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Illegal use of pro-GM propaganda

Tanzania orders the destruction of GM field trials

Sabrina Nafisa Masiinjila (African Centre for Biodiversity, Tanzania)

More wind has been blown out of the sails of the corporate lobbyists attempting to foist their biotechnology on Africa. The Tanzanian Government has ordered an immediate stop to all ongoing genetically modified (GM) crop trials taking place in the country. They had been under the auspices of the *Water Efficient Maize for Africa* (WEMA) project, which involves *Bayer-Monsanto*, the *Gates Foundation* and national research centres.

This decision has come after the *Tanzania Agriculture Research Institute* (TARI) released the results of the trials without the necessary authorisation, having invited a British pro-GM lobbyist, Mark Lynas, to report how 'well' the GM crops were performing.

Unauthorised access to trial sites is evidence of collusion between biotech lobbyists and GM researchers. Lynas and colleagues used the supposed success of the GM trial to justify the introduction of GM crops in the country.

The biotech industry both in Tanzania and across Africa has supported a well-funded media campaign to push for the adoption of GMOs, including maize, despite the questionable benefits for smallholder farmers. They have consistently made unsubstantiated claims about the GM varieties, including superior drought tolerance and resistance to fall army worm.

South African biosafety authorities rejected Monsanto's application for commercial release of its triple-stacked supposedly 'drought tolerant' GM maize on the grounds that the field trial data from the GM crop insufficiently demonstrated its claimed efficacy against drought and insects. It is currently being field-

tried in Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique where the WEMA project is also active.

Organisations have condemned threats by some Tanzania scientists funded by WEMA to push for further weakening of the country's biosafety regulations. The aim of proposed revisions is to change from strict liability to fault-based provisions to allow the commercial release of the GM crops once the trials were completed. Strict liability means that whoever introduces GMOs into the environment is directly legally responsible for any damage, injury or loss caused. Fault-based provisions mean that the fault or negligence of whoever introduces a GMO will first have to be proven.

We at the *African Centre for Biodiversity* (ACBio) hope that this decision will help the government rethink investments when it comes to agricultural research. We should focus on strengthening existing research institutions, and support participatory farmer research on seed systems aimed at strengthening seed, food and national sovereignty.

Will yet another GM-trial ban in Africa help the moratorium on synthetic biology?

This week's developments could weaken attempts of Gates Foundation and those it funds to railroad language supportive of the release of synbio technologies, such as gene drives, through the COP here in Egypt. This language has so far been largely supported by members of the African group of countries. Now some delegates are reporting a weakening in their resolve.

Post-2020

Statement on behalf of Friends of the Earth International, Global Forest Coalition, Econexus, Forests of the World, Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales and Ecoropa

The post 2020 process is key not only for the definition of the objectives, but also for their future implementation. In order for societies to appropriate these objectives as theirs, people need to have been involved in the construction processes. Therefore, it is essential that full participatory processes are set up, not only bringing together country delegates but especially indigenous peoples, local communities, youth, women and civil society in regional settings.

For future commitments to be successful, it is essential that we learn lessons from the past. We need an in-depth analysis of the reasons why the Aichi Targets have not been implemented. Then we need to do things differently and rebuild trust.

The post 2020 process MUST lead us to a world that lives within the planetary limits.

Another element to be considered is the rising impact of climate change on ecosystems.

However, **we do not want a process similar to the UNFCCC process** that led to the Paris agreement, as its “voluntary pledges” approach has clearly failed to deliver a world that stays well below 2 degrees of warming.

Unlimited economic growth is not compatible with saving the environment. It is the responsibility of this convention to make sure biodiversity is conserved, and it needs to set up the processes to ensure it responds to this challenge.

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.

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In order to do so, the role of corporations, in policy debates and through financial instruments, needs to be limited and the corporate takeover of the public sphere halted.

The amount of investment in destructive activities is exponentially larger than the amount of investment in preserving biodiversity. The new targets should include **rules on divestment for destructive projects**, as well as the **reversal of perverse incentives**.

Another lesson learned from the climate convention is that offsetting has failed as a response to climate change. **Biodiversity offsetting makes even less sense than climate offsetting.**

Biodiversity is hugely complex and very distinct in different regions. Coming to one single biodiversity metric – or for that matter, ANY type of biodiversity metric – reduces the multiple aspects of biodiversity to one aspect, and cuts out important other values. It must therefore be abandoned.

Targets should therefore also have qualitative aspects. Further, targets must build on the fact that it is proven that the best preservers of biodiversity and ecosystems are indigenous peoples and local communities.

One down - how many more to go?

As you may remember, the UN's environment chief, Erik Solheim, resigned last week following severe criticism of his frequent flying and massive travel costs (nearly half million dollars) together with alleged internal rule-breaking which led some nations to withhold their funding.

For an environment chief, to fly so often is somewhat contradictory, to say the least...

How many other environment officials in high positions are involved in similarly contradictory activities?

Mainstreaming human rights in the CBD

The Escazú Agreement, a contribution from Latin America and the Caribbean

Ana Di Pangraco (Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Argentina)

The *Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters* in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) or *Escazú Agreement* was adopted on 4 March 2018, after 6 years of negotiations through an open process. It is an Agreement made by and for people.

Opened for signatures two months ago, it will enter into force once it is ratified by 11 States of the 33 of LAC. There are already 16 signatories.

The Escazú Agreement is the only treaty to emerge from Rio+20, the first environmental treaty of LAC, and the first in the world to contain specific provisions for environmental human rights defenders.

This agreement strengthens the international reputation of the region. It is a leading step to make environmental democracy a reality, placing citizens at the centre which is fundamental for addressing the biodiversity crisis we face. “Without biodiversity, there is no future for humanity” states Prof David Macdonald from Oxford University.

But the Escazú Agreement is not only an environmental agreement, it is also a human rights treaty. Human rights and the environment are interdependent. As John Knox (former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment) stated in his Report on Human Rights and Biodiversity (2017)

“biological diversity is necessary for the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights. Its degradation and loss undermine the ability of people to enjoy these rights.”

State Parties to the CDB have determined a framework to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. But despite big efforts, all reports indicate that biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate, and that most Aichi Targets will not be reached.

The CBD includes interesting practices with regards to access rights, such as producing periodic evaluations of progress on global biodiversity targets; as well as providing wide participation to civil society and full recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Escazú Agreement regulates access rights in relevant environmental matters, and that includes biodiversity. It guarantees the right of every person to a healthy environment. It also promotes public participation in forums and international negotiations on environmental matters, and in national instances dealing with matters of international environmental forums, with a regional perspective.

Negotiations on a post-2020 biodiversity framework through a participatory process, along with the SDGs, set a scenario to highlight the advantages of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation policies from a human rights perspective. In this sense, the Escazú Agreement can make a regional contribution to help ensuring full and effective access to information and participation from LAC civil society, both in implementing the Aichi Targets as well as defining a post 2020 biodiversity agenda with a rights-based approach. In this sense, the early entry into force of the Escazú Agreement is highly relevant. LAC civil society is advocating for that, as well as looking forward to engaging more people, communities and groups with the Escazú process.

Implementation of the CBD and environmental democracy through Human Rights, Nature Rights and the Escazú Agreement.

Monday 26 November, 18.15
M6 – Marie Khan Women’s Caucus Room,
Building 1.

Aichi Target 3 & incentives to deforestation for livestock products in Mercosur countries

Isis Alvarez (Global Forest Coalition, Colombia)

While COP14 calls for ‘investing in people and the planet’, in reality a lot of these ‘investments’ worldwide are causing severe harm to biodiversity. Aichi Target 3 states that subsidies and incentives that are harmful to biodiversity must be phased out or reformed by 2020. It is recognized that accelerating progress of Aichi Target 3 is urgently needed, but perverse subsidies still drive deforestation, contradicting the aims of the SDGs, the CBD and other globally-agreed targets.

Four key commodities are the key drivers of deforestation: beef, soybeans, palm oil, and wood pulp. Of these, cattle grazing has the largest role in forest loss but feed crops (mainly soybeans) are an essential part of the global livestock trade, as a significant portion of the production is mainly for export purposes.

Three of the so-called ‘United Soy Republic’ countries are located in South America: Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, who are the main producers supplying the international market with meat and soy. Interestingly, these are also Mercosur countries that have been negotiating a Free-trade deal with the European Union (behind closed doors) already for a while.

We have gathered some clear examples of how direct and indirect incentives and subsidies in Argentina, Brazil & Paraguay, are harming forests and biodiversity while large agribusinesses get all the benefits at the expense of the public good and natural resources.¹

For instance, Brazil in 2017 invested no less than 31.9 billion USD in publicly subsidized rural credit agreements for the livestock sector, while all Brazilian government investment in halting forest loss added up to 115 million only, which is less than 0.4%.

In Argentina, the termination of “**Fondo Solidario Federal**” or “**Fondo Soja**” which existed since 2009, meant that profits from grain exports are no longer redistributed at the federal level for improved social welfare; this is accompanied by new policies and other policy reforms that utilize public funding to subsidize monoculture soy in territories traditionally dedicated to small-scale farming, which is now expand-

ing in the Northwest region (also one of Argentina’s most deforested regions).

Finally, Paraguay is one of the countries with the highest deforestation rates in the world, yet, policies on agricultural exports continue to aggravate the problem. These policies attract companies wanting to do ‘businesses’ at the expense of rural people’s livelihoods. For instance, an advantageous tax system for agricultural producers, among others, mean that while lower VAT rates are given to agricultural producers, **VAT returns have exponentially increased for them.**

Overall, there are inherent dangers when there’s corporate capture of decision-making as governments cease to prioritise the public good, and are accountable only to the interests of elites. In Mercosur countries, this is reflected through the livestock industry where soy production for exports to feed livestock displaces food crops that would otherwise be contributing to local food security.

Biodiversity conservation in countries where governments have acquired important environmental commitments, has been directly affected by government decisions on the economic front such as incentivising livestock and feedstock production precisely in the places with the most deforestation rates: Paraguayan Chaco, Brazilian Cerrado and Northern Argentina.

AT3 is recognized as one of the least accomplished targets according to the latest NBSPAs presented but Parties to the CBD are still on time to react and take action on such perverse policies. They are in time to promote a decreased demand in meat and soy products in order to improve the situation worldwide, both in consumer and producing countries. There is a need to reduce the amount of meat and shift to plant based diets, support for small-scale, and localized food production. Protection of biodiversity, animal welfare and the rights and practices of peasant farmers, Indigenous Peoples and local communities should form the basis of agricultural policy

1 globalforestcoalition.org/perverse-incentives-deforestation-for-livestock