



Forest Cover

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About Forest Cover

Welcome to the forty-second issue of Forest Cover, newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). GFC is a world-wide coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs). GFC promotes rights-based, socially just and effective forest policies at the international and national levels, including through building capacity of NGOs and IPOs in all regions to influence global forest policy.

Forest Cover is published four times a year. It features reports on important inter-governmental meetings by different NGOs and IPOs and a calendar of future meetings. The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Forest Coalition, its donors or the editors.

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CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

	Page
Ex Silvis: The REDD Fairy Tale is Dead, Long Live the Forest	2
<i>By Andrey Laletin, Global Forest Coalition Chairperson, Russia & Simone Lovera, Executive Director, Paraguay</i>	
Doha Summit - Eight More Years of Uncertainty	3
<i>By Marcial Arias, Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena, Panamá</i>	
Synthetic Biology and the "Bioeconomy": Feeding Fuel to the Fire of Landgrabs and Biodiversity Loss	5
<i>By Eric Hoffman and Jeff Conant, Friends of the Earth-US</i>	
CBD COP 11 – Did it change anything in India?	7
<i>By Neema Pathak Broome, Kalpavriksh, Pune, India</i>	
Bright Stars in a Dark Sky: Recognizing Community Conservation	10
<i>By Isis Alvarez, Global Forest Coalition, Colombia</i>	
Calendar of Forest-related meetings	12



People's Biodiversity Festival run in parallel to the CBD's COP11. Photo: I. Alvarez. GFC.



Ex Silvis: The REDD Fairy Tale is Dead, Long Live the Forest

By Andrey Laletin, Chairperson, and Simone Lovera, Executive Director, Global Forest Coalition

Thanks to the hard work of thousands of underpaid migrant workers, Doha, the wealthy capital of Qatar, looks like a city from one of the tales of “A Thousand and One Nights” these days. But as far as schemes to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) are concerned, the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP 18) in Doha, Qatar, in December 2012, turned out to be the bitter end of a five-year long fairy tale.



Since it was first launched as a brand new forest regime at the climate negotiations in Bali in 2007, REDD+ seemed to be the one thing that almost all Parties agreed on (in spite of the warnings issued by some civil society organisations including GFC). The climate talks themselves might have turned from sad to sour in the last few years, but the negotiations on REDD+ had been progressing rather rapidly, and in a remarkably friendly atmosphere. The secret of its apparent success was simple: REDD+ promised generous financial compensation for efforts to reduce forest loss and/or plant any kind of tree, making the scheme attractive to almost every developing country in the world, as well as offering donor countries a potential way of cutting the overall costs of dealing with climate change.

The Norwegian government's timely announcement, in 2007 itself, of almost US\$3 billion to support the new scheme, combined with World Bank and UN offers of 'REDD Readiness' funds to more than 40 developing countries also fostered the idea that REDD might be signed, sealed and delivered at some point in the near future. For other sectors, US\$3.6 million per country¹ might have been seen as a miniscule contribution, but for the funding-starved forestry sector it came as a sweet rain shower in a very dry desert: all over the world, REDD+-related initiatives started to bloom.

This fairy tale was given added credibility by the Eliasch review in 2008 (conducted by Swedish sporting goods manufacturer Johan Eliasch), which convinced UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) participants and others that US\$17-33 billion in forest sector support would suddenly materialise, provided REDD+ was included in post-2012 global carbon markets.¹ Not even Sheherazade could have invented a story as colourful as that!

Alas, the moment had to come when countries discovered this story was no more than a fantasy. At the 18th Conference of the Parties (COP 18) in Qatar there was a dramatic falling out when it came to negotiations about the ambitious and legally binding emission targets needed to address climate change. The same targets are needed to create any kind of demand for carbon offsets. The beleaguered Kyoto Protocol was saved, at the very last moment, but only with an emissions reductions target of -20% by 2020. This is an insult to the peoples of the world — supposedly represented by governments in Doha — in light of scientific findings that a reduction of at least 50% by 2020 is needed if we are to have a chance of halting global warming. It should be noted that in the case of the EU, the only significant block of Parties that signed up to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, the economic crisis has already contributed to an 18% emissions reduction, meaning that post-Doha the EU only needs to reduce emissions by a measly 2% over the next eight years.

There is another popular fairy tale around at the moment: that countries will commit to more ambitious targets in 2015. But the prospects of this happening are also miniscule, since countries have only agreed on some undefined 'legal outcome', and the climate talks are notorious for breaking negotiating deadlines anyway. Furthermore, while US President Obama might have uttered some sweet words on climate change in his inauguration speech in January, his main negotiator, Todd Stern, made it crystal clear at the 2013 World Economic Forum that the US is not planning to take any historical responsibility for climate change, despite being by far the main per capita polluter to date. Countries like China and India, which are trying to do their bit at

¹ As proposed by the World Banks Forest Carbon Partnership Facility:

<http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/fcp/sites/forestcarbonpartnership.org/files/Documents/PDF/Oct2011/Final%20PC10%20Resoluti>



home, certainly won't be willing to commit to ambitious legally binding reduction targets in 2015 if the US refuses to accept its own historical responsibility.

As a result of this stalemate, Northern governments' preferred 'solutions', carbon markets, are failing too. If the supply of carbon credits outstrips demand, because there is no commitment to reduce emissions for example, or because economic activity is depressed, then the price of those credits will inevitably plummet and investors will look elsewhere to make a profit. This is essentially what has happened with the UNFCCC's Clean Development Mechanism:² it has "essentially collapsed" according to the UN panel set up to review it.³ Valued at US\$20/ton in August 2008, it has been predicted that CDM credits (Certified Emission Reductions or CERs) will be worth less than 50 euro cents by the end of the decade,⁴ and prices have already plunged to a comparable low.⁵ Consequently, the dream of US\$17-33 billion, which governments hoped private investors would provide for REDD+, has gone up in smoke.

As it became clear that developed countries would refuse to make commitments in Doha, the REDD+ negotiations soured. Night-long disputes focused on trivial issues, with little or no progress on any of the planned agenda items, including addressing the drivers of forest loss, ways to ensure more respect for environmental and social safeguards, and possible institutional structures. Overall the climate talks could only agree on more talks, now a recognised UNFCCC euphemism for 'no progress at all'.



Future talks will probably focus on how to revive funding for REDD. But, as with desert flowers, germination and survival in the desert heat requires sustained rain, not a single shower. It makes little sense to help countries prepare for REDD+, if REDD+ is nothing more than an unfunded financial compensation scheme.

There was at least some good news in 2012, however. At the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention, Parties agreed to double financial support to biodiversity conservation and to redirect subsidies and other perverse incentives that destroy biodiversity. They also acknowledged the indispensable value of Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs) for conservation and sustainable livelihoods. So there is good hope that forests will survive REDD+ after all.

Doha Summit - Eight More Years of Uncertainty

By Marcial Arias, Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena, Panama

Some countries and non-governmental and Indigenous People's organisations had high hopes for the 18th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which took place in Doha, Qatar, 26 November to 8 December 2012. But instead of maximizing collaborative efforts to resolve this already unfolding crisis, negotiators prolonged any real response for another eight years. Their timing could not be worse: the later action is taken, the less effective it is going to be.

The crux of the Doha negotiations was that industrialised countries have insisted that a new global accord involving all countries — especially China and India — must replace the current Kyoto Protocol, which was never ratified by the US and only applied to 'Annex I' countries (and now applies only to some of them, since some countries, namely Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the Russian Federation, refused to agree to new commitments, even though the Kyoto Protocol does still technically exist). In other words, the industrialized countries are refusing to shoulder the burden alone, even though they created the problem in the first place.

² <http://www.economist.com/node/21562961>

³ <http://cdm.unfccc.int/about/policy/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/2216163/investment-in-uns-carbon-scheme-to-dry-up-as-prices-plunge>

⁵ <http://www.climate-connect.co.uk/Home/?q=CER%20price%20plunge%2040%25%2C%20close%20at%20%E2%82%AC0.12%20per%20tonne%2C%20due%20to%20EUA%20auction%20cancellation%20>



The new global accord is to be agreed by 2015 and will come into force in 2020. In the meantime, the beleaguered Kyoto Protocol will remain in force, with another commitment period now agreed to. Those countries that did agree to taking up new commitments under the Kyoto Protocol will review their emission reduction agreements no later than 2014, with the aim of increasing their respective ambition levels.

Numerous other vague decisions were taken. Governments agreed, for example, on finding ways to intensify efforts, before 2020, to go beyond existing commitments for emissions reduction with a view to avoiding a temperature increase of more than 2° Celsius. Developed countries also reiterated their commitment to comply with the promised long term commitment on climate financing, which aims to 'mobilize' US\$100 billion per year, by 2020 for adaptation and mitigation purposes. Governments also identified ways to strengthen the adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable peoples, including through better planning. A roadmap was established with a view to developing concrete institutional arrangements, to provide the most vulnerable locations with better protection against damage caused by 'slow-start events', such as sea level rise. Ways of implementing national adaptation plans for developing countries were also agreed, including the integration of finance and support. The question is, will any of these fine words be matched by real action?

On a side note, one practical consequence of reaching a decision about the future of the Kyoto Protocol and its planned successor is that the negotiations are back on a single track. There is a great deal of work to do, however, especially regarding developed countries' financing, and monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV). According to Christiana Figueres, UNFCCC's Executive Secretary, "We still have a long road ahead. The door to stay below two degrees remains barely open. The science shows it, the data proves it...the UN Climate Change negotiations must now focus on the concrete ways and means to accelerate action and ambition. The world has the money and technology to stay below two degrees. After Doha, it is a matter of scale, speed, determination and sticking to the timetable."⁶

The conference agreed that next UN climate summit (COP 19/CMP 9) will take place in Warsaw, Poland, at the end of 2013. The coming negotiations will certainly be difficult. Declarations from members of the group of countries known as the 'BRICs' — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — 'threw the ball' into the rich nations' field stating that negotiations on a new climate change treaty will not advance unless those countries commit to higher ambition in terms of their greenhouse gas emission reductions. The BRICs countries also insist that any new treaty must be based on the same principles as the current climate deal, that is, keeping a clear division between rich and poor countries. They stress that in any new treaty they will not accept the same deal that is given to rich nations. Even before Doha they had clearly stated that, "The Durban Platform is by no means a process to negotiate a new regime, nor to renegotiate, rewrite or reinterpret the convention and its principles and provisions."⁷

One can also expect a newly unified stance from a number of Latin American countries, including Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Chile, Guatemala and Panama, who have created a new negotiating group, AILAC (Independent Association of Latin America & the Caribbean),⁸ in order to contribute a Latin American vision that "does not look for confrontation between developed and developing countries". The AILAC countries say they



GFC and other groups fighting for gender and climate justice at the historical first march ever organized by civil society in Qatar. Photo: Queen Ehirim

⁶ http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/pages/gateway/template/news_item.jsp?cid=37700

⁷ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-11-20/china-sets-up-u-s-conflict-by-ruling-out-new-climate-regime-.html>

⁸ <http://www.intercambioclimatico.com/en/>



have decided to stop waiting for emissions reductions or financial support from wealthy countries like the US and launch an ambitious case for low-carbon development at home and abroad.⁹

The industrialised countries certainly slowed down negotiations in Doha, refusing to accept anything other than a new agreement. They also failed to comply with their financial commitments to help southern countries adapt to climate change. In spite of previous promises to help with US\$30 billion during the 2010-2012 transition period, and for funding on a greater scale in 2020, the promised funds have not materialized on anything like the scale promised so far. Furthermore, no firm commitments have been made for the period 2012-2020, although developed countries are “encouraged” to provide finance on the same scale that they did during the transition phase. But this may mean very little: for example, the European negotiator, Pete Betts, said that, financially speaking, it is a hard time for Europe, and they, like other developed countries, could not commit to any targets for 2015.

Finally on 8 December 2012, the conference concluded, a day late, and after intense all-night negotiations. However, a group of delegations gave a statement during the closing evening, recognizing that the final agreement does not meet scientists’ recommendations, which are based on the need for drastic measures to avoid a climate change crisis that is already causing death and destruction, due to extreme temperatures, flooding and drought, and sea level rise. This is having grave impacts on Indigenous and non-indigenous Peoples.

Synthetic Biology and the “Bioeconomy”: Feeding Fuel to the Fire of Landgrabs and Biodiversity Loss

By Eric Hoffman and Jeff Conant, Friends of the Earth-US

The industrial revolution replaced wood for fossil fuels as the driver of the engine of progress, leaving living plants to take a back seat in energy production. Now, with the advent of a set of technologies known as synthetic biology, industry groups and the US Department of Energy are celebrating the advent of a new “bioeconomy” — an energy and materials economy in which products and processes previously derived from petroleum will be produced through the exploitation of biomass and biotechnology. By employing the rapidly expanding techniques of synthetic biology, the new industrialists want to turn microbes into “living chemical factories” engineered to produce substances they would not produce naturally, such as biofuels, bio-plastics, industrial chemicals and oils, and even medicines.

However, early indications show that such an approach likely harbors all of the ill-effects of the fossil fuel economy — simply swapping out black carbon for green — combined with the assault on biodiversity brought on by biotechnologies such as genetic engineering of crops¹⁰. Humans have already caused a state-shift in the global ecosystem¹¹, bringing the planet into a new geological era - the Anthropocene — where the collective impact of human technology has outstripped nature as the most potent force driving ecological cycles. So what happens when we turn to biomass and synthetic biology to run our industrial energy, food, and materials production systems?



Photo courtesy of E. Hoffman, FoE-US.

Synthetic biology is a broad term used to describe a collection of new biotechnologies that push the limits of what was previously possible with “conventional” genetic engineering. Rather than moving one or two genes between different organisms, synthetic biology is enabling the writing and re-writing of genetic code on a computer, working with hundreds and thousands of DNA sequences at a time and even trying to reengineer

⁹ <http://www.intercambioclimatico.com/en/2012/12/13/a-new-latin-american-climate-negotiating-group-the-greenest-shoots-in-the-doha-desert/#more-5684>

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/007/y5609e/y5609e02.htm>

¹¹ http://www.stanford.edu/group/hadlylab/_pdfs/Barnoskyetal2012.pdf



entire biological systems. Synthetic biology's technique, scale, and its use of novel and synthetic genetic sequences make it, in essence, an extreme form of genetic engineering.

Synthetic biology is a nascent but rapidly growing field, worth over \$1.6 billion in annual sales today and expected to grow to 10.8 billion by 2016.¹² Many of the largest energy, chemical, forestry, pharmaceutical, food and agribusiness corporations are investing in synthetic biology R&D or establishing joint ventures in a race for the holy grail of biotech. A handful of products derived from synthetic biology have already reached the commercial market. Many others are in pre-commercial stages.

These microbial production processes depend on industrial-scale supplies of feedstocks, including sugars derived from agricultural and forest biomass, both from natural forests and from monoculture tree plantations.¹³ Increased demand for biomass to feed synthetic microbes for a new bioeconomy could have enormous impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods and food security of local and indigenous communities. With an estimated 86% of global biomass stored in the tropics or subtropics, developing countries are already being tapped as a major source of biomass to supply industrial-scale feedstock for fermentation tanks and biorefineries. But as the first signs of this biomass and forest grab begin to emerge, the temperate forests of the north are not off the hook either.

A company called Mascoma, for example, has patented a technology it calls Consolidated Bioprocessing (CBP) in which "genetically modified yeast and bacteria convert cellulosic biomass into high-value end-products in a single step that combines hydrolysis and fermentation."¹⁴ In 2011 ethanol producer Valero Energy offered \$50 million to build a refinery that would use Mascoma's CBP process to turn wood into ethanol. The plant, in the US state of Michigan, is expected to initially produce 20 million gallons of ethanol and eventually expand production up to 80 million gallons per year.¹⁵

According to the environmental assessment of the Mascoma plant¹⁶, the plant's mid-range production, 40 million gallons of ethanol a year, would require 71,000 acres of timber annually (roughly one acre of forest to produce 563 gallons of ethanol). What does this look like at scale? The US renewable fuel standard calls for no less than 16 billion gallons of cellulosic biofuel by 2022.¹⁷ At 563 gallons per acre, that would require 28,419,182 acres of forest per year – an area of forest just shy of the entire state of New York, to be eaten by synthetic bugs and burned up as fuel - hardly what you'd think of as 'sustainable.' And, as Rachel Smolker of Biofuelwatch has pointed out, that is just for a portion of liquid transport fuels, on top of rapidly expanding plans to burn biomass for electricity¹⁸.

The dream of cellulosic biofuels is that they will, so goes the theory, avoid the food-for-fuel conundrum that was a major factor in the world food crisis of 2007. In fact, so-called "next generation" fuels will only exacerbate this problem by transforming "low-value" forest and agricultural "wastes" such as straw, leaves and branches into high-value feedstocks, and by growing biomass for chemical and energy companies on "marginal" lands. For land-based people in the global South, no lands are "marginal", and for the complex dynamics of forests and agro-ecosystems, what industry posits as "wastes" are important components of the soil's ability to recycle nutrients, promote biodiversity, and sequester CO₂.

The innovation of using synthetic microbes to break down cellulose makes all biomass potential fodder for fuel-production. While this may sound desirable from an industrial growth perspective, it will further incentivize the expansion of existing ethanol feedstocks, such as sugar and eucalyptus, into sensitive areas like the Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado, accompanied by huge demands for water, fertilizer, and cheap labor¹⁹; and it will put the entire terrestrial biosphere up for grabs as a fuel source.

¹² "Global Market for Synthetic Biology to Grow to \$10.8 Billion by 2016." BCC Research, Nov. 2011. <<http://www.bccresearch.com/report/global-synthetic-biology-markets-bio066b.html>>

¹³ ETC Group. 2010. The New Biomassers: Synthetic Biology and The Next Assault on Biodiversity and Livelihoods. www.etcgroup.org

¹⁴ "Cellulosic Ethanol." Mascoma Corporation. <http://www.mascoma.com/pages/sub_cellethanol04.php>.

¹⁵ DeMorsella, Chris. "12 Synthetic Biology Biofuel & Biochemical Companies to Watch." The Green Economy Post, <<http://greeneconomypost.com/synthetic-biology-biofuel-biochemical-company-17244.htm>>.

¹⁶ <http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/documents/EA-1705-FEA-2011.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40155.pdf>

¹⁸ Personal communication.

¹⁹ <http://intercontinentalcry.org/the-dark-side-of-green/>



While Mascoma is preparing to chip up the north woods of the US with cellulose-eating microbes, another company leading the bioeconomy land rush, ArborGen, is genetically engineering trees to grow with less lignin – the woody stuff that makes trees stand up – in order to be more easily converted into sugar for “drop-in biofuels”.²⁰ Through their work sequencing the genomes of eucalyptus, pine, and poplar, ArborGen is tied to the US Department of Energy’s National Laboratories and to the Joint Bioenergy Institute, a public-private venture whose primary mission is to develop the next generation of biofuels.

With the advent of the bioeconomy, our approach to energy is poised to wreak havoc on the planet’s remaining biodiversity. Yet despite the technologies’ rapid growth, there are no national or international regulations to insulate biodiversity and livelihoods from the potential ravages of synthetic biology and biomass energy. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity has started to look at these issues, but failed to implement a moratorium at its recent negotiations in October 2012.

In the face of this new bio-industrial revolution, civil society, social movements, NGOs and governments must come together to bring an end to all forms of land and biomass grabbing. In addition, there must be a moratorium on synthetic biology to ensure this emerging technology is properly regulated and does not threaten the environment, biodiversity, human health, or social justice.



Forests of the future? Photo courtesy of E. Hoffman, FoE-US

CBD COP 11 – Did it change anything in India?

By Neema Pathak Broome, Kalpavriksh, Pune, India



The 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 11, CBD) was held in Hyderabad, India, 5-19 October 2012. In addition to a large government team, it was also attended by a large section of India’s vibrant and active civil society, many of whom hoped to be able to shake the conscience of the Indian government, which seems to be hell bent on ‘economic growth at all costs’, favouring the powerful but totally ignoring the concerns of forests and other ecosystems and those people and communities directly dependent upon them.

Even as the Government of India was preparing for a mega-event like COP 11, it was constructing and proposing around 100 thermal and nuclear power plants, dozens of Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical Investment Regions (PCPIRs),²¹ mines, tourism facilities, and over 200 ports along the coast of India – all of which leaves little for

²⁰ Analysis of the State of GE Trees and Advanced Bioenergy, March 22, 2012;

<http://globaljusticeecology.org/files/Analysis%20of%20the%20State%20of%20GE%20Trees%20March%202012.pdf>

²¹ See <http://chemicals.nic.in/PCPIRPolicy.pdf>



biodiversity or the local people. This continues a longstanding focus on economic growth: since 1980, the successive Indian governments have diverted over 1.5 lakh²² hectares of forest land for mining, bringing about 15% of India's total landmass under mining.²³ Hundreds of mega dams are also planned, affecting all major rivers. This will obstruct the flow of water, cause serious harm to riverine ecology and species, and lead to further damage from sand mining and industrial pollution.

All of this and more is being driven forwards in violation of the laws of the nation, and in the face of huge opposition from a large section of India's citizens, particularly the local communities. To this end Indian civil society groups organised themselves into an informal network, with a view to exposing the government's doublespeak during COP 11²⁴. They met every morning during COP 11, to discuss the official agenda and strategies for intervention; and they organised many events and activities, made statements, and held press conferences. They cried themselves hoarse about the pathetic condition of nearly all rivers and coastal areas in India and the biodiversity therein, and about mining some of India's most ecologically and culturally sensitive areas. But above all they tried to expose the gross violation of the principles of governance that is taking place with respect to environmental decision-making, and the ongoing violation of human rights, and laws put in place as environmental safeguards. They wrote letters to the Indian Prime Minister urging effective and appropriate implementation of the Forest Rights Act²⁵; and they organised an alternative People's Biodiversity Festival. Meanwhile the government continued to pursue its economic policies...quite literally at gunpoint, when faced with local opposition!²⁶

The gist of Indian civil society's activities can be gauged by some of the main India-related events organised by a small network of NGOs, that Kalpavriksh was a part of (bearing in mind that this was just a small part of *all* the events and activities organised by Indian NGOs and government agencies). These included:

- A side event on protected area governance, focusing on India's performance in implementing the CBD's Programme of Work on Protected Areas, and on India's Forest Rights Act 2006.
- A side event on the traditional knowledge of marginalised communities (dalits in India and similar ethnic groups in Japan), which was organised by the National Centre for Dalit Human Rights and Japanese groups.
- A number of Joint statements, press releases and conferences on economic growth vs. biodiversity, and the destructive developments on the coast of India.²⁷
- The release of a report jointly prepared by Kalpavriksh and Greenpeace India on coal mining and community forest rights under the recently enacted Forest Rights Act 2006 of India.²⁸
- Articles in the CBD Alliance newsletter *ECO*, on various aspects of India's performance relating to the CBD.²⁹
- A letter to the Indian Prime Minister from international groups urging the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.³⁰
- Side event on Territories and Areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (or ICCAs) in South and East Asia, following their own traditional and/or local systems. The event aimed at bringing to the fore challenges faced by such communities, and emphasising the need for political and

²² In the US system it would be 150,000 hectares

²³ <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/post/32513>

²⁴ Press release on the Prime Minister's doublespeak in his presentation to the COP11 (16 October, 2012)

[http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/PM address at COP11_reaction_NGO statement.pdf](http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/PM%20address%20at%20COP11_reaction_NGO%20statement.pdf)

²⁵ http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/FRA%20Letter%20to%20PM%20by%20international%20groups_15Oct2012.pdf

²⁶ India's Economic Policies are Destroying Biodiversity and Livelihoods; Commitments Under CBD are Not Being Met, Joint Statement by Indian NGOs, 16 October-2012-

http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/India%20economic%20growth%20press%20release_16Oct2012.pdf

Press release on the Prime Minister's doublespeak in his presentation to the COP11, Press Release (16 October, 2012)

[http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/PM address at COP11_reaction_NGO statement.pdf](http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/PM%20address%20at%20COP11_reaction_NGO%20statement.pdf)

²⁷ India's Rivers are Drying, Fresh Water Biodiversity being Destroyed, and People Seriously Threatened from Mega Hydro-electric Projects - Can CBD help? 12 Oct 2012 [http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Dams press release_Oct2012.pdf](http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Dams%20press%20release_Oct2012.pdf)

Press Release- Marine Coastal Conservation, Statement by Indian NGOs, 9 Oct 2012

http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/MarineNCoastalConsrv_IndianNGOsStmnt_Oct2012.pdf

²⁸ Halt violation of human rights in forests (15 October, 2012) [http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Coal miningAndFRA_KV and Greenpeace press release_15Oct2012.pdf](http://kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Coal%20miningAndFRA_KV%20and%20Greenpeace%20press%20release_15Oct2012.pdf)

²⁹ <http://www.cbdalliance.org/cop11/>

³⁰ http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/FRA%20Letter%20to%20PM%20by%20international%20groups_15Oct2012.pdf



Peasants from La Via Campesina-India speaking out at the People's Biodiversity Festival. Photo: LVC.

social recognition and support for ICCAs, in order to achieve local empowerment and biodiversity conservation.

- An alternative People's Biodiversity Festival, held in parallel to COP 11, showcasing numerous examples from across the country where people are successfully practicing various alternative models of human development and biodiversity conservation (to the extent that the current economic and political environment permits them to do so.)

All this however, seemed to have little impact. Not much was covered by the media outside of the venue, and the Indian government even pretended there were no dissenting voices at all! The government made no attempt to consult or meet with civil society at the COP, and a meeting requested by civil society with the Ministry of Environment and Forests could not take place.

Post-COP 11, it seems that all the above-mentioned industrial projects continue unabated. If any have stopped it will undoubtedly have been because of the unfailing efforts of hundreds of local communities opposing them, even in the face of bullets from government forces. Nothing can be further from the general consensus that seemed to be emerging during COP 11 concerning the need for democratic decision-making and the involvement of local people in the conservation of biological diversity.

Indeed, many events, and even statements from the CBD Secretariat seemed to draw attention towards the fact that the CBD's Aichi targets³¹ can best be achieved by encouraging, supporting and recognising territories and areas conserved by local communities and Indigenous Peoples (ICCAs), and local people's role in the conservation of biological diversity³².

In post-CBD India, however, there is still no move towards recognising and, above all, respecting ICCAs at a large scale. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are not required to take into account whether or not ICCAs exist in areas where development projects are being proposed. Only the Forest Rights Act, a law enacted in 2006, provides a degree of recognition for community managed forests, but this Act is currently under heavy pressure. In fact there appears to be a regression in the government's approach: even as this article is being written the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has directed India's Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Ministry of Environment and Forests to dilute those provisions of the India Forest Rights Act 2006 which deal with seeking the consent of the village assemblies and completion of the recognition of rights process before proposing any development projects! This is being requested even though those two ministries have already opposed such an approach, bringing to the PMO's notice the fact that delays in granting clearance to projects is mostly because of faulty EIAs and a failure to follow appropriate legal and other procedures, rather than the implementation of rights-based legislation such as the Forest Rights Act. And all this just a few months after the Prime Minister, in his speech during CBD, jubilantly announced that his government has enacted the Forest Rights Act recognising the rights of local communities!

COP 11 came....and COP 11 went...but the Government of India continues with business as usual as if nothing was ever said or heard.



Indian civil society representatives at COP11. Photo: I. Alvarez.

³¹ <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

³² <http://www.cbd.int/doc/notifications/2012/ntf-2012-156-icca-en.pdf>



Bright Stars in a Dark Sky: Recognizing Community Conservation

By Isis Alvarez, Global Forest Coalition, Colombia

The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) recognition of forests as "biologically diverse systems, representing some of the richest biological areas on Earth"³³ on which many living organisms depend. We are also keenly aware of the alarming rate at which the world's forests are disappearing. Yet the 11th Conference of the Parties to the CBD, which took place in Hyderabad, India, last October, barely touched upon forests – even though negotiations on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and enhanced carbon stocks (REDD+) took longer than expected - despite REDD's 'voluntary' nature... In the end, most of the COP's REDD-related decisions were directed back to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is already notorious for its lack of effectiveness.³⁴

On the other hand, decisions regarding biofuels were adopted 'easily' and the weak text on the impacts that biofuels "may" have on biodiversity and people, which was negotiated at the SBSTTA-16 CBD meeting earlier in 2012, was quickly adopted — especially after Canada's statement that it would negotiate to weaken the text if it were re-opened, because the CBD "is not a food venue."³⁵

Contrary to Canada's view, biodiversity *is* a food issue, and biofuels are impacting both negatively.³⁶ In fact the production of biofuels is one of the key dynamics that have been seriously jeopardising Indigenous and Local Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs). ICCAs are natural and/or modified ecosystems having significant biodiversity and cultural value, and providing critical ecological services. They are voluntarily conserved by local communities and Indigenous Peoples, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means.³⁷ ICCAs play a crucial role in the conservation of the planet's ecosystems, especially forest ecosystems.

However, the COP did agree to doubling financial support to biodiversity initiatives and reviewing and redirecting incentives for processes that harm biodiversity, so-called 'perverse incentives'. Both of these strategies could, at some point, be used to tackle the controversial issue of biofuels.

ICCA Consortium members present in Hyderabad were also able to visit one of the Consortium's newest members, the Deccan Development Society (DDS) in Zaheerabad, India. We were presented with an inspiring example of communities' access to and control over their own resources, which has led to the area finally being declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site by the Government of India³⁸ (which the communities had been demanding). Satheesh Periyapatna, secretary of the organization, stated that, "*this status is a result of years of struggle and demand of the farmers of DDS, all of who are dalits*"³⁹ and have very small and tiny holdings and



Millet agricultural fields in Pastapur, India
Photos: I. Alvarez, GFC.



Women farmers from DDS in Zaheerabad, India.

³³ <http://www.cbd.int/forest/>

³⁴ further details in editorial of this same issue

³⁵ For more detailed information about the biofuels decision taken at CBD-COP11 read:

<http://peopleforestsrights.wordpress.com/2012/10/15/biofuels-is-the-cbd-asleep-at-the-wheel/>

³⁶ For more information go to: <http://www.criticalcollective.org/publications/agrofuels/>

³⁷ For full definition go to: <http://www.iccaconsortium.org/>

³⁸ <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/zaheerabad-tobe-recognised-as-biodiversity-heritage-site-soon/article4311099.ece>

³⁹ The lowest group in the Indian social hierarchy



have proved that for their kind of farming biodiversity is the best bet ecologically and economically.⁴⁰

The dimensions of the project touch upon many different aspects of sustainability and well-being, including food and seed sovereignty, community participation, and autonomy in communications and markets. The DDS women's sanghams initiative⁴¹ also includes the successful improvement and management of forest resources. Since 1990, they have regenerated over 1,000 acres of common land in and around their villages by planting and nurturing neighbourhood forests. In 28 villages, they have planted over a million trees on the degraded village commons. One of the DDS sanghams has won the prestigious national award called Vrukshamitra (Friends of Trees), awarded by the Government of India. This earned them the distinction of being the only dalit women's group in the country to have won this award.⁴²

Although there are many such community conservation examples worldwide, ICCAs are still being largely overlooked, even though they offer more effective results than other 'solutions' currently on the table. ICCAs can help, for example, to secure collective or community land tenure; establish a sustainable source of resources related to livelihoods; generate concern for the protection of wildlife; maintain the crucial ecosystem functions from which communities benefit; sustain links to the landscape or seascape; and to sustain religious, identity and cultural needs.⁴³ They can also help to keep certain harmful activities – such as mining and monoculture tree plantations – out of important biodiversity areas. But the current lack of support and legal recognition at different levels undermines the biodiversity and cultural richness of these sites.⁴⁴

However, during COP 11, concepts and terms relevant to ICCAs began to be accepted, such as provisions related to traditional knowledge, innovation, *in situ* conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.⁴⁵ Relevant decisions include Decision XI/14 on Article 8(j), Decision XI/24 on Protected Areas, and Decision XI/25 on the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity which, among others, calls Parties to support indigenous and local communities and strengthen the recognition of such areas, including the preparation of an Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas Registry managed by the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre.⁴⁶

With due recognition and support to ICCAs the achievement of the CBD's Strategic Plan of Action and Aichi Targets 11 and 13 (see box below) could become a reality at some point in the future.



Watershed near an ICCA in Palo Cabildo, Colombia. Photo: I. Alvarez, GFC.

- Target 11 - "By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes".
- Target 13 - "By 2020, the genetic diversity of cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and of wild relatives, including other socio-economically as well as culturally valuable species, is maintained, and strategies have been developed and implemented for minimizing genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity".

⁴⁰ personal communication to ICCA members

⁴¹ <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/sangams.htm>

⁴² Further info on the DDS women sanghams experience see <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/default.asp>

⁴³ Kothari A. with Corrigan, C., Jonas H., Neumann A. and Shrumm, H. (eds). 2012. *Recognising and Supporting Territories and Areas Conserved By Indigenous Peoples And Local Communities: Global Overview and National Case Studies*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, ICCA Consortium, Kalpavriksh, and Natural Justice, Montreal, Canada. Technical Series no. 64, 160 pp.

⁴⁴ Further details on Legal and Institutional Aspects of Recognizing and Supporting Conservation by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities http://www.iccaforum.org/images/stories/Database/legalreviewpdfs/synthesis_lr_report_engl.pdf

⁴⁵ http://naturaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/CBD_COP11_Consortium_Participants_Report.pdf

⁴⁶ For detailed information on COP11 decisions related to ICCA go to: http://naturaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/CBD_COP11_Consortium_Participants_Report.pdf



Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings & Events

February

- 16-22 February, 14th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-14) & the 27th Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC27/GMEF), Nairobi, Kenya.

March

- 4-15 March, Commission on the Status of Women No.57, New York, U.S.
- 19-23 March, Conference Advancing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, Bonn, Germany.
- 26-30 March, World Social Forum, Tunis, Tunisia.

April

- 8-19 April, United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-10), Istanbul, Turkey.

May

- 29 April-3 May, 2nd session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, Bonn, Germany (tentative).



Women's action against lack of commitments and false solutions in Doha.
Photo: Nathalie Eddy



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