
The “green economy”, biodiversity and “forest intelligence”

The new “sustainable development” is called the “green economy”, which will function on the basis of “green growth”. Particularly since Rio+20, the UN and national governments have attempted to demonstrate to the world a renewed commitment to a policy of responsibility towards the environment and the future of the planet. Calling this policy “green”, a colour associated with nature, is a smart move. But will the “greenness” of this policy also extend to concern for diversity? And in the future, will the “green economy” also be a “biodiverse economy”?

The Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) offers its services to countries that seek to develop “rigorous green growth economic development strategies”. Those who contract its services will be provided with the methodology needed to formulate “green growth plans”; with assistance in establishing “public-private” partnerships, so that corporations play an even more dominant role in the world; and with the institute’s research services. But nothing is mentioned about biodiversity. So what is the exact meaning of “green” in the programmes of the GGGI and other consulting firms that specialize in “green growth”?

One type of “green” can be observed, for example, in Peru (see the article in this issue of the WRM Bulletin), where the GGGI is one of the institutions offering assistance for “green” development in the Amazon rainforest. The assistance offered includes a number of REDD+ projects. One of the options for the implementation of REDD+ is the establishment of plantations of oil palm – a tree that is undoubtedly green on the outside and, in addition, a “renewable energy” source that can store carbon. Monoculture oil palm plantations destroy biological and cultural diversity. But they are a profitable activity in which the growth of the trees contributes to “green” and “renewable” growth: perfect symbolism.

Another “green” component of the projects in Peru is the highly touted practice of “sustainable forest management”. This would appear to be a practically unassailable practice from an environmental perspective, since it aims to preserve “standing forests” and would therefore supposedly contribute to the preservation of biodiversity as well. Nevertheless, there have been many problems reported in connection with this type of “management” (see WRM Bulletin 188), particularly in areas granted in concession to logging companies. Even “selective” logging has proven to be destructive and to impoverish biodiversity. Moreover, in areas covered by these concessions, violations of the rights of local communities have repeatedly occurred.

Also considered to be “green” – although it is hard to believe – is the “offset” mechanism, which is essential for what “green growth” guarantees: above all, “growth”. This mechanism makes it possible for large-scale destructive activities, such as oil drilling, agribusiness, mining and hydroelectric dam construction, to continue growing unabated, including in forest areas. The idea is for measures to be adopted in order to “offset” the potential damages – for example, guaranteeing the preservation of an “equivalent” forest somewhere else, or simply planting a monoculture “forest”, whenever destruction is “needed” to make way for these activities.

While this may seem incredible, the consulting firms which think up these “innovative” means of

growth make some equally incredible claims in their public relations material. Indufor, the Finnish forestry consulting firm contracted to design Peru's Forest Investment Programme – one of the programmes that promotes REDD+ projects and the sale of “environmental services” – states on its website that it conducts “forest intelligence” that is “analytical, creative and practical”. The firm offers its clients “forest solutions” that are “cost-effective and sustainable”.

Either we begin to use and apply the knowledge and creativity of the world's forest peoples and communities to design and implement programmes that can genuinely save forests, biodiversity and the planet itself from the environmental and climate crises, or we will end up handing over a world in crisis to the “intelligence” of consultants and their partners, who are eager to turn critical problems, almost miraculously, into “solutions” that create more business opportunities and profit for themselves and their clients, while leaving local communities with fewer forests and less biodiversity.