

~~freedom and freedom comes from an equal partnership in the building of society. Democracy and freedom are buzzwords in the west, but civil society has to go beyond rhetoric.~~

~~In summing up the Secretary General called upon civil society participants to keep making their voices heard in the lead-up to the September summit, as well as to holding governments accountable to implement the Summit outcomes "You are essential partners", he said to the civil society participants, NGO representatives and the private sector members. "Together we can make poverty history".~~

Searching for Alternatives: A Parallel Summit to the G8

The People's Forum in Mali organized its fourth meeting at Fana, from 6-9 July, under the theme: "All together, let's build a world of justice and solidarity", focusing attention on the world's poorest countries and their proposed solutions for their social and economic conditions. The meeting was part of the African Social Forum and the World Social Forum, and constituted a parallel summit to the G8 meeting in Gleneagles.

Representatives of producer associations from Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Congo-DRC, discussed how the livelihoods of rural communities are being affected by global factors including input prices for seeds, global labour costs, and international market criteria, such as phyto-sanitarian requirements. Most prevalent was the concern for declining prices for their key exports, considered to be the result of subsidies granted to western and northern farmers. At the same time, adjustment policies have reduced the support received from national governments, leading to the privatization of various sectors.

The privatization of the cotton sector was used as a case to illustrate that under public management, the sector also received support to reduce illiteracy and to intensify subsistence agriculture. This is neither provided nor sustainable under privatization. Participants endorsed petitions to:

- stop the privatization process of the public cotton company of Mali;
- address the environmental impact of mining activities on local livelihoods;
- work toward global fair trade;
- stop GMO experimentation; and,

- seek debt cancellation for poor countries.

Difficulties in accessing land and insecure land tenure rights were considered to be attributable to such factors as the effects of mining, growing desertification and commercial agriculture's claims to land that could otherwise be available for peasants. The situation in the Niger River valley was highlighted due to the problems arising from the high levels of cattle rearing in an area dedicated to seasonal production. The policies to further agro-business through pro-liberal legislation was seen to defeat the pro-poor benefits of family-scale agriculture. This commercial oriented approach to agriculture is resulting in the displacement of many hundreds of households by powerful vested interests who are also the beneficiaries of the irrigation being provided.



The participants were clear in their understanding of the need for change. Experiences confirmed that an open market, conditioned by fairness, can create opportunities of benefit to poor rural households. The representative of the Burkina Faso cotton producers explained how his organization secured shares in the privatized cotton companies, making them full partners in the enterprise. LandNet also reported on the need for policy engagement with governments and international organizations in order to influence trends in land use and management.

Peasants and rural producers' unions are gaining recognition in West Africa. Their negotiating skills and capacity were proven during the WTO negotiation cycle in Cancun, when the impact on policy issues from the Peoples' Forum in Fana was evident.

For more information contact Koffi Alinon, Coordinator of LandNet-Togo kof30al@yahoo.com

LandNet West Africa is a network of Francophone and Anglophone West African land policy experts and practitioners, from research, governmental institutions and CSOs. Copies of the report are available from: jubilecad-mali@cefib.com