

# The Bonfire of Biodiversity: fuelling the food crisis

*Nori Ignacio, Searice & Patrick Mulvany, Practical Action*

Despite valiant efforts by some countries at this COP, agricultural biodiversity - the basis of livelihoods and life on Earth - will continue to haemorrhage. As happened in 1974, the combination of energy hikes, commodity shortages and speculation, has created a crisis. This is the reason why Ban Ki-moon, Lula and Sarkozy will be among the many leaders who will be in Rome next week to participate in the high level conference on world food security hosted by FAO.

This crisis is also, however, an opportunity for the powerful to push through top-down agricultural intensification for food, feed and fuel, with more chemical inputs, accelerated science and technology programmes, and a rapid conclusion of the Doha Development Round. Agribusiness will benefit.

The leaders in Rome will note the impacts of climate change, agrofuels and other threats - and the need to ensure these do not affect food security - but they will not resist the quick fix solutions that destroy agricultural biodiversity. The small-scale farmers, livestock keepers, fisherfolk and Indigenous Peoples who feed the world and sustain the biosphere, will likely lose out.

Biodiversity will be sacrificed on the altar of profit.

Governments cannot plead ignorance. They been informed by consistent statements from civil society organisations and social movements calling for more biodiversity-based agriculture, localised food systems, food sovereignty and the realisation of the rights of farmers and other food providers to their seeds, livestock breeds,

land and waters - free of the proprietary grasp of corporations. Governments have also recently approved the findings of the World Bank /UN assessment of agriculture - the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD).

In the words of the IAASTD Director Bob Watson, reporting on the assessment

## No Quick Fixes!



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at a COP Side Event last week, *"Business as usual is not an option... Agriculture, with farmers making up half of the world's total labour force, 1.8 billion people, and caring for 38% of the Earth's land surface, must be part of the solution to [sustaining] biodiversity."*

Farmers and other food providers must, therefore, be drivers of biodiversity conservation through sustainable use, using more agroecological biodiversity-based methods that defend all dimensions of agricultural biodiversity.

Civil Society is watching and informing the wider public: those who are undermining biodiversity and the security of food supplies will be made accountable. In their Statement on the world food emergency, published last week on International Biodiversity Day (see

[www.ukabc.org/foodemergency/calltoaction.htm](http://www.ukabc.org/foodemergency/calltoaction.htm)), Civil Society called on the Human Rights Council to investigate those who threaten the Right to Food. They also stressed the need for a UN-backed, inclusive, long-term Commission to solve the generation-long food emergency: **no quick fixes!**

Biodiversity and the findings of the IAASTD could be easily forgotten in agribusiness' rush to profit from the food crisis... unless in the dying hours of negotiations, parties strongly endorse the words of the African Region at the High Level Segment. Referring especially to agrofuels, Africa called for development that *"does not undermine other central priorities such as food security or threaten biodiversity and ecosystems which are the best guarantee that humanity has for the future of life on Earth."*

# RUTSCHGEFAHR!!

## The World Bank and the Big Biodiversity Offset

Simone Lovera, Global Forest Coalition

"Rutschgefahr" is a German expression you find in places like the Bonn subway, warning of a slippery slope. In her article in ECO 7, Antje Lorch warns that biodiversity offsets put us on a slippery slope by providing potential incentives for policy makers to accept biodiversity destruction elsewhere in exchange for funding their own biodiversity initiatives.

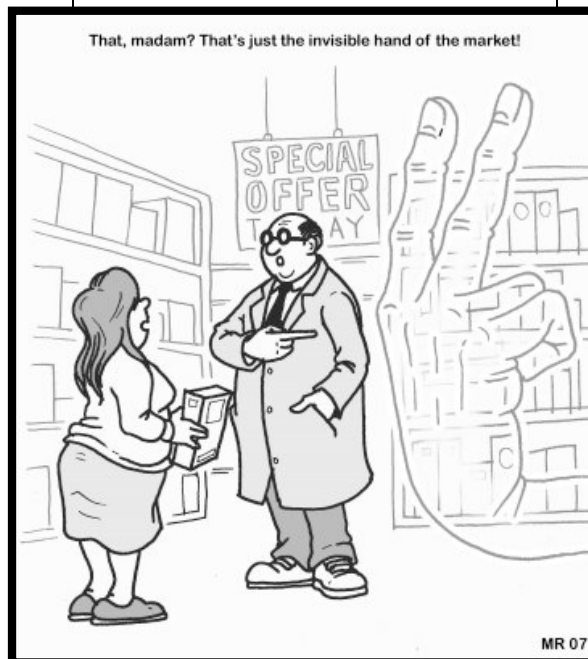
The World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility is a classical example of such dynamics. The main purpose of this facility is to prepare countries to "sell" their deforestation efforts in a possible post-2012 carbon market. The fact is, however, that including forests in the carbon market will mean that the net carbon savings from reduced deforestation will be zero, as the reduced emissions will be compensated for by increased emissions in the North. After all, the principle of offsetting implies that there is no net contribution to environmental problems. Another potential problem with biodiversity offsetting shows itself in the carbon market as well: The victims of climate change, for example, will not necessarily be the same people benefiting from the offset. In fact, there is a major risk they will be the main victims of both climate changes and the offsets that are supposed to compensate for this climate change.

Indigenous Peoples, and women -- two major groups particularly

vulnerable to climate change -- have often been negatively impacted by wrongly-imposed forest protected areas. With less political and economic bargaining power, and less officially recognized titles to land, women and Indigenous Peoples are already losing out in the big REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries) all over the world. No wonder these groups are persistently expressing their strong skepticism about REDD, including at the recent so-called consultation meetings the World Bank organized with Indigenous Peoples. It should be noted that the Latin American consultation meeting was rejected by the participants as they did not agree with the methodology used: two full days of World Bank explanations about the benefits of their facility followed by

some inconclusive discussions amongst themselves. A comment by one World Bank representative is representative of the World Bank's approach towards consulting people: "How do you mean you do not agree with me? How can I go back home after three days of consulting with Indigenous Peoples and report to my boss that you still do not agree with me?"

But there is money to be made, so who cares about equity? The financial interests at stake for the World Bank are massive: It is estimated they will bank an estimated 18% on administration fees for every grant channeled through their facility. Happily, the developing countries are slowly realizing that this new offset experiment will not be very beneficial to them, as money can only be spent once, and if donors give it to the World Bank, they will not give it to the financial mechanisms of the Rio Conventions. At a recent meeting of the Parties to the Climate Convention in Bangkok, the G77 rightfully expressed their concern that the new World Bank carbon finance initiatives undermined the governance structures of the FCCC itself. And with the latest World Bank initiatives in the field of forests in the Congo Basin having violated almost every guideline and operational policy the World Bank has ever written for itself, it is high time governments stop asking the fox to tend their hens.



"With so much at stake, Squirrel joins the call to 'suspend any release of genetically modified trees'"

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The Federal Ministry  
for the Environment,  
Nature Conservation  
and Nuclear Safety

# Making the CBD work

*Christoph Bail, Senior Fellow UNU-IAS and Martin Kaiser, Greenpeace*

As has been reiterated at this COP, CBD implementation on the ground is slow. This is because: few of the provisions of the Convention are legally binding and enforceable; awareness of biodiversity's importance for sustainable development and poverty elimination is low; changes in production and consumption patterns face strong resistance from economic actors; political leaders have so far given little priority to the Convention except for the adoption of the 2010 target at the WSSD Summit in Johannesburg; capacities in most countries are low; scientific information is incomplete and badly communicated; funding is inadequate; and the provisions of the CBD have hardly been integrated into other policy areas such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, development planning, trade, tourism, transport, energy and development cooperation.

Most worrisome is the seriously inadequate operation of the Convention. Decisions are prepared on the basis of ad hoc or SBSSTA meetings where government representatives have hardly any negotiating power except to insert tactical brackets into largely meaningless texts. There is no process for reviewing implementation. Finally, any single party can block decisions at their whim.

It should plain to everyone that the 2010 target will remain fantastical unless financing, the decision making process and the Convention's operation are considerably improved. The CBD may

be the most important Treaty after the United Nations Charter but we need a paradigm shift in governance if its potential is to be realized.

In December 2006 a German government funded Eminent Experts Group consisting of independent ex/government officials, representatives of indigenous and local communities and civil society met in Potsdam for 3 days. It came up with 50 recommendations to improve the implementation and operation of the Convention.

Their key recommendations were:

- a high profile report on social and economic costs of biodiversity loss caused by inaction ("Biodiversity-Stern- Report")
- turning National Biodiversity Strategies (NBSAPs) into living documents guiding decision making and shaping behaviour of actors on the ground
- integrating CBD through NBSAPs into other policy areas and implementing strategic environment impact assessment
- mobilise funding, e.g. through a G8+5 Action Plan, trust funds, earmarking of ODA, levies on tourism and charges for ecosystem services
- elimination of perverse and encouragement of positive incentives
- giving local & indigenous communities as well as civil society full access to the negotiations

- clarifying the rules of procedure so that qualified majority voting applies to decisions except for those that would amend the Convention
- establishing a Standing Committee to meet on a regular basis (eg. monthly) with the mandate to prepare COP decisions and Ministerial meetings as well as overlook policy review and compliance
- establishing an implementation review procedure under the Standing Committee
- mandating SBSSTA to organise the science-policy interface on biodiversity issues including information from natural and social science disciplines including with respect to impacts and policy solutions
- creating synergies among related MEAs including the FCCC and with the WTO in conformity with the principle of mutual supportiveness of international treaties
- fully integrating the CBD into the MDGs

We have only started addressing the changes needed if the Biodiversity Convention is to work properly. In order to properly prepare a decision on the operation of the Convention at COP 10, the COP Presidency could mandate an independent and credible research institute to elaborate options and recommendations improving the Convention's operation by the end of 2009.

## Offsetting Corporate Sins by Planting Trees at the Convention on Buying Diversity

*Rachel Smolker, GEJP*

The CBD is charged with establishing international policy for the protection of biodiversity, a mandate that could not be more important and urgent at this time. Yet the process has been diverted and usurped by corporate interests. The underlying assumption that market forces are the primary tools for addressing the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss now permeates all discussions concerning the future of life at the UN level. One of the ways in which corporations are trying to "offset" their biodiversity destruction is by planting trees, any kind of tree, anywhere.

PLANTING TREES sounds like a "green" idea, but it can be very destructive if it is the wrong tree in the wrong place! Alien invasive species, monoculture plantations and genetically engineered trees are an ecological disaster, and destroy rather than protect biodiversity.

THE ONE BILLION TREE CAMPAIGN of the UN Environment Programme is a classic example of public misinformation, as it promotes the massive planting of trees without properly informing the public that planting the wrong trees in the wrong

places does not help either biodiversity or the climate.

BIOFUELS are promoted as a means of protecting the climate. These markets are only satisfied by the rapid expansion of industrial monoculture plantations at the expense of biodiversity, people, food sovereignty and the climate. The debates within the EU on "sustainability criteria" remain unresolved with dawning awareness of the numerous indirect negative impacts. A rapidly escalating food crisis makes the fallacy increasingly obvious.

*Continued on page 4*

# Notes from the COP

## Today's Nomination for the Golden Chainsaw Award!

**BRAZIL** has once more been nominated. On **agrofuels**, Brazil has shown no willingness to move the agenda forward, after insisting that the scope of the issue should be extended to all energies, with the clear intention to create an impasse for other Parties. On **forests**, Brazil is resting on its past successes pretending that deforestation is under control, when in fact the rate of deforestation is going up again. On **climate**, Brazil has been the one country to oppose the establishment of an expert group (AHTEG) to discuss concrete measure for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. On **oceans**, Brazil is among those Parties slowing consensus on a CBD role in identifying high seas marine reserves.

## The problems of GE trees and industrial tree plantations are inseparable

### *World Rainforest Movement*

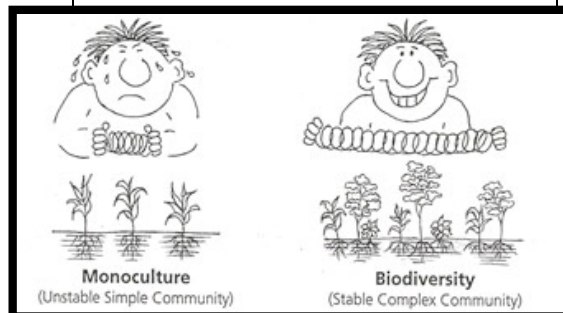
During a side event organized on GE trees and the negative impacts of monoculture tree plantations a member of the Public Research and Regulation Institute stated that GE trees and social problems caused by plantations have nothing to do with each other. But they do.

The genetic manipulation undertaken nowadays is aimed at consolidating and expanding monoculture tree plantations.

Here are examples of the research currently

being carried out:

- Faster growing trees. This will aggravate impacts on water resources which will likely mean even greater consumption of water by tree plantations.
- Genetic modification aimed at making trees more resistant to cold temperatures for the purpose of planting them in colder regions and at higher altitudes. This can lead to social and environmental impacts in areas that until now have not been affected by the impacts of current tree monocultures.



- Introducing genes that can increase tree resistance to the herbicide glyphosate, which would lead to even more serious social and environmental impacts as more herbicide will be sprayed, leading to the destruction of local flora and impacts on human health.

The primary point of carrying out research into GE trees is to facilitate their use in monoculture tree plantations. It is clear that GE trees will increase the social problems caused by monoculture tree plantations.

## **Convention on Buying Diversity continued...**

GE TREES for fast growing, fuel friendly cellulose production are promoted by industry as a "solution" to the climate and biodiversity crisis. The threat that GE trees

present to native forests are dire and once they occur, irreversible. Anyone genuinely concerned with conserving biodiversity would simply not consider permitting their release into nature. Yet there is resistance to adopting a ban on GE trees within the CBD process. Why? Because delegates' countries have vested economic interests.

## PLANTATIONS ARE NOT FORESTS!

Discussions of forest biodiversity are now focused on "sustainable management" of forest resources which often translates into the replacement of native forests with monoculture plantations of "purpose grown" trees. The impacts of these plantations have been well documented over the past twenty years. There is no question that these plantations are a form of industrial agriculture that leads to loss of native forests and contributes to global warming.

**FOX IN THE HENHOUSE:** Handing over responsibility for protection of biodiversity to the corporate community is a classic case of asking the fox to guard the henhouse. Corporate profiteering has long placed marketing and profit making far ahead of environmental protection. Biodiversity is part of the global commons, not a commodity for the corporate community to claim, patent and market for profit. Now businesses are eagerly offering new products and services like "trees for travel" which they present as "green solutions" even when they are clearly yet another means of profiteering, with precisely the wrong effect on biodiversity and climate. This is what led us into this crisis and we cannot now entrust the same process to lead us back out!

## CBD sold to WTO??

Due to some well-organized lobbying by the 'Friends of the non-Party', four CRP papers are littered with the phrases "consistent with international obligations" (which means WTO) or even more clearly "consistent with WTO obligations". They appear 12 times. This means that all these decisions will be subordinated to the WTO. With this language, if there is any conflict between an environmental policy and trade obligations, trade will likely prevail. This is not the first time free trade has tried to trash environmental agreements. For example, in 2002 at the WSSD Ministers rejected similar clauses in the summit's plan of action that would have given the WTO powers over multilateral environmental treaties. It was an important moment; one that must be repeated here.

Yes, we are all exhausted. This has been an incredibly draining COP. **But still we cannot let all our work go down the drain.** Parties must remove the phrases "consistent with international obligations" and "consistent with WTO obligations" in the following documents:

**WG.1/CRP.10: Agricultural Biodiversity, A. Para.9; para 37; B. Para.9, para 9a; para 9c**

**WG.1/CRP.8: Incentive measures, Preambular; para.7**

**WG.1/CRP.5/Rev.1: Forest biodiversity, Para 1.(p); para 2(a); para 2 (e)**

**WG.1/CRP/CRP.11: Alien Species Para.12; para 17.**