



PRESS STATEMENT: 25TH NOVEMBER 2015

POPE FRANCIS SPEAKS OUT AGAINST GMOs!

The twenty organisations that make up Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity welcome GMO-sceptic His Holiness Pope Francis to East Africa, and call on him to repeat his message of caution to regional leaders.

It is very encouraging and inspiring that Pope Francis has a comprehensive grasp of the subject of genetically engineered crops and its many inherent hazards, both to the environment and human health. Far from coming from a strictly religious perspective, he addresses the issue from the point of ecological and economical balance, noting: *"The expansion of these [genetically engineered] crops has the effect of destroying the complex network of ecosystems, diminishing the diversity of production and affecting regional economies, now and in the future."*

Farmers in Burkina Faso¹ have seen the impact of genetically modified crops on their community. Farmer Oumarou explained: "The cotton farmers were not consulted. We were told that Bt cotton would be good for us, and we would save money as we would have to spray less pesticides. This was true for the first year, but not after that. We now have to spray two to three times more, and the caterpillars still come." Another Burkina Faso farmer reports, "With GM varieties, everything is expensive," referring to the seed cost increase from \$2 per hectare to \$58. Meanwhile his yield has dropped by 20% each year; he says: "We are going backwards!"

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are being promoted by the global biotechnology industry as a panacea to food insecurity in the developing world. They argue that the world's population is increasing faster than our ability to feed ourselves. As farmland becomes increasingly scarce, they claim, humanity will come under increasing pressure to meet the demand for food. The corporations use this 'feeding the world' narrative to increase their profits from sales of genetically modified seeds and associated pesticides. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were introduced during the mid 1990s and have been a source of controversy ever since. Opponents maintain that GMOs pose unnecessary risks to human health, destroy biodiversity, lead to increased costs for farmers, increase corporate control of the food chain, and fail to combat global hunger.

Among the people who have come out to speak against GMOs is Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. In his Encyclical letter the Pope praises scientific advancements, but

¹ <http://interpares.ca/news/truth-our-fields>

criticizes the use of novel technologies without adequate forethought, noting that: *"Our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience."*

In East and Southern Africa, including Tanzania, we see the push to create a conducive environment for introducing the genetically modified Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA). These GM varieties will make farmers lose control of their seed supply and become dependent on multinational companies. This dependency will enslave smallholder farmers because the produced seeds cannot be recycled, which means that farmers will have to purchase them every season of cultivation at a high cost.

Before Tanzanians are forced to cultivate and eat GMOs, a broad, responsible scientific and social debate needs to take place; one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name. As Pope Francis prudently wrote: *"Discussions are needed in which all those directly or indirectly affected — farmers, consumers, civil authorities, scientists, seed producers, people living near fumigated fields, and others — can make known their problems and concerns, and have access to adequate and reliable information in order to make decisions for the common good, present and future"*.

We call upon Roman Catholics and believers of all faiths across East Africa to heed the words of the pontiff, to uphold the wisdom of the Holy Father Pope Francis, and wholeheartedly reject the dangerous and destructive genetic modification of God's Creation.

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Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity is an alliance of civil society and private sector organizations concerned with the conservation of agricultural biodiversity for livelihood security and food sovereignty.

Members of the Alliance

- ACRACCS
- ActionAid International Tanzania
- African Biodiversity Network (Kenya)
- African Centre for Biosafety (South Africa)
- Biolands
- BioRe
- BioSustain
- Community Water & Environmental Association (COWEA)
- CVM/APA (Comunità Volontari per il Mondo / AIDS partnership with Africa)
- Envirocare
- ESAFF
- MVIWATA
- PELUM
- Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania
- Swissaid Tanzania
- TANCERT
- Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement
- Tushiriki
- The Vijiji Foundation