
The Biodiversity Convention should take action

The impacts of industrial tree plantations on local plants and animals are very well known. They are particularly clear when tree monocultures replace forests -as happens in many tropical countries- and also relevant, even if not so apparent, when plantations are set up on grassland ecosystems. Tree plantations imply a simplification of the previously existing ecosystem, thus resulting in a loss of biodiversity.

In 1992, governments agreed in Rio that the Earth's biological diversity was facing major threats. They agreed about the need for a Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and approved it. It has since then held four meetings of the Conference of the Parties. During that same time, large scale monoculture tree plantations are being widely promoted and resulting in biodiversity loss and threatening to cover increasing areas in the biodiverse-rich tropical regions. It is clearly within its mandate that the CBD should do something about this. It is equally clear that the rest of the international processes should be in line with that of the CBD.

However, none of this is happening. On the one hand, the CBD seems to prefer to turn a blind eye on the spread of plantations. On the other hand, the Climate Change Convention (CCC) seems to be moving in an opposite direction, actively promoting large-scale monoculture tree plantations as carbon sinks. While this happens, the CBD (Bratislava, May 1998), limits itself to blandly and cryptically warn on the potential impacts on forests and related ecosystems' biodiversity resulting from the expansion of carbon sink tree plantations. Additionally, no follow up appears to have occurred since then and the CCC continues working in such direction.

Additionally, a new threat to biodiversity is appearing within the plantation model: that of "super-trees" produced by genetic engineering. Such monsters, claimed as perfect timber producers because of their ability to produce wood in very short rotation periods, will constitute a real nightmare: the current negative impacts of "standard" fast-growing tree species would be multiplied with the use of these new "trees", with the added threat of the unknown consequences that these genetically modified organisms might have on the environment. Will the CBD do nothing about all this?

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Organizations working on the CBD process at the international level:
 - Stress that monoculture tree plantations constitute a major threat to biodiversity and that the CBD should take action to oppose them
 - Stress the need to discuss and put forward alternatives to the FAO definitions on forests
 - Include genetically modified trees in your work in the biotechnology field

- Organizations working on the CBD process -and on biodiversity- at the national level:
 - Include in your work the issue of plantations as a major threat to biodiversity
 - Identify and disseminate concrete examples of impacts of plantations on local biodiversity

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- Influence your country's government office dealing with the CBD process so that this issue is included in its agenda.
 - Identify government officials participating directly in the CBD events and try to influence them on the issue
 - Get in contact with organizations and networks dealing with biotechnology, pesticides and biodiversity to plan and carry out joint actions on plantations