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CBD – the UNSustainable Use Convention?

Patrick Mulvany (Practical Action)

So, 20 years after Rio, what has the CBD done to stop the **unsustainable** use of biodiversity? As one of the dominant users of terrestrial and inland water ecosystems and with impacts on other ecosystems, what is agriculture's role in realising “*substantial improvements in the sustainable use of biodiversity – a precondition to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*”? Over the decades, has the CBD acted robustly to prevent and reduce bad agricultural practices, and has it defended and promoted the good practices that use agricultural biodiversity sustainably?

The jury is out...

Agriculture is part of the problem.

Industrial commodity and livestock production and fisheries is dramatically undermining, and will continue to undermine, the sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity, its related ecosystem functions and the lives and livelihoods of those who sustain and develop it. This industrial production is supported by unjust and biodiversity-eroding laws, rules, contracts and especially chemically-compliant genetic technologies, including hybrids, GMOs, and now Terminator technologies and Synthetic Biology.

Agriculture can be part of the solution.

Agricultural biodiversity and its related ecosystem functions are conserved, sustainably used and has been, and continues to be, developed by small-scale food producers – farmers, gardeners, livestock keepers, artisanal fishers, forest dwellers, Indigenous Peoples and Local communities among others. Their small scale ecological food production systems,

developed in the framework of food sovereignty, can sustain and regenerate agricultural biodiversity, soil fertility and water resources. Through their practices they realise sustainable use – especially of agricultural biodiversity.

Will the CBD champion these women and men who sustainably use biodiversity – especially small-scale food producers whose resilient production systems provide not only healthy local food but also sustain a wide range of agricultural biodiversity?

Will the CBD tackle the unsustainable users of biodiversity and, as it agreed to do in Rio in 1992, “*anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity at source*”?

Or will the CBD simply wash its hands of its core mandate and resign itself to be the **UNSustainable Use Convention**, letting the powerful fiddle with genes while biodiversity burns?

Can the CBD survive progress?

Mathieu Roy and Harold Crook's stunning new documentary film “Surviving Progress,” shown last night, connects the financial collapse, growing inequity, and the Wall Street oligarchy with future technology, eco-sustainability, and the fate of civilization. Doesn't the “Green Economy” have the same “progress traps” embedded within it? How will the CBD lead us toward an alternate vision? www.survivingprogress.com

Text Mex?

Pat Mooney (ETC Group)

Democracy can be fickle. Certainly, it's not for the faint-hearted. Should governments in the United Nations, for example, insist on consensus – requiring long hours of negotiation and painful compromise – or go for a straight-forward vote? Always a tough call.

In UN meetings, the country that may struggle most with this dilemma is Mexico. Sometimes it demands consensus and sometimes it wants everybody to vote. This is not to imply that Mexico is inconsistent. Watching Mexico exercise its consensus leverage at SBSTTA, some delegations think they can discern a geopolitical pattern: decisions on climate require voting; decisions on biodiversity need consensus. When Mexico chaired last year's Cancun conference on climate change, it stood firmly for the right of the UN to vote and overrode the objections of Bolivia to a deal that not only Bolivia but most of civil society found profoundly distasteful and dishonest. But then in Nairobi last month, as governments struggled to sort out the procedures for IPBES, Mexico is said to have backed the consensus model. Yet, at the same time, half a world away in Panama, Mexico was calling upon the IPCC (climate change again) to forget consensus and just vote. A month later, here in SBSTTA, Mexico is threatening to block consensus on the need to not only list but also address new and emerging issues. Perfectly reasonable, of course – Mexico would lose a vote on new and emerging issues in Montreal, but it can win on climate change negotiations.

Handicapping SBSTTA's capacity to take on new and emerging issues suggests that SBSTTA needs a name change: Subsidiary Body on Science, Technology and Technological Archives?

Toward a World Environmental Organization?

Delegates may have been surprised to see a recent ad in *The Economist* seeking applicants for the post of Executive Secretary to the Biodiversity Convention. Most of us thought we already had an Executive Secretary, Ahmed Djoghlaif. It seems that the Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner, thinks that the position should be shopped around. Technically, UNEP will submit the names of three credible candidates to the UN Secretary-General, who will make the final choice presumably after consultation with governments. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that the incumbent will stay on.

“Take the millions spent on ‘green revolution’ agriculture and re-invest them in Smallholder Farmers.”

Susan Walsh (USC Canada)

During an Econexus, Ecoropa and USC Canada side event on Climate Change and Biodiversity, Marvin Gomez, of the Honduran NGO FIPAH (Fundacion Para La Investigacion Participativa con Agricultores de Honduras), made this comment in response to a question from the floor about whether ecological farming can feed cities. In a country of extreme weather events – Honduras ranks third in the list of disaster-prone countries – hillside food producers are feeding their families increasingly well and selling surplus in markets, Gomez explained. They start by rebuilding the fertility of their soils, heading first to their forest to gather nutrients their fields lost. Next they integrate nitrogen fixing plants into the system, add natural fertilizers called ‘bocachi’, assess and reforest the larger watershed, and select and breed the seeds of local landraces that can thrive under the harshest of conditions.

The establishment of farmer-run research teams, or CIALS, is another key community-based strategy for dealing with climate challenges. With some welcomed initial help from the formal sector, community-elected teams of ‘farmer-scientists’ have managed, in fact, to produce landrace-based maize varieties that are not easily toppled by the ever-present winds. These teams also run the community-based seed and germplasm banks needed to stare climate change down. If the winds or rains destroy their seeds, there will be germplasm there to start again.

The strategy is working. ‘Los Junios’ (the hunger days) that were once common in FIPAH’s programming region have been reduced dramatically, from almost six to under one per year, if even that (see Humphries et al. World Development 2008). And FIPAH’S research into the inputs and technologies used by farmers in their program region suggests that more and more are switching to this agricultural biodiversity based, ecological food production system. They no longer trust or want the introduced seeds and technologies that they can’t afford and that have proven to undermine their soil fertility and plant genetic diversity. It costs comparatively little to make this system work, Gomez concluded. If only our decision-makers would change the regulatory frameworks that make the spread of this work a relentless uphill battle.