Why welcome the drivers of land degradation as observer to the UNCCD? – Say no to agribusiness!

Civil society is not against the observer status of private sector, if they demonstrate a clear and transparent commitment to advancing sustainable development. However, civil society is very concerned that Parties are welcoming agribusiness companies as UNCCD observers despite knowing their notorious record of undermining farmers’ resilience and driving land degradation.

Agribusiness companies are monopolising our genetic resources. Their patents for hybrid and genetically engineered seeds prevent poor farmers from saving, exchanging, using and selling seeds that they have produced themselves. When farmers adopt these seeds promoted by agribusiness, the genetic variety of traditional seeds, adapted to unpredictable local conditions in drylands, is endangered, and may be lost forever.

As the seeds are patented, farmers need to buy them every year. The patented seeds often come in a two-in-one package with chemical pesticides, and require fertilizers to provide economic yields. These external inputs are expensive, and over the years the prices have steadily increased because only a handful of companies control the agribusiness industry. A tradition of farmer selection of well-adapted seed varieties that dates back 6,000 years is being destroyed in just a few decades.

If crops fail, the farmers easily become trapped in a vicious circle of poverty. However, by branding their patented crops as ‘climate ready’ or ‘drought resistant’, these agribusiness companies are making billions in profits. In truth, the seeds are not engineered to respond to varying climatic conditions over time in drylands, but for maximum short-term financial gains under controlled conditions. In addition, the pesticides promoted by agribusiness destroy crucial microorganisms and affect the nutrient cycle in the soil, prevent natural regeneration of the soils resulting in continuous land degradation.

Large agribusiness companies claim to respond to the challenges in drylands, but the evidence shows that they are contributing to the loss of agro-biological diversity, land degradation and poverty of local communities. This has devastating effects for food security, human health and resilience of local communities.

The Parties to the Convention and Observers have always been united by a common desire to mitigate the effects of land degradation on people and their livelihoods. Profit has not been the primary motive behind the promotion of SLM technologies and approaches that promote sustainable livelihoods in the global drylands. We believe that the willingness to welcome any and all private companies that are members to the global compact to the Convention without considering their ethics and the impact of the technologies that they promote will have disastrous results.

Supporting the right of all people to food and seed sovereignty, civil society asks:

To agribusiness companies:

- What is your incentive to join the UNCCD?
- What are you doing to prevent land degradation?

To UNCCD Parties and the Secretariat

- What is the contribution of agribusiness companies to the objectives of the UNCCD?

Supported by the CSOs attending COP 11 in Windhoek in Namibia.