

ABN

The African Biodiversity Network is a regional network of individuals and organisations seeking African solutions to the ecological and socio-economic challenges that face the continent.

NEWS

OCTOBER 2015

Say No to GMOs

Why the lifting of the GMO ban in Kenya spells doom to millions of small-scale farmers



ALSO

STRATEGY

Challenges and opportunities for ABN

WHY THE LIFTING OF THE GMO BAN IN KENYA SPELLS DOOM TO MILLIONS OF SMALL-SCALE FARMERS

YOUTH, BIODIVERSITY AND CULTURE

Learning from the root



“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

-Nelson Mandela

ABN NEWS CONTENTS

CULTURE EDITION
OCTOBER 2015

PAGE 4

Snippets:

Youth as drivers of culture and biodiversity

Killing the golden goose

The bane of GMOS

Vantage point

PAGE 6

What is our context telling us?

PAGE 8

Why the lifting of the GMO ban in Kenya spells doom to millions of small-scale farmers

PAGE 12

Usiko Stellenbosch: Graduates take on the first ever Namibia Cultural Exchange

PAGE 14

Killing the goose that is laying the golden egg



PAGE 6

Page 17

Youth, Culture and Biodiversity



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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The African Biodiversity Network offers an African approach to sustainability and community resilience rooted in indigenous practices through our core thematic areas which are Community Seed and Knowledge (CSK), Community Ecological Governance (CEG), Youth Culture and Biodiversity, and crowning them all, strengthening Networking, Communication and Regional Advocacy. ABN strives to ignite and nurture a growing network of change agents working passionately at all levels through our partners in different African countries.

We believe in restoring people's sense of connectedness to nature for people in Africa to find ways to be resilient and to sustain their land and other "natural resources". For instance, the CSK approach was developed to respond to climate change through addressing biodiversity and livelihoods of communities by recognising the contribution of both men and women in the conservation of biodiversity. The approach recognises the injustices done on African communities since the introduction of new and hybridised seeds, which has now taken a neo-colonial dimension with the forceful introduction of genetically modified organisms and passage of laws that make handling of farmer varieties illegal.

In an regional advocacy meeting held in Accra, Ghana on 8th and 9th August 2015 and attended by ABN partners and national coalitions, we informed African governments, through a press conference, that we remain committed to ensuring that farmers, as breeders and users, remain at the centre of localised seed production systems and continue to exercise their rights freely to save, use, exchange, replant, improve, distribute and sell all the seed in their seed systems.

In this edition, you will enjoy reading captivating stories from our partners and coalitions.

Enjoy!



Karen Nekesa Samukoya
Communications and Advocacy Officer, ABN

SNIPPETS

YOUTH AS DRIVERS OF CULTURE AND BIODIVERSITY



Culture is a living embodiment of a people's collective will, testament and responsibility. It incorporates inter-generational experiential learning; whereby the youth learn from the elders who are custodians of indigenous knowledge and then express it through practice. As such, youth cultural exchanges offer an excellent opportunity for youth alienated from their culture by modernity a chance to bond with the same culture.

KILLING THE GOLDEN GOOSE

In many indigenous and local communities in Africa, small-scale farmers inform the agricultural backbone of a country's gross productivity. In Uganda, the government often acts at the behest of multinational corporations in oppressing the hardworking small-scale farmer, which should not be the case. Thus we are called upon, more so the civil society, to rally behind the small-scale farmer in her pursuit for justice as regards her inalienable right to food sovereignty.

THE BANE OF GMOS

Myths, disguised as facts, continue to be peddled about GM technology as a 'saviour technology'- higher yields, disease-tolerant crops, and so on. However, evidence to the contrary has seen many countries around the world impose a partial or total ban on this technology. Therefore, it is rather worrying that the Kenyan government has lifted the ban on GMOs that had previously been imposed by the previous regime; effectively killing indigenous seeds that have been saved, nurtured, managed and inherited over many years.

VANTAGE POINT

African countries are still under the yoke of colonialism. This neo-colonialism takes the form of multinational companies that power the extractive industry; running a brand of skewed development that emphasises obscene profits at the expense of local communities' livelihoods. All is not lost, however, as the civil society is fighting back to reverse this trend. Among them is the African Biodiversity Network which is strategically placed to champion community resilience and biodiversity, among others.

Funded by:



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Teff (*Eragrostis tef*) is a fine grain- about the size of a poppy seed - native to Ethiopia. The super grain comes in various colours ranging from red, white and dark brown and is packed with calcium, iron, and protein. The grain is ground into flour and is used to make injera- a traditional type of bread which is fermented and has a slightly sour taste to it and which serves as Ethiopia's staple food.

BENIN AT A GLANCE

Official Name: Republique du Bénin

Nationality: Beninese

Population: 9.9 million (2013)

Languages: French (official); others include Fon, Yoruba, Nagot, Bariba and Dendi

Capital City: Porto-Novo

Largest city and seat of government: Cotonou

Other Cities: Abomey, Gavié, Kandi, Ouidah

Area: 112,622 km² (43,483 sq. mi.)

Agricultural products: Cotton, corn, cassava (tapioca), yams, beans, palm oil, peanuts, livestock

World Heritage Site (Cultural): Royal Palaces of Abomey



Why food sovereignty

"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations."

– Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007

From MDGs to SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the Global Goals, build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, aimed at an array of issues that included slashing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Enormous progress has been made on the MDGs, showing the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Despite this success, the indignity of poverty has not been ended for all. The new SDGs, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people.

Source: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html>

FEEDBACK

Do you have any questions you'd like to ask or comments you'd like to make? We would love to hear from you. Email us at abnsecretariat@africanbiodiversity.org or write to us at African Biodiversity Network P.O. Box 6271-01000 Thika, Kenya. You can also interact with us on our Facebook page [africanbiodiversity](https://www.facebook.com/africanbiodiversity) or follow us on twitter [@africanbiodiv](https://twitter.com/africanbiodiv)



What is our context telling us?

Challenges and opportunities for ABN

In a globalised world where a Western-oriented approach to the use of natural resources is fast gaining traction, Africa needs to be very strategic in how it engages its peoples, more so, the youth, to resist this. This was the underlying theme during the last ABN Biennial Partners' Meeting as encapsulated by **John Wilson**.

// It's time to popularise the approach of Earth Law much more."

"We need to keep working on developing processes that deepen our connection with Nature."

"It is essential that we work closely with other networks in our advocacy."

"Where there is any resistance to land grabs and the extractive industries, we must highlight these."

"It keeps coming up that we need to focus on working with the youth more."

"We need to think about how to influence curricula at all educational levels."

These are some of the points that participants came up with at the ABN Biennial Partners' Meeting, after a couple of fairly intense hours of thinking about trends in the context that is relevant to the work of ABN.

In many ways the context ABN partners are working in remains similar to when the last strategic planning was done in 2012. Globalisation continues to push and spread a very Western-oriented approach to land and use of natural resources. This is an approach that commodifies everything and is relentless in its pursuit of economic growth.

Africa is now feeling the full force of the extractive industries, as world attention shifts to this continent that until now, has been relatively untouched in this regard. As technology becomes more sophisticated it brings within reach previously unreachable minerals.

Oil is being found everywhere it seems, with the oil companies suspiciously undaunted by climate change discussions. These discussions seem to be going nowhere, while the impact of climate change is being increasingly felt across the continent.

Resistance to the onslaught of the extractive industries is still minimal in Africa, especially compared to what is happening elsewhere in the world. Many African governments have tied their 'new growth' strategies to these extractive industries. This, in turn, is leading to a fast increase in demand for energy across the continent.

The multinational corporations' drive to move fully into Africa continues in the field of agriculture too. 'Investment' in large plantations, also referred to as land grabbing, seems to be continuing apace.

Furthermore, the MNCs are very much behind the push for green revolution farming for small-scale farmers in Africa,

willingly offering funds to Obama's G8 food and nutrition initiative, which in turn is twisting African governments' arms in various ways. One example of this is the push for laws and protocols related to seed via the regional economic blocks such as ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA.

These laws and protocols put plant breeders' rights at the forefront and largely ignore community-based seed systems.

Along with all this and very relevant to the work of ABN is the ongoing disconnection of young people from their roots and culture as they adopt a Western mind-set.

However, the paradox remains that as things get worse, so do opportunities for ABN increase.

- As ecosystems continue to degrade, people look around for alternative ways, and along with this has come a growing recognition of the role that indigenous knowledge, systems and practices can play. This is particularly true in Africa where cultures were always closely tied to Nature and the land. ABN's approach and methods bring the depth of connection that can lead to the strong sense of caring for the land that is needed if people are going to galvanise towards concerted action. Without this depth of concern, there is little action in practice.
- As the push for plant breeders' rights intensifies, so does the recognition of community-based seed systems. This is especially so in regards to malnutrition, which in many places is worsening. Community-based seed systems emphasise diversity, which in turn strengthens nutrition.
- It appears as if young people are seeking for more connection to their roots and culture to give them a sense of identity. And it is extraordinary what some of the ABN practices, still done on a very small scale, can achieve in giving young people, who are apparently lost in their lives, that sense of identity and purpose in life.
- Everything about the ABN approach deals with climate change, both mitigation and adaptation.

There is no doubt that the context continues to call out for what ABN is offering. The challenge for the Network, as a small and pioneering set-up, is to be very strategic in its response to this ■

Say No to GMOs

Why the lifting of the GMO ban in Kenya spells doom to millions of small-scale farmers

Many governments, cognisant of the adverse effects of GMOs on human, animal and crop health, the environment, and biodiversity, are closing down on GMO technology. **Zachary Makanya** puts forth a strong case on why the government of Kenya should borrow a leaf from these governments.

Many of us have been cautioning Kenyans not to embrace GMOs for a long time and we thought our reasons were clear to all. We were very happy that the Government of His Excellency Hon Mwai Kibaki listened and respected the wishes of Kenyans. The reasons we have against GMOs have not changed and with time, many governments have become wiser and are banning GMO technology instead of embracing it; the most recent, the government of Scotland, banned GMOs as late as August 2015. It is, therefore, disheartening to see the present government of Kenya opening doors while others are fast closing and sealing all the gaps that lead to the introduction of GMOs.

First, it should be noted that many people are not against biotechnology in totality. Biotechnology has been with us for a long time: beer-making, bread-making, yoghurt production, grafting, hybridisation and more recently, tissue culture. Many farmers are not against any of all these forms of biotechnologies and indeed, many are eager that they should be continued and improved. However, there is another branch of biotechnology called Genetic Engineering or Genetic Modification which is really dangerous for all farmers.

Why should Kenyans and all people refuse GMO in agriculture? Why will the lifting of the GMO ban spell doom to Kenyans farmers?

It is a known fact that pollen grains can be spread a long distance through open pollination (wind/insects). GMO crops can, therefore, never co-exist with non-GMO crops of the same species without the risk of contaminating them. This contamination of non-GM crops by GM crops has 2 direct effects on African small-scale farmers:

- ① The local farmers will lose their indigenous seeds through this contamination. This is a great loss since the African farmers have endeavoured to save the seeds they “trust and know” over centuries.
- ② The African farmers who may be found with GM crops growing on their farms may be prosecuted for violating the law of patents.

In the US, there are many cases in court of local farmers being accused of having GM crops through no fault of their own and especially if the crops entered into their farms via open pollination. Due to the patents law, these farmers are being fined heavily. Is this the direction our government is taking its farmers?

GM crops do not necessarily have higher yields. South Africa is touted as a country where the GM industry is doing well. However, the famous Makhatini Bt. Cotton in KwaZulu Natal province is a case in point. This project had an initial 3,000 farmers who were heavily supported through credits and

subsidies. With time and due to the high costs of the Bt Cotton seeds and the inability of the farmers to pay the loans, the support was withdrawn and many farmers halted planting the cotton crop. Currently, only 300 farmers are planting the crop.

It is also on record that recently, Burkina Faso, one of the few countries in Africa to embrace GM cotton, is reducing GM cotton production as farmers continually seek compensation for low yields and bad quality cotton. Over the last few years, over 20,000 farmers in India have committed suicide because of indebtedness and dependence on GE seeds. Such people commit suicide because they are hopeless and helpless. Surely, is this the road we want the Kenyan farmers to take?

All GM seeds are patented by the large multinational companies. It is estimated that currently, over 97% of the agricultural patents are owned by corporate companies in the West. GM seed is also protected by Plant Breeders’ Rights (PBRs). Patents and PBRs always require the users to pay royalties for the use of GM and transgenic crops. Thus, the GM seeds are very expensive and farmers pay heavily every time they want to use them. In fact, the companies that sell GM seeds make farmers sign technological contracts which prohibit them (farmers) from saving their seeds, selling their seeds or even sharing their seeds. The reason is obvious – the farmers will keep on buying seeds from the companies producing these seeds.

It is important to note that over 80% of the small-scale farmers in Africa today save their on-farm produced seeds for the next season. The farmers do this because they cannot



afford the hybrids seeds from seed companies for every planting season. The small-scale farmers will not afford the GM seeds just as they cannot afford the hybrid seeds.

Kenyan farmers should ask themselves why is it that even when there is a lot of maize in the Rift Valley or in the Cereals Board, their neighbouring pastoralists in the North Rift or in North Eastern cannot afford the cheap maize available from their next-door neighbours and have to get relief food most of the time. Do they get relief food because there is no food in the Rift Valley and in other parts of Kenya? This clearly shows that the availability of food in a country does not directly result into food security.

Another pertinent example is Brazil, the third largest producer and exporter of food and one of the leading producers of GM food in the world. Yet, over 30% of the Brazilians go hungry and cannot afford food – even when it is produced and exported by their own country. Other people in other countries, who have money, can afford the food produced by the Brazilians. Argentina produces rice that is enough to feed both India and China. Yet, over 25% of Argentines live below the poverty line and cannot even afford the very rice that Argentina produces and exports.

But why is it that Kenyans, Brazilians and Argentines cannot buy the food produced in their own countries? It is all because they have communities that live in abject poverty! They have no money to buy the food and they just watch it being exported to other countries; countries that do not produce the food but whose people have higher purchasing power and hence can afford it. In order to fight food insecurity, we have to fight poverty at its roots.

The GM proponents argue that the GE crops will reduce the use of chemicals. However, close scrutiny of the real situation of GE crops being promoted reveal some interesting trends. Presently it is estimated that over 80% of all the GE crops in the world are herbicide tolerant. This means that most of the GE crops which are being promoted are only tolerant to certain herbicides or weed killers. Those who are growing these GM crops are forced to buy herbicides or the weed killers from the manufacturing companies. The

most common one is called glyphosate commonly known as “Round Up”. The cancer research arm of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently classified glyphosate as a “probable human carcinogenic”; in other words, it probably causes cancer. The adoption of glyphosate, tolerant crops dramatically increases the use of this dangerous chemical, hence posing a risk to farmers, farm labourers, soil, water courses, food chains and food webs.

After 20 years of experimenting with these crops, the problems associated with GM crops are emerging. For example, the first Bt maize made available in South Africa has been withdrawn as the maize stalk borer has adapted to the poison the crop makes. The company that introduced it had to compensate farmers for extensive crop damage when the technology failed. It is disheartening to note that this same crop, which failed several seasons ago in South Africa, is the one set to undergo field trials in Kenya.

So, what is the way forward?

- ⦿ The government of Kenya should make sure that the ban is still on.
- ⦿ The government should organise a meeting of all stakeholders so that we explain our case with facts and figures on why GMOs should be banned in Kenya, in Africa and in the whole world. There is a need to expose the open lies being perpetuated and, because they are repeated day in day out, sound like the truth.

Who will protect the seeds of the small-scale farmers? Who will guard the interests of the small-scale farmers? The government of His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta and His Excellency the Deputy President William Ruto has been dubbed as a people’s government and one that listens to its people. It should live to that expectation by enforcing the ban rather than lifting it. Unless the ban is enforced, Kenyans farmers must kiss goodbye the seeds they have saved, nurtured, managed and inherited over many years. It will be the greatest betrayal of the century for the future generations who will never see these seeds.

The author is the Chairperson, Kenya Biodiversity Coalition(KBioC); a coalition of over 60 CSOs working with millions of small-scale farmers in Kenya ■



Usiko Stellenbosch

Graduates take on the first ever Namibia Cultural Exchange

For culture to thrive, the youth must be fully included as they are tomorrow's custodians. **Arnold Okkers** reports on one such cultural exchange visit to the Namibia Wilderness Therapy (NWT) in Windhoek where the youth got to experience culture first-hand.



Usiko Stellenbosch graduates in Namibia during the cultural exchange visit.



Dunes in Swakopmund.



Hero's Acre in Windhoek.

This year, 7 learners from Cloetesville Senior Secondary School and Stellenzicht Senior Secondary School, accompanied by 6 staff from Usiko Stellenbosch, embarked on a cultural exchange visit to the Namibia Wilderness Therapy (NWT) in Windhoek.

During the visit, the youth- selected after completing research papers about Namibia and Stellenbosch- attended lessons with their counterparts in Namibia, went to museums and had very meaningful interactions on culture where they learnt about dress codes, cultural norms and values. In their research papers they had had to make submissions on various aspects of culture; the crowning moment being reliving the same culture first-hand. In this regard, this group was the pioneer group, so to speak. Usiko Stellenbosch's hope is that the same experience can be granted to the next upcoming group of graduates.

Phiweka Mantashe, one of the participants, said: "Thanks again for the trip to Namibia. I learnt a lot, experienced lots of new things and for that I'll forever be thankful."

One of the dreams of the not-too-distant future is to host a group of Namibian youth in Stellenbosch to give them a South African experience ■

Killing the goose that is laying the golden egg

The case of the Ugandan government and the small-scale farmers

Uganda's agriculture, which accounts for 46% of total exports from the country and employs 70% of the total workforce, is dominated by small-scale farmers. In light of this, it is only natural for the government to be supportive of this sector, more so, the small-scale farmers. However, as **Jane Nalunga** expounds, this is far from the truth.



It is an undisputed fact that in Uganda, as in many countries in Africa, the agriculture sector has been and still remains the mainstay of the economy with over 70 per cent of the working population engaged in agricultural activity. The sector contributes about 22.5 per cent of total GDP; although this figure has been fluctuating depending on the fortunes and misfortunes of the sector. Uganda's major exports are primary agricultural products which have been accounting for about 46 per cent of total exports. The sector also provides raw materials for most of the agro industries. Needless to say, it also provides the food that is eaten not only by Ugandans but in neighbouring countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and South Sudan. In fact Uganda is regarded as a food basket in the Eastern African region, given the potential of the small-scale farmers to produce a variety of nutritious food and in large quantities throughout the year.

Uganda's agriculture is subsistence in nature, rain-fed and dominated by small-scale farmers who mainly use rudimentary implements like hoes. The women provide almost 80% of the labour as they are the ones who till the land, plant, weed and harvest; with the men taking over when it comes to marketing. Therefore, if agriculture is the

backbone of Uganda's economy, and the main source of livelihood especially for the rural areas, then the women small-scale farmers are carrying this country on their backs. One would expect a lot of government support to this sector given its immense contribution to Uganda's economy and development. On the contrary many government policies and practices have not been very supportive. The policy framework has been very hostile to the agriculture sector in general and to the small-scale farmers (SSFs) in particular, thus making their very existence untenable. *(In fact the policies and practices are out to uproot the SSFs as indicated in the drawing below).*

The sector has, over time, experienced limited budgetary allocations i.e. less than 4% of the total budget. In the financial year 2013/2014 it was a mere 3.13% despite the Maputo Declaration where African leaders committed to allocate at least 10% of the national budget to the agriculture sector. In the 1980s, the government introduced and started implementing a number of agriculture related policy reforms within the framework of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). These have included liberalisation of agricultural input trade, liquidation of cooperatives, domestic and export produce marketing and processing, and drastic reduction of

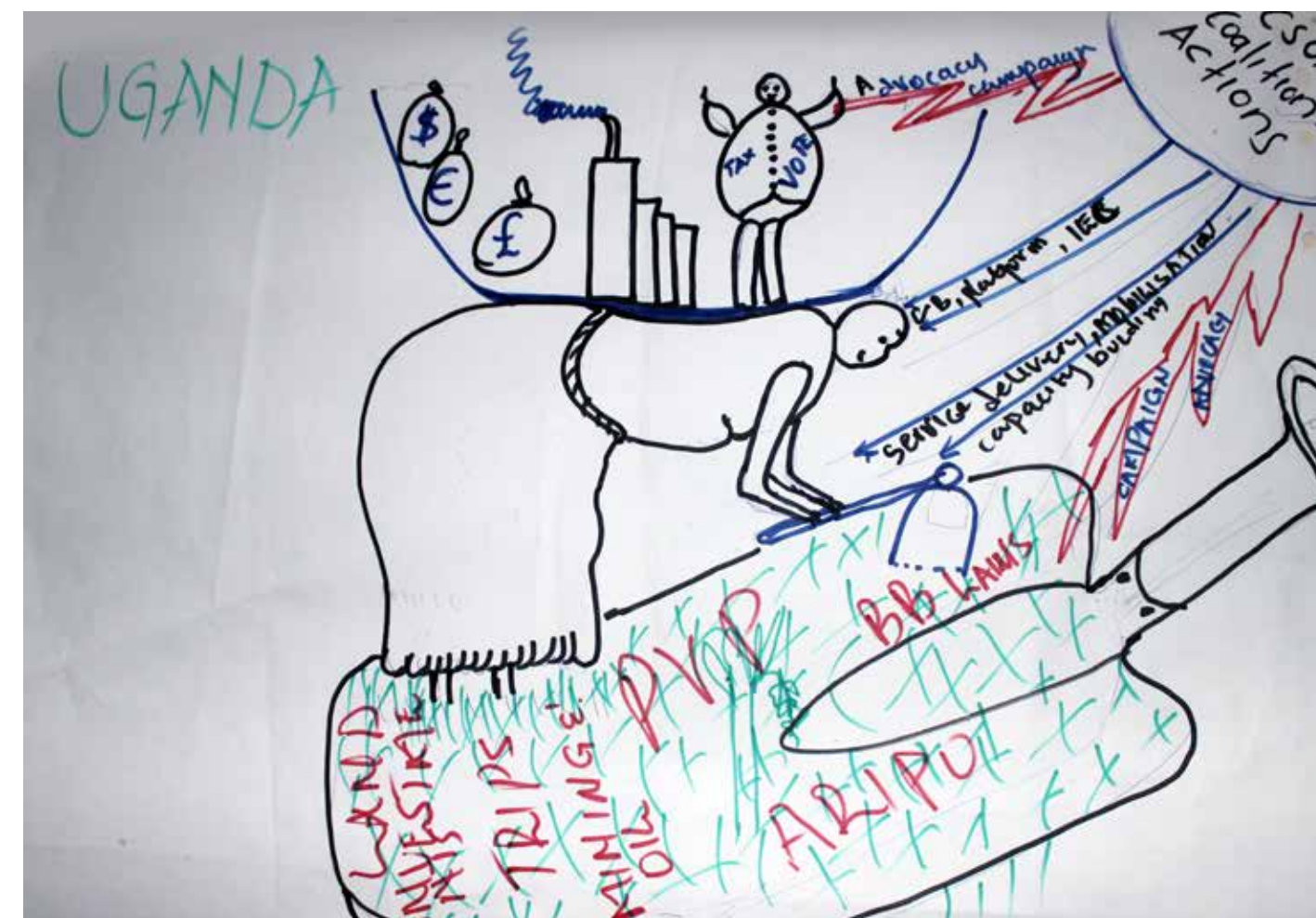


Image credits:

Geoffrey Kamese – National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)

Jane Nalunga – Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI- Uganda)

Bridget Mugambe - Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

extension services. Government also liberalised internal and external trade intended to allow the market, rather than the government, to direct resource allocation and determine prices of inputs and outputs. For example, the issue of minimum prices was abolished and left to the vagaries of the market.

The most recent and pernicious policy and policy proposals have been those related to seed. In agriculture, seed is an indispensable asset and for generations, farmers have depended on the different kinds of seed which they save and share to successfully produce food and feed the world. Seed goes beyond just food to culture and to the very foundation of agriculture. He who controls seed controls the people. In spite of the recognition of the centrality of seed to the agricultural sector and the importance of ensuring the control of seeds by the small-scale farmers, a policy disconnect continues to manifest with the growing forces which seek to obtain monopoly rights and control over seed among other valuable community biological resources, knowledge and markets. These forces, which are fronted mainly by multinational seed companies like Monsanto, have moved to influence different policy frameworks at national, regional and global levels.

Uganda's agriculture is subsistence in nature, rain-fed and dominated by small-scale farmers who mainly use rudimentary implements like hoes. The women provide almost 80% of the labour as they are the ones who till the land, plant, weed and harvest.

The various seed and agriculture related legislations, some of which have either already been adopted into law or are being debated; disregard the inalienable rights of small-holder farmers. Such policy frameworks include, among others, the Plant Variety Protection Act 2014 which fully grants exclusive rights to private breeders over their seed varieties and ignores farmers' and communities' rights to seed; and the Uganda National Bio-safety and Biotechnology Bill 2012 which seeks to, among other things, promote the development and usage of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Beyond Uganda, other policies include the recently adopted African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO) Arusha Protocol for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. This Protocol also ignores the role of small-scale farmers' varieties in plant breeding. Furthermore, at the sub-regional level, and more specifically, within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) to which Uganda is a member, a draft harmonised seed trade law that aims at harmonising seed trade systems in the region is underway. The proposed law intends to criminalise the trade in indigenous and conventionally improved varieties that are commonly used by the small-scale farmers.

Problems faced by small-scale farmers in Uganda

- Dependence on rain fed agriculture
- Lack of access to markets
- Climate change and its effects
- Poor infrastructure, e.g. roads, which make transportation of produce to local markets expensive for the farmers
- Lack of post-harvest handling techniques
- Land grabbing
- Rural-urban migration leading to loss of potential youth labour
- Infiltration of genetically modified seeds threatening the existence of indigenous seeds
- Poor rain water harvesting techniques and technologies

The Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Uganda and beyond have rallied with the small-scale farmers to fight this onslaught on farmers' rights to seed. In Uganda CSOs under the Food Rights Alliance (FRA) continue to mobilise farmers and other stakeholders, build platforms for stakeholders' and policy makers' dialogue, capacity building on critical issues and advocacy against the oppressive seed and agriculture related policies. CSOs are using various advocacy tools including Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials (petitions, position papers, litigation and statements) and the mass media to influence policy makers and to bring as many people on board as possible. These efforts have borne many successes including the increased awareness about the importance of farmers' rights to seed to Uganda's agricultural sector. The controversial Uganda National Bio-safety and Biotechnology Bill 2012 has not been passed though it has been in Parliament since 2009. The struggle for farmers' rights to seed is a struggle for our very existence as Ugandans, as Africans; and this struggle should continue.

Our seed, our food, our future.

Aluta Continua! ■

Jane Nalunga – Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI- Uganda)

Youth, Culture and Biodiversity

Learning from the root

Oral in nature, traditional culture was transmitted via observation and practice day-in day-out. This is encompassed in the 'Learning from the root' experiential programme where youth are integrated into a host family to experience culture by living it.

The Youth, Culture and Biodiversity (YCB) thematic area of ABN aims to deepen peoples' sense of belonging, with one another and with the earth, in order to restore confidence eroded over years of marginalisation of indigenous ecological knowledge and practices. Strategies used to achieve this include bridging the gap in knowledge between elders and the youth on indigenous ecological knowledge, and lobbying for inclusion of this knowledge in school curricula. In the past three years, the work has grown in its effectiveness and complexity and has been refined enough to be used in a wider context. Children and youth are now taken to experience nature and culture and connect with themselves and engage through a range of proactive endeavours in both their schools and communities.

In Ethiopia and South Africa, respective government offices are consulting ABN partners to advise on how to integrate traditional ecological knowledge in to the school system. Celebrations are happening in partner countries involving local communities and decision makers and building both



Youth participate in communal farming at the Konso Gamole Primary School

the confidence and the identity of the community, which are some of the basis for resilience building. Youth are actively involved in healing ecosystems and in campaigning when degradation happens due to various forces. In Ethiopia, youth who come out of this process are demonstrating credible leadership in critical positions in various government institutions and universities as their confidence is built and their relationship with the earth strengthened.



One such event happened recently ((October 2015, spearheaded by the Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD)) whereby participants drawn from across ABN's members and partners visited Konso Gamole village in southern Ethiopia on an experiential learning four-day cultural exchange visit. The exchange visit involved participants integrating into an assigned host-family for deeper learning through observation, dialogue and active participation in daily family and/or communal chores.

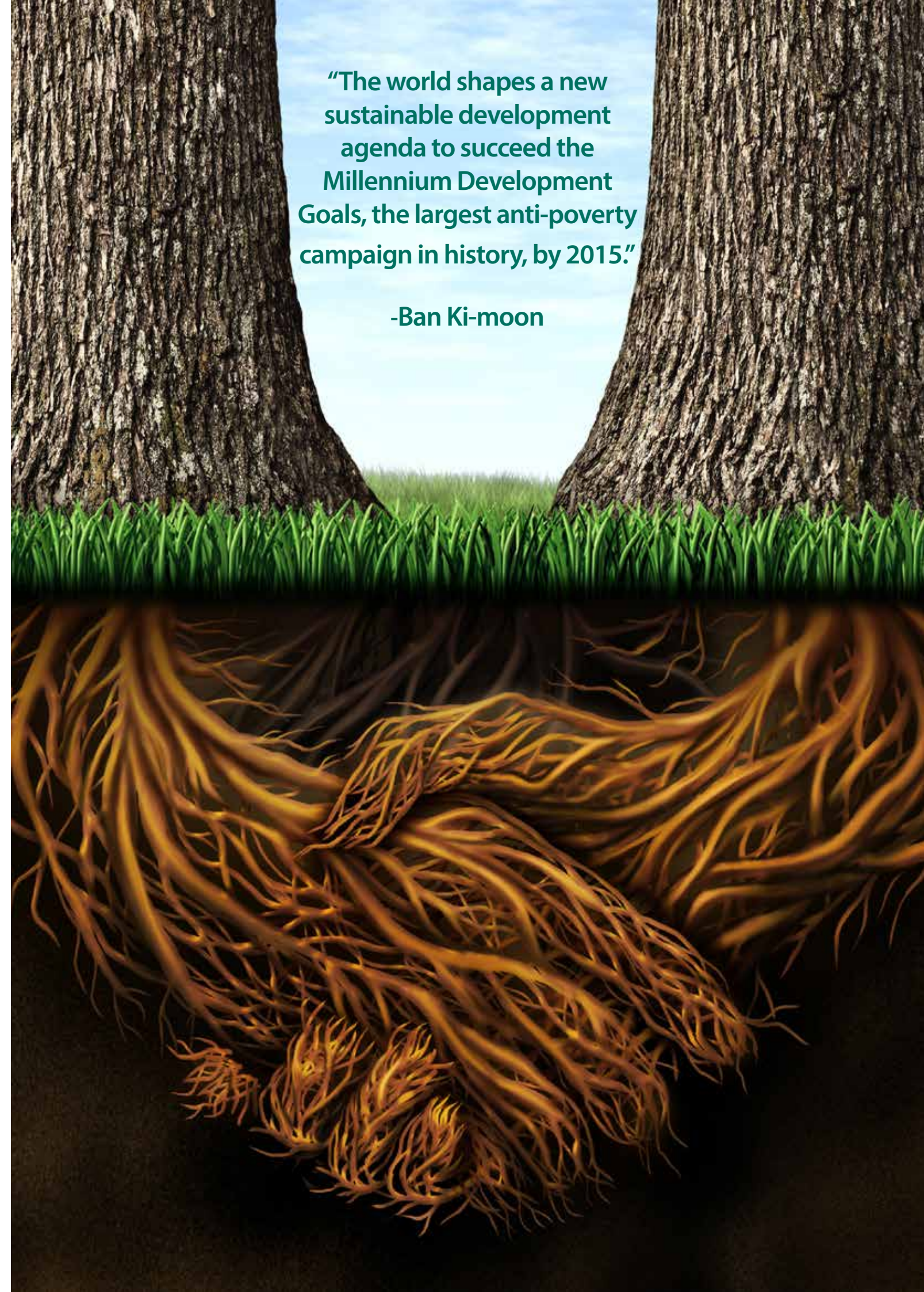
The choice of Konso Gamole village was deliberate as the village is unique in that it has managed to preserve its cultural identity over the years and has been awarded recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Among its exceptional identity include its stone walls, generation trees and agro-ecological practices such as building terraces to control soil erosion, thus preserving soil fertility, and nurturing indigenous seeds. Participants reported instances of convergence and divergence in terms of cultural practices, agro-ecology practices and food. They also got an opportunity to tour places of interest around the region such as 'New York' as well as meeting with the local clan chief and local administration. One of the things that stood out was the pivotal role the youth play in managing the affairs of the Konso community and the surrounding community at large; with the clan chief being a youth and the inclusion of the youth as part of the larger local government administration ■

Lessons Learnt from Konso Gamole Cultural Exchange Visit

- ⦿ Keeping local variety seeds: Indigenous seeds are well preserved using local knowledge.
- ⦿ Agro-forestry practices: Terraces are quite effective at controlling soil erosion. The rocks used for the terraces are from the reclaimed rocky farmlands.
- ⦿ Communal labour: Farms prepared in minutes, hence effective use of time and labour.
- ⦿ Role of elders: Elders are mediators in conflict as well as custodians of indigenous knowledge.
- ⦿ Intergenerational knowledge transfer: Quite effective though modern education poses a threat to the process.

"The world shapes a new sustainable development agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals, the largest anti-poverty campaign in history, by 2015."

-Ban Ki-moon





Visit our website
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