



**AFRICAN CENTRE  
FOR BIODIVERSITY**

*years of advocating for food sovereignty in Africa*

Complexity of agrarian extractivism in  
Africa, Mariam Mayet August 2024  
For Peoples Dialogue





There is no one-size-fits-all definition for agrarian extractivism, rooted in colonialism in Africa: export of coal, diamonds, forest products, coffee, tea Sugar, rubber, tropical fruits, veg oils etc.

- Common features with dominant agriculture systems viz monocultures, plantations, and export of raw materials.
- Technological lock-ins (pesticides, inorganic fertilisers, corporate and GM seed)
- Corporate-led, external inputs/agribusiness control over value chains.
- Concentration of value in the hands of a few





Extractivist dynamics are subsidised

- Through loans and public funds
- Introduction of austerity measures.
- Exploitation of workers and massive youth unemployment, unpaid labour of women and children
- Externalities not accounted for e.g massive environmental destruction





## The Lock-in of SSA

- Africa is highly indebted.
- Producing a few export commodities dictated largely by free trade agreements
- Preventing diversification of agriculture and food systems to serve local, national and regional needs and priorities
- Africa continues to play a subordinate role in the global economy yet, agriculture development is built around narrative that smallholder agriculture unable to achieve transformation -what is needed= deeper integration of labour, land, biodiversity, into the circuits of global capital.

Lock in ecological destructive and inequitable development Promotion of large-scale plantations to attract capital investment.

Figure 10.6: Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP (constant LCU) 1970-2014



# Global Capital investors

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India and China

Sovereign wealth funds, pension funds  
Insurance funds, international  
Asset management companies

Capitalist philanthropy (Gates et al.)





## Some consequences:

- Flower-growing investors displace as many as 3 000 people per year in Ethiopia (agrarian distress)
- Contamination of lakes, and rivers with agrochemicals
- Huge impacts on farm workers working on industrial farms exposed to pesticides
- Deforestation (globally 80%) is 27% of GHG, 70% of terrestrial biodiversity loss, 50% of freshwater biodiversity loss, 52% of degraded land, uses 72% of water.
- Industrial ag, vulnerable to external shocks and food price increases





Fewer than 200 of the 6000 crop species substantially contribute to global food production

Only nine species contribute to 66% of total crop production (sugar cane, wheat, rice, maize, potatoes, sugar beet, cassava, oil palm and soybean).

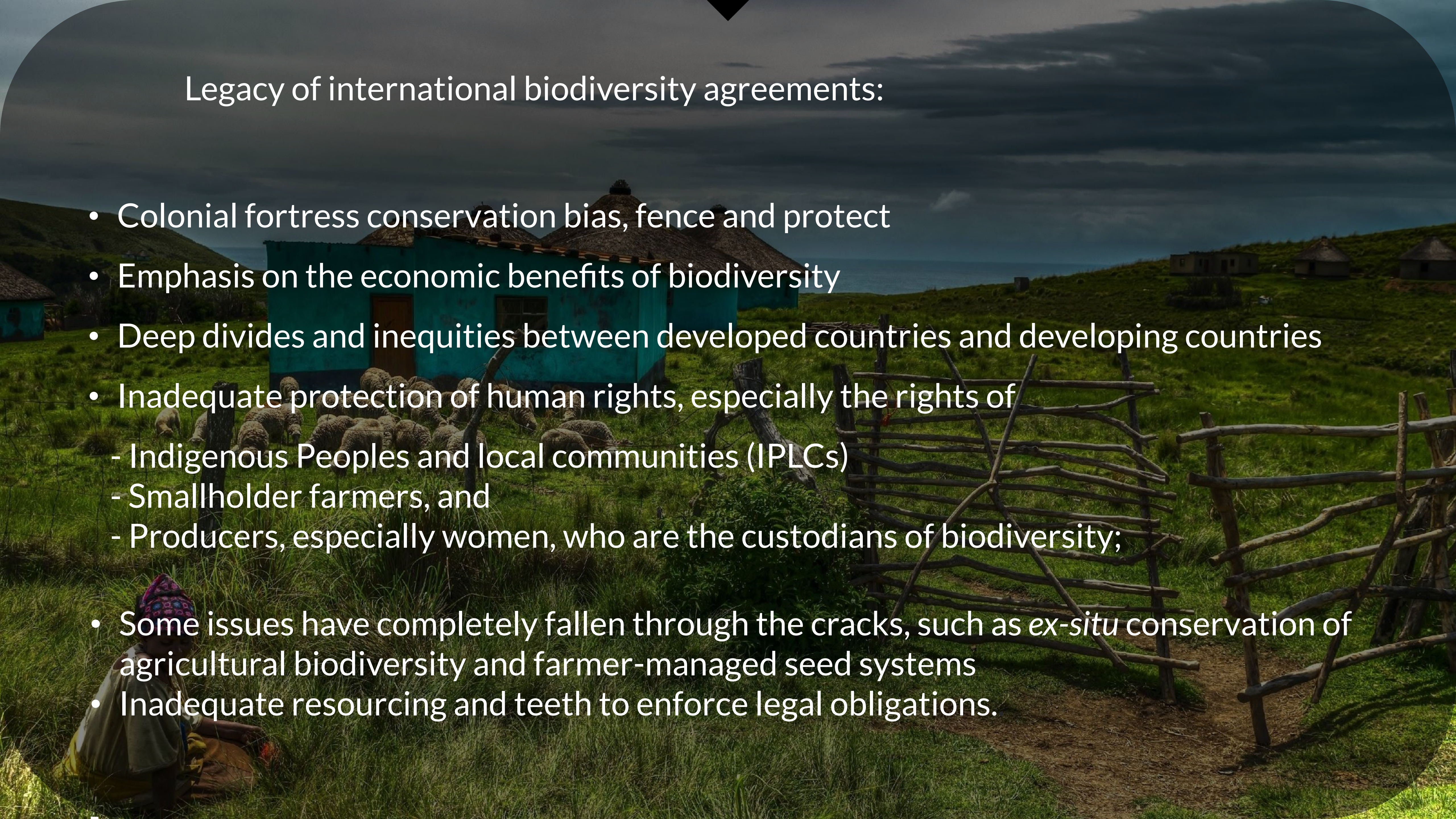
- Globally there is the Global Biodiversity Framework under the CBD, fails to address the exceptional resource ransacking
- Proposing a range of market-based instruments to deal with biodiversity crises, including a voluntary compliance market for biodiversity offsets, to link with carbon markets.





## Legacy of international biodiversity agreements:

- Colonial fortress conservation bias, fence and protect
- Emphasis on the economic benefits of biodiversity
- Deep divides and inequities between developed countries and developing countries
- Inadequate protection of human rights, especially the rights of
  - Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)
  - Smallholder farmers, and
  - Producers, especially women, who are the custodians of biodiversity;
- Some issues have completely fallen through the cracks, such as *ex-situ* conservation of agricultural biodiversity and farmer-managed seed systems
- Inadequate resourcing and teeth to enforce legal obligations.





Farmers' seed systems are integral to the world's genetic and cultural diversity, and are foundational for all food systems”





agricultural biodiversity -historical and ongoing role of world's  
smallholder farmers maintaining, innovating, conserving diverse crop  
seed in their seed systems.

No recognition of these roles

No recognition of these systems  
And their contributions to world  
food, fibre, medicine  
systems as we know it today

Age-old practises of freely exchanging  
And selling seeds criminalised

Relentless marginalisation and  
dispossession






The linkage between agriculture, and food systems. biodiversity, climate change, funding, debt, and trade need to be tackled as a package.

- Looking deeper into the climate change discussions we need a new narrative
- Never-ending debt
- “Harmful subsidies”-CBD parlance in Africa to fossil fuel industry, mining, and agriculture (it is interlined and packaged)
- Financing and how money is organised
- Challenges –agency and resonance with peoples’ bread and butter issues!





Thank you



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