

June 20, 2023.

Why Benin should not Join UPOV !

We, the undersigned organisations – including farmers' organisations, women's organisations, trade activists and consumer groups – wish to express our strong concerns about the possibility of Benin joining the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

UPOV is an intergovernmental organisation that promotes a global system of plant breeders' rights. Its members grant monopoly rights to breeders over the varieties they develop, allowing them to prevent others from using their seeds without payment of a fee. UPOV claims that members benefit by getting access to quality seeds that are productive and nutritious. However, this has not been proved elsewhere. Currently, five African countries (Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Tunisia) plus the West African Intellectual Property Organisation (OAPI) are members of UPOV.

Among the items on the agenda of the first session of its 9th legislature, the Parliament of Benin has included for a second time, after a first unsuccessful attempt in 2017, Benin's application to join UPOV 1991. This move is unnecessary and dangerous.

It cannot be justified for Benin to join UPOV when it is already member through OAPI. If, [as studies show](#), Benin is not benefitting from OAPI's regime of UPOV-complaint plant breeders' rights, it is hard to see how individual membership in UPOV will help. Worse, if Benin joins UPOV on its own, this will most likely open up the country to direct pressure from the global seed industry, which is [62% controlled](#) by four agrochemical giants: Syngenta, Bayer, BASF, Corteva. They are the ones who stand to benefit. Only 10-20% of seeds used in Africa come from the seed industry. The expansion of UPOV will change that – at the cost of African food sovereignty.

We are also well aware that Benin's parliament has debated similar proposals in recent sessions and these were defeated as a result of strong civil society pressure and with the support of some well-informed parliamentarians. Similar debates have been happening in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa.

As organisations that advocate for agroecology and food systems grounded in local communities, we are aware that UPOV replaces small farmers' seeds with industrial seeds. This destroys biodiversity and undermines sustainable approaches to food production in Benin and the African continent at large. Concrete [experience](#) in other African states like Kenya shows that UPOV incentivises breeding for export crops, like ornamentals, and that foreign companies benefit more than domestic breeders. Around the world, industrial seeds are associated with monoculture farming and technology packages that deplete soils, require well-managed irrigation and need herbicides, synthetic fertilisers and pesticides to deliver promised yields.

In Africa, we urgently need to support the development and protection of seed systems that are firmly in the hands of small farmers. Benin recently hosted a West African seed fair on 9-11 March 2023 bringing together more than 250 participants from 22 African countries to celebrate farmers seed sovereignty and diversity. This is a source of pride and shows the determination of African peasant seed defenders and proponents. It is therefore

incomprehensible that the Benin government is proposing to hand over the country's seed system to the commercial greed of the agrochemical industry.

It is against this background that we call upon all players in Africa to reconsider the best strategy to achieve seed systems that serve local communities.

We strongly call upon the government of Benin to withdraw its proposal to join UPOV from the table of the National Assembly and to review, with peasant organisations and civil society, the best steps forward.

Instead, we encourage the promotion of agroecology and the use and protection of local and indigenous seeds, which are adapted to local conditions and contribute to the sustainability of agriculture in Benin and Africa at large. Only then can we secure food sovereignty and peasants rights over seeds.

Signed :

1. Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)
2. African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)
3. APBREBES
4. ADeD: Actions pour le Développement Durable
5. Association Nodde Nooto (A2N) du Niger
6. African Technology Assessment Platform (AfriTAP)
7. Agro Espoir Afrique SARL
8. Agro-Care Consulting (Cameroun)
9. ANA-BIO Togo
10. A Growing Culture
11. Acción Ecológica
12. Asociacion Nacional para el Fomento de la Agruclutra Ecologica ANAFAE
13. Association Sénégalaise des Producteurs de Semences Paysannes (ASPSP)
14. Association des agriculteurs sans frontières AASF
15. Association Tunisienne de Permaculture
16. ATODAD-Togo
17. Attac/Cadtm Maroc
18. AVRDR Tchad
19. BARAGNINI
20. Batamar Bio BITÈYE Sénégal
21. BEELA Center for Indigenous Foods
22. Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya (BIBA-K)
23. Botswana Council of NGOs (BOCONGO)
24. Centre d'études et d'expérimentations économiques et sociales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest - Association Internationale (CESAO-AI)
25. Centre de Formation et d'Insertion des Jeunes du Togo (CFIJ-TOGO)
26. Centre International de Développement AP Agropastoral CIDAP.BAGA TOGO.
27. CEVAD
28. CEVASTE

29. Civil Society Agrarian Partnership (CSAP)
30. CNOP / LVC AOC
31. COASP
32. Commons for EcoJustice (EcoJustice)
33. Community Alliance for Global Justice/AGRA Watch
34. Congo Basin Conservation Society CBCS RDC
35. Coordination Afrique du réseau CADTM
36. COPAGEN
37. COPAGEN Mali
38. COPAGEN NIGER
39. CREDI ONG
40. Eco-impact
41. ECOLOFEMME RDC
42. Emmaus TOHOUE
43. ERA/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN)
44. FAEB
45. FAPD-Sénégal
46. Farmer Managed Seeds Systems -(EOAI)
47. FCPEEP RDC-ACB
48. FENAB SENEGAL
49. FENEV (Femmes Environnement Nature Entrepreneuriat Vert/RD Congo)
50. FIAN Burkina Faso
51. FIAN Suisse
52. FIAN Uganda
53. FIAN Zambia
54. Gabon Environnement
55. GRABE BÉNIN
56. GRAIN
57. Grassroots International
58. Groupe d'Actions pour une Agriculture et un Environnement Durables (GAAED)
HEKS/EPER, Entraide Protestante Suisse
59. IFOAM-OI
60. IRPAD/Afrique (Mali)
61. Jeunes volontaires pour l'environnement Côte d'Ivoire
62. JINUKUN
63. Justiça Ambiental - JA! (Mozambique)
64. LDCB : Ligue pour la Défense des Consommateurs du Bénin
65. Les Jardins d'Hambe
66. Les Jardins de l'espoir
67. Malaysian Food Sovereignty Forum (FKMM)
68. Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania - MVIWATA
69. National Alliance for Agroecology, Climate change and Environmental Sustainability
the Gambia
70. Nature Tropicale ONG (NTONG)

71. Network Siyada
72. ONG Debora
73. ONG Muyissi Environnement pour la défense des droits des communautés locales (Gabon)
74. Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association
75. RADD
76. RAAD PLUS
77. Réseau National des Acteurs de l'Agroécologie du Togo (RéNAAT)
78. Resources Oriented Development Initiatives KENYA (RODI Kenya)
79. RNDDH -NIGER
80. Seed Savers Network Kenya
81. SeedChange
82. Société Civile environnementale et Agro Rurale du Congo SOCEARUCO RDC
83. SWISSAID
84. Synergie Nationale des Paysans et Riverains du Cameroun (SYNAPARCAM)
85. Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity (TABIO)
86. Third World Network (TWN)
87. Trax Program Support Ghana (Trax Ghana)
88. Une lumière dans la Rue (ULDLR)
89. Youth in Agroecology and Restoration Network
90. Youth Volunteers for the Environment Ghana
91. Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB)
92. ZIMSOFF LVC