

PREFACES

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SUMMARY



DEOGRATIAS NIYONKURU

FOR THE DIGNITY OF PEASANT FARMERS

EXPERIENCE AND TESTIMONIES FROM AFRICA,
THOUGHTS, METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES



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*In his new work, *Pour la dignité paysanne (For the Dignity of Peasant Farmers)*, agricultural engineer and specialist in development-related issues, Deogratias Niyonkuru argues in favour of strengthening agriculture based on food systems and values that are typical to the continent; on the dignity of people, rather than on money and technology. He believes that Africa should turn its back on the race to catch up with the Western model, currently considered as the ideal for our planet.*

The book begins with an observation of the repeated efforts that have set out to fight poverty in Africa, particularly in rural areas. The author's point of departure is that of the African peasant farmer, and the importance of taking into account his motivations and the opportunities presented by his environment. He asks crucial questions: What are the farmer's priorities? What type of support should be favoured? How can we reconcile improving productivity, reducing rural poverty and preserving the local ecosystems? Numerous practical examples from on the ground, as well as the farmers' own words, nourish Mr. Niyonkuru's analysis and thoughts. Among the subjects discussed are the importance of culture and the individual, non-agricultural activities, social protection in rural areas, community systems of financing and the key role of agricultural policies.

KEY IDEAS

According to current thinking, development aid to Africa encourages Africans to reproduce Western models. We have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate that not only is this a trap; it is also based on an erroneous analysis, according to which poverty is the result of a technological gap and a lack of funds. However, it is above all a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as extensive exploitation, which are the root causes of the problem. Real development is that which aims to



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The activities of ADISCO, which seeks to develop peasant farmers' autonomy and create viable economic and social models together with them, was awarded the 2014-2015 King Baudouin African Development Prize.

transform people, liberating them from the forces of exploitation and giving them control of their own development through capacity building. Technical training is not the only issue: the downtrodden must be helped to find a meaning for their life, to believe in their future and nourish their ambitions. The methodology we propose is “intense psycho-human training that enables people to change profoundly.”

► **Building programmes over time, based on opportunities not needs**

Classic methodologies for identifying needs turn out to be inappropriate, and even destructive, because they reinforce the idea that solutions must be provided by others. Yet it is a question, above all, of helping the peasant farmer to think about things, so that he can identify opportunities in the environment in which he can invest, so as to improve his living conditions, and identify challenges and the reasons for his difficulties. This is how the roots of the problems can be addressed.

A serious development programme must thus be long-term (between 15 and 20 years); it must be adapted to the context and must also meet the aspirations and capacities of the people and their communities. Pre-determined budgets with rigid and logical frameworks are not able to generate development. Instead of investing large funds in monitoring rather complex indicators, we should privilege a different approach. We should analyse change, the outcomes of projects on people’s lives, on strengthening human capacities and their skills; improving their power within the community, but also their ability to value themselves through solidarity – which

affords them certain social protection – without forgetting the impact on spiritual growth, according to each and everyone’s own convictions.

This work can only be undertaken by those who have a social conscience and inspire confidence in others, who build neighbourhood relationships and complicity with the farmers and who live with them; sharing their food and drink, their troubles and their joys. It is difficult for big development agencies to fulfil such criteria, so they should form partnerships with local organisations.

The question of targeting intervention areas or which people to support is therefore no longer a priority insofar as the strategies must rightly be defined by the beneficiary, who has become an actor. Through supporting the poorest people, one helps to correct an injustice whilst also then generating the dynamics of development. When support is given to the most entrepreneurial groups, a contribution can be made to stimulating the local economy.

Finally, however, what is important is the provision of personalised support for people and groups according to their potential and the opportunities that their environment presents. Initiatives must lead to action that takes into account the land in a holistic manner if they are to be part of an integrated programme that will work over the long-term. States must play an integral role by putting in place infrastructure that is capable of attracting managers to disadvantaged areas.

“Because he comes from the world he describes, this book fills a gap. Peasant farmers rarely write themselves, whilst the quarrels of experts create such a din that the farmers’ voices are inaudible. This essay gives them back a voice. It obliges us to listen to them...”

Olivier De Schutter
(Preface writer)

► **From extension services to strengthening peasant farmers' capacities to improve their integrated farms**

Even though they are widely defended, the methods used for agricultural extension remain, for the most part, dominated by a technocratic and simplistic top-down approach, which has as its objective to transfer technological packages that favour single cultures, seeds sown in lines, fertilisers, pesticides and the use of improved seeds. African peasant farmers are vehemently opposed to these methods because they go against their own experience, which dates back thousands of years and is based on the association of crops; it is the only model that can ensure a well-balanced diet and, above all, the only one that can maintain the long-term fertility of their fragile, ferrallitic soils.

In these conditions, improved production results from improving the entire system of production by transforming it into an *on-going and competitive integrated family farm* (OCIFF). This means helping the farmer to think about the future, to aim for continuity and quality of production, and thus for food security, stable incomes and maintaining the fertility of the soil.

Peasant farmers, however, and particularly the young ones, are disheartened by traditional farming methods. It may, therefore, be necessary to (re-)motivate them by introducing some innovative, market-oriented crops. Such crops could finance improvements planned for the whole farm.

Technical popularisation must be part of a wider programme that facilitates market access, improves the farmers' share in value chains, as well as the quality of their food and their capacity to be integrated into solidarity networks.

An isolated farmer is incapable of meeting the challenges relating to product transformation and access to better markets or exporting, let alone being able to influence the agricultural policies that play such a fundamental role in development. He must therefore work with other farmers and be part of a farmers' organisation. Unfortunately, most of these existing structures in Africa are devoid of any real vision for development and even less for social or political change.

► **From dependent peasant farmers' organisations to autonomous socio-economic movements**

The creation of strong peasant farmers' organisations (FO) must necessarily be via the mobilisation of indigenous resources with a view to taking practical action agreed by members. Such a structure is dependent on the involvement of individuals, who must contribute by bringing capital and by undertaking to do business with the organisation. In return, they will receive services, or a profit, that is of direct benefit to the individual. According to such logic, the 'cooperative' model must be favoured over that of the 'not-for-profit' and some actors are beginning to understand this. Nevertheless, FOs are not just economic organisations: they must also gradually become leaders in the field of social protection in the rural sector. The greatest success of farmers' structures lies in the field of politics; they have succeeded in gradually becoming indispensable in the definition and implementation of agricultural policies.

Too many programmes try to create or generate rapid start-up of FOs, in the interest of achieving their project's goals, or they aim to sustain what has been

created as part of an exit strategy. Such a formula has little chance of success. Many writers therefore insist on the need to base development activities on traditional organisations, rooted in local culture.

The choice must nevertheless be based on a detailed analysis of how the FOs function. They are often held hostage by the organisation's founders or financiers. The identification of 'entrepreneurial' peasant farmers, who decide to get together with people of their own choosing and who have the same level of income, produces excellent results. They provide the foundation for a well-based cooperative movement which is, without doubt, the best guarantee of their efficacy and sustainability.

Since FOs face numerous difficulties relating to governance, leadership and external dependency, it is important to strengthen their autonomy and help them to define themselves a vision and a mission and acquire the necessary skills (technical autonomy) and appropriate indigenous resources (financial autonomy) so that they are not permanently dependent on support organisations or donors.

The crucial step in strengthening an FO lies in the definition of a structuring activity that will organise it according to functions, rather than as a single, hierarchical organigram. It is from this initial phase that it becomes possible to define a vision and a mission that will ensure the organisation's political and ideological autonomy. Reinforcing its socio-political vision is indispensable to ensuring its sustainability and its capacity to bring about structural changes in society.

As far as support organisations are concerned, their path towards autonomy should be via support for all local undertakings and not just the FOs of which they gradually become prisoners. Untangling this equation is beneficial to both parties.

Most cooperatives are built around a single crop, but such structures are rarely profitable since all of the overheads are linked to a single speculation and are subject to seasonal agricultural production. Such enterprises also face other risks, such as price falls and fluctuating production that is dependent upon the vagaries of climate and disease. We believe that the development of multi-crop and multi-functional cooperatives, whilst more difficult to manage, can nevertheless contribute to greater viability.

► **From micro-credit to auto-credit; from money to the creation of local wealth**

Today, we are forced to draw an important conclusion: micro-finance is not a suitable tool to finance farm development. In all of the countries of Africa, micro-financing institutions (MFI) have pillaged peasant farmers by collecting their savings with the objective of supporting urban projects. In the end, it is poor people who have been financing the rich.

The rare credits given to peasant farmers have been for speculative sectors such as cattle fattening or for entry into highly speculative cultivation such as rice, coffee, tea or cocoa. In reality, it is the companies engaged in packaging these products that act as guarantors because they deduct the reimbursement of credit from amounts paid to the farmers, with no concern for the money actually received by the farmers.

High interest rates, risks linked to diseases and the climate, the low amounts of money paid, short payment deadlines and the lack of guarantees, not to mention price volatility, all serve to render this tool completely unsuitable. The creation of farmer organisation MFIs hardly improves the situation because, in the medium term, they feel obliged to make profits and resort to the same instruments as purely commercial organisations.

Even if the microfinance institutions and the banks turn out to be useful for providing support for certain cooperative operations, there is a need for innovative new systems of financing. Experts are exploring various options, such as reducing interest rates, removing charges, providing incentives for banks and MFIs, bank guarantees, insurance and credit reinsurance. These are often special mechanisms that cannot be foreseen for anything other than the local level.

On the other hand, improving agricultural production among peasant farmers necessarily requires state intervention. It is unrealistic to believe that small African farmers can compete long-term with low-priced imports without any support or protection.

Pending more committed agreement from government, the entire paradigm must be changed and we must no longer think of financing peasant farmers' agriculture in terms of money, because in any case the peasant farmer has no money. What he does have, however, is his physical strength, his energy, his willingness to work and his genius in mastering the agriculture of his land.

It is a question, therefore, of helping him to develop activities that require very little money and investment, but which enable an income to be generated quickly. The African tontine kitty would seem to us to be a suitable solution to launch such an activity. With just 15 euros, it is possible to purchase a hundred or so maracuja (passion fruit) plants or plum trees which can generate almost 500 euros in a year and thus finance new activities. Helping the peasant farmer to identify this type of activity, and providing him with technical support and market organisation would seem to us the preferred route to follow. It would enable him to diversify his production and thus increase the country's GDP. It is also the route towards rural industrialisation via the transformation of agricultural products.

Given the rates of interest charged by the MFIs, we recommend using mechanisms of crowdfunding as part of a limited company composed of local people, rather than a cooperative. This would involve harnessing local funds from among the rural elite (employees, shopkeepers, well-off farmers), who would contribute to the money raised from peasant farmers, to make up the balance needed to generate funds to launch businesses without falling into debt. This would also enable more transparent, and thus more efficient, management systems to be put in place.

Such mechanisms would also enable the money to be kept in the village by diversifying bankable projects, which in turn – through a snowball effect – can attract new projects and thus contribute progressively to improving the attractiveness of the villages and reducing the rural exodus. In the end, it is a question of finding an activity that can act as a driver for local development.

► **From chains of slavery to chains of equitable value**

In order to improve the peasant farmer's share of the value chain, strategies must be developed that enable him to build profitable stocks that can be traded at the most

profitable moment; this will enable him to be gradually liberated from the many intermediaries who tap most of the added value. Similarly, the farmer must be able to organise the transformation of his agricultural produce, and its labelling, so as to take advantage of Organic and Fair Trade certification. Regulation of supply, as well as the use of mobile technology to provide access to market information, are avenues that should be promoted. Farmers must, nevertheless, remain vigilant of such mechanisms if they are to avoid being manipulated by the markets and ultimately surrendering added value to multinationals.

Even if agriculture remains the bedrock of the rural world, there are numerous non-agricultural activities that can bring supplementary earnings to the peasant farmer.

► **Non-agricultural, entrepreneurial activities in rural areas**

Non-agricultural activities must be recognised as having intrinsic value since they provide rural areas with small-scale businesses, repair trades and jobs linked to housing, rural electrification and services, all of which are essential to making life possible, or simply more agreeable. Young people, put-off by the hoe, can also find opportunities here to improve their self-esteem and establish themselves.

It is non-agricultural activities that generate more consistent incomes than agriculture and which, in the end, enable a region to develop. Entrepreneurs thus have to be helped to overcome the numerous constraints they face: management in an environment where the family exerts considerable pressure, technological improvement, marketing, wider questions such as weakness in infrastructure (especially electricity), competition from imported products and so on.

As far as improving technical skills is concerned, on-the-job apprenticeships no doubt remain the route to be encouraged, sometimes combined with the occasional return to the training centre. It is up to governments to ensure the promotion and protection of budding enterprises against competition from more developed countries, and against Asian competitors in particular.

Growth in income alone is insufficient to improve the living conditions of rural populations because this is quickly snapped up by various urgent needs. How then can one sustainably invest in healthcare, schooling and housing? Development programmes must secure a double benefit: increasing income as well as providing direct improvements in social aspects such as housing, education, access to water and disease prevention – the one not automatically bringing the other.

► **Towards the development of indigenous movements of social protection in rural areas**

Peasant farmers need solid social protection to face life's uncertainties. In rural areas, the levels of coverage of the four pillars of basic social protection – access to healthcare, income, family allowances and retirement pension – from International Labour Organisation (ILO) are unfortunately very weak.

International institutions currently favour, at least for the poorest categories, non-contributory systems. These tools must be handled with care so as not to compromise the chances of development in Africa by creating dependency and a wait-and-see attitude, such as happened in the post-conflict areas of eastern DR

Congo and Burundi. Care must be taken not to destroy the traditional mechanisms of solidarity, the only really sustainable and indigenous structures.

We must also strengthen the capacities of the poorest states to take these mechanisms in-hand after withdrawal of external contributions.

As far as contributory systems are concerned, the only solutions making progress are the healthcare insurance and systems of micro-insurance managed by the communities. These are essential strategies insofar as they remove financial barriers, whilst ensuring quality control of the services. Nevertheless, health insurance groups can only develop by linking up with economic initiatives that collect subscriptions at source, as in the formal sector.

Despite the poverty of many citizens and states, it is completely possible to provide universal health coverage for the whole population. It involves combining the participations of the richest groups, the subsidies for the less well-off and free coverage for the most vulnerable, through the creation of dedicated taxation. Such an approach requires strong political commitment, the categorisation of the population as well as an obligation to subscribe to health insurance. Some countries, such as Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana and Tanzania, are gradually moving towards universal healthcare. Public participation in financing healthcare is essential because it enables control to be made, through their organisations, of the services provided.

Regarding the other guaranties of the bedrock of social protection – access to employment, old-age pensions and family allowances – the health mutual can also provide the framework for how to begin organising these. One can, moreover, consider these questions through more sustainable types of cultivation that require little labour, a mechanism that enables moving away from the trap of money, which the peasant farmer does not possess.

► **The battle between peasant farmers and the multinationals to gain control over the production factors**

All of the above proposals have little sense unless the peasant farmers have equitable access to the factors of production and in particular to fertilisers, seeds and land.

Because of the fragility of the soils in Africa, the use of mineral fertilisers – which are indispensable for improving returns – must be done with a certain lightness of touch. Access to fertilisers requires being subsidised by the state. The current systems of subsidy only benefit a small fringe of rich farmers and must be re-thought, favouring flexible credit (or rather advance deliveries of fertilisers) that is repaid in kind for instance.

Access to quality seeds is a second requirement for improving agricultural production.

The seeds currently available perform poorly and yet small farmers, as long as they are supported, can produce seeds of an acceptable quality. There is a real danger that African countries will lose their sovereignty if they abandon their production to the multinationals. The national public laboratories must therefore be encouraged at all cost to invest more in improving the seeds, whilst still retaining ownership of the principal genes from national lands. This is an issue of major geo-strategic importance.

As far as the land is concerned – the major factor of production – it can be seen that it is currently subject to enormous pressure, so much so in fact that conflicts over land have become the major cause of instability. It is becoming urgent to put in place solid land legislation that provides reassurance for peasant farmers. Africa can no longer continue to close its eyes over the grave injustices that occur over land ownership and it will be obliged to bring in agricultural reforms: these will, no doubt, be painful but are necessary. Solutions must also be found to enable women and indigenous peoples to have access to land ownership.

Regarding access to the land, the new challenge is that of its being monopolised by the richest men in the country, or by foreign multinationals. Distress sales should certainly be put under control of the government; otherwise the continent will rapidly be confronted by the irreversible pauperisation of its peasant farmers. The capture of land by multinationals must be established as a crime against humanity and punished as such. The granting of huge concessions to foreign firms to produce for the local market – such as the agro-industrial parks of the Congo – should also be subject to the strictest possible citizens' control.

► **In support of agricultural policies that favour the peasant farmer**

States, international institutions and countries that hand out aid, play a decisive role in defining development policies. Peasant farmers' organisations must also, therefore, invest in lobbying for agricultural policies

For the African peasant farmer, lobbying in support of family agriculture against agribusiness is a question of survival. The farmer risks being stripped of his land to become a net purchaser of food, with the means he once had no longer at his disposal. Agribusinesses that continue to exist should only be financed through private banks. Family agriculture is the only model that generates employment, maintains the fertility of the land, produces a variety of foods and cushions the shocks linked to climatic variation, disease and price volatility. It is also the only one that is interested in the development of the land and ensures balanced development on a countrywide scale. It is therefore important to lobby for recognition of this model, whilst demanding practical engagement from government to improve the model and make it more attractive to young people.

This will happen by increasing budgets and by putting in place ambitious support plans with precise objectives that are regularly evaluated together with the participation of civil society. During the 2003 Maputo Summit, heads of state committed to doing this and committed to do so for a further decade again in June 2014. It is in the monitoring of these policies that the peasant farmers' organisations should play a more aggressive role, denouncing failings, making proposals and trying to create multi-actor platforms for dialogue, whilst avoiding falling into cheap populism.

Another key combat is waiting for the FOs. This relates to eliminating imports that destroy African agriculture. This phenomenon is often justified by citing dramatic urbanisation. Food riots, so feared by African governments, have enabled town dwellers to have a political importance that does not correspond to their electoral weight. Lobbying to limit the import of foreign agricultural products would seem to be difficult, particularly because the trade involves corrupt, even

Mafia-like networks. Let us not forget either the sword of Damocles of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional integration rules. Importing products becomes especially dangerous when it creates changes in food habits and sets up long-term dependencies on external markets.

Support for local agriculture through substantial subsidies, the intelligent use of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the training of negotiators to better use exceptions and protective measures, the creation of discussion platforms between state-urban unions and FOs, but above all the promotion of the “local consumer”, are the solutions that should be favoured for this vital question.

Within a context of privatisation of the main agribusiness companies, peasant farmers must be able to play a major role in their management. Lobbying for privatisation that takes into account their interests, and against massive imports, must go hand-in-hand with cooperation with western organisations. But support for the FOs through concrete activities on the ground – to improve local production or build units for crop transformation alternatives – remains indispensable if their political fight is to be believed. Peasant farmers must not remain trapped in the dirty work of production whilst leaving the highly profitable parts to the multinationals and the private sector.

WHAT OPTIONS EXIST FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE PEASANT FARMER?

► Abandoning the notion of “catch-up”

Dignity, or more simply happiness; what does this mean? Does it mean copying the Western model of development?

Let’s not forget that Africa was turned into a bloodbath and looted by slavery... Colonisation invested all its strength in the destruction of the continent’s culture and religions, creating a feeling that, in order to develop, the African had to ignore himself and imitate his new masters to best advantage. Once they had gained their independence, African countries were caught in a downward spiral – the need to catch up with the West – and so they turned to foreign technical advisors, often from colonial countries. These people perpetuated conversion of the continent to the faith and the predominant economic model, namely that of the West. With the rise to power of the World Bank and the IMF, the route was set out and Africa was obliged to follow, at the risk of being refused aid that firmly structured the models of economic, social and political development. The margins for manoeuvre that would allow African countries to define their own strategies for development were thus extremely reduced.

And yet, the aid provided does not appear to produce the desired effects. Some people ask whether they should not “disconnect” entirely from the West or refuse its support. The nuances put forward by Serge Michailof, in denouncing poor management of aid by recipient countries, whilst emphasising the real mechanisms of exploitation of the recipient countries seem to us to provide a more refined analysis.

It is still the case that aid, even of the least interested type, carries with it the germs that contribute to slowing development. One such example: promoting market-oriented agricultural channels is just the back door to control what’s on

the African's plate – by securing it to speculative systems. But the continent is not innocent either. African leaders have been, if not naïve, at least hypocritical in leaving it to others to define and pilot their development.

Whether for the states or for the households, aid only has any chance of success if it is grafted onto coherent national strategies that have been thought out by the beneficiaries. Significant and structural budgets must be mobilised for any activity to be long-lasting.

Africa must forge its own points of reference that correspond to its own culture, its vision of the world, as well as its history. This does not mean staying outside the technological revolution, but rather taming its tools so that they serve development as defined by Africans themselves. Television, for instance, can serve to promote values and an African vision, like that which Nigeria has so well understood and which is developing its own cinematographic production industry.

Aligning oneself to the capitalist model – that of competition where a few individuals control both power and wealth – goes against much African thinking, which favours the construction of solidarity networks rather than personal aggrandisement. As far as the Communist model is concerned, this does not correspond to African aspirations either, because they believe strongly in private property.

The construction of an African geo-strategy must therefore, be based on values of solidarity and sharing, and on a respect for life. This means that we must define the model of society that we want for Africa and build a new society in which money is not an end in itself. Priority must be given to our natural resources, avoiding – as we say in Burundi – becoming *ibisoromandandura*, literally those who harvest the fruit by pulling up the entire plant.

Planet Earth cannot support the Western style of living. If Africa were to follow the same route, eight planets would be needed to meet demand. It is therefore urgent to find consensus regarding shared management of the world's resources.

It follows that Africa must abandon the logic of “catch-up” and define its own model for development. The 20-20, 20-30 and 20-25 visions that operate in a number of countries are, however, a caricature. Here it is not a question of refusing any exchange with other peoples, but rather of beginning by strengthening the “me” before being able to open up to everyone.

► **Defining the points of reference for one's own dignity**

During the first phase of this exercise, it was a question of defining a minimum level of happiness and dignity that the citizens of a country should enjoy. Something like in Bhutan, which created its scale of “Gross National Happiness” (GNH), with its four composite parts of growth and economic development; the preservation and promotion of Bhutanese culture; the safeguarding of the environment; and sustainable use of its resources and good governance. Whilst numerous writers have tried to define happiness, all schools converge on the idea that a person's dignity rests on five key elements:

- self-esteem;
- access to basic services such as food, healthcare, housing, having a family, schooling for the children;
- feeling valued in society;

- access to decision makers;
- spiritual fulfilment.

Self-esteem is no doubt the most difficult to construct insofar as it requires both psychological and spiritual elements. This said, it remains the foundation, the bedrock on which rests the power of renewal, of risk-taking and moving towards new horizons.

Psycho-human training must not only be able to liberate self-belief, but also push people to imagine escape routes by mobilising local means. People must think in terms of promising activities. The peasant farmer has his human strength and his capacity to work using his hands to generate wealth. It is important to encourage him to find ideas to channel this energy into projects that are both innovative and gratifying.

My vision of a dignified Africa – where happiness is shared by everyone – involves avoiding the Western model of an empty countryside in favour of developing medium-sized farms (of 2 to 5 hectares), which are the only ones that can ensure both stable employment for the majority of the population, whilst also enabling the creation of small and medium-sized industries, spread across the whole national territory. The idea is to stabilise urbanisation in Africa, or rather the number of people engaged in agriculture, at 33% of the population.

According to *World Urbanization Prospects 2011*, 31% of Africans are town dwellers: by 2050 they will represent 60%, with a rate of urbanisation of 3.4% per year. We must avoid this rate becoming even greater.

Today, a Congolese or Burundian farming household has an income of close to 1000 US dollars per year. This amount is woefully insufficient to ensure they have access to basic services. To really emerge from this situation, each household should be able to feed three others and thus multiply its income by four. This therefore means quadrupling current returns but without compromising the very fragile ecological systems and without increasing too much the labour required.

The first stage in this process consists of ensuring there is sufficient food through a basic integrated farm, with five components: core speculation; food speculation; speculative crop production or livestock rearing; long-term utilitarian cultivation (firewood, medicinal, construction etc.); and symbolic speculation. In addition to this basic production, I propose adding a new plot of land or new animal rearing so as to generate additional means, over and above food, to get out of “survival mode”.

Given the risk of over-production, speculative products must be able to be transformed, and all as part of an agricultural system that uses little external input.

We have set out below a list of phases that we should like to propose to governments that wish to resolutely engage in favour of peasant farmers.

ROADMAP FOR IMPROVING PEASANT FAMILY FARMS: TAKING THE DEBATE TO NATIONAL LEVEL

1. The first step should involve putting in place at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Breeding (i.e. at the level of the Presidency) an agency for the promotion of integrated family farms. This office could work both with provincial departments of agriculture and animal rearing and with private neighbourhood operators.
2. The agency would manage support funds for integrated family farms, coming from the national budget as well as from technical and financial partners. The method of management would be based on that of other basket-funds existing in the country, which integrate government representatives, donors, FOs and representatives of civil society.
3. Since it is man who remains the central concern, the first step will consist of identifying peasant farmers (prioritising women), who could best promote this approach, and offer them psycho-human training.
4. The identification of these inspiring peasant farmers should be followed by the creation of self-promotion groups (surviving one year or more). In this way we would avoid relying on the more vulnerable or the richest groups.
5. As part of a workshop organised in each village, these people would develop a plan to improve their farms over a 3 to 5 year period, giving precise and detailed undertakings according to the agricultural season. For example 'In the first year, I will plant a 400 metre-long anti-erosion hedge, build a pit to produce 500 kg of manure, replace half of my old banana plants; in the second year I will renew my coffee plantation, etc.'
6. A contract is signed between the peasant farmer, the agency and the commune to carry out these reforms, and the farmer is given a line of credit, repayable over 7 years, and released according to a time-frame linked to an evaluation made each season. The interest rate should not exceed 5% per year and repayment would be made progressively by season. The farmer would therefore be obliged to integrate short-cycle crops in order to ensure progressive reimbursement.
7. The money reimbursed should be immediately allocated to another peasant farmer, in order to generate a genuine feeling of solidarity, and allow the project to progressively benefit the whole community.
8. The farmers targeted will be supported in the establishment of a self-managed cooperative that will notably enable inputs to be available, to ensure product storage and transformation, as well as group trading and participation in the management of the credit funds. The cooperative will make an obligatory deduction from all operations (sales, storage, etc.), a part of which will provide an on-going fund of input for the farmer. Later, as the farm income improves, the cooperative will debit at source an amount for social protection, which will be progressively built (mutual health insurance, disability and professional accident insurance, retirement pensions etc.).
9. It is cooperatives such as these who could use *crowdfunding* to progressively launch rural industrialisation projects, thanks to the transformation of innovative products and thus also get involved in non-agricultural activities.
10. The action plans would be consolidated and common themes would be part of intensive practical training sessions for the managers involved in support activities.

11. The role of the agricultural monitors would consist of monitoring and advising the peasant farmers targeted on each hill. Most of their remuneration would consist of a performance-related bonus, allocated in function of the results obtained in each agricultural season. An efficiency audit committee would be in charge of verification.
12. Each targeted beneficiary would gather around them a group of farmers to whom the training received would be given. They would also have the task of selling them, at cost price, the seeds, shoots and cuttings acquired using the line of credit.
13. The communal administration would also be asked to contribute in monitoring the agricultural monitors and the beneficiaries. The performance indicators would form part of the administration's evaluation.
14. Such a mechanism should be tested across a few provinces or communes prior to being rolled out: this is not however, a fantasy because it has already been tried out on a small scale.

One can hope that the rate of urbanisation will be greater than the birth-rate, so that more land can be freed up for agriculture; this will also enable both the city dwellers and the farmers to be better fed.

Such a model, however, only succeeds if the people accept their food system as the only one that can be of value to them. "Eat local" remains the best defence against massive imports of products that, today, are responsible for dismantling markets.

It is not a question of trying to get around WTO rules or those of regional integration, but simply of trying to re-discover our own food habits. A refusal to consume imported products would, moreover, generate large savings in foreign exchange. For the only African products that people in the West consume, such as coffee, cocoa, and bananas, Westerners have managed to control the marketing channels and impose their prices. Asian countries have understood the problem perfectly and have kept their traditional food.

This said, it is not enough just to persuade people to eat local, even though it is a priority. At the same time, we must develop more attractive systems of transformation and packaging. This is of the greatest economic, social and political importance and an act that will not invoke the anger of the WTO or the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA). It is the *sine qua non* to save Africa and must be talked about in churches, mosques and schools. National competitions must be organised and local products offered at official ceremonies so as to progressively make local consumption an issue of national pride. This is no less than economic patriotism.

This is not a question of being inward looking, but rather of instigating well-thought-out mechanisms to protect our agricultural and industrial sectors, that are still somewhat fragile. Later on, we can gradually open up to the rest of the world.

The African peasant farmer is also torn by the incoherence of aid. The contradictory messages he receives are disorienting and make him waste a great deal of time and money. Hence, the importance of helping him to develop a critical approach towards the various dogmas preached at him.

If the farmer manages to quadruple his income, he will have the necessary means to invest in new activities. He could, for instance, get involved in the transformation of products, and thus progressively in the country's industrialisation; an indispensable stage in improving added value and developing strategies for penetrating more promising markets.

Beyond satisfying his basic needs, the peasant farmer's standing will increase above all within the traditional networks of solidarity: the tontines, exchanges across a beer, support for the wider family... Being surrounded by friends and colleagues when times are hard, having access to credit and having a dignified funeral are the conditions that are essential for self-fulfilment.

But the opening up of society obliges the individual to create links of solidarity that go beyond the traditional microcosm. School, the church, government bodies, the town are places that generate new types of relationships; rural people must also find their place. As far as organisations are concerned, whether it is a question of larger farming structures, political parties or the health mutual, they will only succeed in attracting members if they succeed in building strong ties of solidarity. Only later will they be able to enter the circles of power where decisions are taken. Being able to sit among the traditional village elders to state the law, give advice to others, and take responsibility in the community is the height of power in every farmer's eyes.

The most important choices, those that impact on the lives of rural inhabitants, are those taken at local and national government levels. Despite their undoubted electoral clout, peasant farmers do not succeed in imposing their priorities on decision makers. If it is not to be forgotten, the rural world must quickly set about establishing strong peasant farmers' organisations that have a coherent socio-political vision that is widely shared.

It is certainly in this new approach that the development programmes and the FOs must invest. The objective must be to ensure that elected representatives feel that they have a responsibility towards their electors, on the basis of programmes that give priority to the concerns of rural inhabitants. This is also the path towards the real democratisation of Africa, because elected representatives would be obliged to defend the aspirations of their electors. It is only in this way that good governance can be installed, the indispensable condition for Africa to "be able at long last to get going". With shared management of public life and clear rules for the access to power, one could bring about peace; the major ingredient, indeed the prerequisite, for development.

This said, the Africa that is brimming with raw materials, should not be naïve. World powers sometimes support despots who facilitate the looting of resources, or rebel groups who destabilise regimes that don't serve their interests. African states thus have no choice: they must invest in the creation and arming of efficient national armies. They must also fight against the proliferation of arms, the main menace to peace, and hence to development, on the continent.

Implementing these reforms must be done by highly qualified individuals, who have human and moral values that are above all suspicion. Training, of both the peasant farmers and African managers, is a strategic challenge of first order. Here, it is not only a question of transferring skills, but above all of high moral

values combined with a significant capacity for analysis of the social and political challenges. Given the looting of human resources and the brain drain – key impediments to African development – African countries must absolutely invest in high quality education.

Getting involved with reforms such as these implies men and women who are driven by great spirituality. Africans are deeply religious. The Almighty cannot find glory in people who are reduced to begging or those who live in the hope of a miracle. An African cannot reach self-fulfilment until he is liberated from his faith in magico-religious forces that beset every step he takes.

With men and women so transformed – and this despite a context that can at best be described as complex – it is possible to beat hunger, deprivation, poverty and abuse whilst restoring dignity.

We have set out in this book to suggest some paths that seem to us to be the most fruitful and ones that are more than just the product of intellectual guesswork. They have been created and implemented by peasant farmers and destitute peasants, with very small, nearly insignificant support, that mainly served to stimulate reflexion and ignite a flame here and there.

The best way, which is both simple and difficult, is to regain self-confidence, to hold dear one's own culture, one's potential and the opportunities present in one's environment, and to refuse money as the key driver of development. We must ensure the primacy of spirituality and human values and refuse a civilisation founded on the rampant enrichment of the few, which leads to irreversible degradation of our natural resources. Let us instead demand public policies that encourage development and peace. Let us stop thinking that our misery and poor health is the fault of others and instead get resolutely involved with transforming our lives with the divine message "Get up and walk." Peasants of Africa, get up!

Telema, Simama, Tebegueassi, Yiki, Haguruka¹!



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1. "Get up!", respectively in Lingala, Swahili, Beti, Mossi and Kirundi.