

Open-ended intergovernmental working group on a United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

**PANEL II** : *The situation of human rights in rural areas, in particular in terms of discrimination, poverty and hunger*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The African Network on the Right to Food (ANoRF) is a coalition created on July 11, 2008 to work for the effectiveness of the Right to Food in Africa. The head office of the network is located in Cotonou, in Benin. The network is present in seventeen (17) countries and it covers Central and West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa.

It is known by everybody that 70 to 80 percent of the African population live and work in the rural areas and agriculture is the main economic activity of this population. At the same time, hunger and malnutrition are also encountered in many regions in Africa. Natural disasters (flood and drought), human activities, extractive industries, armed conflicts are some of the big threats on the food production and the respect of the people's rights. This situation is one of the reasons why it is difficult to reach the effectiveness of the Right to Food in Africa. It is, therefore, important to analyze the situation and find solution because food security is one of the main conditions to allow sustainable development to occur in Africa.

## **SITUATION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL AREAS IN AFRICA CONTEXT / CHALLENGES**

If agriculture is the main occupation of 70 to 80 per cent of the population in Africa, food security must not be a problem for the continent but this is not the case. Agriculture has remained the sector of weak interest except in the last twenty years. Though more and more consideration is given to agriculture now in the speeches, and the policies, things have not changed much in the many parts of the continent.

- Working tools and methods are still traditional for farming, fishery and pastoralism.
- Agriculture mainly depends on rain fall and the climate change has become a great challenge for people living in rural areas.
- The soils are getting poorer because of an extensive exploitation and the use of fertilizers and pesticides which are not appropriate for the climate and the nature of the soils.
- Land occupation and tenure is facing the population growth (more people to feed), other economic activities such as industries and infrastructures. The rules put in place to support people who are displaced are not always respected.
- Legislation on land occupation and tenure is rather weak and not appropriate face to the reality of the countries.
- Land grabbing is now pushing the people in rural areas into poverty since they have no more the control on the land which is their main source of production.

- Extraterritorial Obligations (the Treaty of Maastricht) are not respected by most of the big companies who work in Africa.
- Funding for agriculture is not always a priority in the countries. The provision to support agriculture is weak (budget, learning and training...)
- Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) are not given the same attention as the Civil and Political Rights. School education and health services are weak. The majority of the African countries have not yet signed the Protocol the ESCR convention.
- Poverty is one of the main challenges of the people living in the rural areas. This poverty is caused by the very weak access to education, technology, funds, improved working equipment and tools. This situation prevents the people from increasing their revenue.
- Inequalities exist inside most African countries and this between women and men, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, government or political rulers and vulnerable people.
- The participation of the people living in rural areas is not yet sustainable when policies and programs are being designed for the sector of agriculture. These people's right to participate in the governance is not yet a reality in many cases. This explains the failure to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition in the countries.

## **PRESENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN AFRICA**

Face to the challenge of feeding the African population, the leaders of the continent designed a program linked to the NEPAD called the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, **CAADP**.

The CAADP is meant to increase the quantity and the quality of the food produced by Africa in order to improve the food security of the families and the profit of exportations. It is the global program for agriculture development for Africa so that agriculture can remain a priority in the sustainable development in Africa.

The CAADP which is part of the NEPAD was approved by the Assembly of the AU in July 2003.

The CAADP is based on four pillars which constitute the essential challenges for the development of agriculture in Africa. These pillars are:

- Pillar I : Management of land and waters;
- Pillar II : Rural infrastructures and commercial capacities of access to markets;
- Pillar III : Increase of food supply and reduction of hunger;
- Pillar IV: Agriculture research, dissemination and adoption of technologies.

The different economic communities of Africa (East, Southern, Central, West and North) are invited to design a program to implement the CAADP. As an example, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) has the program called ECOWAP. From these regional and sub-regional programs, every country has a National Agriculture Investment Program.

The CAADP and the other programs set the frames for the development of agriculture to

improve the life and to increase the revenue of the people living in rural areas, but there is still a lot to do to reach a sustainable development to improve the living conditions of these people.

## **ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT**

The human right approach must become the tool to design new policies, programs and projects for a sustainable development. A global solidarity must urge the countries to adopt the Protocol to the convention of the ESCR and the respect of the Extraterritorial Obligation of the Maastricht Treaty.

In Africa, some actions need to be implemented such as

- higher budget provision to sustain agriculture in addition to the policies which are designed;
- land occupation and tenure must be supported with a good and clear legislation in the countries to guarantee equal rights for the people in this domain;
- education and training programs must be designed and implemented to build the capacities of the people living in the rural areas so that they can have access to appropriate information and to new technologies, in the one hand, and that they can participate in the designing and the governance of the agriculture programs, on the other hand; these programs must consider the women and the youth as a major beneficiary groups;
- social education programs must be designed and implemented to eliminate big inequalities inside the countries (between women and men, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, government or political rulers and vulnerable people);
- a special attention must be given to value the role and the work of women in the food production process and as care takers;
- countries must consider specific groups in the programs to fight hunger and malnutrition: these groups are children, school children, pregnant women and aged persons;
- social protection and better health care services are needed in rural areas to allow the people to lead a better life.

## **CONCLUSION**

Human rights learning and training will help to find a solution for discrimination, poverty and hunger issues in rural areas specially in Africa. People need to know their rights and use them to improve their living conditions. Policy makers and decision makers also have to use human right when they are designing development programs.

The citizens' participation specially the one of the rural people and the women in the governance can lead to a sustainable development for all.

The dialogue between the stakeholders of agriculture development is necessary for a sensible reduction of hunger and malnutrition. This dialogue must bring together state, private sector, civil society and rural community actors to work on the main issues at local, national, regional and international levels.