

## "Civil Society's and Government's perspectives on Animal Genetic Resources - An Equal Footing Debate"

4 September 2007 in Interlaken as side event to FAO International Technical conference on Animal Genetic Resources

The Swiss government organised this debate to exchange and clarify perspectives on animal genetic resources. It was designed to be between governments who represent their countries in the FAO Conference, and representatives of organisations of smallholder farmers and pastoralists who actually develop, conserve and sustainability use livestock diversity. The debate was on an equal footing, with two representatives of each, co-chaired by the Swiss government and the Swiss development organisation SWISSAID. Francois Pythoud of the Swiss government invited the participants to hold a debate not to contradict, but to put opinions on the table.

### Panel:

François Pythoud, Switzerland (Chair)

Tina Goethe, SWISSAID (Co-Chair)

Daniel Semambo, Uganda (Member of Delegation of Uganda)

Sipke Hiemstra, Netherlands (Member of Delegation of Netherlands)

André Auclair, Union Paysanne, Canada (Civil Society Forum)

Boureima Dodo, ROPPA, Niger (Civil Society Forum)

### Issues to be discussed:

- What are the impacts of the different models of production, industrialized livestock production and smallholders livestock keeping, on the diversity of animal genetic resources?
- Importance of livestock keepers rights for the conservation of animal genetic resources

### Summary

André Auclair, a family farmer from Canada who breeds local cattle and poultry, outlined the devastating effects of industrialized livestock production not only on the variety of breeds and livelihoods, but also on environment, as rivers and soils were polluted by large farms. From a total of 408'000 cattle only 250 are of local breeds. Heavily subsidized industrial livestock production has also led to a high concentration of market power, where a few farmers operate large farms under contract. As a result most smallholders have to sell off their farms – about two per week, traditional knowledge is lost, and the youth face rural unemployment. Local poultry breeds cannot be sold on the market. Most consumers have lost access to healthy meat and milk products, from family farms, that are free from growth promoters and antibiotics. Auclair claims the right to access markets for smallholder farmers with local breeds.

Dodo Boureima from Niger spoke on behalf of 25 million rural Africans who are organized in ROPPA, the network of smallholder farmers in 11 countries of West Africa. In Africa, the livestock industry has become established in many countries and dumping of internationally traded products is also significant. But the livestock sector is based mainly on smallholders and pastoralists. The mobility of pastoralists – which

is necessary to allow recovery of fodder and vegetation – is blocked almost everywhere, by disrupting migration routes and by sedenterization. Privatization of resources has replaced traditional collective rights. Very often privatization has led to unsustainable use of natural resources and to conflicts between communities over what is left to them. Animal health regulations put smallholders and pastoralists at a disadvantage and they have little access to services. Industrial livestock production is now spreading very fast in these countries due to heavy support by governments. Trade liberalisation and privatization is progressing, although it has been shown to contribute to hunger and poverty rather than fighting against it. These policies globally marginalize smallholders. They foster unemployment and discourage youth from livestock keeping. Knowledge and culture are getting compromised. The fight of smallholders and pastoralists starts from their potential as producers of quality produce and they have a tremendous strength. They are now reclaiming their rights about access to grazing land, water, services and cross border mobility.

Sipke Hiemstra of the Centre for Genetic Resources in The Netherlands presented his study on exchange, access and use of animal genetic resources. The change towards intensive, vertically integrated production systems is driven by population growth and urbanisation. It has a strong impact on genetic diversity and decreasing diversity affects smallholders. Such impact assessment is necessary to guide livestock sector policy. Breeding programs should consider the market values of local breeds. Consumers in many parts of the world are conscious of quality, taste and regional origin of their food, especially livestock products. The Global Plan of Action fosters a combination of conservation in gene banks and in the natural environment. Such conservation needs to be regulated by responsible exchange mechanisms. There should be a better balance of rights systems, which accommodate the equity concerns of smallholders and pastoralist communities as well those of the breeding industry that wishes to protect its investments. Breeders' rights, similar but not equal to the UPOV in plants may be a solution. Patent offices should receive better guidelines. Existing legal approaches like herdbooks kept by breeders' associations, trade marks, Geographic Indications could all be considered, but the question must be posed whether these systems are functional to ensure conservation and sustainable use of breeds.

Daniel Semambo, from the Ugandan delegation and a member of the Bureau of the Conference, represented his government on the panel. He underlined the crucial role of incentives, both supportive and perverse subsidies and regulations, in developing production systems. In his country, Uganda, local breeds are very important and conservation is efficiently done by keeping the animals in productive systems. He supported the idea of creating ranches where endangered breeds are kept in open nucleus breeding schemes. Farmers' goat breeds could be improved, and traditional breeding knowledge should be learnt from farmers. Governments could also form breeders associations in order to promote livestock keepers' rights.

Comments from the floor:

It was noted that there is a lack of livestock keepers' rights rather than a lack of balance. Already, the World Trade Organisation, while it allows animals to be exempted from patenting, provides an intellectual property rights system (TRIPS) that some countries are using to impose patents and other IPRs on others, enforced through bilateral Free Trade Agreements. Introducing breeders' rights would further

strengthen the IPR/patent system, not the collective rights of communities. Less space is left to collective rights and local breeders.

There is a reluctance among many to adopt the term Livestock Keepers' Rights because it is not well defined. The best approach therefore would be to limit the individual rights system in order to create the necessary space to develop the collective rights system.

Livestock keepers rights are presented as a bundle of rights. Within the discussion the aspect of intellectual property rights on animal genetic resources is often overemphasized, but the other elements of those rights are crucial.

Furthermore, breeding policies were challenged. Local communities are rarely consulted; they are often considered of low social status. Breeding associations again are a Western concept that does not fit with communities and their traditional knowledge. Breeding associations will not provide collective rights.

Tina Goethe of Swissaid as Co-Chair summed up and added her perspective. Neither development of industrial livestock production nor trade liberalization have helped to reduce poverty and smallholders and pastoralists have lost out. Both civil society delegates stressed the devastating impact of the industrialization and concentration of livestock production on traditional livestock keepers and therefore on livestock diversity. The ecological and social problems described are dramatic, not only for poor people in developing countries, but also for producers and consumers in the North. Many of these aspects of livestock production systems are described in the report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources. However, the current draft of the Global Plan of Action does not respond to the urgent needs of technical and scientific inputs in order to help policies to change.

On the rights issue, Goethe noted that the audience was perhaps even more focussed than the panel speakers, probably due to the deep concern of Civil Society with regard to the loss of collective rights that not only occurs with regard to livestock genetic resources. Collective rights are essential if diverse breeding by diverse communities to sustain livestock diversity is to continue. More work is needed to better define livestock keepers' rights, and the political space for this must be left open by keeping Intellectual Property Rights and individual rights at bay.

Thanking the Swiss government, panellists and the audience, Goethe stressed that it is very important for everyone to consider the broader context of animal genetic resources as discussed in this Equal Footing Debate. The meeting was an important step to create understanding between civil society and governments, through dialogue.