

The Bonfire of Biodiversity: fuelling the food crisis

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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 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."

He went further to highlight that of all the aspects of biodiversity, the

No Quick Fixes!



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interface with agriculture has perhaps the greatest potential for practical, sustainable solutions that are implemented because they benefit both people and natural ecosystems. But the way agriculture is practiced has to change if these benefits are to be realised; if it does not change, there will be increased hunger, inequity and environmental degradation.

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 (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."*