Ethical quotation system

COVALENCE ANALYST PAPERS

Green Banks, Ethical Banks, Seed Banks: too many eco-something banks

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The term "bank" can be associated with various words. Often, in fact, we read "green banks": banks that have given support for carrying out ecosustainability to their management or of bancari institutes that invest money for the discouragement of CO2 emission quotas; sometimes we see ethical bank: institutes that invest only in sure fields: regarded as ethical and with particular rules. The seed banks also exist, a type of gene bank[1].

All these "banks"- in various ways and at different times- have engaged themselves in making a better future. We try to analyze them, one by one.

Green Banks:

An example of the term "green banks" is in the article "***Banking on the Future: The Two Biggest US Banks To Dedicate Billions to Halting Climate Change***" by Anne Moore Odell published the 16 may 2007 on SocialFunds.com.

Another example is in the article "***Green, greener, greenest ... the top 10***" published the 2 june 2007 in the ***New Zealand Herald*** : "*ABN AMRO The Dutch banking group aims to integrate environmental issues into all business decisions to ensure its contribution to a sustainable society. Its external policy is aimed at predicting environmental developments related to its commercial activities. ABN has developed environmental and social risk policies covering the oil and gas, mining and forestry industries, dams and nuclear power".*

It's seems to be good, but that is a bit deceptive. In fact one can read on Covalence's website[2]: "*Investments by Dutch banks cause more than three times the CO2 emissions that the Netherlands emits annually. The banks invest over twenty times more in projects that harm the climate such as oil extraction and coal-fired plants, than in projects for climate friendly renewable energy. ABN AMRO is the worst performing Dutch bank with the biggest climate impact.*". It's very hard codify and synthesizing information by a variety of sources. Nowadays banks are more and more engaged in this sector. In June 2003, the Equator Principles[3] were launched, later revised in July 2006.

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[1] Gene banks are a means of preserving genetic material, be it plant or animal. In plants, this could be freezing cuts from the plant, or the seeds themselves. In animals, this is the freezing of sperm and eggs in zoological freezers until further need. This is one way scientists have prevented a gene family line from being wiped out. In plants, it is possible to unfreeze the material and sow it, however, in animals, a living female is required for artificial insemination.

[2] http://www.covalence.ch/index.php/2007/06/09/climate-change-not-with-my-money/

[3] The Equator Principles is a set of environmental and social benchmarks for managing environmental and social issues in development project finance in the emerging markets. Once adopted by banks and other financial institutions, the Equator Principles commit the adoptees not to finance projects that fail to follow the processes defined by the Principles.

Ethical Banks:

An "ethical bank", also known as social, alternative or sustainable bank, is a bank concerned about the social use of its investments and loans. Although there are differences among the main ethical banks, they share a common set of principles, the most prominent being the transparency and the social or environmental aim of the projects they finance. Some of them are specialized in microcredits. Ethical banks are regulated by the same authorities as traditional banks and have to abide by the same rules. They have to be distinguished from ethical institutions that provide certain banking services but do not meet the legal definition of bank.

The name of "ethical bank" is somewhat controversial, because it seems to imply that the other banks are not ethical. However, this is the most extended definition. "Ethical banks" usually work with narrower profit margins than traditional ones, and therefore they tend to have few offices and operate mostly by phone, internet or mail. An extreme case of this is Smile (a branch of Co-operative Bank), the first ethical bank that operates exclusively by Internet.

Seed Banks:

Seed banking is a relatively new and under-exploited tool in combating the loss of global plant diversity. It has the unique feature as a conservation technique of making plants rapidly and easily available for investigation and evaluation. Seeds safely stored help keep our options open.

The purpose of a "seed bank" (*banque de gènes*)[4] is not to replace wild populations, but to act as an insurance policy. In a world where the rapid loss of biodiversity is of great concern, the efficiency, effectiveness and ease of seed banking make it an attractive conservation option, especially as a back up to on-site (*in situ*) conservation - which is the preferred option.

The seeds in the "seed bank" could be used in the future to help restore damaged or destroyed environments, or to increase numbers of rare and endangered plants in the wild, thus relieving pressure on the wild populations. They can also be used in scientific research to find new ways for plants to benefit society such as in medicine, agriculture or local industry.

The result of putting seeds into a "seed bank" is to slow down the rate at which they deteriorate and at which they lose their ability to germinate. Seeds of some plants can probably last thousands of years in cold storage or a "seed bank". For some wild plants, centuries is probably a more realistic figure, far longer than most would survive in the wild (It is estimated that 80% of the species stored in a seed bank will live for at least 200 years.). At the very least "seed banks" offer an insurance service to other conservation techniques - it may be the only option available when the last surviving individuals of a species are about to be destroyed.

Nowadays the seed bank is essentially divided in two categories:

1) scientific interest (safeguard of the biodiversity).

2) economic and agricultural interest.

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[4] However, french syntagma "banque de gènes" could induce in error: not separated genes are preserved, but the entire plants, with seeds, tubers, stolons, boutures,tissue culture, cuttings and seedlings.
[5] The European Native Seed COnservation NETwork http://www.ensconet.com/
[6] World of Trade Organization: the Iraqi government has observer statute.

A good example: The Millenium Seed Bank

The Millennium Seed Bank Project is the largest *ex situ* conservation project ever conceived. Its partners will have banked seed from 10% of the world's wild plant species by the end of the decade. These will not be just any plants, but will include the rarest, most threatened and most useful species known to man.

The Millennium Seed Bank project is funded through public donations from individuals, sponsorship from corporate companies, and awards from grant-making bodies. A very good example of social sponsorship. Example: "The Orange room" (so called in the recognition of the Premier Sponsors of the Appeal). In this room visitors can learn, through a variety of exihibts and computer-aided interactive displays, how Kew's Seed Conservation works.

Often "seed banks" creates some networks to share data and a job improvement also. E.g. E.N.S.C.O.N.E.T[5] that coordinates seed conservation activities of wild plants within Europe. This network involves different institutions, working jointly on seed preservation for the future.

Study, information, research on seed biology will be supported by the work of the partners through the exchange of experiences, protocols and facilities. All the efforts are headed to optimise seed conservation practices: collecting, curation, data management and dissemination of all the knowledge.

If the economic interest prevales…

When L. Paul Bremer III, administrator of the provisional coalition in Iraq, left Baghdad in June 2004, after alleged "the transfer of sovereignty", he left behind him 100 decrees which he had emitted as a chief of the occupying forces. Among those, it is decree 81 which relate to the "Patents, the industrial design, not revealed information, the integrated circuits, and the law on the varieties of plants". This order causes to replace the Iraqi law of 1970 on the patents and it through law until the new administration decides to revise it or to repeal it. With this law, the United States posed an important additional stake for the radical transformation of the economy of Iraq and this with major implications for the peasants and the future of agriculture in this country.

In Iraq almost all the system of production of seeds functioned, since several generations, in an abstract and not controlled way. Husbandries had served for a long time as bases where seeds were preserved in farms where innovation was free and the exchange of seeds was `produced' among the communities of farmers. With the new law, that is now illegal. The producing peasants of seeds are now authorized to plant "protected" varieties which were imported into Iraq by transnational firms and of which the rights of ownership are retained by these last - all that in the name of the rebuilding!

While historically the Iraqi Constitution prohibited the right of private property on the living resources, the new law of the patents, imposed by the Americans, introduced a monopolistic system of rights on the seeds. One added to the old Iraqi law a whole chapter on the protection of varieties of plants (PVP), which envisages "*to protect the new varieties from plants*".

The PVP is a right of ownership intellectual or a kind of patent for the varieties of plants giving of the exclusive rights of monopoly to a selector which would claim to have developed a new variety. Thus "protection" in the PVP has nothing to do with conservation, but is rather intended to protect the commercial interests from the private selectors (often of large firms) which claim to have created new plants.

According to implications' rising from this new law, the Iraqi peasants cannot freely and legally plant or preserve seeds of seeds of any variety of recorded plants.

That thus deprives them of a right which is considered by them and many others arpund the world as being an inalienable right: to preserve and replant seeds.

The new law is presented as being necessary to ensure the good qualitz of seed provisioning in Iraq and to facilitate the accession of Iraq with the W.T.O. (O.M.C.)[6]. Actually, it facilitates the penetration of Iraqi agriculture by corporate giants who control the seed world trade such Monsanto (US), Syngenta (Swiss), Bayer (Germany) and Dow Chemicals (US).

This law succeeded in eliminating competition coming from the peasants, which is a prerequisite to help these transnational to launch their operations in Iraq.

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