
[An appeal to COP 9: Biodiversity with and for people](#)

Today the world – the people’s world – is helplessly witnessing a global crisis due to a steep rise in the price of foodstuffs which, as all disasters, affects the more vulnerable sectors, the more dependent economies, the more impoverished countries, more seriously.

Many factors leading to this crisis have been pinpointed: the increase in the price of fertilizers (caused by the rise in oil prices), serious droughts in key regions, increased demand by countries with economies in expansion – such as India and China. But above all, because more farmland is increasingly being turned over to the production of agrofuels. In fact, out of the world production of grain, less than half is allocated to human consumption; the difference goes to animal feed and increasingly, to the production of fuel.

The dominant global economy is dismantling national food systems and causing food crops to stop being at the service of people, just like nature as a whole. In a pathetic parody of King Midas, the predominant neoliberal and globalizing model converts everything it touches into goods, business, speculation and profit-making. In order to achieve this, they have deviated the diverse features of nature, patronizing all possible types of monocultures: farm crops, trees, and those of the mind. They have had various tools to help them: the industrial and exporting agricultural model of the “Green Revolution” started in the sixties and free trade through “recipes” and policies imposed by the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organization and more recently, the Bilateral Free Trade Agreements.

Technocratic spheres, where the destiny of people is usually defined, also reproduce the model and loose total contact with the true situation. One example is the FAO, with its definition of industrial monoculture tree plantations as “forests” – taken up by the Convention on Biological Diversity – completely ignoring the ecosystem concept. However, local populations that have suffered from the negative impacts of plantations, have a clear perception of the difference reflected in the diverse definitions given in the various parts of the world, according to the experience they have had with these plantations.

In a country such as Thailand, where agriculture is of vital importance for the peasant population, they define eucalyptus trees as the “selfish tree” because not only do they prevent crops from developing under them, but also appropriate the water needed for the rice crops.

In Chile the vast pine plantations were installed in Mapuche territory during the Pinochet dictatorship. It is not surprising that they should be defined as “planted military” because they are green, stand in line and advance!

In the Cauca Valley in Colombia, the local people call pine plantations “forests of silence.” This is due to the fact that the plantations are lacking any form of life beyond that of the trees. Silence is thus total.

In Brazil, people call eucalyptus plantations “Green deserts” as they do in South Africa. However in

the latter country this definition has been challenged with the argument that in a few square metres of desert there is more life than in an entire eucalyptus plantation!

Furthermore, also in South Africa there are people who prefer to define plantations as “green cancer,” an expression that reflects the uncontrollable progress of the plantations, that advance destroying water, soil, flora, fauna and the peoples’ means of livelihood, eventually killing everything...just like cancer does.

In the State of Sarawak in Malaysia, the local people claim that eucalyptus and oil palm plantations are much worse than industrial logging. The reason is that the logging companies enter the forest, cut down the best trees and leave, taking the timber with them. But the plantation companies cut down the best trees, burn the rest and stay!

In Ecuador there are communities that, not by chance, call eucalyptus trees “eucas.” The reason is very simple “eucaliptos” contains the charming diminutive “ito” (little), which these trees don’t deserve because they are so evil.

A last example, that in some way summarises all the above definitions, comes from the state of Espirito Santo in Brazil, where the eucalyptus plantations were defined as “dead forests that kill everything.”

All these definitions are a reflection of the fact that the rural communities are well aware of the meaning of biodiversity because it has been the sustenance of their ways of life: ranging from agricultural biodiversity, treasured and transmitted through the centuries, to the forests that have been another opportunity for food sovereignty for those who inhabit them and depend on them.

Monoculture plantations not only devastate local seed diversity but also the knowledge accompanying it, the cultural identity that bred it, the food sovereignty that it ensured. The owners of monoculture plantations – increasingly large agribusiness transnational corporations - take over the land, the seeds and the destiny of the food and the peoples.

But this is not enough for them; they want to strengthen their power even more with genetic manipulation, making tree plantations tailored to their business. Transgenic trees threateningly stick out their green crowns from the test tubes of powerful laboratories related to famous and not so famous universities, linked to corporate groups interested in the various points of the business: biotechnology, the automotive industry, the pulp and paper industry, the energy industry, the chemical industry, just to name a few. They intend to install monoculture transgenic tree plantations and even then, continue to call them forests!

In this framework, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has an enormous responsibility in its hands: to define whether biodiversity is to be at the service of corporations or at the service of people.

The forthcoming COP 9 must resolve various pending issues, among them agrofuels, transgenic trees and forest diversity. There has been no consensus over these issues and therefore the proposed text will be full of brackets (*). Paraphrasing Helena Paul of Econexus...biodiversity itself is between brackets.

Regarding transgenic trees, the CBD will have to decide between a moratorium, the precautionary principle or no restrictions. The proposal of a moratorium was submitted by some delegates to CBD

in 2006, promoted by various social organizations. On that occasion, it was decided that CBD should prepare a report on “the possible negative environmental, cultural and socio-economic impacts of genetically modified trees.” This was presented in February at the thirteenth meeting of SBSTTA. It pointed out that many scientists place “emphasis on the application of the precautionary principle on considering the use of genetically modified trees.” But some countries are attempting to weaken this safeguard, promoting another text that leaves it between brackets.

Regarding agrofuels, in spite of the acknowledged and overwhelming evidence of the negative environmental and social impacts of their large scale production, CBD is sailing between two waters, acknowledging the negative impacts but also talking of the positive ones and it is not categorical in opposing their large scale expansion.

In general terms, it is alarming that CBD opens up its doors to the companies responsible for productive, market and consumer models responsible for so much destruction and that today can be part of national delegations to the convention.

In order to protect biodiversity, the CBD should give instead its decided support to community forest management systems and to traditional farming systems that have successfully harvested and conserved biodiversity.

As expressed in the open letter to CBD, which many social organizations are supporting (http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/open_letter_CBD.html), this excludes the expansion of large-scale monoculture plantations, and requires that:

- monoculture tree plantations are excluded from the definition of forests;
- all political, technical and financial support should be withdrawn from monoculture plantations for agrofuels due to their direct negative impact on biodiversity and food sovereignty;
- the release of transgenic trees should be banned together with the use of “terminator” technology.

Only thus can a biodiversity for and with people be possible.

(*) The texts over which a consensus has not been reached are left between square brackets for later discussion.