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GE trees in Brazil – Will a party to the CBD disregard COP decision IX/5 (1)? Real risks of unintended transboundary movement

Ricarda Steinbrecher – Federation of German Scientists

Genetically engineered (GE) trees threaten biodiversity, forest ecosystems and the culture & livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities. Over time it is impossible to contain GE trees, and once released on a large scale, they will inevitably and irreversibly invade and/or contaminate native as well as managed forests and ecosystems.

Trees produce vast quantities of pollen and seed to ensure their spread and reproduction.

Pollen can travel very long distances. Pine pollen for example was found to travel more than 600km and is estimated to travel up to 1200 km on air currents. Birch pollen was found to travel for 9-20 hours by south-eastern air-masses from central Europe to Finland and Scandinavia. Long distance spread is also assured by seed, often carried by wind, water or animals.

The potential for unintended transboundary movement as well as the risks for global ecosystem functions were at the heart of the debates at COP 9 in Bonn and resulted in decision IX/5 (1) – urging parties to strictly apply the precautionary approach and not to authorise the environmental release of GE trees until thorough and transparent risk assessments, including long term, have been carried out in order to avoid negative impacts on forest biodiversity, including impacts on the livelihoods of indigenous and local communities.

In Brazil, FuturaGene, a biotechnology firm owned by Brazilian pulp and paper company Suzano, has asked for authorisation to release GE eucalyptus on

a commercial scale. The claim that trees genetically modified for fast growth, such as Suzano's GE eucalyptus trees, will require less land and hence protect the natural forest is clearly a myth. It is, for example, well documented that over past decades increases in growth rates of plantation trees has resulted in the rapid expansion of plantations, not the opposite. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization between the years 1990 and 2010, the average yield of wood from plantations doubled, yet the amount of land occupied by those plantations increased over 60% from 97 million to 153 million hectares.

Eucalyptus produces large amounts of pollen as well as seed and has a high potential to become an invasive alien species.

Scientists and Civil Society have voiced grave concerns regarding Brazil's large-scale field trials and the current move towards commercialisation. Given the risks involved, it is vital that the precautionary principle, is strictly applied to GE trees, and Parties including Brazil, must implement their own decision, as expressed in decision Cop IX/5 (1).

The CBD Alliance wishes to thank the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation for enabling the publications of ECOs during MOP7 and COP12. We also thank all other donors that enable the work of the CBD Alliance and all those who contributed in bringing the voice of civil society to this process.

Not enough focus on Agriculture and Small Farmers' Rights will hurt mainstreaming!

Roy Cabonegro, SEARICE

Together with the cold in the tent, the EU asking for the removal of the text "including agriculture, forests and fisheries" from the Strategic Issues for COP13 in the multi-year programme discussion sent an equally chilling message of insensitivity to the importance of getting these critical issues back in the agenda of the CBD.

To add insult to injury, the reference to the *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (ITPGRFA) in the item on capacity building on the Nagoya protocol on para 10 "... mutual supportive & harmonious implementation" was also proposed removed.

We see these as complementary actions aimed at backtracking at standing commitments of the CBD on pushing actions for agricultural biodiversity conservation as well as ensuring that this is done with the full recognition and implementation of farmers' rights as enshrined in the the ITPGRFA, especially in the context of implementing the Nagoya protocol.

At the beginning of the discussions on the work programme for COP13, the EU took the floor and talked about the importance of mainstreaming as the key for the effective implementation of the Aichi Targets of this convention.

We are very surprise that EU - despite its pronouncements for support to effective mainstreaming of biodiversity in other key sectors - would now prefer *not* to have these issues in the strategic issues to be discussed in COP13.

At this COP, all these issues have been insufficiently discussed. While we welcome the agreements in the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation* (GSPC) - particularly strengthening the linkages between agriculture and nutrition - the GSPC does not cover many other aspects of agriculture besides plant conservation.

The efforts of the CBD and FAO Secretariats to bring to the CBD Parties notifications which

outlined various tools and guidelines for countries in the CBD to fully integrate agricultural biodiversity in its work has not resulted in substantive actions to implement previous specific agreements on agricultural biodiversity conservation.

These include strategic issues in the annex to the draft decision on agenda item 31, para 5, X/34 which identified key activities in relation to underutilized crops, on-farm, *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation, benefit-sharing, review of trends on intellectual property rights, and the views and participation of farmers' and producers' organizations and the views of indigenous and local communities.

Agricultural biodiversity is unique among other ecosystems as this is the only ecosystem whose conservation and sustainable development can only be done through the direct interventions of human beings.

As such, ensuring that the rights of small landholders for control and access to seeds and other genetic resources together with sufficient and continuing agricultural extension services to allow them to effectively adopt integrated, diversified, and organic farming systems that ensures conservation of agriculture biodiversity is paramount.

We therefore call on all parties to retain the focus for agriculture together with equally important issues of forest and forestry in the multi year program of the COPs. We also call for the retention of reference to the link of the CBD work with that of the ITPGRFA.

The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organizations, unless otherwise expressed.

Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.

Keep agriculture, forestry and fisheries on the agenda!

Friedrich Wulf, Friends of the Earth Europe

With the COP nearing its end after 2 weeks of intensive discussions, it is natural to look forward to the next meetings. One way of doing this is to discuss the Multi-year program of work (MYPOW). The draft as well as the CRP on this agenda item foresaw that “*Strategic actions to enhance national implementation, in particular through mainstreaming and the integration of biodiversity across relevant sectors, including agriculture, forests and fisheries*” should be discussed.

There is enough reason for that:

Agriculture, forestry and fisheries are among the most important drivers for biodiversity loss, (quote GBO 4). Encompassing more than 90% of the globe’s area, they are at the core of the CBD’s second goal –sustainable use. These issues have been important items of work under the CBD in the past, all three have been equipped with a program of work. But in the last decade, momentum on these issues havestalled. The POW on agriculture has not been renewed since 2000, and the Extended POW for forests has not been followed up much since 2002. At the same time, industrialisation of agriculture with the destruction of landscape elements, depletion of agricultural habitats and the rise of GMOs and Agrofuels have substantially encroached on biodiversity in recent years. Pollution from excess nutrients – adressed in Aichi Target 8 – is even moving away from target according to GBO-4, being one of the 4 targets worst off track. With still 13 Mio ha of forest per year being cleared, and pressure on turning natural forests into monoculture tree plantations, the situation is only marginally different for forests, and 60% of global fish stocks are overfished, with ecosystem collapse within view.

The CBD Alliance has underlined the importance of agriculture and forestry in its High-level statement and a special edition of eco, published yesterday.

So there is every reason to discuss how to further mainstream biodiversity aspects into these sectors, and the draft did well foresee to include a debate

on this at COP 13. This would be an ideal point in time to bring these topics back to the heart of the CBD where they belong.

Unfortunately, due to the pressure of the EU, the mention of agriculture, forests and fisheries was now deleted. The new agenda item now reads “*Strategic actions to enhance national implementation, in particular through mainstreaming and the integration of biodiversity across relevant sectors*”with no obligation to look at agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This means there will be no particular attention to these issues in the COP in the coming years if any, and we will not have the much needed strengthening of the issue.

It seems strange but also logical that the EU should object to this.

- **Strange** because agriculture has just recently been confirmed as *the* number 1 cause for the loss of habitats of community interest (i.e. protected habitats) in the EU. Species and habitats linked to agriculture are those worst off in the EU, with only 7% of habitats and 3% of species in favourable conservation status (as opposed to 17% each on average)¹.
- **Logical** because EU agricultural lobby has already been very successful in trashing any attempt at greening its own Common Agricultural policy last year, as presented in science² (G. Peer et al.: “EU agricultural reform fails on biodiversity”). They seems to have a firm grip on their delegates in Pyeongchang as well.

The CBD should not let itself be told by agri industry what to discuss. Agriculture, Forestry and fisheries are the main land uses and have a huge impact on the subject of the CBD’s mandate – biodiversity. So if the CBD wants to do its work properly, it has to be discussed. It will not be discussed under CBD if it is not clearly marked in the agenda. If it is not discussed, the necessary and urgent steps to move

¹<http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/eu-2010-biodiversity-baseline>

²<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/344/6188/1090.full.pdf?keytype=ref&siteid=sci&ijkey=gFx4IqwJ0DN96>

towards in that sector will not be taken, and if we do not venture to look into this issue, we will never achieve the second goal of the CBD nor the overall 2020 mission of the strategic plan. So please, dear delegates in the EU and elsewhere, do everything to put sustainable land use back on

the agenda. We and future generations will thank you for this. We wouldn't want COP 12 to be remembered as the COP when finally agriculture, Forestry and fisheries were taken off the agenda, do we?

Big wall in front of marine and coastal management in host countries of CBD

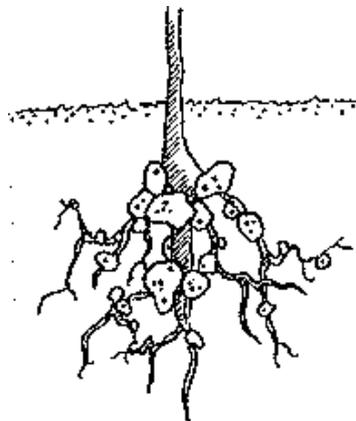
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Coastal ecosystems such as natural Sandy beach, Coastal wetlands (Tidal Flat), River estuary, Coral reefs are in danger because they are vulnerable to environmental changes, however coastal development in Korea and Japan has increased rather than been stopped during this four years after adoption of Aichi biological conservation targets. Large scale construction works, for example, in Saemangeum tidal flat of Korea and in Isahaya tidal flat, reefs of Okinawa and Jeju, giant sea wall construction in sandy beach in Tohoku, have never stopped.

These coastal areas are home to many kinds of endangered species as well. The construction works give serious impacts to threatened species. Dugong (Dugong dugon) in Okinawa, the Red-Foot Crab (*Sesarma intermedium*) in Jeju, many migration birds, sea turtles, fishes in both countries are influenced. The scientific surveys in these places show that the construction works give damage to the environments.

Ensuring migratory route for marine creatures and birds by setting MPA network is another important issue. The status of Marine Protected Area in both countries requires revision. Japan claimed that 8.3% of their water is designated as MPA, however according to analysis by NACS-J (Nature Conservation Society of Japan) that areas truly conserved is only less than 0.3%. On the other hand, Korea has only 0.5% of MPA for total. This is far from creating MPA (Marine Protected Area) network. We strongly hope the designation of more truly effective MPAs, ensuring the conservation and

sustainable use of biodiversity. At least two countries, Korea and Japan have problems with attaining Target 10, 11 and 12. So, two countries should restore and open gate in Saemangeum, Isahaya dyke, and river estuary barrage, and there areas should be designate as important areas as MPA for biological conservation MPA. We hope CBD secretariat would review the progress of each county and urge strongly to those countries to do their



Rhizobia

Helps the ecological balance of ecosystems by synthesizing ammonia and minerals in soil into nitrogen, a process that legume plants are not able to do. Therefore, it supports the reduction of the use of synthetic chemical like pesticides and fertilizers. (GYBN)

Berberis (*Berberis lycium*)

It produces a fruit that once dried can be used as a herbal medicine and also as a dye. This dye is generally used for wool, leather and wood pigmentation (GBYN)

