

Sometimes life is funny

joyce hambling - seeds

The seemingly endless workload of the CBD keeps many of us on a constant treadmill, following and producing work for the diverse subjects within our particular areas of expertise. As the rota of meetings and issues pertaining to the articles of the convention keep churning round, the agendas for both the COP and SBSTTA sometimes throw up little ironies.

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SUBMISSIONS: Welcome from all civil society groups. Please give to Rosario Ortiz at the morning NGO meetings, or email to rosa.ortiz@sympatico.ca

On this occasion, in agricultural biodiversity, the two subjects under discussion present such a marked contrast for the direction of human stewardship of the planet's biological heritage, that it feels like we are at a paradigm interchange where we can choose one of two roads, but not both.

One road, in the guise of genetic use restriction technology (GURTs), signals the path to a totalitarian dictatorship over life on earth...not only of other species and life forms, but also of farmers. Reducing the innovation and interaction of the world's agriculturists to becoming mere end consumers, applying chemicals by rote means that maybe one day we will not even need their presence; the job could as easily be done by robots. Whether you buy the industry line that GURTs are a potential biosafety 'cureall', or like me, you see them as probably the most effective way to enforce intellectual property monopolies by transnational companies promoting industrial agriculture, surely no-one can argue that they espouse principals of participatory innovation, social equity or technological democracy.

The other road, that of exploring and sustaining soil ecology, takes into account not only the huge contribution that the experience of small farmers from around the world can make, but also includes the myriad life forms, unseen and often unconsidered which work in symbiosis with plant life to produce sustenance for all life on earth.

While the remit of SBSTTA, is by definition, to consider the technical, it is only the most naive that can possibly think that technological choices are made in isolation from the broader political perspective.

It is salient to remember the historical contribution made during the 20th century by the companies promoting GURTs - algae bloom threatening fresh water sources, soil erosion creating dust bowls of the fertile plains of North America, soil impaction resulting in ever more heavy duty machinery just to till the earth and a legacy of chemical pollution which future generations will not thank us for.

After the recent devastation caused by the tsunami in SE Asia, an international group of agroecologists set to work researching various strategies to deal with potential soil salination - they found scant information recorded from previous tsunamis, but a mountain of work on soil salination caused by industrial agricultural chemicals.

Surely this gives some indication which road it would be wisest for us to choose.



The Draft PoW on Island Biodiversity: critical issues

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Island biodiversity is the new thematic area to be developed under the Convention and will be considered at COP 9 (Decision VII/31). A major step towards developing a Programme of Work (PoW) on island biodiversity was the AHTEG meeting in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife (Canary Islands), Spain, from 13 to 17 December 2004. The draft PoW produced by the AHTEG will be reviewed by SBSTTA 10 (and possibly 11) before reaching COP 8 in 2006.

The draft PoW is in table form and consists of targets and related indicators; priority and supporting actions for the parties, action for the secretariat, identification of relevant actors and partners for the implementation of the PoW, and synergies with other programmes. Five main goals were developed: Conservation; Sustainable use, Addressing threats; Benefit-sharing and maintenance of island genetic resources; and Increasing capacities and financing for the implementation of the programme of work (see UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/10/4 at www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=SBSTTA-10).

The island AHTEG was conducted in a friendly atmosphere. The only matter of contention revolved around language concerning traditional practices and indigenous and local communities (ILCs)' rights and participation. The issue of ILCs continued to crop up during the final plenary when the entire PoW was considered. An agreement was eventually reached to introduce one or more paragraphs addressing ILCs' participation and rights in the introduction (preamble), and to keep specific reference to rights and participation of ILCs only in particularly important aspects of the PoW.

Concerning the introduction, Kiribati proposed the following three paragraphs in different sections of the introduction:

a. *'In terms of cultural diversity, many islands are also home to unique cultures that have developed traditional resource management systems that have enabled people to develop and live in harmony with biodiversity'*. Jamaica objected and after some negotiations, the final text read: *'In terms of cultural diversity, a number of islands are also the home to unique cultures that have developed traditional resource management methods that have enabled people to survive on the islands'*. However, the original proposal is preferable, and hopefully it will be reinstated during SBSTTA 10.

b. *'Traditional resource management and practices relevant to the sustainable use of island ecosystems are at risk of breaking down as a result of modern economic and social*

pressures, and require actions for revitalisation and protection'. The suggestion was accepted.

c. *'It is important to note that cultural diversity and the traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities of many small islands are unique and need special consideration and integration in this programme of work. All aspects of the programme of work **must** be read and implemented with the full recognition and respect for the rights of indigenous and local communities and their full and effective participation'*. This became paragraph 14 of the preamble, but the word 'must' (in bold, above) was replaced by 'should'. Thankfully, the text was accepted but some countries may challenge it at SBSTTA. **We must ensure that this reference stays within the text of the islands PoW.**

The PoW emphasizes the needs and priorities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) but it is developed to be relevant to any country with islands. The draft PoW is quite comprehensive and does not seem to need major changes. However, there are issues that need attention:

- Target 1 (p. 9) may contain too much emphasis on gene banks compared with in-situ conservation; and gene banks should only be allowed with the full respect for the rights of ILCs and with their full and effective participation. Likewise, Target 15, Priority Action 3 (p. 27) could also present some problems as it deals with bioprospecting without mentioning ILC's rights.
- A specific target in the *Provisional Framework for Goals and Targets* (Target 8.2) deals with maintenance of *'biological resources that support sustainable livelihoods, local food security and health care, especially for poor people...'*. This has been marginally incorporated into Priority Action 1 of target 3 of the PoW, but it might be more appropriate to develop a new target or priority action to deal with this more effectively.
- Priority Actions 11 and 12 in Target 7 on tourism (p. 17) contain some Supporting Actions that may worry ILCs and that may not contribute to conserve biodiversity.
- GMOs: a target could be developed under Goal 3 (Address threats to island biodiversity), possibly after the target dealing with invasive species.

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CBD Indicators: What can we do when the arrows drop down?

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The document "Indicators for assessing progress towards, and communicating, the 2010 target at the global level" (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/10/9), which resulted from the meeting of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Indicators for Assessing Progress Towards the 2010 Biodiversity Target (October 2004, Montreal), offers an unique set of biodiversity indicators for national implementation plans.

The thirteen 'immediate application' indicators proposed by the AHTEG give us a stark picture of the dire situation we are facing. These indicators give us a global and national biodiversity thermometer, pointing to the current state of biodiversity loss. Arrows plummeting on the graphs speak more than thousands of documents alerting on the tragedy. We certainly have a lot of work ahead if we hope to achieve the 2010 target.

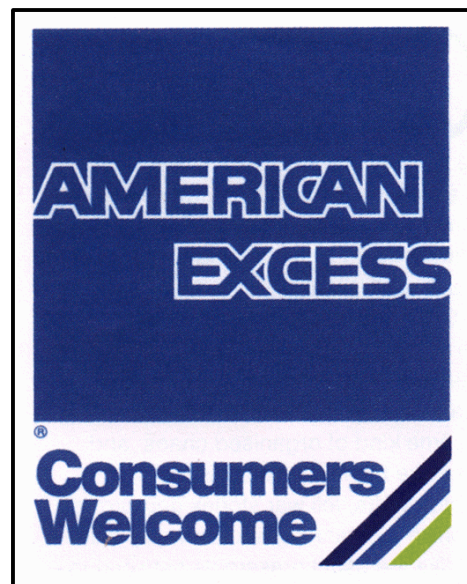
At COP 7, Parties also agreed on the following sub-target: "Target 4.2: "Unsustainable consumption, of biological resources, or that impacts upon biodiversity, reduced". Western lifestyles, particularly in the so-called 'developed world' - but also where they are being exported as a model - are one of the root causes of biodiversity loss. In response to this, the AHTEG recommended the examination of the "ecological footprint" as a possible indicator of unsustainable consumption (and hopefully the necessary reduction of unsustainable consumption!). For those who are not familiar with this, an ecological footprint is the amount of biological productive area that a defined population uses for all its resources requirements and wastes, and it is expressed in terms of bioproductive space, using world-average productivity. The ecological footprint assessments allows researchers to analyze whether the amount of biotically productive area available to an economy is equal to or greater than that required to supply all consumed resources and to absorb all generated wastes.¹ I strongly recommend that the Parties adopt this indicator as an appropriate backdrop to *all* biodiversity indicators. In order to stop biodiversity loss, we need to reduce over consumption, and the ecological footprint points to which countries are progressing in the right and wrong directions!

The indicators associated with 'sustainable use' demonstrate the multi-dimensional nature of biodiversity. The sustainable use indicators should take into account the economic and social contexts within which such use occurs. The AHTEG has proposed the following indicator for immediate testing: "Area of selected sectors (forests, agriculture, aquaculture...) in production certification system". The AHTEG also considered the possibility of an indicator showing the proportion of products derived from sustainable sources, data for which could be available from the trade of certified products, though this indicator need further work.

The increase of certified products, particularly those associated with organic agriculture, are good news for biodiversity protection, although we need to have a simultaneous picture showing how unsustainable and industrial 'non certified' products are expanding rapidly too. Furthermore, we also need indicators that can show the links between international trade/consumption AND its' effects on biodiversity. For example, an indicator showing products serving local markets versus export products are necessary because export-oriented production is often less sustainable than production for local markets.

The AHTEG report (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/10/INF/7) has recommended that these links (between biodiversity loss and international trade/consumption) could be researched under the indicator of 'Proportion of products derived from sustainable sources'. A research partnership between the University of Sherbrooke (Quebec, Canada) and the NGO CBD Alliance is developing research on these indicators. If you want to know more please visit the SBSTTA-10 poster session or write to: Rosario Ortiz (rosa.ortiz@sympatico.ca).

For the 2010 indicators to be effective, we need to follow the drivers of biodiversity loss, not only measure biodiversity loss. *It is imperative that the Parties to the CBD include indicators on consumption and trade in order to address a root cause of biodiversity loss.*



¹ Wackernagel, M. and Yount D. Footprint for sustainability : the next steps. Environment, Development and Sustainability. 2: 21-42, 2000. Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

Terminator Seeds... Not Dead Yet

hope shand – etc group

Terminator seeds (a.k.a. genetic use restriction technology - GURTs) is on SBSTTA's agenda – again. Terminator/GURTs refers to genetic seed sterilization technology developed by the multinational seed and agrochemical industry. If commercialized, Terminator would make it impossible for farmers to save seeds from their harvest, forcing them to return to the commercial market every year.

Although the CBD has already recommended a partial (and weak) moratorium on genetic seed sterilization, many governments, indigenous peoples' and civil society organizations have called for the CBD to *ban* the introduction and commercial sale of Terminator seeds because it threatens biodiversity, poor farmers and global food security. The vast majority of the world's farmers routinely save seed from their harvest for re-planting.

At SBSTTA10, promoters of Terminator technology will seek to discredit a report prepared by a technical expert group (AHTEG) in 2003 that was highly critical of Terminator's potential impacts on smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples. At SBSTTA9, four governments – Canada, New Zealand, Argentina and Brazil – made a surprise attack on the AHTEG report and stalled further action and debate by arguing that the report lacked scientific rigor. In reality, the AHTEG's mandate was not to provide a scientific assessment (which has already been conducted by FAO).

In Bangkok, representatives from the multinational seed industry will describe Terminator/GURTs as a biosafety tool to prevent the escape of genes from GM crops to related plants and wild relatives. The seed industry argues that engineered sterility is a strategy to prevent gene flow from genetically modified crops, because if genes from a Terminator crop escape, the seed produced from unwanted pollination will not germinate – they'll be sterile. But we don't need another dangerous technology to clean up industry's genetic pollution problem!

If Terminator is accepted under the guise of biosafety, warns ETC Group, it will be introduced everywhere as a biological tool to enforce industry monopoly on seeds. Governments gathering in Bangkok for SBSTTA10 need to muster the political will to put an end to delays and make strong recommendations to stop Terminator seed technology.

ETC Group and EcoNexus invite you to attend a lunchtime side-event, Tuesday, 8 February: Terminator/GURTs: Strategy for Biocontainment?

And if you still can't decide if GURTs were designed with biosafety or *profit safety* in mind, here's a quote from 'Transgenic plants and world agriculture', a report prepared under the auspices of the Royal Society of London, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Indian National Science Academy, the Mexican Academy of Sciences and the Third World Academy of Sciences, July 2000: "Over the long term, the most significant form of intellectual property protection for seeds may prove to be technological. A specific example of this that has been the source of much controversy is a patent application for an invention whereby traits in transgenic plants would be expressed only if a certain chemical activator was applied to seeds or plant (genetic use restriction technology, GURT)"

(Oliver *et al* 1995: 32)

Islands PoW continued from pg. 2

- The indicator '*Status and trends of linguistic diversity and numbers of speakers of indigenous languages*' (in the *Provisional Indicators for Assessing Progress Towards the 2010 Biodiversity Target*) was not incorporated into the PoW. If a consensus is reached on this indicator, it should be incorporated into the islands PoW.
- Mariculture is dealt in two different ways in two sections. Target 10, Priority Action 4, Suggested Action 2 (p. 21) reads: '*Halt the conversion of mangrove ecosystems for mariculture activities*' while Supporting Action 5 in Priority Action 8, Target 7 (p.15) reads: '*Promote sustainable aquaculture practices ensuring indigenous and local communities participation*'. These two actions could either complement each other or conflict with each other. A decision should be taken concerning Supportive Action 5.
- Goal 5.1 (pp. 28-31) is rather poor in terms of language on ILC's participation in the implementation of the PoW and benefiting from additional financial resources.

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