

SUSTAINING LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS



PRACTICAL ANSWERS
TO POVERTY

CBD must Defend the Global Commons

Poor farming communities are increasingly excluded from access to and control over the resources and technology needed to sustain their livelihoods and the local environment. Moreover, globalised trade regimes are reducing local choice and control over markets and production systems and are threatening the integrity of the global genetic commons through increasing pressures for their privatisation. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the international United Nations organisation mandated to defend these commons and ensure their sustainable use.

GLOBAL GENETIC COMMONS

The Earth's environmental resources are a common inheritance of all humankind, which should be held in shared trust for a common future. In many developing countries, especially in Africa, 80 per cent of people gain their living from the use of natural resources. One product of this human interaction with nature is what is now commonly called Agricultural Biodiversity - a key component of the global genetic commons.

AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY

Agricultural biodiversity is a vital sub-set of biodiversity and includes crop, forest, livestock, aquatic and microbial species that support agricultural and food production. It has been carefully selected and developed by humankind, whose food and livelihood security depend on the sustained management of those diverse biological resources that are important for food and agriculture. Millions of lives and livelihoods depend directly on agricultural biodiversity. It is also the basis of global food security.

Agricultural biodiversity has developed through the application of the knowledge and

"Agricultural biodiversity includes the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms which are necessary to maintain the structure, processes and key functions of the agricultural ecosystem for, and in support of, food production and food security." (FAO/SCBD, 1999).

Sustaining Life and Livelihoods

is an ITDG campaign to raise awareness and advocate for changes that will reduce the vulnerability of poor women and men and protect the global commons by improving poor peoples' livelihoods and the environmental sustainability of smallholder production systems and making energy, food, trade and technology policies more equitable. It focuses on three issues:

Sustainable agriculture and local markets;
Defending the global commons;
Energy justice.

skills - the technology - of farmers, herders and fisherfolk in a wide range of agroecosystems over 10,000 years. Whilst agricultural biodiversity originates in specific farming communities, it has been shared widely and is considered by many to be part of the much-threatened global commons. The **protection of these 'commons'** from biopiracy (privatisation through patents and other intellectual property rights) or the spread of Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs or Terminator Technologies) and the **implementation of Farmers' Rights** to a share of the benefits for their contribution to the development of agricultural biodiversity are two crucial elements in the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity. They are a focus of the tension between farmers and corporations mediated by governments and intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation.

Agricultural biodiversity is under immediate threat. Around 1.6 billion people depend on farm-saved seed, yet, more than 90 per cent of crop varieties have been lost from farmers' fields in the past century and animal breeds are disappearing at the rate of 5 per cent per year.

The rate of loss may well accelerate as global trade rules, intellectual property rights regimes, the concentration of agricultural research and development on inappropriate technological 'solutions', and now the introduction and promotion of genetically

engineered organisms, all combine to erode local resources from the fields of smallholder farmers. Of particular concern is the pollution

by genetically engineered crop varieties of Centres of Diversity in which the world's food crops originally developed, e.g. Maize/Corn in Mexico, which contain the widest range of diversity of local varieties and their wild

Context

- 1.2 billion people across the globe live with the constant threat of hunger. Among these people, 800 million poor women and men live in rural areas in the developing world. To survive, they use their knowledge and technological and social skills to draw on the natural resources around them to feed themselves and provide other essential goods.
- Smallholder agriculture supports the food needs of a large proportion of the world's population
- Farmers are the developers of agricultural biodiversity and are principal managers of terrestrial ecosystems.
- Biopiracy of genetic resources and the privatisation of other common property resources such as land and water is on the increase. These resources underpin wealth creation, now more easily captured by industry.
- Contamination of Centres of Diversity, international gene banks and the agricultural landscape by genetically modified organisms is threatening the genetic integrity of the resources that underpin food security. Biosafety regimes need strengthening with adequate liability obligations.
- Trade is taking precedence over sustainable development, equity and the environment. For instance, the concentration of corporate power over the \$2 trillion annual food and agriculture trade has increased in recent years through a series of acquisitions and mergers. More than 30% of the global seed market is in the hands of just 10 transnational corporations and just 4 control all GE seeds. These same organisations control most of agricultural research and development spending.
- International treaties are often skewed in favour of corporate interests rather than those of producers and consumers.
- Policy support for greater civil society influence in development planning has found little practical foothold in development practice.

relatives; this is leading to the contamination of genebanks which store some of these crops' historical diversity.

It is urgent that the world's policy makers create a significant shift in international and national policy and practice towards supporting farmers' efforts to:

- Conserve, manage and develop agricultural biodiversity
- Realise their Farmers' Rights to the productive resources they need to achieve sustainable livelihoods
- Contribute to global food security
- Manage terrestrial ecosystems and provide ecological services

CBD/COP 6

At the 6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity there are opportunities to press governments on the following key issues:

- International recognition of Farmers' Rights to their resources, knowledge, technology choices and production systems
- Keep genetic resources in the public domain and support ratification of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
- Protect Centres of Diversity, genebanks and the agricultural landscape from contamination by genetically engineered crops and other organisms
- Ban the development and use of Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs) and especially Terminator Technologies
- Redirect agricultural research and development towards agroecological production
- Protection of local markets that support agriculturally diverse local production
- Ensure corporate accountability and liability for biosafety.

For further information on agricultural biodiversity issues and the CBD negotiations, see: The web site of the UK agricultural biodiversity coalition (UKabc) <www.ukabc.org>

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