

**LA VIA CAMPESINA'S AFRICAN CONTINENTAL ENCOUNTER OF AGROECOLOGY
SCHOOLS AND TRAINING PROCESSES
24-26 SEPTEMBER 2017
SELINGUÉ, MALI**

INTRODUCTION

At Selingue, the site of the historic International Forum for Food Sovereignty (2007) and following up on the Forum for Agroecology (2015), La Via Campesina's International Center for Training in Peasant Agroecology and Nyéléni recently hosted the 2017 African Continental Encounter of Agroecology Schools and Training Processes aimed at strengthening our organizational capacity to advance peasant agroecology across the continent through popular education and training processes.

Referred to by most as “Nyéléni”, the gathering of nearly three dozen delegates from 24-26 September discussed their collective commitment to the global struggle for food sovereignty and – its central pillar – peasant agroecology. Specifically, they met to exchange their own experience of building movement-led schools and training processes, to expand on their potential and to identify ways to support one another at all levels: local, regional, continental, and global.

Hosted by Mali's **Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP)**, representatives of LVC member organizations from across the African continent travelled to the rural village of Selingué for an important moment of critical reflection on our agroecological processes of education and training.

In **Western and Central Africa**, participants came from Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mali itself, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. In the case of **Southern and Eastern Africa**, delegates journeyed in from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. They were joined by **International Coordinating Committee (ICC) member Hortense Kinkodilla, CNOP President Ibrahima Coulibaly, and CNOP's Agroecology Training Coordinator Chantal Jacovetti**. Together, they launched the Encounter with a day-long debate on the radical difference between food security and sovereignty, the need to defend peasant agroecology from corporate and/or institutional cooptation, and the strengthening of struggles for community-controlled agroecosystems through La Vía Campesina's Global Articulation of Peasant Agroecology Schools and Training Processes.

Day two was dedicated to an all out exchange on the continent's multiple schools and training processes – described in detail below – and day three included two important reportback sessions on (i) Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) and (ii) Strategies to Strengthen All Peasant Agroecology Schools and Training Processes¹.

During the same period, and just a short walk across the Nyéléni Campus, numerous delegates of the LVC Working Collective on Agroecology, Seeds, and Biodiversity met with allies of the **International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)** as part of its “International Capacity Building Training of the IPC Working Group for Farmers' Rights to Genetic Resources”. The participants, from the Americas (Brazil, Guatemala, and Peru), Africa (Mali, Tanzania, and Swaziland), Asia (India, Iran, Korea, and Thailand), and Europe (France, Spain, and Italy) took time to dialogue with the African Agroecology Encounter during several moments of informal exchange as they prepared for the October 2017 Meeting of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (ITPGR) in Kigali, Rwanda.

Here is a short report

DAY 1: PEASANT AGROECOLOGY FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

1. NOTE: Similar discussions took place this year in Europe (Feb.), Asia (June), and the Americas (Sep.), all of which will be shared internationally during the upcoming Global Encounter of Peasant Agroecology Schools and Training Processes (Dec.).

Facilitated by CNOP's Chantal Jacovetti, the opening session of the Encounter was dedicated to a **collective and critical look at the concept of Food Security** as promoted by agribusiness interests, international institutions such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and national governments. While “food security is a numbers game, calculating calories available in the market”, Jacovetti explained, “food sovereignty is about our rights to the natural resources we need to feed our families, our communities, our peoples”. According to ICC Member Hortense Kinkodilla, food sovereignty includes “peasant, indigenous, and nomadic peoples' control over our traditional lands and territories”, including “access to agricultural biodiversity like our peasant seeds and animal races, the water needed for life to flourish, and the knowledge held by generations of community members”. Food security, on the other hand, is about “corporations and governments using hunger to open markets and make money”, explained South African delegate Davine Witbooi. “They promise it will feed people but we continue to live without the land we need, without our rights respected”, she added. Overall, delegates agreed that food security is simply a way for agribusiness to promote itself at the expense of people's rights. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, is about community-control and decision-making, popular movements forcing governments to meet their obligations, and human rights being respected, promoted, and realized.

Following up on this initial discussion, delegates went on to debate the urgent need to **defend peasant agroecology from corporate or institutional capture**. For food sovereignty to flourish, explained Niger's Idrissa Moumouni, “we can't let our agroecology be taken from us by Monsanto or NGOs”. Instead, he argued, “peasant agroecology has to be promoted by our organizations, our facilitators, our schools”. Rooted in one of LVC in Africa's most important processes of peasant agroecology, CNOP's Jacovetti detailed the **“seven pillars of peasant agroecology” as described in the April 2017 “Nyéléni Manifesto of Peasant Agroecology”**²: (1) Guarantee access to land, water, and other natural resources, (2) value and protect biodiversity, peasant seeds and animal races, (3) promote peasant agroecology practices that stimulate diversity, complementarity, and adaptability, (4) develop diverse, nutritional, and therapeutic local food systems, (5) recognize and reinforce the importance of women and youth, (6) strengthen synergies and alliances of collective organizations, and (7) take actions that impact institutional and regulatory bodies.

“We must uphold all of these pillars”, Jacovetti argued, “or our agroecology will be stolen by corporate technicians trying to clean up the green revolution's mess”. Even worse, warned Mozambique's Inacio Maria, “transnationals will continue their landgrabs, arguing that 'clean' or 'green' plantations will somehow solve the problems of hunger and climate change in our countries”. Of the many interconnected issues, delegates agreed that the greatest threat to life in rural Africa might just be the **lack of youth participation in the struggle**. “Without youth committed to fighting for our rights, our organizations and dreams will have nowhere to grow”, declared Ghanaian youth delegate Arnold Kwadwo. “African youth want real-life experiences, the freedom to make decisions, and a future worth fighting for” he explained. The ICC's Kinkodilla agreed, adding that “youth must be given priority in each of our organizations. Every LVC meeting is a training space and the youth need these opportunities to see how food sovereignty can be won through organizations that struggle collectively”. The session ended with an **overall consensus on the need to strengthen peasant agroecology education and training in all LVC member organizations**, described by Jacovetti as “the greatest opportunity to engage youth and build organizations that can truly transform our societies”.

DAY 2: LVC'S AFRICAN SCHOOLS AND TRAINING PROCESSES

• CENTRE DE FORMATION EN AGROECOLOGIE DE WINDITAN (PPN-NIGER)

The **'Winditan Agroecology Training Center'** is a rural education and training center recovered by LVC member organization **Plataforme Paysanne du Niger (PPN)**. Originally established in 1996 as part of a two-year “Food Security Support Program” of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), it was altogether abandoned in 1998. After years of struggle for their own space to train members agroecological principles and practices, Plataforme Paysanne was granted full responsibility over the centre in 2010.

With 15 hectares of arable land, meeting rooms that can seat up to 150 participants, a dining hall and

² <https://viacampesina.org/fr/mali-manifeste-de-l-agroecologie-paysanne/>

dormitories, the Center is one of LVC in Africa's most important formal training school. **Its' priority: training women, youth, and others to multiply peasant agroecology experiences in order to contribute to food sovereignty across the country.** Training contents include the fundamentals of ecology, biology, and endogenous animal and plant breeding, intercropping and agrosilvopastoral systems, fishing techniques and management of ponds, water harvesting and drip irrigation, food processing and marketing, as well as popular education facilitation techniques. **To date, the Center has trained some 3,000 participants, many of which have become active promoters of peasant agroecology across rural Niger.**

While trainings continue, the organization is pressuring the national government to dedicate specific public resources to funding graduates of the Center who are able and willing to carry out agroecological food production projects. By doing so, they encourage greater participation in trainings and secure social and economic recognition to graduates committed to food sovereignty.

- **ESCOLA DE CAMPONESES (UNAC-MOZAMBIQUE)**

Located some 80km from the capital of Maputo, Mozambique's '**Peasant School**' is a unique example of horizontal learning and exchange to promote peasant agroecology. In a country where peasant agriculture has withstood pre- and post-independence plantation monoculture, and with 80% of people still living in rural areas, the **União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC)** developed this School to massify peasant agroecology, recover native seeds, promote the rights of rural people, and prepare members – both politically and technically – to advance the struggle for food sovereignty.

Organizing the School's 6.5 hectares into four parcels [(i) farm and garden, (ii) forest, (iii) facilities, (iv) leisure areas] and applying their own **peasant-to-peasant methodology and training manual**, UNAC has facilitated on-site exchanges on everything from crop rotation, polycultures, agroforestry, and animal incorporation to peasant seed systems, community-control over decision-making, and the struggle against land grabbing. **Over 1,200 agroecology promoters have now engaged in these trainings**, with an open and ongoing cycle of learning that encourages promoters to activate agroecology in their provinces, massify the experience, and return to the School for further dialogue with others.

Faced with a violent increase in corporate-backed land grabs, a 2016 Seed Law that threatens to restrict the rights of peasants to seed and knowledge exchange, and an exodus of rural youth, UNAC's 'Peasant School' is a strategic learning space to promote peasant agroecology.

- **SHASHE AGROECOLOGY SCHOOL (ZIMSOFF-ZIMBABWE)**

The **Zimbabwe Smallholder Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF)** is currently home to La Vía Campesina's International Operative Secretariat (IOS). Organized by peasants for peasants, many ZIMSOFF members are both promoters and beneficiaries of the country's 2010 Fast Track Land Reform Program – perhaps the most significant land redistribution program of the 21st century. In Masvingo Province, where peasants occupied and won land formerly held by absentee ranchers, ZIMSOFF established the '**Shashe Agroecology School**'.

At Shashe, three distinct **on-farm experiences** serve to present participants with the principles and practices of peasant agroecology: **(i) soil and water conservation, (ii) seed production, selecting, and saving, and (iii) agroecosystem design for environmental protection.** In all three cases, peasants host peasants in 3-4 day periods of horizontal knowledge exchange that includes the use of organic cattle and goat manures, enriched composting, multiple cropping and agroforestry systems, mulching, minimum tillage, countours, traditional seeds and open pollinated varieties, indigenous animal diversity, and kitchen gardens to improve farm family health and nutrition. Shashe itself has an area dedicated to **collective gardening** where community members pool labor resources to grow specific crops under irrigation, thus **securing certain foods (and marketable produce) yearround.**

Recognizing the role women play in defending rural life and defining the priorities of rural families in Zimbabwe, **Shashe prioritizes women's participation.** "Women define the direction each family will take", explained ZIMSOFF's Delmah Ndlovu. "Women's commitment to peasant agroecology is the only guarantee it will be practiced on each farm, within each family". **Youth are also considered key to the**

future of Shashe, and crops grown by youth in the collective garden are sold by youth to finance their own initiatives.

- **CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE FORMATION EN AGROECOLOGIE PAYSANNE NYELENI DE SELINGUÉ (CNOP-MALI)**

Mali's **Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP)** established the **International Center for Training in Peasant Agroecology – Nyéléni** at around the time of the International Forum for Food Sovereignty (2007). Since then, it has become the hub of peasant agroecology training across the country thanks largely to CNOP facilitators working together with local promoters in 20 different rural Malian communities. Combining political and technical training with literacy reinforcement programs, the Centre's aim is to empower rural communities to defend, demand, and develop food sovereignty through peasant agroecology. In a country where 75% of people rely on agriculture for food and income, the aforementioned '**Nyéléni Manifesto of Peasant Agroecology**' (2017) is an important indicator of just how far Nyéléni has come.

Training the trainers, Nyéléni currently offers the following modules to CNOP and allied peasant agroecology promoters: (1) the pillars of peasant agroecology, (2) native seed selection, saving and exchange, (3) animal husbandry and vaccination, (4) agrosilvopastoral systems, (5) small-scale fish ponds, (6) water harvesting and management, (7) strengthening of soil organic matter, and (8) the transformation of harvested crops such as rice, maize, and millets. All of these are developed in a **decentralized way, adapted to local social and ecological conditions**, with promoters encouraged to engage in community-based experimentation and dialogue based on a **consensus with elected officials (maire), community leaders (chefs de village), heads of households (chefs de famille), and training participants (apprenants)**. After each training, promoters are asked to reportback on the challenges faced and needs identified by each community involved.

The CNOP's strategy for massification of peasant agroecology also includes convergence with allied organizations across the country and region. Participation in the 2016 Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, for example, allowed CNOP to link Mali's struggle for peasant agroecology to that of peoples across West Africa.

- **AFRICA'S OTHER TRAININGS, CAMPAIGNS AND PROCESSES**

In addition to the more formal training centers and processes detailed above, La Vía Campesina member organizations across Africa have a number of other important experiences in the promotion of peasant agroecology. From Senegal to South Africa, Ghana to Tanzania, Africa's peasant organizations are demanding food sovereignty take root territorially.

In SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA (SEAF), South Africa's Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM) and Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC) organize '**Activist Schools**' aimed at developing cadre to promote food sovereignty as part of an inclusive post-Apartheid South Africa. They now use two self-developed texts for popular education, land occupation, and peasant agroecology promotion titled "Advancing Food Sovereignty through Seed Saving: An Activist Guide"³ and "Peoples' Food Sovereignty Act"⁴. **In Uganda, the East and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmer Forum (ESAFF)** uses **popular education and rights-based trainings** to promote the reduction of off-farm inputs and free farmers of costly inputs. Trainings are both technical and political, empowering ESAFF members to resist exclusionary top-down land distribution schemes currently underway.

In Tanzania, the Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (NVIWATA) or National Network of Tanzanian Farmers' Groups holds ongoing '**Leadership Trainings**' that include content on peasant seed systems, crop rotation and soil protection practices. Participants in these trainings go on to defend the economic, social, cultural and political interests of Tanzanian peasants in the organization's diverse advocacy efforts. **In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, education and training efforts of

3 <http://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Seed-Saving-Activist-Guide.pdf>

4 <http://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Peoples-Food-Sovereignty-Act-2016.pdf>

the **Confédération Paysanne du Congo (COPACO-PRP)** focus on developing the capacity of members – together with allied lawyers and advocates - to defend the rights of peasants in a context of climate change, exclusionary environmental “reserve” policies of the national government, and forced displacements caused by regional conflict. The right to food sovereignty, as well as territorial control over, land, water, and other natural resources is at the heart of their trainings.

In WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA, Senegal's Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR) uses their own training manuals and organizational position statements⁵ in youth trainings nationwide. In collaboration with allies at the Fédération Nationale pour l'Agriculture Biologique (FENAB), CNCR youth are encouraged to become **peasant agroecology promoters (animateurs)** who activate rural communities for local food production, distribution, and consumption. **In Ghana, the Ecumenical Association for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (ECASARD)** has over 100+ community-controlled gardens used to train members on the benefits of intercropping, crop rotations, and composting. These gardens are used as a collective space for political development, allowing the organization to mobilize pressure on the national government through specific mobilizations on 'Rural Women's Day' (15 October) and 'International Day of Peasant Struggle' (17 April). **In neighboring Togo, the Coordination Togolese des Organisations Paysannes (CTOP)** holds frequent trainings to interest peasant youth in agroecosystem diversification and organic soil improvement practices, systematizing the knowledge of rural communities nationwide and promoting rural life to the youth. **In Congo Brazzaville, the Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes en Producteurs Agricoles du Congo (CNOP-Congo)** has 10 different peasant-to-peasant agroecology exchange programs that currently involve an estimated 300 members. Focused on increasing diversification of agroecosystems, the exchanges include agrosilvopastoral systems and the composting of river-lagoon plantlife to increase soil organic matter. **In Burkina Faso, the country's Syndicat des Travailleurs de l'Agropastorale (SYNTAP)** uses trainings hosted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and allies such as the FAO to expand its own membership's commitment to peasant agroecology. Joining LVC at the 7th International Conference (July 2017) is part of a larger SYNTAP strategy to advance peasant agroecology across the country.

DAY 3: S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS & WAYS FORWARD

Having exchanged the many experiences of peasant agroecology schools and training processes, Encounter participants spent the entire third day dedicated to critical reflection on how these processes are going, what strengths and weaknesses they contain, and what opportunities and threats exist to their success. The following summary can be shared:

STRENGTHS: Richness of traditional knowledge and agricultural biodiversity; community-control over many seeds and animal landraces; territorial reach of peasant organizations; access to land in countries where agrarian reform has advanced (ex. Zimbabwe); and peasant agroecology embraced by communities, families, women and youth;

WEAKNESSES: Lack of resources to support exchange between peasant organizations in each region, across regions, and globally; lack of systematized experiences to share virtually in appropriate languages; lack of academic and institutional allies committed to peasant organizations and our agroecology; and lack of youth involvement in peasant organizations;

OPPORTUNITIES: African majorities in rural areas; social, economic, and ecological destruction caused by 'Green Revolution'; climate crisis linked to industrial agriculture; adaptability of peasant agroecology principles and practices; membership in LVC for greater peasant-to-peasant exchange;

THREATS: Corporate control of government policies, especially as it relates to agroexport plantations for international investment; landgrabbing by transnational corporations (TNCs); corruption of local and national leaders; abundance of coopted NGOs that speak on behalf of peasant and other rural people; exodus of rural youth to urban areas and/or outside of Africa;

5 <http://www.cncr.org/fr/publications/positions-du-cncr>

WAYS FORWARD...

Participants of LVC's African Continental Encounter of Agroecology Schools and Training Processes came to a collective understanding and agreement on the following next steps for each of their organizations, the regional process, and LVC in Africa's contribution to the Global Articulation of Peasant Agroecology Schools and Training Processes:

(1) Adapt the 2017 Nyéléni Manifesto of Peasant Agroecology, 2015 Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, and 2007 Declaration on Food Sovereignty to local realities while increasing national, regional, and continental engagement in La Vía Campesina in order to improve youth, women, and others' political and technical training and the resulting commitment to peasant internationalism;

(2) Harmonize the strengths found in each of our schools and training processes by increasing the quantity and quality of regional, continental, and global exchanges to promote peasant agroecology, including information and material sharing (seeds, training manuals, educational videos, etc.) and improved online communication (emails, website posts, social media, etc.);

(3) Strengthen Africa's four (04) formal schools by securing new and more permanent funding for infrastructure and increasing the frequency of peasant-to-peasant exchange opportunities facilitated by each, using these schools to multiply and massify positive experiences in the more informal processes across the continent.