GJOP Global Justice Overcoming Poverty

Network BULLETIN

- Mexico's right to restrict GM corn
- Reforestation efforts in Ecuador's Amazon region
- Land injustice and food insecurity in East Adrica

MEXICO'S RIGHT TO RESTRICT GM CORN
CANADIANS GIVE THEIR SUPPORT

In solidarity with Mexico, several Canadian organisations have declared their objection to Canada's involvement in a trade challenge initiated by the United States, aimed at stopping Mexico's restriction on using genetically modified (GM) corn in certain foods. The USA brought this challenge under the Canada-US-Mexico trade agreement (CUSMA); . Canada joined the trade dispute as a third Party, though Canada does not export any corn to Mexico

Corn, also known as maize, is a staple of the Mexican diet, and is central to Mexican culture and agriculture, history and national identity, and is integral to Indigenous cultures and spiritual practices. The groups are calling upon Canada to respect the seed sovereignty of Indigenous and peasant farmers in Mexico and their pursuit of food sovereignty.

On February 13, 2023, the President of Nexico issued a decree banning the use of GM corn for making traditional foods, such as tortillas, that rely on minimally processed, white corn flour. The decree also states the intention eventually to replace GM corn with non-GM corn in all processed foods. These measures are the long-awaited result of decades of struggle by farmers and grassroots communities for their right to seed and food sovereignty.

The National President of the National Farmers' Union of Canada, Jenn Pfenning, asked Trade Minister Ng 'not to bring Canada into this dispute. Canada signed both the *United Nations(UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peop*les and the *UN Convention on Biodiversity*. Our commitments to these values should see Canada supporting Mexico's efforts to protect its genetic and cultural heritage. Since these measures are strictly focussed on corn, and Canada does not export corn to Mexico, Canada's exports to Mexico are not affected'.

Mexico is the global centre of origin of corn. Indigenous and peasant farmers in Mexico have been stewarding life-giving corn biodiversity for thousands of years, building agro-ecological practices, such as the *milpa,* to safeguard locally adapted landraces[1], and ensure a resilient food supply for families and communities. The *milpa* system is the basis of

[1] A landrace is a variety of a species of animal or plant that has developed and been domesticated over time through adaptation to its natural and cultural environment, in isolation from other populations od the species.

traditional agriculture in Mesoamerica[2]. It is based on a polyculture of maize, bean and squash and is associated with a great diversity of crops and wild species .The presidential decree says that Mexico is restricting the use of GM corn in order to uphold food sovereignty, including the indigenous *milpa*; to protect native corn from GM contamination; to preserve Mexico's bio-cultural heritage; and to take precautionary measures to protect human health.

The joint statement of solidarity with Mexico is one way for people in Canada to show how we can work together to build a food system where family and cooperative farmers and f food workers live in dignity, feeding everyone high quality, healthy, safe food using practices that protect our soil, water, biodiversity, and other natural resources.

Sources: Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN), 'Response to Canada's Arguments Against Mexico's GM Corn Restrictions', April 9, 2024. Slightly edited by Mary Boyd, who is a member of CBAN and grateful for their research.)

REFORESTATION EFFORTS IN EQUADOR IN THE REGION OF THE SACRED HEADWATERS OF THE AMAZON

At the UN Climate Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in 2021, King Charles III (then Prince Charles) met with representatives from various Equadorian Indigenous peoples. As a result, King Charles asked for a delegation from the *Circular Bioeconomy Alliance (CBA*) to visit Equador. The CBA initiative is a non-government organisation (NGO) established by King Charles in 2020 to accelerate the transition to a circular bioeconomy that is climate neutral, inclusive, and prospers in harmony with nature. This delegation explored possible ways to collaborate with our Indigenous partners on projects of restoring forest ecosystems.

In 2023, after 2 years of planning and laying the groundwork, *Fundación Pachamama* and two Amazonian Indigenous federations, with *CBA, Reforest Action* and the *Sacred Headwaters Alliance* began a reforestation project in the provinces of Pastaza and Morona Santiago within the Sacred Headwaters region of the Equadorian Amazon.

Reforest Action is an organisation from France and their mission is to regenerate terrestrial ecosystems on a large scale to tackle global challenges using field experience, local communities, science and technology. This new project, *n*amed *Reforesting Edible Forests*, aims to plant at least 167,000 native trees and non-timber plants that will directly benefit the food gardens (chakras)of Amazonian families and communities as well as provide economic alternatives to extractive industries.

Reforesting Edible Forests is also being completed within the framework of the *Sacred Headwaters Alliance*—a group of Indigenous nationalities and, formed on the basis of cooperation and harmony to protect permanently the life, biodiversity and territories in the Amazon.

[2] Mesoamerica extends from south-central Mexico southeastward to include the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Yucatán Peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and the Pacific coast of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica down to the Gulf of Nicoy.

The reforestation work so far has been carried out with the help of local communities with technical support and monitoring provided by *Fundación Pachamama.* In addition to the technical team, strategic partnerships have been formed with the private sector and the Amazon State University, which has sent students as interns to work on the project. Based on systematic soil nutrient analysis in the areas to be reforested, specialised natural fertilisers are being developed to improve production in the area.

The Provincial Government of Pastaza approved the production of 100,000 forest fruit, useful and medicinal plants. More governmental agreements are in the works to further advance the production of forest plants, vanilla plants and orchards for the community chakras. Around 250 agreements have been signed with beneficiaries in 51 communities belonging to 8 Indigenous nationalities in the Provinces of Pastaza and Morona Santiago. Around 228 community nurseries have contributed to the generation of plants for the project.

In this phase of the project, 103 different Amazonian species have been planted and verified, covering approximately 770 hectares. About 20% of the species that have been reforested in the project are either in danger of extinction or in a state of vulnerability. So, the project also contributes significantly to the restoration of the natural environment. It promotes the recovery of biodiversity and the resilience of the ecosystems and traditional productive systems of the Amazon.

The project will be completed at the end of June 2024 and, together with current and new allies, F*undación Pachamama* hopes to keep these actions as a permanent policy of improving the natural environment while strengthening the livelihoods of families within the framework of the bioeconomy and Indigenous economies.

Source: Pachamama Alliance, May 14, 2024 Slightly edited by A Healey.

LAND INJUSTICE AND FOOD INSECURITY IN EAST AFRICA

‘OUR LAND IS OUR LIFE’

Food security remains a critical challenge in many regions across the globe, particularly in East Africa where issues of land injustice and displacement worsen the situation. In the pursuit of sustainable solutions, the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) Partnership must make a priority the root causes of food insecurity and promote social justice and environmental sustainability.

The purpose of the U-EU Partnership is to collaborate in fostering sustainable, just and resilient food systems. Central to this partnership is the goal of mutual prosperity, that is, ensuring that neither continent is exploited for the benefit of the other. However, achieving food security requires going beyond immediate concerns and addressing systemic challenges ingrained in the global food order.

One of the key initiatives within this partnership is the expansion of efforts to combat food insecurity in East Africa, with Uganda serving as the point of entry. However, this

expansion faces significant obstacles, particularly in regions scarred by conflict and land disputes. In Northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war has left a lasting impact on social cohesion, contributing to persistent land disputes that hinder agricultural productivity and increase food insecurity.

Similarly, Adjumani District grapples with population challenges, made worse by the influx of refugees. As a result, there are conflicts over land resources and agricultural activities are disrupted. These examples demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable solutions to address the complex interplay between land injustice and food insecurity in East Africa.

Central to these efforts is the promotion of agro-ecology and land rights, recognsing that land is not merely a source of food and resources but also a vital aspect of cultural identity and tradition. Indigenous wisdom offers valuable insights into sustainable practices of land management, emphasising stewardship and respect for the environment. By drawing upon traditional knowledge and indigenous practices, communities can develop resilient food systems that ensure sustenance for generations to come.

The words, 'Our Land is Our Life', express the profound connection between land, culture, and identity. This expression makes clear the importance of preserving land resources for future generations and acknowledges the depth of spiritual and cultural significance embedded within the landscape. By embracing indigenous wisdom and traditional practices, East Africa can chart a path towards sustainable development featuring environmental stewardship and social justice.

To conclude, addressing food insecurity in East Africa calls for a mix of approaches that tackle the underlying issues of land injustice and displacement. The AU-EU Partnership provides a framework for collaboration, but meaningful change will require concerted efforts at the local, national, and international levels. If East Africa gives top priority to sustainability, social justice and respect for indigenous knowledge, it can build resilient food systems that ensure the well-being of its people, and the planet.

Source: Elvis Ng'andwe, M.Afr, Executive Secretary of Afica Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) | 31 March, 2024. Slight editing by Alison Healey

THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Wealth without work,
Pleasure without conscience,
Knowledge without character,
Commerce without morality,
Science without humanity,
Worship without sacrifice,
Politics without principles.
Mohandas K. Gandh

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