



forests and
biodiversity
& food
sovereignty

for the land that feeds us

struggles and achievements in building food sovereignty and
local diversity

july 2011



for the land that feeds us

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march 2011

Friends of the earth international is the world’s largest grassroots environmental network, uniting more than 70 diverse national member groups and some 5,000 local activist groups on every continent. With approximately 1.5 million members and supporters around the world, we campaign on today’s most urgent environmental and social issues.

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summary

for the land that feeds us

struggles and achievements in building food sovereignty and local diversity

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introduction to the publication

Indigenous communities, peasants and urban populations live in different parts of the world, conducting their lives in accordance with their traditions and culture, or on the basis of habits that have been acquired or imposed. As our livelihoods are all different, so too are our ways of obtaining our daily food; and this in turn is part of our culture and identity, contributing to the way in which we perceive nature, and the bonds we forge with mother earth.

These relationships also determine the way in which we coexist with the myriad different forms of life that surround us, which we call 'biodiversity'. Indigenous, peasant and fishers' communities, living in harmony with the environments they have chosen to settle in, rely on the varied natural food sources found in forests, jungles, rivers, oceans, lakes, and other ecosystems.

Indigenous-peasant communities also acquire their food from orchards, and family and/or community farms, preserving ancient traditions, which are adapted to their own or nearby environments. There are also semi-rural and urban populations maintaining close relationships with rural men and women, buying food from them; this helps to maintain the strength of local and community economies.

But it's also true that a large part of the population in each country dwells in big cities, and that these people tend to turn to the supermarket aisles of multinational enterprises for their food. These companies sell food to much of the world's population, but they are engaged in acquiring and trading in food in a way that excludes and conceals the work of thousands of rural working women and men, ignoring their relationships with biodiversity, and imposing models of production that have little to do with the sustainable use of common goods or the strengthening of local economies. Ideas about the nature and value of peasant work and food production are often distorted, and the rural world and biodiversity may only appear on people's 'radar' when they consider endangered species or exciting holiday destinations. This disconnection from their own cultural, social and culinary identity predisposes people to accepting that the 'production' of minerals and the destruction of the resources we ultimately depend upon are normal and necessary for 'development'. Many people have forgotten why food needs to be produced in a sustainable way.

How many times have we wondered where our daily food comes from? Do we know what the seeds look like? Do we know where to find particular plants growing and bearing particular fruits? Have we considered whether we are really in control of decisions about the kind of food we are about to eat? Or do we just cook and consume these foods in a way that has been determined by the market?

The answers to these questions will differ, depending on who responds. The answers from a member of an indigenous community won't be the same as those of a peasant, and both will differ again from those of an inhabitant of

a big city. And that's why we are inviting you to consider these questions: because the search for these varied answers will help all of us to revise our own habits and perspectives, and to understand that there are alternatives.

We are convinced that if the ways in which we obtain food are based on respect for natural cycles, the capacities of ecosystems, and the value of ancestral knowledge, combined with support for local production, we will be able to improve the quantity, quality and variety of our daily diets. At the same time we can strengthen local production and consumption, and live in harmony with the people and environment that surround and contain us. All in all, this would allow us to exercise our right to food sovereignty, respect the biological diversity of ecosystems, and promote cultural diversity amongst people.

We regard it as urgent to promote a form of education that values our ancestral cultural traditions and focuses on our existence as part of a biologically and culturally diverse world. This is why we want to share some of the answers people already have. This report describes other ways of organizing, successfully practiced by communities from different parts of the world. It shows that the role of women, men and local authorities, committed to mother earth, biodiversity and people, is fundamental for the permanence and success of these practices. But it also highlights the difficulties and limitations encountered, and describes people's non-stop search for solutions to the problems that the dominant socio-economic system throws up each and every day. Sharing these experiences encourages us to keep going and to strengthen our work and struggles.

We are aware that we are walking together, men and women, along different paths but with many spaces for meeting. Sharing these experiences will help us to recognize each other, and to acknowledge the fact that the upcoming struggle will be long, but full of opportunities to collaborate.

Following page: "Healthy food for everybody" School of the Memory, International Peasant Movement, Argentina.



introduction from the programs

“We work to uphold the local communities’ rights to control forest resources and secure sustainable livelihoods.”

Forests and Biodiversity Program

“We help build people’s food sovereignty based on diverse, localized, ecological and sovereign solutions.”

Food Sovereignty Program



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To undertake a joint work such as this is always a big challenge, but it can also be very exciting. In this case, both were certainly true.

Our intention was to publish a written publication with the goal of appreciating, publicizing and strengthening the links between biodiversity and food sovereignty, taking as a starting point the work that FOEI’s member groups are undertaking with grassroots organizations. This is why we called on them to share their experiences, their struggles and their achievements. The result is this report, with which we invite you to discover more about what is already happening around the world, both in terms of the adverse realities we collectively face, and with respect to our victories and anticipated successes.

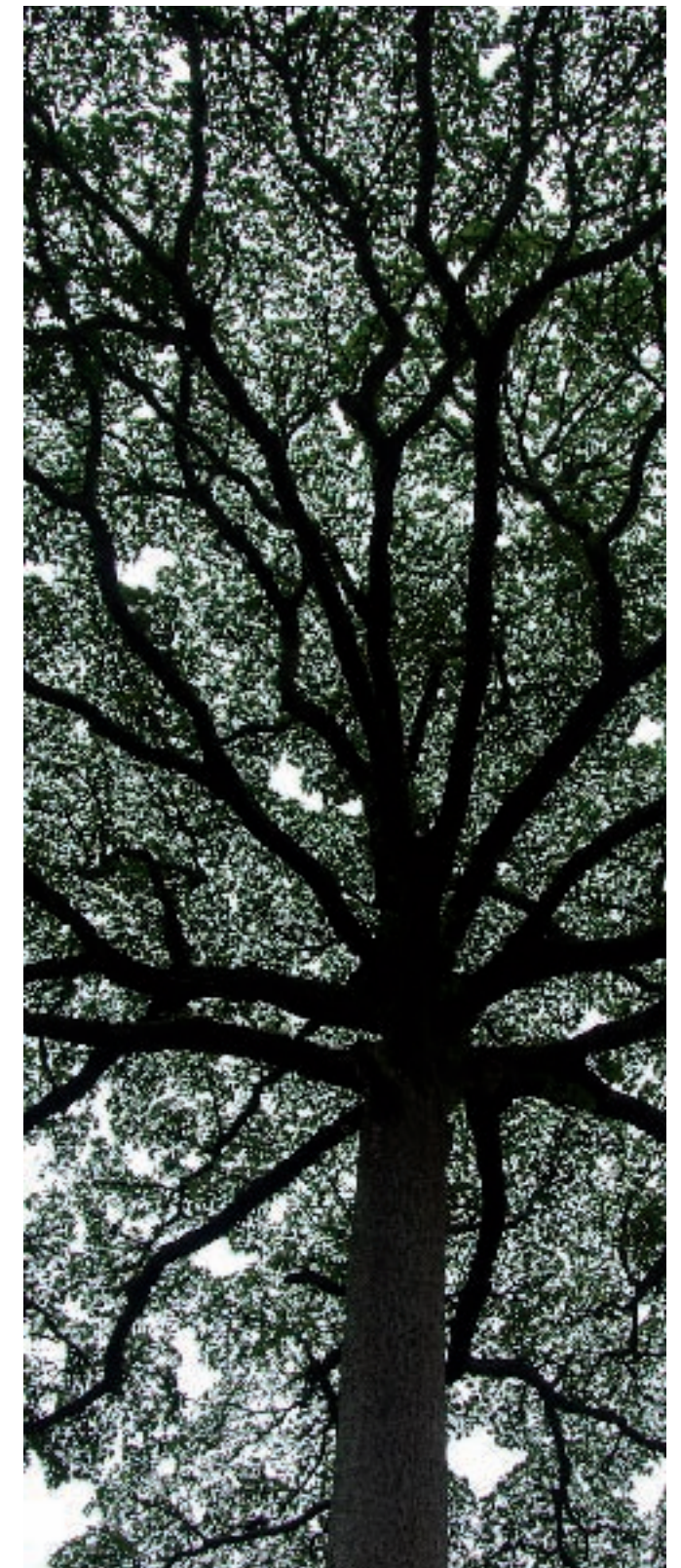
Bringing the case studies together in this one text makes it possible for us to really appreciate the diversity of approaches that each group has, and their many and varied ways of organizing and fighting in their respective territories. This has a special meaning for us, because it also prompts us to reflect on the fact that we all start from different realities, and we have different capacities. This report reaffirms that diversity is not only important in the natural world, it is what joins us together, it is our strength. We are convinced that the articulation of our diverse abilities to bring about change will help to strengthen FOEI’s Programs and Campaigns, and hope that reports such as this one will motivate others to participate in the federation’s many joint actions.

This publication has several aims, from highlighting the role that peasant women and men, indigenous people, and young people play in the improvement, use, conservation and defense of biodiversity, through to showing the strategic role that agroecological and family, peasant and urban agricultural practices play in the defense of territory and resistance against the advance of monocultures and other extractive industries.

We want to appreciate and value the relationship between food, seeds and biodiversity, encouraging families and communities to keep on contributing to the protection of life, land, common goods and ancestral knowledge. We want to inspire them to go on building food sovereignty founded on their relationship with the diversities of their territories. As several of the case studies demonstrate, we also want to reflect on and emphasize the role that women have played and still play through their daily contributions.

The testimonies that the communities and movements have contributed help to shore up our commitment to resisting every mechanism designed to appropriate the natural heritage and goods essential to food sovereignty and the protection of biodiversity. They illustrate people’s increasing awareness of food sovereignty and biodiversity; and demonstrate the esteem they have for native seeds and social diversity.

We made a big challenge come true: that the word continues to circulate.



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territories



Nigeria

forests are the key to human wellbeing and biological diversity

By Rita Osarogiagbon ¹- FOE Nigeria/Environmental Rights Action

Local peasants and indigenous communities are the defenders of forests, food, agriculture, water, biodiversity and the environment. Throughout history, they have been engaged in the management of forests and their resources as traditional owners. Now, however, their role is barely recognized when it comes to the formulation of policies relating to community forest governance. Worse, these communities, who depend on their immediate environment and ecosystems for their survival, are hit hardest when land is allotted to individuals and transnational companies by the government. These allocations, usually shrouded in shady deals, result in social and cultural dislocation, starvation and sickness. Entrusting community forest lands to transnational companies has brought impoverishment, not development, and has impacted indigenous community dwellers, especially women, young people and children.

For instance, French corporate giant Michelin's acquisition of over 3,500 hectares of the Iguobazuwa forest reserve in Edo state, to create a rubber plantation, increased hunger, malnutrition, poverty and forced migration, as food became harder to find or produce after the company bulldozed the area. Unsustainable logging practices by both registered and illegal contractors, the conversion of forests to plantations by multinational companies, and forest fires resulting from oil spills from energy facilities are all major challenges to ecosystem protection and food sovereignty in Nigeria.

Women play major roles in protecting forests and managing forest resources. As caregivers, they are involved in the daily running of their homes, subsistence farming, and the collection of fuel wood and medicinal leaves. Unfortunately, modern forest policies and laws neglect this reality, and are generally biased against women. For instance, there is gender inequality in access to land, which is critical when it comes to using and managing natural resources. In fact both modern and traditional laws tend to be interpreted in favor of male ownership and control. In some cases, women are banned from acquiring land without their husbands' consent.

"I used to be a large-scale cassava farmer. People used to come and buy cassava from me. So when Michelin came with their evil bulldozers... I fainted... nobody was there to help me. When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying on weeds. It was then I started weeping. It was as if there was no reason to live again. Now, no land, no farm, no food," says Mrs. Victoria Odogbee from Aifesoba.

Research has proven that when gender is mainstreamed into sustainable forest management, the effectiveness of policies is enhanced, food sovereignty is increased, potential conflicts among forests users are decreased, and women have equal access to land ownership. Yet even though southern Nigeria is particularly active in forestry, women are rarely hired because of its classification as a dangerous profession.

The African continent is severely impacted by climate-related

crises. Allowing rich countries to keep polluting in the North and coming to the 'third world' to cultivate plantations for rubber, palm oil and agrofuels is not the answer to climate change. Furthermore this approach is completely unacceptable, a form of environmental racism, that entrenches the devastating consequences felt across the continent, even though Africa has contributed little or nothing to climate change. The REDD scheme currently being imposed by governments intent on using market mechanisms to address climate change is not a genuine solution. It is an agenda to further colonize and impoverish the good-rich continent. Increasing cases of desertification in the north of the continent, deforestation in the south, and gully erosion in the east and west, along with generally unpredictable weather patterns, are visible signs of the early impact of climate change. These all impact on forests, biodiversity, food sovereignty, and the sustainability of livelihoods.

Food sovereignty and Africa's rich biodiversity are also being undermined by land grabbing for industrial agriculture, the cultivation for agrofuels, and the push to introduce genetically engineered crops by one means or another.

This is illustrated in research concerning the fate of the nine communities Michelin invaded in December 2007, bulldozing the forest and destroying people's livelihoods without prior warning. This action brought untold hardship for all, especially the women. This act not only destroyed their environmental heritage but also dislocated their economic circumstances, and their social and cultural affiliations.

challenging michelin

FOE Nigeria/ERA started a campaign to stop the threats posed by the conversion of forest ecosystems to rubber plantations. This has involved a series of awareness and advocacy skill-building workshops, specifically mobilizing women to take active roles. FOE Nigeria has also written to the government in Edo and to Michelin Nigeria Plc, demanding justice. Also, in January 2009, more than 50 placard-carrying community representatives from Aifesoba and Obozogbe visited FOE Nigeria's headquarters in Benin, to seek help and register their protest.

Together with partners around the world, this case has been made a global campaign, and 6,000 people from 60 countries signed a petition against Michelin, calling on the Edo government to revoke the concession. The campaign also resulted in the French company being awarded third 'prize' in the 2009 Pinocchio awards organized by Friends of the Earth France, specifically for abusing human rights.

The pressure on Michelin has brought about a dramatic increase in payment of compensation at least to the Obozogbe community (in comparison with compensation paid to other highly impacted communities). In addition, affected farmers were given at least some notice to remove their crops. This

allowed them to salvage a part of their harvest before the arrival of the bulldozers, which had never happened before.

The campaign has strengthened the alliance between FOE Nigeria, the World Rainforest Movement, including in Uruguay, and FOE France, who have been in touch with Michelin's headquarters (hence the executives at Michelin are very aware of the Nigerian case). More women are joining the fight against deforestation in the region. There is also growing concern among local and international journalists, which has led to improved reporting.

FOE Nigeria is demanding an outright revocation of the lease agreement with Michelin for non compliance with relevant laws. Also, the remediation of the environment by planting fast growing plants of various species to replace those lost when the bulldozers laid bare the environment, increasing the vulnerability of people and the environment to the impacts of climate change. They are also calling for full compensation for destroyed crops and the return of ancestral lands; and a comprehensive and adequate compensation package for affected farmers and communities, to be administered under the supervision of the Edo government and relevant civil society groups. The struggle, however, continues.



Uganda

BIDCO palm oil brings poverty, not prosperity

By David Kureeba² - National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) - FOE Uganda

BIDCO, the largest manufacturer of vegetable oils, fats, margarine, soaps and protein concentrates in East and Central Africa has established a multi-million dollar oil palm plantation on Bugala island in Kalangala. The company is linked to investment partners including Archer Daniels Midlands from the United States, the Wilmar Group in Malaysia, and Josovina of Singapore. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank granted a US\$10m loan for the plantations and supporting infrastructure, and the Ugandan government will contribute the equivalent of US\$12m in the form of land, electricity and roads. BIDCO will invest \$120m³.

The palm trees have already been planted, covering an area of 10,000 ha. Of these, 6,500 ha were planted by the nucleus estate (estate company) and 3,500 ha by out growers/small holders. This involved the destruction of the island's natural rain forest and grassland, and its replacement with oil palms in time to begin processing palm oil by December 2009.

The project was designed to improve livelihoods in Uganda, and those of the fishing community of Kalangala in particular. It was also intended to reduce the costs of importing vegetable oils, and to improve nutrition in the region. However, the outcomes have been quite different. The promises made by the government and the company have not been fulfilled, and a report undertaken by the Kalangala District NGO Forum (KADINGO), FOE Uganda's partner, highlights the serious negative impacts people are facing today.

The establishment of the oil palm plantation led to extensive deforestation and water depletion. As a result, local people can no longer obtain clean water, and a large number of forest products and services such as firewood and medicinal herbs have disappeared. Communities have suffered land grabbing at the hands of the company, which means they have lost the lands where they find or produce their food. This process has been accelerated by the government, which has given formal ownership of the land to the company, not the people, a move which repressed opposition from local communities. Now, people are much poorer than they were before, and there is more conflict between them, over land, food and firewood, all of which are in short supply. There has also been considerable wrangling over land between BIDCO and the community. Some residents worry about the fact that they cannot tell what the future holds for them or their children, because BIDCO is claiming the land they have settled on for decades, and is even being granted title to it.

It is particularly important to note that many communities were displaced from areas they were cultivating and grazing, some of them without adequate compensation, meaning that they also had to sell their cattle. Conflicts with the project have also arisen because the communities have found that they are forbidden from using the project's road network for livestock transportation; denied access to their traditional water access points located

within the project area; fined or lost "trespassing" animals grazing in traditional areas (with the risk of having the animals confiscated, slaughtered and eaten free of charge, which discourages animal rearing in the areas of the project).

Public land was previously used communally: so when the government gave it away, many were affected. Additionally, the booming land market on the island has attracted many rich men who have bought up private land. The indigenous communities that lived on these lands for years have either been fenced off or evicted. Consequently, they have lost their livelihoods. Even those who have not been affected yet are worried about their future and cannot make long-term investments. In Mugoye village, some groups are currently living on a land enclave surrounded by palm plantations, worried about what will happen if the 'owners' decide to sell to the company or convert it to palm tree growing under the out-growers scheme.

Kalangala used to be a tourist attraction. But with the introduction of agrofuels, much of the wildlife that attracted the tourists, like the beautiful rain forest and the monkeys, has disappeared. The remaining animals are also under threat: the government has ordered that the monkeys be killed, because they eat the oil palm fruits, leading to big losses for the company. The same thing applies to dogs, which damage the plantations⁴. By television, an official from the government ordered their killing if owners allowed them to access the plantation and eat palm fruits.

Another problem concerns the fuel required for processing the palm oil. The factory was meant to use electricity, but by the time harvesting and processing started, hydroelectric power had not reached Kalangala and electricity had not been installed in the factory. This delay resulted in the use of firewood, and it is remembered that BIDCO cleared a big chunk of forest for this purpose, leaving small patches in the hands of communities. Now, the company wants the remains, also for fuel. This is unthinkable for the communities, because this is where they get building materials and fuel wood for domestic use. Now, the cultural forest in the area, including sacred sites, has been destroyed. This has severely impacted the community of Kalangala.

foe uganda/nape's work

In September 2010, a team from FOE Uganda's Sustainability School visited Kalangala to assess the situation: they found communities and their leaders worrying about a water source that had been enclosed by palm oil meaning they had lost their access to it.

One of FOE Uganda's core objectives is to empower communities so that they can more easily identify their problems and forge a way forward. Thus this campaign against the palm oil fitted very well with the Sustainability School objectives. The issue of rights violations is increasing rapidly, especially in areas where foreign investors are establishing projects that involve plantation, hydropower and the extractive industries (including projects

financed by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)). BIDCO, for example, is planning to establish a further 30,000 ha of oil palm in the regions of Bunyoro, Iganga, Gulu, Mubende and other areas.

It is essential that civil society, government and other stakeholders sensitize local communities in some of the targeted areas, so that they become aware of the dangers of oil palm. The case in Kalangala provides vivid evidence of what can happen. It is important to note that these projects do not alleviate poverty: they accelerate it and worsen people's livelihoods.

2 - Forests and Biodiversity Officer, FOE Uganda/NAPE

3 - WRM, Bulletin 100, November 2005, <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/100/AF.html#Uganda>

4 - http://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=8034&Itemid=59



Indonesia calling for community based conservation

Berry Nahdian Forqan⁵ and Ade Fadli⁶ - WALHI - FOE Indonesia

Indonesia had lost 72% of its natural forest by the beginning of this century⁷. Uncontrolled deforestation has led to a massive loss of tropical forest, with Indonesia having one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. The number of ecological disasters has also been climbing year on year. Yet the government's efforts are limited to mere lip service, with no serious efforts being made to reduce or prevent these disasters. This is inspite of the fact that forests are a source of life for most Indonesians: approximately 60–80 million people are dependent upon them for food, medicines and shelter. Along with the increased destruction of forests, comes an increasing level of poverty.

According to Indonesia's Forestry Law, there are three major types of forest, based on different functions, namely: conservation, protected, and production forests. The first one is a forest area with specific characteristics, which is considered to be primarily for preserving the biodiversity of specific plant and animal species, as well as ecosystems. The government's interpretation of this, as stated in the Act on the Conservation of Biological Resources and Ecosystems, focuses on the management and wise utilization of biological resources to ensure the sustainability of supply by maintaining and improving diversity and value.

Various policies relating to nature conservation are based on this conceptual approach, which sees natural goods as nothing more than a static resource, to be preserved in a museum and identified as 'forbidden to be touched'. This point of view is anti-development and denies the dynamic capability of nature⁸. Because others have a very different perspective about conservation, this has triggered continual conflicts in conservation areas.

WALHI's actions

In 2003 FOE Indonesia/WALHI noted that there had been forced expulsions from conservation areas, including in National Park (TN) Lore Lindu, TN Kutai, TN Meru Betiri, TN Komodo, TN Rawa Aopa Watumoi, TN Taka Bonerate, TN Kerinci Seblat, and some other areas. Even in TN Komodo, fisherfolk are still forbidden from working in their traditional zone, which was unilaterally allocated as part of the core zone of the national park. Some other cases include a road construction in the Leuser Ecosystem Area and TN Gunung Leuser; cases of expulsion and shooting of fisherfolk in TN Komodo; the Napoleon Operation in TN Wakatobi; the expulsion of the Dongi-Dongi tribe in TN Lore Lindu; and the expulsion of the Moronene tribe in TN Rawa Aopa Watomohai.

Conservation is being transformed into a business, and this is becoming more and more evident as the years pass: ecotourism is raised as a cover for this. In TN Komodo, for example, a joint venture company was established several years ago named PT Putri Naga Komodo, whose shares are partly owned by an international conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy,

which also obtains grants from international financial institutions to strengthen its financial base. Meanwhile, the local fisher groups were 'forced' to look for another fishing area farther from their home.

Other findings were also published by the Washington Post: The Nature Conservancy, the world's richest conservation organization, was reported to have engaged in illegal logging, with a US\$64 million transaction to clear roads in order to construct luxurious houses on vulnerable land, and drilling for natural gas under a breeding zone for rare species of birds⁹.

Trade in species continues as well, including the trading of protected animals and plants, and animal exchange for zoos and research. In 2008¹⁰, there were deliveries of faeces, blood and DNA extracts from a variety of protected species, such as Owa, Orang-utan, Gibbon and Sumatran Rhinoceros, for example.

Local and indigenous communities have established a culture of managing life-sustaining resources over the generations. Various cultures and local systems have been built up on the basis of practical experience as communities have interacted with nature. This forest management is still performed in some areas, such as Lembo, Simpukng and Tembawang in Kalimantan, as well as in Sumatera known as Repong, Mone and Parak, and in Sulawesi, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Papua, and even in Java.

In 1999, FOE Indonesia compiled the principles underlying effective local management systems:

- people are the main actors (local communities and Indigenous Peoples);
- management institutions are established, implemented and controlled directly by the respective communities;
- there are clear territorial boundaries and legal standing;
- there are direct and intimate interactions between the communities and their environment;
- ecosystems are a fundamental part of local people's living systems;
- indigenous knowledge poses an important position underlying and enriching forest management systems and policies, in addition to modern knowledge;
- the prioritization of local technologies or those that have been adapted and within limits controlled by the people;
- the scale of production is limited by the principles of sustainability;
- economic systems are based on common welfare; and
- biodiversity (species and genetic) underlies a variety of fields, including cultivation methods and utilization of common goods, social systems, economic systems, etc.



FOE Indonesia aims to maintain the remaining ecological areas, including by encouraging ecological reforestation efforts and ensuring the recognition of community managed areas by the state. The Conservation of Biological Resources and Ecosystems Act should be expanded to cover the management of protected and conservation areas, as well as traditional conservation areas (local and indigenous community management systems), to provide a guarantee that Indonesian people can continue to live sustainable lives. WALHI expects the government and the parliament to take a more comprehensive approach to ecological and sociocultural issues in today's Indonesia, and proposes that they show a preference towards local/indigenous communities and the environment. Only by providing recognition and protection to the resources that sustain life, can this country move towards its ideals of independence.

5 - National Executive Director of FOE Indonesia/WALHI

6 - FOE Indonesia/WALHI activist and Forest Observer in East Kalimantan

7 - World Resources Institute, 1997.

8 - Ibid.

9 - Sinar Harapan, Conservation NGO Performs Illegal Logging (per December 2010), <http://www.sinarharapan.co.id/berita/0305/19/ipt01.html>

10 - Department of Forestry, Export Realization of Wild Animals and Plants (per October 2008), <http://www.dephut.go.id/index.php?q=id/node/4949>

Argentina

“there’s always something to eat and sell”

By Eduardo Sánchez - FOE Argentina

Misiones Province, in the far northeast of Argentina, is home to 40% of the country’s exotic plantations, even though it is one of Argentina’s smallest provinces. The advance of these industrial monocultures, mostly of tobacco and pine, has driven relentless deforestation in the area, destroying ecosystems and displacing peasant and indigenous communities from their ancestral territories.

This social rift and the consequent exodus of many young people from the countryside, combined with environmental degradation, is making it more and more difficult to produce healthy food in a healthy environment. Many farms are in a state of severe degradation, and traditional and subsistence crops have been neglected in favor of ‘essential’ products. Food sovereignty has dwindled as a direct consequence of the model of intensive agricultural production, which was introduced in the Uruguay



Silvio Galle.

River Basin area some years ago.

organizing family enterprises

Reni Luft is Brazilian and has lived in Argentina since she was 8 years old. She is married to Silvio Galle, an Argentinian, and they both live on a family farm 18 km from the city of El Soberbio, in Misiones Province. Like many other families in the region, they have chosen a new path, building family and community enterprises. Five years ago Reni and Silvio decided to produce and commercialize food from their own orchard, selling it to tourists visiting their home, and also in the city’s Feria Franca (Free Fair), butchers’ shops, the campsite, and a hotel in El Soberbio.

The zone they live in has been dominated and degraded by the production of tobacco and citronella. They told us that, “Tobacco production needs poison, and this contaminates the land over the years, damaging even those families dedicated to food production, because they are surrounded by those planting tobacco. The settler gets poisoned and all that is left for him is sickness. In addition to that, every two or three years the tobacco planters cut down even more forest, because tobacco needs fertile soil.”

With respect to the production of citronella, they said, “The main problem has been deforestation, because a great deal of wood is needed to fuel the distillation of citronella in the stills. As production increased, the citronella growers deforested increasing swathes of native forest. But overproduction led to a drop in the price of citronella, to such an extent that it then became unprofitable to cultivate it. Production dropped, leaving devastated farms and impoverished soils in its wake.”

Although the production of monocultures is tempting for local producers, because there are so few alternatives, Reni and Silvio decided to try to subsist by growing and consuming their own food and selling the surplus. With the help of two Italian NGOs they were able to access an agri-tourism initiative, which enabled them to improve their products and services: they improved their facilities by constructing a barbecue to cook food for tourists, building a showroom for their products, providing toilets, and erecting signs to their enterprise along the roadside. There are now 14 families running similar enterprises, and they collaborate with and recommend each other. They also meet up to discuss the development of their projects.

As defenders of local biodiversity, Reni and Silvio observe that, “Sometimes people look at the forest, but they can’t actually see all the different trees and native fruits, because they don’t know about them. Here we have several threatened indigenous plants, and as long as we have a space to plant them we will, so that people can know about them, and the birds can come and eat the fruit. There’s no need for artificial fertilizers because we produce our own organic compost. We use aromatic plants as insect repellents, which allows us to avoid using chemical products.

We’ve got used to producing without poisons and it works fine for us.”

“We used to produce annual crops including soybean, corn, sunflower, and cotton, but now we focus exclusively on cultivating food. For our own use we grow cassava, chard, scallions, lettuces, parsley, beets, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, and peanuts. Sometimes there’s enough to sell as well. With the fruits we prepare jams, spirits and natural juices. We also make pastries: scones, bread, sweet bread, cakes, and quince jelly cakes. We have a cow, and we raise chickens for the eggs. Living like this you grow roots, you take root, you want to take care of your land and what it produces. You also learn to talk to others: you have to sell your food at the fair and it’s important to be able to explain what you do and how you do it. I used to be afraid of talking, but not anymore! You also learn how to manage money, especially the women, who used to stay at home. Now they go to the fairs to sell their food. You break with your daily routine.” Reni and Silvio also have a more active social life as a direct result of their new enterprise. They participate in radio programs, and also in some of the meetings of the Movimiento Agrario Misionero (MAM)¹¹.

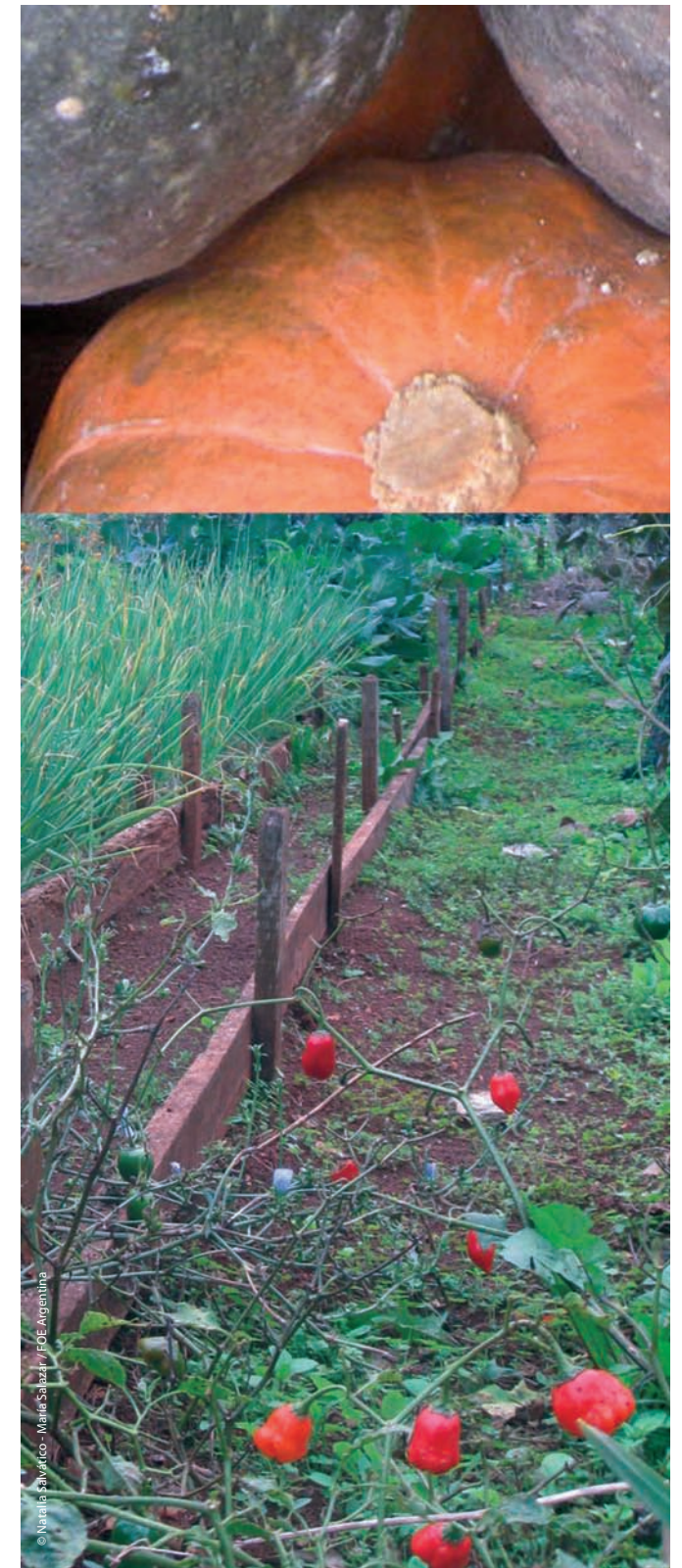
Reni and Silvio are clear that they don’t want to be involved in growing tobacco or citronella, because they are aware of the consequences. But their current life is far from easy: in particular they need more people to help with production. Their children, went away looking for “a better future”, as have many others, But they are determined to continue, affirming that, “With one or two hectares dedicated to producing food, the settlers can harvest all year long, crops are rotated, and there’s always something to eat and sell.”

regional alliance against tree and soybean monocultures

Friends of the Earth Argentina’s regional campaign, the ‘Regional alliance against monocultures of trees and soybeans in the Uruguay River Basin’, brought them into contact with the ‘Más Vale’ organization from El Soberbio, who introduced them to many local family enterprises. They visited and spoke with many peasant families, learning about the joys and difficulties they experience in their lives.

Part of the campaign strategy included organizing workshops with the local community about the sustainable management of native forest, deforestation, monocultures, and the use of agrochemicals and their consequences and alternatives, all from a local point of view. Friends of the Earth Argentina considers this kind of dialogue and discussion to be fundamental to food sovereignty, as it supports communities resisting the industrial agricultural model, and encourages them to continue with their bold bid to transform their lives and environment by building their own new enterprises.

11 - The Agrarian Movement of Misiones is an agrarian association of small and medium producers, formed in the early 1970’s.



Orchard in Misiones, Argentina

Colombia

a history of resistance: protecting the plentiful páramo

this article is based on the writings of María Stella Sandoval - FOE Colombia/CENSAT

Life in the García Rovira Province in Santander is rooted in agriculture. It is a fertile region, producing potatoes, onions, cassava, corn, kidney beans, fique fiber, cane, tobacco, blackberries, luloes, tree tomatoes, papayas, oranges, bananas, and other foods. The livestock sector is also an economic mainstay. The region's natural wealth is enriched by the fact that 37.5% of the territory consists of an abundant 'water factory', the El Almorzadero páramo ecosystem. This makes García Rovira a region where food production can be guaranteed: with the right forms of production and distribution enough food can be grown to feed all the inhabitants of the province and those in the surrounding areas. This important fact shapes the local culture, but there are some factors working in opposition at present, including a disdain for all things rural, damaging and unhealthy food production techniques, and a persistent view of the páramo as a source of minerals. The pressure to introduce coal mining continues, which has already deteriorated the sources of water, soil and identity.

the birth of agrovida

In 1998, peasant families that came into contact with each other when they resolved to challenge the threats to the páramo, decided to create Agrovida - the Association of Agroecological Producers of García Rovira - in order to improve their livelihoods and address threats to their culture. They came from several municipalities in the province including Málaga, Cerrito, Concepción, Enciso, San José de Miranda, San Andrés and Molagavita. Agrovida sprang into life as a result, giving the peasants a means of addressing a wide range of issues.

Agrovida's key priority has been to address a common problem: a lack of alternative markets for agroecological products. The conventional model had homogenized tastes to such a degree that traditional 'criollo' varieties had faded into the background: they were not known and

there was little demand for them. Conventional markets were also unsuitable because intermediaries tended to mix up the intensively produced and agroecological food products, which was deeply discouraging for both producers and consumers.

As part of the solution to this problem, Málaga initiated the National Feast of Traditional Seeds in 2000, gathering together more than 400 peasant women and men, grassroots organizations, environmentalists, indigenous people and academics (both men and women). As the years have passed, Agrovida has been able to revitalise the growing of more than 100 varieties of potato, 40 varieties of broad bean and 30 varieties of kidney bean, and has diversified its in situ seed banks.

Agrovida then asked the municipality for a space in which they could operate, and in 2002 they inaugurated the Peasant

Agroecological Market of García Rovira Province. Each month it promoted peasant culture, sharing music, and selling chichi drinks, fruit and vegetables, and traditional food and other products, including angú¹², jams, flowers, eggs, criollo chickens, cheeses and curd.

Interaction and exchanges between families from the high and low zones also became possible, strengthening alliances amongst the peasants and allowing a greater sharing of this diverse range of locally-produced foods. The market took place every month for two years, providing an opportunity for peasants to define criteria and strategies. Important issues were discussed including production, prices, presentation, and



packaging. They held community lunches with the food that everyone brought.

Numerous questions arose out of these meetings: How could they convince consumers, women and men, that their products were really healthy? How expensive should the food be, and who should they sell it to? How could they guarantee its availability? How would they ensure that the peasant products reached the market, even from far away spots? And how could they protect the food sovereignty of the associated peasant families?

The first decision they made was that they would only commercialize the families' surplus production. They also agreed that the agroecological production should reach and benefit the most vulnerable populations, and that the prices charged should be those of the conventional market, avoiding overheads that would exclude the poorest women and men, with only richer people being able to afford them.

They also decided to design their own certification system. Organic products were already being certified by specialized institutions, but it was felt that this system often had negative impacts for family and community enterprises, failing to provide credibility, social justice, and a process that works at the community level. This certification was even seen as yet another system of domination and indebtedness: it didn't guarantee decent living and working conditions for the women and men producing the food, and was focused on production for export rather than guaranteeing food sovereignty. Agrovida decided to establish a direct relationship with the women and men buying their products, through a system of certification showing the agroecological productive processes.

In 2005, a National Meeting of Ecological Markets also took place. Here they debated numerous issues including:

- the negotiations and agreements that were taking place in the context of the Trade Promotion Agreement with the United States (formerly known as ALCA), and the World Trade Organization (WTO);
- the impact of production chains on peasant cultures;
- the threats posed by agribusinesses and green export markets, which are being promoted by transnational financial institutions and the Colombian government;
- the implications of 'clean' production designed to meet the demands of high income consumers, which can be detrimental to diversity and people's food sovereignty.

In 2007, the group also decided to establish a Solidarity Economy Community Shop, a process that further strengthened Agrovida. Its goal is to supply what the peasant families need but do not produce: items that make up the basic family food basket (excluding cigarettes, spirits, sodas and other products

from transnationals companies such as Coca-Cola or Nestlé).

The shop prioritizes peasant and local production: this means that it also avoids stocking products that would compete with those of the Agrovida label, which include coffee, kidney beans, honey, pollen, quinoa, coconut sweets, jellies, brown sugarloaves, creams, soap, and shampoo. This makes solidarity real and creates trust amongst the producers, who are gradually coming to understand the benefits of the Agrovida products and label. The end goal is that the economic resources of the more than 700 peasant families connected through Agrovida are redistributed amongst them, rather than being usurped by big companies.

The shop works under the principles of the solidarity economy: the free entry and exit of products and the equitable distribution of surpluses, permanent education, and integration associative. Nowadays, it also sells the products of other organizational processes including coca tea, coca rum, quinoa products, amaranth and maca, ecological chocolate, curcuma, ginger, hibiscus and creams. They are also considering establishing a community winery, which would be administrated by Agrovida.

The climate crisis is already affecting the region drastically, and the peasant population in particular. Shortages of irrigation water and the intensity of solar radiation have reduced production levels¹³, in many cases to mere subsistence level. Thus alternatives, such as the conservation of water, have to be considered by every peasant community enterprise, including shops. This is also the reason why it is vitally important that the páramo ecosystem is protected from the threat of mining.

A people's initiative to declare the páramo a mining-free zone is underway, and the idea has also been taken up by the neighboring municipality, which is also affected by the mining concession. It is critical that this effort is supported throughout the province. If the páramo is threatened, so too is the intergal nature of the territory, including its biodiversity, and food sovereignty.

¹² - Angú, is a cornmeal dish which, just like other traditional dishes, was becoming forgotten in the region; now these dishes are being prepared and offered in the park, as a way of reviving them.

¹³ - Some products such as kidney bean, corn, wheat, quinoa, cocoa, and some produced ones such as coffee, honey, pollen, wines and jams, have not been affected quite so severely, because they can be stored for some time. But the production of vegetables and fruit has been limited, except for mangos, oranges, tangerines, lemons and bananas.

Costa Rica

a wealth of experience in community forest management and peasant agriculture

By Mariana Porras ¹⁴ - FOE Costa Rica / COECOceiba

In Costa Rica, the Institute for Agrarian Development (IDA) distributes land to peasant families. This program, which has been ongoing since the 1970's, acquires farms from private owners and has established 'peasant settlements' on them. Each settlement usually consists of a built-up zone and a series of parcels of land of similar size for agricultural use.



When it was planning these peasant settlements, the IDA also left areas aside, because of their protective functions or as nature reserves. These include wetland zones, steep slopes, areas of primary forest, and water sources. Even though most are just patches of forest less than fifty hectares in size, they collectively contain a great deal of the region's exuberant biological wealth, including species that are endangered and/or endemic to the area¹⁵. They are vital to the protection of wildlife in Costa Rica.

The ownership of these settlements, as defined by the Forestry Law, rests with the Ministry of the Environment (MINAET), but many of them are in a legal and administrative limbo in reality, with the majority still in the hands of IDA. This confusion over ownership has resulted in poor management; in the worst cases it has led to forests being destroyed by fire, invaded, or suffering high rates of hunting and illegal logging. None of the institutions wants to take responsibility for such events.

In the North Huetar zone, which represents 14% of the national territory, the presence of such settlements is particularly important. Altogether there are 136 peasant settlements, totaling an area of approximately 46,900 hectares. There are more than 8,600 families living in these settlements, constituting an estimated population of about 55,665 inhabitants, more than a quarter of the regional population. About 25% of these settlements have (or used to have) community forests of more than 5 hectares.

Since the mid 1990's, several peasant organizations, together with Friends of the Earth Costa Rica/COECOceiba, have been calling for more attention to be paid to these reserves, because of their potential contribution in terms of sustainable forest management. There has also been a concerted effort to increase knowledge about the zone's community forests, placing them within a system of geographic information, and evaluating their state from a biophysical point of view as well as with respect to their management and conservation.

peasant settlement of sonafluca

The Settlement of Sonafluca, located in the Cantons of San Ramón and San Carlos, is a particularly successful example of community forest management. It is 1,750 hectares in size, and has 112 'parceleros' (peasants in receipt of land distributed by the government). There are three well-established communities, in Santa Lucía, Tres Esquinas and El Bosque; and the community forest, the Dendrobates Biological Reserve¹⁶, covers 146ha.

The settlement was created in the late 1980's, but the forest has had to be defended on several occasions since then, such as in 1994, when 21 of those hectares were invaded. It is mostly primary forest, and although probably logged in some

sections, its level of biodiversity is high, as is typical in this zone. Notable species include threatened tree species such as Manu (Minquartia guianensis) and Tostao (Sclerolobium costaricense).

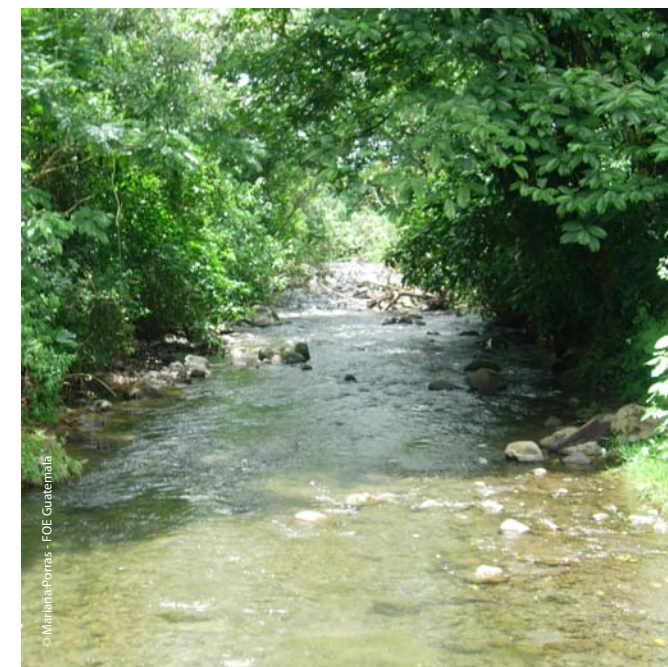
It also forms part of the buffer zone protecting the Children's Eternal Rain Forest; and it has the potential to be linked to the small neighboring forest of La Pajula (a water source located in the community of Santa Lucía) via a forest corridor. The Administrative Association of Aqueducts and Communal Drains (ASADA) manages this resource, from which water is supplied to the whole settlement and some neighboring communities.

The community's forest also incorporates the basic infrastructure needed to sustain rural tourism, including a reception point with toilets, a lounge, a short path of 1 kilometer and another of 5 kilometers. It also has a water tank and pipes.

The smaller parcels of land that also make up the settlement have an average size of 4 to 5 hectares and are characterized by their agroforestry systems, which incorporate crops, including cassava, ñame, tiquisque, papaya and a variety of vegetables, as well as livestock and trees. They are located in fenced areas or in small patches of forest. Part of the production from these parcels is for family consumption, and part is sold on the national market. It is important to emphasize that in this particular settlement most of the parcels remain with their original owners: it has been reported that in other settlements in Costa Rica the parcels have been sold to big agribusiness companies because of the pressure to develop agricultural and forestry monocultures.

The community forests are still threatened, however, in spite of the strong community orientation of the settlements. This is partly because of a failure to mark their boundaries effectively, and partly because of general uncertainty related to the fact that these territories still belong to the state. Whilst it is possible for the communities to protect, manage and consolidate these areas, there is concern that work done will not be recognized, and that there remains a possibility that people will no longer be able to administer these areas for purposes of community tourism or environmental education, and that they may no longer be allowed to utilize fallen wood, including for handicrafts, or medicinal plants. If there are changes to the country's environmental legislation, could the forests be passed in to private hands? This would represent a serious threat, not least because of the significant amount of water produced in forests such as the Dendrobates Biological Reserve.

It is thus of the greatest importance that the community right that communities have in relation to their forests is fully recognized, allowing them to move ahead with the sustainable



use of these areas, integrating them into their strategies for improving their livelihoods, and defining the rules regarding their protection and use. The parceleros' sense of belonging has allowed them to understand the importance of defending their territory, preserving their lands and working them to plant a variety of food crops.

¹⁴ - Forestry Engineer, a member of COECOceiba FoE Costa Rica, working in the area of Forests and Biodiversity.

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¹⁶ - Dendrobates are poison arrow frogs.

El Salvador

los cuzcatlecos: conserving criolla seeds, resisting transgenics

By Silvia Quiroa – FOE El Salvador/CESTA

El Salvador has experienced severe food shortages, as have other Central American countries. These, in combination with the destruction of the country's ecosystems, have generated an unprecedented food crisis.

There are several underlying factors, including the fact that public policies favor the importation of cereals and other basic foods to maintain market demand, rather than programs that would encourage domestic production and crop diversity. This in turn has led to a severe weakening of the agricultural sector: nowadays, small parcels of land are only used for subsistence purposes, producing foods to be consumed by those farming them. Soils are impoverished and levels of productivity are very low, as a result of the excessive use of chemical inputs promoted by agribusinesses such as Monsanto, Bayer and Syngenta.

At the same time, the global climate crisis is increasingly evident, especially in highly deforested countries like El Salvador: 88.7% of its territory is vulnerable to natural disasters, according to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC). This makes it one of the most vulnerable countries in the whole world. These climate-related vulnerabilities also affect the cultivation of food.

The most obvious consequence is an increase in food prices in the market. In 2008, for example, prices increased by 45% compared with the previous year. According to the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), some 25% of the population is finding it harder to buy food.

Another key concern is the rapid loss of biodiversity and genetic erosion, resulting from the indiscriminate use of chemical inputs for agriculture, such as glyphosate, and from deforestation triggered by the continuing expansion of the agricultural frontier, mainly to free up land for the production of sugar cane.

Also, it is important to bear in mind that the highest unemployment rate in the country is that of the rural sector: in 2008 it stood at 6%. On top of this, some 50% of the population in this zone lives in a state of poverty, according to the National Association of Agricultural Workers (ANTA).

the experience of los cuzcatlecos

In response to these problems, many rural communities in El Salvador have initiated and organized actions to reduce the impacts of the food crisis and to promote sustainable models of agricultural production, distribution and commercialization. One example is the group Los Cuzcatlecos, which has participants from eight communities in the municipalities of Monte San

Juan, Perulapía, Santa Cruz Michapa and Tenancingo, in the Cuscatlán department. They began organizing themselves in 2006, with a view to sharing and seeking out knowledge about how to produce food whilst taking care of the environment. They also wanted to find ways of creating alternative means of subsistence and ways of generating surplus income for the depressed rural economy.

To these ends the group's members have worked locally in vegetable production, in nutritional and medicinal orchards, and in the elaboration of natural medicines to treat basic health problems afflicting the population. The principle underlying their efforts is that every woman and every man is part of nature.

Nowadays, in addition to being very experienced and informed about these topics, the members of Los Cuzcatlecos have also ventured into politics, where they have played an active role in resisting the introduction of transgenics, including by pushing for the observance of the Consumer's Law regarding the labeling of genetically modified products, and by defending the article in the Seeds Law that forbade production with transgenics.

It is important to emphasize that state institutions have urged some of the group's members to switch to cultivating tempate (*Jatropha curcas* L.) or castor oil plants (*Ricinus communis* L.), as raw materials for agrofuels. Members have also been tempted by the delivery of agricultural packages from the government, containing seeds and chemical inputs, surely intended to discourage agroecological practices. These have been accompanied by general pressure resulting from the activities of agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto.

One of the Los Cuzcatlecos community group's key strategies is the promotion of traditional or 'criolla' seeds, by collecting, keeping and protecting them in biodiversity 'sanctuaries'. To this end, spaces have been created to facilitate seed exchanges amongst peasant women and men from different zones of the country. Gradually a number of varieties have been recovered, especially corn and kidney bean varieties, which had previously been lost in some regions. In these meetings, each participant shows his or her ways of preserving the seeds, contributing to a recovery of ancestral practices of producing and preserving criolla seeds, through sharing, awareness raising and joint efforts and struggle. The group also has access to an alternative market, where they exhibit and exchange their produce. In addition they have created seed inventories, and train people to work in the biodiversity sanctuaries.

Los Cuzcatlecos belongs to the Citizens' Network against Transgenics¹⁷, which is part of the Mesoamerican campaign

against Monsanto. In this sense, they have also developed activities focusing on mobilizing and resisting the experimental cultivation of transgenics by Monsanto. FOE El Salvador/CESTA has helped Los Cuzcatlecos to link in to several of these regional and national spaces, which also helps to build links with FOEI and other international campaigns including against Monsanto, against monocultures, and against agrofuels, and for the rescue and restoration of criolla seeds. Los Cuzcatlecos have participated in some of these international meetings, including the Mesoamerican Biological and Cultural Diversity Week, and the Mesoamerican Forum against Agribusiness and for the Sovereignty of Mesoamerican People, both of which are spaces for information exchange, learning and linking with other local groups.

Their achievements have been many. An important advance has been accessing communications media, which has made them much more visible when they make proposals and demands. Nowadays, for example, they are - along with other groups of microenterprises - in a position to negotiate loans from the Ministry of Economy, in order to develop productive subsistence enterprises.

They have also been able to articulate their demands with respect to seeds and biodiversity much more effectively. Guadalupe, a member of the group, says, "We are organized and this has enabled us to make connections with other groups, to understand their experiences and to build our own knowledge. We have learnt to protect and conserve the environment. If I don't protect my environment, my land, my parcel won't give me the fruits I expect. This means I need to diversify it, and plant hedgerows."



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United States giving consumers a choice

By Eric Hoffman¹⁸ and Kate McMahon¹⁹, Friends of the Earth US

Agriculture in the United States is an increasingly concentrated industry, with fewer farmers and a rapidly decreasing diversity of crops and breeds. Less than 2% of the American population now farm for a living, and they are growing fewer crops – from around five crops per farm in 1900 to just one crop per farm today, on average²⁰. The top four seed companies control 43% of the US seed market, and 50% of the ‘proprietary’ market through intellectual property rights – largely with respect to genetically engineered seeds²¹.

This loss of on-farm diversity has also brought severe loss of both agricultural and ecological biodiversity. At least 200-280 million km² are dedicated each year to growing the major monoculture commodity crops: corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton. By 1990, 46% of corn grown in the US came from just six varieties. Half of the country’s wheat came from just nine varieties, and 96% of peas came from only two varieties²². Monoculture farming is heavily dependent on

chemical pesticides and fertilizers, which have led to further losses of biodiversity, not only threatening the target pest or weed but entire ecosystems. Pesticides bio-accumulate up the food chain, and some studies have even shown mass killings of birds and amphibians linked to it²³. Herbicides kill all plant vegetation, completely disrupting food chains. Additionally, chemical fertilizers run off into local waterways and have led to loss of aquatic biodiversity²⁴.

Problems of industrial agriculture are only exacerbated by the increased use of biotechnology. Monsanto now controls 60% of corn and 62.5% of soybean seeds and seed traits licensed in the United States²⁵. As of 2009, Monsanto’s patented genetically engineered genes were found in 93% of all soybeans and 80% of all corn grown in the US²⁶. Genetically engineered crops are “pesticide-promoting” (since the only two traits in commercial use in the US are for plants to be resistant to herbicides and for plants to produce their own insecticide.) This has led to a significant increase in spraying

of herbicides and even to the development of ‘super-weeds’ that are becoming resistant to these chemicals, which is causing farmers to revert back to using even more toxic chemicals.

Although far from being a healthy and just food system, the US public is beginning to wake up to the dangers of industrial agriculture and start supporting their local farmers and local food systems. Communities are eating more fresh and nutritious food while farmers are paid directly and money stays in the local community. Genetically engineered-free food labels are the fastest growing ones in the US, showing that citizens are beginning to reject this untested, unregulated, and dangerous technology.

Friends of the earth us’s experience

Founded in 1970, Friends of the Earth US’s mission is to champion a healthy and just world. The Food and Technology campaign is currently being re-vamped, and we are working to develop a comprehensive campaign to address the systemic problems within the agricultural sector. A primary focus is to eliminate the economic drivers of environmental degradation, including federal tax subsidies, private financial support or other financial incentives. In the agricultural sector, for example, historically FOE US has campaigned to end subsidies for commodity crops, which primarily support industrial agricultural operations and the export of these commodity crops.

At present, we are focused on subsidies for unsustainable agrofuels, such as corn ethanol, which destroys natural prairie biodiversity and uses up farmland. More than 30% of this crop is diverted away from other uses. The increased pressure for land has resulted in unnaturally high prices of corn, having impacts on food prices in the US and around the world – and causing deforestation and other forms of land use change, both in the US and elsewhere in the world.

Corn production in the US requires massive amounts of fertilizers and pesticides, which results in water pollution downstream. Our campaign also seeks to educate lawmakers and the public on the environmental harm of US agrofuels policy.

Another long-standing campaign aims to alert the public to the dangers posed by genetically engineered organisms. Genetic modification creates enormous threats to biodiversity, while also concentrating control of agricultural production in the hands of a few corporations. FOE US’s biggest exposé came in September 2000 when, through independent testing, we discovered StarLink, a genetically engineered corn not approved for human consumption, in taco shells, a Kraft

product. They were forced to recall millions of boxes, publicly reinforcing the threats posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the need for safety testing and accurate labeling so that consumers can make informed choices.

Our campaign on genetic modification continues. Genetically engineered and cloned animals are expected to hit the US market in the near future and we are working to ensure they are not approved, or at least to ensure that they are labeled so consumers have a choice, and can avoid these dangerous foods.

Currently, we are a key environmental organization challenging the approval of the world’s first genetically engineered animal intended for human consumption, an Atlantic salmon engineered to supposedly grow twice as fast. FOE US also remains crucial in challenging developments in biotechnology, nanotechnology and synthetic biology. We are fighting to stop them and to ensure that if they do reach the market they are properly regulated to protect people and the environment – not corporate profits. Emerging technologies are a threat to food sovereignty since they allow the building blocks of life to be patented by private interests, and put farmers, farm workers, the land, biodiversity, and citizens in general at risk.

Increased use of genetically modified seeds also reduces the diversity of grain options and the sovereignty of farmers and consumers alike, putting control over these options into the hands of corporations. Increased use of agrofuels puts stress on land for food production as well as for natural ecosystems, while creating a strange marriage between agribusiness and big oil. Our work on these two issue areas helps highlight the broader problems with US agricultural policy.



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Guatemala

an interview with Florinda Ramírez, farming in Cuilco

By Claudia Jerónimo, FOE Guatemala/CEIBA

“This ranch is called ‘Por Venir’²⁷ because everything is about to arrive. For example, just now the cow and one of the goats are pregnant: the calf, the kid, the milk and the cheese, they are all on the way.

My name is Florinda Ramírez Ambrocio. My husband is called Roberto. I have five children. Some 20 years ago, we started to plant trees on our parcel of land. Before that we farmed kidney beans and corn on a borrowed plot of land, but not trees, orange or coffee, because it was not our land. That’s why we worked hard and bought this place, even though it is a very dry place, there’s too much stone.

In fact it had nothing. That’s why, when we started, my husband was not very excited. Anyway, we, the women, planted vegetables. The river took them away during the first winter, but we planted again. Then he got enthusiastic and began planting grass, I started to introduce trees for my firewood and, even though I had to carry the irrigation water, we increased the work, we began to establish nurseries, to make organic compost, and we planted milpa²⁸.

We started conserving the soil after Hurricane Stan²⁹ as part of a program of ensuring potable water. In those days we still didn’t have enough grass to feed the animals, so we began to build terraces as well. That was when the real diversification of our parcel got started. We understood that protecting the soil was important in this area: when the river floods the grass we planted protects the soil. But if the crop is lost, because of some flood we can’t control, we have the seeds to plant it back. There’s still much to do, but if we count how many species there are on the ranch, we realize there’s already a good variety³⁰.

Now we have many plants and much to eat, given that my husband kept on supporting us. I believe we won’t leave our work, we have done a lot. When he is not around, we, the family, remain in charge, because the absence of the husband doesn’t mean work stops. Sometimes it is hard work, but my children help me. Alone it would be very difficult to do the laundry, take care of the kids, see they go to school, sell the milk, which is important for getting money. We, the women, help to look after the animals in particular. At home I cook along with my daughter-in-law and my daughters. We get the firewood, In the afternoons sometimes we get together with some partners to learn how to do stuff that is useful on the parcel.

We’ll keep on improving, we have already filled the parcel with guineos³¹, cinnamon, peppers, cocoa, star apples, loquats, and macadamia nuts. We are already out of space to plant (laughs), we are moving toward the river banks. We’re thinking about planting coffee, taking advantage of the shadow of the fruit trees.

We have a seed bank too. If I don’t care for the seed, I lose it. If I work with the parcel, we keep the seed, the plants, the traditions. This year we’ll keep our own kidney beans. The corn seeds we cultivate are criolla seeds, one of them is broad and yellowish, an ‘old one’, we don’t know where my father-in-law got it from; another is reddish, a neighbor donated it to us. We are happy because harvesting is time for preparing the milpa, with all the family working together.

For me, food sovereignty is a right that is related to vegetables, kidney beans, eggs, ranch meat. We live our right when we have a place to produce, when we are able to plant our vegetables, when we have money from our harvest, which means we can buy what we don’t produce because the climate or the characteristics don’t allow it. One needs to have some money. On this ranch, our money and our harvest are shared. That’s why it’s good to have a good family relationship, to make the parcel work. When the product is sold, it’s sold here on the ranch or we go door-to-door in the community or the neighboring village.

We make preserves, which my daughter takes to school to sell, the same thing with cushin fruit, that’s why she has some savings and this allows her to build a good habit of saving. My little son also sells small flowers, which people come looking for, he’s beginning to save some money too. This is important because the kids learn that the parcel can also provide a living, it provides more than one thinks. What we sell most is milk, coffee, chili, cilantro, green manure seeds (soybean, guandul), coyol palm nuts, preserves, jams, and cheese. We also have some bee boxes that produce honey for us.

We plant clumps of cilantro, hierba mora³², and chipilín; I plant peanuts and I take the seeds. We also have vegetables, kohlrabi, quilete, bishnay.... that’s the good thing about working the land and learning about plants from other places. You have to ask your neighbors to know which plants can be eaten and how, it’s important to learn well how the plant is germinated, where, how it smells and what it looks like, because there are plants that look alike that may be harmful.

There are medicinal plants, if we get sick we use them, all my children have been cured like that. It’s been years since I went to the health center and then only for vaccinations. We also eat very well, many vegetables, tortillas, a little meat but many herbs, much milk and cheese for us to remain healthy. It’s fundamental to be well fed, in order to not to spend money on expensive medicines to get well.

Sharing first with the family is admirable. The exchanges of knowledge and seeds with other families have made us think a lot. It doesn’t matter what the size of the parcel is, what counts is the interest, the initiative. The work relating to the



27 - Por Venir is a ranch located in Cuilco, in the Huehuetenago Department, Guatemala, which is on the border with Mexico. Por Venir means ‘about to arrive’

28 - Milpa is an ancestral mesoamerican intercropping system of corn, kidney bean, squash, herbs tubers, and flowers.

29 - In 2005.

30 - C. Nájera 2010. About 97 species of plants were counted in the parcel.

31 - Bananas

32 - Known as ‘healall’ in English.

community is more difficult, but it is important to defend it against deforestation, against mining...and sometimes there are not enough spaces on the training programs for everybody, but if we share what we learn, that really promotes knowledge, participation and the struggle.

Mining is a major contamination. It won’t help us. The big river will bring pollution if the mine is established near the water. If you plant your vegetables, you want the river to be clean. The good food will get contaminated. Nearby they have traced where there are mines. We don’t agree with that, because the land gives us the conditions we need for the milpa to grow, for it to give a good harvest. The water will be gone, it’s going to get dry.

Guatemala lacks good food, those with few resources can still plant and harvest to eat. Even if it’s not a big amount, even planting in tyres, you can have plants to eat. If there’s no land, you can rent it, and if there’s not much space or money, you can find other ways of planting. There are places very far away, plots of land in a very bad location, on slopes, or without nutrition for the plant. That’s why it’s important to work very well on the parcel, to take care of the soil, and put as many plants in as possible. We always have to keep on working: this year for example, we have to improve the water collecting system and install a solar heater, which is being promoted now. There’s a lot to do, we are happy because now we have more than only grass on our ‘integral parcel’...

This job is good, it keeps us healthy, and provides most of our food. I’m happy, my husband as well, because we know that we are working, we have enough to eat and sell. We get excited about the planting. When we bought this land we planted cushin, which we used to buy. We started to train, and then we kept on working. My husband got so excited about the work that he saved up and bought another plot of land in Mexico.”

Florinda Ramírez, her husband Roberto and their little children moved to Mexico at the end of 2010. The ranch ‘Por Venir’ remains in the hands of the eldest son, while they work on the new parcel, on the other side of the frontier, to diversify it, and begin to socialize with their new neighbors, developing food sovereignty.

FOE Guatemala/CEIBA promotes the construction of a decent life, through the rescue and assessment of traditional cultures and biological diversity. The experience of this family encourages us to keep on training and strengthening the families that are building food sovereignty, health and the defense of territories through their daily actions, no matter where they are.

Suiza

la iniciativa popular para el uso sustentable de la tierra

por Bertrand Sansonnens, en colaboración con Marcus Ulber y Marcel Liner

Switzerland is a small country whose territory has been increasingly urbanized over the last few decades, at a very quick pace and in a rather chaotic way. The development of individual housing generates an increase in traffic and the development of further infrastructure, leading to the loss of our best arable land and more and more CO2 emissions. Since 1980 Switzerland has had a fairly good law on spatial planning; however it has not been enforced correctly by the authorities: for example 30% of all buildings have been built outside the areas legally designated for construction.

Urban sprawl is quickly expanding across the lowland territories, tending to abolish the differences between traditional urban centers, and countryside and villages. The same situation

appears in a number of locations in the Alps where tourism centers are quickly developing across very large areas. Due to the significant proportion of the country that lies at a very high altitude, only a third of Switzerland's territory is potentially available for settlements in the first place; of this, almost a quarter is already built up, and agricultural land and forests occupy the rest. Urban sprawl – including housing and commercial and transport infrastructure - is thus occurring mostly at the expense of land currently used for food production.

Switzerland's food self-sufficiency is already low, at just over 50%. This means that the country is highly dependent on imported food from around the world (for example, Switzerland imports 250,000 tons of soy annually, mostly from Brazil).



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Thus using up its own arable land for other purposes also means increasing pressure on land in the South.

In spite of being famous for its beautiful landscape and natural heritage, Switzerland ranks high among European countries in terms of numbers of extinct, endangered or threatened species (both animals and plants). One of the main reasons for this is the fragmentation of habitats caused by infrastructure, as well as the intensification and industrialization of agriculture, which threatens many species belonging to ecosystems linked with traditional agriculture (such as extensive pasture (high-biodiversity meadows) or high-altitude orchards with old, local varieties of fruit trees).

Finally, through a constant deterioration of the structure and quality of the landscape, urban sprawl is threatening the cultural values of the people, while an egoistic, individually-oriented system of land use threatens the continued existence of common spaces for leisure and relaxing; ironically it could ultimately threaten tourism, if visitors cannot find what they are looking for in Switzerland anymore.

Proposal for a solution

FOE Switzerland/Pro Natura is one of the most important environmental NGOs in Switzerland, with 107,000 members and a 100-year history of activism for nature. The issue of unsustainable land use, largely ignored in the country until recently, has been prioritized by FOE Switzerland because it demonstrates the clear links between the major environmental problems of our time perfectly: these are biodiversity loss, climate change, and the impact of modern consumption-based lifestyles. There is a need to established public policies that serve both as barriers and incentives.

Due to the importance of the topic, and the need to exert influence widely on society as a whole, FOE Switzerland decided to launch a 'people's initiative' to address it, for the first time in its history. This is a well-established democratic tool used in Switzerland, that can force the government to organize a nationwide referendum on a constitutional amendment: it requires 100,000 citizens to have signed up in support. The campaign is supported by 18 organizations – environmental NGOs, small-scale and organic farmers' organizations, and green and left-wing political parties. The initiative demands that federal and regional governments collectively ensure: a sustainable use of land, with clear separation of areas for building and those where construction is banned; that agricultural land is preserved and used exclusively for food production; and that the total area of

zones where construction is permitted capped for the next 20 years (as research has shown that the existing construction zone is sufficient for sustaining reasonable demand for the next 30 years).

The referendum will take probably place in early 2012, and FOE Switzerland is getting prepared to a tough campaign to convince a majority of voters to support it. Whatever the final result of the referendum is, this campaign is already a big success, as it has managed to move the debate center stage, with strong coverage in the media. In addition, whatever the final decision of the voters, the government and the parliament have first to take a position. According to discussions that are already taking place it seems likely that the current law will be amended and improved as a consequence of the initiative. An approval of all our demands will not be easy to reach, but the issue will definitely be an important and disputed one over the next few years in the Swiss context, especially as national elections take place during 2011.

This type of action may seem rather different from the typical community-based struggles that take place in the South. Indeed, the struggle led by FOE Switzerland, in a highly individualized and rich society, takes place at an institutional and communications level. However, it still aims to protect rural communities – and eventually all people – from the vested interests that want to keep society moving towards unsustainable development, destroying nature and culture in the process. This struggle is all about preserving natural and cultural diversity, and enforcing community-based, environment-friendly economy and lifestyles, in order to save a common and necessarily limited good for its reasonable use by future generations.

At FOE Switzerland/Pronatura we are happy and proud that Swiss people are listening to us, and our bet is that in the end they will prove us right.

Left: traditional agriculture in the Jura region, with high-grown cherry orchards usually with local breeds, and soft transition between forests, meadows, orchards and even small-scale vineyards.

conclusions

Food sovereignty is impossible without forest and biodiversity. Working for food sovereignty involves each person, family, community, organization, movement, government and region learning about the ecosystems with which they interact, which provide them with such a generous supply of all those things needed for life including food, medicine, shelter and welfare. But this interaction also implies a commitment not only from the community, but also from governments, who should be implementing policies that really benefit the people and the natural heritage of each country.

In most countries, there is legislation that could, if applied correctly, ensure a sustainable coexistence with biodiversity. Unfortunately, time and time again these laws and agreements, both national and international, are ignored. This undermines our coexistence with biodiversity, threatening traditional culture and the right to food sovereignty. Luckily, in certain spaces there are organizations and movements actively promoting the defense of territories, providing opportunities for strengthening culture, planting traditional crops and organizing for a sustainable future.

When we suffer the loss or a lack of food sovereignty, we come to believe that we are incapable of producing the foods we eat daily, and we lack the confidence in our ability to look for opportunities to exchange foods, recover old breeds and varieties, or find new substitutes. This lack of confidence is amplified by the need to obtain money, in a world where education, health, housing and governmental technical assistance neglect improving livelihoods or strengthening the peasant-indigenous economy. On the contrary, all these aspects of our lives are increasingly at the mercy of (and shaped by) capitalist market mechanisms, meaning that money becomes ever more essential: many families are forced to sell their crops - which they would otherwise eat or use themselves - in order to acquire enough money to pay for such services. Money is also sought for commercially promoted goods that are not essential to subsistence, including communications technologies, junk food, agrochemicals, as well as a series of products that could otherwise be supplied by family production and a better relationship with community, nature and land.

However, from diverse territories around the world, there is increasingly good news about the work and struggles of people, families, communities, organizations and movements, who are building and living food sovereignty day by day, within the context of their specific circumstances. Their experiences focus on developing a bond not only with the biodiversity that surrounds us, but also with other people who are dependent on this diversity: thinking about food sovereignty implies an awareness of the needs of other women and men, a willingness to think and act in ways that benefit others fairly and equitably, and a determination to promote truly sustainable

development. There is no place for extractive industries and other megaprojects which are undesirable, both ethically and in terms of their damaging real world impacts.

An essential step on the road to food sovereignty is strengthening local community economies. In Colombia, for example, the Agrovida association tells us of its experiences of improving economic conditions by developing a community market. Their analysis of the prevailing economic system allowed them to generate a lively alternative market in order to strengthen their own local economy. Their example shows that in this struggle, sovereign communities building and improving their own ways of marketing their products, build trust in each other as they do so: they have reinforced the community and economic bonds that link them together. Spreading and strengthening this approach has also been made possible by participating in and influencing local communication media, and regularly engaging in innovative actions that increase their access to local foods and products. Apart from satisfying specific needs according to their traditions, they have also increased their confidence in their own abilities, and no longer have particular tastes, shapes, smells and colors imposed upon them.

The availability of diverse foods in a local market is directly related to the diversity of indigenous seeds present in a region. But the expansion of monocultures, processing factories, maquiladora export zones, and big urban projects threaten the preservation and continuity of biodiversity. All of these are generally promoted by governments, one way or another, either through fiscal and other incentives, or, in the worst cases, a failure to apply existing laws. For those communities living in small countries, as is the case in El Salvador and Switzerland, the development of such agro-industrial and urban projects has particularly negative impacts, not only on the spaces they relax in and their culture, but also on the production of diverse foods for subsistence, the conservation of endemic species, and the preservation of the natural heritage needed for survival.

In El Salvador, the Los Cuzcatlecos group has identified and prioritized seeds as a fundamental part of life, and focused on spreading information about seeds' vital role with respect to food sovereignty: along with land, water and knowledge, they are critical to survival. Protecting seed diversity from the threats of the free market is an essential part of the commerce and exchange processes in communities where seeds are regarded not as merchandise, but as a fundamental element ensuring the continuation of life. Like Los Cuzcatlecos, many communities have been threatened by the expansion of novel technologies and organisms (those that have been genetically modified, and now those that are being synthesized): these represent a grave danger to biodiversity and food sovereignty, especially in the centers of origin of specific crops. It is

essential that we learn about the origins of our foods, and understand relevant legislation regarding foods and related products...armed with this information we can grow our own foods, and challenge those who threaten food sovereignty. This is the only way in which we will be able to build and promote community and national actions that support the protection of biodiversity and guarantee food sovereignty against agro-industrial production for export.

El Salvador and Switzerland, two very different countries, share a key factor influencing domestic food production - dependence on imported food. FOE Switzerland, in the experiences they share in this publication, demonstrate the utility of legal actions to promote food sovereignty. Even in a country where most people are able to afford enough food, food sovereignty is still essential to coexisting with biodiversity in a sustainable manner. The 'people's referendum' used in Switzerland has been a forceful declaration concerning the defense of territory and biodiversity. The experiences of a family in Guatemala also demonstrates that the stronger the bond between the person and their land, the deeper their joy and identification with the rural way of life.

Focusing on agroecology as a technique for food production, along with raising awareness of the political implications of different forms of food production, shows that there is a real and effective alternative model of development, in which mother earth has an important place and the equality of rights of men and women is promoted. This approach is becoming a reality for many Argentinian families who, apart from producing food in an agroecological way, are sharing their experiences by getting involved in radio programs, and campaigns about the sustainable use of native forests.

This idea also comes to the fore in the Sonafluca community in Costa Rica, which supplies local markets, and also works for the recognition of community rights. With the whole community empowered by a shared set of principles, Sonafluca provides an example of how and why states should generate alliances with local communities enabling them to continue to guarantee and protect the natural heritage of their territories. These alliances are critical, because they make it possible for entire communities to remain within the ecosystems that have ensured their food sovereignty for thousands of years. But when governments allow foreign bodies to 'invest' in the 'protection and management' of specific zones of the territory, entire populations can be and are deprived of their means of sustenance and livelihoods.

FOE Indonesia offers a critical analysis of the way in which some conservation organizations make use of areas where there has been a deep and enduring bond between humans and biodiversity historically. Their experience of this struggle is based on an understanding of the ecosystem as a fundamental part of the local population's food sovereignty.

From this starting point they have prioritised compiling, sharing and promoting information about local systems of managing territories and biodiversity, and conveying that information to government, in order to promote a shared understanding of food sovereignty.

There are many other countries in which models of conservation have been misunderstood or misapplied to such an extent that it is affecting Indigenous populations co-inhabiting ecosystems. But communities are also struggling against the expansion of monocultures and land grabbing by private companies and investors, as is the case with oil palm production in Uganda. In this case study, we consider the difficulties of confronting large and influential companies that have the support of the state, which allows them to introduce systems of crop production in spaces previously used for local production, whilst contaminating water sources, drastically modifying the landscape and destroying ecosystems. It is essential to understand these problems, to analyze them, and to work with local inhabitants with respect to any initiative that threatens their lives and sovereignty: this is how FOE Uganda has engaged, helping to raise public awareness and empowering communities to fight against such companies.

FOE Nigeria also shares its experience of struggle and denunciation, similarly driven by the need to challenge the imposition of tree monocultures; in this case, focusing on the role of the women, and highlighting their importance in terms of their interaction with and enhanced understanding of biodiversity, a strategy which turned out to be a successful factor in helping to stop that expansion.

Finally, those of us who live in cities, and those of us that consider ourselves to be consumers, should also feel invited to search for food sovereignty through diverse actions. In countries such as the United States, where the traditional peasant sector has almost disappeared, where agriculture uses potentially risky technologies, and where transgenics are the norm, actions such as the introduction of labeling for products free of genetic engineering can make a considerable difference in terms of strengthening local markets, preserving indigenous varieties, and stopping the global food business, which is currently in the hands of just a few companies.

The experiences we present here provide a panorama of the many ways in which biodiversity, and thus our food sovereignty, are being threatened. At the same time, however, it reveals a rich and developing plethora of actions that people are undertaking and organizing around the world, to recover food sovereignty and build a sustainable present and future.

