

**Southern Africa Rural Women's Assembly  
Limpopo, 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

***Guardians of Land, Life and Love***

**Final Declaration**



"The Guardians of Land, Love and Life" was the theme of rural women's assembly which brought together 250 women from 9 Southern African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe) representing peasant organisations, small farmers, rural women's organisations, farm workers unions and NGOs. We gathered together in Limpopo, South Africa from the 28-30 October 2009 to discuss and work through our common problems and find solutions through our struggles and joint campaigns.

For us, **land is life**. It is an expression of our existence and is integral to our ecosystems on which we survive as a species - the water, seeds, plants and animals. Our culture and humanity is deeply rooted in the land and how we use it. For us land is the basis for the future of our children and the restoration of our dignity and hope.

A few days ago we celebrated the UN World Food day (October 16<sup>th</sup>) and according the UN General Secretary, 1 billion people are still hungry and without food. As rural women of Southern Africa, we know that millions of those hungry people live in our region of the world. The global economic crisis, the food crisis and the energy crisis especially climate change are all the creation of the rich and powerful in the world, yet the poor, especially rural women who are the producers of food and the guardians of life sit with empty plates and go to bed hungry. All of our governments have committed themselves to reducing and eradicating hunger and poverty by 2015 as the MDG state, but instead the number of hungry and poor people is increasing day after day. It is ironical that in an instant, the governments of rich countries were able to find billions of US dollars to bail out the banks (the agents of financial capital) yet after years and years they do not show the same willingness to find resources to solve hunger, climate change, etc.

"As Southern Africans we can feed ourselves, if we are supported and not undermined" was a common view expressed at the Assembly. Instead we see striking similarities as women identify problems of landlessness, limited land and agrarian reform that is based on World-Bank policies of Willing Buyer-Willing Seller, growing privatisation of communal and state land, lack of technical and financial support, lack of subsidies that support sustainable and small scale food producers, for comprehensive Land and Agrarian Reforms. The food sovereignty of the region, our indigenous seeds, our forms of local and traditional production are also been eroded as our governments do little to

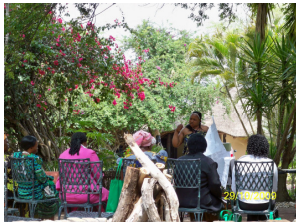


protect local agriculture for large-scale agro-industry that put profits before human beings.

For us there is an urgent need of a radical land reform that should benefit all and not the elite at the expense of the poor.

It is a shame that our governments do not stop transnational seed, grain and fertiliser companies from making profits from the food crisis – women in the assembly believe if supported, people in the rural villages of our region would not have to go around with begging bowls.

Our families, our communities, our homes are being destroyed as the scourge of HIV-AIDS permeates through our lives, leaving thousands of women and children carrying the burden and effects of HIV-AIDS. Today millions of women have died because of our governments' inability to provide adequate resources, such as anti-retrovirals, health care and education.



In our view, the spread of HIV-AIDS is closely associated with cultural practices such as polygamy. Throughout the region there is a growing concern that polygamous relationships are the basis for many rural women's oppression and exploitation. Rape, domestic violence, incest and abuse are also destroying the social fabric of our society- our governments, our social, cultural and religious institutions (the church and the chiefs) are standing by in silence. We should break this deafening silence.

### **Considering all these, We therefore demand:**

- a) that our governments honour their commitment of the Maputo Declaration, where they all signed for dedicating 10% of national budgets to agriculture
- b) from this 10%, at least 60% should be allocated to small scale farmers
- c) Scrap market-led land reform, land tenure policies and instead enact popular people- led land reform ownership
- d) Our governments and SADC implement measures that protect our biodiversity, the atmosphere, the environment, native seeds, and our water resources.
- e) Our governments and SADC protect our local markets from dumping of cheap foods at the expense of achieving regional food sovereignty;
- f) our governments and SADC enact measures that prevent dumping of toxic waste that destroys life on our soils, rivers and oceans;
- g) Our governments and SADC allocate greater resources to fighting preventable diseases linked to poverty (TB, Malaria) and implement an urgency plan of action to contain and eradicate the HIV-AIDS pandemic.
- h) Our governments and SADC acknowledge that polygamy, as a cultural practice, oppresses women and therefore discourage this practice.
- i) Our governments and SADC recognise that domestic violence, rape and abuse are destroying our societies and communities, therefore it requires common programme to retrain and resource our Police, the Justice Systems, our social and cultural Institutions and Education System.

**As rural women from Southern Africa, and after this 3 days assembly which was very inspiring for us and for our struggles:**

- a) We commit ourselves to building a country level rural women's movements as well as powerful movement of Rural Women in Southern Africa which puts our common humanity at the centre of our struggles and demands,
- b) Our movement must be feminist in orientation and approach;
- c) Our movement should break the silence on HIV-AIDS, polygamy and all other forms of cultural and religious practices that oppress women;
- d) Our movement will respect and celebrate our cultural and historical diversity and builds unity in action;
- e) Our movement will place mother earth, our seeds, our environment and another model of development in the centre of its demands;
- f) Our movement will demand peace and justice and rejects the system of capitalism that exploits life and humanity.
- g) Our movement should manage to hold an annual assembly like this one, so that we can reflect our common problems and struggles as well as progresses.



*Guardians of Land, Life and Love*

Limpopo, South Africa  
30 October 2009

**Coordinating Committee:** Women on Farms Project (convening organization), African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS), Eastern and Southern Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF), Land Access Movement South Africa (LAMOSA), Mozambique National Union of Farmers (UNAC), Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU), National Small Holders Farmer's Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Trust for Community Outreach & Education (TCOE), Via Campesina Africa 1.