

The Politics of GEF

Zoe Young

As party after party called for more funding through the GEF last Friday, the Financial Resources Working Group was surprised by an NGO request for the GEF to focus less on funding discrete conservation projects, and more on addressing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, for example the practices of its implementing agencies like the World Bank.

The NGOs – including Ecoropa and SEEDS – continued that the review for COP 9 should examine cost-effective means to substantively address the drivers of biodiversity loss, including perverse subsidy regimes and extractive and depleting natural resource policies. This call (not surprisingly, omitted from the resulting draft text) reflects criticism of many GEF projects for being over-large and run from the top down by outsiders neglectful of local skills and needs. Lands and livelihoods have been lost as a result, and conservation goals suffer when capacity-challenging mega-projects start and stop according to outside priorities. Meanwhile clearcutting and monoculture continue undisturbed elsewhere.

Some GEF funding has certainly been environmentally effective, for example the small grants programme (including \$40,000 for the Theocratic Government of His Majesty Selassie I Churchical Order of the Nyabinghi, to promote organic farming in Barbados). But even though such GEF ‘projects with a human face’ form a tiny proportion of current spending, many delegates still argue that to be more effective the GEF simply needs increased funding – rather than the reduction the US now threatens.

The Real Word on the GEF

Away from the diplomatic microphone, GEF’s critics have spoken of an arrogant and arbitrary bureaucracy, and its own officials can offer more radical critiques than is provided by their ‘official opposition’ in the big environmental groups. GEF implementers are first to admit there are no easy answers to their contradictory tasks, especially now that the US (not a party to the CBD) has imposed a ‘resource allocation framework’ to reward recipient governments adopting (US-friendly) ‘good governance’. This blatantly political move seems to parallel World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz’s ‘anti-corruption’ drive, and has been roundly condemned by the G77.

The GEF was planned by donor governments to help the Bank respond to Northern environmental uprisings of the late 1980s, which focused on consequences of Bank-funded dam, road and other development projects in the South. The GEF has been successful insofar as many environmentalists are now keener to

improve and gain access to GEF funding than to publicly challenge it, let alone to ally themselves with grassroots movements for ecological justice that doubt the value of a mission to ‘green’ the World Bank. GEF has thus divided activists willing to play along with the US and Bank’s strategic agenda from those who will not; the latter can be dismissed as extreme and unconstructive, while the former’s skills and passion can be channelled through GEF processes to extend the reach of corporate capital and culture.

Working from within the World Bank’s economic culture, GEF consultants are driven to ‘price’ natural value in an attempt to justify the protection of forests, swamps or species deemed worthy of attention from certain governments, global experts and investors in a kind of ‘green globalisation’.

GEF’s Strategic Value

Not only NGOs have been suckered into this “market mechanisms” vortex – much of the UN’s environmental agenda is being drawn in as well. If fully implemented, some of the CBD’s provisions could fundamentally reorient global development away from the current exploitative frenzy. But with the environmental treaties constrained by their financial mechanisms, dominant donor governments and institutions can ensure that the only actions financed are those not threatening to their strategic interests.

The problems with the GEF do not stem solely from a lack of funds or poor project planning, nor are they limited to strategic co-option and greenwash. Even if a weakened GEF survives its current travails, it is clear that the battle to extract ecological imperatives from the clutches of political and economic interests will be a long one.

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International delegation visits Occupied Syngenta Fields

On Wednesday, 22nd of March, an international delegation of NGOs and press went to bring messages of solidarity to 600 members of Movimento Sem Terra (MST) occupying the illegal GM field trials on a 50 hectare Syngenta testing station near Iguacu National Park. No GMO field trials are allowed there because it is a protected area. As was reported in last week's ECO, Syngenta has been fined half a million dollars for their transgressions. However, Syngenta claim their testing is permitted by the National Biosafety Council. Via Campesina intends to sue both the Syngenta directors and those responsible at the Council for environmental crimes.

After a 7 hour bus ride we were met by a few hundred people at the gate, and banners flying, we made our way towards the site.

We came upon a "mystical" circle of yellow flowers with figures poised as though frozen in time, their bodies coated in soil. Two men sang as indigenous people entered the circle with bows and arrows. They were followed by corporate conquistadors marked "Monsanto" and "Bunge". Farmers moved into the circle but were, along with the hunters, quickly dispensed with. Corpses lay everywhere and sounds of wailing sprang from the Earth. The frozen earth statues began a graceful dance weaving amongst the corpses. The land stirred as though waking from a deep sleep. More earthen figures emerged from out of the land and joined in the dance. Yellow corn women and green men bearing fruits scattered seeds, the indigenous hunters rose to resume their hunting. Real people sloughed off their black plastic skins of Monsanto and Bunge to join in the dance of the Earth.

All the participants then gathered with Via Campesina groups from around the world who spoke about their struggle, and their solidarity with the action of MST. Speeches were also made by Terra de Direitos (a group of lawyers supporting MST), Greenpeace and a woman from the grassroots movement of GM crop pullers in Britain.

Via Campesina introduced us to the illegal trial. Twelve hectares are GM soya and half a hectare of GM maize, though it was not entirely clear which plots were GM.

We were invited into a makeshift tent of plastic where an entire family had already been living for 9 days. They were from an MST encampment about 40 km away, where they had been living in similar circumstances for 3 years.

Finally we visited the regional court in Cascavel, where tremendous support for the action against Syngenta was apparent, and appealed to the Judge not to evict the camp.

We hope to make video, audio and pictures available soon, so stay tuned

Visita solidaria de delegación internacional a los campos ocupados por Syngenta

El miércoles 22 de Marzo, una delegación internacional compuesta por ONGs y la prensa llevó el mensaje de solidaridad a 600 miembros del Movimiento Sin Tierra (MST), ocupando el sitio de las pruebas de campo ilegales de OGMs ubicados en la estación experimental de Syngenta de 50 hectáreas, cerca del Parque Nacional Iguazú. La corte regional, con un poder de desalojo, autorizó a las familias del MST a permanecer en el lugar hasta el miércoles. Por otro lado, los campos experimentales de Syngenta no deberían haber sido establecidos en la zona debido a que se trata de una zona de protección de un parque nacional. Sin embargo, Syngenta sostiene que estos fueron permitidos por el Consejo

Nacional de Bioseguridad. La Vía Campesina intenta iniciar un juicio a los directores de Syngenta y a aquellas personas del Consejo responsables de crímenes ambientales. Hoy fue anunciado por Syngenta que pagará una multa de medio millón de dólares. Después de las 7 horas de viaje en bus, encontramos a una centena de personas en la entrada del campo de pruebas, con pancartas al viento. Nos encaminamos hacia el lugar.

Luego, realizamos una celebración mística que consistió en la construcción de un círculo con flores amarillas y figuras, suspendidas mientras permanecían congeladas en el tiempo, con sus cuerpos cubiertos por suelo. Dos hombres cantaban mientras los indígenas entraban, cazando con arco y flecha, seguidos por la "gente corporativa" enmascarada y vistiendo plásticos negros con las inscripciones "Monsanto" y "Bunge". Los campesinos ingresaron; empero, ellos y los cazadores fueron rápidamente desalojados. Las corporaciones se asentaron por todo lado y sonidos de gritos desesperados fueron lanzados, aparentemente fuera de la Tierra. Las estatuas de tierra congelada iniciaron una danza llena de gracia, ondeando sus cuerpos por entre las corporaciones. La Tierra fue renaciendo y caminando desde un sueño profundo. Más figuras emergieron literalmente desde la tierra y se unieron a la danza. Mujeres de maíz amarillo y hombres verdes sostenían frutas mezcladas con semillas; los cazadores indígenas aparecieron para finalizar su caza. Las personas corporativas se sacaron sus pieles plásticas de Monsanto y Bunge para unirse a la danza de la Tierra.

Todos nos reunidos con los grupos de Vía Campesina de todo el mundo, quienes hablaron sobre sus luchas y su solidaridad con la acción del MST. También hablaron personas de Tierra de Derechos (un grupo de abogados que apoya al MST), Greenpeace y una mujer de los movimientos de Inglaterra que rechazan a los cultivos transgénicos.

Vía Campesina nos informó sobre las pruebas de campo ilegales: Doce hectáreas son de soya transgénica y media hectárea de maíz transgénico; sin embargo, no estuvo completamente claro que parcelas eran transgénicas.

Fuimos invitados a una carpa improvisada con plástico, donde una familia entera estuvo viviendo allí por nueve días. Ellos eran del campamento del MST ubicado a 40 km. de distancia, donde estuvieron viviendo en condiciones similares por tres años. Finalmente, visitamos la corte regional de Cascavel. Se hizo claro que existía un enorme apoyo a la acción en contra de los predios de Syngenta, y apelamos al Juez no desalojar el campamento. Esperamos elaborar y poner pronto a disposición un video, material de audio y fotografías sobre esto; entonces, mantente alerta...



Accent on Access

Sandy Gauntlett, Global Forest Coalition

Again reflecting their preparedness to block consensus, the Access of Evil (Canada, Australia and New Zealand) appear intent on drawing out dialogue on participation of Indigenous Peoples while continuing the talks on a regime for Access and Benefit Sharing. The obvious dangers of this approach include the very real possibility of reaching agreement on Access while not having agreement on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities who (in many cases) hold traditional and legal title to the lands and resources under question.

Obviously, the accent in these discussions is on Access, and the question of Benefit Sharing may well deteriorate to a debate about how much *Governments* get from the companies whose access they have mandated. To legitimize access without settling issues like participation; free, prior and informed consent and benefit sharing for provider communities is to legalize modern day piracy.

Since January, the European Union has desperately tried to introduce text that would cement the rights of Indigenous Peoples and have been continuously blocked by the Access of Evil countries. In particular, Canada has taken a lead role in watering down the text, and the final agreement between the EU and Canada is now both weak and meaningless. While the EU deserves credit for their efforts, Canada deserves naming and shaming in the world's media for their neo-colonial position.

The Indigenous Forum met for most of the weekend and has come up with the following replacement text:

The Conference of the Parties,

Reaffirming paragraphs 5 and 11 of decision V/16, paragraphs 1, 6 and 7 of decision VII/19D and all other decisions recognizing the right of the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

Decides to reaffirm Decision V/16, paragraph 11, which "invites Parties and Governments to support the participation of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, as well as relevant organizations



Talking about not *with* Indigenous Communities

Saunder Van Bennekom, Oxfam - Netherlands

More than ten years of negotiations on Access and Benefit Sharing of genetic resources have brought little tangible results. The divide between the positions of the Global North and South is profound, and the shopping list that came out the 4th Working Group meeting in Granada, where even the most basic goals were bracketed, means the negotiators have little to show for their efforts. And sadly, as the pressure to develop an ABS regime is mounting, and the negotiations are becoming more concrete, the access of local and indigenous communities is diminishing.

Friday's text proposal on the participation of indigenous communities can only be regarded as the ultimate non-decision. The chair can decide on their 'effective' participation; countries can decide to take them on board in the delegation, but none of

representing Indigenous and local communities in advising the COP in implementation of article 8J and related provisions."

Decides to continue to support the participation of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, as well as relevant organizations representing indigenous and local communities, in the process of the elaboration and negotiation of the proposed International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing, on issues related to genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, and to this end:

- a) *Urges Chairpersons to facilitate the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities in the process of the elaboration and negotiation of an, including providing timely and appropriate indigenous participation in all debates;*
- b) *Requests the secretariat to provide administrative support to representatives from indigenous and local communities through practical measures, including making available meeting rooms, access to documentation, and computer and photocopying facilities, subject to the availability of funds; and*
- c) *Also urges Parties and Governments to facilitate the participation of representatives of indigenous and local communities, including on and off delegations, to meetings of the Ad Hoc Open Working Group on Access and Benefit Sharing. This should not preclude the right for Indigenous Peoples to participate outside of government delegations.*

The right to capacity building, full and effective consultation, and full and effective participation, along with the necessary free prior and informed consent of Provider communities (as opposed to provider governments) should for all of us be a pre-requisite to discussions on the regime. That three countries are able to effectively hold the Convention ransom over the issue of participation should concern to us all. Perhaps it is time to consider trade boycotts of countries that put little money into the Convention process but insist on dominating decision-making.

these principles guarantees any real participation for the people who have most at stake in the ABS regime on genetic resources and traditional knowledge. The most concrete recommendation in the text proposal deals with administrative support, meeting rooms and copying facilities. This means that indigenous peoples can at least meet and distribute statements about their lack of involvement in the regime -- a cynical result!

The reasons for the involvement of indigenous communities are evident. Most of the NGO discussions seem to focus on the benefit sharing elements of a possible regime, but let us not forget that the first goal of the regime is access.

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Notes from the C O P

Indigenous people from Guyana Speak Out

Three indigenous leaders of the Wapichan people from Guyana told a gathering at COP 8 yesterday that they are *already* protecting their environment through traditional land and resource use practices. The leaders explained how these practices are under threat because land laws in Guyana do not protect their extensive and sustainable land use system, and national conservation policies fail to recognize the contribution of indigenous peoples to the maintenance of biological diversity. The Wapichan leaders hope the CBD can be used to facilitate their continued efforts to protect their environment.

Key recommendations for improved implementation of CBD requirements for protection of customary use and traditional practices in Guyana, include the need to amend laws and policies, particularly through recognition of indigenous peoples' territorial rights and their extensive systems of traditional resource use. The leaders also made a strong plea for national and international support for their efforts to develop a territorial and sustainable use management plan. For more information on these ongoing efforts, contact Gavin Winter (ghavyn@gmail.com)

Lula speaks!

The President of Brazil, Lula Inácio Lula Da Silva, has supported the existing prohibition on Terminator in his opening statement today to the High Level Segment of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity COP8 Conference in Brazil where Ministers of Environment from around the world are gathered. Brazil currently has a national ban on Terminator seeds:

Translation from Lula's speech:

"Biodiversity, the complete set of different lifeforms, is the biggest treasure of our planet. Anything that threatens it or conspires against the equitable sharing of its resources must be rejected as a threat to the survival of humanity and of the planet. This understanding has directed the Brazilian position in this conference of keeping to the spirit of COP5 in Nairobi that forbid the use of sterile seeds. Whatever threatens life or monopolizes access to its resources doesn't serve the common cause of humanity. "

In Portuguese:

"A biodiversidade, o conjunto das diferentes formas de vida, é o maior tesouro do nosso planeta. Tudo o que possa ameaçá-la ou

conspirar contra a repartição equitativa dos seus recursos deve ser rejeitado como ameaça à sobrevivência da Humanidade e da Terra. Esse entendimento orientou a posição brasileira de preservar nesta Conferência o espírito da COP-5, realizada em Nairobi, de proibição do uso de sementes estéreis. Nada que ameace a vida ou monopolize o acesso aos seus recursos serve à causa comum da humanidade."

Maxima Apologia

**I'm just a messenger!
They say jump and I have to say how high.**

-- A US delegate overheard apologizing to another delegate in the corridors last week.

QUIZ:

Who first said:

"It is vital to anticipate, prevent, and attack the causes of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity at source."

Was it:

- Ahmed Djoghlaif
- Via Campesina
- Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Bola Murcha (Flat Ball) of the day nomination goes to the European Union

Greenpeace



Today's *Bola Murcha (Flat Ball)* nomination for the most destructive government delegation at CBD COP8 goes to the European Union for not supporting a binding agreement on the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological diversity (ABS).

According to the statement of EU Commissioner Dimas to the Brazilian press yesterday (Folha de Sao Paulo 27-03) the European Union cannot support the establishment of an ABS agreement before going through two years of discussion and another two years of negotiations. During the next 4 years more destruction of biodiversity and more biopiracy will take place, and meanwhile the rich nations will try to smuggle this issue into WTO

negotiations where it has no chance of being resolved equitably.

Talking about, not with IPOs from pg. 3

Under an ABS regime, bio-prospectors will have access to the lands, knowledge and practices of communities all over the world. It is pointless to try and estimate the total value of this knowledge in the global economy, especially in the long term. But recent predictions that the 'bio-economy' will be the next step in the globalization process, indicate the economic importance of genetic resources.

The COP parties are unfortunately more comfortable talking *about* indigenous communities than *with* them. The danger of Friday's text on indigenous participation is that it will formalize a status quo. There is no consensus on this controversial topic and, instead of extending negotiations or respecting previous practices, this decision implies that the meeting chair has complete freedom to determine the participation of indigenous peoples. Besides the arrogance of such a procedure, it makes it practically impossible for indigenous peoples to prepare for COPs, working group meetings, or other sessions of the CBD. After all, nobody knows the participation policy until the meeting starts!

And what are the parties so afraid of? They are not afraid of accessing the lands and knowledge of indigenous communities. They are not afraid to benefit from or make use of the way these people have been cultivating forest products or other plant genetic resources for thousands of years. Then why not involve the same people in the negotiations of the regime? The only reasonable *quid pro quo* for developing an access & benefit-sharing regime is that right holders of these lands, knowledge and resources fully participate in the negotiations.

COPTRIX – "Welcome to the Real World of the Convention on Biological Diversity" is the name for the alternative forum organized by Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) during this week of COP-8. Events will be held in the Global Civil Society Tent in the mornings and afternoons. According to the program, the new President of Bolivia – Evo Morales – is scheduled to speak on Friday afternoon (though this has yet to be confirmed).

To get more information about COPTRIX, go to the site: <http://www.socioambiental.org/coptrix/en>