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Mayan peoples in COP 13

Veronica Villa & Trudi Zundel, ETC Group

While we are all here in this corner of the Mexican Caribbean engaged in the CBD process (with all its complexities and paraphernalia), only 350 km away from the Moon Palace peasant communities are fighting to extend the legal ban of transgenic crops.

In early October, the regional Mayan council from East Bacalar (only 350 km away from the Moon Palace) gave a press conference explaining that they want to enact an *amparo** from the local authorities, who approved an application from industrial farmers to plant 253 thousand hectares with transgenic maize. The communities from East Bacalar want this approval to be revoked because it would “dispossess them of their natural resources, mainly seed, lands, water and food. This planting of more than 253 thousand hectares of transgenic soy could irreversibly hurt nature, and present and future generations.”

These communities are the world’s main producers of organic honey. Transgenic crops are already harming their livelihoods: for two years, they have had to put up with the massive collapse of beehives because of fumigation with glyphosates. The markets in Europe – where GMOs are not allowed – have been rejecting their shipments of honey because they have found traces of transgenics.

Corporations are required to consult with communities before implementing projects under international and domestic requirements. But once the industrial mega-project has been funded and has all the investments needed to go ahead, only then do the developers ‘consult’ – and if the Mayan communities do not give their consent to the project, they are permitted to go ahead anyway having fulfilled their duty to consult, because the consultation is non-binding.

* *Amparo* means legal protection from the actions of the state.

Locals win against GM mosquito release

Yesterday, the US Department Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reversed its approval of the genetically engineered mosquito for release in the Florida Keys.

This victory comes on the heels of an official public referendum on November 8, 2016 in which the community of Key Haven voted against the release of the GM mosquitoes, owned by Oxitec, the biotech giant that makes the GM mosquitoes. Because of the ecological risks for the unique and fragile ecosystem and potential health impacts, residents in Key Haven, Florida have been organizing against the GM mosquito trial release for several years.

“Using genetically modified mosquito technology is not only a huge risk, it’s totally unnecessary. Cost-effective, safe and approved alternatives already exist,” said Mila de Mier, a local resident and real estate agent in Key West, Florida.

The Mayan communities don’t want to engage in this fashionable new tool of dispossession. They are using a new legal strategy of refusing consultation as it is implemented by the Mexican State because it only legitimizes the project that they want nothing to do with.

These are Mayan peoples. The same people that the tourism industry use in their advertisements and in whose name a lot of rhetorical promises are made about the future of biodiversity. Many of these Mayan people also work here, all along the hotel zone in Cancun, but we no longer perceive them as members of the Mayan peoples when they turn up here; instead we see only “workers” – they are invisible to us. Evicted from their lands as a consequence of development projects they had no say in.

In Mexico, we are living in one of the worst periods of our nation's history. The peso has lost 30% of its value in less than 2 years (which means we would have to work 15 hours per day to acquire the same goods as in 2014). Overall in the country, social peace is held up by pins; in many places, there is an open situation of civil war. This means that for the Mexican State, it is very important that this summit turns out well.

The voice of international civil society has a special opportunity to be amplified during this COP. It is crucial that we as participants be conscious that our host wants to improve its approval rating, both at home and internationally. As civil society, we can express ourselves loudly. One of those statements could be in favor of the Maya people that reject 253 thousand hectares of transgenic soy.

Countries need to increase actions and funding or the Aichi Targets won't be achieved

Rowan Braybrook, Conservation International

With four years left for countries to make progress on the Aichi Targets, our coalition of five NGOs — Birdlife International, Conservation International, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Nature Conservancy and WWF — reviewed the data to determine how countries are progressing. We looked at how countries matched their ambition to each Aichi Target as well as their progress in meeting the global goals.

While our report shows positive progress on a number of the targets, the overall picture is poor, with inadequate progress to date in most countries. Unless countries significantly increase their ambition through more resources and improved policies for biodiversity protection, the Aichi Targets will not be met, and we will increasingly undermine the long-term well-being of humanity.

To develop the assessment, the NGO team examined data provided by the CBD Secretariat that analyzed the NBSAPs submitted by individual countries through July 2016. 52 percent of CBD Parties submitted such plans and the data they contained was scored by the CBD Secretariat. The NGO team looked at the extent to which countries' plans aligned with the Aichi Targets as well as their progress toward the Targets, and considered factors such as economic status and political groupings such as the EU.

We found that around 75 percent of reporting countries have made progress toward the goals, but at an insufficient rate to meet them by 2020. An additional 20 percent of national reports indicate that countries have made no

progress or have even moved away from the global targets. This means that just 5 percent of countries who have reported progress on the Aichi Targets are on track to reach their global biodiversity goals by 2020.

The team found that countries have made the most progress on process-oriented Targets such as Target 17, which involved updating their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Target 20, Resource Mobilization, in which countries secure financing to meet other Targets, scored among the lowest in terms of progress, with 35 percent of countries reporting no movement. The team also found that overall, higher-income countries set weaker goals than lower-income countries, but showed slightly higher progress toward achieving them.

The message to countries is clear; continue as you are, and you will fail to meet your commitments to safeguarding biodiversity. This week at CBD COP13 we are calling on all countries to:

1. Be bold and raise the ambition of their national targets
2. Intensify progress on implementation
3. Increase support and resources to low-income countries to translate ambition into implementation
4. Take responsibility for global ambition
5. Ensure accurate and regular reporting on national implementation

You can find the report at: <http://www.conservation.org/aichi-target>, www.birdlife.org/aichi-progress

Consumer Rejection Driving Out GMOs in USA and Elsewhere

Jeffrey M. Smith, Institute for Responsible Technology

Survey results released this week by the Pew Research Center reveal that 39% of American consumers believe that “GM foods are worse for health than Non-GM foods.” This follows a similar poll from last year by Packaged Facts in which 43% agreed that, “GMO food products are not safe to eat.”

Realizing that using GMOs will hurt their market share, the US food industry is removing GMO ingredients from more and more brands. The natural products sector already cleaned out GMOs, while mainstream brands jumped on board in 2014. They are now racing to declare non-GMO before their competitors.

Nestlé advertises on TV that its coffee creamer is non-GMO. Danone brags that its yogurt will soon be from cows fed non-GMO feed. Del Monte, Hershey’s, Campbell’s, Unilever, Post, Chipotle, and General Mills are among the long list of companies that have brands or products lines either already free of GMOs or slated to be soon. According to Ken Roseboro, a non-GMO food expert and editor of The Organic & Non-GMO Report, “The non-GMO tsunami is here. Most big brands are going non-GMO and grain processing giants like ADM, Cargill and Bunge are establishing large-scale non-GMO ingredient supply chains to meet the demand. What's happening in the US now is similar to what happened in Europe in the late 1990s when major food companies removed GMO ingredients from their products.”

Non-GMO Trend Impacts Global Trade

Biotech companies told leaders around the world, “GMOs will save your industry; don’t get left behind.” But those with a thriving non-GMO supply chain are now benefiting from saying no. Some US companies are looking overseas to get items like corn derivatives that are GMO-free. Moreover, the non-GMO trend is worldwide and growing. Taiwan banned GMOs in school meals, Nestlé removed

GMOs from baby food in South Africa, and non-GMO canola from Australia sells at a premium, compared to the less popular GMO varieties. According to Nielsen’s 2015 Global Health and Wellness Report, while 49% of US consumers are concerned about GMOs, in many other countries it’s higher. In China it’s 71%, Russia 61%, Italy 61%, Mexico 56%, and Brazil 55%.

Consumers Reject Gene Editing and SynBio as GMOs

Both the Non-GMO Project verification program and US organic standards board have clarified that new forms of gene editing and synbio should not be included in verified or certified products. Organic certifying organizations worldwide are also expected to exclude these soon. These policies are supported by widespread consumer perceptions and preferences. According to André Leu, President of the International Foundation for Organic Agriculture (IFOAM), “These new techniques are rightly understood to be just another form of GMOs, with their serious risks and over-hyped promises. But consumers will not be fooled.”

Health Danger Evidence Mounting

Thousands of US physicians are advising patients to avoid eating GMOs and many report improvements in health that follow. A survey of 3,600 people who experienced better health after switching to non-GMO diets describes which diseases and disorders most commonly improve (in press). It is noteworthy that many of these same health issues are found in lab animals fed GMOs, and the incidence of these disorders have been rising in parallel with the increased use of GMOs and their associated pesticide Roundup.

Those in the food industry don’t have to believe that GMOs cause any health problems. They just have to realize that their customers believe it. And that’s moving the marketplace around the globe.

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.

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Aichi Targets 11 and 12

Environmental movement victory brings EU back on track

Konstantin Kreiser, NABU/BirdLife Germany

Since yesterday, EU representatives at COP13 can be significantly more optimistic regarding their countries' performance under Aichi Targets 11 and 12 - thanks to a major victory of Europe's environmental movement. After more than two years of uncertainty European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and his 27 fellow Commissioners decided that the flagship *EU Nature Directives* remain untouched – and that an Action Plan will be presented next year for better implementation, enforcement and financing of this legislative framework that defines the minimum standards for sites and species protection in all 28 Member States.

Just before COP12, Juncker had asked his Environment Commissioner Karmenu Vella to assess the potential of merging the EU Birds and Habitats Directives into a “more modern piece of legislation”. This order was given in the context of a massive push for deregulation (coded “better regulation”), so BirdLife, EEB, WWF and Friends of the Earth created the #NatureAlert campaign which became probably the biggest biodiversity movement Europe has ever seen. For a public online consultation more than 500.000 citizens were mobilised, breaking all records in EU consultation history. In a time where the EU is in a deep crisis of identity it is remarkable that so many people stood up to defend existing EU law.

And Karmenu Vella delivered: He carried out a massive “Fitness Check” of the two Directives, resulting in a 700 page heavy study with evidence from all Member States. The results were crystal clear: The Directives are effective,

efficient, relevant, coherent and have a massive added EU value compared to purely national approaches. Massive problems exist, but they occur in implementation, enforcement and financing and are not related to the legal text itself. Obviously these results were not what Juncker (and the lobbyists around him) had hoped for, and it took quite a while longer than planned (and heavy NGO pressure) until the study was released.

In addition, an impressive movement unfolded, surely encouraged by #NatureAlert, among Environment Ministers and in the European Parliament. Led by the German and Luxembourg Ministers Hendricks and Dieschbourg a firm government coalition was formed against Junckers plans. The European Parliament voted with an overwhelming majority against changes to the Directives. A great number of other stakeholders, including several industry, farming and hunters organisations positioned themselves as well, understanding the risks of legal uncertainty and years of battling if new laws would have been put forward for negotiation.

Yesterday's decision of President Juncker and his Commissioners to save the Directives creates an important positive precedent for environmental policy in Europe. It has become clear that Europeans do not want deregulation - but an EU that stands for sustainability and solidarity. So now all can go back to work and focus on implementation of the nature laws as well as on ... mainstreaming, i.e. reforming the EU's failing agricultural policy.

To use or not to use – that is the question.

Contact group on Synbio