

BULLETIN OF THE DRYLANDS: PEOPLE, POLICIES, PROGRAMMES

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Getting
the drylands
moving

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contributor to poverty as is the very limited availability of farm inputs, appropriate technology and easy access to markets.

Over the next 20 years, the developing world's urban population is likely to double, placing further pressures on food availability. While urban and peri-urban agriculture may provide a significant source of food, there are associated problems with contamination of soils and water in urban areas. Urbanisation and income growth are also generating significant changes in diets. Furthermore HIV/AIDS will increasingly damage farming systems and food supplies in Africa and in many other parts of the developing world. Hence, IFPRI paint a picture of the future which looks uncertain and difficult.

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Trouble with TRIPS

The Africa Trade Policy Working Group (ATPWG) has launched an initiative to support African farmers' rights. Current trends in global trade regulations put smallholder farmers in Africa – and the developing world generally – at risk of losing control of their seeds, crops and other agricultural resources to international business interests. The patenting of plant and crop materials threatens community control of local food systems.

In line with its market-oriented approach, the policies of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) work to give transnational corporations access to developing country economies and markets, allowing foreign corporations the same rights as local citizens and enterprises, and supporting the privatisation of natural resources. One way this happens is through Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), a mechanism that allows the global patenting of seeds, plants and animals and the functions they perform.

Africa has taken a lead role in resisting efforts to cede control of

its biological and agricultural resources through privatisation, as exemplified by the work of the Africa Group at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) has developed 'African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources'. The model legislation is particularly directed towards the US government to support the interests of African smallholder farmers in US trade policy, and at the WTO. The OAU also urges individual African governments to enact the model legislation into national law.

The main principles of the model legislation are:

- Recognition of the rights of local communities over their biological resources, traditional knowledge and technologies as being of a collective nature, taking precedence over rights based on individual or corporate control.
- African states and local people have the right to ensure the conservation, evaluation and sustainable use of their biological resources, knowledge and technologies and to govern access to them.
- Local communities have the inalienable right to access, use, exchange or share their biological resources in sustaining their livelihood systems as regulated by their own customary practices and laws.
- African states and their people have the right to protect farmers' rights and community intellectual property rights to biological resources according to customary law and practice.
- The patenting of life in any of its forms violates these rights.

The initiative has already received support from a number of civil society organisations from around the world. To endorse the declaration of support you can email gri@afjn.org or fax +1.202.832.9051 or visit <http://afjn.cua.edu> for more information.