

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Canadian Senate Ponders Development in African countries

Africa : The Will to Live

"We came here today to tell you we are peasants and that we want to keep on being peasants and live with dignity."

Ibrahima COULIBALY

"Peasants are entitled to improve their income by what they sell", said the ROPPA representative and president of the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations, Mr. Ibrahima COULIBALY, to the Standing Committee on Foreign affairs of the Canadian Senate.

In his presentation, Mr. Coulibaly clearly demonstrated the direct impacts of the World Bank's structural adjustments programmes on the increasing poverty of the population and on the destructuring of the agricultural sector. While agricultural subsidies were largely maintained in richer countries, all support measures to agriculture in Africa were eliminated, thereby making agriculture even more fragile, even as it barely managed to feed its people.

"We want to exercise our ability to choose our policies and to protect the interests of the majority of our population."

Ibrahima COULIBALY

"At the same time, we were forced to adopt liberal policies of opening our markets to food imports of subsidized surpluses from developed countries. In such conditions, how can we manage?" he asked the senators.

Canada: Affirming its leadership

On March 22, the director general of UPA International Development (UPA DI), states this same senatorial committee that, things being as they are now, it is unrealistic to imagine that agriculture in Africa can position itself to its advantage on international markets.

"I always listen to how things are said, the choice of words, and the language used. Language is a reflection of culture, and if we do not understand the culture, something is missing in our aid programs. The World Bank and other financial institutions tend to impose their own concepts, their vocabulary and benchmarks such as assessment parameters, output, annual growth, average annual growth, strategic remedies. If I understand you correctly, these do not apply in your country. Before having any pretensions of helping you, we would have to learn your language, your way of doing things, and this is what is fundamentally lacking in all our aid programs. This now seems obvious. Even the financial institutions with which we are associated seem to show a lack of respect towards your way of living and the objectives you are pursuing. Not only do they impose policies, but they also interfere in the internal administration of your country. As you have noted, the people grow poorer as a consequence."

(Sénateur Corbin)

Instead of saying it is isolated at the WTO, Canada should champion supply management on a global level as a way of regulating markets. It should promote it and explain it.

Canada would then realize that it can count on many allies.

Moreover, he is convinced that the continental market is the safest and the most accessible. It is therefore urgent to give West African countries the means to protect and develop their market of 300 million inhabitants.

As to how Canada can play a leadership role at the WTO, Mr. Beaudoin reminded the senators that Canada can show the rest of the world an effective way to protect agricultural producers and family agriculture while staying inside a market economy model: **supply management**.

Supply management is a proven mechanism that has been in place for 40 years in Canada. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated and it is an adequate response to African needs. In fact, Africans are the first to request its implementation in their countries.

"Capacity building in production, development in processing, organization in marketing, these remain to be done. Only a comprehensive and well-structured strategy, one that involves all stakeholders and is supported by appropriate policies, will enable producers to earn their livelihood; will allow countries to enjoy the benefits of their resources so that, at last, development can really come to Africa."

André D. BEAUDOIN

These questions will undoubtedly be taken up again at the Saly Seminar of the Support to the Development of West Africa's Agricultural Leaders' Competences Project to be held in Senegal, April 19 to 23 2005.

This annual event will allow for an assessment of the Equitable Agriculture Movement (MAÉ-MAÉ), a year after its inception. Participants will also be able to increase their understanding of supply management.



Food Safety or Food Sovereignty

Since 1996, or more precisely since the Rome Declaration of the FAO, food security is the top ranking concern of the global community, at least in the prevalent discourse. It is only normal to want to eliminate world hunger, especially since we have the technical and financial means. All human beings should have access to sufficient quality food. This is a worthy project that rallies everyone. So much so that even the WTO wanted to be part of it.

By facilitating the trading of agricultural products on a global level, competition would bring prices down and the most destitute would have access to the world's food supply. However, 5 years into the FAO's 2015 deadline, the results are catastrophic. Not only has the number of starving and undernourished stayed stable, but peasants all over the world are poorer and poorer. Many are

reduced to visiting food banks, not to supply them but to feed themselves. And thus, those who should have been part of the solution are now part of the problem.

At the same time, economic growth has outpaced demographic growth, even in most developing countries. So there is no lack of resources and these do generate wealth. If the goal was and still is realistic, it has become clear that the means used to attain it are inappropriate.

The heart of the problem is the distribution of wealth. The low-prices policy has left peasant impoverished without improving access to food for the poor. The real solution resides in the consideration of the costs of production of farm products along with a better distribution of wealth so as to decrease world poverty, a first step in eliminating it. For agriculture, the target is not food safety but rather food sovereignty, a concept that rests on the six fundamental rights supported by the MAÉ-MAÉ.

Motion

“For Fair Trade of Agricultural Products in Benin”

Joining the MAÉ-MAÉ movement and supporting the rights it defends

We peasants and agricultural producers of the Republic of Benin, proudly contribute to feeding our fellow citizens. We are active participants in the socio-economic vitality of urban and rural areas. We have a precious historical and natural heritage; we hold dear our roots as well as our resources. We want to ensure our future and that of our communities.

We believe in mutual support and will place collective action and deeply-felt values of solidarity and equity at the heart of our agriculture. We are advocates and fervent supporters of a new “agricultural social contract”, based on a supply of high-quality products, the preservation of resources, local processing and the redistribution, here in Benin, of the collective wealth.

For this reason, in our interest and that of the population of Benin, we denounce that fact that many agricultural products are paid less than what it costs to produce them, so much so that our income is fast decreasing and a growing number of Benin peasants and agricultural producers are disappearing.

Strong arms are leaving our fields.

“Our agriculture” is dying...

This situation cannot go on any longer!

We appeal to the solidarity of our fellow citizens to demand measures that will allow us :

- ☞ To enforce **price transparency** from all participants in agriculture and agribusiness.
- ☞ To obtain a **just and equitable remuneration** for our work and our families.
- ☞ To ensure the **stabilization of the number of human-scale farms** for the coming generation.
- ☞ To perpetuate an agriculture that promotes **collective action** and **supply management**.
- ☞ To claim that our profession, from farm to table, bears witness to the **respect we have for each other**

Les paysans et paysannes, agricultrices et agriculteurs de la république du Bénin.

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