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Transparency and social responsibility in the governance of natural resources in Francophone Africa

SPEECH OF THE DIRECTOR OF IED AFRICA

The Honourable Technical Adviser to the Minister of State, Minister of the Environment
Mr Senator
The Vice President of the Regional Council
Mesdames and Messieurs, the Directors and Heads of the National and Regional Services
Mesdames and Messieurs, the representatives of civil society organisations
Mesdames and Messieurs, the representatives of the private sector
Mesdames and Messieurs, Guests

The Technical Adviser

First of all I would like to thank you for the honour you have bestowed on us in opening our workshop. Your presence illustrates yet again the importance that the Ministry of the Environment of the government of the State of Senegal accords, generally, to the crucial issue of the sustainable governance of natural resources.

Mr ...

As you know, the economies of the African countries still very largely depend on the exploitation of natural resources. However, these are subjected to a growing pressure owing to the combination of several factors that are at the same time the the ever increasing demand for our own answer to the imperatives of economic and demographic growth, but equally by a phenomenon that is certainly not new but has recently taken on an unexpected magnitude of scale: this is what it has commonly become known as the “land grab” of African territory by foreign and domestic investors. Indeed, the food crisis of the years 2007-2008 revealed, on a global scale, the fragility of agricultural food supply systems. Understanding the implications of a situation like this, several emerging countries, net importers of food products, have initiated a new strategy to secure their food supplies through the relocation of their agricultural production to the countries in the South.

According to the PNUD (United Nations Development Programme), since 2006, between 10 and 15 million hectares of land has been the subject of negotiations or transactions with foreign investors in the developing countries. But, at the same time, one has noted an acceleration in mining concessions with the growth in the demand for raw materials for these emerging economies. The recent strong inroads made by China in Africa and the colossal investments it has agreed to in the mining or petroleum sector are a perfect illustration of this. The flow of resources towards the mining and petroleum sectors for a large part explains the growth of more than 45% in direct foreign investments in Africa between 2006 and 2009.

Even although the potential positive impacts of investments like these should not be passed over in silence; like the creation of jobs, the improvement of the balance of payments, the diffusion of new agricultural technologies in rural areas, if these are not well bedded down institutionally, they may also be a source of tension, including through the increase of land tenure insecurity of the most vulnerable groups, the social and economic consequences linked to the displacement of population groups, the threat to local agricultural production, conflicts between local population groups and foreign companies etc

These problems generally arise when the mechanisms of governance based on the transparency of transactions and the management of revenues, the inclusion of the population groups affected in the decision-making process and the establishment of an appropriate system of information and communication is not clearly defined.

Indeed, it is particularly important to establish an institutional and regulatory system which defines clearly the terms and conditions for the use of natural resources, the main concern being the protection of the rights of the local population groups. In the absence of this, frustrations arising from the lack of such mechanisms can lead to disturbances with very important consequences, as recent experience has shown in different regions in Africa.

Our workshop today, which brings together the participants of 12 countries, and which is the result of a regional partnership between IED Africa and ANSA-Africa based in South Africa, would like to capitalize on the innovative practices launched by the States, civil society organisations and the private sector in order to contribution to the widespread diffusion of these initiatives. This seems especially important in Francophone Africa, where despite the increasing awareness of the economic, ecological and social challenges of the overexploitation of natural resources, experimentation focused on the development of tools and innovative, inclusive and transparent management mechanisms for natural resources are still scarce and compartmentalised.

For several years now, IED Africa has been working on the development and diffusion of tools and approaches for the promotion of good governance. This has taken effect through various programmes, in particular for the support of the communities at the grass roots and local authorities in the promotion of mechanisms for the co-governance of natural resources through local agreements, the strengthening of the participation of women in the decision-making process, the promotion of tools for participatory budgeting, the participatory monitoring and evaluation of the performance of local authorities or the dissemination of good practices in agricultural management. Recently, with the launching of the Action Forum for Local Governance in Francophone Africa (FAGLAF), we have initiated regular electronic conferences with the simultaneous participation of 7 countries on the issues of local governance.

Our partnership with the ANSA-Africa Network enters into a period of strengthening these different initiatives and including them in a larger network thus creating the conditions for mutual learning. This is the reason why, we dare to hope that this workshop will contribute to initiating a new partnership with come of you and to strengthen those which we already have with the others.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants who have accepted our invitation and in passing, welcome to Senegal. Given the diverse profiles and the wealth

of individual experience represented here, we foster the legitimate hope of having rich and fruitful exchanges.

Before closing, I would like to reiterate our thanks and to commend the commitment of the Ministry of the Environment in supporting initiatives in the field of local environmental governance stressing the role that the Directorate of Water and Forestry has played for a long time as a central role player in the national network on local agreements initiated by IED Africa and has done much to advance the reflection on local agreements in Senegal.

Thank you

Bara GUEYE
Director of IED Africa