BULLETIN

World Rainforest Movement

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THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST TREE MONOCULTURES

This WRM bulletin is a contribution to the activities to be carried out on September 21st, International Day Against Tree Monocultures. Friends of the Earth International, Global Forest Coalition and World Rainforest Movement agreed to join forces for raising awareness on this day about the social and environmental problems resulting from the expansion of such plantations. In line with this collaborative effort, the editorial of the bulletin has been jointly produced by the three organizations. More importantly, the articles included reflect a broad range of impacts and struggles in different continents and on different types of plantations. We hope it will serve as a useful tool for 21 September.

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Why an International Day Against Tree Monocultures?

All "international days" concern problematic issues of global importance that need to be addressed by society as a whole. The expansion of tree monocultures has resulted in so many social and environmental impacts that it gave rise to the idea of establishing an International Day to raise the issue at the global level. The date of September 21st was chosen following the lead from local networks in Brazil, who in 2004 decided to establish this date –which is Tree Day in that country- as a day of struggle against tree monocultures.

The date coincides with the UN Day of Peace, which is precisely what local communities affected by plantations wish: peace to live in harmony with nature and with other human beings. Tree plantations are destroying such peace and the need for raising this issue on a specific day at the international level stems from a number of issues:

The first and more important is that many people –in South and North- are totally unaware about the social and environmental impacts resulting from large-scale tree monocultures and believe that planting trees is always positive. They are also unaware of the fact that these plantations are not aimed at improving local peoples' livelihoods, but at feeding wasteful consumption in the North.

The above situation results from a combination of factors, among which the fact that the voices of local peoples' struggling against plantations are silenced through fear, repression or by being made invisible by the media. Both fear/repression and media invisibility result from the economic and political power of plantation companies, usually also involved in investments in the pulp, timber, palm oil or rubber industrial sectors. The companies' power –expressed through different mechanisms- result in partial or total control over government and media, who become "partners" of their investments. As a result, whenever local people stand up for their rights against plantation companies they are defined –together with their supporters- as "troublemakers".

Plantation companies are further empowered by international bodies, forestry departments and mainstream forestry professionals, who –against all evidence- insist in defining tree monocultures as "planted forests" and as having similar positive roles as true forests. As a result, plantation opposers are classified as either ignorant or having hidden political agendas.

The above combination of corporate, government, professional and media influence is what maintains most people ignorant about the negative impacts of monoculture tree plantations. There are of course government officials, foresters and journalists who either oppose such plantations or are at least open to look into the existing evidence, but they are still a minority suffering the same constraints imposed by power.

And if things weren't bad enough, large-scale tree plantations are currently being promoted as a false solution to climate change in two manners: On the one hand the European parliament and others are pushing for so-called "second generation" agrofuels based on wood, which will lead to the rapid expansion of monoculture tree plantations, including of genetically modified trees. On the other hand,

several Southern countries have stepped up their attempts to finance the expansion of large-scale plantations as carbon offset projects or to use tree plantations to compensate for the loss of forests when these countries apply for funding from a potential mechanism under the Climate Convention.

Such is the context within which this International Day Against Tree Monocultures is taking place. There now exists abundant documented evidence about the social and environmental impacts of plantations, but governments, international bodies and mainstream foresters choose to ignore it. There are abundant cases to be reported –of environmental destruction, human rights violations, extreme working conditions, impacts on women- but the mainstream media chooses not to report them.

On this 21 September we therefore aim at providing visibility to the numerous peoples struggling against plantations, as a means of breaking the circle of silence and lies surrounding their plight. At the same time, our aim is to disseminate as widely as possible the evidence emerging from those struggles regarding the social and environmental impacts resulting from those plantations. Through this means, it is our aim to weaken government support to plantations and to expose those that either provide plantations with credibility or who misinform the public about the issue.

Finally, we wish to stress that the struggle against plantations is something that has been imposed on communities, who are in fact protecting their livelihoods and local environments against corporate greed. It is a struggle that needs to be staged in order to protects forests, grasslands, wetlands, biodiversity, soils, water and people, all of which are being affected by these vast tree monocultures. It is, in sum, a struggle for life.

Friends of the Earth International - Global Forest Coalition - World Rainforest Movement

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VOICING OPPOSITION

- A PowerPoint presentation based on local testimonials

Depletion of water sources, changes in flora and fauna, loss of land, human rights violations, destruction of the social fabric: these are just some of the problems brought about by tree monocultures.

Those who know more about this than anyone else are the local communities who have suffered this invasion first hand, but whose protests and struggles are systematically silenced by powerful corporations and their allies.

This PowerPoint presentation (available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/ingles/monoculture2008.pps) is aimed at providing a forum for these voices, so that they can spread, circulate and join with others, culminating a single, unanimous, forceful call to bring an end to the destructive model of large-scale monoculture tree plantations. We hope you will use this tool to spread these voices and their message.

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- Statement by forestry professionals and students

For local communities that live in forested areas, the difference between a forest and a tree monoculture is very clear. Unfortunately, this clarity is not shared by many forestry professionals, whose training has been based on the concept that tree plantations are forests and carry out similar functions.

This is no minor matter, because it is forestry professionals who advise governments, since governments believe that forestry professionals – and not local communities – are the experts on this subject. And based on this advice, governments formulate and implement ambitious forestry plans that often entail the establishment of vast stretches of monoculture tree plantations, which have nothing in common with forests.

Within that context, there are also many forestry students and professionals who totally disagree with that view, based on concrete experience of the social and environmental impacts of tree monocultures, and who join the people to oppose both the planting of these monocultures and that they continue to be defined as “forests”.

With the aim of strengthening that opposition, a group of forestry professionals and students issued a statement in which they very clearly stress that “plantations are not forests.” They are now calling on their colleagues from around the world to adhere to the statement as a means of initiating a profound process of change, both inside and outside forestry training institutions.

We consider this 21 September to be an excellent opportunity to disseminate this statement, and we urge all forestry professionals and students who identify with this position to sign on.

Monoculture tree plantations are not forests
Statement by forestry professionals and students
2008

Throughout the world, governments are actively promoting the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, despite the serious social and environmental impacts already witnessed on existing plantations. The promoters of this model claim that plantations are forests, which simply is not true. Plantations are not forests. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues in the forestry sector support this model, and our teaching institutions continue to train new generations of forestry professionals to perpetuate and expand this type of forestry model, aimed at seeing forests where they do not exist.

This is why we feel the need to publicly state not only that monoculture tree plantations are not forests, but also that these plantations result or have resulted in the destruction of our native forests and of other equally valuable ecosystems that they replace.

Those who know the most about this issue are the local populations who directly suffer the impacts of plantations, such as:

- Loss of biodiversity (and the resulting loss of food, medicines, firewood, and materials for housing construction and crafts, among others).
- Changes in the water cycle, resulting both in the decrease and depletion of water sources and the increase of flooding and landslides.
- Decreased food production.
- Soil degradation.
- Loss of indigenous and traditional cultures that depend on the original ecosystems.
- Conflicts with forestry companies over the ownership of land in indigenous territories and those of other traditional communities.
- Decreased sources of employment in traditionally agricultural areas.
- Expulsion of rural populations.
- Destruction of the natural landscape in tourism areas.

For reasons like these, we forestry professionals who strive for the conservation of forests and recognise the basic rights of the peoples who live there must take the side of those who truly defend the forests – the local communities – and oppose the expansion of monoculture plantations.

We want to stress that this process is not beginning today, but in fact dates back to the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. At that time, a group of forestry students and professionals agreed on the need for “another kind of forestry training based on a different way of seeing the world, in which forests are not seen simply as wood, but rather as what they really are: diverse ecosystems made up of forest flora, fauna and peoples.” In line with this position, we clearly declared ourselves “against the establishment of large-scale monocultures or homogenous tree plantations.”

Today, within this framework, we are calling on forestry students and professionals to adhere to this declaration and to begin a process, inside and outside educational institutions, that will make it possible for those of us who enter this profession to actually do what we thought we would be doing when we entered it: defending forests and the peoples who depend on them.

Signatures follow. The declaration with the updated list of signatories is available at

http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/foresters.html

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WHEN TREES BECOME DESERTS

- Plantations we support and plantations we oppose

Planting trees is generally considered to be a positive action. The act of planting a tree – either at a school or in a peasant community – in many societies symbolizes concern for nature and a contribution by the present generation to future ones.

In addition to this symbolic aspect, many tree plantations are indeed positive, in particular when they are made by decision of the communities themselves to cover their needs, for example in the case of fruit trees or woody species that serve to address other needs for firewood, fibres, seeds, flowers, medicines, shade, shelter, etc. Many of these plantations are in fact agro-forestry systems in themselves, often part of traditional local ecosystem management systems.

It goes without saying that WRM supports and has always supported this type of plantation, which has a socially beneficial and environmentally appropriate nature.

However, under the cover of this positive image of plantations, other types of plantations have been developed, generating wide opposition, firstly in the local context and later at international level. We refer to large-scale monoculture tree plantations, including those aimed at the production of timber or pulp and those aimed at the production of palm oil or rubber. More recently, monoculture tree plantations serving as “carbon sinks” and those aimed at the production of biodiesel and cellulosic ethanol have come to join this latter group.

This model is actively promoted by a set of actors including international organizations such as FAO and the World Bank, state agencies in industrialized countries (export credit, bilateral cooperation, technical support), in addition to companies benefitting from this investment (banks, the pulp and paper industry, manufacturers of machinery, consulting firms, etc.). The final result is the production of abundant and cheap raw material –timber, pulp, rubber, palm oil or others – that serves as an input to the economic growth of the industrialized countries themselves. At the level of producer countries, what remains is a degraded environment, an impoverished population - the “externality costs” – so that raw material is cheap.

It is this type of plantations that WRM has been opposing for over 20 years, due to their serious social and environmental impacts. In spite of the fact that they are defined as “planted forests,” it is certain that they have nothing in common with a forest. While forests serve to support local populations – both people and fauna – these plantations evict them; while the former regulate the water cycle, the latter deplete it and contaminate water sources; while forests protect and enrich the soil, plantations deplete and erode it, while forests contain an enormous diversity of life, plantations are green deserts.

All these impacts are an inevitable consequence of the model, based on single-species monocultures – generally alien – covering vast areas of land previously given over to satisfying the subsistence needs of local populations and the habitat of numerous species of plants and animals. To the social and environmental impacts arising from this land occupation, are added those caused by the use of large amounts of chemical fertilizers, weed-killers, insecticides and fungicides used to guarantee the profitability of the investment. These agrotoxics contaminate water, air and the soil with the consequent disappearance of species of fauna and flora and serious impacts on the health of workers and local inhabitants. In turn, the growth of trees planted as large-scale monocultures depletes water resources and soil nutrients. The scant jobs the model requires – temporary ones, with low wages and poor working conditions – decrease as mechanization of all the operations progresses.

To the above is now added the recent threat of the incorporation of transgenic trees, genetically modified to increase profitability of the plantations. Such research is being carried out in at least 19 countries (see details at www.wrm.org.uy). The use of such trees in commercial plantations not only implies a very serious threat to the world’s forests but would also worsen the impacts already observed in existing monoculture plantations.

All this has led to an increasing number of organizations and people opposing large-scale monoculture plantations, gathered under the

premise that “plantations are not forests.”

As for WRM, our position is very clear: we support certain types of plantations and oppose others. We have nothing against eucalyptus or pine trees or oil palms or any particular species of tree. Our opposition is aimed at a specific model of use – and now genetic manipulation – of trees, benefitting large corporations and harming both the local communities and the environment where they are installed.

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THE IMPACTS OF TREE PLANTATIONS ON PEOPLE

In AFRICA

- Cameroon: Bagyeli severely impacted by the establishment of industrial plantations

In South-Western Cameroon, near Kribi, two giant industrial plantations cover a total area of 62,000 hectares. One of them, HEVECAM, is a rubber tree monoculture belonging to the Singapore-based GMG group, while the other, SOCAPALM, is an oil palm plantation, property of the French group Bolloré.

HEVECAM and SOCAPALM adjoin about ten communities of Bagyeli (“Pygmy”) hunter-gatherers. The latter are traditionally characterized by a strong dependency on forest resources and by a remarkable adaptation to forest areas. Bagyeli camps constitute the central socioeconomic unit from which production/consumption activities are organized, based on hunting and gathering, but also increasingly on agriculture. Traditionally however, their economy rests on natural reproduction cycles (other than agricultural). A few huts (up to a dozen) comprising a population of 15 to 70 persons form the community, whose functioning is remarkably egalitarian. Each community presents a set of customary rules regulating a given forested territory and particularly the use of its natural resources. Nevertheless, these exclusive rules are balanced by an “obligation of conviviality” based on friendship relations with persons from outside the community.

The main problems caused by the establishment of HEVECAM and SOCAPALM are linked with the vanishing of large areas of forest formerly inhabited by Bagyeli. Here are two concrete cases:

-- Kilombo I is a Bagyeli village stuck between SOCAPALM and HEVECAM. The situation of its inhabitants is particularly difficult, due to their isolated location and to the destruction of their forest. SOCAPALM forced them to leave their place of residence in order to allow the establishment of the plantation and promised them in return modern houses. But until today, no houses nor any compensation (for example for the tombs which had been destroyed) have been given. These Bagyeli are now surrounded by plantations, in which they are not allowed to enter. As a result, the population of Kilombo I has drastically decreased since the arrival of the plantation.

-- Nyamabandé is another Bagyeli community located between HEVECAM and the Campo-Ma’an national park, where the two entities touch each other. The Bagyeli were little by little forced to settle next to the Campo-Ma’an protected area in which they only recently recovered the right to hunt and collect. On the contrary, within the perimeter of HEVECAM, only adults are allowed to enter and to collect snails. Additionally, the “Convention d’Etablissement” (conditions of contract) between the government and HEVECAM (dated 15th of September 1998) does not mention a single time the interests of the Bagyeli.

The opportunities to obtain a job in the plantations are very poor: HEVECAM does not enrol Bagyeli workers in rubber tapping and neither does SOCAPALM in its oil palm plantations. On the rare occasions when SOCAPALM provides them a temporary job, the company pays them less than Bantu workers. In the same way, HEVECAM periodically appoints a subcontractor for the weeding of the monocultures; the latter sometimes hires Bagyeli but underpays them in a scandalous way.

From a health perspective, Bagyeli say illnesses are less frequent in the forest than close to the plantation. As a matter of fact, mosquitoes proliferate in the stagnant water puddles between the tree rows. Consequently, malaria and cholera affect today the local populations more than before. Our Bagyeli informants also noted that high blood pressure and depression rates are more frequent than before. The problems linked with an unhealthy food and with water pollution (agrochemical products, erosion) are worsening notably through the lack of access to their traditional pharmacopeia (frequent cases of abortion, chronic intestinal problems, etc.). Because

they are not part of the wage-earning workforce, local Bagyeli do not have free access to the hospitals and schools belonging to the plantation companies.

Formerly, Bagyeli used to find in the forest everything they needed to live, but today it is only at the edges of the plantation, and above all much deeper in the forest, that animals can still be found. On the side of the Campo-Ma'an park, the fauna has become rare, not only because of the plantation, but also because of the numerous poachers living in the HEVECAM region. The protein intake of HEVECAM's workers still depends 75% on "bush meat". Illegal commercial hunting has thus considerably increased during the last few years while in the past hunting was exclusively dedicated to local household consumption. It is estimated that there are more than two thousands irregular firearms in HEVECAM's concession. This has become a major problem for Bagyeli and it will go increasing hand in hand with the intensification of industrial activities.

By Julien-François Gerber, e-mail : JulienFrancois.Gerber@campus.uab.es

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- Liberia: Painful rubber – the hard day's life of Firestone tappers

In 1926, Firestone Tire & Rubber Company signed a 99-year contract with the government to lease one million acres [approximately 405,000 hecatares] of land for the establishment of a rubber plantation. The total concession area of Firestone represents 4% of Liberia's territory and nearly 10% of its arable land.

Firestone currently occupies some 240 square miles [approx. 62,000 hs] of the concession with about 7,000 employees, most of whom are rubber tappers. There are also approximately another 4,000 laborers who work for the company with no legal status hence with no benefits from the company, such as health and education for their families. Also, an additional some 4,000 people work on the plantation for the tappers and therefore have no legal status with the company.

Tappers work approximately 12 hours a day without safety equipment (gloves, goggles, rain boots, rain coats and other safety gears) unless they are bought by the tappers themselves. They have to carry all the latex they produce on their bare shoulders on a stick with two buckets weighing 70 lbs [31.7 kg] each.

This primitive means of transporting latex has not changed since 1926. With 140 lbs [63.4 kgs] yoked across their shoulders, laborers walk to weigh stations that may be up to three miles [4.8 kms] away from the grove of rubber trees. Firestone provides no alternative means of transportation. Rubber tappers doing this backbreaking work risk injury and the development of deformities the longer they are employed.

A tapper wakes at 4 o'clock every morning to get prepared for tapping up to perhaps 750 trees daily on a normal tapping day. However, only half of the daily rate of $3.38 is paid if a tapper fails to complete the full daily quota. Faced with these onerous quotas, tappers have little choice but to allow family members to assist them in completing their quota or hire a sub-contractor.

The tappers work every day of the year including national holidays, with the exception of Christmas day, producing high volumes of latex. An average tapper's monthly production can be valued at US/$2,296.80 on the ground in Liberia and US/$3,915.00 at world market prices while the tapper is paid US/$125. Out of the monthly wage of US/$125, he may have to pay one or two sub-contractors who helped him tap.

"These people are treating us like slaves because we have nobody to talk for us and we have nowhere to find a new job. You produce more than 5 tons of latex for the company a month and they don't even pay you the price of one ton", said bitterly a tapper.

Besides latex production, tappers are required to apply chemicals (both fungicide and stimulants) on the trees for protection and to increase production. In addition they are required to under-brush the trees they tap. This workload means that many of the tappers have to hire sub-contractors to get all the work done. In the instance where the tapper's family is large and can not afford the deduction of their rice supply or salary for a sub-contractor, the wife is obliged to abandon her children to assist her husband in completing his

quota.

Huge disparities exist between laborers and other staff of Firestone. For example, a superintendent who monitors the tappers makes more than US$700 a month, according to his educational level, resides in a well-furnished bungalow, and enjoys other benefits including excess monthly production bonuses.

In contrast, tappers and other laborers live in dilapidated houses. Most of these houses, that were built in the 1930s when Firestone started operations, are one room, lack electricity, pipe-borne water, indoor latrines, indoor kitchens, living rooms and ceilings. Roofed haphazardly with asbestos, many of these structures now leak profusely.

"When it is raining we have to put all of our eating bowls around in the rooms or else the whole place will be filled with water", denounced a labourer.

Clean water is a luxury on the plantation. In more than 20 camps visited unofficially by a SAMFU's investigation team between November 2006 to date, an average of two hand pumps were seen in the camps with the average population of approximately 500 persons. These hand pumps sit on wells that are dug by hand and therefore do not have water during much of the dry season. This situation leaves tappers and other unskilled employees and their families with no option but to drink from shallow wells and creeks. Meanwhile, staff members have access to pipe borne water and specially treated drinking water located inside the processing plant.

The company tried to control worker's organization through the Firestone Agriculture Workers Union of Liberia (FAWUL), until extensive pressure from plantation workers and Liberia's two major labor federations led to FAWUL's suspension by the government. Elections were called to usher in an independent and democratic union.

At the end of April 2007, workers engaged in a strike to protest Firestone management's efforts to delay the elections. During the strike on April 27, 2007, police reportedly brutalized peaceful striking workers with batons and sticks, chased harmless workers throughout the city of Harbel – where the Firestone rubber processing plant is located-, broke into houses and beat many innocent people which resulted in dozens of injuries. Two dozen workers were injured so badly that they were forced to miss work while they underwent treatment. Subsequently, one of the injured workers died as a result of wounds suffered during the attack. In addition, tear gas was fired into Harbel's densely populated communities without regard for children, women and the elderly. It appears that many innocent workers were not only unnecessarily arrested, but unreasonably detained.

"If you have seen the people who produce the latex for the rubber products you use; the place they live, the kind of work they do, the food they eat and the amount of money they take home in salaries … you will be conscious of who produces the rubber you use on a daily basis".

Excerpted and adapted from: "The Heavy Load. A Demand for Fundamental Changes at the Bridgestone/Firestone Rubber Plantation in Liberia", published by Save My Future Foundation, June 2008, http://www.samfu.org/do%20files/The%20Heavy%20Load_2008.pdf

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- South Africa: Tree plantations ravaged by fire turned a lurking tragedy into a sad reality

Monoculture is against nature, which is diverse. That is why an unnatural system like industrial plantations of tree monocultures triggers off several negative impacts. One of them is fire.

Unlike forests, whose humidity and dense greenery of shrubs act as a barrier against fires, industrial tree plantations lack the structural and biological diversity of forests. Tree plantations have "single-layered" canopies (ie. all the trees are of similar height), "closed" canopies that block out the sunlight –resulting in shaded understories with fewer plants-, poorer water conservation qualities, poorly developed canopy epiphyte layers (ie. mosses, lichens, and ferns living on tree trunks and branches) and suspended soil (which form from the decay of these epiphytic plants), less overall biodiversity, all of which make them highly prone to set on fire. They represent a tragedy lurking out there.

And the tragedy has just come over South Africa.

According to NASA's Earth Observatory, "A river of smoke several hundred kilometers wide flowed off the southeast coast of Africa in early September 2008. The smoke was coming from hundreds, probably thousands, of fires burning in Mozambique, South Africa, and Swaziland. September is near the end of southern Africa's dry season, and intentional agricultural fires as well as accidental forest fires are common." (http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Newsroom/NewImages/images.php3?img_id=18139)

However, "This particular situation has never been experienced before. Reports are coming in from all over the country," said Percy Morokane from Johannebsurg's Emergency Services in an interview with the BBC.

On the last weekend of August, fanned by strong winds, more than 100 wildfires across South Africa have left at least 20 people dead and 26 injured in the blazes. Fires raged across 50,000 hectares of land, 15,000 of which are industrial stands of trees in Mpumalanga. Three men were caught in a fire in the Sappi Escarpment tree plantation owned by the FSC certified pulp conglomerate Sappi.

Several different fires left 14 dead in KwaZulu-Natal province, three people including two children dead in the Eastern Cape, three people dead in Mpumalanga province, and dozens homeless in Cape Town.

Unfortunately, it is often on tragedies that awareness is raised. Let's hope mourn gives rise to good sense to stop the expansion of monoculture tree plantations.

Article based on information from: "South Africa: Three More Injured in Mpumalanga Fires", BuaNews (Tshwane), http://allafrica.com/stories/200809030578.html; "South Africa bush fires 'kill 20'", BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7591950.stm

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In ASIA

- Cambodia: Indigenous women raise their voices to protect their forest and traditional livelihoods from rubber plantation companies

In North East Cambodia different indigenous groups have lived for centuries, preserving an immense and extremely diverse forest ecosystem, maintained intact until the recent decades, when massive forest exploitation started. Indigenous agricultural practices, as in many other forest-covered areas in the world, have contributed to maintain biodiversity and are among the most sustainable so far known.

The subversion of this ecological and social system is full of consequences for indigenous communities and women, as this Bunong woman from Mondulkiri explains:

"*The company has cut all the trees to do the plantation. They say that indigenous people cut the forest too. But indigenous people don't do that! We ask the spirits before cutting, we try to understand from the dreams if the spirits agree, then we cut just small plots to do our fields, and we never cut the big trees. The company instead cut all, so now there are no trees, animals and even vegetables. There were six big forests here around, and lots of wild animals; we could find vegetables, medicines, resin, roots, fishes, fruits.*

Now the forest has been cut and the spirits were dismissed, so they don't help the community anymore. For our elders it is now difficult to be respected by young people. Before, the spirits were around the village and young people were more respectful. The spirits don't help the community anymore, even if we lack food, or in case of disease.

We are afraid of the company workers, afraid of drug addicts, of rape, and that they will beat our people. Since the last two years we have these people around; we go everywhere accompanied by men, because we are scared. They don't respect women, so we feel afraid, and we fear that the men of the village may become like the workers, especially the young."

Commercial plantations not only subvert the ecological environment, but have harsh consequences for the communities. The massive immigration of workers that normally occurs when plantations are established cause the overexploitation of resources like wild animals

and fishery, which become scarce and less accessible to indigenous communities. Immigrants will trigger the migration of other non indigenous people, as service providers, and this may easily contribute to change the population balance in the areas. Plantations workers are predominantly males; as a consequence sex provision services start to mushroom in the area, which contributes to devalue the status of women in general, and to introduce a male bias in social life.

In words of a Tampuan woman from Ratanakiri, "*Here there is no more forest around, we have only rubber plantations. Now everybody wants to sell land too; they want to plant cashew nuts, soja beans, or cassava. First they sold land at district level. People have complained about these land sales, but they couldn't get the land back. So now the villagers follow them and want to sell their land too. They think that if they don't sell, companies will take the land anyway. Men want to sell land, they don't listen to women anymore, they want money. They answer back to the elders: 'if we want to live differently it is up to us, is not your business...' They don't listen to the elders and sell their land; then they invade other people's land, disputes erupt, they say it is a private affair, not a community issue, and lots of conflicts start between people and between women and men. Men drink, and when they do not have money, they sell pieces of land to pay the debts! Those who sell their land become poor, and after that become drunkards. Families without land often become heavy drinkers, they are always drunk."*

It is within the communities that intensive commercial exploitation of forestland has more dramatic consequences. The values that this form of development carries are highly destructive for the social fabric of indigenous communities, and human beings in general. Money, individualism, competition and consumerism break up the solidarity pact that animates the communities. Divisions appear between its members, elders and younger, women and men. Market oriented economy is male biased, and men appear to be more easily lured by the appeal of money and cash economy.

Women pay a great tribute to this subversion of their societies and values. Their workload increases, as many of the resources that they use to collect nearby, like firewood, water, vegetables, materials for crafting, tools, medicines, small animals, resin, are no more at hand. When the plantations arrive, indigenous people have to move their fields far away, which forces women to long walks just to reach the field and working at their family farms. If men are enrolled as workers, women are left alone to tend the farms. Women's work in the family farms assures everyday meals, but is invisible and unvalued, because not inscribed in the cash economy frame. But it is this work that keeps plantation labourers' salaries low and profitable for the companies. In the male context that this form of neo colonial development is forging, indigenous women's work is unrecognized and overwhelming, while their status as women starts to be seriously weakened.

For women the forest is much more than mere subsistence: it is also pleasure, a nice place to stay, it is fun, an open door to imagination. As Lun, a woman from Ratanakiri says: "*We women like the forest a lot, is it fresh, and it is fun. We like to go there, we are not scared and we have a nice time. We used to go there, and sleep in the forest, when I was a child with my father and my uncle from the village nearby. It was one of the enjoyable things to do, catching the small fishes and the crabs in ponds, collect the resin, or find small bamboo. Sometimes we could find some special leaves and we used to stay overnight to collect the resin. But now it is difficult, because there is a company, we don't know how it happened, if the forest was sold or if they just took it, they just put the fence, and a panel to forbid the entry."*

When the forest is cut, something more than tangible products gets lost. The forest is the refuge of spirits, the source of stories and epopees, the place of challenges and adventures, and the shelter that awaits everybody at the end of the life. And it is also about stars, as told by a Kreung girl from Ratankiri*: "When there are many stars in the sky, some stars come to sleep with the girls, others go to sleep with the boys. I learned from the elders that the stars look after the forest. That's what I know."*

By Margherita Maffii, Phnom Penh, September 2008, e-mail: mafpol@gmail.com

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- Indonesia: Harsh conditions for women workers in oil palm plantations

Indonesia is the world's second largest palm oil producer; together with Malaysia they account for about 80 percent of global palm-oil production. With actually around 6 million hectares of land planted with oil palm, Indonesia plans a significant expansion which is set to cover up to 20 million hectares by 2020.

Oil palm expansion has implied and implies the occupation of customary lands by companies to first “clear the land” (meaning deforestation) and then develop an oil palm plantation. Land occupation means in turn the displacement of local communities from their land thus triggering off several conflicts –about 400 in the whole of the country according to Indonesian NGO Sawit Watch.

For rural communities, land is the base of their livelihoods. According to WorldWatch Institute, a “2006 study of the area found that small farming systems provided livelihoods for 260 times as many people per hectare of land as oil palm plantations did” (1).

However, oil palm companies arrive protected by legal concessions and with false promises of jobs for local communities. Rural people who have been deprived of their land and livelihood are often forced to migrate, to end up in urban slums or to hire their labour force in the very plantations that displaced them. Once there, they have to face poverty, unsafe working conditions, frequent violation of their rights, insufficient pay and intimidation by employers.

Oxfam International has denounced that “In Indonesia, although the right to form a union is recognised by law, the International Trade Union Confederation notes that in practice trade-union rights are seriously weakened by intimidation and lengthy mediation processes which force unions to resort to wildcat strikes. In this context Musim Mas, an Indonesian palm-oil company, last year [2006] fired over 700 union members in retaliation for a strike, forcibly evicting the workers and 1,000 family members from their homes, and expelling their children from school.” (2) (and see also WRM Bulletin Nº 109).

Work in oil palm plantations is hard for both men and women, though different. It is quite frequent that women help their husbands in the plantations meet demanding production quotas, usually doing unpaid work. Apart from that, women have to take care of the children, elaborate the food and collect firewood and water, which now are rather far due to destruction of the forest by the oil palm plantations. In case women work on a hired basis, they often receive lower wages than men. Discrimination is set on the grounds that their work is easier than that of men.

According to an article by Rainforest Action Network, “Women are often assigned tasks that seem less onerous, but which are actually more dangerous and physically demanding than that of their male counterparts. In Indonesia, women are often designated to spray pesticides because it is less physically taxing than other plantation work. Unfortunately, they are rarely given proper protective gear like gloves and masks. When they return home, they have to prepare food for their families, often with pesticide residue still on their skin and clothes.” (3)

Paraquat and Glyphosate (Roundup) are the most common herbicides used in oil palm plantations. In addition to concerns about the effects on health from direct exposure to the toxics, the publication Down To Earth (DTE) revealed that herbicides can be washed by heavy rainfall “into streams and rivers which provide the only source of water for all household needs - including drinking - for villages around the plantations. Furthermore, the herbicides do not bind to sandy soils” (4)

DTE puts flesh and bones to statistics bringing the case of Mardiana, better known as Etek, who works for PT Agro Masang Perkasa in Agam district, West Sumatra. “She has been working there since 1994 and will continue to do so as there are no other jobs she could do to sustain herself and her family” explains a brief report based on an interview with Etek on June 2008 in Bogor. (5)

She cannot see out of her right eye since weedkiller accidentally got into it three years ago. "Before, whenever anything got in my eye, I rubbed it. This is what it's like now - like the eye of a salted fish," she says.

Etek works on the plantation, mainly spraying herbicides between the rows of oil palms. There are only three groups of sprayers. Each group has one person in charge and consists of nine or ten people. In one day, each person must cover nine rows or around two hectares.

For every two litres of Roundup mixed with 16 litres of water, the workers can cover two hectares of plantation. Usually they work in pairs and each earn Rp30,000 (US$ 3.25) for the two hectares. At harvest time, Etek also gets Rp400 (around 4 cents) per bunch of palm fruits, the same amount whether the bunch is big or small. As a sprayer, she also gets Rp8,000 (US$ 0.86) to buy milk. Initially the company provides safety mask and spray equipment, but it does not provide replacements when these wear out or break. The cost of a new sprayer, or what the workers call a kep, is Rp200,000 (US$ 22) each, and can be paid for by installments over four months.

Although they don't get enough training about the dangers of toxic chemicals, Etek and her friends know not to speak while spraying,

until they get to the water tank, where they refill their sprayers. They know that there's the possibility of toxic chemicals entering the body through the mouth.

Whether the final product from this –and other- oil palm plantation is biodiesel, cosmetics or palm oil, its content label should include the percentage of health lost by Etek and all the other plantation workers. For social accountability, at least.

Sources:
(1) http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5821
(2) http://www.oxfam.org.nz/imgs/pdf/biofuels%20briefing%20note.pdf
(3) http://ran.org/campaigns/rainforest_agribusiness/resources/fact_sheets/hostile_harvest_us_agribusinesses_and_labor_rights_abuses/
(4) http://www.downtoearth.org.in/
(5) http://dte.gn.apc.org/78.pdf

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- Malaysia: Those who lose in the oil palm business

In Malaysia, palm oil expansion goes hand in hand with deforestation –despite government officials claiming otherwise.

A press release issued by Sahabat Alam Malaysia [SAM] Friends of the Earth, Malaysia, on August 6, 2008, reveals that some 2.8 million ha of largely forest land in Sarawak has been handed out for plantation concessions of mainly oil palm and fast-growing pulpwood trees.

However, communities who exercise Native Customary Rights (NCR) in those areas have not been taken into account in the licensing process. As the statement says, they typically realize that “their land would be affected only after work commences on the ground. … After having their land clear cut, the people may be affected by environmental impacts that range from disturbances in the water, soil nutrient and ecological cycles, in addition to erosion, river sedimentation, and threats of fire and pollution from agrochemicals and processing mills”.

NCR land is quite significant to indigenous people in Sarawak. As Tuai Rumah Ladon anak Edieh, a farmer aged 70 who lives in Ulu Bawan, Balingian (District), Mukah (Division) explained in an interview in 2006: “The land provides us all our needs such as food from those crops we planted, wild plants we collect for vegetable and herbs for medicine. We make use of our forest for timber to construct our longhouse, to build canoe, and coffin when we die. We could hunt for wild boar and other animals as well as fishing in the streams of our NCR areas. We are attached to our NCR land. … If our land is taken away, we would not be able to survive.”

But that’s the fate they have faced. In 1973 they were misled by politicians and officials to “develop” their land planting oil palm. The arrangement with the company began in a kind of land renting while the community were offered work in the plantation with a rather low pay that did not compensate for the resources they got from the forest. And to crown it all, the company continued planting oil palm despite expiry of rental term.

An article from Rhett A. Butler published in Mongaby (http://www.mongabay.com/borneo/borneo_oil_palm.html) speaks of the significant reduction in biological diversity following forest conversion to oil palm plantation and that “many animals will not move through plantations while others, like orangutans, become crop pests putting them at risk of defensive poaching by plantation managers. The use of herbicides and pesticides can also impact species composition and pollute local waterways. Drainage systems required for plantations (oil palm plantations in Borneo are often established in swamp forest) may lower water tables, affecting neighboring forest areas. Further, destruction of peat lands increases the risk of flooding and fire. Land-clearing fires set by large oil palm plantation owners were the single largest cause of the massive 1997-1998 fires in Borneo. … The existing system appears to sometimes lock small plantation owners into conditions akin to slavery”.

For indigenous communities, the encroachment of extractive industries in their territories meant the disruption of their subsistence economies; after that, they were forced to enter a cash economy, usually dependent on timber. However, as Butler explains: “Given the scarcity of timber in parts of Borneo … oil palm seems to be the best alternative for communities that are just eking a living off

rubber cultivation, subsistence rice farming, and fruit gardens. When a large agricultural firm enters an area, some community members are often eager to become part of an oil palm plantation. Lacking legal title to their land, deals are often structured so that members of the community acquire 2-3 hectares (508 acres) of land for oil palm cultivation. They typically borrow some $3,000-6,000 (at 30 percent interest per year) from the parent firm for the seedlings, fertilizers, and other supplies. Because oil palm takes roughly 7 years to bear fruit, they work as day laborers at $2.50 per day on mature plantations. In the meantime their plot generates no income but requires fertilizers and pesticides, which are purchased from the oil palm company. Once their plantation becomes productive, the average income for a 2 hectare allotment is $682-900 per month. In the past, rubber and wood generated $350-1000 month, according to Curran. The low level of income combined with large start-up costs and relatively high interest payments virtually ensures that small holders will be perpetually indebted to the oil palm company. Oil palm cultivation also makes local people more dependent on agricultural firms since they no longer grow their own food."

Meanwhile oil palm firms are making a fortune. "Some firms in West Kalimantan are seeing a 26 percent annual internal rate of return over a 25-year period, an astounding number", reveals Butler. It seems that the current agrofuel booming demand allows for oil palm plantations to flourish at the expense of the local communities.

Article based on: "Plantation development in Sarawak, deforestation and Native Customary Rights (NCR)", August 6, 2008, Sahabat Alam Malaysia [SAM] Friends of the Earth, Malaysia, sent by SAM, e-mail: sam_inquiry@yahoo.com; "The Impact of Oil Palm in Borneo", Rhett A. Butler, http://www.mongabay.com/borneo/borneo_oil_palm.html
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- Thailand: Diversity and community forest use versus monocultures and parks

The road linking Trang and Krabi in southern Thailand is an example of what economists call development. What used to be lush tropical forest has been converted into endless rows of either oil palm or rubber trees. The monotony is only broken here and there by a few houses and shops surrounded by a sea of tree monocultures. At the end of the road, shrimp farms occupy the place of mangrove forests, and only a thin row of mangrove trees bordering the river have been spared from destruction. The monoculture model appears to have defeated the rich diversity of the region.

When faced with criticism to such model, government officials will quickly respond that biodiversity has been taken care of within a number of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, that ensure the conservation of native species of flora and fauna.

However, many local people are unhappy, both in relation to monocultures and to official forest conservation policies and have set up organizations to make things change. One such organization is the "Network of People Organisation for Bantad Mountain Range", which has brought together people facing similar problems.

The problems arose some 30 years ago, when the government began to establish different types of protected areas in forests where local communities have lived for centuries, such as in the case of the Sakai ethnic group. In order to be able to remain in the area they had to prove that they had lived there before the forest law was enacted. More importantly, they would be authorized to carry out their traditional activities in the forest if: 1) the area is not considered to be "at risk" or to be "sensitive" by the government 2) the slope is less than 30%. The result of the application of those two conditions make most activities illegal, given that any area can be classified as being "at risk" or "sensitive" and that local communities traditionally use all the different altitudes for different purposes.

What the above conservation model hides is the historical role of the government in forest destruction, both by the promotion of monocultures and through logging concessions.

In the case of monocultures, members of the Bantad Mountain Range Network explain that "the Rubber Tree Fund is part of government. Officials from the Fund come to the area to promote rubber plantations. The local farmers are provided with funds to plant monoculture as a contract on individual land. People are initially happy, but problems later arise. Before, they had integrated garden with rubber, but now it is a monoculture and there are landslides. People lose their traditional means of livelihoods. Other impacts include increased government control, whereby local people's activities are declared illegal and punished. People are controlled by

rangers and even with helicopters. People are facing many legal procedures (13 court cases at the moment) and also fines, ranging from 100,000 to 5 million bahts. The community has to pay guarantees to get people out of jail."

The government is also responsible for forest destruction resulting from past logging concessions. Representatives of a member community of the Bantad Mountain Range Network explain that they came in with the logging company and later stayed in the area. They have now established a system of integrated traditional gardens, where rubber trees are intermixed with fruit trees, bethel, pepper, beans and a long list of other plants that provide for their needs. The community is therefore improving an environment previously degraded by the government-awarded logging concession.

In spite of the positive role they are playing, the communities are having problems with the government. They explain that they have little land area for agriculture (1-5 hectares per family) and that they use the forest as part of their means of livelihoods. Most people live from the gardens, supplemented with hunting (without firearms), fishing, collecting snails, mushrooms, bamboo shoots and other gathering activities. But according to the government, most of this is illegal. "Everything is in fact illegal", they claim. The government tried to relocate them, but they didn't accept and resisted in every way possible. Their struggle is for food security, for the right to choose, for "the right to set the future for ourselves".

One aspect that deserves being highlighted is the access road to the abovementioned community. One of the arguments used by governments for opening roads into the forest is that they will enable people to link with the outside world. However, most roads are truly built to serve the interests of companies wishing to access natural resources (wood, minerals). They are therefore sufficiently wide so that big trucks can extract those resources, but in the case of this community, the road is a peoples' road, adapted to the local situation, where most families own a motorbike. The road is therefore less than 1 metre wide and paved only in some parts having steep slopes. People have easy access, companies don't.

Another interesting process that is developing in the region is the Alternative Agriculture Network. Given the current high prices of oil palm and rubber, local farmers are earning high incomes from these crops. At the same time, high oil prices have resulted in chemical fertilizers becoming very expensive. Added to the health and environmental problems linked to the use of agrotoxics, this has resulted in a situation where more farmers are willing to embrace a more diversified and organic type of agriculture. Chemical fertilizers are being replaced with organic inputs to the soil and many other plants (for food, timber, medicines, fibres) are being introduced under the monoculture plantations. Although the output of the main crop is slightly reduced, this is compensated with the lesser cost and with the large number of other products for self consumption and marketing. This is also seen as a safeguard for possible falls in the international price of rubber and palm oil, as has happened in the past, particularly with rubber.

In sum, local people and communities have organized themselves to protect their environment, livelihoods and rights. The government-promoted package of monocultures, agrotoxics and anti-people protected areas is being changed into a diversified, community based and ecologically respectful system. As local people say, "we want to be proud of what we are and what we are doing." They certainly can.

Article based on local testimonies from a field trip carried out by WRM in July 2008

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In AMERICA

- Argentina: Indigenous and environmental activists sound alarm over plans to promote tree plantations

The Patagonia region of Argentina accounts for only 4% of the country's tree plantations. This limited development of the sector is viewed by the Argentine authorities and forestry industry as a source of vast possibilities: four million hectares of potential plantation land divided among the provinces of Neuquén, Río Negro and Chubut.

Both the national and regional authorities are directing their efforts towards tapping this potential. After gathering in April in Esquel, Chubut for the First Coordinating Meeting of the Patagonian Regional Forestry Plan, they are now gearing up for the 2009 World Forestry Congress to be held in Buenos Aires, envisioned as a showcase that will draw foreign investors, consultants and business

delegations to the country.

But the region's Mapuche indigenous communities view these developments as a threat, and warn that the government is not measuring the true costs of such an undertaking. "The goal is to place the region at the forefront of the rest of the country, no matter how they have to do it," say environmentalists and Mapuche community leaders.

According to the government of Neuquén, around 60% of the province's 1.5 million hectares of land [of which only 60,000 are now occupied by tree plantations] is private property – although in many cases, the legitimacy and legality of this ownership is disputed by the Mapuche people. The remaining 40% is public land used for transhumant or migratory cattle-raising, primarily of goats and sheep.

The question is how to reconcile traditional productive practices with plantation activities. Traditional herding systems comprise three subsystems that are indivisible: winter pastures in lowland areas, summer pastures on mountain slopes, and the migration routes between the two, which can range from a few kilometres to hundreds of kilometres, depending on the community. This is precisely where plantation activity – as it has been designed – is not compatible with the current use of the land by small producers. The fencing off of large areas of land for tree plantations [in this case, pine trees] will cut off the migration routes and diminish the area of land available for use as pasture.

Deepening conflicts

These factors have given rise to a series of land conflicts that have intensified in recent years. In 2003, faced with the decline in their livestock herds due to the reduction and deterioration of their summer pastures caused by overgrazing and the drying up of springs – a consequence of the establishment of pine plantations – the Wiñoy Folil Mapuche community moved back into the fields it had used since ancestral times in Pampa de Lonco Luan, in the department of Aluminé. They had been forced off of this land in the 1980s by the Corporación Forestal Neuquina (CORFONE).

Last November, in this same region, the Paineo and Cayupán communities called on the provincial authorities for the restitution of their summer pastures, which had also been sold to forestry companies. And in January of this year, the Central Regional Council (CZC) – which represents Mapuche communities in the central region of the province of Neuquén – and the community of Vicente Katrunao Pincén took back a number of areas of land from which they had been forced to leave.

"While they have been turning over land to private owners, we have also begun a process of recovering summer pastures that have been illegally usurped. This process is growing, because the more they shut us in, the more they oblige us to hit back to defend ourselves against this plight and recover our territory," said Martín Velázquez Maliqueo, the *logko* or traditional leader of the community of Logko Puran, which forms part of the CZC.

Although the conflict sparked by the incursion of forestry companies into Mapuche territory has been most heated in the south-central region of Neuquén – due to the degree of development of the plantation sector in this particular province – the tensions extend to the rest of the provinces of Patagonia.

In August 2004, the Italian company Ecoxilon signed a letter of intent with the government of Río Negro to lease a million hectares of public land for 30 years "for forestation and oxygen production." While this initiative was ultimately shelved, at the time the Indigenous Advisory Council condemned the provincial authorities for agreeing to hand over this land with no regard for the land rights over it claimed by the Mapuche people.

Alien species

In addition to these land conflicts, the Mapuche people have also voiced their alarm over the introduction of alien evergreen species – *Pinus ponderosa* and *Pinus contorta*, native to western United States – which disrupt the delicate balance among the different elements of the natural ecosystem.

Environmental organizations share in this opposition to plantations of alien species, stressing that they produce changes in the acidity of the soil, take over and displace native species due to a lack of natural enemies, and disrupt hydrological systems by absorbing large quantities of water, among other factors. They are also concerned that when these plantations have "matured", it will lead to the establishment in the region of highly polluting pulp mills as the next link in the production cycle.

Tree plantation activity was given a boost in the early 1990s by a government policy to promote the sector, crowned in 1999 by Law 25,080, which grants subsidies and tax exemptions among other incentives for the establishment of tree plantations. The economic crisis of 2001 put a brake on the sector's rapid expansion, and by 2003 raw wood production accounted for only 0.3% of GDP, while wood processing activities represented 2%. But now the possibility of establishing tree plantations under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism and obtaining credits for carbon capture presents an extra incentive.

Of the three Patagonian provinces, Neuquén has most actively promoted plantation activity, which has also been drawn to the area by favourable soil conditions. At present, 60% of the region's tree plantations are in Neuquén, and the area devoted to this sector is growing by 3,500 hectares a year. The 2001 Neuquén Forestry Plan set a goal of reaching a growth rate of 10,000 hectares of new plantations annually based on a sustained increase over the next 35 years. The provincial government itself is responsible for 63% of planting activity, which is carried out through CORFONE, a mixed public/private company with majority state ownership.

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- A Green Desert in the South of Latin America

Imagine an area the size of 500,000 football fields planted with a single species of tree. Is it a forest? No, it is a green desert: no people, no water, no other plants. A few years from now, this will be the landscape in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state, where three companies are concentrating pulp production, leading to significant social and environmental damages.

The state of Rio Grande do Sul, like Uruguay to the south and Argentina to the west, forms part of an ecosystem known as the Pampas: fertile lowlands with a unique biodiversity encompassing hundreds of birds and mammals found nowhere else on earth. The subsoil of this region contains one of the largest freshwater reserves in South America.

And it is precisely because of these characteristics that this region was chosen by the Swedish-Finnish pulp and paper company Stora Enso for its pulp production operations. Eucalyptus trees, the raw material for pulp, can be harvested seven years after planting in Brazil. In Scandinavia, a tree planted for pulp production would need at least 50 years to reach the stage when it could be harvested for manufacturing paper.

There are three companies that control tree plantation and pulp production activity in Rio Grande do Sul, although in practice, they are essentially one and the same. Besides Stora Enso, the other two companies are Aracruz Celulose and Votorantim Celulose e Papel (VCP). But Stora Enso and Aracruz are co-owners of the joint venture Veracel, and VCP is a shareholder in Aracruz, as well as a partner of Stora Enso in another joint venture, Aracel.

With the further incentive of tax breaks granted by the Brazilian government, these companies bought up thousands of hectares of land, forcing small farmers and their families out of the region. In northern Brazil, in the state of Espirito Santo, Aracruz had already driven numerous indigenous communities off their territories and stolen 10,000 hectares of land.

The purchase of land in Rio Grande do Sul is also a violation of Brazilian law, which prohibits foreign companies from buying land in border areas. For this reason, Stora Enso created a ghost company, purportedly Brazilian-owned, to purchase land on its behalf.

In the towns and cities where these companies have set up operations, they have blatantly violated the rights of workers. Men, women and teenagers harvest trees on the plantations with no protective equipment. To avoid paying social security contributions, the companies fire workers after three months, then rehire them at a lower salary.

In addition to social impacts, monoculture tree plantations for pulp production also cause serious environmental impacts. In Uruguay, where the Finnish company Botnia and the Spanish company ENCE own 360,000 hectares of land, dedicated to eucalyptus plantations, water shortages have already hit the areas where they are operating. This is only natural, since it is estimated that a eucalyptus tree consumes 20 litres of water a day. According to Science magazine (23 December 2005), eucalyptus plantations in the

Argentine pampas have reduced the flow of water by 52% and dried up 13% of the rivers.

In Rio Grande do Sul, according to researchers at the Federal University, the eucalyptus plantations will consume 20% more water than the average volume of rainfall in the state. In addition to drying out water sources and causing desertification, eucalyptus trees also increase the acidity of the soil. One can only imagine what the consequences will be for the 3,000 species of plants in the Pampas ecosystem.

Moreover, these companies do not even have to pay taxes, since 97% the pulp produced by their mills is for export. When neoliberalism was at its peak, the Brazilian government created a law that exempts exported goods from taxes.

Until 2006, these companies pursued their goals in silence, relatively ignored by society at large. But the silence was broken on 8 March of that year by a group of women from Via Campesina, who demonstrated their opposition by occupying a eucalyptus plantation in Rio Grande do Sul. The following year the women returned, and this time they occupied eucalyptus plantations in other areas as well.

In 2008, once again on 8 March – International Women's Day – the women staged another protest and denounced the illegal purchase of land by Stora Enso. The response was swift and violent.

The Stora Enso plantation the women had occupied was cordoned off by the police, which prevented journalists from entering to document the events. The 900 peasant women protestors were attacked by the police with tear gas and pepper spray. No doctors or lawyers were allowed to enter. The women were forced to remain lying on the ground with guns pointed at their heads for hours. They were only allowed to eat after being held for 12 hours.

But the story does not end there. With their first protest, these peasant women alerted the Brazilian public to the dangers posed by monoculture plantations and pulp mills. Their continued efforts have served to promote greater coordination among peasant and environmentalist movements throughout South America. Just as capital has no borders, these Brazilian women have taught us that our struggle must have no borders either.

By Miguel Enrique Stédile, Movimento Sem Terra and Via Campesina, Brazil.

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- Chile: A forestry model generating poverty and extreme poverty

In Latin America, the Chilean case is presented as a successful forestry model, in spite of the fact that many Chilean organizations – in particular Mapuche indigenous organizations – have for years now been denouncing the impacts of large eucalyptus and pine plantations in southern Chile. However, this has not prevented well-paid forestry consultants from repeating the same lies and from convincing governments of other countries (Peru and Ecuador are the most recent cases), to follow the "successful" Chilean path. As part of the advertising package, the model's promoters include its so-called capacity to generate jobs in the plantations and consequently an improvement of the inhabitants' quality of life.

Within this context, the following excerpt from a document prepared by two professional foresters from the Universidad Austral de Chile (1), shows the falseness of such claims and illustrates, on the basis of official statistics, the dimension of the social disaster arising from this model. They state that:

"One of the greatest contradictions of the Chilean forestry sector is that while there has been a notorious growth of forestry exports based on pine and eucalyptus plantations, mainly found in the eighth and ninth Regions, the population of these Regions has not improved its quality of life. During the rapid expansion of these plantations (mainly in the seventies and eighties) problems occurred regarding migration, explosive growth of well established towns and unemployment. Presently forestry activities in Chile are located in Regions from the seventh region to the tenth and it is precisely these four Regions that have the lowest Human Development Indexes (HDI). According to Government figures, between 1990 and 1998, the eighth and ninth Regions were those having the largest number of people in poverty (an average of 40.5% in 1990 and 27.3% in 1998) and in extreme poverty (an average of 15.8% in 1990 and 8.5%

in 1998). The same source states that, according to the Gini Coefficient, the relationship between poverty and income distribution is evident: in 1998 the eighth and ninth Regions showed the worst distribution of income in Chile. In specific areas, the ninth Region is that with the highest percentage of people showing poor and very poor health (41.7%) and regarding education, the seventh, tenth and eleventh Regions have the largest percentage of population between 4 and 17 years of age who do not go to school. Furthermore, the eighth Region, concentrating the greatest extensions of exotic plantations, is also the poorest and with the highest percentage of rural population in extreme poverty in the country. Following the eighth Region, the ninth is the Region with most forestry activity in Chile and has the greatest concentration of Mapuche population. The Mapuche population in this Region receive half the income and their HDI is lower in all aspects than that of non-Mapuche people. Additionally, there are presently serious conflicts between forestry or agricultural enterprises and Mapuche communities regarding land ownership claims."

"Although it would be unfair to attribute the above-mentioned problems exclusively to the forestry sector, the data at least suggest that this sector, even in rural areas, has not contributed to improve the socio-economic situation of the inhabitants of these Regions. For example, between the years 1987 and 1996, the seventh, eighth and ninth Regions in addition to the third Region showed the worst rates in overcoming poverty, while forestry exports over the same period rose. This is explained, among other factors, by the workers' low salaries, precisely the factor that has helped to attract capital to the Chilean forestry sector."

Need we say more?

(1) Donoso, Pablo & Otero, Luis (2005) – Hacia una definición de país forestal: ¿Donde se sitúa Chile? (Towards a definition of a forestry country: What is the position of Chile? Bosque (Valdivia) v.26 n.3. Valdivia, December.

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- Victories of peoples' resistance in Peru and Brazil

At a time when large corporate interests are gaining control over ever more land and resources, it is refreshing to hear news of victories won through the tenacious resistance of local communities.

In Peru, within the framework of the implementation of the free trade agreement with the United States, the government of President Alan García has passed more than 30 laws and decrees aimed at extending the frontier of extractive activities in the Amazon region. These laws were intended to dismantle community rights and communities themselves, by facilitating the sale of their lands through more flexible mechanisms for the division and sale of collectively owned lands and the withdrawal of the special protections these lands once enjoyed. Ultimately, the goal was to strip the Amazon peoples of their territory to such a voracious extent that there was even talk of granting concessions over lowlands and riverbanks where poor people grow their rice or corn. These efforts where enthusiastically backed by the agrofuel, tree plantation, oil and mining industries (see WRM Bulletin No. 129).

One of the companies that hoped to benefit from this process was CMPC, a Chilean pulp and paper company. CMPC owns vast tracts of pine and eucalyptus plantations in Chile that were established in Mapuche indigenous territories during the Pinochet dictatorship. Referring to CMPC's plans to invest millions of dollars in Peru, Fernando Léniz, former minister of finance under Pinochet and current president of Corporación Chilena de la Madera, a national association of wood producers, stated: "Over there [in Peru] there is a better labour climate and better control against violence. This idea that pressure groups can achieve their demands though violence and illegality is doing a lot of harm to Chile." Mr. Léniz was alluding here to the legitimate struggle of the Mapuche people to regain control over their ancestral lands.

But neither Mr. Léniz nor the Peruvian government were expecting the forceful response of the peoples of the Amazon in defence of their rights. On 8 August, more than 3,000 indigenous and campesino protestors from various parts of the Amazon region declared an indefinite national strike against the new legislation.

On 22 August, as a result of this massive opposition and protest, the Peruvian Congress repealed Legislative Decrees 1015 and 1073, which the government had attempted to impose in violation of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and for the benefit of powerful economic groups. The indigenous victory in Peru is a clear demonstration of power against those who would attempt to destroy the Amazon, and has blocked the way to the establishment of large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the region, at least for the time

being.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, a historic court decision has reinforced the popular struggle against eucalyptus monoculture plantations. On 28 August, the Court of Justice passed and unanimously upheld a decision that ordered the immediate suspension of eucalyptus planting in the municipality of São Luiz do Paraitinga, São Paulo, in view of the disastrous environmental and social impacts of the industrial expansion of this monoculture. The suspension is to remain in effect until the transnational companies operating the existing plantations carry out environmental impact assessments in all of the areas where they are located, along with mandatory public hearings with the rural populations affected by them. Violation of this decision will be punished with a fine of 10,000 reals (around 6,000 U.S. dollars) per day.

In another landmark decision, the Court of Justice also rejected a motion filed by the São Luiz District Attorney's Office that sought to prevent the Public Defender's Office from monitoring compliance with the decision and challenged its right to take part in the proceedings. The Court of Justice unanimously found that the Public Defender's Office not only can but must act on behalf of the population with regard to environmental issues.

Public Defender Wagner Giron, who filed the suit, declared that the companies that own the eucalyptus plantations, particularly Votorantim Celulose e Papel and Suzano Papel e Celulose, "do not respect any environmental norms whatsoever. They plant the trees on mountains, in native forests, encroaching on springs and drying up waterways. There have already been cases of poisoning of human beings and deaths of fish and animals here, all as a result of this violation of environmental norms." (1)

It should be stressed that eucalyptus plantations currently cover around 20% of the municipality of São Luiz.

Victories like these in Peru and Brazil are like rays of hope that light the way for the legitimate resistance struggles of local communities around the world.

Article based on the following sources:
Peru: Interviews with Vladimir Pinto (vladimirpinto@gmail.com) and Paul Mcauley, Loretana Environmental Network (redambientalloretana@yahoo.com); "Perú: Un Importante Triunfo de los Pueblos Indígenas Amazónicos", Mapuexpress, Informativo Mapuche, available at: http://www.mapuexpress.net/?act=news&id=3164&PHPSESSID=847e1084eea7a047e12fd762591bd28a
Brazil: Interview with Geise Pereira, FASE-ES (geise.fase@terra.com.br); (1) "Brasil: Tribunal de Justiça suspende plantio de eucalipto em município de SP", available at: http://www.biodiversidadla.org/content/view/full/39528

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CERTIFICATION OF PLANTATIONS

- FSC: Stop certifying monoculture tree plantations!

Asia Pulp and Paper is probably the most controversial paper company in the world. It has destroyed vast areas of forest in Sumatra and replaced hundreds of thousands of hectares with monoculture plantations. In December 2007, the Forest Stewardship Council announced its "dissociation" from APP after the company starting using the FSC logo. FSC issued a statement saying that it has "a duty to protect the good will and integrity associated with its name and logo for consumers and for our trusted partners and members." At last, it appeared, FSC had noticed it is greenwashing environmentally and socially destructive companies. Unfortunately, the dissociation from APP remains a one-off.

FSC's goal is "to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests." FSC should not certify industrial tree plantations, for the simple reason that they are not forests. FSC should no more certify plantations that it should certify fields of lettuce.

Industrial tree plantations are neither environmentally responsible nor socially beneficial. They are often only economically viable as a result of generous government subsidies.

Veracel is perhaps the most egregious example of the many companies that should never have been certified by FSC. Since the company established its monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the south of Bahia state in Brazil, rivers, streams and springs have dried up. As the company's plantations have expanded the area of land planted to food crops has decreased. Rural people have lost work and moved to cities, many living in overcrowded and dangerous favelas.

In July 2008, The Brazilian Federal court fined Veracel for clearing Atlantic rainforest. The court ordered Veracel to replace its eucalyptus plantations with native trees. Veracel's certificate remains in place.

Last year, armed guards employed by another FSC-certified plantation company, Vallourec & Mannesmann (V&M), shot and killed Antonio Joaquim dos Santos in front of his 16 year-old daughter. He was collecting firewood. A year before the shooting, local people submitted a complaint, pointing out that the replacement of the native savanna (cerrado) with V&M's monocultures has left the community without access to firewood and fruits. V&M's response was to increase the pressure on the community.

The killing came as no surprise to many people. "The threat to workers and people here is great," a villager told journalist and activist Heidi Bachram, in 2006. "Shots have been fired on people by the armed guards. They feel prisoners within their own lands."

A few weeks after the murder of Antonio Joaquim dos Santos, V&M announced its "voluntary decision to leave FSC".

In Uruguay, WRM has documented the near-slave labour conditions in FSC-certified plantations. FYMNSA, one of the FSC-certified companies, "was violating labour rights", said Jose Bautista, the head of a local workers union. "It should ever have been certified," he added.

Eufores, another FSC-certified company, was recently caught clearing 80 hectares of strictly protected forest in Uruguay. The company is a subsidiary of the Spanish company ENCE. In June 2008, another ENCE subsidiary, NORFOR, saw its FSC certificate withdrawn in Spain. Among the problems that NGOs pointed out were indiscriminate use of herbicides, damage to the soil, increase in erosion, clearcuts of more than 20 hectares and the use of exotic species.

In Ireland, Coillte has about 450,000 hectares of pesticide-laden monoculture plantations. After a 2007 audit, the body which checks that FSC standards are upheld, Accreditation Services International (ASI), found that "non-compliance with relevant FSC Criterion is likely to be ongoing for a few years". Nevertheless, Coillte remains FSC-certified.

More than 1.6 million hectares of industrial tree plantations are certified in South Africa. As Philip Owen of the South African NGO Geasphere points out, "Plantation management operations destroy grassland's multiple products and services," thereby undermining economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits."

FSC is well aware of the problems with the certification of plantations. It has been working on a "Plantations Review" since the 2002 FSC General Assembly. At the time, FSC had certified 3.3 million hectares of plantations. The figure is now 8.6 million hectares. The plantations review has made no difference whatsoever to the way FSC certificates are issued.

In fact, FSC actively promotes industrial tree plantations, by aiming to increase sales of FSC-labelled paper. FSC's "Global Paper Forum" brings several hundred industry representatives together to find "Market opportunities for FSC-labelled paper". This year's Forum was sponsored by Mondi and Suzano among others. FSC's General Assembly, which will take place in South Africa in November, is sponsored by Mondi, Tembec and Sveaskog.

FSC urgently needs to distance itself from the industry it is certifying. Instead it is getting closer. As it does so, the FSC logo becomes little more than corporate greenwash.

By Chris Lang, http://chrislang.org

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- Brazil: The pulp and paper companies' "green international quality standard labels"

Approximately five years ago, Aracruz obtained a “green” quality label for its plantations in the extreme south of Bahia. This is a very important conquest for the Company as this certification implies, among other things, that the Company is working in an ecologically and socially correct manner, respecting all municipal, state and federal environmental laws. Such a label is essential for the Company’s exports because with it, it gains enormous prestige abroad.

Basically the certification process takes place as follows: an internationally renowned and qualified company, in this case “Bureau Veritas,” checks whether a specific company, in our case “Aracruz” deserves or not certification under the “CERFLOR” scheme. The first time, five years ago, we submitted our numerous criticisms; however Aracruz received certification all the same. Now the time has come for renewal.

In four cities in the Extreme South of Bahia, public meetings were arranged, during which interested parties could express their observations, complaints, questions and doubts, both on the Company to be certified and on the certifying company. The locations for these meetings were: Posto de Mata, Caravelas, Alcobaça and Ibirapuã. The questions, doubts, observations on the certifying company were to be answered immediately by representatives of the certifying company and questions on the company to be certified were to be answered in the final report to be published 40 days afterwards on the certifying company’s website.

I was present at the Posto de Mata and Caravelas meetings and discovered that all this was no more than a great farce and just a shameful trick to conquer the world market. Let us look into some aspects.

Some 20 people were present at Posto de Mata, of which more than half belonged to the company. Following the initial explanations by the representatives of Bureau Veritas – the company responsible for certification – the time came for questions and observations.

I took the floor and said that for the past five years, we members of the local community had observed various environmental and labour-related irregularities. Our duty is to denounce and record such irregularities to the public municipal, state and federal bodies such as IBAMA, IMA (formerly CRA), the Public Regulatory Agency and the Ministry of Labour. We did this over the five-year period on several occasions. We played our part. So I asked the certifying company to contact those public bodies where various illegal and irregular events had been registered. It would be an easier way to assess and inspect Aracruz’ operation and practices over the period. The reply by the representative of the Bureau Veritas was: *“We are not inspectors of public bodies, that is not our role.”*

I almost fell over backwards, but thought that I had not understood the reply and insisted “I am denouncing the irregular and illegal actions committed by Aracruz over these past 5 years and according to our obligation, these were duly registered by the public state and federal bodies.” Once again the representative stated that Bureau Veritas is not an inspector for public bodies. However if we heard of irregularities or illegal actions now, indicating the location, a representative of Bureau Veritas would visit the place either today or tomorrow to verify the complaint.

Thus, the environmental and/or labour-related crimes committed over the past five years and duly registered by the public bodies – which probably do not even exist anymore because they have either been “solved or manipulated” – have no value.

The following day, at Caravelas, in a room full of school children, who do not understand or who know very little about this subject, I asked if the work carried out by the certifying company was considered to be research. The representative of Bureau Veritas replied that it was not. So I ask myself: a company that does not inspect the governmental bodies to check whether Aracruz committed irregularities, or did not respect environmental and labour laws and that does not carry out research ... what morals, what ethics does it have in granting international certification valid all over the world, expecting it to be proof that all Aracruz’ activities are ecologically and socially appropriate, and that they are complying with all existing laws?

After all this I no longer felt like going to the meetings in Alcobaça and Ibirapuã, because it was very evident that all this is a great farce. It was clear to me that these certifications are not granted because they are warranted but because they are purchased. That is the way this certification system works here.

By Father José Koopmans, e-mail: pejose@oi.com.br

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