

Why Does India NOT have a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan?

Ashish Kothari

At COP7, India moved to set a target for when all countries should produce their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans. 2006 was accepted as the deadline. Ironically, India itself does not yet have one, despite having initiated the exercise in 2000!

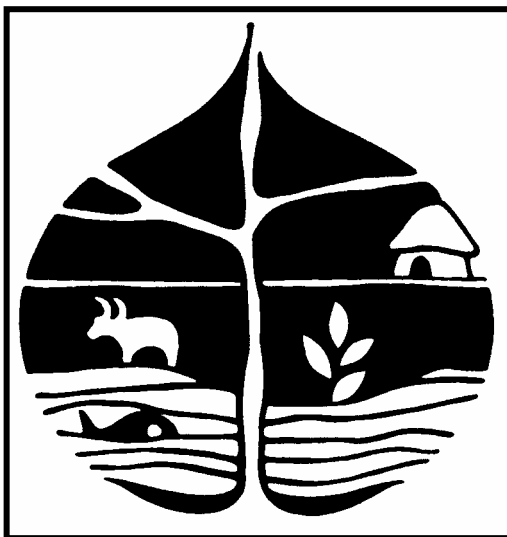
From 2000 to 2003, India's Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) facilitated the NBSAP process, under GEF/UNDP sponsorship. Technical coordination was given out to a NGO, Kalpavriksh, working in conjunction with a 15 member Technical and Policy Core Group (TPCG).

Over four years, the NBSAP process involved well over 50,000 people, making it possibly the largest such exercise in the world. Over 70 local, state, inter-state, and thematic action plans were prepared by communities, academics, government officials, students, and others. Widespread grassroots consultation was carried out through public hearings, biodiversity festivals, workshops and seminars, foot marches, boat rallies, questionnaires, and outreach through mass and folk media. UNDP and other international organizations hailed this process as a "best practice" other countries could learn from.

Based on this process, a final draft NBSAP was submitted to MoEF at the end of 2003. It contained comprehensive recommendations on how to achieve conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of biological resources, and equity in decision-making and benefit-sharing relating to such resources. It lists over 100 strategies, including:

- more decentralized governance and administration, taking further the principles and intent of recent changes in India's Constitution;
- a national land and water use plan identifying areas of critical biodiversity significance and keeping these areas out of bounds for industrial development;
- re-orientation of agriculture, industry, infrastructure, and other development sectors to make them more biodiversity sensitive;
- expansion of areas and species under effective conservation; and
- meaningful involvement, and recognizing the rights, of those communities most dependent on biological resources.

Unfortunately, over two years have passed since the final report was submitted, but India is still yet to produce the final NBSAP.



In March 2005, MoEF even told Kalpavriksh not to make the report public! Tired of waiting, and being answerable to the participants of the process, Kalpavriksh published the report in October 2005. This publication includes all 100 documents produced in the process, and a detailed process documentation (see www.kalpavriksh.org). Scientific institutions, NGOs, and communities across India have subsequently taken part in releasing the report and organizing discussions on how to move it forward.

More positively, many of the sub-national (local, state, and thematic) action plans prepared under the NBSAP process, are already under implementation or being reviewed for implementation by local authorities or communities -- they are not waiting for the central government to get its act together. Several of these plans are being taken up officially by State Biodiversity Boards set up under India's Biological Diversity Act 2002.

Many of those involved in the NBSAP process continue to advocate the acceptance of the final national report, and are hopeful the government's final action plan will be true to the report's spirit and content.

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ECO has been published by the NGO (non-governmental organisation) community at most Conferences of Parties to International Environmental Conventions. It is currently being published at the 8th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Curitiba, Brazil coordinated by the CBD Alliance. The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organisations, unless otherwise expressed.

SUBMISSIONS: Welcome from all civil society groups. Please give to Jessica Dempsey or James Rowe at morning NGO meetings or submit to jdempsey@interchange.ubc.ca

ECO thanks SwedBio for their on-going support!

Terminator Technology - A Brutal Business

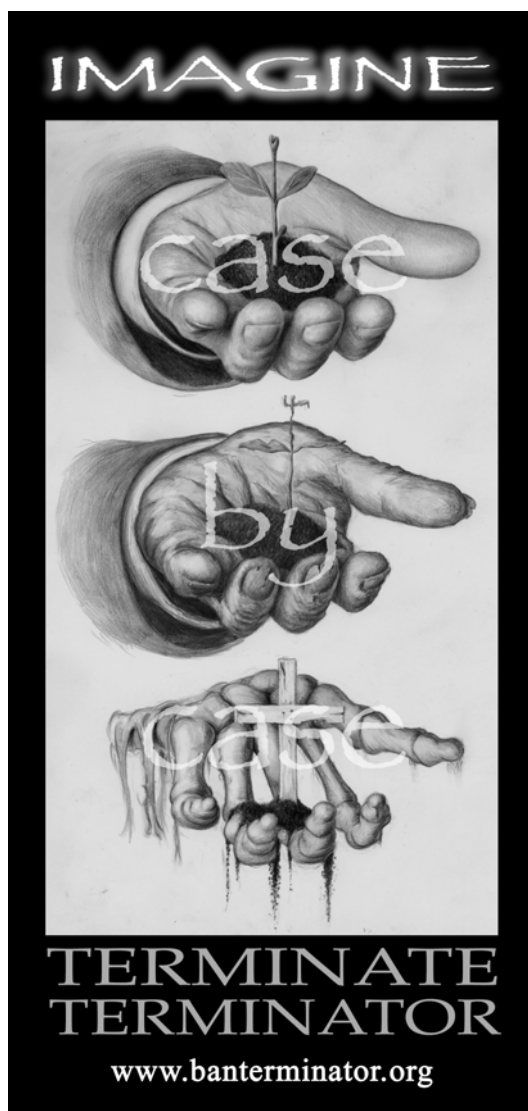
Joyce Hambling, Seeds

Imagine being told by Planet Exploitation Inc. that in the future, if you wanted children, you would need to pay for your babies, and that all their progeny would be sterile or only be able to produce still births (v-gurts), or suffer a disability unless you paid regularly for 'corrective medicine' (t-gurts). No choice, take it or leave it.

Now it may only be British gardeners who view their seedlings as babies, but this is in effect what faces all custodians of the planet's agricultural biodiversity - and that means anyone who plants a seed for food.

The raison d'etre of all living things is to reproduce and flourish, and in general, plants give birth to seeds that will grow into fertile plants themselves. 74% of the world's farmers depend on farm saved seed, a majority of whom are women, and as women, with less access to cash or credit, this represents their life, their food and their autonomy.

20 years after the Chakrabaty case in the USA opened the floodgates to patents on living organisms, and several years since the handful of big biotech companies first discovered genetic engineering has a public image problem, they have to explain to shareholders why their profits have been a minus figure, to the tune of several billion dollars, and why the patents and promised royalty payments are not lining the coffers.



Industry has discovered that patents on plants are almost impossible to enforce. Even as far back as 1999, a Royal Society (UK) report by a panel of scientists from the Global South identified Genetic Use Restriction Technologies as primarily a physical tool for enforcing patents - as indeed does the biotech industry when it's talking to the business world.

But financially, there's much more at stake for agribusiness. If they introduce a new product to farmers in the North, the farmer generally stops buying the old product and begins buying the new - the resulting profits are minimal. If however, they can find a way to stop farmers in the Global South from practicing their age old tradition of saving seed - thus having to purchase new seeds every year -- agribusiness would experience a massive market expansion. The negative impact and instability for the farmers, and indeed the food security of whole countries, would be equally huge. Bearing in mind that a mere handful of multinational business own most of the world's seed companies, and most of these also promote genetic engineering, this means fat profit for a select few.

In last Friday's *Gazeta Do Povo*, the quarter page advert endorsed by various industry coalitions and emblazoned with the CBD insignia read: 'for industry, biodiversity is capital.' But for the world's majorities, diversity is life.

Nota de solidariedade às mulheres camponesas

Via Campesina

Está ocorrendo no Rio Grande do Sul uma situação absurda em que o Estado ao invés de defender os interesses da sociedade, coloca todas as suas instituições, especialmente as forças de segurança pública, a serviço dos interesses do grande capital. Nesse sentido querem transformar uma questão social num crime comum.

A manifestação das mulheres da Via Campesina, no 8 de março, teve como objetivo denunciar ao mundo os crimes ambientais e sociais das empresas que promovem o deserto verde, como a Aracruz. Elas agiram em defesa da vida, de uma forma de desenvolvimento rural que se baseia na agricultura camponesa, na reforma agrária, na preservação da biodiversidade e na construção da soberania alimentar.

A ação das mulheres provocou um debate mais crítico na sociedade brasileira e mundial sobre o agronegócio. Porque as empresas e a mídia vendem uma imagem de que grandes empreendimentos

geram muitos empregos. Mas a Aracruz gera apenas 1 emprego a cada 185 hectares plantados com eucalipto, enquanto a agricultura camponesa gera no mínimo um emprego por hectare.

Estranhamente, ao invés de se preocupar em investigar as empresas, que com apoio financeiro dos governos, estão provocando destruição ambiental, desemprego e êxodo rural, concentração fundiária, entres outros crimes o Estado do Rio do Sul se apressa em achar um culpado ou culpada para ação contra o deserto verde.

Via Campesina Women protest Terminator in WG I

Approximately 40 women peasant farmers from across the Americas staged a dignified protest against Terminator on the floor of the negotiations at COP 8 yesterday. They received applause from delegates and the chair remarked that it was "a heartfelt protest that many of us feel sympathy with. This reminds us that we are citizens of the world not just of countries." The women stayed for about ten minutes and then left the plenary room singing traditional songs to further applause.

Livestock Keepers' Rights crucial to domestic animal diversity conservation

70% of the world's poor keep livestock. They have developed a wide diversity of domestic animal breeds. These breeds are adapted to the conditions of subsistence farming practiced by close to 640 million livestock keepers practice. They produce milk, eggs and meat, plough the fields and transport goods and people in rural areas, often in spite of the pressures of heat, drought, diseases and parasites. Many of these breeds are kept by pastoralists; in fact, the driest areas sustain the widest breed variety.

Among the world's 190 million pastoralists are the Gabbra breeders in Northern Kenya. Chachu Ganya of the Pastoralist Integrated Support Program in Kenya reported that with an adequate mix of species like camel, cattle, sheep and goat, they make the best use of limited resources. Their use of fodder and veterinary plant species is sustainable, and with their mobility they contribute to the biodiversity of the whole ecosystem.

Pastoralists mostly use lands largely unsuitable for cropping. Still, they are often driven away from lands they have long held grazing rights to. In India, as in many other countries, pastoralists are denied seasonal grazing rights in protected areas, as Perumal Vivekanandan of Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Voluntary Action (SEVA) told the audience of a side event on 21 March. In response, the pastoralists have to send many of their animals to slaughterhouses. Their youth migrate to cities to find alternative livelihoods. In Rajasthan, however, pastoralists are getting organized to claim their traditional rights in the courts.

In Southern Africa, indigenous breeds contribute 38 % of the Gross Domestic Product, according to Susanne Gura of the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development. This figure does not even include the subsistence sector, draught power and manure. Tuli cattle, Damara sheep and the Boer goat, the best meat breeds in the world, are used to improve breeds in industrialised countries.

Unrestricted by monopolies, gene flow from South to South helped the cattle industry in Brazil: The Ongole cattle in India is

the source of the Nelore breed which accounts for 85% of Brazilian cattle. Australia reaped huge benefits from West Bengalese Garole sheep, which helped the Australian wool industry grow during the past centuries.

With the advent of genomics, there is a danger the historically free access to genetic resources will be limited by patent monopolies. The genomes of cattle, sheep, pig and chicken are identified. Monsanto has applied for patents on pig breeding in 160 countries, and research is ongoing to determine the genetic basis for the Red Maasai sheep's high tolerance to a parasite plaguing the global sheep industry. In response to these growing concerns, a global gathering of pastoralists occurred in Karen, Kenya in 2003 to claim Livestock Keepers' Rights. These Rights Include:

- **participate democratically in making decisions** on matters related to the conservation and sustainable use of animal genetic resources
- **access, save, use, exchange, sell** their animal genetic resources for food and agriculture, unrestricted by Intellectual Property Rights and without genetic engineering
- have their breeds recognized as products of their communities and as **Indigenous Knowledge** and therefore
- remain in the **public domain**
- **benefit equitably** from the use of animal genetic resources

Pastoralism has recently been taken up by development organisations in a supportive way, according to Maryam Rahmanian of the Iranian NGO CENESTA. UNDP runs the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism, in cooperation with environmental organisations like IUCN. FAO is intensifying its work on Animal Genetic Resources. A series of international meetings are planned. Pastoralist organisations, as well as NGOs like the League for Pastoral Peoples, are prepared to campaign hard for Livestock Keepers' Rights.

Pop Quiz: What *is* case by case?

English is such a rich and ambiguous language - great for fine literature and quintessentially British puns, but slightly less than useful as an international communication tool that is imposed on people that speak it as second, third, fourth or fifth language - so we'd like to ask our distinguished delegates to form a AHTEG of polyglots and tell us what 'case by case' really means:

Is it:

a) Box by box, shipment by shipment (a definition seemingly favoured by some delegates, but they're probably only monolingual, and as such should have observer status)

b) GMO event by individual GMO event (a definition favoured by the official UK ministry, but there again, they don't employ socio-economic risk assessment, preferring the purely economic)

c) A corruption of 'casasse' - the Portuguese past subjunctive of 'to marry', loosely used by [some] delegates to imply the industry ideas that they are already wedded to.

Victims of Agribusiness speak out in Curitiba

The expansion of (GM) soy monocultures is causing a wave of environmental and social destruction throughout the MERCOSUR. Companies like Cargill, ADM, Dreyfuss, Monsanto and factory farms in Europe are among those that profit most from expanding soy production. The Biodiversity Convention fails to clearly target industrial monocultures and trade liberalisation policies headed by the WTO, as major actors of (agro)biodiversity destruction. Equally, the Convention fails to protect local and indigenous communities from displacement and intoxication.

Soy expansion is directly related to increased situations of health crises caused by fumigations, and to violence against rural and indigenous populations. Intensive fumigations with agrochemicals intoxicate people, animals, destroy harvests, contaminate water sources and ruin rural livelihoods. And in Paraguay, communities are frequently threatened by violent evictions, carried out with the help of corrupt police forces and paramilitaries.

GRUPO de REFLEXION RURAL (Argentina), GRAIN, and the Network for a GM Free Latin America (RALLT) invited a delegation of "Victims of Agribusiness" to Curitiba to expose the reality of large scale GM monocultures in Latin America. They shared their experiences at a side event during MOP3, and at the COP8 Alternative Forum ("Welcome to the Real World") on Monday March 20th.

Jorge Galeano, part of the delegation and leader of the Movimiento Agrario y Popular, witnessed the infamous eviction of June 24 2005 in the community of Tekojoja. This was the first time news of such an event was circulated internationally. A group of soy producers and hired policemen expelled 270 people from their lands, burnt 54 houses and adjacent fields, arrested 130 people and killed two persons.

Three years ago Petrona Villasboa, who was also present in Curitiba, was poisoned along with her entire family after a GM soy producer fumigated with glyphosate next to their farm. Her 11 years old son, Silvino Talavera, died. Petrona and CONAMURI are fighting a legal battle for justice against the two soy producers involved.

Sofia Gatica from Barrio ItuzaingC Anexo, a neighbourhood on the fringes of the city of Cordoba (Argentina), accounted for the

suffering imposed on her community by agrochemical contamination from RoundupReady soy fields that surround her neighbourhood from three sides. Recent studies have revealed a local health crisis, and concluded that the neighbourhood should be evacuated. Residues have been found in the soil and water supply. Among a population of 5000, the neighbourhood counts 300 cases of various cancers, a high incidence of leukemia, skin diseases and related ailments. Unless something is done soon, this dire situation will be replicated in villages across Argentina.

The organisations involved in this delegation strongly denounced the agro-export model the countries and peoples of Latin America are being subjected to. Contact: contacto@grr.org.ar, www.grr.org.ar

GE Trees Moratorium proposed!

Kudos to Iran for proposing a moratorium on GE trees and a global assessment of the risks therein. GE trees are neither socially nor biologically benign, and they should be taken very seriously by the Parties to the CBD.

More Kudos

Kudos to the Chair of WG I for affirming the importance of the Via Campesina intervention yesterday afternoon.

India and the NSAP

Continued from page 1.

NGO statement on India's obligations under CBD

In a related move, over 70 organisations and individuals issued an Open Letter to the Prime Minister of India on 20th March, expressing concern over how India is not meeting its obligations under the CBD. They cited the following concerns.

1. India's environmental impact assessment and clearance procedures do not meet most provisions of the CBD Akwe: Kon Guidelines, even though India's Third National Report says they do.
2. There has been a failure to honour the widespread public process of NBSAP and accept the final document as basis for the action plan.

3. Though the Biological Diversity Act 2003 has a general provision on protection of traditional knowledge, subsequent Rules (2004) do not empower communities towards this, and instead only mandate them to produce knowledge registers which could actually facilitate biopiracy.
4. Traditional people's rights are being further violated in protected area legislation, instead of moving such legislation towards the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas.
5. India is becoming more and more open to GMOs, endangering one of the world's centres of origin for several crops, and threatening vulnerable farming communities.

The NGO statement (for details, contact kanchi@hathway.com) reminds the Prime Minister that India once played a leading role in the CBD, and that it must reverse the above trends to re-establish its role.

India's delegation to COP8, which has some very experienced and sensitive officials, will hopefully listen to this anguished plea from India's civil society.

POLITICAL ACTION:

Via Campesina and the Global Civil Society Forum call all social movements and NGOs for an ACTION AGAINST MONOCULTURES, IN DEFENSE OF BIODIVERSITY, AND IN SUPPORT OF VIA CAMPESINA WOMEN.



GATHERING: 11:00AM – In the Global Civil Society Forum tents. We will walk to the main lobby of expotrade for the official event.