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OUR VIEWPOINT

- The many invisible “Gaza Strips” in the forests

During the last weeks, the world became an impotent witness to the horror of the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip. Although the images transmitted by TV barely reflected a small part of the suffering of the Palestinian people, they were more than enough to understand the dramatic situation they were going through. Entire families being wiped out by bombs; homes, schools, shops, hospitals and temples reduced to rubble in a matter of seconds; water, sewage and energy systems destroyed; fear, wrath, pain, weariness, hunger and thirst.

What much of the world doesn't know – because they are never included in the mass media's news – is that there are other very similar situations to that of the Gaza Strip taking place almost daily in different parts of the planet. The weapons employed may be different and the number of people affected fewer, but the results are the same:

violation of people's human rights and destruction of their means of livelihood.

For example, on 18th December 2008 hundreds of police and paramilitaries stormed a village in the Sumatran province of Riau, Indonesia, with teargas and guns. A helicopter dropped an incendiary bomb on the village burning hundreds of houses allegedly with napalm. Teargas and fire arms were used. Two toddlers were killed and many people were injured while others were arrested. Some 400 villagers fled into the forest in the mountains and just 58 people remained in the village. Two days later, a helicopter flew at low height over the tents of homeless villagers and bombarded them with stones.

The reason for so much violence may seem absurd: the manufacture of paper. However, as in the case of the Palestinian conflict, the key issue is territorial control. The Indonesian Government ignores the traditional rights of the local people and allocates itself land ownership which it then transfers to a company to plant trees to produce paper. The local communities resist eviction and the government's response is violence.

Similar situations are taking place all the time and the issue of territorial control is always present as one of the central causes. For example, each time a government decides to build a large hydroelectric dam it is violating the rights of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people who live in the area and whose homes, forests and fields are going to be flooded or whose means of survival are going to be seriously affected by the dam. What generally happens is that people do not accept this situation passively and then the State intervenes using repression and criminalizing the protest.

The same happens when a State grants logging, oil or mining concessions to a company. The affected territory is not empty, but inhabited by indigenous, traditional or peasant communities, that in many cases have been living there long before the existence of the national State. However, the latter ignores the ancestral rights of these communities and allocates itself the right of ownership over those lands.

It is important to point out that for these peoples the destruction of the forest is similar to what took place in the Gaza Strip: the destruction of homes, temples, schools, shops, hospitals, drinking water systems. For these peoples, the forest is their home and their temple and from it they obtain their food, medicines, fertilizers, fibres, wood, water and everything they require for their livelihood. The disappearance of the forest and the environmental degradation resulting from the industrial activities that take over – logging, monoculture plantations, mining or oil exploitation, hydro-energy, etc. – are like “bombs” that are thrown on their territories, destroying all that is of value to them.

“We are all Palestinians”. Under this slogan, thousands of people all around the world demonstrated their support to the Palestinian people and their rejection of the attack by the State of Israel on the Gaza Strip. Many other “Palestinians” – such as the Ayoreo in Paraguay, Adivasi in India, Bagyeli in Central Africa, Tagaeri and Taromenane in Ecuador/Peru and many others – are today being “bombed” and need support in their unequal struggle against an enemy that is much more powerful than they are.

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Cameroon: A “communal forest” opposed by local communities

To establish a communal forest may look like a good proposal. However, it may be not, according to many local villagers from the district of Dzeng (Center Province, Department of Nyong and So'o), who have denounced the attempt of the current Dzeng's mayor to make use of their forest lands for commercial exploitation. Some 25.182 hectares of forest lands would be classified as a "communal forest", an intermediate category between logging concessions and community forests.

Law No. 94/01 provides that classification should take into account the social environment of the local populations so they keep their traditional rights of use. Under the category of a “communal forest” a management plan is prepared by the local authority, and must also involve the participation and agreement of the local population. In this case the local communities were never consulted and mistrust arises from the fact that they were never told about the mayor's plan to classify their lands as "communal forest" thus breaking the spirit of the Law –they only got to know about it through an inconspicuous written communiqué hang on one of the walls of the municipality of Dzeng.

The local mayor has said that he plans to build a saw-mill in the area. "We firmly express our opposition to this project of forced classification of all our forests crossed by the Tofini stream as communal forest with the purpose of filling the pockets of a group of individuals that have never been preoccupied about the public interest", the heads of the Assok and Nkonmedzap villages wrote to the mayor. (1)

The mayor argues that the extreme impoverishment of his municipality is what urges him to establish a communal forest and count on resources for the accomplishment of projects. However, those forest lands have already been highly exploited by logging companies, which only brought forest destruction for the communities. The forest was left without its most valuable species and now is just regenerating from the action of corporations such as SAB and SEBC - subsidiaries of the French-owned Thanry Group, one of the largest logging conglomerates in Africa. Thanry is now controlled by the Hong Kong company Vicwood Pacific.

An open letter sent to the President of the Republic of Cameroon, Paul Biya, by Alain G. Njimoluh Anyouzoa conveys his fear “that is also shared by all the families of the aforementioned district when we are told that as a consolation prize for loosing our lands to commercial exploitation, we would get in its place a sawmill!” The letter asks for the President's arbitration to prevent “the attempted plundering of our district, as it has already been the case in other regions of our beloved country”.

An open letter was also addressed to the mayor Emmanuel Nnemde contending that it would be a manipulated classification of forest lands as a “communal forest” that would bring no benefits to the local communities. “You state that your decision for the

emergency acquisition of a communal forest was motivated by the extreme poverty of your district and a great need for resources to implement projects. Your constituents whose forests had been harvested ruthlessly by the logging companies Sab and Coron in the eighties without a single local investment in return have disproved the arguments you pushed forward”, said the letter.

In his letter, Njimoluh Anyouzoa referred to the disastrous consequences resulting from the haphazard management of the existing communal forests –social problems like unemployment, poverty, famine, prostitution, serious illnesses (HIV/ AIDS), unwanted pregnancies. Those social problems that, he said, “the people of Assok, Nkomedzap and other populations have tried to tell you in their petition submitted to the relevant Cameroonian officials, as it specifically relate to law No. 94/01 of January 20 1994 pertaining to the regulations on forests, wildlife and fishery, which grants you an almost discretionary power on harvesting these forests once they become ‘communal forests’”.

He announced that he had sent a copy of his letter “to the office of the European Environment Agency (EEA) in Copenhagen (Denmark) this week intending to find out if the European Union (EU) was in any way involved in this scheme, and to vigorously denounce the policy of ‘eliminating our forests’ in which the EU has sometimes participated with the help of a few local officials.”

Sources: (1) « Dzeng : Une forêt déchire les populations et le maire », Mutations, November 27, 2008, <http://www.quotidienmutations.info/mutations/nov08/1227799736.php> . (2) Open Letter to the Mayor of the District of Dzeng – Cameroon by Njimoluh Anyouzoa, December 30, 2008, sent by the author.

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- Congo, D.R: Inga dams mean big business for corporations and no benefit for local communities

The Inga hydroelectric scheme (Inga 1, Inga 2, Inga 3 and Grand Inga) is located 140 miles southwest of capital city Kinshasa. It lies on the largest waterfall by volume in the world, the Inga falls, where the Congo River drops 96 m (315 ft) over the course of nine miles with an average flow of 42,476 m³/s.

The project started in 1920 during Belgian colonial rule. Colonial authorities forced the site’s first inhabitants to leave without any compensation. Inga’s displaced communities haven’t received any compensation till today.

The hydroelectric plants Inga 1 and Inga 2 were commissioned in 1972 and 1982. Both dams contributed heavily to the country's spiraling debt crisis and currently operate at only 40% capacity because they never received maintenance: about half of the 14 turbines don’t work at all. (1)

Inga 3 would be a tunnel diversion hydropower scheme for electricity export to South Africa and other neighboring countries, and to attract energy-intensive industries to

DRC, with a total cost up to \$8 billion. (2)

Grand Inga (see WRM Bulletin no. 77) was proposed in the 1980s and was delayed by political conflict in central Africa. It started moving again in April last year when seven African governments and the world's largest banks and construction firms met to plan the massive hydropower project with an estimated cost of US\$80 billion. Designed as a series of 52 750MW turbine installations, the Grand Inga mega-project (which includes the related Inga 3), could produce over twice the power generation of the world's largest and most notorious Three Gorges Dam in China.

Grand Inga will allegedly "light up Africa" thus allowing industrialization as a way of alleviating the continent's poverty. Quoting International Rivers' report: "Inga's centralized grid system is likely to do little to "light up" Africa for the 90% of people now living without electricity, most of whom live in rural areas outside the reach of power grids. Grid expansion is quite costly, and trying to reach scattered rural communities would significantly increase project costs as well as the cost of electricity. ... Based on historical trends, the trickle-down effects in the form of jobs and taxes will likely be minimal for Africa's poorest, while also increasing unsustainable national debt loads." (3)

Indeed, the mega-project will provide industrial economic growth for foreign businesses seeking cheap electricity and financial opportunities for Africa's elite business and government leaders. They have the financial support of the World Bank Group, the European Investment Bank and the African Development Bank as well as the political leverage of the G8 countries.

Also, according to a The Guardian's article, "Grand Inga's prospects of being completed by 2022 are said to have risen significantly in the last year as countries, banks and private companies have found they can earn high returns from the emerging global carbon offset market and UN climate change credits." (4)

In a time of credit crunch, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a market-based program to subsidize alleged low-carbon projects in developing countries allowing industrial polluters to continue "business as usual", represents another highly needed source of money for such a millionaire scheme. Grand Inga project is being sold as "clean and environmentally friendly" energy that can offset carbon emissions elsewhere "by harnessing run-of-river hydroelectricity as opposed to damming up a river".

But as International Rivers warns: "While run-of-river projects can have less damaging consequences than storage dams, they are often far from environmentally benign. The term 'run-of-river' is undefined, and is often therefore used to 'greenwash' projects. In fact, many run-of-river dams have large dam walls, major social and environmental impacts, and even reservoirs. The extent of barriers and diversion canals involved in this colossal project is still unclear, but the cumulative impacts of Grand Inga's 52 turbine installations, as well as Inga 3, on the river's flow could be considerable. Impacts to fisheries, riverine forests and river ecology will need careful study. As more studies of GHG emissions from hydropower are conducted, scientists are finding increasing evidence that emissions from dams, especially methane, are a

legitimate concern”.

(1) Inga 1 and Inga 2 dams, International Rivers,

<http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/2877>

(2) Inga 3, International Rivers, <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/africa/grand-inga-dam-dr-congo/inga-3>;

(3) Grand Inga, International Rivers, <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/africa/grand-inga-grand-illusions>

(4) “Banks Meet Over £40bn Plan to Harness Power of Congo River and Double Africa's Electricity”, John Vidal, The Guardian,

<http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/2744>

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- Ecuador: New oil exploration activities in Yasuní National Park

Yasuní National Park stretches along the basins of the Yasuní, Cononaco, Nashiño and Tiputini Rivers. Aside from the fact that these are major rivers in their own right, they are also surrounded by floodplains, wetlands, lagoons and lake systems like the Jatuncocha, Garzacochoa and Lagartocochoa. This area is also the ancestral territory of the Waorani indigenous people and two indigenous tribes living in voluntary isolation, the Tagaeri and Taromenane.

Cononaco and Tiputini, like hundreds of other indigenous names, are also the names of oilfields. The oil industry's practice of using indigenous names for projects that entail the devastation of indigenous territories are just one more means of humiliation of the local communities.

In December 2008, the Waorani denounced new oil exploration activities in the Cononaco oilfield. In order to appease the community, the Ecuadorian state-owned oil company, Petroecuador, paid them 35,000 dollars. But these new activities affect the Yasuní National Park, a protected area.

Previous oil operations in Cononaco have been inspected as part of the trial underway against Texaco, since the activities in the field were undertaken by this multinational oil giant. Of the 35 samples taken, 30 showed readings higher than those permitted by law.

The area in question forms part of both the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve and the Waorani people's ancestral territory, and the contamination caused by oil activities there directly affects Yasuní National Park.

When the pipeline between the Auca and Cononaco oilfields burst in 2006, the resulting oil spill contaminated the Tiputini River which runs through the National Park. But the new exploration activity is even more menacing, because it is taking place in areas vital to the survival of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation.

Moreover, the denunciation of new exploration activity in protected areas implicitly

exposes the continuation of the extraction-based economic model, which views nature as merely an adversary, and the continued use of typical oil industry practices. Essentially, the first hole drilled will imply the violation of all of the rights recognized in the country's new constitution:

- * The prohibition of oil operations in protected areas, Art. 407.
- * The right of nature to exist and maintain its life cycles and structure, Art. 72.
- * The precautionary principle, established through the stipulation that the State will apply precaution and restriction measures to all activities that can lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems or the permanent alteration of natural cycles, Art. 73.
- * The protection of the territory of peoples living in voluntary isolation, a right whose violation would entail the crimes of genocide and ethnocide, Art. 57.

The Waorani, who have demonstrated their opposition to oil operations through different forms of protest, have been treated as criminals, divided and ignored. Today, however, protected by the right to resistance recognized in the new constitution (Art. 98), they are armed with a new tool to move from denunciation to action.

By Esperanza Martínez, Oilwatch: tegantai@oilwatch.org

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- Paraguay: Action to protect Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation cannot be delayed

The Ayoreo Indigenous People are one of an estimated 100 uncontacted tribes around the world and the only uncontacted people in South America outside the Amazon basin. The Totobiegosode ('people from the place of the wild pigs') are the most isolated sub-group of the Ayoreo and live in the Chaco, a vast expanse of dense, scrubby forest stretching from Paraguay to Bolivia and Argentina. They are extremely vulnerable to any form of contact with outsiders because of their lack of immunity to diseases, warns an emergency submission sent in November 2008 by Survival International to the United Nations. (1)

Though some have still managed to avoid all contact with outsiders, since 1969 many of them have been forced out of the forest harassed by deforestation carried out by land speculators and ranchers. Two Brazilian companies -Yaguarete Pora SA and River Plate SA- are currently devastating the Totobiegosode's ancestral territory and livelihood to make way mainly for grazing cattle for beef.

Widespread condemnation and pressure from the public in Paraguay has come as a result of satellite photos that revealed the destruction of the Indigenous Peoples' land, as well as increasing media coverage of the issue around the world and a letter campaign from Survival International. (2) Paraguay's National Environment Council

(CONAM) announced the decision to withdraw Yaguarete's licence to work in the area. Still, when a government team went to investigate the activities of the Brazilian Yaguarete Pora SA in the area, it was barred from doing so by the company's employees.

The Global Forest Coalition (3) reports that "This tragedy is occurring in Paraguay's largest reservoir of carbon and is happening in a department where deforestation is banned by the Department's Law."

The amount of Totobiegosode's land bulldozed in the northern Chaco has almost tripled since May last year. The push for agrofuels has added to the traditional land grab to graze cattle for beef. The Minister of Agriculture of Paraguay was in the Chaco Region promoting crops for agrofuels as a profitable scheme. The Argentinean firms Carlos Casado and Patagonia Bioenergía joined to create a company to produce in Paraguay *Jatropha curcas* for agrofuel. (<http://www.biodiesel.com.ar/?p=1001#more-1001>).

According to GFC, "The Ayoreo's land is being deforested at a tremendous rate. More than 200 hectares have been clear-cut and another 1,000 hectares are slated to be cut by the end of the year. The deforesters vow that they will meet this deadline 'come what may.' The lands will be designated for growing 5 species of oleaginous plants for 'bio-diesel' production including *Jatropha curcas*." The GFC informs that "The company Carlos Casado already has a 'field trial' of 15,000 hectares in the western part of the Chaco".

Projects and policies that devastate the cultural diversity of the society, the environment and the climate run counter to the discourse of President Fernando Lugo, who has promised to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights and the environment. As Survival International warns: "Lugo must take action to protect the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode now. Wait any longer and it may be too late."

(1) "Emergency report to UN about uncontacted tribe", Survival International, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3938>

(2) "Glimmer of hope for uncontacted tribe", Survival International, <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3929>

(3) "Agrofuel Production Threatens the Life of last remaining Indigenous Peoples Living in Voluntary Isolation South from the Amazonian Basin," 11 December 2008, Global Forest Coalition, sent by Rachel Smolker, Global Justice Ecology Project/Global Forest Coalition, e-mail: rsmolker@globaljusticeecology.org

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- Philippines: Oil and gas bringing misery and destruction in mangrove region

More than three years ago, a large vessel arrived without warning at Tañon Strait, one of the richest fishing grounds in Central Philippines and a global center for marine biodiversity. For two months, the M/S Veritas Searcher owned by the Japan Petroleum Exploration Co. Ltd. (Japex) roamed the strait to determine the existence of oil and natural gas deposits using highly sophisticated technology to detect and

determine the extent of these deposits.

Unknown to the people, Japex was already undertaking an extensive geophysical survey, using a vessel with an airgun and hydrophones connected to a cable that it drags underwater to produce seismic reflection surveys to detect large scale features of the sub-surface geology. The sonic boom from an airgun array is 255 decibels (dB), way over the human threshold of 80 dB and that of animals which is ever lower.

Seismic blasting can damage reproductive organs, burst air bladders, and cause physiological stress in marine organisms. It can also cause behavioral modifications and reduce or eliminate available habitat, alter fish distribution by tens of kilometers, and damage planktonic eggs and larvae. Since then, the lives of thousands of subsistence fisherfolk have never been the same.

Mangroves that line the Tañon Strait are indicative of the rich food provider ecosystem now endangered by oil and gas exploration activities. Fish is a major diet component, accounting for over 50 percent of the total animal protein consumed in the country. The oil and gas exploration activities of Japex at the Tañon Strait and NorAsia Energy Ltd. at the Cebu-Bohol Strait are adversely affecting an estimated 200,000 fisherfolk in the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, and Negros Occidental in the Central Visayas region. Various Fact Finding Missions conducted by different groups since 2005 documented destruction of fisherfolk devices for fishing, disappearance of local types of fish as well as fish catch reductions brought about by Japex and NorAsia's operations: 3 – 5 kilos from 15 – 20 kilos reported by fisherfolk using motorized boats; 0 – 2 kilos from 4 – 6 kilos by fisherfolk using non-motorized boats.

The fisherfolk organization Pamalakaya fears that oil and gas exploration activities have long-term impacts not only on the livelihood of subsistence fisherfolk in the region, but on the food security of the whole country as well. They may result in a "fish crisis" that would cut domestic production by an average of 600,000 metric tons of fish and other marine products annually for the next seven to 10 years, the group said. Even per capita fish consumption of every Filipino may be reduced by not less than 20 percent.

Meanwhile, Australian company NorAsia, is preparing to conduct off-shore drilling in the Cebu-Bohol Strait early next year. If oil and gas exploration has had such devastating impacts, imagine exploitation. "We're scared that when the drilling starts, we would totally have nothing left to eat. Even now all we can afford most of the time is just rice. Some of my fellow fish vendors have migrated to the cities to work as domestic helpers because there is no livelihood left here," said Lucena Sarahena, 41, a resident of Brgy. Langtad, Argao. "Our income used to be just enough for transportation, food, and electricity. Now it is barely enough even to put food on the table," said Merla Labid, 53, whose grandson got sick of bronchopneumonia and dropped out of sixth grade.

NorAsia also promised residents of Argao that the pump prices of gasoline, as well as prices of basic commodities, will go down if the oil and gas exploration goes well. But the fishermen of Brgy. Langtad are not convinced. "What will we do with low prices if we have no money because there is no fish?" says Felisa Albandonido, 60.

In the meantime, the issue has resulted in the creation and strengthening of local fisherfolk groups across the region. Fisherfolk now lead organizing activities, public fora, pickets, and mass actions.

“We have seen in Asia and many parts of the globe that historically, oil doesn’t translate into wealth of the people,” says Gilbert Sape of People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS). On the contrary, the experience of fisherfolk in Central Philippines has again proven that potential oil discovery has led to even greater poverty and destruction of the world’s natural wealth.

Excerpted and adapted from: “Hunger and plunder in the seas: Oil and gas exploration causes destruction of marine environment and food insecurity in Central Philippines,” Ilang-Ilang D. Quijano, PAN AP and PCFS, November 2008, <http://www.foodsov.org/resources/hungerplunder.pdf>

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Indonesia: The paper that brought violence and death

Once more, the conflict over natural resources has played havoc on humble people. This time the criminal action took place on the settlement of Suluk Bongkal, Beringin, in the district of Bengkali, Riau Province, Sumatra.

On 18th December 2008 hundreds of police and paramilitaries stormed the village with tear gas and guns. A helicopter which appears to belong to PT Arara Abadi dropped an incendiary bomb on the village burning hundreds of houses allegedly with napalm. Tear gas and fire arms were used. Two toddlers were killed and many people were injured while others have been arrested. Some 400 villagers have fled into the forest in the mountains and just 58 people have remained in the village. Two days later, a helicopter flew at low height over the tents of homeless villagers and bombarded them with stones. They are under extreme psychological pressure.

The attack was aimed at evicting the population who have been enduring a long-standing land rights conflict with the plantation company PT Arara Abadi, a subsidiary of the Sinar Mas Group, a company owned by Eka Tjipta Wijaya, to which Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) also belongs. Arara Abadi operates the largest industrial tree plantation in Indonesia to supply wood to the pulp and paper factory Indah Kiat. In Riau alone, Arara Abadi has concessions over more than 350,000 hectares.

The environmental organisation WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia) denounces that most of those tree plantations were set up in contravention of Indonesian legislation: Forestry legislation has been ignored, monocultures have been established on steep slopes which are at an angle of more than 30°, in water catchment areas, in areas with high biodiversity and on land belonging to local communities. Local people are losing the right to their land, without receiving fair and timely compensation and are becoming ever poorer as they lose access to and control of the country's natural riches.

WALHI believes that the violence in Suluk Bongkal, Bengkalis-Riau reflects the way in which natural resources are being treated in Indonesia, in a way which creates ever more conflicts and removes essential resources from the Indonesian population.

The conflict began in 1984, when PT Arara Abadi claimed the land and destroyed 200 graves of the indigenous Sakai people. Since then the conflict and violence has been escalating.

The people must be given back sovereignty over the resources on which their livelihoods depend. The government must restructure the pulp and paper industry as well as reviewing licenses for large-scale tree monocultures. "WALHI demands that the Indonesian government withdraws the license from PT Arara Abadi, ends the violence against people and all measures to isolate the village, releases those who have been detained and returns all property stolen from the people" says Berry Nahdian Forquan. "WALHI also demands strong measures against those responsible for the violence."

"WALHI is strongly opposed to any use of state violence against the population for the purpose of defending industry interests" says WALHI's Director. "This police and paramilitary action constitutes a violation of human rights", he states.

We encourage readers to support demands by WALHI that the state authorities must guarantee the human rights of the population and investigate and punish those responsible for this crime, and that the business permit granted to the plantation company in question must be withdrawn and that the rights of the population must not be sacrificed for companies' economic interests, by signing a letter posted at Rettet den Regenwald's website (<http://www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/protestaktion.php?id=345>) to be sent to authorities in Indonesia.

The working group for democracy, human rights and environmental protection in Indonesia and East Timor, Watch Indonesia!, also demands "an immediate investigation of this new human rights abuse, compensation for the local population and a guarantee of their safety and rights, as well as punishment of those responsible for the violence. We demand that European governments and companies examine their links to companies such as Sinar Mas which are responsible for human rights abuses. Europe's excessive consumption bears some of the responsibility for the growing use of violence in land conflicts over paper, palm oil, gold and other raw materials. Sumatra is not the only place where people are being violently evicted for mass production of paper."

Article based on press releases by WALHI, sent by Ade Fadli, adefadli@walhi.or.id, and Watch Indonesia! at <http://lists.topica.com/lists/indonesia-act@igc.topica.com/read/message.html?sort=t&mid=813357752>

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This new publication of the WRM Series on Plantations (*) examines resistances of populations neighboring two of Africa's largest industrial tree plantations: the rubber monoculture *Hévéa-Cameroun* (HEVECAM) and the oil palm plantation *Société Camerounaise de Palmeraies* (SOCAPALM). The report intends to contribute to fill a lack of information on the situation around commercial plantations in Equatorial Africa.

Before the settlement of the two monocultures, the region – situated in Southern Cameroon near Kribi – was covered by coastal rainforest exceptionally rich in biodiversity. It was sparsely populated by Bantu peasants-hunters and Bagyeli hunters-gatherers (“Pygmies”), both of them tightly dependant on forest resources. With the arrival of the plantations in 1975 for HEVECAM and in 1978 for SOCAPALM, these populations were displaced and the forest was cut and replaced by monocultures. Today, the plantations are adjacent to about twenty Bantu and Bagyeli communities which are in more or less open conflict against these agro-industries, as the report explains.

By investigating the conflict, it appears clearly that the role of the government has always been central, notably through its determination of the legal framework within which the agro-industries operate (land property, terms and conditions, social and environmental laws). If it is true that the state must comply with the requirements of international actors (IMF/World Bank, French government), it remains nevertheless true that it is a key actor in the conflict, roughly speaking always on the side of the agro-industries. The relation between local populations and the state is in this respect ambiguous: on one hand, it is perceived as distant and authoritarian (“it is not your land but the land of the government” is the typical answer villagers receive from authorities), and on the other hand, the state is to a certain degree still respected (“we are not going to take up arms against our own government!”).

In this conflicting context, one may wonder why, in Cameroon, industrial plantations have so much been promoted by the state – while their economic performances often remained well below the expectations. An explanation consists in showing the vested interests of the national elite and/or the subordination of peasants to the requirements of capitalist accumulation seen as the unique way towards “development”. In short, the state has incontestably been positioned from the beginning of the colonization – and at the request of the mother country's private sector – as the main actor imposing the transition to capitalism, and this, in spite of the resistances of many local communities. Incidentally, the first important nationalist movement – the UPC (*Union des Populations du Cameroun*) of the socialist Ruben Um Nyobé – originates from land ownership issues related to the French colonization.

Yet the conflict between local populations and HEVECAM–SOCAPALM is not only a struggle over the land: it is also – and perhaps above all, now – an environmental conflict. This is so because Bantu and Bagyeli do not claim the control of the plantations' territory as such, since the latter has now, in their eyes, become useless. What they claim is: (1) a compensation in any form – monetary, village plantations, or infrastructure (roads, schools, etc.) – for the destruction of what they see as their forest; and (2) the non-extension of HEVECAM–SOCAPALM, that is, the preservation of their remaining customary forests. It is for this purpose that the neighboring Bantu

commonly claim the employment of some of them among the high executives of the companies.

However, as it is often the case with rural impoverished populations, social conflicts remain largely latent, poorly organized and without a clear political dimension. Villagers often show a form of resignation. As the state is the “supreme chief of the land” as well as of the legitimate violence, there is an obligation of compliance. The protest’s ground often remains the discourse, a situation that R. Oyono names a “conflict of language”. In fact, the events described in the publication correspond quite well to what J. Scott calls the “everyday forms of resistance”. The latter refers to any act by members of lower classes aimed at mitigating or refusing the requirements (here: the land occupation and the obligation to respect private property) of superior classes (here: HEVECAM–SOCAPALM’s management and the state) or aimed at expressing their own requirements (here: a compensation in a broad sense). This kind of resistance went mostly unnoticed by historians and political scientists – because it generally remains without written traces – although it may represent the most common form of conflict among rural populations. The latter are therefore not what external observers have too often thought they were seeing, that is, globally passive social groups which would sporadically burst in violent riots. These everyday forms of resistance often are the weapons of the powerless. They can take different forms such as sabotage, theft, feigned ignorance, false agreement, concealment, non-commitment, slandering, arson, etc. In our case, the thefts of the plantation’s products as well as the fires are typical forms of resistance taking place around HEVECAM–SOCAPALM. This kind of class struggle requires no or little coordination and planning; it is generally anonymous and avoids all direct confrontation with authorities or superior classes in order to dodge repression. What is more, through their accumulation, these resistances can have serious effects on the interests of the ruling classes.

Regarding the relation conflict–effects, J. Martínez-Alier points out that “the focus should not be on ‘environmental conflict resolution’ but rather (within Gandhian limits) on conflict exacerbation in order to advance towards an ecological economy”. It is plausible indeed, writes this author, that these kinds of environmental conflicts – described as an “environmentalism of the poor” – will soon represent an important social force social towards sustainability.

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(*) WRM Series number 13: "Résistances contre deux géants industriels en forêt tropicale. Populations locales versus plantations commerciales d’hévéas et de palmiers à huile dans le Sud-Cameroun" by Julien-François Gerber.

Only available in French.

It can be downloaded from WRM's web site at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/Cameroun_fr.pdf

For printed copies please contact: bookswrm@wrm.org.uy

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Did you ever imagine that the tyres of your car may have been produced at the expense of a local community's livelihood in Nigeria?

Most of the world natural rubber production goes for the manufacturing of tyres for different types of vehicles, ranging from cars, to trucks, airplanes and so on. To have an idea of the huge amount of tyres consumed, let's take a look at the statistics in 2007 where 1.3 billion tires were produced.

South East Asian countries (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) are the major producers of rubber in the world while Africa accounts for some 5% of global natural rubber production. Within Africa, the main producing countries are Nigeria (300,000 hectares), Liberia (100,000) and Cote d'Ivoire (70,000).

The multinational companies Michelin and Bridgestone are the major players in the world tire production. Both of them are active in Africa, where they have set up their rubber plantations. Bridgestone/Firestone Corporation has its conflictive plantations established in Liberia and the sad history is well known (see previous articles on Bridgestone in WRM Bulletins 134 and 102).

On its part, the France-based Michelin has only recently started to write its own history of human rights violations. It all started on May 29 2007, when over 3,500 hectares of Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve including individual and communal farmlands were allocated to Michelin to be converted into rubber plantations in an illegal deal without the consent of community people. The invaded Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve is located in Edo State at the southwestern part of Nigeria.

Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve has been described in time past as one of the forest and biodiversity-rich regions of Nigeria. Around Iguobazuwa, more than 20,000 agrarian people live. They depend on the forest for their daily livelihoods and furthermore they used to have their farmlands around the forests to cultivate the land.

Without having ever consulted the communities, the local government allocated 3,500 hectares of forest land to the French multinational company to set up its rubber plantations.

When Michelin arrived, it bulldozed the 3,500 hectares of forests and also the people's farmlands. Local people found themselves from one day to another with both sources of livelihood –their forest and farmlands- completely destroyed. Iguobazuwa communities lost everything.

Their farmlands allowed them to cultivate food for daily consumption, but it was also a source of income as they used to sell some of their produce at the local market. The surrounding forests used to be their pharmacy, as well as the wood and water provider, and their place for worship.

The national environmental advocacy group, Environmental Rights Action (ERA) that has been closely following the case, reports that "On the eve of former Edo State's Governor Lucky Igbinedion's exit from office (29th May, 2007), large expanses of

Iguobazuwa forest reserve measuring over three thousand five hundred hectares were allotted to Michelin Nigeria Plc (owners of Osse river rubber estate company), without due process. The approval, believed to have been gotten through the back door, was done without due process or the consent of the community people. This action, publicized by Michelin and the Government as a sign of development, has brought a serious setback to the agrarian communities, as Michelin's rubber plantation has destroyed their forest, forest resources, age-old individual and communal farmlands, leaving the affected community people uncompensated.”

Speaking with ERA's Forest & Biodiversity officer/Media relations, Rita Osarogiagbon, the Chairman of Iguobazuwa Community Development Association, Mr. Gabriel Igbinigie revealed that the community people had once led a protest delegation to the former Edo State Commissioner for Environment Mrs. Sara Adetugbogboh (now Commissioner for Commerce and Industry), over an alleged illegal concession of forest lands to Michelin Nigeria. He said 'She reiterated that the present arrangement with Michelin was done by the past and not the current Government, adding that Michelin should go and resolve the differences by paying compensation to affected community members”.

There have been many attempts by different members of the communities to make their voices heard but nothing has changed. Women, tired of being passive, have decided to raise their voices and make their demands heard both by the authorities and the company. During the first days of November they gathered in a two day workshop to share their experiences. As a result, they have come up with a series of demands and are determined to get their lands back.

As a fallout from the 2-day workshop held on the 4th -5th November 2008, Michelin called some members of two communities (Aifesoba and Iguobazuwa) out of the nine communities directly impacted, and payed them compensation. One group from Iguobazuwa was paid fully while the other community from Aifesoba was payed what the community people described as peanuts, as according to them, it was a far cry from the extent of destruction and was not commensurate with the amount valued for the crops destroyed.

This divide and rule tactics by Michelin, has caused serious disaffection among communities and its members. Hence, a peaceful protest march by men, women and children of the aggrieved communities was held recently in Benin city to drive home their grievances. They solicited for ERA/FoEN and the World Rainforest Movement's continuous support in ensuring justice.

A woman from one of the adjacent communities in Iguobazuwa described the situation in very clear terms when she said *“I don't want money. I want my land back...if they give me one million Naira today, I will still go broke, but if I have my land I can always farm to take care of my family and possibly pass the land on to my children.”*

They are facing serious threats linked both to food shortages -which has resulted in the food price hike in the local markets and has led to serious hunger and malnutrition- and also health risks due to an outbreak of epidemics as a result of the extinction of

local medicinal plants resulting from Michelin's conversion of their forests to rubber plantations.

They stated that they won't stop until their land is given back, every tree felled replanted and full compensation for the crops destroyed is given. They know it is not an easy path and for accomplishing it they know that they need international support.

Those of you who wish to support these women can do so by signing on to the letter at

[http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Support to Nigerian Communities.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Support%20to%20Nigerian%20Communities.html)

that will be sent to the Nigerian Government as well as to Michelin's offices.

Article based on: Information from Environmental Rights Action, ERA Field report 172, at: http://www.eraction.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=105:field-report-172-michelin-converts-prime-forest-to-plantation&catid=5; Michelin web site: www.michelin.com;

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Information gathered during the workshop conducted in Nigeria on 4 and 5 of November within the joint WRM – FOE Project on the role of the EU in disempowering women in the South.

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- Papua New Guinea: World Bank promoting oil palm and pushing people into poverty

The “Small Holder Agriculture Development Project” (SADP) is a World Bank loan recently granted to the PNG Government. The SADP project, a US\$ 27.5 million credit “aims to enhance agricultural incomes in a number of communities in West New Britain and Oro provinces.” According to World Bank’s Country Manager for PNG Benson Ateng this project is “a core element of the new Country Strategy, through its support for poverty alleviation in two oil palm growing provinces. The project aims to increase the revenues of oil palm farmers through a community-based approach to agricultural development.”

However, the local people in Oro Province, where plantations were also developed with a previous World Bank loan and one of the targeted areas under the SADP loan, are strongly opposed and denounce that the loan “has been hijacked by the Oil Palm Plantation Companies in Papua New Guinea to push for the expansion of oil palm rather than expend it in areas that will enable greater economic benefits for the agricultural dependent rural masses of Papua New Guinea.”

Instead of promoting a diversified approach to agricultural development, by means of this project smallholders will be encouraged and receive funding to establish oil palm plantations on their lands.

According to a letter received by the World Rainforest Movement, local communities object to the loan being spent on oil palm expansion for the following reasons:

“Firstly **oil palm is not the only option** for active participation in the cash economy for the rural population as is the view of our Government and the multinational oil palm companies operating in our country. The various assessments have been focused on oil palm rather than alternatives. In the Northern Province, the assessment teams held discussion only with the stakeholders in the oil palm industry. These consultations also failed to convene meetings with non oil palm growers in oil palm growing areas. Therefore, the views presented to support the loan submission do not reflect a broad cross section of the community.

Secondly, we are of the view that for this SADP Loan to benefit more agricultural dependent families the government should focus on developing and maintaining road access to rural communities to enable greater participation by the bulk of the population.

Any further expansion of oil palm will not be in the best interest of the nation as it will have serious negative effects on our social and terrestrial environment. It has already contributed to major losses of forests and biodiversity in our country bringing with it social and environmental problems which the oil palm companies have refused blatantly to accept responsibility.

We are aware of the fact that the World Bank is very well informed of the issues as a direct impact by the oil palm industry however sees it fit to grant another loan to the Government of PNG in the pretence of agriculture development as a strategy to alleviate poverty whilst the fact remain the multinational corporations profit from the loans while we repay these loans.

In fact the previous World Bank loan for the Oro Expansion Oil Palm Project in Oro province has done quite the contrary from reducing poverty. Some of our people have suddenly become landless who will pioneer a class of poor. This is something we have not known since our ancestors.”

Based on the above considerations, local communities call on the World Bank to either review the loan conditions to promote alternatives other than oil palm or to cancel the loan.

On their part, palm oil companies are lobbying the government to push for the funds to be released quickly as they already have their own implementation plans ready. Yet, there is still time to make things change and that is exactly what the local people from the northern Oro Province are pushing for: to stop this monocultural approach and push for a diversified future.

They are requesting international support and have drafted a letter that will be sent to the World Bank authorities as well as to the PNG government. The letter in full is available at:

[http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Support to Papua New Guinea.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Support%20to%20Papua%20New%20Guinea.html)

Those who would like to support the letter, can do so by sending your name,

organization and country to the email: support@wrm.org.uy before February 20th.

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- Plantations, poverty and power: Europe's role in the expansion of the pulp industry in the South

Before the current global economic meltdown, the pulp industry had ambitious expansion plans. Although the industry was closing mills in the North, it was expanding dramatically in the South where about five million tons of new capacity was due to start up each year for the next five years. Vast areas of monoculture tree plantations have been established to feed raw material to huge new megamills, particularly in Latin America, southeast Asia and South Africa.

Today, however, industry analysts are talking about overcapacity in terms of a "wall of pulp". Between September and December 2008, global pulp production shrank by more than 2 million tonnes. Hardest hit is southeast Asia, where Asia Pulp and Paper and APRIL have reduced pulp production by a total of 580,000 tonnes. In Brazil, Aracruz is desperately trying to save money after losing about US\$2 billion on investment in derivatives and has scrapped (for the time being, anyway) its proposed 1.5 million tons a year pulp mill at Guaiba in Rio Grande do Sul.

Pulp mills do not build themselves any more than plantations plant themselves. One of the reasons for the industry's current problems is a conflict of interest. European companies, aid agencies and institutions play a significant role in promoting and financing the expansion of the industry in the South. They promote this expansion not as a form of "development" but because it is beneficial to European industry.

My new report, "Plantations, poverty and power", looks at the role of European companies and institutions in promoting the expansion of the pulp and paper industry in the global South. The report replies to the lies that plantation proponents repeat to justify the expansion of industrial tree plantations in the South: that plantations provide jobs, relieve pressure on forests, are only established on degraded land, restore soils, sequester carbon and help meet a "global demand" for paper. The biggest lie of all is that plantations are forests.

The reality for people living in the areas where plantations have been established is that plantations have destroyed their livelihoods and sucked streams and rivers dry. The few jobs created are dangerous, poorly paid and often seasonal. Pulp mills are among the most polluting of industrial processes. Among the reasons that the South looks so attractive is that regulation is less strict. Trees grow faster in the tropics, labour is cheaper and governments provide a series of subsidies to encourage the expansion of the industry. But another important reason, which the industry is more reluctant to acknowledge, is that in several countries, the area of industrial tree plantations expanded rapidly under brutal military dictatorships, when protest against the impacts of plantations was either extremely dangerous or impossible. Examples include South Africa, Chile, Brazil, Thailand and Indonesia.

The report looks at five pulp projects in detail: Veracel (Brazil); Sappi (Swaziland); Advance Agro (Thailand); Asia Pulp and Paper (Indonesia); Botnia (Uruguay). Without generous subsidies it is unlikely that any of these projects would have gone ahead. The projects provided a series of lucrative contracts for European, Nordic and North American consulting firms, machinery companies, chemical suppliers and engineering firms. All of these projects have resulted in serious problems for local communities.

This is followed by profiles of some of the European actors involved in promoting, designing and building pulp projects in the South. Pöyry is the largest forestry consulting firm in the world and has facilitated (and benefited from) the expansion of the pulp industry in many countries, both North and South. The Confederation of European Paper Industries supports the European pulp and paper industry regardless of its impacts on people and forests. The Asian Development Bank, the International Finance Corporation and the European Investment Bank provide examples of multilateral aid agency support to the pulp industry. Each of these aid agencies has different standards which it is supposed to apply to potentially destructive projects such as industrial tree plantations and the pulp industry. In each case, the standards (and the way in which the standards are applied) are inadequate to prevent the impacts on local communities and the environment.

The report looks in detail at two sets of voluntary standards: the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's voluntary guidelines for "planted forests", and the Forest Stewardship Council's certification scheme. Both organisations support the pulp industry and the expansion of industrial tree plantations. By defining plantations as forests, the FAO helps create the illusion that plantations are not destructive, but simply another form of forest. FSC supports the pulp industry by certifying industrial tree plantations as well managed, failing in the process to address even the most egregious impacts of industrial tree plantations.

The report concludes with a suggestion for an alternative way that the pulp industry could develop, which would provide the paper needed to meet local demand, based on small-scale pulp and paper mills using local raw materials. Paper could and should be produced without destroying forests, grasslands and local people's livelihoods. A first step in moving towards a less destructive pulp and paper industry would be to stop the subsidies which help to keep the status quo. No more development funds should be used to facilitate the expansion of the global pulp industry and its associated industrial tree plantations.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

Chris Lang's new report, "Plantations, poverty and power: Europe's role in the expansion of the pulp industry in the South", can be downloaded here: http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/Plantations_Poverty_Power.pdf

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- Charcoal disguised as “biochar” sold as another profitable climate tech-fix

According to a growing, vocal and very well-connected group of scientists, entrepreneurs and lobbyists, the best if not the only way of humanity surviving climate change and solving the food and energy crisis is to plough billions of tonnes of charcoal into the soil every year. They call charcoal used in this way “biochar” and claim that it will lock up carbon for thousands of years, provide energy through the same process which produces the charcoal, greatly increase plant yields and stop deforestation (caused, according to many of them, mainly by small farmers who slash and burn forests because they cannot keep their soil fertile). However bizarre and unfounded these claims may be, they are being taken very seriously in high-level policy circles.

A keynote speaker at the 2008 conference of the International Biochar Initiative (IBI), which is the main biochar lobbying forum, was the Australian Tim Flannery. He chairs the Copenhagen Climate Council which is organising the World Business Summit on Climate Change in May, '09, which will put forward business and pro-business leaders' 'recommendations' to UNFCCC. Many IBI members and supporters are similarly well-connected and able to influence high-level policy decisions.

The IBI achieved major successes at the Poznan UNFCCC Conference: Following a UNCCD submission in Poznan, biochar has been included into the “dialogue for the post 2012 climate regime”.¹ Furthermore, the government of Micronesia proposed that biochar should play a vital role in mitigating climate change. Post-2012 CDM credits for biochar could be formally approved at Copenhagen.

If it is endorsed then a statement made by Flannery about “biochar” might well prove correct: “With the appropriate ...promotion and adoption, it will change our world forever”, though, there is every reason to reach the opposite conclusion regarding the second part of his sentence: “and very much for the better”.²

Fine-grained charcoal is a by-product from biomass pyrolysis, a form of bioenergy production which yields two types of fuel; bio-oil and syngas as well as the charcoal. Both can be used for heat and power and they can also be further refined into second-generation agrofuels, i.e. into fuel for cars and potentially planes. It thus fits in perfectly with the push for biorefineries and tree plantations to fuel cars, but it does not depend on those. Pyrolysis for heat and power could be rapidly scaled up, provided that ‘market hurdles’ can be overcome. If pyrolysis companies could earn money from turning the biochar into patented fertilisers (with plantation expansion guaranteeing high profits from fertilisers), and if, on top of that they could attract carbon credits, the industry could take off very quickly. For companies such as Best Energies, Eprida, Dynamotive and Biomass Energy and Carbon, getting biochar included into carbon trading could make the difference between possible bankruptcy or, as Best Energies put it “win[ning] the current land grab in next-generation fuels”³.

IBI lobbyists promote an image of a future industry which primarily benefit small farmers and other villagers, through small pyrolysis units and charcoal-making cooking stoves, yet many of their spokespeople call for “biochar” ‘carbon sequestration’ targets which would make half a billion hectares of biochar plantations sound

conservative.

“Biochar” thus fits in with other false climate solutions based on large-scale plantations and land-grabbing, from agrofuels to ‘carbon sink’ tree plantations and GE trees. The scientific rationale for “biochar” is even shakier than for many other false solutions: Agrofuels, however harmful, can at least power cars. Applying charcoal to soils, on the other hand has not been shown to reliably sequester carbon or make soil more fertile on its own. The ‘evidence’ for the claims is based primarily on terra preta, ancient soils in Central Amazonia, formed hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Terra preta was created by small farmers who, over many generations, mixed charcoal as well as compost, animal and fish bones, river sediments, manure and diverse biomass residues into the soil. There is no evidence that carbon-rich, fertile soils can be recreated simply – or quickly – by applying large quantities of charcoal to fields.

So far only one “biochar” field study has been published in peer-reviewed journals. Researchers found that, charcoal additions to soil made synthetic nitrogen fertilisers work better. Yields for plants grown with char and fertilisers were still considerably lower than for plants grown solely with chicken manure. Using nothing but charcoal, however, resulted in zero plant growth after two harvests. This is why a lot of the ‘biochar research’ actually involves an ammonium bicarbonate fertiliser, of which char is only one component. At least during this short-term study, most of the carbon remained in the soil, but other studies indicate that even this is not guaranteed.

A study in Kenya showed that over the first 20-30 years after biomass burning, soils lost 72% of the carbon contained in charcoal.⁴ Initial results of a Colombian field study show that plots with charcoal had higher yields but lost 60% more soil carbon than control plots over two years.⁵ This makes claims about biochar having the potential to sequester carbon on a geo-engineering scale little more than hot air.

The push for “biochar today can be compared with that for agrofuels around 2002: Unfounded promises to solve the climate crisis and poverty with one stroke, while, behind the scenes, a massive lobbying effort is paving the way for artificial markets through state support. By the end of this year, the biochar lobby could well succeed in getting “biochar” into the CDM and other carbon trading schemes from 2012, possibly with ‘double credits’, as well as gaining other state support. Once this is in place, major industry investment and plantation expansion will follow. Several Indonesian pulp and paper companies, the executive director of the Indonesian palm oil association, Embrapa in Brazil, the Bolivian agribusiness firm DESA in Santa Cruz and Shell are amongst those already promoting the idea. The question is whether civil society groups and movements will be able to organise quickly enough and succeed in stopping the push for industrial biochar and, above all, carbon trading in charcoal as a soil amendment (“biochar”). If we fail this year then we could soon find ourselves fighting against another wave of land-grabbing and forest and other ecosystem destruction.

By Almuth Ernsting, Biofuelwatch, <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk>, e-mail: info@biofuelwatch.org.uk

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For fuller information see in particular Section 4 of "Climate Geo-engineering with 'Carbon Negative' Bioenergy", www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/cnbe/cnbe.html

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