

Uphold People's Control on Agriculture! Assert Farmer-centered Agricultural Research and Systems!

We, the farmers, representatives of farmers organizations, peoples' movements and civil society from throughout the Philippines and around the world who gather here for the People's Street Conference against the Annual General Meeting of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) uphold this statement of unity.

The Street Conference is an independent initiative to claim space for critiques of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and for the presentation of alternatives.

The CGIAR, including the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), has consistently failed to meet the needs of poor farmers throughout the world. From the start of the Green Revolution, the research centers of the CGIAR have promoted a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to research that ignores the knowledge and experience of farmers, farming communities, and indigenous people. The agriculture promoted by the CGIAR, with its dependence on pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals, is environmentally and socially unsustainable. Farmers have been plunged into debt, their health and the health of their families has suffered, their knowledge, culture and social systems have been exploited, and the agro-environment of their farms has been severely degraded.

Despite decades of effort by civil society, by farmers and farming communities both requesting and demanding reform of the system, the CGIAR has shown itself unable or unwilling to reform. Despite participation in conferences, on committees, writing papers, and letters, despite interviews, speeches, briefings and meetings, by millions of farmers throughout the world, we do not see any significant change in the CGIAR approach. For this reason we are forced to take to the streets.

The following issues are of particular concern to us:

Accountability and governance: The CGIAR has never been accountable to whom it claims to serve. This is reflected in its governance structure which is fundamentally controlled by four rich countries of the North. It has never attempted to solve its problems of accountability and continues to refuse attempts to genuinely involve farmers' organizations in its decision-making processes.

The Green Revolution to the Gene Revolution: The Green Revolution continues to cause immense damage. Far from learning from the mistakes of the Green Revolution, the CGIAR are frantically chasing the tail of the latest mythological 'one-technology-fixes-all:' genetic engineering. GMOs are associated with genetic privatization through patenting and IPR; genetic contamination; market rejection; threats to farmers' rights through increasing monopolization in agriculture; negative health effects; environmental damage, and a deepening of the structural inequalities between rich and poor. The failure of the CGIAR to defend genetic diversity in the light of contamination is disgraceful.

Trusteeship and biopiracy: The inability of the CGIAR to protect material it holds in its genebanks from biopiracy is a betrayal of the trust of farmers and farming communities. The FAO-CGIAR trust agreement has been handled inadequately and must be fundamentally restructured. Germplasm, its components and derivatives must be kept free of intellectual property control.

Worker health and safety: The relationship between CGIAR centers and the national workforces facilitates exploitation including, in some instances, immunity from national labor laws. Illness and death of workers, contractualization of labor, unfair dismissals and worker harassment result. Workers have the right to stable, ongoing, safe employment with adequate remuneration protected by national and international law.

Business as usual: The ever strengthening links with the private sector and capitulation to private sector values and agendas brings into question the independence and integrity of the CGIAR. The stated aims of corporations (to make money) and the CGIAR (supposedly to increase food security) are completely different. Biopiracy, the undermining of public-oriented research agendas and a continuing flow of knowledge and resources from the South to the North are the result.

The CGIAR have grossly failed to recognize and enforce farmers' rights despite their rhetoric.

The CGIAR has shown itself to be unable to change. The use of nice language and pro-farmer rhetoric to clothe the same unsustainable approach does not constitute change. For this reason and the reasons listed above, the Peoples' Street Conference calls for a dismantling of the current international agricultural research system and the reorientation of public funds into responsive, pro-poor, pro-farmer, sustainable approaches.

New models of agricultural research:

The work of many of the farmers, Peoples' Organizations and NGOs attending this street conference is illustrative of the wide range of farmer-centered research that is being pursued throughout the world including farmer-breeding initiatives, participative research, and the maintenance and development of community knowledge. Farmer-led and farmer-oriented approaches, however, are chronically underfunded, unsupported and marginalized by the mainstream approach to research.

Call to action:

It is imperative that agricultural research is farmer-centered, farmer-led, pro-poor, and rooted in the principle of farmers rights, genuine land reform and food sovereignty. Alternatives to the a mainstream approach to agriculture must be strengthened and developed.

Funding for socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture must be strengthened. We call upon donors to reorient their funding from research on GMOs, hybrids and other damaging techno-fixes to agro-ecological, farmer led approaches.

Public research on agriculture must be maintained free from the influence (direct and indirect) of profit-oriented private companies. We call on all the international scientific community to join farmers in conducting farmer-led, farmer-oriented participatory research.

We demand that there be no patents on life or any kind of intellectual property. The international scientific community must join peoples' movements in explicitly rejecting patents on life, and in proactively protecting plants, animals and agricultural processes from patents and other forms of IPR.

The international research community must work to ensure adherence to human rights, and labor rights in accordance with all national and international laws.

None of these demands can be achieved without the full implementation of farmers' rights at national and international levels. The international research establishment must recognize and advance farmers' rights in all its policies and actions.

The current system of international agricultural research, particularly the CGIAR, has blighted the development of responsible public science by diverting resources and subverting knowledge, technologies and agendas. There has been a stifling of creativity, a marginalization of farmer science and a tragic narrowing of analysis and goals of research. We call upon ourselves, the international scientific community, donors, and governments to start anew in agricultural research.