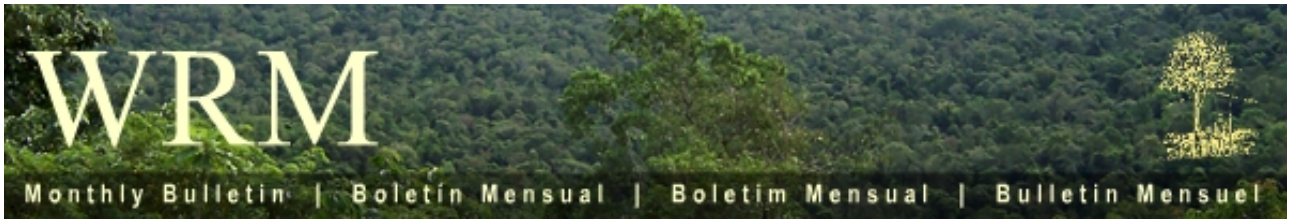

Issue 159 - October 2010

Printable version | For free subscription | Previous issues also available in **French**, **Portuguese** and **Spanish**

THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: CBD AT THE CROSSROADS

This issue of the bulletin has a special focus on the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that will be held in Nagoya, Japan on October 18 to 29, 2010.

As a contribution to COP 10, the Convention on Biological Diversity Alliance (CBD Alliance) – an international network of which WRM forms part – has facilitated the development of a series of briefing papers by representatives of civil society and indigenous peoples' organizations, which focus on the top ten issues that they believe should be urgently addressed in Nagoya, along with the paths that should be avoided and those that should be followed. In this bulletin we present three of the ten issues put forward by the CBD Alliance (to see all ten, visit: http://undercovercop.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CBDA_10briefings_ENG_v8.pdf).

OUR VIEWPOINT

CIVIL SOCIETY'S MESSAGE TO CBD

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Biochar: “Sustainable charcoal” from 556 million hectares of plantations?

ARTICLES AVAILABLE ONLY IN OTHER LANGUAGES

- Análisis crítico de “La silvicultura y el agua: Ciencia, Dogmas, Desafíos” (Walter de Paula Lima, 2010)
- Cameroun: un village résiste à la tentative de Socapalm de planter des palmiers à huile dans ses terres

OUR VIEWPOINT

- Nagoya: Opportunity for a biodiversity-based forest definition

The Tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will be taking place in Nagoya, Japan, from 18 - 29 October 2010. This meeting provides the CBD with a good opportunity for responding to the increasing demand to come up with a serious definition of one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth: forests.

Until now, most national and international bodies have uncritically adopted the FAO’s definition of forest, which not only fails to adequately describe what a forest is, but also allows the inclusion of monoculture tree plantations as such. Though by no means intentionally, the FAO has recently published a report that could not be more timely for convincing the CBD about the necessity of seriously addressing this issue.

On October 4th, the FAO released the full report of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010. If all the arguments put forward over the years for demanding the exclusion of tree monocultures from the definition of “forest” (see WRM’s latest contribution in Bulletin 156) were insufficient, we believe that this report provides some very good arguments in this respect.

For instance, the way in which the FAO deals with two very similar tree monocultures -rubber and oil palm plantations- is a very good example of the above:

- Rubber plantations. Until the year 2000, the FAO understood that rubber plantations were NOT forests. However, since that date FAO considers that rubber plantations ARE forests. Why? According to the FAO, “because of their increasing significance as a supply of fibre for wood industries.” Which means that a forest is defined by FAO solely by its capacity to produce a single product: wood. In this case, while rubber tree plantations produced only latex, they were not forests. When the price of rubber slumped and many producers started chopping down the trees and selling them as wood, they suddenly become forests. Following the same logic: shouldn’t they now be excluded as “forests” because rubber prices have gone up once again?

- Oil palm plantations. Palm trees are typical components of tropical forests. However, oil palm plantations are NOT defined as forests by the FAO because “oil palm is an agricultural tree crop”. Again, the reason is that they do not produce wood. Such nonsense reaches absurdity in the tropical African context, where

plantations of a native tree species (oil palm) are not defined as forest while plantations of an alien tree species (rubber) are considered to be forests.

The above distinctions appear to be in contradiction with FAO's extremely simplistic definition of forest: "Land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ. It does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use." That –according to FAO- is a forest.

Unless FAO defines what "land that is predominantly under agricultural use" means – which it does not- within its own logic either all tree plantations should be included or all should be excluded from being defined as "forest". Why is the production of oil palm an "agricultural" activity while the production of wood by a eucalyptus plantation is not? Why are olive tree plantations not "forests" while pine plantations are such? Simply because the FAO says so.

A second set of arguments provided by the FAO report is related to what it defines as "afforestation" and "reforestation". According to the FAO, the former implies the planting of trees in non-forest areas, while the latter means planting trees in areas previously occupied by forests. In both cases, the FAO defines the result as the establishment of "planted forests" (defined as "Forest [sic] predominantly composed of trees established through planting and/or deliberate seeding").

What the FAO defines as "afforestation" in fact implies the destruction of the native vegetation (usually grasslands or savannas) and its substitution by a plantation of a (usually alien) tree species. However, instead of classifying this as the process of establishing an "agricultural tree crop" (from which only wood is harvested), it raises it to the category of "forest". Why? Simply because such plantations produce wood which, according to the FAO, is what a forest produces.

In the case of what the FAO terms as "reforestation", most people would assume that through this process forests are being restored by planting native species. They would be wrong. In the vast majority of cases, "reforestation" implies the planting of monocultures of alien tree species (pines, eucalyptus, acacia, gmelina, teak, etc.) in forest areas. This means that a diverse tropical forest area can be totally bulldozed and replaced by a single tree species –alien or native- and nothing will have changed for the FAO. In its own words: "Where part of a forest is cut down but replanted (reforestation) … there is no change in forest area."

While such narrow approach clearly serves the interest of the pulp/paper and wood industries –which are portrayed as "planting forests"- it runs counter to the interests of local communities whose means of livelihoods –dependent on forests and grasslands- are destroyed under the guise of "planting forests".

From a global perspective, the FAO's insistence in continuing to define wood-producing monocultures as "planted forests", hides the impacts of such plantations on biodiversity. "We are reminded that forests represent some of the most diverse ecosystems on Earth", says the FAO report. May we in return remind the FAO that what it defines as "planted forests" represents some of the least diverse ecosystems on Earth, defined by many as "deserts of trees".

The FAO report provides clear evidence about the frightening expansion of such "deserts of trees", which have "increased by more than 3.6 million hectares per year from 1990–2000, by 5.6 million hectares per year from 2000–2005, and by 4.2 million hectares per year from 2005–2010." From a biodiversity perspective, this can only be defined as a disaster, given that such plantations destroy the habitat of millions of native species –ranging from plants to insects- many of which have not yet been classified by science. The FAO, however, welcomes the expansion of these plantations because they "have further reduced the net loss of forests" –as defined by itself.

The above are but some few examples of the arguments unwillingly provided by this FAO report, proving the absurdity of considering any type of monoculture tree plantation as a "forest", and thereby strengthening the need for excluding them from the definition of "forest".

In that respect, we would like to highlight what the FAO says: that it "hopes that the information in this report will help broaden discussions on forests". We believe it does, though much will depend on FAO's willingness to do so –which until now has never happened. More realistically, we hope that the corporate-friendly and unscientific forest definitions used in this report will help to stimulate the discussion in other fora –particularly within the Convention on Biological Diversity- for the adoption of a serious definition of forests that finally excludes the absurd category of "planted forests".

See full FAO report at
http://foris.fao.org/static/data/fra2010/FRA2010_Report_1oct2010.pdf

---

CIVIL SOCIETY'S MESSAGE TO CBD

- Biodiversity Justice: The way forward for life on earth

In 2010, we face compounding biodiversity, food, fuel, economic and climate crises. The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is fundamental to addressing these crises, and charting a truly sustainable path for humanity.

In Nagoya, governments are gathering for a critical international negotiation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in hope of stemming the ongoing losses of biodiversity – the stuff of life. Since the inception of the CBD in 1992, governments have failed to make much progress, with scientific consensus projecting more habitat loss and high rates of extinctions, including losses of food and livestock varieties, with drastic consequences to human societies. While the CBD is often described as a great compromise between the North and South (so called developed and developing), the North has not lived up its end of the compromise, especially in terms of financial resources, and also the lack of progress on the critical issue of access and benefit sharing of genetic resources (ABS).

In Nagoya, will governments agree to business as usual economic growth and overconsumption, deferring to market opportunities and techno-fixes? Or will they agree to actually address the root causes of biodiversity loss, and set forward a bold

new pathway that will defend and support the custodians of biodiversity - Indigenous Peoples, local communities and small-scale food providers like farmers, fisherfolk, and pastoralists?

Over the past two months, civil society groups from all over the world have been discussing, debating and coming to agreement on what they believe to be the key issues for the Nagoya COP. We call on Parties to strengthen (not weaken) the Convention's core principles – like the ecosystem approach, the precautionary principle, and an understanding that biodiversity cannot be separated from those humans who nurture, defend and sustainably use it. Parties should stay clear of the market approach of other agreements, like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and not permit biodiversity agreements be subservient to other international agreements, including trade.

Instead, Parties should adopt a biodiversity justice approach, which means not only upholding the rights, dignity, and autonomy of all peoples, but also respecting the rights of all living things. A biodiversity justice approach places the custodians of biodiversity at the centre of policy making, and as the most critical beneficiaries of biodiversity policies. These critical communities and their conservation and management systems should be rewarded, not commoditized or forced into neo-liberal economic agendas.

Many civil society groups, from all over the world, have come together to create a set of 10 collective briefings: the "Top 10 issues for COP 10". On the next page we highlight our key demands.

Civil society groups call for the following commitments in Nagoya:

1. Parties urgently need to fulfil their obligations as signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity and agree to a strong and ambitious strategic plan; this plan must contain targets that will:

• integrate biodiversity and its pivotal role in ecosystem functioning and resilience in international institutions and agreements, especially trade, and also in national policies, including economic development and accounting

• eliminate subsidies and perverse incentives harmful to biodiversity by 2020 (particularly for oil and gas, agriculture, agrofuels/bioenergy, fishing)

• reduce deforestation and destruction of natural habitats to zero by 2020

• end current unsustainable production and consumption patterns

• end overfishing and destructive fishing practices

• make agriculture, forestry and other land use sustainable and reduce nutrient loading below critical load levels

• achieve a representative system of protected areas based on full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and respect for their rights (including free, prior and informed consent)

• increase public finance tenfold

• defend, and increase genuine representation in decision making of, local conservers, users and developers of biodiversity,

2. Parties need to adopt a legally binding ABS Protocol that will have strong enforcement and compliance measures that can stop biopiracy, respects and protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and questions the primacy of intellectual property rules. The ABS Protocol should also ensure real and actual benefits for Indigenous Peoples and local communities and that the Protocol will not result in further privatization of genetic resources and monopolies on technologies.

3. Parties should address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, starting with eliminating perverse subsidies that promote the expansion of monocultures, bioenergy, biomass and other commodities.

4. Parties should avoid risky, unproven approaches like forest carbon offset markets (e.g. in REDD), biodiversity offsets and the Green Development Mechanisms that lack appropriate safeguards for biodiversity and for Indigenous Peoples rights and Human Rights.

5. Parties should adopt and uphold moratoria on the development, testing, release and use of new technologies which pose potential threats to biodiversity, including geoengineering and synthetic biology.

6. Parties should focus on implementing decisions by developing compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

7. Parties should put the real custodians of biodiversity center stage in the implementation of the Convention and in decision-making, this includes adopting a strong new work programme to enhance customary resource management and sustainable use.

8. Parties should establish a definition of forests and sustainable forest management that excludes monoculture tree plantations and prevents invasion of alien species, in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD that include the rights of communities to access, control, and govern forests.

9. Parties should defend and protect the smallholder and peasant farmers, herders, fishers and other small-scale food providers who conserve and develop agricultural biodiversity thereby securing future food. In so doing, they must prohibit any systems, methods, processes or technologies, which might damage biodiversity and related ecosystem functions in managed ecosystems.

10. Parties should agree to improve support, management and governance of existing protected areas, and ensure that any new protected areas are based on full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and respect for their rights (including free, prior and informed consent).

11. Parties should agree to expand protected areas (terrestrial and marine) to include

a greater representation of biodiversity. Any new protected areas must not be part of biodiversity offset or other compensation programmes that allow business as- usual practices to continue elsewhere.

COP 10 must be turning point for biodiversity policy. We need to strengthen and renew efforts to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ensure benefits flow to those who nurture it. We need to strengthen the CBD's role in international policy and to strengthen its implementation at all levels. Civil Society calls upon parties to take heed of these imperatives for the sake of humanity and all living things.

- Ending deforestation through socially just measures, not markets

The world's forests face many threats. Parties to the CBD must take serious, immediate action on deforestation, addressing the drivers of deforestation, in line with the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Parties must not blindly accept the terms of market-based REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), and should establish a definition of forests in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD.

What is at stake?

Deforestation and climate change

The world's forests are critical ecosystems for the peoples who depend on them, but also for global regulation of rainfall and climate, and, of course, biodiversity. However, they are disappearing. Deforestation is mainly caused by (often) subsidized commodity production, a problem compounded by the growing demand for agrofuels/ biofuels and meat, amongst others.

High biodiversity forests have been suffering continued aggression from corporations and governments involving indiscriminate displacement of forest people in the name of so-called sustainable forest management (SFM), protected areas, and critical wildlife habitat. Further, the climate crisis represents a major growing threat to the world's forests. If not stopped, major changes will occur in forest ecosystems and their biodiversity with huge negative impacts on local communities including livelihood destruction and abrupt social changes. The impacts from the loss of the biodiversity and climate regulation provided by forests would affect the whole world population, adding to the unpredictable extremes of weather that we are already beginning to experience.

False solutions to conserving forest biodiversity – market based REDD+ and offsets

Whereas a healthy synergy between the CBD and UNFCCC would be beneficial to both biodiversity and climate, a dangerous convergence between these two conventions is being concocted, led by those who want to profit from the climate crisis through commercial mechanisms such as carbon offsets, carbon trading, and REDD+ schemes. Current REDD+ approaches do not distinguish between forests and plantations (see point below); they ignore safeguards for biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples'/human rights, and refuse independent monitoring. In its present

manifestation, REDD+ does not adequately deal with the direct and underlying causes of deforestation and also does not lead us to the real solution: cutting fossil fuel emissions at source. As such, we are concerned that these approaches risk/erode the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and forest communities and put biodiversity in peril, both at the global level (through climate change) and the local level (through "sustainable logging," biofuel production, etc.).

In particular, Indigenous Peoples' rights, protected by international treaties, could be imperilled by the ownership claims of carbon or biodiversity by organizations dictating the use of the forest they are paying to "save." Further, some corporations also hope to maintain access to other resources, i.e.: minerals, by zoning forests and by offsetting destruction in one area with "protection" of high value biodiversity "hotspots" in another.

Plantations are not forests

Plantations are not forests; they do not fulfil the same functions in maintaining biodiversity, soils, water and regulating climate, and they also impact negatively on local ecosystems and on forest-dependent peoples' livelihoods.

Plantation establishment and replacement also has a devastating impact on soils. The notion that young fast growing trees sequester more carbon than standing forest is false. Moreover, plantations rarely provide livelihoods to forest peoples; in most cases they cause an array of social problems, including loss of livelihoods and conflict. Yet, disguised as forests, monoculture stands of timber are progressively replacing biodiversity rich forest ecosystems.

Genetically engineered trees

The use of genetically modified trees would aggravate the problems associated with industrial tree plantations further and add new threats with far reaching consequences to forests and forest ecosystems. Additional to the intended trait, genetic engineering introduces unpredictable and unintended changes into a tree, which might only become evident years into the growth of a tree or generations later. Genetic engineering could increase the competitiveness or invasiveness of trees, change their interaction with other organisms such as soil microbes, insects, and other plants, or might affect their response to biotic or abiotic stress, e.g. they might be more vulnerable to storms, fire, or pathogens. They might also decrease the number of beneficial organisms, including predators. Escape via seed or outcrossing via pollen with resulting genetic contamination of natural forests is a major risk associated with field trials and commercial plantations of GM trees.

What needs to happen? What should CBD do?

Ending deforestation is a critical part of ending biodiversity loss, and the CBD (not the UNFCCC nor carbon markets) should lead the task of protecting forests.

As such Parties must:

Agree to reduce deforestation to zero by 2020

• Address the direct and underlying causes of deforestation, starting with perverse subsidies such as those for biofuels (see Briefing 6 on Bioenergy) and other commodities like soy and meat. • Pursue an ecosystem-based approach for forest protection that prioritizes primary forests, contains biodiversity safeguards, and acknowledges the rights of forest communities to access, control, and govern forests as well as the major role of women in forest governance and protection.

Reject approaches that reduce forests to carbon stocks and trades

• This includes biodiversity offsets and market-based REDD approaches that lack appropriate safeguards for biodiversity and human/Indigenous Peoples' rights, and have yet to demonstrably reduce carbon emissions.

• Strengthen its dialogue with the UNFCCC to ensure that any policy related to climate and forests takes into due account the full spectrum of forest values, including the key role of Indigenous Peoples and ICCAs [indigenous and community conserved areas] play in carbon mitigation efforts, by ensuring the proper conservation and respect of forest biodiversity while pursuing Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Establish a definition of forests in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD

• Lead a comprehensive process to establish a universally accepted definition of forests and sustainable management of forests inspired through an ecosystem approach that includes the rights of communities to access, control, and govern forests; such a definition should exclude monoculture tree plantations as well as prevent invasion of alien species.

• Agree to a binding moratorium on all field trials or releases of GE trees.

- Climate Change, Geoengineering and Biodiversity

The role of biodiversity in climate change policy is receiving increased attention: both how the loss of biodiversity worsens climate change and how the protection of biodiversity needs to be central to any effective adaptation or mitigation strategy. Parties must ensure that the CBD principles (e.g. precautionary principle, ecosystem approach, Indigenous Peoples' rights) are upheld and applied in all strategies for combating climate change. The conservation of biodiversity will not be accomplished through the market mechanisms and techno-fixes that are dominant amongst contemporary public policy options—indeed there is a danger that over reliance on market approaches and unproven technologies might worsen the protection of biodiversity.

What is at stake?

Will the global response to climate change protect biodiversity and strengthen community and ecosystem resilience, or will it actually make the situation worse by promoting false solutions?

Geoengineering ourselves out of a planet?

The failure to adopt effective policies to reduce emissions has resulted in increased support in some wealthy countries for extremist geoengineering approaches (large-scale technological attempts to intentionally manipulate the climate) that will have devastating consequences on biodiversity:

• Ocean fertilisation (stimulating the growth of algae to absorb excess atmospheric CO2) threatens marine ecosystems as well as the livelihoods of fisherfolk and coastal peoples.

• Shooting sulphates into the stratosphere (to mask global warming by reflecting sunlight back to outer space) will wreak havoc the ozone layer and global precipitation patterns.

• Biochar (burnt/charred biomass supposedly to sequester carbon in soil and improve soil fertility) is touted as a solution for climate, food security and energy but will in fact result in further pressures on the land and food supplies of people who are already hungry and landless.

In all cases the alleged “carbon sequestration” or “cooling effect” is scientifically disputed and very high risk, but the threat to biodiversity and related livelihoods are real and tangible. Geoengineering represents an unprecedented threat to biodiversity and the ability of local communities and indigenous peoples to equitably enjoy its benefits; the CBD should strengthen the role it has already played on this issue.

Anything goes for climate mitigation, except cutting emissions

In pursuit of rapid fuel shifting (away from fossil fuels), new technologies and questionable energy sources are proliferating.

For example,

• Huge corporate-owned monocultures of agrofuels (e.g. sugar cane, soya, jatropha, oil palm) are destroying rich bio-diverse ecosystems and depriving local and indigenous peoples of their livelihoods, while increasing the use of petrochemicals and fertilizers, two of the main contributors to global warming (see Briefing 6 on bioenergy).

• GM biotechnology industry sees climate change as a big opportunity to ‘contribute’ to climate change adaptation and mitigation, using technologies that have risks to biological diversity and communities (i.e. GE trees, synthetic biology).

• The establishment of large-scale dams that devastate water and land biodiversity over entire areas –expelling local peoples from their homelands. Meanwhile, dams and reservoirs, particularly in the lowland tropics are also significant sources of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

The UNFCCC is the wrong path to follow

So far, the dominant approach for climate change mitigation has been the market imperatives of the UNFCCC – which thus far have proved to be a failure in terms of

reducing CO2 emissions and achieving the holy grail of sustainable development. The UNFCCC has not only failed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (current concentration levels is about 390ppm compared to 350ppm at 1990) but has actually endorsed some policies that disrupt ecosystem functions without delivering tangible climate benefits. This is especially the case for the Clean Development Mechanism, which has largely failed to achieve significant emissions reductions and has not contributed to sustainable development.

Now REDD and REDD+ - with their overwhelming focus/emphasis on market-based approaches (i.e. REDDbased carbon trading) - may result in the largest corporate land grab ever witnessed and yet another novel way of privatizing "air".

The experience of the CDM, and the less than ideal outcomes of other payments for ecosystem services, should give us plenty of reason to pause and consider alternative policy paths (see Briefing 5 for more detail on REDD and the Briefing 2 on financial resources).

Proposals for COP 10 and beyond

While the market-oriented approach of the UNFCCC is seeping into the CBD, Parties must take a different path, as there is little evidence that the market based approach will work (see Briefing 2 on financial resources). The protection of biodiversity and those who protect and nurture it are key elements in the fight against climate change.

Parties must:

• Adopt a moratorium on geoengineering and synthetic biology as proposed in SBSTTA 14.

• Ensure that any measure adopted by UNFCCC (or other international organizations) respects biodiversity conservation as well as the associated livelihoods that maintain it, and that all the necessary measures that need to be taken to avoid biodiversity and cultural diversity loss are adopted as a matter of urgency. This includes reaffirming the importance of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIPs).

• Reject approaches that reduce forests to carbon stocks (and trades), including biodiversity offsets and market-based REDD approaches that lack appropriate safeguards for biodiversity and human/Indigenous rights, and have yet to demonstrably reduce carbon emissions (e.g. CDM).

• Reject land-grabbing and monoculture plantations for biofuels and biochar (see Briefing 6 on bioenergy).

• Promote and support the role that community conserved and Indigenous lands play in climate mitigation.

• Uphold previous moratoria, as the threats recognized have not diminished. In particular the moratorium on GURTs (Terminator technology) and GE trees.

- Fuelling Biodiversity Loss: Biomass for Biofuels, Bioenergy, Biochar and the Technologies of the new Bioeconomy

Industrial scale biofuels and bioenergy, with their new demands for wood, agricultural products and other plant biomass, are having serious and irreversible impacts on biodiversity, especially forests. Driven by overseas investment, large tracts of land are changing to bioenergy feedstocks in the global south, undermining the rights of Indigenous Peoples, food sovereignty, agrarian reform and land rights. CBD language "to promote the positive and minimise the negative impacts of biofuel production" must be replaced by a call to end all perverse incentives that promote the further expansion of industrial bioenergy production.

What is at stake?

Industries come together to form the new bioeconomy. Biofuels and bioenergy generally are emerging as the energy basis of the "knowledge based bioeconomy (KBBE)", based on the idea of replacing fossil oil as a source of energy and other products with biomass. Major industries, including GM biotechnology, agribusiness, petroleum, timber, pulp and paper industries all see profit potential in the "new bioeconomy" and the development of plant-based chemistries.

The EU and the US continue to promote the bioeconomy, while India, Brazil and China are among those exploring it. Expanding large-scale, industrial bio-energy (biofuels and biomass) is part of a political agenda that claims to address climate change and energy security, but seriously compromises small-scale, traditional uses.

Bioenergy targets in the US and the EU alone are increasing demand so dramatically that already large regions of the global south are being converted to industrial monoculture plantations and energy crops for export. While this is done in the name of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, lifecycle accounting for most bioenergy processes including transportation fuels and burning for electricity indicates a net increase in emissions. The promotion of biochar (turning biomass to charcoal) to supposedly 'sequester carbon' and thus provide offsets for emissions would further increase biomass demand.

Impacts on biodiversity

Since the last CBD COP in 2008, a number of reports have further illuminated and documented the impacts of industrial bioenergy. These include:

(1) As subsidised bioenergy demand grows, biodiversity is destroyed. Bioenergy demand is driving further conversion of natural ecosystems to industrial plantations, and also has significant impact on water resources, chemical and pesticide contamination, and forests. In the EU and the U.S., new industrial scale wood burning facilities are creating a major new source of demand for wood, which seriously compromises policies to conserve and restore forest biodiversity.

(2) Industrial bioenergy competes with food production and worsens hunger. Industrial bioenergy competes with food production for crops, water and land. Yet

diversion to energy 'crops' continues to escalate, displacing other crops to replace biodiversity and forest elsewhere. Promoters claim that future technologies that exploit cellulose, non-food plants and trees will avert this conflict, but the underlying requirements for land, soil and water remain. Crops that are sources of both biofuel and animal feed such as soya and maize add to the pressures. Further, studies have shown that there is not sufficient land for biofuel production to meet the current demand for energy.

(3) Industrial bioenergy is fuelling global speculation and investment in land, resulting in a new era of colonization and "land grabs". Investors are taking over large areas of lands around the globe, to meet expanding demand for both food and bioenergy crops. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), foreign investors are negotiating deals on up to 20 million hectares (49 million acres) of land in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is often claimed that such land is "marginal, abandoned and degraded" whereas in fact it may be used by pastoralists, small food producers, indigenous peoples and local communities.

The impacts are clear: people are expelled from their land and become food insecure, women and their families lose access to traditional bio-energy for local use, ecosystems are degraded, fragmented and lose their resilience and capacity to regenerate, water supplies are damaged and depleted, biodiversity is lost and bioenergy plantations effectively prevent regeneration of native ecosystems on these lands.

(4) Industrial bioenergy is increasing the development and use of new crops and potentially dangerous technologies. Genetically engineered crops and trees are proposed as solutions to everything from increasing the speed of growth, to making crops and trees easier to process for energy production. Eucalyptus, poplar and other tree varieties are being developed and tested to grow faster and contain reduced lignin (a structural material in wood that interferes with processing), and newly developed corn varieties have been engineered so that both grain and stalks can be converted to ethanol, among many other examples. Modified trees and crops have the potential to contaminate wild relatives and seriously threaten biodiversity.

Synthetic biology promises the construction of "synthetic" microbes to aid in digesting plant cellulose for industrial refining and conversion to biofuel and "bioproducts". However, synthetic biology is largely unregulated and the consequences of releasing synthetic organisms on ecosystems are entirely unknown.

Invasive species: many biofuel crops are known to be invasive species, e.g.: switchgrass, miscanthus, jatropha, moringa, eucalyptus, willow, yet cultivation of these plants is being widely encouraged and supported.

What should happen at COP 10 and beyond?

Despite all these increasing impacts and threats to biodiversity, language in the CBD actually encourages biofuel development by speaking of the "need to promote the positive and minimize the negative impacts of biofuel production and its use on

biodiversity". Rather, Parties must stick close to the fundamental principles of the CBD, especially those related to Indigenous Peoples' rights, the precautionary principle and ecosystem approach.

Parties at COP 10 must:

• Reaffirm that biodiversity and ecosystems are basic to our survival and their resilience and restoration is fundamental. All forms of government incentives for industrial bio-energy should be classified as perverse incentives and must be removed.

• Support a moratorium on commercial use and environmental releases of synthetic organisms as partly proposed by SBSTTA 14.

• Not give any incentive to large-scale biofuel production.

- Action in the CBD against GM trees

A group of social and environmental networks and organizations, concerned about the possibility that the United Nations finally endorse policies that accept and promote genetically engineered trees, warned of their potential harm, that would be aggravated within the model of large-scale monoculture.

Below is the "Open letter to participants at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP 10) on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the 5th Meeting of the Parties of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (MOP 5) to be held in Nagoya, Japan in October 2010

Stop the Extermination of Biodiversity-- Stop Genetically Engineered trees

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) born out of the 1992 Earth Summit, was supposed to provide an international legal instrument to ensure the protection of biodiversity—recognized as an invaluable global asset for the survival of present and future generations. It was supposed to recognize the need to travel on a path of development that did not involve the destruction of biodiversity and that had a social justice framework.

Today we reaffirm this need, but note that we are getting further from the goal. The world is being swept up by powerful corporate forces whose main consideration is profit, leading to a development based on extermination, exploitation and exclusion. These forces are also at work at the CBD, as evidenced by the effort to legitimize genetically engineered trees— a new tool of control, domination and extermination.

There are two very dangerous aspects of the GE trees model: genetic engineering - with its many unanswered questions and unknown long-term consequences - and the monoculture model, based on absolute control. Monocultures also require the appropriation of ever-increasing amounts of land at the expense of food sovereignty. They result in the extermination of ecosystems, soil, water and the communities living in and with these ecosystems.

Genetically engineering agricultural crops to increase the profits of the patent-holding corporations has resulted in the devastation of biodiversity. Development of GE trees - whether manipulated to reduce lignin content, resist insects, grow faster or withstand the cold – converges the business model of endless-growth-at-any-cost with the monoculture model, which already thrives on the extermination of diverse ecosystems. GE trees have the additional threat of invading and contaminating wild forests, thereby enhancing the threat to biodiversity.

Monoculture tree plantations, linked with the research in genetic engineering, are a cause of land appropriation at the expense of food sovereignty. They also cause the destruction of other ecosystems, soil, water and the communities living in those ecosystems.

There are several doors through which GE trees can invade the CBD:

Agrofuels and Wood-Based Bioenergy – Industrial plantations of trees engineered to grow faster, be more densely planted, survive in colder climates, or be more easily transformed into liquid fuel are the perfect feedstocks for bioenergy. The massive increase in demand for wood that will accompany increased use of wood-based bioenergy will greatly accelerate deforestation, the conversion of forests and grasslands to plantations, and the wholesale loss of biological and cultural diversity. Scientists project that the result of this exponentially growing demand for wood will be the complete conversion of all native forests and grasslands to tree and crop monocultures by 2060.

Forests - The FAO definition of forests adopted by the CBD includes tree monocultures, which bear as much resemblence to forests as corn fields to native grasslands. This allows industrial plantations, completely devoid of diversity, to be promoted and subsidized in so-called “reforestation” “afforestation” and “forest restoration” efforts.

Climate Mitigation - Among the mechanisms the UNFCCC has proposed to tackle climate change, are several that will exacerbate the situation. These include use of tree plantations as carbon sinks (which will enable emissions to continue unabated), the "increase of forest carbon stocks" (REDD+), which wrongly incentivizes fast growing tree monocultures, and recently, "biochar "- charcoal buried in the soil, derived from burning trees. REDD can even include GE trees.

On the other hand, in the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, the topic of risk assessment of transgenic trees will also be on the agenda. The purpose of risk assessment should be to avoid impacts on the environment, biodiversity, human health and the social and economic welfare of the population. Therefore, the backbone of risk assessment should be the principle of precaution. It is already known that GE trees companies plan to export their GE trees around the world. In fact, they already are. U.S.-based ArborGen has taken a eucalyptus hybrid from Brazil, sent it to their New Zealand labs for modification, and then to the U.S. for mass-cloning and outdoor testing. This intentional transboundary movement of GMO trees must be stopped.

Therefore, it is necessary that the MOP 5 and the COP 10 strengthen the decision

established in 2006, when the uncertainties associated with potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts, including long-term impacts and cross-border of genetically modified trees on global forest biological diversity as well as on the livelihoods of indigenous and local communities were acknowledged and the precautionary approach recommended.

For life and Biodiversity. No to transgenic trees!!"

Signed by: Coecoceiba AT Costa Rica, Econexus, ETC Group, Global Justice Ecology Project, FASE, FOEI (Friends of the Earth International) OLCA, RALLT (Network for a free GE Latin America), RECOMA (Latinamerican network against Monoculture Tree Plantations), Redes AT Uruguay, Sobrevivencia AT Paraguay, World Rainforest Movement

---

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Ecuador: Defending the Yasuní initiative, to conserve biodiversity

The ITT oil exploration block, located within the borders of Ecuador's Yasuní National Park, is an area of extraordinary biological diversity. The Ecuadorian proposal to leave the estimated 850 million barrels of oil reserves in this block untouched, in perpetuity (see WRM Bulletin Nº 157), marked a change of course in the right direction towards biodiversity conservation. Ecuador, whose economy is largely dependent on oil exports, would thereby prevent the emission of some 410 million tons of carbon dioxide, in exchange for international financial compensation equivalent to at least 50 percent of the profits it could earn by exploiting the reserves, in the framework of the industrialized nations' environmental debt to the countries of the South – the suppliers of the raw materials on which the North's wealth was built.

The initiative would serve to protect not only the rich biodiversity of this tropical rainforest area, but also the indigenous peoples who inhabit it and depend on it for their survival. It would also contribute to the need to halt the further exacerbation of the climate crisis, by preventing deforestation and the contamination produced by oil drilling. But there is even more at stake in this initiative: the principles of responsibility and solidarity, which are frequently spoken about but seldom practised, and are becoming increasingly crucial to rescue us from the road to destruction on which we are headed. It constitutes a step towards a post-oil society and economy.

In this sense, the Ecuadorian initiative is unique because it falls outside of the framework of the carbon market and thus cannot be used to offset emissions created elsewhere: it is not a case of paying Paul in order to rob Peter. But in order to work, it requires support – financial support which, at the same time, would serve historical justice. To begin with, Ecuador needs to receive 100 million dollars this year, a sum that represents one half of the revenues it is giving up by leaving the oil in the ground. And the time has come for the countries that have historically prospered from an unjust model of development, which has led to a disaster that everyone must now pay for, to accept their responsibility and assume serious commitments.

In 2008, the German parliament declared its willingness to support the Ecuadorian proposal, a position that was adopted by the government and signified international recognition for the Yasuní-ITT initiative. It was a decision that received broad support and commitment from large sectors of German society.

However, following a change in government, in mid-September the new German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Dirk Niebel – who has declared himself in favour of abolishing development aid – expressed his reticence with regard to financing the Yasuní-ITT initiative.

He raised doubts about how it would be possible to guarantee in the long term that the oil reserves in question remain untouched, and stated that there are "numerous other alternatives" being discussed for the conservation of Ecuador's rainforests. He mentioned among these the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism and the "Socio Bosque" ("Forest Partner") programme – an approach that has been criticized because it is aimed at marketing water, biodiversity and carbon capture as "environmental services" and because it would not prevent destructive activities like mining or oil drilling from being carried out in areas covered by the programme.

The news was like a bucket of cold water for the Yasuní initiative's supporters. But civil society reacted immediately. The Oilwatch international network sent an open letter to the German parliamentarians, noting that Niebel's statements had sparked a crisis which could nonetheless serve as an opportunity to discuss certain underlying issues: "How will we confront the climate crisis? What are the responsibilities of the North and South with regard to the crisis? How can new forms of plunder be prevented? How will we confront the accelerated production of oil and its decline?"

Oilwatch stressed: "In international discussions of the climate crisis, the polluters, banks and companies responsible for creating the crisis have invested time and money into transforming the real problems of destruction of ecosystems, pollution, diseases and climate disasters into virtual discussions of carbon molecules and financing that almost no one is able to understand. In this way, they have distracted attention from the search for solutions and replaced them with a series of evasive measures that are often not only unviable or absurd but also perverse."

In contrast, "the strength of the Yasuní-ITT initiative has always resided in maintaining it as a proposal outside the carbon market and REDD, fully distanced from negotiations pursued under the Kyoto Protocol. Linking the Yasuní proposal to REDD would not contribute to the success of the proposal. On the contrary, such an approach raises concerns, because REDD – and its probable national version, Socio Bosque – neither fulfil the expectations of indigenous organizations nor provide a real solution to the climate problem. Critics also point out that this could lead to the loss of collective rights for the communities involved and violates the spirit and the letter of the Ecuadorian Constitution, which recognizes nature as having rights of its own (Art. 10 and 71) and that as a result, 'environmental services will not be subject to appropriation' (Art. 74)."

Meanwhile, in Germany, Rettet den Regenwald quickly gathered more than 9,000 signatures on a petition addressed to Minister Niebel

(https://www.regenwald.org/protestaktion.php?id=621) demanding that Germany follow through with financial support for the Ecuadorian initiative.

This mobilization was crucial. On an official visit to Berlin in support of the proposal, Ecuadorian Heritage Minister María Fernanda Espinosa met with members of the German parliament and received a commitment from five political parties represented in parliament for continued backing of the initiative. Although the administration has yet to confirm its position, the minister said she was confident of regaining German government support for the ITT-Yasuní initiative.

Otherwise, as declared by Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta, former minister of Energy and Mines and former president of the Constituent Assembly of Ecuador, "We will have to forcefully promote Plan C: to leave the oil in the ground, even without an international contribution."

This article is based on the "Open letter from the Oilwatch network to German parliamentarians", September 20, 2010, Oilwatch; the article "Alberto Acosta rechaza posible incumplimiento de Alemania [Yasuní ITT]", in Ecuatoriano Noticias, http://www.elecuatoriano.com/noticias/?p=14213; and information provided by Guadalupe Rodríguez, Salva la Selva, guadalupe@regenwald.org, http://www.salvalaselva.org

---

- Burma: Farmers fight plantation company threatening protected forests and tiger reserve in Hugawng Valley

In defiance against Burma's ruling military junta, farmers in the northern state of Kachin are fighting against a plantation company from destroying their lands and livelihoods.

The farmers accuse the Yuzana Company of large-scale destruction of forest in the Hugawng Valley, an area that also happens to comprise the world's largest tiger reserve.

The Yuzana Company conglomerate, whose chief Htay Myint is said to be close to the Burmese military rulers, was given the license to operate plantations in the Hukawng Valley in 2007.

Since 2007, Yuzana Company has been relocating entire villages, destroying crops and confiscating farmlands to prepare about 200,000 acres of land (in the total about 5.4 million acre valley) for the planting of sugarcane, jatropha and cassava to produce agrofuels.

The project is given security by 200 soldiers from Infantry Battalion 297 based in the area as well as private militia.

Despite threats and intimidation from the powerful interests behind the project, the seven villages in the project area have bravely resisted the loss of their lands and homes to the company.

Villagers from Ban Kawk and Warazup have driven away the company bulldozers, pulled out tapioca seedlings and refused to relocate from their homes.

Farmers have filed written complaints to authorities and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) after the removals started.

In June 2007, the Hugawng Valley Farmer Social Committee sent a letter of appeal signed by about 800 farmers protesting land confiscation in Hugawng Valley to Senior General Than Shwe urging him to stop the project.

As their demands continued to be ignored, the villagers then requested the National League for Democracy, Burma's main opposition party, to file a court case against the Yuzana Company for abuse of citizen's rights.

Following the farmers' petition, the Kachin Supreme Court in Myitkina opened a case on behalf of 148 farmers in July 2010.

The Kachin News Group reported last year that the company has built around 100,000 houses in the valley for men and women working on the plantations. Farmers state that Yuzana has confiscated land in seven villages in the region and compensated only 80,000 kyat (US$80) for an acre of land normally valued at 300,000 kyat (US$300).

The Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), a Kachin environmental group, recently released a report titled "Tyrants, Tycoons and Tigers" describing the operations of the Yuzana Company in the Hugawng Valley.

The report states that the company has already forcibly moved more than 160 families. The company reportedly used herbicide to kill the forest undergrowth and then cleared the ground with fleets of bulldozers and excavators leaving large swathes of denuded land. Then the company used excavators to dig out canals between the blocks. Local residents have reported a decrease in wild animal sightings and that livestock have gotten trapped in the canals and died.

Hugawng Valley is located in the western part of Kachin State near the Indian border, between the Kumon Mountain range to the east and the Patkai Mountains to the west.

The Patkai range includes headwaters for the Chindwin and Brahmaputra Rivers, while the Kumon Mountains contain the headwaters of Danai, Tawang and Tarung Rivers, which together form the headstreams of the Chindwin.

The catchments flow into the plains of the Hugawng Valley where they combine to form the largest tributary of the Chindwin – the Danai River.

The entire valley comes under the Hukaung Valley Tiger Reserve created in 2001 with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

About 50 tigers are said to inhabit the valley that is also home to a number of other rare or endangered animals, including leopards, Himalayan bears and elephants.

Based in New York City, the WCS in 1993 became the first conservation group to initiate a program inside Burma with its primary aims to work closely with the Burmese military regime (specifically the Ministry of Forestry), increase the number of protected areas and engage in wildlife protection.

In 2001, the Myanmar government designated 2,500 square miles of the Hukaung Valley as a wildlife sanctuary, based on the first ever biological expedition of the area in 1999 led by Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, currently CEO of the wild cat conservation group Panthera, staff from the Myamnar Forest Department and the WCS's Myanmar Program.

In 2004, the area was expanded by a further 4,248 square miles leading to Panthera and the Wildlife Conservation Society announcing it as "the world's largest tiger reserve." In August 2010, in a WCS press release officially announcing the expansion, Rabinowitz said, "I have dreamt of this day for many years. The strides we made in 2004 were groundbreaking, but protecting this entire valley to ensure tigers are able to live and roam freely is a game changer."

The reserve now covers almost the entire Hugawng Valley, creating the world's largest tiger conservation area and one of the world's largest protected forest areas. The Hugawng Valley Tiger Reserve adjoins other wildlife conservation parks in northwest Kachin State to form the huge "Northern Forest Complex.

No responses were available from Rabinowitz or staff of Panthera and WCS to emails concerning the threats to the valley tigers at the time of writing this article.

Burma's regime recently outlined a National Tiger Plan to double the country's tiger population by 2022. The plan is to be submitted at the Global Tiger Summit in Russia's St. Petersburg in end 2010.

In March 2008 BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organisations, reported on Yuzana Company's encroachment stating that a strip of forest up to 1.5mile-wide that ran for 50 miles had been almost completely felled and re-planted with sugar cane and jatropha plantations.

The authors of the report said: "As of February 2010 [we] were unable to see any remaining forests in animal corridor areas [within the agricultural zone]. Only the signboards of the forest department and the Wildlife Conservation Society were left standing."

The Valley protected area is also being threatened by gold mining projects operated by Chinese and local businessmen having links to the military.

The majority of the about 50,000 people currently in the Hugawng Valley are Kachin, with other ethnic minorities also represented such as Naga and Shan. The ethnic peoples are closely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and cultural practices.

In collaboration with international conservation groups such as the WCS, the authorities have forbidden hunting and rotational cultivation by local villagers living within the reserve, and have confiscated all guns. This has had serious impacts on local traditional livelihoods and food security.

In the making of the tiger reserve, the valley peoples were not allowed any rights to participate in the decision-making process regarding development and conservation occurring on their own land.

Now they are fighting not only to reclaim their confiscated farmlands, paddy fields, forests and housing but also to save the valley home of the tigers.

Amraapali N. (1)
(1) Amraapali N is a pen name for an environmental journalist based in Bangkok, Thailand.
(Article previously published in the Bangkok Post on 5 September)

- Nigeria: Women at forefront of struggle against oil corporations

With a population of some 150 million people, the Nigerian economy has been relying for more than 50 years on oil extraction by foreign large corporations - with Shell at the top - in the Niger Delta remote region of mangrove creeks.

The country's oil production is mainly to feed the energy demands of industrialized countries – it supplies 8.2% of all US crude oil imports. Oil companies reap huge benefits while most local people bear the environmental burden left by gas flaring and oil spills - 300 major oil spills have poured about 8 million barrels of oil into the once lush area.

The Nigerian organization ERA denounces that an estimated 168 billion cubic meters of natural gas is flared yearly worldwide and 13% of this is flared in Nigeria (at about 23 billion cubic meters per year) in over 100 flare sites emitting a toxic mix of chemicals into the atmosphere.

The operations for oil extraction that pollute the land, water and air leave a sad toll of leukaemia, infertility, still-births, deformed babies, bronchitis, asthma, and other pollution-related diseases. No wonder life expectancy in rural communities in the Niger Delta has fallen to 41 years old.

All this takes place in a context of massive land grabbing by oil corporations and agribusiness that erodes traditional farming practices and communities' food sovereignty.

But in the land of Ken Saro-Wiwa who roused the consciousness of the people over the environmental injustice in Ogoniland, the women, the foremost victims in the Niger Delta tragedy, have empowered themselves to fight for their future (see WRM Bulletin No 152).

Once again it has been the women who reacted and protested against the unfair distribution of oil industry revenue and the environmental degradation that neglect the communities and leave them bereft. Recently, in the end of August, a group of women from Ugborodo community put siege to the Otumara-Escravos flowstation in Delta State to call attention to their grievance.

The Otumara-Escravos station is a joint venture project between Shell and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation and renders an estimated $800 million profit. The community women, who had earlier seized the Chevron operated Escravos Gas Pipeline project at Madangho, succeeded in halting the oil operations during two

days.

Oil extraction, mainly responsible for the present climate crisis, has only brought misery to the Nigerian people. Amidst the present climate crisis, ERA proposal outstands as the appropriate way out. ERA proposes that Nigeria should learn that there is no future in crude oil as the major revenue earner and that it should not make any new oil block concessions.

ERA says: "Let's leave the oil under the ground." Indeed it's the best way to protect biodiversity, it's the best way to protect the people.

Article based on: "Shell shuts plant in Nigeria as women's protest expands", Google/AFP, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jVlOCDcxqXSnReV6U7A4N4TjxpUA; "Nigeria: No More Oil Blocks! Let's leave the oil under the Ground", ERA/Oilwatch, http://www.oilwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=610&Itemid=224&lang=; "Shell's Escravos, Otumara flow stations commence operation", The Nation; thenationonlineng.net/web3/business/energy/11507.html

---

- India: Forest protection is a matter of ecological justice

"The forest dependent people of India are raising their voice strongly against the loot of natural resources in the name of delivering development, saving the environment and combating climate change. They are bringing forth the issues of people's political economy of protection of natural resources and protection of livelihood vis-à-vis the elite and capitalist interests on the natural resources.

According to tribals and other marginalized forest people, there can be no solution of the present ecological crisis without ensuring the rights of the communities dependent on natural resources. These rights, according to them, also means social equality and social justice that has been denied to them since ages.

It is increasingly in evidence that devastation of environment is directly linked with increasing poverty across the world. Without proposing solutions to end poverty in the larger debate of ecology, the debate of saving the environment is futile. In the ongoing debates the social and political aspect is completely missed out.

The discussions on conservation of nature have now come on to the streets from technical debates of closed door discussions, to become the issue of environmental or ecological justice for Adivasis and Moolnivasis (the indigenous and other communities) for protecting their livelihood and cultural resources.

This has been understood at the global level. In Indian forests hundreds of militant mass struggles are going on against the hegemony of State, but all these struggles, which are essentially democratic and lead by local leaders, are being branded as Maoists struggles.

Often it is ordinary Adivasi, women and youth that are challenging the State with their

raised mass political consciousness. Hence in the name of anti-Maoist operations, governments are trying to discredit democratic movements in the forest areas."

This is how Roma and Ashok Chowdhury, from Ecological Justice Movements, start their overview of the history of the forest struggle in India, to continue analysing the fraud committed by the Indian State on the Forest People, the struggles of forest people, the issues of wildlife conservation and Forest Rights, and the political struggle for justice at large in forest areas. The full report, sent by the authors, can be read at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/India/India_Roma.pdf

---

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: Sustainable on paper - the eucalyptus plantations of Bahia

Endless rows of tree trunks pass before our eyes behind the car window. In the utmost south of the Brazilian state Bahia, eucalyptus plantations are a common sight. Sometimes we can see the remains of the Mata Atlântica, the majestic Atlantic Rainforest that used to cover the region. Now there is only four percent left. Logging companies and sawmills have made huge profits here.

After the deforestation, something new was introduced to the region: eucalyptus, the new green gold. The plantations we pass are all owned by Veracel.

David Fernandes, Veracel's forestry official, guides us over sand roads through a giant maze of eucalyptus plantations. The car halts at a slope with a view on the company's pride: the mosaic landscape. Fernandes elaborates enthusiastically on the harmony between the eucalyptus on the higher plateaus and the rainforest on the steep slopes and alongside the rivers.

Further down the road the greenery makes room for an arid plain, where everything has been cut down. But next to the dry land, young eucalyptus is already growing for a future production cycle. We drive between two huge walls of stacked tree trunks. Big machines, resembling mechanised prehistoric predators, are cutting down the mature eucalyptus trees at incredible speed. It takes a mere 25 seconds to cut down, debark, saw and stack a tree. Fernandes: 'For each hectare we plant 833 trees. After seven years the trees are thirty meters high and ready to be harvested.'

Bahia's climate allows a higher productivity than elsewhere in the world. 'It's only during the first year that we spray nine litres of glyphosate per hectare. It's a Monsanto weed killer, more commonly known as Round Up. It's a perfectly safe product, there's nothing wrong with it.' The FSC agrees, according to them the use of the weed killer does not endanger sustainability. But what Fernandes lacks to mention, is that Veracel uses 'large amounts of a chemical product blacklisted by the FSC', as stated in an ASI [a company inspecting for FSC certificators] report concerning Veracel's certification. Plantations infested by ants are sprayed with Sulfluramide. The company asked and received an exceptional permission from the FSC in 2008.

IBAMA, the federal environmental agency, had to impose some restraints on

Veracel's use of chemical herbicides as well. The company used weed killers on land intended for the regeneration of rainforest, resulting in the destruction of a large amount of indigenous trees. Veracel was fined 400.000 real (€160.000).

Illegal paper

In 2008 Veracel was convicted by the federal court for deforestation of the Atlantic Rainforest, and was fined twenty million real (eight million euros). During the trial it was revealed that Veracel did not have a valid environmental impact assessment for its eucalyptus plantations. The judge ruled the licenses for the 96.000 hectares of plantations to be illegal.

'The consumer buying cellulose from Veracel has to realize that he is buying an illegal product and that the sustainability label doesn't reflect reality', warns João Alves da Silva, public prosecutor in Eunápolis.

Indigenous protest

Respect for the rights of indigenous people is the third principle that companies have to obey to obtain the FSC label. Eliane Anjos, sustainability officer at Veracel, assures us that Veracel maintains an excellent relationship with all Indian communities in the region. Biribiri, a leader of the Pataxó Indian Community Coroa Vermelha, gladly confirms.

However, Coroa Vermelha is the exception that proves the rule. In the region of Veracel's eucalyptus plantations, only four of the nineteen Pataxó and Tupinambá communities have their own territory. The inhabitants of Guaxuma, an Indian village alongside the BR lOI road, have been waiting on the recognition of their territory for more than ten years. The territory they claim reaches far beyond the plantations that come closer every second.

Since a couple of years they are completely surrounded by eucalyptus. Kuhupyxa – we can call him Antonio – tells us that ten years ago, his community was hunting in rainforest that has now turned into eucalyptus. He takes us to the fence next to his house. 'Veracel wanted to plant eucalyptus up to here. Ten meters from my house. They sprayed everything with poison while the kids were playing outside. We chased them away with bow and arrow. They don't have the least bit of respect for us.'

Led up the plantation path

An elementary condition to be recognized as a sustainable plantation, is that the plantation cannot be situated in places which recently housed natural forests or rainforests.

Still we can read in the audit reports of SGS Qualifor that Veracel did deforest rainforest after 1994, in order to plant eucalyptus.

The research centre CEPEDES in Eunápolis has video images of Veracel, at that time operating under the name Veracruz, destroying the rainforest with tractors and chains in the nineties. For them it is crystal clear that the company does not deserve

a sustainability label.

In a devastating report, the ASI inspection team crushes the work of SGS Qualifor. SGS Qualifor did not allot enough time for a thorough audit, and was pleased with figures and studies provided by Veracel without checking or verifying anything. The report reveals that ASI would not have granted the label. But the power of ASI is limited to inspecting certificators. Only SGS Qualifor can retract the label.

Nobody eats eucalyptus

On a rainy day we meet a group of men and women assailing young eucalyptus trees with machetes. They are members of MLT, a small organisation for landless farmers. Rose Lemos explains: 'This land is terra devoluta, it is property of the state and is intended for land reform. Veracel doesn't have the right to plant here', she says. Social organisations assert that Veracel has planted eucalyptus like this on roughly 30.000 hectares of government property. MLT is still waiting on the judge's verdict about this particular piece of devoluta: 'We want to grow food crops again, because people don't eat eucalyptus. This region has the capability to export food instead of importing it, which it does now.'

Further down, MLT has already planted cassava, beans, corn, pumpkins and other crops. The 65 families living under plastic sheets dream of the day they can supply the city, because now all the food comes from other states.

In the eyes of Veracel, the actions of the landless farmer organisations are nothing more than vandalism, costing the company already five million real (two million euros) since 2009.

The city of Eunápolis now has 85.000 inhabitants. There are a lot of new, flourishing businesses owing their success to the presence of Veracel. But the drug trade has increased as well. Here, armed young boys barely twelve years old ride their bicycles through town hunting for cellphones and other valuable collaterals. On the outskirts of a favela, Roberto Joaquina dos Santos, living in the gut of the city, tells us how everything has changed: 'The people who moved here only knew sowing and harvesting. They weren't prepared for a life in the city. The slums grew and brought violence and drugs with them.'

Sustainability without borders?

If the stakeholders give the green light, Veracel will increase the production of its pulp factory from 1 million tons to 2,7 million tons. In order to do that, Veracel needs another 92.000 hectares of eucalyptus. The environmental applications for licenses have already been filed. According to ASI Veracel still has a long way to go to obtain the FSC label for the extended land. But SGS Qualifor has the final word on this matter. Manager Sergio Alipio is definitely optimistic: 'If we keep complying with all the principles and criteria of the FSC, as we did up until now, then it's only normal that the new plantations will be certified as well.'

Social and ecological conflicts, the question of indigenous people, problems with food security, rural flight and the decline in farmland are all enhanced by the

expansion of eucalyptus, writes IMA, the environment agency of Bahia, in a report in 2008. For that matter, IMA expects that the conflicts will increase due to the coming of BahaBio, a project providing 300.000 hectares of sugarcane and 64.000 hectares of African palm for the production of biofuel in the region. 'There's a desperate need for an integrated vision', the government report concludes.

Excerpted from the report "Sustainable on paper: the eucalyptus plantations of Bahia, Brazil" by Leopold Broers and An-Katrien Lecluyse, September 2010, funded by Fondo Pascal Decroos. The full report was published by the Flemish magazine MO* and is available at http://www.mo.be/index.php?id=340&tx_uwnews_pi2[art_id]=29629&cHash=45bfb71da2

- Biochar: "Sustainable charcoal" from 556 million hectares of plantations?

Two previous WRM Bulletins (January and September 2009) reported on the "biochar" concept – the idea of producing charcoal on a large scale and applying it to soils on the assumption that this will store carbon for thousands of years and slow down if not reverse climate change as well as making soils more fertile, producing 'renewable energy' and doing all sorts of other magical things.[1]

Firstly, biochar advocates have become far bolder: In the past, most of them liked to speak about making biochar from nothing but 'residues', although even then it was clear that their figures did not add up and that new tree plantations were likely. Last month, however, several leading biochar advocates, amongst them the chair and vice-chair of the International Biochar Initiative (IBI), published an article in science magazine 'Nature Communications' where they suggested that a large amount of biochar could be made from 'crops and trees' grown on 'abandoned cropland' as well as on converted tropical grasslands. They conveniently omitted to say how much land would be required. More than twenty organisations issued a press release to point out that nearly 370 million hectares of land would need to be converted to biochar plantations to meet the 'sustainable biochar potential' claimed by the authors – showing the 'true colours' of biochar advocates. The groups pointed out that the concept of 'abandoned croplands' is already being widely used to justify land-grabbing, including for agrofuels, across the global South and that croplands classed as such are often anything but 'abandoned' but instead are home to millions of people as well as being essential for biodiversity. [2] Surprisingly, one of the authors later informed us that they had an even higher land figure in mind: They were thinking of 556 million hectares worldwide!

Secondly, biochar advocates have now got a 'credible strategy' for achieving their main aim: Attracting carbon offsets so as to kickstart their programme. They continue trying to get biochar included into various carbon trading schemes, including the UN Clean Development Mechanism, but their immediate aims are two different schemes: On the one hand, they hope to attract large-scale voluntary carbon offsets. So far, a lot more carbon finance for industrial tree plantations has come from voluntary carbon offsetting than from the Clean Development Mechanism. On the other hand, they have found a big new ally: The Canadian tar sands industry. Or, to be more specific, ConocoPhillips Canada, one of the main tar sands investors. Together, they are now

trying for tar-sands carbon offsets with charcoal – through the Alberta' "tar sands" Offsetting System.[3]

During September, the IBI, together with the state-owned agricultural research institute in Brazil, Embrapa, held their Third International Conference. The main outcome from the conference was an even closer link with 'tar sands offsetting'. The BI hired one of the chief architects of the Alberta offsetting scheme, Keith Driver, as the lead person to devise 'biochar standards'. Interestingly, for all their talk about 'sustainable biochar', they seem to have dropped the idea of 'sustainability standards' for now – they are now only interested in technical 'industry standards' to commercially scale up biochar production as quickly as possible. This approach at least seems more honest than any 'biochar sustainability standards', which would be farcical in the context of the vast land-conversion to plantations being promoted for biochar and the IBI's open links with members of the tar sands industry, one of the most destructive, polluting and climate-destroying industries on the planet.

At the same IBI conference, some of the same people trying to work out the new 'tar sands-charcoal' offsetting deal got to visit what they claim to be their 'inspiration' – ancient soils in Central Amazonia created by indigenous farmers 500-2,500 years ago by mixing charcoal with diverse organic residues. The irony could hardly be greater.

Notes:
1) For more background information about debate about how or whether 'biochar' works, see www.econexus.info/pdf/Agriculture_climate_change_copenhagen_2009.pdf, Chapter 5
2) www.globaljusticeecology.org/pressroom.php?ID=439
3) This collaboration centres on the 'Biochar Protocol' development: http://www.biocharprotocol.com/. Although the IBI is not listed as a partner, they are involved as formal partners of the Carbon War Room.