

Sprouting Up...

A new partnership for Africa?

GRAIN

Recently it has been impossible to talk about development in Africa without mentioning NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development). But what is NEPAD?

NEPAD is a development program for Africa, launched by the presidents of South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria, Egypt and Senegal. It takes the form of a document drawn up by experts commissioned by these political authorities without any popular consultation, and without any involvement of the different social actors, in their respective countries. NEPAD was adopted by the African heads of state at Abuja (Nigeria) in October 2001. NEPAD's point of departure is that since independence, Africa's development has not been effective. New approaches are needed to resolve the problem of poverty. NEPAD's answer is a new programme for development, giving a greater role to private investment, and founded on a new form of partnership with developed nations.

The text of NEPAD starts by saying, *"This New Partnership for African Development is a promise, made by African leaders, founded on a common vision, as well as a firm and shared conviction that it is their urgent duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on the path of sustainable growth and development, while actively participating in the world economy and international politics..."*. As we can see from NEPAD's title, its focus and the approaches it has made, it is clear that the development of Africa will be based on a partnership with the developed countries and the principles of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which currently dominate the global economy and international politics.

In the field of genetic resources, we have seen over the last few years that the principles of the WTO, which promote intellectual property rights over biological resources, oppose the sustainable use of biological diversity. Sustainable development, meaning development that does not undermine the social and environmental resource base nor benefit only a minority, cannot be fuelled by the international economic and political system as NEPAD would have us believe. Sustainable development must be based on the recognition of each country's traditional practices, on the sustainable use of African genetic resources, according to the African peoples' ways of life. NEPAD now looks more like a promise to the North that African countries will adopt the WTO framework of intellectual property rights, or laws that will promote the monopolistic commercial exploitation of traditional resources and knowledge, while allowing the consumption and production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), rejected in the North.

Genetic resources (agriculture, forests, medicinal plants and so on) and the protection of traditional knowledge and values do occupy an important position in the NEPAD document. But if we

are not sufficiently wary, we may end up mortgaging the future of generations to come to ensure the implementation of this initiative. Under the heading *"Action Plan: Strategy to Ensure Sustainable Development in Africa in the 21st Century"*, the following is written about agriculture and culture:

"140. Culture is an integral part of efforts to develop the continent. That is why it is essential to protect and correctly use the indigenous knowledge that represents an important dimension of the continent's culture, and to ensure that it benefits all humanity. NEPAD will pay particular attention to the protection and development of traditional knowledge. Namely literary and artistic production based on tradition, as well as scientific endeavours, performances, inventions, discoveries, concepts, brands, trademarks and logos, information yet to be revealed, and all other innovation or creation founded on tradition or intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic domain. This concept also includes our genetic patrimony and the traditional medical knowledge that is associated with it..."

"141. NEPAD leaders will take urgent measures to ensure that Africa's indigenous knowledge is protected by appropriate legislation. They are also in favour of its protection at an international level, working to achieve this in close collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)"

In the light of these extracts, we can congratulate the authors of NEPAD for the pride of place granted to genetic resources and the protection of traditional knowledge linked to these resources. But what is really worrying is that, in order to protect genetic resources, NEPAD recommends working in close collaboration with WIPO. In effect, this organisation, and its subsidiary in Francophone Africa, OAPI (Organisation Africaine de Propriété Intellectuelle) have demonstrated time and time again that they have no interest in African development. For example, they recently undertook (1996-2002) a revision of a supranational law of the 16 nations of Francophone West and Central Africa (Bangui Accords) on the orders of the WTO, without any consultation of the farmers and local communities whose interests are trampled on by this law. The protection of Africa's genetic resources cannot be achieved in a sustainable manner unless all the social actors at a national level, headed by farmers and local communities in each country, propose, in their own interest and not that of the multinationals, the ways and means to effectively protect their genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

NEPAD's official website is at www.nepad.org

