



biowatch

SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | biosafety | social justice

bulletin

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Agro-ecology: a jubilant and vibrant social movement

National Agro-Ecology Meeting, Brazil, 16-18 May



Photo: Zayaan Khan

Top: Diverse maize seed, shared freely by Brazilian farmers.

Bottom: "Without feminism, there is no agro-ecology" was a refrain echoing through the three-day conference. Many women shared their stories and it was evident that while they were the ones who did the bulk of the agro-ecology work, it was often the men who made the decisions.



With support from Oxfam, Karen Read, Biowatch (see page 2), and Zayaan Khan, Surplus People Project, recently attended Brazil's National Agro-Ecology Meeting. They participated on an international panel presenting findings based on the realities and challenges in South Africa.

"This was a wonderful opportunity to not only learn more about agro-ecology, but to experience agro-ecology as a jubilant and vibrant social movement," said Karen. "South Africa is at the early stages of building an agro-ecology movement, and the conference was an invaluable networking experience. The struggles in Brazil and South Africa are similar. We are both fighting inequality, poverty and agri-business. We need to support each other in our struggle for a better planet for people and the environment."

For more about the conference, go to our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/biowatchsa.

We introduce two staff members: Mpho Ncube, co-ordinating our Farmer Support Programme, and



Karen Read, heading up our Advocacy Programme.

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The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food makes an urgent call for the world's food systems to be radically and democratically redesigned. Food security, he warns, must be built around the ability of small-holder farmers to thrive.

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Pongola small-holder farmers march against GMOs and GM seed, joining other marchers around the



world on 24 May, international March Against Monsanto day.

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From the director

We are delighted to welcome two new staff members who joined Biowatch in April. We are already experiencing the impact and energy of these two people and we're really appreciative of what they bring to Biowatch and how their contribution will strengthen and deepen our work.

Biowatch now has a Facebook page! It has been a long time coming, but we are glad to be able to interact more directly with our readers, and the photographs that have gone up in the last few weeks show a kaleidoscope of events – participation in the Brazilian National Agro-Ecology Meeting, participation in the March Against Monsanto in Durban and in Pongola, working with farmers on eco-calendars and listening to the elders ...

We have also been busy working with partners on the Right to Food Dialogue hosted by ECARP (Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Project) and participating in a national agro-ecology meeting hosted by SPP (Surplus People Project). Experiences and learnings from participation in the Brazilian National Agro-Ecology Meeting were enormously valuable for our participation in the national AE meeting.

We are soon to be part of a team that will host a session on "Reviving agricultural traditional knowledge systems to support resilience" at the International Society of Ethnobiology's biennial congress. This will bring together our work with The Mupo Foundation and the University of Cape Town's Environmental Evaluation Unit, under our Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI).

In this newsletter, we have included an article on the call by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, to redesign current food systems. We give the link to his wide-ranging, insightful and powerful final report, which is essential reading!

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Welcome to Biowatch

We are very excited to introduce two new staff members who joined us in April: Karen Read and Mpho Ncube. Karen is heading up our Advocacy Programme (Durban office), and Mpho is co-ordinating our Farmer Support Programme (Mtubatuba office).

These are two positions that Biowatch has strategised for, planned for and hoped for – and we are delighted that we have been able to fill them with these two dynamic people. Both Mpho and Karen bring expertise, strength and inspiration to our organisation and we look forward to them developing and intensifying our work on biodiversity, agro-ecology and farmers' rights.



Karen Read, advocacy.

Karen Read has worked in the NGO sector since 1987. She is passionate about justice, the environment and food, and has worked for such organisations as South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) and Diakonia Council of Churches.

"I have always been interested in food, one way or the other – especially nutritious and organic food," said Karen.

"Food and environmental issues are inextricably linked. I look forward to exploring these links further, to promoting agro-ecology, and to investigating the role corporations are playing in the centralisation and control of food."



Mpho Ncube, farmer support.

Mpho Ncube began her career in the tourism industry. She soon realised her passion for community development, and started working at African Impact as a co-ordinator. She later joined the African Conservation Trust, working to ensure food security through agro-ecology, and mentoring communities on household food

gardens. Mpho is a qualified Assessor on Agro-Ecological Farming Practice and is currently studying Household Food Security at Unisa.

"Biowatch speaks the language I understand: agro-ecology," said Mpho. "I look forward to working with the Biowatch-supported small-holder farmers, and to spreading the 'NO 2 GMO' message."



Photo: Max Bastard, Oxfam, Biowatch

Small-holder farmers from the Biowatch-supported Lindizwe Project in Ingwavuma. “Food security must be built around securing the ability of small-holder farmers to thrive,” says UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

Radically and democratically redesign food systems warns UN right to food expert

In March, Olivier De Schutter concluded his six-year term as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food with a call for the world’s food systems to be radically and democratically redesigned to ensure the human right to adequate food and freedom from hunger.

In his final report titled *“The Transformative Potential of the Right to Food”*, De Schutter warned that current food systems were efficient only from the point of view of maximising agri-business profits. He stressed the urgency of accommodating alternative, democratically-mandated visions at a policy level – locally, nationally and internationally.

“Objectives such as supplying diverse, culturally-acceptable foods to communities, supporting small-holders, sustaining soil and water resources, and raising food security within particularly vulnerable areas, must not be crowded out by the one-dimensional quest to produce more food,” De Schutter said.

“Food security must be built around securing the ability of small-holder farmers to thrive. Respect for their access to productive resources is key in this regard,” he said, calling for priority investments in agro-ecological and poverty-reducing forms of agriculture.

In addition to his report, the expert presented a summary of recommendations issued over the course of his mandate as Special Rapporteur (2008-2014). These as well as the full report are available at: <http://www.srfood.org/en>.

Participation is the key in certification process

Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is an alternative to the expensive and lengthy route of getting vegetables organically certified, and is a way for small-holder farmers to have their agro-ecology produce given the value it deserves. “Participatory” is the key, as farmers decide together who gets certified and who does not, according to agreed principles.

We are growing our understanding of what PGS is and what it entails, and we are supporting small-holder farmers to develop their own PGS standards and implementation system based on our Agro-Ecological Principles.

In March, Lawrence Mkhaliphi, Biowatch Agro-Ecology Manager, and Jeremy Lister-James, marketing consultant, met with members of Siyavuna, a rural organic farmer-support organisation based in Ugu District, KZN. Siyavuna, which is already implementing the PGS system, shared their system of team inspection. Siyavuna trains and mentors emerging “organic” farmers under one brand – *Kumnandi*. They encourage farmers to form agri-businesses (via co-operatives) and to make market linkages. The farmers own the co-operatives, and are paid out in cash.

In April, Karen Read, Biowatch’s new Advocacy Co-ordinator, attended the PGS(SA) AGM held in George to meet organisers and learn more about the PGS system.



The recently formed farmers advocacy group meet in Mkuze in April. The 10-member group includes farmers from each of the five areas in KwaZulu-Natal where Biowatch currently works. The group discussed their anti-GMO campaign, and how they could involve more organisations and farmers' groups. They also discussed their plans to support and participate in the global March Against Monsanto (see below).



Lawrence Mkhalihi (left) and Sophiwe Dlamini (right) visit ECARP farmers Mxedi Ncanywa and Limenathi Mariman to share agro-ecology methods and learnings.

Farmers gather at Right to Food Dialogue

Biowatch joined other non-governmental and community-based organisations, farmers' groups and forums from KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape at the recent Provincial Right to Food Dialogue.

The main purpose of the event, organised by the Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Project (ECARP) and hosted by Rhodes University in Grahamstown, was for community and farmer groups to develop their "voice" and capacity in preparation for a national dialogue on the right to food. Participants also worked together to identify priority issues and areas for national engagement and lobbying to address food insecurity.

During their visit to the Eastern Cape, Lawrence Mkhalihi, Biowatch Agro-Ecology Manager, and Sophiwe Dlamini, Biowatch-supported small-holder farmer, took the opportunity to visit two ECARP project sites to see how agro-ecology principles were being applied.



Photo: Rolene van der Merwe

A farmer-organised anti-Monsanto march took place in Pongola, KZN, on Saturday 24 May, in solidarity with the global March Against Monsanto campaign and other marches that took place around the world. The Pongola farmers marched to the local offices of the Department of Agriculture and handed over an anti-GMO seed petition.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- 14th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology in Bhutan: 1-7 June
- Biowatch Seed Workshop: 18-19 June
- Seed Blessing, Pongola: 11 July

Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated.

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Seed Workshop

Biowatch will be hosting a seed workshop in Pongola, KZN, from 18-19 June to increase awareness of the importance of farmers' seed varieties, as well as the importance of farmers having control over those varieties and resisting GM seed.