African and European agricultures needs protection

The sixth European Union African Union Summit will be held on February 17 and 18 in Brussels. On this occasion, we jointly express the imperative need to rebuild food sovereignty on our two continents. Even today, it is peasant and family farming that, in Europe as in Africa, feeds people. Our small and medium-sized farms create jobs and sustain rural areas. Moreover, at a time when scientists agree on the urgency of a global agro-ecological transition to respond to climate crises and the collapse of biodiversity, the maintenance of numerous peasants practicing diversified agriculture on all territories should be a shared priority.

However, for decades, policies of deregulation and opening up of agricultural markets have weakened our farms. Subjected to competition from low-priced imports, local agricultural production is mistreated, to the point that a large number of peasants end up abandoning their activity. The liberalization of investments opens the door to massive land and water grabbing by multinationals or hedge funds against small producers. Rather than supporting young people who would like to settle, governments are promoting false technological solutions such as GMOs, digitalization or robotics.

The economic partnership agreements between the European Union and the countries of the African Union are largely responsible for this situation. We are far from a balanced partnership here. The interests of large European companies have systematically been prioritized over those of the people. The priority given to international trade over local production has led to a loss of food sovereignty which, today, can lead to serious food crises. The growing dependence on food imports in many African countries increases vulnerability to market volatility. But Europe is not immune to major disturbances either, as the situation at the start of the COVID 19 pandemic showed. At a time when the price of cereals is soaring on the international markets, the memory of the 2008 crisis and the food riots is still vivid, as is this painful observation: the lessons have not been learned.

It is high time to rebuild relations between our two continents on the basis of mutual respect and the interest of the peoples. The dogma of happy globalization has had its day. Cooperation between Africa and Europe must be rebuilt around food sovereignty, i.e. the right of peoples to protect their local agriculture to allow a decent income for producers, a right to food for all and all and support for the agro-ecological transition.