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ECO

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Submissions to ECO:
NGO representatives are invited to submit articles and announcements to ECO via the following:

- 1) e-mail: barbarag@elciafrica.org
- 2) labelled 3.5 diskette or written document. Drop off in box marked "ECO submission" at ELCI display area in the corridor.

Don't Marginalise the Drylands

Summary of the Eastern and Southern African Regional Biodiversity Forum on Sustainable Use of Drylands

Drylands have it rough. We think of them as the second-class citizens of land. We call them "marginal lands", "low potential", or "badlands". They rarely figure as important resources for a developing country in their natural state, even though they are among the most biodiverse areas of the world in terms of species per square metre, and they provide local and national food security. They also make a large contribution toward the production of key food items, such as meat. We treasure the wildlife that flourish in drylands, but we rarely seem to appreciate either the integrity of the whole landscape that supports them or the livelihoods of the people who have maintained this integrity for thousands of years.

Non-governmental organisations, other civil society stakeholders, and government representatives from Eastern and Southern Africa met in Mombasa in February this year to address the CBD programme of work on drylands. This is what they chose to bring to the attention of delegates at the conference of parties:

It is rural people who are ultimately the custodians of Eastern and Southern Africa's rich biodiversity, and drylands around the world. The programme of work should thus be "people-centered", in particular, "dryland-resident centered". Activity 7, the action-oriented activity, begins with a protected area approach, but the forum felt that the emphasis should be put on people and drylands living together.

In many dryland ecosystems in Africa, the lack of ownership and tenure has contributed immensely to the loss of

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biodiversity and degradation of these areas. Imposition of alien land tenure systems has expelled traditional communities from their ancestral lands. Ownership and appropriate tenure empowers communities to assume full control and management of drylands, enhancing the success of many community based natural resource management programmes.

The CBD secretariat has pointed to activities 4, and 8 a and b of the programme of work as those that address ownership and tenure issues. But activity 4 is a knowledge-building, not an action-oriented activity. The issues in relation to land tenure are well-known; more studies will not do much. IFAD, in particular, serves as a clearing-house of information on land tenure. Duplication is to be avoided.

Thus, activities 8 a and b may be among the most critical in the entire program of work, and deserve special effort and initiatives.

The forum saluted the recognition, in activity 9, of working through the promotion of alternative markets and incentive measures to direct flows of investment to drylands.

The sustainable management of drylands depends heavily on water, and wetland management in drylands. There is no clear, focused activity within the drylands program that relates to water, and the forum found this to be a serious omission: dryland biodiversity is inseparable from water management.

There was concern among the participants at the forum that a prejudice against drylands in their natural state is again finding form in the CBD programme of work on drylands, that dryland

biodiversity will likely yet again be relegated to its usual "important, but not really all that important" status. While their unique character will surely be acknowledged, it is uncertain whether discussions today will yield much practical support for the particular needs of dryland ecosystems.

Why is this?

For programmes to be supported by the CBD's funding body, they must show clear evidence of producing "global benefits". Most marine conservation projects can show global benefits because the oceans and seas, in great part, belong to the world community. Forest conservation is often justified on the basis of climate change: by conserving tropical forests, there is desperate hope that we may reverse, or

at least briefly slow down, global warming. But for drylands it is very difficult to show global benefits. They cover vast acreage and are home to significant numbers of people and a rich and diverse flora and fauna. But none of this, if conserved, will necessarily benefit people around the world equally.

Or will it?

As IUCN's Misael Kokwe notes, "One assumes that the criteria

of global benefits was adopted to safeguard against unlimited requests for fragmented actions all over the globe. Even if this were the case, however, one can argue that the earth is an aggregate of fragmented entities. It is as though I have a house, and I knock out a few bricks. I may say, it doesn't matter, it's just a small piece and I have the rest of my house. But if I carry on with this philosophy, knocking out a brick here and a roof tile there, suddenly the whole place will cave in."

Contrary to popular belief: in a square metre of grassland, there is an extraordinary diversity of life, between the grasses, the flowering herbs, the insects and grazing animals that visit, and the many many organisms that live in the soil. In a tropical rain forest, almost all the biomass is held in the leaves and stems. In a grassland, the roots go down into the soil for metres, and life as well extends down far into the ground. There are more species in a meter of arid grassland than in a meter of tropical rain forest, even if the forest is far more diverse over hectares.

Perverse Incentives — A Cause of Biodiversity and Livelihood Loss

From the ELCI Working Group on Alternative Trade

Agriculture forms the basis of Kenya's economy, income and food security — at both national and local levels. But there are many different types of agricultural land uses and practices, which have widely varying impacts on biodiversity (and on people's livelihoods). Many of Kenya's most vulnerable farmers survive because their farming systems are based on biodiversity — the mix of crops that carry them through drought and hard times, the resilience of local livestock breeds that are adapted to the harsh conditions of dry rangelands, the forests and woodlands that provide a source of food, fodder and cash when all other sources fail.

But the components of agricultural biodiversity, and the land and resource management practices that support it, are being lost. One of the most worrying trends in recent years, in terms of both biodiversity conservation and social development, has been the rapid spread of large-scale and commercial farming into Kenya's farmlands and rangelands. We have seen pastoralist populations being pushed into more and more marginal areas by a rising tide of crop farming, we see small-scale producers becoming increasingly pressurised by commercial companies and markets, and we see a devastating loss of the biodiversity that not just provides the basis of local livelihoods and security but also generates immense national and global benefits. These losses cost millions of dollars a year — in terms of lost earnings and employment, in terms of failed crop harvests, in terms of decreased livestock production, in terms of food aid expenditures, in terms of land degradation, in terms of extinct species, in terms of lost opportunities for future developments and applications ... and so on.

This raises an important question: if the loss of rangeland and farmland biodiversity is so devastating in social and economic terms, why is it occurring? One important reason for this has been the whole focus of national economic policies over the past decades. A great deal of time, money and effort has been expended in promoting "modern", arable, agriculture as the best and most proper land use. Even where it isn't, and where markets and prices have had to be artificially manipulated to make it so. Although now decreasing, billions of shillings of government budgets, tax-payers' money and donor funds have been spent on subsidising the

inputs (such as fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation infrastructure, research and market development) which support commercial agriculture. Land taxes have been set at lower rates for private agricultural land than either for extensive livestock ranching or for "conservation" land uses that include trees and wildlife. Modern farming technologies have been exempted from a wide range of taxes, and export crop production has been encouraged through the provision of special facilities for the retention of foreign exchange earnings. Traditional land uses, especially those which are based on biodiversity conservation, have found it hard to compete against these subsidies and preferential treatment.

Collectively, all these ways of manipulating the profitability of "modern" agriculture (or, alternatively, of subsidising biodiversity loss) are termed Perverse Incentives. These are incentives that encourage biodiversity loss, and result in the expenditure of public (and private) money for purposes that are directly in conflict with the conservation, sustainable use and equitable benefit sharing objectives of the CBD. And, almost always, are in conflict with the secure and sustainable livelihoods of many of the poorest or most vulnerable sectors of society. They cost a lot of money — both directly, to governments and tax-payers, but also indirectly in terms of the environmental and livelihood costs they incur.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the Conference of the Parties will discuss, under Agenda Item 18.3, Incentive Measures. It is clear that, as part of these deliberations, such perverse incentives must be addressed. Several key organisations, at international, national and community levels have emphasised the importance of identifying, and dismantling, perverse incentives — not just in the agricultural sector, but in all those other sectors of economies that are manipulated at the cost of biodiversity, such as industry, trade, land, water, forestry and mining — and instead replacing them with positive incentives that actively encourage biodiversity conservation. Unless perverse incentives are put clearly onto the global biodiversity agenda, as a matter of urgency, there is little hope that biodiversity will be conserved, sustainably utilised or equitably shared, and rural livelihoods will continue to be undermined, throughout the world.

Announcements

- All delegates who have not received Nature Kenya/BirdLife International postcards on threatened birds of East Africa can obtain a set at the BirdLife international/Nature Kenya stand.
- During the CBD, there will be an NGO coordinating meeting each day at 9 am. in Tent 1.
- NGO representatives wishing to help put ECO together can meet at the Palm (or Jacaranda?) Room at Landmark Hotel, at 8:00 p.m. each evening. This venue is also available to NGOs wishing to hold meetings in the evenings to address upcoming COP agenda items
- Parallel conference:
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDICINAL PLANTS, TRADITIONAL MEDICINES & LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM, May 16-19, ICRAF, Lundgren Auditorium, co-covened by Environment Liaison Centre International and Global Initiative for Traditional Systems of Health.
- Lunchtime Workshop Wednesday May 17 1-3pm (room to be announcement). The Role of Strategic Planning in the Design of National Policy on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing.
- Upcoming topics of ECO, for which we invite articles, are:

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| Thursday, May 18: | Inland Water Biodiversity , Clearing House Mechanism |
| Friday, May 19: | Agricultural biodiversity, Identification, monitoring and assessment |
| Monday, May 22: | Alien species, Education and Public Awareness |
| Tuesday, May 23: | Global Taxonomy Initiative, Impact Assessment |
| Wednesday, May 24: | Biosafety and Biotechnology |
| Thursday, May 25: | Summary statements from NGOs on the operations of the Convention |

Bird Walks

Bird walks will be offered by Nature Kenya for COP attendees from 8:30-9:30 on Thursday, May 18 and on Tuesday and Thursday May 23 and 25 on UNEP campus. Meet at the main entrance to the UNEP building, in front of the business centre.

Saturday Morning, May 20, Special Bird Walk for CBD COP delegates and resident Nairobi birders. Meet at National Museum car park at 9:00.

Wednesday Bird Walk: Bird watching walks at sites in and around Nairobi. Meet at the National Museum car park every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Return about 12:30 p.m. Those who are not members can get temporary membership at Kshs 100 per birdwalk, payable on arrival at the car park.

Pot Luck Outing, May 21: Bird-watching outings held on every third Sunday of the month, i.e., 21 May. Bring a picnic lunch (most hotels can provide if asked), binoculars, field guides, etc. and meet at 9:00 am at the National Museum car park. Those attending decide on the venue - hence "Pot Luck"

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