

## ABS and Development

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It is easy to overlook development goals when protecting the environment. Deep ecologists believe nothing is more important than protecting the environment. That includes eliminating poverty or HIV/AIDS.

That is why developing countries insisted ECO 92, as it is called in Brazil, or the Rio Earth Summit as it is known outside Brazil, had to be mounted as the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

The UNCED mandated that environment and development had to be mutually supportive. It was true to the original meaning of "sustainable development": strategies to promote growth should also protect the environment, and vice versa.

Some of the work on Access and Benefit Sharing does not take into account the development dimension.

### Growth and poverty

For the first time, we can regard a world without poverty as attainable.

In the last 50 years, more people have been lifted out of poverty than at any time in human history. In 1970, 20 per cent of people in the world lived on less than a dollar day. It fell to 5 percent by 1998. In 1990, 28 percent of people in developing countries were living on less than a dollar

day. That had dropped to 21 percent by 2001.

The key is growth. The last 50 years also shows that reduction of poverty occurs faster in countries with higher growth and the economies that grew fastest were those in which market forces were less restrained.

### The environment cannot be protected without growth

It is no accident that the environment is often least protected in the poorest countries. It takes money to protect the environment. And as the standard of living rises in countries so does the health of the environment.

Measures to improve access to genetic resources should not therefore restrict opportunities for growth. Some of the proposals on the table in the CDB would limit growth in developing countries.

### What not to do

Measures to protect the environment should not:

- restrict investment (by domestic as well as foreign investors)
- deter research in new technologies

- deter adoption of biotechnology
- restrict opportunities for business to build growth.

varieties and

- would deter foreign investment in biotechnology.

The idea of an ABS convention which would regulate transfers of genetic resources and provide extensive rights to check intellectual property law trips all these caveats.

Governments which adopted such measures would:

- weaken patent law
- chill research
- discourage investment
- discourage introduction of biotechnology.

### **Anti-development measures**

In Issue III of the Curitiba Report, the adverse impact of international regulation on the transfer of genetic resources and patenting of inventions which draw on derivatives of genetic resources was summarized.

Countries which subscribed to international regulation of transfer of genetic resources

- would restrict their capacity to secure access to the publicly available gene pools of agricultural genetic resources.
- would restrict their capacity to secure patents for new plant

### **The 'benefit' of preserving genetic resources is an illusion**

There is a view that tight national control will enable a higher return to be achieved from development of genetic resources.

Tighter national control means less research and development and less economic return. How often does government-controlled business produce more economic benefits than the private sector?

The national stock of genetic resources may not be as valuable as people think. Researchers can now replicate all compounds and genes in laboratories.

The benefits of genetic resources can only be secured when natural market forces are allowed to research and invest as they are other areas of the economy.