



CDU/CSU Congress on Biodiversity COP 9, April 9th 2008, Berlin

TALKING POINTS – BY MEENA RAMAN, CHAIR, FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL

General Introduction

It is vital to revitalise high political interest and momentum on the issue of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. It has been overshadowed by the issue of climate change, which has received a great boost from the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to show the urgency needed in addressing climate change effects. The Millienium Ecosystem Assessment provided much needed evidence on the sad state of our ecosystems and biodiversity. However, it did not receive the same media and public attention as the IPCC outcomes and process. It is imperative therefore to revive the attention of the world and policy makers and have a similar process such as the IPCC for biodiversity, building on the work of the MEA. This is important to create the political momentum needed.

Further, it is important to appreciate that the links between the root causes of climate change as well as that of biodiversity loss and degradation. As identified in Rio, the current economic model, premised on unsustainable production systems (largely dependent on cheap fossil fuels) led to unsustainable, irrational and inequitable consumption patterns, where the world's scarce natural resources drawn from ecosystems, feed the luxuries of the minority rich rather than the basic needs of the majority who are poor. The richest 20% of the world are consuming 80% of world resources and this is a major driver of both biodiversity loss, environmental degradation as well as social injustice.

For instance, deforestation and land conversions, are responsible for both rising greenhouse gases as well as biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. The ever increasing demand for timber and paper for example, leads to the lost of forests. For communities who depend on the forest, this means a loss of livelihoods and their culture – such as that of the millions of indigenous peoples around the world.

In many parts of our world, the mangrove forest which is along the coast, is critical for fishery habitat and coastal zone protection. You remove them and convert them for shrimp production to feed the rich consumers of the north or for other uses, we lose fishery resources which are the basic protein for the poor; fisherfolk lose jobs; and the coastal communitis lose their resilience to tidal waves, tsunamis and sea-level rise.

Hence, the protection of biodiversity and its sustainable use is critical for meeting the basic needs of the poor. Therefore, biodiversity is not only about nature protection for the enjoyment of the few. It is about sustaining the lives of millions who depend on nature for their sustenance and livelihoods. It is also about sustaining natures ability to provide ecological functions – such as the provision of water, regulate temperature, and genetic resources needed to feed and heal the world.

Hence, given the high prority given to climate change, stressing the importance of biodiversity protection and restoration in the context of climate change is key, as in promoting carbon sinks as part of mitigation efforts, in addition to conserving biodiversity for its own sake, given the ecological and cultural imperatives.

Issues at COP 9

Many issues of critical importance in the COP agenda and they are as follows:

Forests

It is good that the COP will have a strong focus on forest as they are very important for cultural diversity (for local communities and indigenous peoples who depend on the forests for their livelihood and culture) and also for performing ecological functions as well as for ensuring biological diversity (trees, plants, animals, genetic resources, medicinal plants, food, non timber products etc.).

In this regard, the following issues are pertinent

- Ensuring forest conservation, creation and effective management of protected areas that will reach at the very least, the global target of 10% of the total land area.
- Enabling reforestation

These efforts require definite financial resources and mechanisms. Progress has been slow in the CBD in this regard. Moreover, new impetus is being given to forest conservation and reforestation under the UNFCCC in relation to the issue of 'REDD' – reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries. It is vital to ensure the appropriate synergies between the CBD and the UNFCCC to ensure appropriate policies and measures are in place which will ensure the conservation of forests in the context of biodiversity protection and in the sustainable use and conservation through the efforts of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Many environmental and indigenous peoples' groups have expressed real concern at the UNFCCC over REDD mechanisms that ignore the rights of indigenous peoples over their forests and which will 'privatise' the forests to corporations or other non-government interests, in the name of forest protection.

It is therefore important to ensure that all forest protection programs are based upon and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples (as laid down in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), women and local communities, by prohibiting any actions that seek to exclude indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities from 'conservation' areas. Outstanding land and tenure questions and the free and prior informed consent of affected communities should be addressed as a prerequisite, before the implementation of any such programs.

Further, in reforestation efforts, the time is ripe to push even further community forestry efforts, to promote forest biodiversity, instead of promoting monoculture plantations.

- Enhancement of trees through genetic modification
This is a major concern is genetic modification of trees to capture carbon in reforestation efforts has been proposed as a solution to addressing greenhouse gas emissions. This has to be opposed in view of the application of the precautionary principle under the CBD and the Biosafety Protocol COP-MOP should address this.

More generally, we call on governments to

- address the direct and underlying 'drivers' of deforestation and the destruction of biodiversity in other ecosystems which are also critical to climate stability by reducing demand for agricultural and forest products and energy; removing trade and investment liberalisation rules that fuel deforestation.

Biofuel

We welcome the CBD in addressing the issue of biofuels, with a focus on agrofuels as they describe fuels derived from agricultural crops such as sugar-cane, corn, soya, rapeseed, oil palm, peanuts, wheat etc. The implications on food prices and shortages, the environmental and social impacts, the generation of greenhouse gases in the process of biofuels production are all important concerns.

As stressed by the CBD Secretariat in its background note to the COP on "The Potential Impacts of Biofuels on Biodiversity", "...the dominant factors determining the environmental and biodiversity impacts of biofuels are the types of lands used for producing biofuel stock (forestland, cropland, marginal or degraded lands) and the feedstock

production practices employed, including the plant species used (crop, grass, ligneous biomass or crop residue). Depending on the feedstock used, where and how it is grown and the manner in which it is processed, the greenhouse gas balance, energy yields and environmental impacts of biofuels may differ greatly. Many aspects of the biofuel debate correspond to similar points made on the environmental impacts of (modern) agriculture generally."

"Life cycle assessments are increasingly used to determine the positive and negative impacts of biofuels....Recently published scientific studies suggest that most, if not all, biofuels may actually exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions over the short to medium term and cause other environmental and social impacts."

Given this backdrop and the current demands and targets set in the EU and US, the production of 'sustainable biofuels' is a hugely contentious issue, as we believe that the demand and the scale of the target is inherently unsustainable. We are therefore extremely concerned by proposals that call for the establishment of criteria, standards and certification of 'sustainable biofuels'. Certification diverts attention from the real solutions needed, which include the reduction for such demand for energy, improving energy efficiency and significant investments in energy-efficient technologies and renewables based on sun, wind, tides and small-scale hydro.

For instance, in the transport sector, developing more sustainable public transport systems and forcing car manufacturers to improve efficiency of their vehicles through legally-binding targets for CO₂ emissions. A recent study by the UK government found that in UK, potentially up to 44% (from a 1990 base year) greenhouse gas savings from transport could be made by 2030 through having low emission vehicles alone and up to 20% savings through economical driving.

In addition, existing certification systems, such as that in the FSC certified timber for instance, has not reduced the problem of unsustainable timber production and is also fraught with abuse and huge complexities in the entire certification system itself.

Hence, we in FOEI are calling for the halt in the development, production and trade of agrofuels, and suspend all targets and other incentives, including subsidies, carbon trading and public and private finance related to the development and production of agrofuels. We also have called for the EU to drop its targets for agrofuels, which is fuelling the demand and expansion.

As we have stressed, there are more sustainable solutions than the biofuels/agrofuels approach and that is what has to be promoted.

Protection and promotion of agrobiodiversity

In situ conservation of agricultural biodiversity is very crucial. Hence, there needs to be strong support for small farmers and more research into ecological farming systems. Apart from the need to protect and promote agrobiodiversity for the sake of preserving genetic resources and its diversity for a variety of reasons, ecological farming can also be viewed as mitigating climate change. This is because ecological farming does not depend on fossil fuel based fertilisers and pesticides, but is organic based. Hence, in the context of climate change, ecological farming (which is both organic and sustainable), should be given higher priority in terms of funding and orientation.

There has been a disproportionate public and private funding of both green revolution agriculture and genetic engineering based agriculture, both have which have not produced the results in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and still fraught with grave uncertainties. In the case of green revolution agriculture, many studies have shown that its time has gone, given the peaking and decline in yields of largely monocrops, that have also destroyed agricultural biodiversity. Moreover, it is fossil fuel based and contributes to climate change.

In the case of GE-technologies, there has been a lack of proper comprehensive assessment of these biotechnologies. Biosafety has to be strengthened under the Biosafety Protocol.

Accordingly, sustainable agriculture which is ecological should be greatly promoted and funded. Countries who promote ecological farming instead of genetic engineering must be allowed to do so. Perhaps, with the next US President, ecological farming can be made a high priority globally and Germany can take the lead in so-doing.

Access and Benefit Sharing

Another major stumbling block has been the issue of the access and benefit sharing of genetic resources. It has been acknowledged, much biopiracy has been going on, where the genetic resources of the developing country communities and their traditional knowledge in using the resource for a variety of purposes including for cosmetics and medicines, have been stolen or appropriated by companies in the North for huge profits without their consent, let alone benefit to them. The CBD began to address this issue, to ensure that such is not the case.

Given that equity must be a central concern in North-South cooperation, it is time to ensure that there is progress in COP 9 towards an international regime in place that is legally binding by 2010. In this regard, the EU, led by Germany can have a consensus with the G77 on the components of the international regime. This would indeed give a boost to real North-South cooperation.

But this would imply that the EU and Germany would be ready to change national and international patent laws, so that disclosure procedures as to the origins of the genetic resource and the traditional knowledge are made prerequisite to the granting of any patents. This will bring providers, i.e. indigenous peoples and governments in a position, that respects their sovereignty over their genetic resources and traditional knowledge, so that users can be prevented from patenting of life. Now, the patent system practically is undermining the provisions and objectives of the CBD on Access and Benefit Sharing. This should come to an end.

Financial resources – World Bank Funding

Increasing financial resources to implement the Convention should be a major priority especially of the developed country parties, in addition to existing ODA.

In a related matter, we are concerned about major donor countries channelling huge amounts of money into the World Bank for climate related funds, including for forests, instead of channelling such money to the UNFCCC. Such moves must be halted, so as to ensure fairer participation of developing countries and democratic decision-making over the use and management such funds to enhance the climate regime.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all efforts must be done to ensure that there is a real progress in efforts to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. As we know, much can be done to address this with the right political will and political climate. In this regard, leadership from the EU and from Germany in particular, in addressing some of the major issues as we have highlighted will go a long way in ensuring a fair deal in the CBD negotiations.

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