

Convention on Biological Diversity Alliance¹

Media Advisory

Civil Society at the United Nations
Convention on Biological Diversity:
Matters for life and livelihoods on earth

May 12 – 30, 2008, Bonn Germany

Date: May 9, 2008

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Contact the coordinator of the CBD Alliance, **Jessica Dempsey**, by email [jdempsey@interchange.ubc.ca] or by phone in Bonn at **0049 176 8505 5783**.

Civil Society at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity: Matters for life & livelihoods on earth

May 12 – 30, 2008, Bonn, Germany

Between May 12 - 30, 2008, almost all of the world's governments will gather to debate, negotiate, and hopefully take decisive action for life – both human and non-human – on earth.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the leading United Nations agreement for ecological governance, covering many areas of environmental, economic and social policy, involving thousands of participants and producing large amounts of policies, guidelines and international law. While less known than the UN Climate Convention, the CBD is also an outcome of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, signed and ratified by 192 countries. The 9th Conference of Parties (COP), the main decision-making body for the CBD, will convene from 12th - 30th May, 2008, in Bonn, Germany.

The CBD process is often difficult to follow, with highly technical and legalistic documents and information that are not readily accessible to the average layperson. *Civil society organizations – including nongovernmental organizations, Indigenous organizations, local communities, and social movements – play a crucial role in highlighting the biggest threats and the most urgent issues that governments need to address.*

The common will to halt biodiversity loss

Biological diversity has three components: the species diversity (including for example, polar bears, potatoes, soil bacteria and humans); the genetic diversity (which makes each human being an individual); and the diversity of ecosystems. All three components are being lost at a rate estimated to be one hundred times the rate of natural loss.

In 2004, the 192 Parties (signatories) to the CBD agreed to reduce the rate of biological diversity loss by 2010. But many Parties to the CBD have failed to implement CBD policies and programs, and both cultural and biological diversity are being rapidly lost, disregarded and eroded. By 2010, we can expect to see increased climate change disturbances, and increased rates of biodiversity loss, not the desired opposite.

The loss of biological diversity and climate change require strong, global, and collective action. Any solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss must be complementary, not undermine each other. Any solutions must put the knowledge and rights of those most impacted at its core: Indigenous peoples, local communities, including family farmers, fisherfolk, peasants, pastoralists and others.

Cutting through the jargon

Civil society brings expertise and voices of those who are not always represented at intergovernmental conferences, voices with stories to tell about ecological devastation, corporate theft, wrong-headed governmental policies, and the spiraling decline of both cultural and biological diversity. Hundreds of civil society groups from the Global South and the North will be present in Germany to ensure negotiators face up to some of the most pressing issues for the equitable and socially just survival of life on this planet.

Some key issues:

1. Food, hunger and agricultural biodiversity:

The capacity of the world to feed itself depends on sustaining agricultural biodiversity – diverse, and locally controlled seeds, crops, livestock, fisheries and productive ecosystems. The CBD should lay out a new path for agriculture, livestock and fisheries in the 21st century, with food sovereignty at its core. Two thirds of current OECD agricultural subsidies are destroying biodiversity and must be cancelled.

2. Bad “agrofuel” energy: The subsidies and runaway development of the agrofuels industry is fuelling speculation in commodity futures markets and land, so driving food prices, hunger and the destruction of ecosystems and communities. The CBD must act to halt the damage and call for the control of markets in agricultural commodities for food, feed and agrofuels.

3. Forest biological diversity: Forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate and many legally binding CBD commitments are not implemented on the ground. The CBD must identify and quash perverse economic incentives that lead to deforestation, make real commitments to combating illegal and unsustainable logging, and reject socially and environmentally destructive tree monoculture (plantations). The CBD must promote a systemic approach to forest biological diversity that has, at its core, the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and ensure their full and effective participation in all negotiations concerning their lands and ecosystems, including the international climate negotiations.

4. Genetically engineered trees: The release of genetically engineered (GE) trees poses an unprecedented threat to global forest ecosystems and forest biodiversity. Escape of GE trees and their traits into forests would be irreversible. The CBD must put an immediate global stop to the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment.

5. Damaging climate techno-fixes: Profiteering companies are promoting extreme technological solutions to climate change such as seeding the oceans with iron – known as geo-engineering. Ocean fertilization is not proven to reduce climate-changing gases in the atmosphere and may cause major changes to marine ecosystems – altering food webs, creating toxic tides or deoxygenated seas – changes that could, in some cases, be irreversible. The CBD must stop these before they worsen ecological destruction.

6. Ecosystem approach: The Ecosystem Approach has the potential to transform our efforts to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity. The CBD must ensure Indigenous Peoples and local communities are central to the Ecosystem Approach, or else it will fail, taking with it one of the few opportunities to pull the world's ecosystems back from the brink.

7. Ownership of life: The genes, seeds, organisms and knowledge that the worlds' poor depend on are being stolen, privatized and often patented. The new "access and benefit sharing" rules being decided at the CBD must prevent, not facilitate such theft, and be based upon the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

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8. Protected Areas: The global network of protected areas to be attained by 2010 on land and by 2012 on sea is one of the tools to reduce biodiversity loss. So far both terrestrial and marine ecosystem protection has not been realized. The broadening of protected areas governance types is critical to the expansion of protected areas systems, and Parties must fully recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in protected area policies, programmes and projects, and ensure their full and effective participation.

9. Compensation for victims of genetic contamination: Not every country or community accepts the risks of genetically engineered organisms. Who should be liable and accountable for unwelcome contamination of genetically engineered organisms, or their health or socioeconomic impacts? The COP must develop a strong agreement that would leave no victim of contamination uncompensated.

10. Invasive species: Invasive species are one of the biggest threats to biological diversity, often transported through international trade and travel. The CBD must take strong action to block the pathways for their movement and turn the tide of alien invasions.

More information

More information on these issues, from the perspective of many civil society groups is found within this media briefing kit. These media briefs have been assembled through contributions of 30 civil society organizations and networks to alert the media of some civil society concerns, facilitated by the CBD Alliance (www.cbdalliance.org). These briefings are not representative of civil society positions around the Convention on Biological Diversity. We encourage media to seek out particular individuals and actors for their own views as the negotiations advance.

Stay connected with the CBD negotiation

Civil society groups will use a variety of means to update the world on the progress (or lack of) at the negotiations. The ECO is a daily newsletter published by the civil society community, and cuts right through the bureaucratic United Nations language to the issues and politics at hand. The ECO will be posted on www.undercoverCOP.org (going live 12 May 2008), and many civil society groups will use this site to update the world on the events at COP 9.

On the ground media contacts in Bonn

Those seeking an on-the-ground contact in Bonn can find contacts for each issue at the end of each briefing page. Media should also contact the coordinator of the CBD Alliance, Jessica Dempsey, who can direct you to appropriate contacts and experts from all over the world. She can be reached on email [jdempsey@interchange.ubc.ca] any time or by phone in Bonn at 0049 176 8505 5783.

Food, hunger, and agricultural biodiversity: The security of food supplies depends on decisive CBD action

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.1

A major challenge: CBD / COP 9 must agree a programme that will stem the loss of agricultural biodiversity. This special sub-set of biodiversity is developed by knowledgeable farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples and other food providers who work with nature to secure food supplies. They conserve the agricultural biodiversity, that adapts to changing needs and conditions including climate change, which underpins all food production.

Critical losses of agricultural biodiversity: What is clear is that the losses of agricultural biodiversity are now at dangerous levels. More than 90% of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers' fields. One livestock breed out of the few thousand still alive becomes extinct every month. All major fisheries are overfished. And associated agricultural biodiversity – such as pollinators, predators, soil micro-organisms and diverse ecosystems – which provide support to agriculture and maintain the biosphere, are all disappearing fast. Seeds and livestock genes stored in gene banks can provide a backup, if freely accessible by those who provided them, but should only be regarded as a 'last resort' when all genetic materials have been lost in farming and pastoral communities. They can only store historical diversity, not current diversity that is developing in farmers' fields and on the range. The future security of all food supplies and the health of the planet are in a critical state because of these losses.

Rapidly increasing corporate control: Agricultural biodiversity is being lost as a result of the elimination of small-scale food producers and harvesters, taking their knowledge and skills with them. The losses are exacerbated by increased corporate control of the food chain from seed to sewer, the spread of industrial monocultures, and the privatisation of life through commercial contracts, seed laws, patents, intellectual property rights and proprietary GM seeds. The ten largest seed and genetics corporations control nearly 60% of the global seed market and just four companies provide the genetics globally for industrial poultry production.

Terminator threat: Corporate control will be strengthened by Terminator technology – a genetic modification that disrupts germination of farm-saved seeds and prevents seed saving so that farmers have to buy expensive new seeds from these corporations each season. COP 8 in 2006 upheld the moratorium on the release and use of Terminator technology, yet the EU with others continue to develop such technologies through its 'transcontainer' project. Fashioning itself as a potential GMO containment tool that will reverse the seed sterility of Terminator seed, Transcontainer is just another form of Terminator technology.

Food vs. Fuel: Corporations are now pushing agriculture to produce fuel rather than food. The CBD's call for a moratorium on agrofuel targets is being blocked by a few countries. The targets are causing widespread conversion of productive land and grazing areas intended for production of food to industrial fuel production. Agrofuel plantations are already destroying the remaining rainforest reserves in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia pushing farming communities to abandon food production. Agrofuel production is irreversibly displacing agricultural biodiversity.

Perverse subsidies: The influence of a few corporations on key governments is weakening the CBD's ability to make the necessary decisions. Agriculture subsidies in OECD countries are around €240 billion annually, but two thirds of them have been found to damage biodiversity. These perverse subsidies, which some governments refuse to recognise as a problem, are taking their toll. They eliminate small-scale agroecological production and erode agricultural biodiversity. Similarly, unfair trade and neoliberal trade agreements, particularly those that favour food and agribusiness corporations and undermine biodiverse farming, are not accepted as causes of biodiversity loss by a few CBD Parties.

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Land tenure reform, as part of an agrarian reform process – one that provides access to and control over land by poor people - is essential to enhance agricultural biodiversity and reduce pressure on wild biodiversity as well as eliminating rural poverty. Smallholdings are proven to have higher productivity per unit area and are demonstrably biodiverse while large commercial farms eliminate biodiversity by growing monocultures. The rapid acquisition of land by commercial farms is posing a new threat to agricultural biodiversity and will accentuate the food crisis. Access to and collective control over land by small-scale food providers will enhance biodiversity and improve rural livelihoods and must no longer be ignored.

Radical changes essential: The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) has added a scientifically supported warning signal: unless there are radical changes to the way agriculture is developed, how natural resources are used and how food systems and research are governed, the future production and provision of food cannot be sustained. There will be further social unrest caused by food shortages, more hunger and increased environmental damage from current unsustainable food production methods. The 2000+ pages of evidence and analysis in the recently released IAASTD report, accepted in April 2008 by 60 governments, was produced by 400 scientists in a thorough, four year, peer-reviewed process.

According to IAASTD, smaller-scale, biodiverse, agroecological agriculture is the way forward. Agroecological systems with thriving ecosystem functions are more resilient to shocks than those dependent on agrochemicals and can help agriculture to adapt to climate change; to build organic matter in the soil that sequesters carbon dioxide and improves water retention; to secure local food systems, and to feed the hungry, whose numbers would otherwise increase as the world population is expected to rise towards 11 billion by 2050.

With the incontrovertible and accepted evidence of the IAASTD in the hands of Parties to the CBD, COP 9 must now take bold decisions and set targets to ensure that all Parties are obliged to transform agriculture and reverse the decline of agricultural biodiversity in all agroecosystems. COP must implement legally-binding rules to stop agrofuel targets; to outlaw the privatisation of all life and other natural resources; to ban Terminator technologies; and to end perverse subsidies. The COP must incorporate these rules in a strong agricultural biodiversity programme that puts food sovereignty, farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and other food providers and their social organisations at the centre of agricultural biodiversity policy and practice.

For further information:

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On Terminator Technology: CBDC Network Programme - Paul Borja, The Philippines - paul_borja@searice.org.ph ph: 0049 176 85012823.

Practical Action - Patrick Mulvany, UK - patrickmulvany@clara.co.uk ph: 0049 176 85037047

[For the views of the global organisation of smallholder farmers Via Campesina, contact ph: 003248688884]

See also:

Background: www.cbdalliance.org/agricultural-biodiversity/

Review of SBSTTA 13 agricultural biodiversity debate and challenges for COP9
www.twinside.org.sg/title2/susagri/susagri026.htm &

www.twinside.org.sg/title2/susagri/susagri027.htm

More on Food Sovereignty: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_sovereignty

Agrofuels: A major threat to biodiversity and no solution to climate change

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.2

Civil society organisations from around the world are calling for agrofuel monocultures to be urgently addressed at COP9. In view of soaring food prices and biodiversity destruction, they are demanding a moratorium on agrofuel promotion. For the CBD to postpone an effective response on the issue beyond COP9 would be a disaster.

Competition with food: First promoted as the perfect solution to the challenges of energy security and climate change without any sacrifice by the rich countries, agrofuels are now under serious question. The negative impacts of agrofuel monocultures on food production and food prices have been swiftly felt where they are part of the industrial agriculture system. The impact of agrofuels on food prices is made far more acute by speculators in land and commodity futures markets.

Destruction of biological diversity: Government targets and other incentives and subsidies are driving the process of land conversion to agrofuels at an unprecedented rate. Millions of hectares of land in Africa, Asia and South America are being designated for agrofuel production. Destruction of biodiversity-rich areas like rainforests, savannas and drylands is accelerating.

Land grabbing: All over the global south, land for agrofuel production is being taken away from local communities by deception or force. This includes not only fertile cropland, but also marginal land used by local communities to collect food and medicinal plants, and to graze their livestock. These resources are crucial for nutrition and health of the poor.

Unsustainable crops: The extra water, fertiliser and other petrochemical inputs that agrofuel crops require have negative impacts on soil, water, biodiversity and climate.

New invaders: Many agrofuel crops, like miscanthus, jatropha, poplar, or switchgrass, are invasive species that can out-compete and drastically reduce native biodiversity.

New problems with GMOs: Genetic Engineering is being widely applied in the development of agrofuels. This includes a multi-million-dollar search for ways to reduce lignin and break down cellulose in trees and crops so as to produce so-called second-generation agrofuels. They could irreversibly contaminate the biosphere with traits that could lead to massive insect and disease attacks on weakened plants, as lignin and cellulose provide strength to the plant cell walls.

Increased net greenhouse gas emissions: Where critical centres of biodiversity such as rainforests, peatlands, savannas, grasslands and diverse and resilient agricultural systems are cleared to grow them, agrofuel monocultures actually increase the global emissions they are meant to reduce.

In contrast to civil society's and many scientists' alarm and the increasing skepticism expressed by many political decision makers, a number of governments have been calling for the discussion on agrofuels to be postponed until COP10 or beyond. Never before have there been so many square brackets, the symbols of disagreement, at the CBD. All the text on agrofuels is within square brackets. It is vital for biodiversity that COP9 addresses agrofuels and shows the rest of the world that they are no answer to problems of energy security and climate change.

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For the views of the global organisation of smallholder farmers Via Campesina, contact ph: 003248688884

Global forests: Critical ecosystems for livelihoods and biodiversity

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.3

Forests are home to a large part of the planet's terrestrial biodiversity and include not only plants and animals but also the greatest diversity of human culture and languages.

Forests and particularly tropical forests are also critical to climate regulation, through the carbon they store, absorb and cycle. However vital this ecosystem is, it is being destroyed at an alarming rate, particularly in the South. The causes are many and vary according to the different countries and regions, but it is possible to discern direct and underlying causes of forest destruction.

Some of the main direct causes of deforestation are the substitution of forests by other activities (agriculture, cattle-raising, tree plantations, shrimp farming, etc.), industrial logging both legal and illegal, mining, oil exploitation, construction of large hydroelectric dams (which result in the flooding of extensive areas of forest).

Some of the underlying causes of deforestation are land allocation policies, development plans, road-building, the need to pay the external debt, policies imposed by international financial institutions, overconsumption in predominately Northern countries, the extensive international trade in tropical timber, as well as poor governance mixed with corruption.

Weak institutional capacity, ambiguous regulatory frameworks, lack of information and expertise, low levels of law enforcement and corruption, private land ownership, and conflicting economic objectives, including the rush to expand the production of agrofuels, have also been identified as key impediments in many countries.

Some countries are also heavily and unjustifiably reliant on protected areas as their main implementation tool, while rampant deforestation takes place on vast areas around those protected areas.

An independent analysis by 22 Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and NGOs in 22 different countries on the implementation of the Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity revealed that levels of knowledge and public information about the Programme of Work were low everywhere – sometimes shockingly so. Some country monitors even encountered key government officials who seem to be completely unaware of the Expanded Programme of Work. Public knowledge is minimal; and evidence of capacity-building meagre.

There are some clear success-stories of forest biodiversity conservation, especially on recognized Indigenous territories and lands, but Indigenous Peoples and local communities are still frequently excluded in forest related policy making and implementation processes.

To make matters worse, millions of hectares of disappeared forests are excluded from global deforestation figures. The reason is simple: the definition of forest.

A misleading definition of forests...

Since the FAO adopted a definition of forests that includes any combination of trees, industrial monoculture tree plantations managed to enter the scene under the guise of “forests”.

Far from any sensible equivalence with a rich ecosystem like the forest, the definition allows for the establishment of large-scale monocultures of alien -and often invasive- tree species with negative impacts on soil, water, biodiversity and livelihoods. According to this definition, a plantation of eucalyptus in Brazil, of acacias in Indonesia, of rubber trees in Cameroon are all considered to be “forests”. As a result, the destruction of the original native forest and its substitution by industrial monocultures is not counted as deforestation, because the area under “forest cover” has not changed.

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The Convention on Biodiversity now has a chance to put forests and biodiversity in harmony again by adopting a global, legal definition of forests that matches the sense of the general public in terms of forests being a biologically diverse and self-regenerating ecosystem providing both local and global benefits.

A globally harmonized definition of forests should ensure that policies and incentives to conserve forests benefit real forests and not socially and environmentally devastating tree monocultures. It should also acknowledge the role of forest and forest dependent communities, who for millennia have not only preserved the forests but have also used them in a sustainable way, carrying out productive activities without destroying them.

Those peoples are the missing factor in the mainstream concept of forest conservation, and their disregarding has been one of the major causes of the failure of most conservation schemes. It is therefore time for the CBD to promote a systemic approach to forest biodiversity conservation that puts community-based forest management at centre stage. Local forest and forest dependent communities not only have the necessary knowledge but also the need to sustainably use their forests. They should thus be the main actors for ensuring forest biodiversity conservation and the CBD has a major role in making this possible.

Most importantly, the governments should recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples to manage their own territories, as recognised by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and ensure their effective participation in forest policy development and implementation.

The in depth review of this programme of work at the 9th Conference of Parties is a unique opportunity for the conservation of world's forests. NGOs call on governments to further strengthen the implementation of the expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity, in particular in view of the 2010 biodiversity target and the need to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation.

Addressing the drivers of deforestation

As a first step towards strengthening efforts to preserve the world's forest ecosystems, governments should strongly enhance awareness of the Programme of Work as a tool to implement legally binding commitments under the CBD; and place it at the heart of national forest policies. They should also go beyond the establishment of protected areas.

In particular, governments facing high deforestation rates should implement deforestation moratoria and bans, which have proven to be highly successful policy measures in terms of halting forest biodiversity loss. They should identify and reverse perverse economic incentives, including financial and other support for agrofuel production, which is having a dramatic direct and indirect impact on forests and forest peoples. Instead, governments should promote positive incentives for sustainable use of forests, focused on community based forest management.

They should also identify any legal, social and economic reasons for corruption and set up measures to eradicate them. Governments should be particularly cautious about the privatization of land and market-based mechanisms, which could complicate and even frustrate effective forest law enforcement and the implementation of forest biodiversity policy in general.

Finally at COP 9 governments must make real commitments to combating illegal and unsustainable logging and related trade. This should include a commitment to adopt national laws prohibiting import, possession and sale of illegal timber, as well as a decision to develop a mechanism to halt the international trade in illegal timber by 2012.

Forests and climate change

Tropical deforestation accounts for approximately 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore the parties to the Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) have now initiated negotiations on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). However, the strong focus in the UNFCCC negotiations on capturing and storing greenhouse gases through market mechanisms holds a risk of the UNFCCC parties failing to acknowledge the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as well as the importance of protecting forest biological diversity. As a result, a future climate change agreement could become a perverse incentive for the CBD, instead of an agreement promoting synergies among the Rio Conventions.

At COP 9 governments must therefore point out the importance of the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities in all negotiations concerning their lands and ecosystems, including the international climate negotiations which could undoubtedly have major impacts on their livelihoods. Finally, governments must decide that the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be fully integrated in any future climate agreements.

The governments must also decide that protection of biodiversity, and hence the recommendations of the CBD, shall be fully integrated into future climate change agreements. Furthermore, the governments must decide to establish an ad hoc technical expert group or other mechanism with a mandate to develop recommendations on inclusion of biodiversity concerns. When establishing this expert group or other mechanism, governments must also ensure the funded participation of indigenous experts. The protection of biodiversity will in return increase the stability of the forests and other ecosystems, as well as the ability of ecosystems to resist climate change, and thereby secure storage of greenhouse gasses in the long term.

For further information:

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<http://www.wrm.org.uy/>

Global Forest Coalition - Dr. Miguel Lovera: miguel.lovera@globalforestcoalition.org ph: 0049 176 85012823.

Greenpeace - Martin Kaiser, Germany: mkaiser@greenpeace.de, ph: 0049 171 8780817

See also:

Independent monitoring of Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity by Indigenous Peoples and NGOs to be presented at COP9

<http://www.globalforestcoalition.org/img/userpics/File/publications/DraftsummaryIMRome.pdf>

An appeal to COP 9: Biodiversity with and for people

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/129/viewpoint.html#appeal>

Genetically Engineered Trees: A global threat to forests and peoples

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.4

Civil society organizations, social movements, Indigenous Peoples groups, farmers, foresters and scientists across the world are gravely concerned about the impacts of genetically engineered (GE or transgenic) trees. Representatives will be coming to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bonn, demanding an immediate global stop to the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment.

The release of GE trees poses a serious threat to global forest ecosystems and forest biodiversity. Their release is likely to irreversibly genetically contaminate native forest ecosystems, which will themselves become contaminants in an endless cycle. The potential effects of the release of transgenic trees include destruction of biodiversity and wildlife, loss of fresh water, desertification and salinisation of soils, collapse of native forest ecosystems, major changes to ecosystem and climate patterns, plus serious human health impacts. Rural and indigenous communities will bear the greatest burden of the negative impacts of transgenic trees. Despite these potential consequences, thorough risk assessments of GE trees have not been done.

Trees have evolved to produce large quantities of seed and pollen, often spread by wind. Claire Williams, a visiting professor at Duke University in the U.S, states: "...pollen and seeds from trees disperse without hindrance into their surroundings for many years. As seed and pollen production increase with the age and height of a tree, each year more seed and pollen travel progressively farther by a process known as long-distance dispersal." Pollen models created in 2004 by Duke University researchers demonstrate pollen from native forests in the southeast U.S. traveling in air currents for more than 1,200km into eastern Canada. Clearly, GE trees cannot be regulated solely at the national level, as transboundary contamination of native forests with transgenic trees and traits is virtually assured.

The main traits being engineered into trees include insect resistance, herbicide tolerance, reduced or altered lignin, faster growth and cold tolerance. Potential impacts on forests and ecosystems include: contamination with the insect resistance trait, affecting the food chain and disrupting forest ecosystems; contamination from low-lignin trees resulting in forest trees that cannot resist insects, disease or environmental stresses like wind; and escape of the faster growth trait leading to transgenic trees out-competing native trees and plants for light, water and nutrients. All of this is leading to biodiversity loss and disruption of ecosystems and even desertification.

Human health risks include, for example, increased exposure to hazardous chemicals, including herbicides that need to be applied to plantations of transgenic trees. Inhaling pollen or sawdust from trees that produce the bacterial Bt toxin to resist insects, may also harm human health.

In July 2005, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) concluded in their Review of Biotechnology in Forestry: "New biotechnologies, in particular genetic modification, raise concerns. ... It is very important that environmental risk assessment studies are conducted with protocols and methodologies agreed upon at a national level and an international level."

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At its March, 2006 Conference of the Parties (COP-8), the Convention on Biological Diversity made a decision recommending parties to take a precautionary approach with regard to GE trees.

The damaging effects of conventional industrial monoculture tree plantations are already well-documented and are being resisted around the world. The addition of transgenic tree plantations can only worsen existing problems. Due to the lack of credible risk assessment of transgenic tree release, the UN CBD must follow through on their decision to launch a thorough examination of the risks of transgenic tree release.

Given the serious situation of lack of knowledge, data and risk assessments combined with the threat to global forest ecosystems, a strong and binding international moratorium is the needed decision for COP 9.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

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Canadian Biotechnology Action Network - Lucy Sharratt, Canada, coordinator@cban.ca ph: 0049 176 85012823

Third World Network - Chee Yoke Ling, yokeling@myjaring.net, ph 86-13910071567

See also:

http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/stopgetrees_about.php

<http://www.econexus.info/ge-trees/> (GE tree information from 12 May 2008)

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/biotechnology.html>

<http://chrislang.org/category/ge-trees/>

http://globaljusticeecology.org/stopgetrees_partners.php (STOP GE Trees Campaign Partners)

Ocean Fertilization and Geo-engineering: Putting the brakes on extreme climate experiments

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.5

The Issue:

Spurred by new carbon trading markets, a set of extreme proposals to cool the climate are now becoming commercial reality. At CBD COP 9 governments must act to rein in geo-engineering projects, such as dumping nutrients in the ocean, before such schemes inflict serious ecological damage.

Background:

Geo-engineering, the large-scale alteration of the environment to 'fix' climate change, is now being pursued by a few scientists and small start-up companies exploiting the lack of international oversight. Private geo-engineering companies have raised millions of dollars to pursue a technique called 'ocean fertilization' (or 'Ocean Nourishment'). This involves dumping multi-ton quantities of iron, urea or other nutrients into the open oceans to encourage the growth of plankton. Last year an Australian company, Ocean Nourishment Corporation, attempted to carry out a geo-engineering project in the Philippines and a US company, Planktos Inc, set sail to dump iron particles near the Galapagos Islands. Both were stopped. Now a third company, Climos Inc of USA has announced its intention to carry out an ocean fertilization project within the next year. Scientists from Germany, India and Chile have also announced a similar intention. These proponents claim that human-induced plankton blooms will soak up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus slowing down climate change. In exchange they hope to sell voluntary 'carbon credits' to consumers.

What is at stake?

Commercial plans to experiment with the oceans have drawn widespread condemnation from many ocean scientists, national governments, climate experts, environmental groups, fisherfolks and indigenous communities. Ocean fertilization is not a proven method to reduce climate changing gases in the atmosphere and may, instead, cause major changes to marine ecosystems – altering food webs, creating toxic tides or deoxygenated seas – changes which could, in some cases, be irreversible. Ultimately, this could even result in feedback changes to weather patterns.

The UN climate science body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has called geo-engineering proposals "largely speculative and unproven with the risk of unknown side-effects". Another intergovernmental body, the London Convention on Dumping of Wastes at Sea, has declared that large-scale ocean fertilization is not currently scientifically justified and could have negative impacts on the marine environment and human health. Many of the companies involved, however, claim to be outside of international law and are moving ahead with their plans.

Groups concerned with climate change are concerned that the false techno-fix options of geo-engineering will distract political and commercial will away from reducing carbon dioxide emissions at source. Such groups also point to the distorting influence of carbon trading markets.

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Contact the coordinator of the CBD Alliance, Jessica Dempsey, by email: jdempsey@interchange.ubc.ca or by phone in Bonn: 0049 176 8505 5783.

What will happen at CBD COP 9?

At COP9 the issue of how to prevent ocean fertilization experiments from harming marine ecosystems will be under negotiation in both the climate change discussion and the item on marine and coastal biodiversity. Governments from Africa, Asia and Latin America have indicated that they will push for a moratorium on these dangerous experiments. Civil society groups will be asking all governments to apply the precautionary principle and ensure that no geo-engineering experiments are carried out in the open oceans.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

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Greenpeace – Saskia Richartz, Belgium, saskia.richartz@diala.greenpeace.org , ph +32 495 290 028

USC Canada - Susan Walsh, Canada - swalsh@usc-canada.org ph: +1 6132919793

The Ecosystem Approach: How governments can learn from Indigenous Peoples and local communities

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.6

In government practice, we often see policies responding to threats to biodiversity. But could the relationships between humans and biodiversity be one that is not simply about reacting to species extinctions or loss? The Ecosystem Approach could be the answer.

The Ecosystem Approach has the potential to transform our efforts to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity. Practised for thousands of years by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, the CBD has now embraced it too and made it pivotal to its programmes of work. But unless Indigenous Peoples and local communities are central to its development and management it will fail, taking with it one of the few opportunities to pull the world's ecosystems back from the brink. Civil Society Organisations are therefore calling on COP9 to make their participation a priority.

The Ecosystem Approach takes as its starting point the fact that an ecosystem is one entity. Recognising that in an ecosystem all living and non-living parts, including human beings, are interdependent, it looks not just at certain species or at a part of the ecosystem, but instead approaches it as one functional unit. It does not focus merely on conservation, but instead places human needs at the centre of biodiversity management. By doing so it makes a strong link between the livelihoods of people and better management of the Earth's ecosystems.

For many Indigenous Peoples and local communities the Ecosystem Approach is simple logic. They understand and respect the fact that all parts of the natural environment need the other parts. They know that a balance must be maintained between conservation and exploitation. The ecosystem is their source of living and sustainable use is key to the sustainability of their communities. Recent research, among which several long-term case studies carried out in three continents, highlights how indigenous communities naturally approach the ecosystem as a whole. For example, indigenous fishermen in Suriname, South America, documented how the seeds of certain tree species falling into the creeks and rivers were needed by certain species of fish for food. They protect these trees because they know them to be part of the food web.

The Parties acknowledge that most ecosystems are very complex and dynamic, and that there is still a lack of complete knowledge and understanding of how they work. Indigenous Peoples and local communities have the knowledge and experience of the ecosystems that they have lived in and used for generations. Their information on the functions of the world's ecosystems and their guidance on adaptive management, is vital.

The ecosystem approach has been adopted by the CBD as its primary framework for action and it should guide Parties when implementing the various work programmes under the Convention. This is very important for Indigenous Peoples and local communities because when it is applied properly, their rights and needs are recognised, and their knowledge and management practices are central to it.

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However, only 12% of the Parties have effectively applied the principles and guidance of the ecosystem approach. Review has shown that there is not only ineffective participation of those directly affected, but also failure to use existing knowledge, as well as lack of decentralized and integrated management. Principles are in place, but they are not translated into practice. The Parties also acknowledge that the “clearest applications of the ecosystem approach occur at the local level, where communities can participate more directly”. That barriers are preventing this is of grave concern. Such failure is extremely damaging to biodiversity and society, especially Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

It is now time to move from Ecosystem Approach theory to practical implementation. The necessary knowledge is readily available. With the help of Indigenous Peoples and local communities Parties can build their own capacity to understand, interpret and apply the ecosystem approach. In Bonn, Parties must prioritize the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in both the refinement and implementation of the ecosystem approach.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

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Forest Peoples Programme - Caroline de Jong, The Netherlands: carolinedejong@versatel.nl - ph: 0031-6-24286489

See also:

CBD definition: <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/>

CBD description: <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/description.shtml>

CBD Online Sourcebook <http://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/sourcebook/>

In-depth review of the application of the ecosystem approach, discussed at SBSTTA 12; UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/12/2, para 11, 27 and 33 on EA application by governments, available at <http://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SBSTTA-12>.

Case studies focusing on the knowledge and sustainable use of ecosystems by indigenous communities in three continents are summarised in: Marcus Colchester, Forest Peoples, Customary Use and State Forests: the case for reform. Draft paper presented to the 11th Biennial Congress of the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP) Bali, Indonesia, 19-23 June 2006, available at http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/conservation/10c_overview_iascp_jun06_eng.pdf

Ownership on life: Ending biopiracy and respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.7

The principles contained in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must serve as the starting point for the Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) deliberations and as minimal standards for a legally binding regime that prevents biopiracy and secures the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities over their territories, genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) must fully participate in these negotiations. The COP9 documents clearly show that current regulations and practices in place have not been able to stop biopiracy. Especially user countries have failed to implement the relevant provisions of the CBD.

The international regime should, inter alia:

- protect the inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities;
- guarantee free and prior informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and countries of origin;
- establish the right to deny access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge;
- define conditions and processes that guarantee truly fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from any access;
- require a new free and prior informed consent when the use or user of the genetic resource or traditional knowledge changes;
- ensure participation of all rightholders in order to prevent ABS-agreements from causing conflicts between communities sharing same genetic resources and traditional knowledge;
- establish a multilateral mechanism for benefit sharing of genetic resources and traditional knowledge originating in more than one country or outside national territories such as the High Seas or Antarctica;
- ensure that legal systems in user countries guarantee that users comply with Prior Informed Consent (PIC) and Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT) rules;
- ensure that legal systems in user countries enable countries and rightholders providing genetic resources and traditional knowledge to enforce their rights in user countries;
- ensure that subsequent to the negotiated access the genetic resources and traditional knowledge can be kept free of intellectual property rights that restrict further access, thus preventing patenting life forms;
- contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

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A certificate of compliance will be an important tool to ensure compliance with, inter alia, PIC, MAT and national ABS legislation. It secures transparency concerning the origin of the genetic resource, the traditional knowledge and the negotiated restrictions of use. We welcome the report of the meeting of the group of technical experts in this respect. Such a certificate can only be effective if it is compulsory and supported by respective provisions in IPR-laws and market approval concerning genetic resources, derivatives and the associated traditional knowledge.

The ecological debt of mainly industrialized countries should be recognized. Biopiracy contributed to this debt and is still a major problem. To compensate for this ecological debt, industrialized countries should provide sufficient funding and other support to enable developing countries to conserve and sustainably use their biodiversity.

(This briefing is based on a joint statement produced by many civil society groups present at the 5th Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit Sharing, Montreal, Canada, November 2007)

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

Third World Network - Chee Yoke Ling, Malaysia: yokeling@myjaring.net - ph: 0086-13910071567

Berne Declaration – Francois Meienberg, Switzerland: food@evb.org - ph: 0041 79 796 76 12

See also:

link to COP-7 decisions: <http://www.cbd.int/decisions/cop-07.shtml?m=COP-07&id=7756&lg=0>

Protected Areas: Meeting the 2010 Target?

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.8

There is no sign that the ambitious goal of stemming the loss of biodiversity by 2010, is going to be met. This is despite governments agreeing to a comprehensive agenda on Protected Areas, at the 7th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in 2004.

Biodiversity remains under serious threats from extractive and other industries such as logging and mining, new processes such as the promotion of agrofuels, and other such factors, which also have serious impacts on the survival and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Parties should fully recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in protected area policies, programmes and projects, and ensure their full and effective participation.

Ironically, some of the most effective means of reducing biodiversity loss are contained in the CBD agenda on protected areas, but remain largely neglected. This includes, especially, the recognition of the practices of indigenous and local communities in community conserved areas (CCAs) and their lands and territories, and through the involvement of such communities in the establishment and management of government protected areas.

Civil society organizations recognize that there has been some progress on implementation of the CBD's Programme of Work on protected areas, but their concerns remain on the following points:

1. Many protected area programmes continue to undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in implementation and in their long-term management. The rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should now guide the implementation of the protected area agenda. Governments should fully recognize the rights of indigenous and local communities in PA systems, and ensure their full and effective participation.
2. Governments should place bans on industrial and commercial extractions of resources in areas of biodiversity importance, yet most governments continue to allow such activities. Such bans would move us closer to reaching the 2010 target.
3. Indigenous and local communities have been managing and protecting biodiversity for millennia. In some countries, communities have stronger knowledge of ecosystems and biodiversity than those in government charged with conservation, forestry and biodiversity. More attention needs to be given to non-literate expertise by local and indigenous peoples and establishing partnerships between conservation NGOs, States and InLCs. Information Communication Technologies and Geo-spatial Information technology can bridge current gaps.
4. Around protected areas, there is continued degradation of the landscape. Protected areas should be considered one of the many tools available for the protection of biodiversity, and more emphasis placed on the sustainable use of biodiversity across the planet. In this light, the Life Web initiative being launched by the German government at COP9, should be aimed at achieving all the three objectives of the Convention (conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits) in and around protected areas. It should furthermore be implemented in accordance with the ecosystem approach, and be available for direct financing of community and civil society initiatives of a range of governance types of protected areas, including community conserved areas.

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5. Protected area schemes and poverty and livelihood schemes in countries are still de-linked, creating artificial shortages of finances for conservation and driving governments towards private sector funding and management of protected areas, even further undermining rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. There is a need to link various programmes of the government, democratize protected area planning and implementation, and support protected areas as the 'commons' that are critical for ecological security and for the livelihood security of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
6. So-called 'innovative mechanisms' for financing protected areas such as carbon and biodiversity offsets are of serious concern as they provide an escape route to those most responsible for the destruction of the planet, and as they are often used by governments to continue carrying out activities in violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Governments and donors must commit to putting in the funds needed from public funds first and foremost, and where relying on other innovative mechanisms, to ensure ecological sustainability and the full respect of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

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Forest Peoples Programme - Maurizio Ferrari, UK: maurizio@forestpeoples.org - ph: 0044 7733478307

Contamination from genetically engineered organisms: No victim shall go uncompensated

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.9

The Genetic Modification Contamination Register Report 2007 exposes 39 new instances of crop contamination in 23 countries over the past year. Over the past ten years, the annual Register Report has recorded 216 contamination events in 57 countries. Who can be made accountable? How to prevent such damage?

Preventing damage, strictly speaking, means preventing releases of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the environment, and into our food chain. GMO-free regions are the preventive answer to GMOs. But still, GMOs are being released in large numbers. They are promoted by huge transnational corporations and powerful exporting countries. These interests claim that the World Trade Organization (WTO) protects them against trade barriers, such as denial of import due to environmental concerns.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety follows the precautionary principle, claims equal standing with the WTO, and establishes prior informed consent of importing countries, i.e. the right to say no to GMO imports.

Many negotiators and representatives from Indigenous Peoples organizations, social movements and civil society were and are fully aware of all the mutually reinforcing legal building-blocks needed for effective biosafety. But the biotechnology industry, the major grain exporting countries, US, Canada, Australia, Argentina, joined by Chile and Uruguay resisted these efforts. In the night of the final compromise in January 2000 some important biosafety building-blocks had to be sacrificed or were put on hold. This is why "Living Modified Organisms that are intended for direct use as food or feed, or for processing" had such ridiculously non-descript identification obligations (Article 18.2 a). This is why "Socio-economic Considerations" have such weak wording. This is why "Liability and Redress" (Article 27) has not been elaborated.

The 147 countries that are Parties to the Protocol (as was to be expected, not the US, Canada etc.) are indeed addressing these weaknesses. Many of them are finding it difficult because they have become producers and exporters of GMOs themselves. But it was possible to agree upon strict identification rules (Article 18.2). MOP 4 in Bonn will start putting life into socioeconomic considerations with biosafety (Article 26).

And liability? Without an international agreement, it would be very difficult to ensure that a victim is compensated. MOP 1 established a working group to elaborate rules and procedures for liability and redress to be presented at MOP 4 in 2008. This is now! The final proposal submitted by the working group after its fifth meeting in Cartagena in March is still full of unresolved contradictory options. Therefore, three days of informal emergency meetings were added prior to MOP 4. Will there be an agreement? No agreement is better than a bad one which would discourage stricter legal initiatives.

A good agreement would leave no victim uncompensated.

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Here are some of the elements needed:

- Legally binding agreement, at least in essential parts
- Wide definition of damage, including damage to environment, health, socio-economics, and traditional damage
- Extended time limits due to the nature of the damage
- Guarantee of financial security by the operator, in the form of insurance or funds
- Facilitated access to justice including public interest litigation
- Strict liability
- Reversal of the burden of proof
- A supplementary fund
- Right and obligation of the administration to intervene in cases of damage, to decide on remedial action and to reclaim the costs from the operator
- Special provisions on private international law, including on recognition and enforcement of judgements in other jurisdictions.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contacts on this issue will be available at COP9:

Third World Network - Lim Li Lin, Malaysia: lin@myjaring.net – ph: 0041788750084

Ecoropa - Christine von Weizsaecker, Germany: ph: 0049-228-9181033

See also:

Genetic Modification Contamination Register by GeneWatch UK and Greenpeace International
<http://gmcontaminationregister.org/>

MOP4 Annotated Agenda

<http://cbd.int/doc/meetings/bs/mop-04/official/mop-04-01-add1-en.pdf>

Liability and Redress negotiation status

<http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/bs/mop-04/official/mop-04-11-en.pdf>

Invasive Alien Species: From review to implementation

CBD Alliance Media Briefing No.10

Invasive alien species are commonly recognized as one of the top threats to biodiversity, with impacts on human health, local livelihoods and sustainable economies. Additionally, invasive species are frequently cited as being in the top three threats to biodiversity and are the number one cause of species extinctions on islands.

Invasive species are spreading around the world at an accelerating rate. Rapid increases in global trade and travel are enabling more and more animals, plants and diseases to be transported from their native environments into new territories. The economic impacts are already being felt with the estimated damage from invasive species worldwide totaling more than \$1.4 trillion – five percent of the global economy.

COP-9 provides a once in a decade opportunity to review all invasive species-related decisions taken to date. However, there are already concerns about the review's comprehensiveness. With only 30+ submissions by governments and other organizations and the fact that the CBD's scientific body (SBSTTA) did not provide input on the review, Parties will be arriving in Bonn with a new un-discussed text for the draft Decision. Amidst all the other issues to be discussed at the COP, this will only increase the burden on countries to fully consider the issue and its ramifications.

The draft Decision correctly identifies the critical need for guidance on actual implementation of COP decisions and acknowledges the need for additional financial resources to support this implementation, but governments in Bonn must also strengthen action on invasive species. They should call for Parties to renew their implementation efforts, while continuing to identify obstacles and capacity needs. They must recognize the role of regional organizations in catalyzing and supporting national efforts and call for further work to identify opportunities to enhance this work and to share lessons learned across regions.

Furthermore, since reliable information and data are critical for preventing the impact or introduction of invasive species, governments in Bonn should urge additional support and work to support the development of and access to data at the international, regional and national levels.

Finally, the COP must take action to address the ways that invasive species travel – their pathways. In Bonn, governments should prioritize a few key ways that invasive species move around the world, including through international trade. The CBD has already started soliciting guidance for animal invasives and should continue this process. Countries should also define a path forward to develop tools and guidance for:

- air travel – passengers, cargo, aircraft;
- hull fouling – crustaceans, algae and other organisms that cling to the hulls, seachests and other submerged areas of ships; and
- development assistance – funding and technical aid resulting in intentional or unintentional species introductions through agroforestry, biofuels, infrastructure development, or food aid.

For further information:

The following Civil Society contact on this issue will be available at COP9:

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