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Les travaux de la Cop viennent de commencer réellement

Au moment où les travaux de la COP8 prennent leur envol, il est regrettable de constater que les questions relatives au Comité de la Science et de la Technologie (CST) demeurent et que les solutions annoncées ou probables tardent à venir. Notamment quelles actions faudrait-il mener pour que les résultats des travaux du CST deviennent accessibles aux populations et aux organisations qui se situent à la base et qui sont à la fois acteurs et bénéficiaires du développement? Comment pourraient-elles s'approprier le savoir et les connaissances scientifiques, les évaluer et les adapter à leurs besoins sur le terrain?

Les experts travaillent souvent en vase clos. Il faudrait souvent améliorer l'interaction entre ces experts scientifiques et les experts locaux proches des communautés de base afin que les savoirs traditionnels fassent partie intégrante des résultats de recherche qui pourraient être disponibles. Faut-il le rappeler, depuis des millénaires des stratégies et des actions appropriées de lutte contre la désertification ont été développées par les populations autochtones elles mêmes pour assurer leur propre survie. Nul au monde ne connaît mieux que ces populations comment améliorer la productivité des sols, parvenir à la maîtrise de l'eau et protéger leur environnement.

Il convient également de rappeler qu'une étude de la CCD sur les valori-

sations des connaissances traditionnelles en 2000 recommandait l'identification, la collecte et la valorisation de ces connaissances aux niveaux national et international, à travers la mise en place de bases de données. Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui de cette recommandation? Allons-nous continuer à égrener des chapelets des recommandations sans application? Et pour combien de temps? N'est-il pas temps de mettre à jour toutes ces connaissances et expériences! Nous parlons tellement d'actions, agissons donc!

Au plan national, les relations chercheurs, décideurs et société civile doivent être renforcées si l'on veut résolument améliorer le sort de nos populations en proie aux effets néfastes de la désertification. Une plus grande concertation s'avère nécessaire entre ces différentes parties dans le cadre de projets ou programmes interdisciplinaires et/ou intersectorielle, participative. Il est certain que l'élaboration et la mise en œuvre des politiques nationales soient d'une grande importance. Et dans ce domaine, quels rôles pourraient jouer le CST et les autorités nationales dans le cadre de la décennie (2005-2014) de l'éducation en vue du développement durable?

Finalement, la question qui demeure en suspens est celle de la stratégie à adopter pour les dix ans à venir en vue de l'avancée concrète de la convention de lutte contre la désertification. □

NGO activists demonstrate at the opening of the COP 8

Members of organizations from the whole world demonstrated to demand from the powerful decision-makers effective measurements against the desertification during the inaugural meeting.

In front of an extensive police drawstring grouped after a banner with the motto "a convention without action causes desertification", the demonstrators asked for concrete performances and more civil society participation. Likewise slogans were used to claim immediate and local actions so that the targets proposed by the Convention could be fulfilled. □

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“It is the villages that will find the solutions”

Paulo Maciel belongs to the Sertao Institute, an NGO that works in the state of Ceará, North East Brazil, a zone located in which he calls semi-arid Brazil. They organise education programmes for civil society groups with the objective of making people aware of the problems of the desertification and how to fight against desertification in their region.

What is your perspective on COP 8?

We think that we must work at all the levels that we are able to, so that we can make this issue a matter of daily concern. It is so important it can be seen as a question of survival. This is why we participated in the Brazilian Seminar. This seminar represents civil society and today includes participation from 700 organisations including NGOs and community organisations, rural workers unions and many more. This suggests that there is willingness within civil society to change this situation. I believe that we do not have time to wait anymore, we have waited for 10 years, we cannot wait anymore. We must begin to act.

Do you believe that the government officials who are meeting here will consider the position of NGOs?

Well, this is our hope. We hope that our message is heard here and when each official returns to their country they are prepared to do what they are talking about, so that these ideas do not just remain in books. When they return we want them to remember what they have said here and commitments they have made. Each one of them must put into practice what they have said here. And for the people that are here [in the conference] we know that we should transmit the message as well, this is the reason we are here - to try to say what the people want.

Can you tell me about biofuels in Brazil?

For me they are one of the problems because they push in the opposite direction to the fight against desertification. It is not possible to talk about biofuels

and at the same time to say that we are fighting the desertification in the way that it is often argued. It is clear that small scale alternative energies should be used to solve immediate problems, but it cannot be a government strategy to promote biofuels as if they were a panacea; an alternative to petroleum. It is clear that we and the government must support alternative energies, but not on this massive scale because what happens is that the large industrialists take control of land, which is not the same as each farmer in his property producing his own alcohol or its own biofuel. I believe that this [small scale approach] would be more sustainable and provide more economic benefit to the farmers. But this leads us to changing the consumption matrix. With the current over-consumption it is not possible to talk about sustainable development.

Paulo Maciel believes that an education contextualised into local experience is necessary to halt desertification.

That is to say, the issue is about changing consumption habits?

Education is in the centre of this change. Contextualised education, participative education, created from what is going on around people in their area. Not an education that comes down from above. We need to do the same with the books – write them from the lived experience, that is to say, that they go from below to above. I believe that in this way we can change the future that at the moment we are faced with.

Then it seems that you see possibilities for the future...

I am not pessimist, I am optimist. There are always possibilities, even on the brink of the abyss. I am optimistic because I believe that it is the villages that will find the solution; the thinkers will not, because they have already had sufficient time. It will be the people who find the solutions. □

What is expected of COP 8...

The CST (Scientific and Technological Committee) according to Azalia Aryan of ACNU (Cuban Association of the United Nations)

The CST (Scientific and Technological Committee) was conceived at the Rio Convention in 1992. At this convention three new areas of work were created within the United Nations: biodiversity, desertification, and climate change.

Each area has scientific, technological and also financial support. The CST belongs to the area of desertification. Its objectives are, among others, to undertake studies on desertification which will help develop better understanding, to support experts who advise communities, to establish a common understanding on what desertification is and what we should be aiming for... really to have one wider, scientifically objective vision of desertification.

And nowadays what is the CST? What do the NGOs ask of this institution?

It is important to know that the CST works as a structure that responds to the needs of the world wide population in terms of desertification. It considers communities as the foundation of their work, but the problem is that they do not take into account traditional knowledge.

The CST undertakes studies on desertification to analyse the causes, but it does not suggest any solutions in collaboration with local communities or solutions that are more in harmony with nature...

This is one of its weaknesses, another one is that information is not shared and there is no will to communicate. There is lack of communication. In addition they have not established a base line on desertification or where we should be aiming. What the NGOs really request is effectiveness and an effort to face the real problems.

In this Conference the CST is going to meet to speak about the weaknesses that have been mentioned previously and how to try to tackle them as far as possible. It is hoped that different community groups and NGOs will unify and engage in a dialogue. The objective of this meeting is that the opinions of the groups with whom we have engaged are considered within the dialogue rather than the CST trying to perfect itself as an institution. Also we hope to communicate and maintain a dialogue with other institutions related environmental concerns like the IPCC [on climate change]. □

Linkages between traditional knowledge of farmers and scientific knowledge

Mr. Noel OETTLE from the EMG organization accepted to be interviewed about the linkages between traditional knowledge of farmers and scientific knowledge. He works in the fields of agricultural extension and economics of agricultural development. At the moment he is carrying out a project with farmers in South Africa. There are several kinds of people in the project: some of the farmers were owners during the Apartheid years of dry lands in marginal areas, others are tenants, etc.

The target is to link the local and the global. They work with the spirits of the three Conventions of the UN created in Rio de Janeiro: the Convention of the United Nations to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change. They are trying to create opportunities for land users to share their valuable views and experiences. They produce study cases for the Conferences of the Parties, such as this COP8, in order to assure that the local point of view of farmers and other local actors is heard. Nowadays, many people in South Africa are sharing this knowledge helped by this organization.

An interesting method they are using is the called PAR (Participatory Action Research) and whose general idea is that people share common challenges, in this case that farmers, scientists, development agencies, etc. share their problems.

Some years ago, the idea of multi-transdisciplinary collaboration got a lot of interest. Multi-transdisciplinary means that experts from different fields will work in the same area in order to solve a problem or make a study, etc., but always in their re-



spective fields. But what EMC is promoting is a transdisciplinary method, which means that for instance, a chemist could go and work together with a biologist.

There is a project called BIOTA which is funded by the German Government and which has a big impact in Africa. The project aims at establishing terrestrial observatories to investigate the impacts of the climate change and land use of the environment. They organise trainings for scientists and farmers to work with this transdisciplinary approach and get improvements on the ground. An example of what they have done with farmers is a study about the pollination of Rooibos and another about plants nutrition.

During the NGOs meeting it was discussed and criticised the fact that the SCT tries to impose their points of view without taking into account the local knowledge. In Mr. Oettle's opinion this is a wrong way to approach the problem, because the role of the SCT is to discuss and to find solutions, but what the scientists normally forget is the culture and the local background.

Very often it happens that clever scientific solutions do more harm than good. The reason is that we cannot know about the unexpected consequences and the displacement on the local technologies and indigenous species. Things like genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can cause unexpected consequences. Another important issue is the influence they can have on the biodiversity of the area, which could be terrible.

Let illustrate that with the example of the genetically modified cotton plant. There is a bacterium known as BT that usually eats this kind of plant. With this new modified version of the plant in which a gene has been put into with the aim of killing the BT bacterium. It is better for a BT bacterium not to eat from this genetically modified cotton plant, because if it does it will explode. Nevertheless, the most serious problem is the fact that we cannot know the consequences that this plant will have in the ground around it. We shouldn't forget that it is in the ground where most of the biodiversity resides. □

Convention's evolution from the RIOD – West Africa point of view

The ten-year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (which has been object of an important monitoring from some of the participants and largely debated during the pre-COP) made us wonder how did the Convention progress in the past, for which we asked Mr. Florent Quédraogo, one of the Convention's veterans from the sub-regional focal point of the association RIOD – West Africa. Mr Quédraogo has participated in the Convention since its founding in 1994 (even though it came into force in 1996) and he gladly gave us his association's point of view.

According to him, from the beginning the Convention was able to mobilize most of the actors, and additionally from different kinds –states, civil society, local populations and donors–. From RIOD's point of view, there was a true NGOs' participation, above all, in the heart of this network that had left an important stamp during negotiations. The countries committed themselves to work out subregional (SRAP), regional (RAP) and national action plans (NAP)



The NGOs are meeting every day at 8:00 in the NGOs room (G035)

which were cooperation means to carry out actions.

This was all made with enthusiasm and faith, but soon disappointment got to the affected countries, which saw reality as a joke or even as treason. "They have given us cunning arguments every time so as not to fund the Convention", says Mr. Quédraogo. These are the reasons for which RIOD has, nowadays, tried to bind itself to other initiatives such as CPP (countries partnership programs) and TerrAfrica, which represent great hope for this organization.

But Mr. Quédraogo is not so pessimistic and says that, even though there has been little real action, there has been some success at the level of reinforcement of participation, of raising awareness of the problem, abilities and capacities, investigation, cooperation between north-south and, more recently, cooperation between south-south, which was nonexistent.

Regarding the society's participation throughout the COPs, we have to point out that NGOs' participation grew in the first years but it has fallen during the last 2 or 3 years. Mr Quédraogo points out that the reason for them is the lack of resources to assure NGOs to take responsibilities, particularly for the ones coming from poor countries. Besides, in every COP the PTF programs (technical and financial partners) raise hopes for the NGOs that are condemned to obscurity once the closing speech is delivered.

For the past 10 years RIOD – West Africa has been preparing capacity reinforcement programs with their own national focal points, specially regarding media, information exchange, training exchange, etc., without ever receiving the least support. It is very easy to say RIOD is getting weaker but, which institution would not get weaker without any support? □

SIDE EVENTS

5th September, 18:00 h.

• *El Plan Especial del Alto Guadiana como ejemplo de desertificación por sobreexplotación hídrica.* Organize: Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace, SEO/BirdLife and WWF/Adena

• *Desertification like war weapon: Palestine case.* Organize: Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz (ACPP)

• *Developing capacities in changing times: NGOs and landusers mobilise local and scientific knowledge to combat desertification and adapt to climate change.* Organize: DRYNET



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Please give your articles to eco@ecologistasenaccion.org

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