

REPORT ON JUST GOVERNANCE

Title: Just Governance: The Nigerian Biosafety Act and GMOs Implications for Nigeria and Africa

Venue: Reiz International Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria

Date: May 24-26, 2016

Attendance/Participants: 498 (See breakdown below)

Day	Total Participants	Breakdown	Media
1			
2	262	141 (M)121(F)	19(Print-12, Electronic-7)
3	171	79 (M) 97 (F)	18(Print-12,Electronic-6)
4	65	39(M) 26 (F)	26(Print-15,Electronic-11)

Official speakers at the press conference (see page 7)

Media at press conference and special briefing (See page 7)

Communiqué (See page 8); Press Conference (See page 10); and Photographs (See page 11)

KEY ISSUES

Myths and Demystification

Two lead speakers, Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP, Executive Director, Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) and Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) respectively, set the tone of the Conference (in their welcome addresses). Rev. Okure situated the discourse in the wider and more specific context of its over-arching theme: “Just Governance” and established its direct correlation to Nigerian Biosafety Acts and GMOs implications for Nigeria and Africa. He said that foreign aids have done more harm than good to Nigeria and Africa and warned that exploitation of the “weak” by the “strong” was on-going as multinational corporations know the weaknesses of our leaders for money and praise and exploit it, maximally. He urged participants to know that “Nigeria is a beacon of light on the African hill yet to be lit over the years because those entrusted with governance have failed to work for the common good of the citizens.” Essentially, he advised the participants to develop what Frederick Nietzsche described as the “art of mistrust” of suspicious aids and care about the future of the earth, “our common home,” to use the words of Pope Francis in the Encyclical *Laudato Si*.

Nnimmo Bassey demystified Monsanto’s myths that Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) produce higher yields; are resistant to pests; and would ultimately solve the problems of food security in Nigeria and Africa. He said that by 2015, remarkable reduction had been seen in the

acreage planted with GMOs due to rejection and price falls because it had failed to produce disease resistant strain and its efforts at producing sweet potato had failed in Kenya. The introduction of Genetically Engineered (GE) cotton seed to Burkina Faso failed because it produced a shorter-fibre to the traditionally cultivated cotton. GMOs not only create dependency syndrome through seed colonialism, their seeds contaminate agricultural systems, create unintended eco-systems while they control the food security of dependants. He said that GMOs used cut and paste technology and that genetic engineering was still a relatively young science and urged participants to reject Monsanto's propagated myths because Monsanto was facing numerous litigation across the world due to various problems it has caused. He reiterated that Monsanto should not be allowed to introduce GE seeds to Nigeria and Africa.

Deceit, lying and litigation

In his contributions, Dr. Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour of Nigerians Against GMOs said that participants should not be fooled by expressions like "inconclusive scientific evidence" because Monsanto commissions scientists to carry out studies on GMOs to give them the semblance of objectivity. After submitting their findings, the scientists rarely have control over the outcome of such studies and so, in the US, they push the issue of safety to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). He said that Monsanto has been enmeshed in bribes, corruption, environmental degradation, a long history of lying and the European Union is fighting the organisation.

Request for a sound framework

The submission of the Minister of State for Environment, Usman Jubril that the present government would need a sound framework as guidance (from the conference on Just Governance) because it does not want to take wrong decisions that would put Nigeria in trouble, drew spontaneous applause from the participants of the conference.

Review the Science of death

His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Abuja, Metropolitan Archbishop said that Science and Technology remain useful but when its application destroys the life of man and other creations of God, then it has to be critically reviewed and rejected.

God demands justice

Dr. Felix Omobude, President, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria said that the Church was not opposed to science but reminded participants that God demands just and has primarily given man the duty of stewardship over creation. He said that the problem of hunger was not lack of food but lack of access to food noting that post-harvest wastage, poor rural infrastructure remain serious challenges to food security in Nigeria and Africa. To him, agricultural engineering, nano technology and synthetic biology are extreme means of modifying life and require serious attention.

Nigerian Biosafety Law needs critical review

Mariann Bassey Orovwuje, CEO, Friends of Earth Campaigner Nigeria/Africa said the process that produced and established the National Biosafety Agency (Establishment Bill), 2010 (HB. 184) was severely flawed because it were neither transparent nor participatory and therefore requires serious interrogation. She also revealed that a public hearing of 3rd December, 2009 on the draft clearly demonstrated that the Biotech Industry drove the promotion and sponsor of the Draft Bill at the National Assembly. To her, the hearing was skewed and its outcome was predetermined because majority of those who spoke opted that “biotechnology was a technology that could not be stopped and must be accepted by Nigerians.” She further noted that main principles such as: precautionary principles; principle of prior informed consent (AIA); the right to say no; national sovereignty in decision-making; and obligations and responsibility on producers /exporters were ignored. Therefore, it lacked legally binding international harmonization of civil liability rules and procedures especially when there are adverse effects that are significant and, or measurable on biodiversity and human health. According to her, the Bill was defective and hurriedly signed into law (as the National Biosafety Management Agency Act, 2015) in the last week of the administration of former President Jonathan Goodluck. She said that the Law cannot be allowed to pass because its inherent gaps have to be filled as follows: There is need to create access to information; engender wide consultation and public participation; initiate redress for liability; establish labeling and the right to know; initiate decision-making and create appropriate room for appeals and reviews. Essentially, enormous discretionary powers have been vested in the Agency without in-built checks and balances to ensuring that GMOs do not pose harm to the health of humans, animals, society and the environment. Using the euphemistic imagery of metastasis, she presented a graphic illustration of GMOs contagious effects on the environment; biodiversity; sustainable agriculture; food sovereignty; socio-economics; power and control; ethics and religion; democracy; regulation and legislation; scientific uncertainties; human and animal health.

The undisguised haste to pass the Bill was also established by Nnimmo Bassey who pointed out discrepancies in the dates of the advertisement in the Leadership Newspaper. He also revealed that the National Agricultural Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) held a press conference on 17th July to “fast track” the adoption of genetically modified organisms in Nigeria. Bassey told the participants that genetically modified rice had been sighted in Nigeria.

Consumer protection

Dr. Olanrewaju Oginni, Executive Director, Consumer Campaign Foundation said that the government has a strong obligation to protecting consumers from the harmful effects of GMOs and should therefore withdraw the current Biosafety Bill because it is not pro-life. The protection can be done through the following, among others: access to adequate public information; consumer education; consumer redress and provision of choice.

Health challenges

Professor Maurice Iwu of Bioresources Development Group revealed that the evolving food-consumption-pattern of Nigerians (and other Africans) is drawing them away from nutritious

African diets to Western food habits that are genetically modified. The genetically modified foods use harmful preservatives; have excessive adherence to pesticides; release toxic, carcinogenic chemicals into the foods. GMOs provoke allergy, suppress immunity and create antibodies. He revealed that Bisphenol A (BPA), a harmful chemical is found in imported food and packaging materials. The BPA causes organ failure; leukemia; weight loss; and compromises immune system. It is not only the health of the immediate victim that is compromised, the health of the future generation is hampered because it causes abnormalities in the functions of reproductive organs, creates placental dysfunction and facilitates prostate cancer and later-life diseases. He said that African agriculture and food security lie more with maximizing resources because promoters of GMOs have poor or no concern for African foods.

Biological colonization

Dr. Philip Njemanze, Chairman, International Institute of Advanced Research and Training, Chidicon Medical Centre said Biotech is a tool for biologically colonizing Africa saying that Henry Kissinger's maxim of "control the food and you control the people" was being demonstrated. According to him, Biotech Companies of developed nations are using biotechnological warfare to exploit and desecrate Africa. He said that the 14 million telephones given to farmers in the last civilian administration would enable the farmers to be tracked and said that cassava was already being tracked in Nigeria. He said that the invasion of Nigeria by biotechnology was part of a grand plan to begin harvesting human organs for cloning.

Food security and global politics

Using a narrative approach, Rev Fr. Vincent Ajayi of Atan JDPC explored the story of God's creation and the magnificent provision in the Garden of Eden. He said that God had already created food before creating man and giving him dominion over the entire plants, fruits and foods of the garden. According to him, food has a sacred character and a spiritual dimension. He said the moral of the parable of the farmer with a bountiful harvest who lost his soul (that night, even before harvesting) was quite instructive: The farmer was guilty of thinking of himself (an ethical issue) and he likened the greed to promoters of GMOs. It was also to remind business people to show concern to the poor people. He then urged the participants to get directly involved in politics and get into decision making positions so as to influence policies and official decisions.

Making his contribution, Rev. Fr. Yusuf Wushishi, Christian Council of Nigeria said that the Garden of Eden was God's own Ministry of Agriculture. According to him, the Bible established that food is life saying after the people had been fully fed in the Beatitude; Christ instructed that the remnants be packed so that food does not waste. Rev. Wushishi advised the participants to share information on the harmful effects of GMOs with those not at the conference so that intense lobbying can be done to properly guide law makers on government decision.

Sr.Prof.Teresa Okure, SHCJ, Professor of Scripture and Gender Hermeneutics said that GMOs and emerging biotechnologies were designed to create contradictions and go against nature. She stated that the West has been deploying non-productive lifestyles such as same sex marriage to Africa to prevent full development.

Marginalisation of women

Betty Abbah, Executive Director, CEE Hope stated that women have been the most vocal in India and South America where the negative impact of GMOs have been felt because they, their children and unborn babies suffer the consequences of poisoning from herbicides and pesticides. Birth defects affect them due to exposure to chemicals. According to her, the women will form a pressure group not just to agonize but organize and pressure government to rejecting GMOs in Nigeria and Africa. Women would lose their hold on land if large corporations dispossess them of their lands as often happens if genetically engineered crops are cultivated.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Discussions by panelists deepened the depth of the discourse as follows:

Nigerians can feed self and Africa

Lateef Irekeola, Chairman, Vision Multi-Purpose Small Farmers Group, Abuja stated that the small farm holders constitute about 70 per cent of the farmers' population. He said that Nigeria's soil supports the cultivation of variety of crops nationwide and if available resources are deployed properly, the country is capable of feeding her citizens and other countries of Africa. To him, Nigeria practices organic farming and her crops does not have harmful residue like GMOs. He said that the former government programme of Growth Enhancement Schemes (GES) failed because the Government did not carry the farmers along, properly.

His counterpart Paul Mgbechi, Chairman, Anambra Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) said that local rice was more nutritious than imported rice but relatively more expensive because it requires intense, manual labour.

Chief Nicholas N.Chibueze Onuowa, Chairman FCT National Association of Cassava Growers of Nigeria used the call-response technique is raising the consciousness of participants to reverting to the consumption of local Cassava.

Franchois Traore, President of the Farmers Union, Burkina Faso revealed that Burkina Faso went into partnership with Monsanto for the cultivation of Cotton. The result was that the length of the fibre was shorter than the locally cultivated one. He tried, unsuccessfully, to convince the participants that going into partnership with Monsanto can be productive if the media channeled adequate information to the farmers. However, his position was challenged by his countryman, Tapsoba Ali, Societi Civil of Burkina, Terre A. Vie/CCAIE who revealed that Burkina Faso had realized the disadvantages of using Monsanto's GMOs and had begun seeking legal redress.

Loss of consumer sovereignty

Elizabeth Jeiyol, Executive Director, Gender and Environmental Risk Reduction Initiative (GERI) noted that once Monsanto introduces GMOs, the resultant crops and foods would be pre-determined by the corporation so that local consumers in Nigeria and Africa would not have any

freedom or choice over what to eat or not eat because the entire concept of livelihood and consumer sovereignty is captured.

Loss of local cultivation knowledge, techniques and institutional memory

The uses of GMOs require learning new, foreign, modern techniques of cultivation by farmers. Since the GMOs have been patented, the farmers are put on a strict regime of cultivation, harvesting, storage and distribution. This leads to huge dependency on multinationals and loss of traditional knowledge of cultivation and institutional memory.

Neo-colonization

Tapsoba Ali, Societi Civil of Burkina, Terre A. Vie/CCAIE who spoke in French (but had it translated into English) advised Nigeria to resist the introduction of GMOs by Monsanto because it was a great agenda of neo-colonization. According to him, Nigeria has a large land mass, very big and diverse population and a very large and virile market. So, if Monsanto gains a foothold in Nigeria through the introduction of GMOs, it would eventually take over the rest of Africa because many African countries look up to Nigeria as a role model for leadership and guidance. He said Monsanto's failed experiment in Burkina Faso remains a serious lesson to Nigeria. For his courageous presentation, the other participants gave him a loud and spontaneous ovation.

Nigerian youths as agro-producers

Ambassador Onoja, President, Next Generation Youth Initiative International (NEGII), said the passage of the Biosafety Bill remained a subtle acceptance of GMOs and it must be resisted by all means. He said that the youth are the most productive labour sector and can be encouraged to farm through the right incentives such as an enabling atmosphere, adequate support services, among others. In addition to granting unrestricted access to land, relevant information and knowledge on extension services and modern techniques should be provided for them.

Destruction of land

Tapsoba Ali, Societi Civil of Burkina, Terre A. Vie/CCAIE informed the participants that the farming land in Burkina Faso has been severely degraded by the use of GMOs because chemical residue travelled over ten kilometer-radius under the ground and has prevented cultivation of other varieties of crops. So the farmers are stuck with Monsanto and its GMOs.

Destruction of livestock

Mohammed Bello Tukur, Secretary, Confederation of Traditional Herdsmen Organisation said that the symbiotic relationship between food production and livestock would be destroyed by the introduction of GMOs to Nigerian agriculture systems. He said that livestock feed on grass and other plants and once their food has been contaminated, the livestock would ingest them, be affected and pass them onto humans that consume them. He, therefore, said concerted efforts should be made to prevent Monsanto from introducing GMOs to Nigeria and Africa.

Paradigm shift

Dr. Celestine U Aguoru, Department of Biological Sciences, FUTA, Makurdi, Nigeria warned that GMOs promote gene pollution among plants and humans and have catastrophic effects. He urged the rejection of GMOs and advised a paradigm shift to bio-diverse, agro-ecological based farming.

African culture and foods will disappear

Dr. Olugbenga O. Adeoluwa, Country Coordinator Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative in Nigeria said the inflow of Monsanto's GMOs would erode African culture and foods and advised participants to legislate against the invasion of Monsanto.

WORKING GROUPS

The house broke out into six working groups as follows: Rev. Fathers; Religious Sisters; Farmers (Men and Women); Women; NGOs and Youths. Each group was assigned the responsibility of working out the next plan of action. After the groups had discussed for over forty minutes, their spokespersons presented their plan of action as follows:

(1) Rev. Fathers decided to use the pulpit and other platforms in encouraging members to join politics, take up elective positions so that they can influence government policies.

(2) Religious Sisters resolved to provide spiritual support in addition to promoting publications to encourage organic cultivation. An example of such a publication was Alvin Pitcher's "The Ten Commandments of Environmental Responsibility" distributed by Sr. Helen Eluagu, RSC.

(3) Farmers (Men and Women) said that they would further coordinate their organisations and exert more pressure on government over the rejection of genetically engineered seeds and foods.

(4) NGOs stated their desire to increase advocacy by providing more intense education and information to law makers, majority of who are unaware of the implications of adopting GMOs.

(5) Women resolved to use organized bodies like market women association in promoting creative activism to rejecting the introduction of GMOs to Nigeria.

(6) The Youth said that they would explore the potentials of social media in educating young people at the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions on the need to prevent the introduction of GMOs into Nigeria and Africa.

SPEAKERS AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE

S/N	Name	Role
1.	Rev. Fr. Chika Onyejiuwa, CSSP Executive Secretary, Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN)	Communiqué reader
2.	Rev. Fr. Prof. Aniedi Okure, OP, Executive Director, Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN)	Lead speaker
3.	Rev. Sr. Prof. Teresa Okure, SHCJ, Professor of Scripture and Gender Hermeneutics	Co-speaker
4.	Rev. Fr. Fortunatus Okeke, OP, Dominican Community Ibadan	Co-speaker
5.	Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health, Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)	Co-speaker
6.	Dr. Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, CEO, Nigerians Against GMO	Co-speaker
7.	Mohammed Bello Tukur, Secretary, Confederation of Traditional Herdsmen Organisation	Co-speaker
8.	Paulinus Nzekwesi, Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria	Co-speaker
9.	Tapsoba Ali, Societi Civil of Burkina, Terre A. Vie/CCA	Co-speaker

MEDIA PRESENCE

S/N	Print	SN	Electronic
1.	The Guardian	16.	Ray power FM
2.	Nigeria Tribune	17.	African Independent Television (AIT)
3.	Leadership	18.	Galaxy Television
4.	This Day	19.	Triple XL
5.	Daily Trust	20.	PRTV
6.	Daily Champion	21.	ONTV
7.	National Mirror	22.	EKO FM
8.	Vanguard	23.	MITV
9.	The Nation	24.	STV
10.	People's Daily	25.	Theleaderng.com
11.	Business Day Newspaper	26.	TV News
12.	Time Nigerian Magazine		
13.	Authority Newspaper		
14.	Capital Post		
15.	Blue Print		