Food sovereignty and the new “discovery” of biodiversity

For thousands of years, different peoples in the most disparate parts of the world – especially women, but also men – have guaranteed food sovereignty based on the biodiversity of the regions where they live. Through their wisdom and knowledge, they were able to distinguish and use an abundance of seeds, roots, fruits, leaves, trees, shrubs, medicinal plants, animals, fish and much more.

But our so-called modern world has managed to drastically reduce the world's wealth of biodiversity, by introducing large-scale monoculture plantations for the production of food and products such as timber.

While those who defend the monoculture model argue that it has led to the production of more grains, and more food, there has also been a clear loss of food sovereignty.

It seems rather odd that over the last few decades, and especially more recently, biodiversity has once again captured the interest of the big corporations who so vigorously defend monocultures and who have largely contributed to reducing biodiversity. Why?

In addition to the patenting of seeds, which has been underway for years, big capital has set its sights on other elements of biodiversity more recently – particularly as these elements grow increasingly scarce, such as water, climate regulation, soil conservation, etc.

The different articles in this month's bulletin address the new threat posed by the “rediscovery” of biodiversity by transnational corporations, for example, as they seek to cash in on the sale of environmental services. This can have profound impacts on people's lives, as we see in the case of the UK-based New Forests Company and its activities in Uganda, which are even backed with the “green label” of FSC certification. To make way for the company's monoculture tree plantations, no fewer than 22,000 people were evicted from their lands, all for the ulterior motive of selling carbon credits, thereby drastically compromising the food sovereignty of an entire population.

We dedicate this bulletin to the communities who are fighting back against the attempts to commodify nature and to defend their territories with all of their biodiversity. We support La Via Campesina which, earlier in this month of October, together with other organizations, pressured FAO and especially the Committee on World Food Security to prohibit land grabbing, the large-scale appropriation of land by investors, governments and foreign companies, which is happening primarily in Africa. This perverse process promotes monoculture agriculture, agrofuel production and the appropriation and sale of environmental services. According to Oxfam, some 227 million hectares of land have already been sold, leased or licensed, an area the size of northwest Europe, demonstrating the profound social and environmental injustice of this model. We firmly back the call for FAO to adopt measures to guarantee the rights of small farmers to the land and natural resources.

We will wrap up with a piece of good news that is motivating and encouraging: we congratulate our

sister organization GRAIN, which has worked for many years to denounce the destruction of biodiversity and defend food sovereignty, for being recognized with the 2011 Right Livelihood Award for its ongoing efforts against land grabbing and in defence of small farmers.