A COMMUNITY COMMUNIQUE CALLING ON AFRICAN HEADS OF STATES TO STOP THE USE AND PROMOTION OF GENETICALLY ORGANISM (GMO) SPECIES

NATURE TALK AFRICA

The Chair of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change,

H.E William Ruto President of the Republic of Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION.

On August 26, 2023, the Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA) in partnership with Nature Talk Africa (NaTA) organized a one-day consultative meeting with women environmental and human rights front liners in Kyakaboga community hall. The participants were drawn from 20 villages of Kabaale and Buseruka sub counties in Hoima district, Uganda. The aim of the meeting was to create awareness and empower the women on climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation with the focus on "reactivating indigenous knowledge and amplifying local voices in climate action".

Through you, your Excellency, we want to extend our great appreciation to all the African heads of states for their efforts towards achieving climate justice. As you recently stated in one of your communications, **"Climate action is not a Global North issue or a Global South issue. It is ourcollective challenge, and it affects all of us. We need to come together to find common, global solutions."** We strongly agree that climate change is a global challenge and it does require collective responsibility to combat the already devastating effects, which unfortunately are hitting us hard as Africans, especially the rural communities who are predominantly agricultural farmers.

Your Excellency, we do understand that different African states have made a number of policies, laws and commitments regarding climate change including integrating the aspect of climate justice into their different state policies and laws, this is highly appreciated. However, as a grassroot community whose livelihood entirely depends on agriculture, we still believe that our leaders have not done enough to respond to these calamities. As such, there is an urgent need for radical approaches towards saving African people and the future generation from the current climate crisis.

Your Excellency as you convene the Africa Climate Summit next week, we want to bring to your attention the concerns of the African grass root communities. Their major concern was about the use and promotion of genetically modified organisms (for both plants and animals) into Africa. Uganda, whose backbone is agriculture, once known for its indigenous plants and animals now faces many difficulties in dealing with these invasive species. Maintenance and management strategies of these species require a lot of capital in terms of purchasing inputs such as fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides among others. The concerns are further discussed in the observations below.

2. KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. **Food insecurity**. The meeting pointed out that climate variability has made it hard to predict planting seasons; farmers are no longer able to achieve good yields due to poor timing. The introduction of one-seasoned faster growing genetically modified organisms has just worsened the situation by reducing the yields. This is because the invasive species are not tolerant to the climatic fluctuations, pests and diseases.

   As earlier stated, these species require many inputs in terms of chemicals like fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, processed feeds, and vaccines among others that are all expensive for the ordinary African farmers.

   The communities stated that they are well aware of the other factors contributing to food insecurity, such as poverty, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to land and credit, and climate change. However, the introduction of genetically

modified organisms remain a big challenge, as many households can no longer engage in productive agricultural activities since they cannot afford to buy some of the inputs and maintenance required.

2. **Loss of livelihoods**. In Africa over 85% of grass root communities heavily rely on rain-fed agriculture. The invasive species are not resistant and not compatible with our local environmental conditions. As such, they require effective irrigation as an alternative, which is extremely expensive for grass root communities. Whereas these GMOs were initially introduced as a solution to enhance agricultural productivity and food security. There has been a concerning trend of a financial strain on communities due to the high costs associated with these invasive species. Buying seasonal seeds for planting and agricultural inputs to manage these species among others is not sustainable and oftentimes leads to significant drain of limited financial resources within the communities. The local farmers are often compelled to divert funds from other essential needs such as education, healthcare and basic infrastructure development.
3. **Increased outbreak of pests and disease**. This is attributed to the increase in temperatures caused by the changing climate. Unfortunately, the genetically modified organisms are prone to attack by these pests and diseases. The farmers pointed out that the outbreak of armyworms destroyed their maize plantations last year in March. They alleged that the maize planted were only genetically modified species and they could not resist any attack from such pests, thus leading to their total destruction. It should be noted that, scientifically, it has been proven that reproduction of some pests is highly favored by warmer temperatures.
4. **Rapid loss of soil fertility**. Farm produce has significantly reduced due to the intensive use of herbicides and pesticides. These became predominant with the introduction of genetically modified organisms that were intended to enhance agricultural productivity and food security. The farmers shared that the reduction in soil fertility is as a result of over spraying GMOs (both plants and animals) with chemicals which kill other important

microorganisms which are very essential in nutrient recycling and aeration of the soil among others.

5. **Health risk**. There is a high illiteracy level among the grassroot communities. Most of the farmers do not understand the precautions to follow while using these pesticides and herbicides. This exposes the users to high risks of contracting diseases through ingestion, inhalation, or skin contact that can lead to acute and chronic health related issues. These include respiratory diseases, skin irritations, neurological disorders, and even certain types of cancers in the end. Most grassroot women are also worried about the consumption of these genetically modified organisms since they are mainly treated with chemicals; others are injected with hormones to increase their shelf-life spans (storage).

6. **Climate Change risks**. The farmers relatedly emphasized that some GMOs require intensive use of herbicides and pesticides. Furthermore, during manufacturing of these chemicals a lot of fumes are released into the atmosphere causing air pollution that leads to formation of acidic rain, drying up of soils which leads to direct withering of vegetation cover. Unfortunately, due to the high cost of inputs required to maintain GMO species, some section of communities are now running in forested landscapes and protected areas to engage in unsustainable practices like charcoal burning, illegal timber logging, poaching as an alternative source of livelihoods hence greatly removing the carbon sinks, contributing to climate change crisis.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS.

As the 54 African States gather for a very important discussion next week, in the view of the above observations, we recommend that African heads of States consider the following during their gathering:

a. Pass a strong resolution to immediately ban the use and promotion of GMO products in African countries.
b. Pass a strong resolution for promotion of indigenous species of plant seeds and animals in all African states.

c. Pass a resolution to increase budget allocation for agriculture with focus on research in preservation and conservation of indigenous species of plants and animals in Africa. This will contribute to knowledge sharing and awareness creation on the relevance of indigenous species as a response to climate change.

d. Lastly, pass resolution to integrate indigenous agriculture practices in education curriculum in some relevant subjects like agriculture and biology in all African countries. This will enable preservation and increased knowledge among the young people on the need to preserve and promote indigenous species.

Yours Sincerely,

Christopher Opio, Team Leader

Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)

Signatories;

No.	Name	Gender	Designation/Location
1	Tumuhaire Judith	F	Kabale
2	Kusiima Joan	F	Kabale
3	Happy Lydia	F	Kyakabooga
4	Ketura Musinguzi	F	Kyakabooga B
5	Nyangoma Jane	F	Kyakabooga A
6	Mugisa Grace	F	Kyakabooga A
7	Kabonesa Sarah	F	Kyakabooga A
8	Shabahuria Fabes	F	Resetlement

9	Nyakato Grace	F	Kabaale
10	Neema Juliet	F	Nyakabingo
11	Tumuhairwe Fausta	F	Resettlement
12	Bikorwa Clinton	M	Kikuube Kiziranfumbi
13	Tumwine Julius	M	Kikuube Kaseeta
14	Ongyera Frasuazi	F	Resettlement
15	Alirachi Justine	F	Kyakaboga
16	Ngamita Susan	F	Kyakaboga
17	Lempachu Kilimatina	F	Kabaale
18	Yikani Janet	F	Kyakaboga
19	Kemigisa Joyce	F	Kabaale
20	Asiimwe Alice	F	Kabaale
21	Ayebale Christine	F	Kabaale
22	Giphato Margret	F	Kyakaboga
23	Fuachan Gorjina	F	Kyakaboga
24	Rachiu Pasi	F	Kyakaboga
25	Achani Roje	F	Kyakaboga
26	Nyakatoo Jovia	F	Kabaale
27	Kayenyiparwoth Bridget	F	Nyakabingo
28	Atimango Grace	F	Kabaale
29	Kothurach Margret	F	Kyakaboga
30	Birwinyo Harriet	F	Kyakaboga
31	Nyamahunge Millius Abwooli	F	Kabaale
32	Chepkurui Lois Sabila	F	Kampala

33	Robert Pitua	M	Kyakaboga
34	Ongyeer Emmanuel	M	Kampala
35	Balach Bakundane	M	Kampala
36	Innocent Tumwebaze	M	Kyakaboga
37	Ochokdhogu Julius	M	Kyakaboga
38	Opio Christopher	M	Hoima