natural resources to the detriment of the livelihoods and food security of local communities. Ensure that public and private, domestic and foreign investors respect the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all affected local communities. **Adopt and implement solid business and human rights action plans and mandatory due diligence laws** at national and regional level in Europe and in Africa, and engage constructively in the negotiations for a binding UN treaty on business and human rights.

4. Promote inclusion and participation

Ensure that the implementation of the Action Plan of the Agenda for Rural Transformation, as it emerges from the negotiations between the AU and the EU, is undertaken with the full and effective participation of small-scale producers, agricultural workers, women's rights organisations, informal sector workers and food insecure urban populations, as they are directly concerned by the decisions taken. This should be done by situating programme design and implementation in contexts where peoples' organizations are part of the decision-making process. If a high-level group of African and European stakeholders is to be established to oversee policy commitments, as proposed by the Task Force, such a group must be dominated by local actors that the initiative is supposed to benefit, with due attention to prevailing power imbalances.

ⁱ Any forthcoming high-level task force with participation of affected communities and farmers organisations from Europe and Africa could have that mandate, or the mandate of the existing observatories that DG AGRI runs on Dairy Market and on Meat Market could be expanded in scope and participation. See CONCORD (2018), [Recommendations on CAP and PCD: Common Agricultural Policy reform proposal 2020-2027](#).

ⁱⁱ As suggested by the [Opinion 2018/0216\(COD\) of the Committee on Development](#) of the European Parliament for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

ⁱⁱⁱ IPES-Food (2019), [Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union](#); CONCORD (2019, p.8), [A Litmus Test for EU Leaders](#).

^{iv} See for example AFSA & TOAM (2016), [Agroecology - The Bold Future of Farming in Africa](#); outcomes of the [Second International Symposium on Agroecology](#) (FAO, Rome, 3-5 April 2018); and ROPPA (2018), [Document de position du ROPPA sur l'agroécologie paysanne](#).

^v African Union Council Decision on Organic Farming during its 18th Ordinary Session from January 2011 (EX.CL/Dec.621, XVIII).

^{vi} CFS (2016), [Connecting Smallholders to Markets: Policy recommendations](#).

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