



Seminar on seeds in Burkina from 5 to 11 December 2011



Meet and Greet Report

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From 05th to 11th December 2011, a seminar was organized by Terre et Humanisme in Burkina Faso in the Agro-Ecology Centre of the AIDMR (Inter-area Association for Rural Development) at Beta (a village of the Oubritenga Province). The theme was "Seed autonomy and the preservation of traditional varieties", with the following objectives:

1. To strengthen the establishment of a body of facilitators and trainers in Agro Ecology in Burkina Faso;
2. To store and produce local seeds for the preservation of African genetic heritage, building blocks for the food sovereignty of peoples;
3. To back the emergence of a training centre in Agro Ecology in Burkina Faso together with the AIDMR.

Native communities in developing countries with no appropriate measures to combat climate change are the most affected. Thus, rural populations of the Sahel that depend mainly on the agricultural sector, and are particularly vulnerable to its effects, try to adapt their production methods to the variability of the climate.

In addition, the diversity of traditional seeds is closely related to the socio-cultural realities of the producers. Such diversity is now threatened by the introduction of improved varieties, causing new challenges of adaptations.

“Local seeds stock is instrumental to climate change adaptation”. The continuous use of new varieties of seeds by small-holder farmers could result in the abandonment of traditional ones, which are believed to be “more resilient to the effects of climate change”.

45 people from 6 different countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Togo, and France), 8 of whom were women, 22 associative structures and NGOs (Terre & Humanisme (**TH**), Inter-area Association for Rural Development (**AIDMR**), Agro ecological Centre for the Production of Tropical Seeds (**CAPROSET**), Biodiversity, Exchange and Dissemination of Experiences (**BEDE**), Rural Organization for a Sustainable Agriculture (**ORAD**), **HAKILI** Association, Coalition for the Protection of the African genetic heritage (**COPAGEN**), National Union of the Agro-Pastoral workers (**SYNTAP**), **BAOBAB** Association, Association for Extension and Support to the Sahel Agro-ecologist producers (**AVAPS**), Association for the Development of Agro-ecologic Techniques and practices (**ADTAE**), **APEN-SAHEL**, Association for the Environmental Management and the Promotion of Sustainable Development (**AGED**), **APAD**, Technical Alliance for Development Assistance (**ATAD**), Association for the Promotion of Local Initiatives in Burkina Faso (**APIL**), (**EPHYLA**), The Senegalese Association of Peasant Seed Producers (**ASPS**), Benin Agro Ecological Federation (**FAEB**), Agricultural and Craft Development Centre (**CD2A**), Regional Research and Training Centre for Integrated Development (**NGO CREDI**), and **AfricaAdapt**, took part to this seminar.

Participation of AfricaAdapt

AfricaAdapt took an active part in this seminar by making a three-hour presentation followed by discussions. It started by introducing the network to the participants, “who we are”, “what we do”, and how they can benefit from this new niche of knowledge sharing on adaptation, and of financing climate change resilience projects.

At the end of the presentation there was a series of questions:

1. Themes related to the innovation fund and selection criteria
2. Do we raise awareness on climate change?
3. What is AA’s stance on the hybrid seeds, GMOs, improved seeds?
4. What are the conditions of membership?
5. What are the tools used to reach out to the grassroots? If an association is willing to disseminate our information to the hard-to-reach, would we support it (logistical and/or financial support)?
6. Do we give additional support outside the innovation fund?
7. What are the themes discussed on the AA platform, and apart from agriculture, do we support other sectors such as forestry, etc?

Pursuant to this series of questions was a discussion on: **why should we save our local seeds, and what importance do they have for us, in this context of food security and climate change?**

Participants made several contributions, the most relevant being:

- ✓ Preventing the disappearance of local varieties
- ✓ Seeds have a cultural, social, economic, and also health dimension
- ✓ They also have a biodiversity dimension, hence the importance of preserving them.
- ✓ Industrial agriculture does not take into account the populations; they are rather profit-focused.
- ✓ Today producers are increasingly dependent on such new-found seeds. Our great parents and parents have always produced their own seeds; there is no reason to change this time-honoured practice.
- ✓ In Europe, farmers lost all their local seeds decades ago, and they are now striving to recollect them from those who had the good idea to save some, in Europe, or even in Africa. This is a proof that they are not satisfied with the new seed varieties
- ✓ The NERICA variety is a failure in Africa unlike what politicians say, in sum, the so called "improved" seeds are not so good, given that since their inception, the farmers have not made any progress, if not a worse level than before.
- ✓ Local seeds do not need much care, while with improved seeds, producers contract loans every year to cope with the need for fertilizers, etc. And after harvesting, they remain indebted, since their crops are not sufficient to meet family food needs, and refund their debts.

- ✓ Local seeds are our identity, our integrity. "When you are given a bike, do not sell your donkey"; using GM seed (locally called "seed of suicide agriculture"), or improved seeds (called locally "lying on somebody's mattress"), it is like "suckling the grandmother while the mother is not dead".

“Our local seeds are the best! And before speaking of food sovereignty, we must speak above all of seed sovereignty”.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following this seminar, the different exchanges with the participants, and in connection with the initial objective of the Meet and Greet of reaching “hard to reach” groups, the following recommendations are worth being made.

1. More Meet and Greet and training

On-the ground observation revealed that 500,000 cfa franc is a significant amount of money for most of these CBOs. The Meet and Greet is undoubtedly an excellent way to bring our members together, or to welcoming new members onboard; but we can diversify our methods, by funding CBOs to organize such events, up to 500 000f for example, on adaptation to climate change, which will give us the possibility of supporting many more people, and allow the AA network to grow with more CBO membership. This Meet and Greet could also serve as a framework of training for some associations in need, in climate change adaptation techniques, etc.

So for some of the incoming Meet and Greet events, we could launch a call, and delegate selected CBOs to organize them, in line with the AfricaAdapt criteria.

2. The network's stance on hybrid-GM varieties

During and even after the presentation, several concerns emerged among the participants regarding the stance of the network with respect to improved seeds, hybrids and GMOs, given that—according to them—FARA has endorsed these new varieties. This is then an opportunity to inquire about the stance of AfricaAdapt on this subject?

Moreover, the Secretary General of the SYNTAP (National Union of the Agro-Pastoral workers) called on AfricaAdapt to help lobby in Burkina Faso (a Pro – GMO country) against GMOs, especially concerning the bio-fortified sorghum (read his interview on: <http://www.combat-monsanto.org/spip.php?article886>). "Sorghum, he said, is the staple food of almost 300 million people in Africa." "A patented GM sorghum would seriously threaten African food security and sovereignty." End of December they were supposed to set up the Organizing Committee. They expect the support of the network (financial and also if possible attendance) “to say no to this dispossession of our food sovereignty by multinational corporations."

3. Capitalising on the seminar

Another suggestion is to capitalize on the experiences of this seminar; it is worth launching a second theme of discussion on the forum, which will focus on local seeds and their importance to biodiversity and adaptation to climate change. This will help reinforce the messages that will be conveyed by the Policy Brief and which undoubtedly sparkle the interest of many members due to the controversy triggered by the issue. Mid-January could be an appropriate period to launch this discussion.

4. More AfricaAdapt gadgets

Finally, we could diversify our gadgets, while altering our high environmental awareness. Thus we could make pens, calendars, key rings, diaries, hats, tee-shirts pen drives, etc., that we could send to our members (at least active and/or influential ones via mail), or distribute in our different face-to-face meetings. The materials could include captions of IF winners, or any other AfricaAdapt "success stories". These gadgets are very effective communication tools.