

Gene Giants Brand Themselves as Climate Saviours

Hope Shand - ETC Group

After failing to convince a skeptical public to accept genetically engineered foods, biotech companies see a silver lining in climate change. The world's largest seed and agrochemical corporations such as Monsanto, BASF, DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer, and Dow – along with biotech partners such as Mendel, Ceres, and Evogene – are swamping patent offices around the world with claims on crop genes related to environmental stress tolerance, especially drought and extreme temperatures. These so-called “climate-ready” crops will be used to drive farmers and governments onto a proprietary biotech platform.

Corporations Grab “Climate Genes”

In a recent report, ETC Group (www.etcgroup.org) uncovered 532 patent documents (both issued patents and applications) corresponding to 55 patent families – all related to environmental stress tolerance in crops. Many of the patent claims extend not just to “abiotic” stress tolerance in a single engineered plant species, but also to substantially similar genetic sequences in virtually *all* engineered food crops. The corporate grab extends beyond the U. S. and Europe – to



patent offices in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Mexico, and South Africa.

The Gene Giants are also teaming up with philanthro-capitalists to introduce climate-tolerant traits in the developing world. Monsanto (the world's largest seed company) and BASF (the world's largest chemical firm), for example, are working with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and national research programs in Africa to develop drought-tolerant corn. The program is supported by a US\$47 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Monsanto and BASF have entered into

a colossal \$1.5 billion partnership to engineer stress-tolerant plants and will “donate” drought-tolerant transgenes to African researchers. Together, the two companies account for nearly half of the patent families related to engineered stress tolerance uncovered by ETC Group.

In the face of climate chaos and a deepening global food crisis, the corporate grab on so-called climate-tolerant genes is business as usual. Governments must respond urgently to strengthen farmer-based breeding and conservation programs and the development of on-farm genetic diversity. They must also adopt policies to facilitate farmers' access to seeds and germplasm and eliminate current restrictions (including intellectual property and trade regimes).

While monopoly control of crop genes is always a bad idea, in the midst of a global food crisis and a rapidly changing climate, such control is unacceptable. Patented gene technologies will concentrate corporate power, drive up costs, inhibit independent research, and further undermine the rights of farmers to save and exchange seeds.

UN criticizes genetically engineered crops in Indian Agriculture

This week the UN-committee for human rights criticised the use of GM in agriculture and demands urgent measures to protect farmers from dependency on multinational corporations. Exact text below.

“The Committee is deeply concerned that the extreme hardship being experienced by farmers has led to an increasing incidence of suicides by farmers over the past decade. The Committee is particularly concerned that the extreme poverty among small-hold farmers caused by the lack of land, access to credit and adequate rural infrastructures, has been exacerbated by the introduction of genetically modified seeds by multinational corporations and the ensuing escalation of prices of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, particularly in the cotton industry.”

Who is implementing the Forest PoW?

Miguel Lovera, Global Forest Coalition

Over the past 20 months, the Global Forest Coalition, an international coalition of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, has conducted an independent monitoring of the implementation of the CBD's Expanded Programme of Work on forest biological diversity in 22 countries. The final summary of these national reports is contained in a publication called "Forests and the CBD", which will be discussed **today at 13:15 at a side event in the Maritim Room.**

The main findings of the monitoring process can be summarized as follows:

- There is an acute lack of awareness of the CBD Expanded Programme of Work on forest biodiversity at the national level. There is an imperative to put this programme of work, and the ecosystem approach, at the heart of national forest programs. We urge the Parties to not to allow this Expanded Programme of Work be diluted by the priorities of other organizations like UNFF and the World Bank. We are

particularly concerned by the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility which threatens to severely undermine the financial mechanisms of the CBD and the FCCC, and we share the concerns expressed by the G77 at a recent meeting of Parties to the FCCC in Bangkok in this regard.

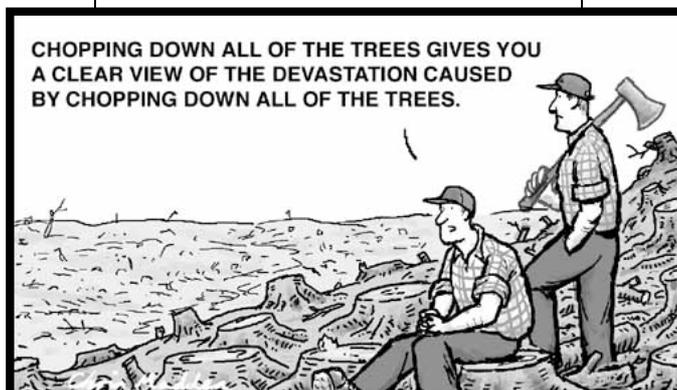
- There are some clear success stories of forest conservation, especially in Indigenous lands and territories, so Indigenous Peoples should be able to participate fully and effectively at all levels in the elaboration and implementation of forest policies.

- The country reports noted that market-based mechanisms and the privatization of forests undermine the good governance and effective law enforcement so desperately needed to

combat deforestation.

- Agrofuels are already having a devastating impact on forests in many countries, directly or indirectly, and we fully support the call of other NGOs and IPOs for an immediate moratorium on all kinds of support for agrofuels.
- The lack of a clear definition for forests has led to a rapid direct and indirect replacement of natural forests by monoculture tree plantations, especially here in Europe. We urge Parties to take the lead in developing a clear definition of forests that excludes these monocultures.

More than 100 forest species are being lost per day to deforestation and forest degradation worldwide. This forum is in a unique position to halt this terrifying trend by calling on countries to ban deforestation. This, along with targeting the underlying and direct causes of forest loss and degradation, are moral imperatives for this forum.



2010 Target, Protected Areas, and Life-web

The world is trusting protected areas to conserve its biodiversity. We know, however, that protected areas cannot, by themselves, counteract the destructive industrial and market forces active across the landscape. We also know that protected areas have displaced and impoverished people and even neglected or crushed the unique conservation capacities of indigenous peoples and local communities. The CBD Parties designed a Programme of Work on Protected Areas in 2004 that attempted to remedy this. But its implementation is disappointing --- in particular in tackling industrial and market threats, and moving towards more democratic governance, participation, equity and benefit-sharing.

For instance, the oldest types of protected areas – indigenous territories and community conserved areas – are barely being acknowledged, let alone supported by national governments. Such recognition and support could possibly

double the area under effective conservation across the world. Participation in managing state-run protected areas, as co-managers on an equal basis, also remains poor in most countries. And protected areas continue to negatively affect community livelihoods and violate the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

In many countries biodiversity in general and protected areas in particular continue being sacrificed for infrastructure, mining, dams, industrial fishing and aquaculture, agrofuels, and other such projects.

All these issues could have been resolved with more meaningful and effective implementation of the Programme of Work. Countries must renew their efforts towards this. We demand that Parties provide political and financial support to implement the Programme of Work on

PA in its entirety, and not selectively as has happened so far.

The German government's Life Web initiative can be a step in the right direction, if it helps tackle the key industrial and commercial threats to protected areas, and allies itself with the indigenous and local communities of the world to further innovative forms of conservation that respect their rights and cultural diversity.

The 2010 target currently seems out of reach. Parties to the Convention may wish to ask themselves: how much of this failure is because they have neglected the key threats to protected areas, and the rights of affected indigenous peoples and local communities? And what will they do to alter this?

Addressed to WG I behalf of several civil society organisations, by: Chandrika Sharma, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers Ashish Kothari, Kalpavriksh, India

Stocks down on Thursday

Saskia Richartz and Richard Page, Greenpeace

Stocks were down on Thursday, with four-fifths of fish stocks outside safe limits and much of marine wildlife unprotected. Recent decades have seen massive increases in global fishing, spurring drastic declines in global fish stocks and significantly impacting marine diversity. In particular, the most sought after stocks are disappearing at an alarming rate, with top predators down 90% from 1950 levels.

Late-night discussions on Thursday were unable to halt this general trend. Despite having agreed on the need to invest in creating a global network of marine protected areas and marine reserves, the global community has so far failed to act in sufficient time to meet its own targets. Had governments spent less time counting brackets and negotiating word-by-word, perhaps they could have been successful?

The oceans are struggling to cope under the influence of human activities: fast expanding fishing, mining, coastal development and shipping all contribute. Add to this the unpredictable effects of a changing global climate and the

outlook is dire for oceans. Leading analysts predict these changes will profoundly affect coastal communities around the world leading to mass unemployment and food shortages.

The situation in the Pacific is representative of this common trend. There are unknown numbers of large-scale industrial fishing vessels scooping up vast amounts of tuna in the Pacific.

Asset stripping by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is also rampant, with Pacific Island Countries having only limited means for patrolling their vast waters in the Pacific Ocean. On the high seas, the resources necessary to monitor and control fishing activities adequately are even more limited.

The global oceans management crisis is fuelling public outcry worldwide and will come to a head during the coming days in Bonn. All eyes are on the contracting Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is tasked with halting the global creature crunch and sharp downturn in fish stocks. Come May 30th, 2008, the world will know whether governments are willing to walk the talk and protect marine biodiversity beyond their borders, or whether decision-makers fall back on the convenience of empty rhetoric.



Addressing hunger and food security: conserving agro-biodiversity locally

Eduardo Aguilar

A lot has been said about the “current” food crisis: the effects of global warming on crops and the lack of measures in place to address food security. But not enough has been said about the alternatives small holders around the world have been implementing to combat hunger and guarantee a growing diversity of seeds for future generations and thus increasing food sovereignty.

Such is the case with a group of Mesoamerican farmers working under the umbrella of a Participatory Plant Breeding program, in close collaboration with scientists from different agricultural technology institutes and universities. Through the last 8 years, the program has proven successful, in the sense that

farmers have successfully bred several new varieties of maize, beans and sorghum from segregating materials according to their own criteria of selection. This has allowed them to learn breeding techniques and to look for traits they prefer, instead of being driven by the market or seed companies’ wants. For some, this has also meant a new entrepreneurial endeavor, as the seeds struggle to get into regional markets.

COP9 has the unique opportunity to address the growing food crisis in grains by taking actions involving other intergovernmental agencies (i.e. FAO) and not simply noting --but committing to-- the “conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through demonstrated

good practice(s) in the management of agricultural biodiversity” (UNEP/CBD/COP/9/1/Add.2), such as participatory plant breeding.

The program in Mesoamerica has given farmers not only seeds but also the ability to improve staple food varieties. In addition, it recognizes the essential role they play and puts smallholder agriculture back into the production chain -- critical in addressing rural development in the South and to achieving food security.

Information on the program www.programa-fpma.org.ni (available in Spanish)

Notes from the COP

GM Trees Moratorium Defended by Liberia and Switzerland

Liberia, speaking for the Africa Group with Kenya, has support to continue their call for a suspension of any releases of genetically modified trees, following a strong intervention by Switzerland.

Canada eliminated the African proposal in their text proposal. Without blinking, Canada intervened directly following Liberia's reiteration of their position for a moratorium, and ignored this option (as did the Secretariat in their proposed text).

In a squashed room with standing-room only, Parties now move with 2 bracketed texts on GM trees - one with a moratorium and one without.

As all Parties are aware, NGOs and Indigenous peoples speaking here are demanding that Parties to the CBD protect our global forests from GM transboundary contamination.

8j PIC Victory: N.D. Bracket approves

PIC is a many splendoured thing! Yesterday proved it. After 8 years of struggle with Canada, Australia [and on odd occasions New Zealand] the gang of 3 gave up [well mostly] with Australia demonstrating that the administration has in fact changed and voluntarily lifting the brackets on PIC. As the room burst into applause, Dr. N.D. Bracket was observed falling off his chair and loudly singing Waltzin Matilda. But its PIC... You know... PRIOR INFORMED CONSENT... a cornerstone of the right to self-determination that enables indigenous peoples to decide for themselves what they want to do through processes they deem appropriate [and live with the consequences].

Will the world come to an end? Will the sky [, as appropriate,] fall [on Canada]? No, but perhaps now we can FINALLY get on with working out how to make PIC work and provide actual real flesh and blood people[s] with choices about what to do

with their knowledge, their resources and their futures.

Given the tendency of some Parties to behave like complete [*]ICKS there is still room for outbreaks of stupidity. But let us celebrate this shift and give thanks where it is due. So, thank you EU for making PIC your own and sticking with it. We share your view. Thank-you to the many other Parties (i.e. almost everyone) who have stuck up for PIC. Now that the PIC war, subject to occasional skirmishes, seems to be over, it's time to Party. So, Australia, New Zealand and [, as appropriate,] Canada have a beer on us. We will be happy to join you in dancing while the earth is turning and our beds are burning. It's taken a while but perhaps now fairs fair and we look forward to you paying your share.

Drink and be merry Australia [subject to national legislation]!

'Shareholders' help industry to celebrate biodiversity

Today, the 6 largest biotech corporations, supported by associations like the ICC and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, organised a side event to 'celebrate biodiversity'. The Small Shareholders Initiative (TSSI) of these companies interrupted the "free lunch," to express their happiness about profits made this year, and the clever way these corporations, like Bayer, Monsanto, Chiquita and Syngenta, have managed to get away with bribery, producing large-scale pollution, patenting seeds, and financing paramilitaries.

Below is a statement from the 'TSSI':

“The Small Shareholders Initiative’ (TSSI) are very glad about the important issues we have to report on behalf of the International Profitdiversity Day today:

Business gets 220.000 US \$ to support companies in their work at the CBD. This means that we can give our profits to the shareholders and still make people believe that we work for biodiversity.

During the high level meeting Thursday May 29, business rightly gets a full hour to present its ideas. All other stakeholders together have to share the other hour. Afterwards all delegates are invited, as part of the official program, by business for a lunch. Another possibility to make the delegations do what we want. Hear hear!“

Via Campesina:

No agrodiversity without farmers!

This years' celebration of the international day for biological diversity had as a focus “biodiversity and agriculture“.

During a message by UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon, the ceremony was disrupted by the rolling down of two huge banners from the top balcony. "No Agrodiversity Without Farmers" and "Nature for people, not for business" were its messages. Shouts and clapping from the floor signaled to the activists that many supported them.

This action was to express that it is not acceptable that agricultural biodiversity is discussed without taking into account farmers voices. Though la Via Campesina had asked several times to present the positions and proposals of peasants and small-scale farmers on the issue, it was refused. Meanwhile, the secretariat of the CBD is proposing to offer 220000 USD to business to enhance the participation of corporate interests.

Agricultural business as usual

International Biodiversity Day was celebratory, but the negotiations on agricultural biodiversity did not give much reason for hope. After the applause for the IAASTD presentation was over, the parties in the Contact Group met last night decided not to welcome, but only to take note of the IAASTD report, and relegated it to “a useful tool”. Although civil society has called for no more “failures as usual”, the food crisis was not a topic. Parties fought over whether the ecological footprint would be a good indicator for the sustainability of agriculture or not (still bracketed).

ECO is published by the civil society community at many International Environmental Convention negotiations. It is currently being published at the ninth Conference of the Parties (COP-9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Bonn, Germany coordinated by the CBD Alliance. The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organisations, unless otherwise expressed. **SUBMISSIONS:** Welcome from all civil society groups. Email to jkrowe@ucsc.edu and jdempsey@interchange.ubc.ca ECO thanks Project “COP 9 preparation” supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funds of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Swedbio, and Hivos-Oxfam Novib Biodiversity Fund.



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