
Voices from North and South against agrofuels

While the promotion of agrofuels -wrongly called biofuels- continues increasing and resulting in the establishment of more and more plantations in Southern countries to produce them, many voices of representatives from North and South denounce their impacts and intend to influence those who are taking decisions to promote them.

One of the decisions that is already causing a considerable increase in the production of agrofuels, is the one taken by the European Union which established the target that by the year 2020, 10 % of transport should be using agrofuels.

It is important to underscore that this decision was taken in spite of the documentation provided to the European Union proving that this decision would be affecting the majority of the world's population, that lives in Southern countries.

By the end of June this year, more than 15 representatives of non-governmental organisations, Indigenous Peoples' organisations and other social movements met with the European Parliament in Brussels, the Dutch Parliament in The Hague and with other representatives of European organizations and governmental representatives and participated at the XII Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the UN Convention of Biodiversity in Paris. Many were the testimonies about the direct and indirect impacts of agrofuel production on the global South.

Among others, representatives from Asia stated that oil palm plantations are a tremendous disaster for indigenous peoples and local communities in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea

Representatives from Latin America, described how sugar cane, soy and eucalyptus monocultures have caused massive migration, expulsion of small farmers from their lands and have increased rural and urban poverty in Brazil; how in Colombia agrofuel plantations are exacerbating the problems of sovereignty and land tenure, that are a key cause of conflict in the country; and how tree plantations -even the ones certified by FSC- are having negative impacts on people and the environment in Uruguay.

African representatives pointed out that water resources, biodiversity, local communities' security, health and economies are being affected in those African countries where monoculture tree plantations are already a reality.

During the same days, organisations from the North and the South called for a moratorium on European Union imports of agrofuels from large scale monoculture plantations; and on their promotion through targets and incentives, including tax breaks, subsidies, and financing through carbon trading mechanisms, international development aid, or loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Such a moratorium will allow time for the in depth study of the tremendous impacts of large scale monocultures already felt by their expansion serving other industries as pulp and paper.

In Paris, at a meeting of a UN scientific advisory body on biodiversity, the majority of government delegates expressed serious concerns about the risks of large-scale production of biofuels to forests, ecosystems, indigenous peoples and local communities. A large number of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples Organizations from around the world present at this meeting also expressed their concerns about the risks and made a call for their evaluation before continuing with the promotion of agrofuels.

While all this was happening in Europe, representatives from organizations at an International Meeting on Agrofuels and Food Sovereignty held in Quito from June 27 to 29 presented personally a letter to the Minister of Energy containing a strong message to his government:

“The present government faces two alternatives: to support a production model based on diversity, sustainability, that guarantees food sovereignty, the continuity of the way of life of Indigenous Peoples, afro-descendents and peasants and the conservation of the biodiversity, or support agri-business. We hope that the government’s decision will be in favor of the people”.

That same letter is valid for all governments –North and South- that are currently taking decisions on the issue of agrofuels. The decision they take will show if they are in favour or against the people.

Article based on information from the Report of the Debate “Biofuels – implications for the South” Dutch Parliament, The Hague, June 29, 2007, by GFC and CEO, available at [here](#); information published by WRM during the SBSTTA meeting in Paris available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/SBSTTA/news_SBSTTA.html, and the Quito declaration at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/Biocombustibles/Declaracion_Quito.html