

Small scale producers: key to the protection of biodiversity

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Via Campesina Intervention to CBD [Convention on Biological Diversity] SSTA 13, in Rome (Italy), 19th February 2008.

Via Campesina, the global movement of small-scale farmers in five continents, ROPPA, which represents the farmers and pastoralists of West Africa, and various civil society organisations here present are waiting for the CBD to indicate through which process it will recognise the rights of farmers, livestock keepers, fisherfolk, indigenous people and civil society NGOs to participate in decision making on the future of agricultural biodiversity.

Peasant farmers do not just conserve agricultural biodiversity, they renew and add to it continuously. The collective knowledge that they use is not only traditional but, with modern agro-ecology, they continuously innovate in order to ensure sustainable use of natural ecosystems and to protect food sovereignty. They contribute to the struggle against global warming by fixing organic matter in soils.

Industrial agriculture aggravates climate change by destroying soils and water resources and in consuming large quantities of fossil fuel energy in chemical fertilisers, pesticides, mechanisation and international transport. Ever since industry imposed its seeds and new livestock breeds, nowadays genetically modified or cloned, the decline of agricultural biodiversity has not stopped. In order to defray their investment in patents, industry is commercialising as few varieties and species as possible. Research into developing sterile seeds directly threatens biodiversity and peasants' livelihoods and must continue to be prohibited.

In order to enable adaptation to climate change and to meet new demands for food, farmers must secure access to their traditional seeds that are locked in gene banks, and reclaim their collective rights to conserve, use, exchange and sell their farm-saved seeds and their breeding animals.

Only diverse local breeds and family-based livestock keeping can respond both to the threat of avian flu and other livestock diseases, and to the need of poor people for protein. Industrial livestock production using a few patented breeds bred for excessive growth is contrary to the principles of responsibility concerning the prevention of new viruses and the hunger of poor people.

Only locally selected varieties and breeds and agriculture for local markets can combat the risk of invasive exotic species.

The collective rights of peasant farmers to access land for food must be defended against its appropriation for profit. With industrial production of genetically modified feed for livestock in rich countries, or of agrofuels for their vehicles, industrial tree plantations constitute the principal threat against forest biodiversity. Rich countries must renounce their illegitimate demands for debt repayment from poor countries, which forces them to destroy forests and their food crops in favour

of industrial export crops.

Finally, marine biodiversity and artisanal fishing on a small scale must be protected from destruction by industrial fisheries in all the world's seas, and not only in limited protected areas.

Small scale farmers and livestock keepers who practice agro-ecology, as well as small-scale fisherfolk and forest peoples, are key to the protection of agricultural biodiversity and ecosystems.

We demand that the CBD decisively recognises their central role.

Thank you for your attention

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