



Issue 169 - August 2011

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THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: REDD+

In the midst of our sorrow over the loss of our dear friend and colleague Ricardo Carrere, to whom we will dedicate the September issue of the WRM bulletin, the best we can do is to follow in his footsteps on the paths that he opened.

It is quite fitting, then, that in this issue we continue to denounce the REDD and REDD+ mechanisms. As Ricardo himself once said: "If REDD were to be implemented, some 'showcase' projects would provide funding to forest communities, which would be used as publicity for promoting REDD. But these would be the exception to the rule." He also warned of the dangers of indigenous peoples and local communities being stripped of their rights over their forests, in the name of "conservation".

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Over the last five or six years, forests have once again earned a prominent place on the international agenda. But this renewed emphasis has emerged in a very particular way: through discussions over the best way to conserve the carbon stored in forests.

The goal of reducing carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation has led to the development of policies at international climate conferences that have come to stress a term that is rather strange and difficult to understand for many: REDD or, more recently, REDD+.

Although efforts to combat and reduce deforestation are admirable, the fact that these efforts focus primarily on the carbon stored in forests and REDD+ mechanisms makes it clear from the beginning that they will not place any priority on the forest communities and their problems. Nor will they consider the crucial role played by forests in the conservation of most of the world's biodiversity and water resources. REDD+ represents a limited vision of the problem of deforestation that serves the interests of major polluters in the industrialized countries by helping them to avoid the need to change their polluting ways. What's more, REDD+ is creating more problems for forest peoples.

For this issue of the WRM bulletin we decided to analyze some of the "sins" of REDD+, focusing our attention on the risks posed by its implementation for forest peoples, particularly in relation to their land rights and traditional use of forests for their survival. To do so, we wanted to take a closer look at two experiences with REDD projects, one that dates back a number of years, in Brazil, and another, more recent project in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Above all, we wanted to learn more about the views and experiences of the communities who are directly affected. And we have observed that they face numerous serious problems.

After more than five years of following international discussions involving governments, NGOs, researchers, corporations, consulting firms, banks, etc., and reading reports on REDD pilot projects – which are meant to be model experiences that serve as examples to be followed – there is one question that comes to mind: is it possible to "fix" the problems of the REDD+ mechanism, on which enormous amounts of resources continue to be spent for meetings, consultations, conferences and projects?

We believe that the current situation demonstrates more than ever the need to pursue other paths beyond REDD+. First of all, it is crucial to update and analyze the direct and indirect causes of deforestation, both within each individual country and at the international level. This has been scarcely and insufficiently addressed in recent years and without the indispensable participation of the peoples who live in the forests and the organizations who work directly with them on the issue of deforestation.

Second, it is essential to recognize the contribution of forest peoples to the conservation of forests, something that the promoters of REDD+ projects fail to do, because as far as they are concerned, the presence of communities in the forests represents a "problem". This is because, according to the project promoters, the use of the forests by local communities compromises the calculations of the amount of carbon that specialists in the matter estimate to be stored in a determined area of forest involved in a REDD project. What we have observed in practice is a more or less explicit policy of prohibiting communities from access to the forests that they have traditionally used.

The likely outcome that REDD+ will develop exclusively into a market mechanism means that it will simply allow the polluters to continue polluting while compensating for their emissions through the carbon supposedly sequestered in the forests that have been preserved, leading to an increase in industrial production. And this will in turn further delay the implementation of structural measures urgently needed to confront the climate crisis related to the totally undesirable models of production and consumption that benefit a minority of the world population and will end up causing much more destruction of forests than any REDD+ project could ever remedy.

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REDD MENACE THREATENS LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- The 'sins' of the REDD+ approach

The world has been caught in a severe climate crisis as a result of the dramatic increase of anthropogenic (namely, caused by human beings) gases in the atmosphere causing a dangerous rise in the global temperature – what is known as global warming. However, though a global process, it has not been caused so “globally”. Neither all human beings bear the blame for such state of things nor are the ones that historically have contributed most to the problem – industrialized northern countries – taking on their responsibility.

Strong claims – including ours – argue that the ultimate underlying cause of the problem can be traced in the present consumerist system “exported” from northern industrialised countries to the world, where production, commerce and consumption swallow huge quantities of fossil fuels.

The so called international community (organised in the United Nations) has acknowledged the crisis, invested a lot of money in protracted international meetings and proposed a mixture of market-based measures and poor and insufficient reduction commitments to deal with climate change. Failing to deal with the root of the problem, those measures have even allowed polluting countries to evade those reduction commitments. The result is that greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

The UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has lately focused on deforestation and forest degradation as a source of carbon emission. However, recalling what we had said some time ago, the premise that carbon released through deforestation is the same as carbon produced by burning fossil fuels is a faulty premise, because climate change is not the result of emissions from forests, but rather of the constant increase in the total stock of carbon in the atmosphere due to the burning of fossil fuels. It is this carbon, which has been stored underground for millions of years as coal, oil and gas, that is the cause of the problem. The resulting carbon emissions – which do not form part of the natural cycle of carbon continuously released and absorbed by plant life – began to accumulate in the atmosphere and gave rise to global warming, which in turn triggered climate change. To claim that carbon emissions from the use of fossil fuels can be “offset” simply by preventing emissions from deforestation is a false, misleading and lethal argument.(1). This is

obviously not to dismiss the problem of deforestation, however, it must be stressed that REDD is only addressing one minor source of carbon while it also does not tackle the complex set of direct and especially underlying drivers of deforestation.

In 2005, under the UNFCCC COP 11 the so called REDD (standing for reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) strategies entered the scene. Later on, in 2008, COP 13 added the concepts of “conservation, sustainable management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks”, giving rise to what is known as REDD+. Financial incentives have flooded already to a number of projects allegedly intended to conserve the forests in tropical or subtropical southern countries, for the sake of carbon.

REDD+ programs imply complex strategies of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) where national governments are being assisted in their preparation by UN organizations – including FAO, UNEP and UNDP under the UN-REDD program – while the World Bank has been leading the provision of economic incentives through the Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).

While focusing on deforestation in southern countries reduces pressure on industrialised northern countries to cut their own emissions, the REDD+ governing institutions have been empowered to shape and define, validate or marginalise decisions related to land tenure, benefit sharing and forest management in southern countries. Also, a set of principles and standards will define how to measure carbon stocks –as well as who participates in the process, and to what extent. As highlighted in a report on REDD+ by Thompson, Baruah and Carr (2), such control over participation and validation of certain practices, data, and analysis in addressing climate change affects not only local communities but also the states which are constrained by frameworks that undermine their sovereignty as long as those frameworks define what is to be measured and how.

On the other hand, REDD+ projects tend to reinforce the role of the state including many states that do not duly recognize the land rights of forest and forest related peoples who have been indeed true guardians of the forests. Satellite data used by the Woods Hole Research Center and the Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia have shown that forest lands where indigenous rights have been recognized stopped clearing in high-deforestation frontier regions in the Amazon. In spite of that, REDD+ gives economic incentives to governments to leave forests untouched, which will imply eviction and marginalization of forest people. Also repression of traditional forest land uses will inevitably impact on livelihoods and thus food security and sovereignty of local communities as well as on their historical structures and ways of living that nurture their identity. Meanwhile, fossil fuel industries, plantation companies, and other industrial deforesters are overlooked.

Indigenous peoples face also the problem of lack of information. Quoting the mentioned report by Thompson et al: “many criticism of REDD+ activities around the world cite insufficient information being provided to indigenous peoples, resulting in the further marginalization of already vulnerable groups”.

Claims point not only to lack of information. In January, 2010, a Papuan New Guinea native leader of the Kamula Doso Peoples, Abilie Wape, denounced he was forced

at gun point to surrender the carbon rights of his tribe's forest: "They came and got me in the night, police came with a gun. They threatened me. They forced me to get in the vehicle. Then we came in the night to the hotel. They told me: 'You sign. Otherwise, if you don't sign, I'll get a police and lock you up.'"(3)

REDD+ frame may also shape a key issue such as land tenure which is related not only to local communities but also to deforestation. A study by IIED on land tenure in REDD (4) explains that "unclear or insecure tenure may itself promote deforestation. Resource users may have little incentive to protect the resource if they feel they have no stake in it. ... In addition, tenure may influence the distribution of risks, costs and benefits of financial transfers linked to forest conservation. More secure tenure is therefore likely to give local people greater leverage in negotiations with the government and the private sector."

The report, which has identified tenure regimes in seven rainforest countries and some of the challenges they present for REDD, explains that: "As REDD schemes are likely to be regulated by national rather than customary law, a key issue is the extent to which customary tenure systems are recognised and protected under national legislation". And concludes: "It will be hard to determine who should be supported under REDD schemes, e.g. who should get payments, since tenure is unclear on much of the land under threat of deforestation. Experience tells us that, as the value of standing forests or forest land increases, powerful actors tend to capture those values to the detriment of the less powerful forest-dependent poor. If REDD increases value it may also increase conflicts as claimants stand to gain more by winning control. Critical dangers with tenurial uncertainty include: customary rights being violated in the interests of inward investment; community interests being locked into abusive contracts of a long-term nature; and land speculation by investors at the expense of community interests."

As Tom Goldtooth, from the Indigenous Environmental Network stated: "The debate must be about property rights; customary land rights and land tenureship; and how this is defined within the discussions of REDD and forested lands. The insertion of strict language that recognizes the rights of Indigenous People is very important here, because it's not just about full participation. How can you have full participation if you don't have rights?" (5)

A market-based REDD+ - the most probable outcome of the overall process, even for proposals of fund-based REDD+ - will add power to corporate interests as long as they are more equipped with money and expertise than local communities at the time of presenting projects and complying with complex requirements. Thus, business companies enter the scene becoming stakeholders at the same level as communities that have long protected the forest while using it to meet their needs.

For women the impact of market-based mechanisms is twofold. They generally occupy a marginal position in monetary economies as long as their role as caretakers of the family – in charge of rearing the children, cooking, fetching water, taking care of the old people, and so on – and the forests is economically invisible. Also, they seldom participate in the settlement of transactions. Those in a weaker initial negotiating position are more likely to lose.

While a major sin of REDD+'s approach as an alleged solution to deforestation is that it neglects the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation ultimately putting the blame on forest communities, other major sin is that REDD+ has opened the door to monoculture tree plantations.

The Kyoto Protocol adheres to FAO's definition of forests that includes any area with a certain quantity of trees. Thus, even alien genetically modified industrial tree plantations are considered a kind of forests – planted forests. REDD+ activities will likely adopt this definition, even more as REDD+'s approach reinforces the reductionist view of forests – now converted into just “carbon stocks”.

We have mentioned some major sins of REDD+ but maybe the worst of all is that it fails to tackle the urgent problem that it is meant to solve: climate change. In times when a concerted action on a large scale in many countries – mainly the ones with more emission levels – is urgently needed, REDD+ becomes a false solution that diverts the attention from the real measure: reduce carbon emissions at source.

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- (1) "From climate change to climate disaster: A thin oil line", WRM Bulletin 160
- (2) "Seeing REDD+ as a Project of environmental governance", Mary C. Thompson, Manali Baruah, Edward R. Carr, 2010, pp 100-110, ELSEVIER, www.sciencedirect.com
- (3) "Carbon Markets Violate Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Threaten Cultural Survival", Press Release, 1/13/10, Indigenous Environmental Network, <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/pressroom.php?ID=345>
- (4) "Tenure in REDD – Start-point or afterthought?" Cotula, L. and Mayers, J. 2009, Natural Resource Issues No. 15, International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK, <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/13554IIED.pdf>
- (5) "The REDD train is going pretty fast and it's left us at the station": Interview with Tom B.K. Goldtooth", by Chris Lang, <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2009/01/14/interview-with-tom-bk-goldtooth/>

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- The Conservation International REDD pilot project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – a very different kind of Walt Disney production

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Conservation International (CI) is promoting a REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) pilot project financed by the Walt Disney media and entertainment company. The project is being implemented in the Tayna and Kisimba-Ikobo nature reserves, and is one of the first of its kind in the region.

Despite the glowing presentations of the project available on the internet, little is known about what is happening on the ground, and particularly with regard to the local communities directly impacted by the project. In Africa in general, and the DRC especially, communities who live in and depend on forests for their survival are waging an arduous struggle for recognition of their rights to their lands and to the use

of the forests.

This is why WRM decided to undertake a case study (1) to learn more about the impacts of the CI-Disney REDD project, by listening and giving a voice to representatives of local communities and other organizations involved, in order to contribute to the debate on REDD at the local and national level in the DRC, as well as internationally.

The importance of forests in the Congo and the rights of local communities

The DRC has the largest forested area in Africa, with various different types of forest that are extremely rich in biodiversity. Between 35 and 40 million people depend on these forests for their survival, as a source of food, medicinal plants, building materials for housing, and fuel. For many communities, the forests also have important spiritual, cultural and social significance.

The struggle of local communities to guarantee their legal rights to the lands where they live and the forests they use is a difficult one. The constitution of the DRC establishes a certain recognition of these rights, although all land in the country is technically the property of the Congolese state. Article 22 of the Forest Code stipulates that communities may obtain concession titles to the lands they occupy and use, based on their customary rights to those lands, although the modalities by which these rights are exercised remain under discussion. Meanwhile, in practice, the right of communities to occupy the lands they have traditionally occupied and to make traditional use of the forests is being violated, and countless communities have seen their lands transformed, for example, into national parks. Although the law obliges the state to consult with local communities over the creation of such protected areas, these continue to be created, and most often through the expulsion of the communities who live there. There are currently more than 26 million hectares of so-called "classified" forests, such as national parks, reserves and other protected areas, where the user rights of local communities are extremely limited, or use of the forests is completely prohibited.

In addition to this, for more than a decade, the DRC has been caught up in armed conflicts involving neighbouring countries, fuelled by competition for control over natural resources, primarily minerals, that are highly sought after by transnational companies. This has led to enormous suffering for the population, especially in the eastern region of the country. Armed groups continue to be active in this region, including the area of the Kisimbo-Ikobo reserve, creating an ongoing climate of insecurity on the site where the CI-Disney REDD project is being developed.

The REDD process in the DRC

The DRC was the first country in the Congo Basin to benefit from REDD financing through the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility or FCPF (2)(USD 200,000) and the UN-REDD Programme (3) (USD 3.4 million), with the goal of implementing the REDD mechanism in the country post-2012. Additional financing for pilot projects from Norway and the United Kingdom is planned but still not operational. The various actors involved in promoting REDD generally grant significant importance to pilot projects, including the CI-Disney project.

It is striking how forest peoples in the DRC are singled out in this official process as the main drivers of deforestation, due to their traditional farming system of shifting cultivation. This is the case, for example, in the 2009 report prepared by the U.S. consulting firm McKinsey on the potential of REDD+ in the DRC, which also downplays the responsibility of logging companies in deforestation. The McKinsey report also recommends afforestation and reforestation through large-scale intensive agriculture, particularly the establishment of monoculture oil palm plantations, on seven million hectares of supposedly “marginal” land and another four million hectares of purportedly degraded forests, despite the major impacts that oil palm expansion is causing on the environment and local communities in Africa (4) and the negative impacts also documented in Asia and Latin America.(5)

The CI-Disney REDD pilot project in the DRC

The pilot project in question is the result of an agreement signed between the Walt Disney Company and CI for a total of USD 7 million. According to the marketing information released over the internet, this investment is aimed at “protecting forests” in Peru and the DRC. The protection and sustainable management of more than 500,000 hectares of rainforest will reportedly prevent more than 900,000 tons of CO₂ from being released into the atmosphere.

In the case of the DRC, the project aims to protect two so-called “community reserves” in the eastern province of Kivu North, the Tayna and Kisimba-Ikobo reserves, while improving social services, supporting local development and reducing poverty in local communities. Disney will be providing initial funding of USD 4 million; it is worth noting that the company’s net income in 2010 was USD 7.59 billion. The company has stated that this investment forms part of its environmental policy, which includes the goal of cutting its carbon emissions in half.

The DRC project is being managed in partnership with the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI) and the Union of Associations for Gorilla Conservation and Development in Eastern DRC (UGADEC), a federation of local associations that work for conservation and community development in the region, thus contributing to the concept of “community reserve”. USAID (6) is also participating through its CARPE (7) programme.

What is a “community reserve” in this context?

A “community reserve is an area managed by local communities, divided into three zones: a fully protected integral zone, where all human activity is prohibited; a buffer zone, where some human activity is allowed but is controlled; and a development zone designated for “permanent production” through economic activity and infrastructural improvements.

The Tayna “Community Reserve”, which covers 90,000 hectares, was initially created in 1998 by promoters of the idea of this type of “reserve”, with the participation of local traditional leaders. The Tayna reserve is considered the first initiative of this kind in the DRC and even in Central Africa. In 2006, this “community reserve” was recognized by the state and transformed into a nature reserve, called the Tayna Nature Reserve (RNT), through a decree issued by the Ministry of Environment and

Nature Conservation. This decree defined the area as the property of the state but transferred management of the reserve from the competent state agency, the ICCN (7), to a “community” organization called RGT (Tayna Gorilla Reserve). Neighbouring communities were immediately benefited by a number of projects, such as the supply of electrical power in a few communities through a small hydroelectric plant, the creation of a nature conservation university, and improvements in healthcare and education infrastructure, among others.

The second community reserve involved in the REDD project is the Kisimbo-Ikobo Primate Reserve (RPKI) (8), which covers an area of 137,000 hectares. It was created for the purpose of expanding the conservation model established in Tayna, located further north in the same province. The RPKI, like the Tayna reserve, was officially designated as a nature reserve by ministerial decree, in 2006. The organization RECOPRIBA (9) was established to manage the reserve.

The two reserves form part of a nature conservation strategy aimed at creating a corridor to link Kahusi Biega National Park (PNKB) and Maiko National Park.

In the case of the RPKI, a significant number of traditional leaders, women and men in local communities have been opposed to its creation since 2003, as reflected in a vast accumulation of letters of protest to the authorities and subsequent letters of response. At one point, the Ministry of Justice went so far as to suspend RECOPRIBA, but this did not prevent the creation of the Kisimba-Ikobo nature reserve in 2006 by the Ministry of Environment and Nature Conservation. This particular move served to further exacerbate the ongoing conflicts, because it severely restricted the communities’ rights to the use of the forest, which they consider to be a veritable attack on their way of life.

The struggle waged by the communities of Kisimba and Ikobo is now aimed at revoking the creation of the nature reserve and replacing it with a system of community forest management, in which the communities themselves exercise control over the area, based on their constitutionally guaranteed rights. The agreement for the creation of the nature reserve should be overturned for the simple reason that it was signed by only two local chiefs, supposedly in representation of all of the communities, although they were not specifically authorized to do so.

Impacts of the REDD project on local communities

Although the REDD project agreement between Disney and CI was signed in 2009, the local population cannot actually comment on its impacts yet, since, according to UGADEC, the Project Design Document (PDD), which “technically” describes the REDD project in terms of prevented carbon emissions, is still being formulated. As a result, the first project payments are not expected until 2012 at the earliest. A socioeconomic survey is also being conducted to determine the actions to be undertaken to benefit the communities.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that since this REDD project was first announced, its promoters have been carrying out numerous activities that primarily emphasize the sensitization of the local communities, something that was already being carried out with regard to the preservation of gorillas and is now continuing in

relation to the forest in general, for the purposes of the REDD project. According to the project's promoters, an agreement signed by community leaders provides concrete proof of the free and prior consent of the communities.

But we were able to determine that the consent for the implementation of the REDD project in the Kisimba-Ikobo reserve has numerous flaws and is, at best, only partial. Moreover, the process has only deepened an ongoing conflict in which land and forest use rights are at stake. Part of the community is opposed to the REDD project because it merely reinforces the creation of a "community" reserve which, in fact, has stripped these communities of their rights over their ancestral lands and forests. In a recent letter addressed to the governor of the province by dissatisfied communities from this reserve, they state that they are opposed to the REDD project because it does not respect their rights to the land and they have not been given the opportunity to express their demands.

The significant percentage of the population of Kisimba and Ikobo who already opposed the creation of the nature reserve and now the REDD project are being even further marginalized. The REDD project promoters seem to simply ignore the fact that this part of the population did not provide its consent for the project, and they are doing nothing to attempt to resolve the conflict. On the contrary, UGADEC officials announced that they would soon be initiating the "participatory" physical demarcation of the Kisimba-Ikobo reserve.

Even among those who are not opposed to the REDD project, there does not seem to be a very clear idea of what it will entail, particularly regarding the responsibilities of the population in the project area. Nevertheless, there are high expectations, as reflected in the comments of one of the community members interviewed:

We were informed about the REDD project and they told us that there are going to be a huge amount of benefits for us. They told us not to attack the forest anymore, but to protect it, the same way we protect the gorillas. (...) They told us that trees produce carbon, which is important for the atmosphere. Everyone is going to be well off and our lives are going to change. They told us the project is going to last 20 years, and it started three years ago and we still haven't seen anything. So we can see that the benefits are taking a long time to reach us and people are starting to get discouraged. But we keep on hoping, because they have filled us with hope.

Comments like these demonstrate the serious lack of information available on the project. The greatest source of information seems to be the internet, in a region with little or no internet access. Moreover, local actors have no knowledge of the contract signed between CI and Disney, much less the project budget, and that includes even the local leaders involved in the creation of the reserves. As a result, they have no real way of evaluating the implications of the project for the community. As one local actor commented, "CI and DFGFI have kept a lot of information to themselves."

There was also little clarity among the community leaders interviewed about the division of responsibilities and tasks among CI, DFGFI, UGADEC, RGT and RPKI. All that several were able to say was that CI is responsible for the finances and DFGFI is handling the technical and administrative end. In the words of one local leader: "*It is our forest and other people are managing it in our place.*"

In the meantime, it was clear that for most of the people we spoke to who are directly involved in the implementation of the project, a REDD project is synonymous with the sale of carbon credits, which means it is necessary to calculate the amount of carbon stored in the forest and the amount that can be traded on the carbon market. But what is striking is that nobody seems to be concerned about who holds the rights to the carbon that would be “bought” by Disney, something that obviously has implications for the distribution of the fees paid by the company for these credits. If this point is not clarified, it could potentially lead to new conflicts in the future.

Finally, it was observed that while the men in local communities have little information about REDD, the women have even less. During a conversation with the members of a women’s association based in the area surrounding the Tayna reserve, one of the women stated, “We have never heard of REDD.” This is remarkable, considering the fundamental role played by women in forest conservation.

Final considerations

The arrival of this REDD pilot project in the eastern DRC has created a great many expectations among the various actors involved, especially among local communities. Up to now, however, the project has contributed more to bolstering the image of CI and Disney as champions of “community” forest protection.

In the meantime, there is a serious conflict brewing over rights to the land and forests, involving a significant part of the population of the communities of Kisimba and Ikobo. This conflict urgently needs to be settled by the authorities.

Indeed, experience has shown that in the logic of REDD projects, local communities turn into an “obstacle”. Studies carried out as part of the official REDD process in the DRC have even identified local communities as largely responsible for deforestation. Under these circumstances, the struggle of a significant part of the communities of Kisimba and Ikobo to implement a different kind of forest management, based on respect for their customary rights to the land and to use of the forests, becomes even more of an uphill battle. Legal and practical measures are urgently needed to make it possible to implement their proposal for genuine community forest management. This proposal is supported and actively promoted by numerous local NGOs in the region, such as Réseau CREF, who share the conviction that it is not only crucial for the future of these communities, but for the conservation of the DRC’s forests as well.

Finally, the survival of the forests and the communities who depend on them in the DRC cannot be allowed to become hostage to the sale of carbon credits under the logic of REDD. It is simply unacceptable for local communities who have already suffered so much from years of armed conflict and violence to be forced to endure even more suffering, in order to allow a U.S. corporation to continue polluting the atmosphere while boosting its image as a protector of the forests through a relatively minor investment.

(1) This article is based on a case study on the CI-Disney REDD pilot project in the DRC undertaken by WRM in May 2011. The final report on the case study, authored by Belmond Tchoumba, will be published by WRM in September 2011.

- (2) Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
- (3) A United Nations programme created to assist countries in preparing and implementing national REDD+ strategies.
- (4) See Oil Palm in Africa: past, present and future scenarios, available at: www.wrm.org.uy
- (5) For more information, visit: www.wrm.org.uy
- (6) United States Agency for International Development
- (7) Central African Regional Program for the Environment
- (8) Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature
- (9) Bakumbule Community Primate Reserve

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- Forest carbon project in Paraná, Brazil: Reduction of deforestation and persecution of local communities

In 1999, a number of years before the emergence of REDD, one of the world's first forest carbon projects was launched. A joint initiative of Brazilian NGO *Sociedade de Pesquisa em Vida Selvagem e Educação Ambiental* (Society for Wildlife Research and Environmental Education, SPVS) and U.S.-based NGO The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the project is located on the coast of the southern Brazilian state of Paraná, more specifically, in the municipalities of Antonina and Guaraqueçaba.

With funding from three U.S. corporations – General Motors, American Electric Power and Chevron – SPVS acquired a total of 18,600 hectares of land. The organization claims that through its conservation efforts and activities to restore degraded areas, 860,000 tons of carbon have already been removed from the atmosphere (1). Under the logic of REDD projects, the carbon credits generated would be used by the U.S. corporations that provided the financing to “offset” or compensate for part of their contaminating emissions. However, there is little information available on either the SPVS website or the sites of the corporations involved regarding the actual amounts transferred to the NGO by these corporations. The local communities we visited also had no knowledge of this, which demonstrates a lack of information and transparency.

The SPVS website (2) reports that, according to the Brazilian Forestry Service, the project falls under the category of “REDD actions that have generated good results.” However, the project has caused devastating impacts on the local communities who live around the SPVS forest reserves.

Brief historical background

Since the colonization of the region by the Portuguese, the Paraná coastal area has been inhabited by so-called *caiçara* (3) communities, indigenous communities and quilombola communities (made up by escaped African slaves and their descendants). These different communities practice agricultural and extractive activities. They live in harmony with the forest, where they grow subsistence crops, mainly cassava, through the traditional farming system of shifting cultivation. From the Mata Atlântica or Atlantic Forest they gather palm hearts for food, vines for craft

making, and wood for building houses, fences and fishing canoes. They hunt and fish to feed their families.

Obviously, these communities depend a great deal on the forest for their survival, and they have developed a relationship of harmonious coexistence with it. Proof of this is the fact that this region is one of the most well-preserved areas of the Atlantic Forest biome, which has suffered a higher degree of destruction than any other biome in Brazil.

These communities had never bothered to register or fence the lands where they live, since they considered this territory to be an area of shared use, belonging to everyone. Most of the lands were legally classified as *devolutas*, or publicly owned, on which the families lived with their belongings that were passed down from generation to generation. They worked the land, sometimes individually as a family unit, or sometimes collectively, practicing itinerant agriculture.

The arrival of the ranchers

One of the first major changes in the region began in the 1960s with the arrival of loggers and, especially, ranchers. These ranchers began to register and take over control of the land, in many cases through *grilagem* (illegal registration and appropriation of land), a common practice in rural areas of Brazil. As a consequence, the local communities were threatened and many families were forced off of their lands. The ranchers used *jagunços* (hired killers) and even water buffaloes to invade and take over the properties of small farmers. Ranchers in this region opted to raise water buffalo instead of cattle, because they are heartier and more resilient animals and thus better suited to the local conditions in the deforested areas, which are prone to flooding, making access and locomotion difficult.

The arrival of SPVS – and its promises

In the late 1990s, the SPVS arrived in the region and began to buy up large areas of land from the ranchers. It also managed to buy up a certain amount of land from *posseiros* (farmers without official land ownership documents), mainly from those who felt pressured by the NGO. According to local inhabitants, at the beginning, the SPVS provided jobs for 47 people from the community, paying them slightly more than the minimum wage. Three of the employees were women, who were paid even lower salaries than the men. The SPVS promised that these jobs would last for 40 years, the planned lifetime of the project. Most of the local community members hired were employed as forest rangers. In addition to providing employment, the SPVS promised it would improve the incomes and lives of local families.

The project's impacts on the community

In reality, however, the arrival of the SPVS dealt a heavy blow to local communities. As the NGO began to buy up land in the area, the communities living nearby gradually lost access to the abundant forest and the rivers; in other words, they began to lose their freedom, their autonomy, their right to freely move about and their right to their own way of life. They even lost the right to cut down native trees on their own properties, as in the case of a local inhabitant who had planted a grove of juçara

palm, a native tree used for harvesting palm hearts, for self-sustenance. Today, he is prohibited from cutting down these trees, even though they are located on his own land.

To intimidate the local communities into submission, the SPVS brought in the environmental police of the state of Paraná, known as the “Força Verde” or “Green Force”. Their persecution of the communities continues until today, with Força Verde officers going so far as to forcibly enter and search private homes without due authorization.

A local community member reports:

They wanted us to collaborate with them, and we agreed to collaborate (...) but then they started sending the guards in. Around three days went by and they started to send the guards to my house. They came in saying that I had hidden things there, it was completely wrong, if the door was closed they would come in anyway. They would bang on the door and say they had a court order, they didn't care about anything, they would just come right in. (...) The Força Verde came into our house numerous times, not once or twice, many times. (...) If there was any kind of weapon in the house, they would grab it and take it with them. (...) You couldn't even have a knife, they would take it away, they wanted everything. (...) They never showed us anything, they just turned up and came right into the house. Once when I wasn't home they came in holding a gun. My brother-in-law was in bed, the door was ajar like that, my father was there outside. They came along, pushed the door, banged on it until the latch came open. My brother-in-law was sick, with the flu and a headache. They showed him a gun and he said, “What's going on, I'm sick and you break in like this.” (...) And they showed up at my house like that numerous times. Collaboration? That kind of collaboration isn't good for anything, it's just harassment. It would be better to end it. And they tried to fool a lot of people that way.

Another community member told us that her husband was handcuffed in their home by the Força Verde, who claimed that they were just doing their job. Another time, when he cut down a tree to build a canoe, he was imprisoned for 11 days, and had to pay bail in order to be released. Their lives today are filled with hardships and fear: if they stay at home, they have no means of survival, but if her husband goes out to look for work elsewhere, she and her children will be left alone, frightened and unsafe. This also underscores how the impacts of the SPVS project and the persecution accompanying it affect women and families as a whole.

Many families have been so traumatized that they have chosen to move away from the place where they have lived for generations. Families who used to grow cassava and then produce and sell cassava flour now have to buy all of the food they eat, including cassava flour. The resulting change in dietary habits is one of the causes of increased health problems, according to the local inhabitants. Some of them now suffer from high blood pressure, stress and other ailments that were previously unknown among these communities. In addition, as more and more local families move away and the communities grow smaller, middle-class families from Curitiba,

the state capital, have begun to buy up land and houses where they can spend weekends and holidays.

The promises of improved living conditions and opportunities for income generation gave rise to a handful of initiatives that gradually dwindled out over the years. A women's group was organized so they could earn income through dressmaking, and while the project lasted for a short time, it has now ceased to exist, according to a number of women from the communities. The promise of employment with the SPVS was not kept, either. Former employees from the communities report that almost all of them were fired, and only seven community members still work for the NGO. The only initiative that seems to have prospered in any way is a honey production project, but it does not directly involve the most heavily affected communities.

The communities fight back

In spite of the difficulties they face, local communities have managed to resist the pressures exerted by the SPVS, which seems to be determined to drive all of them out of the area. One group of local inhabitants organized in a rather special way. Near the beginning of the last decade, a ranch owner in the municipality of Antonina wanted to sell his land to the SPVS, which would have led to the eviction of the families living there. The local communities joined together and with the support of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) they occupied the land in 2003. Today there are 20 families living in the camp established there, which is named after late environmental activist José Lutzenberger. They continue to fight for the camp to be officially designated as an agrarian reform settlement by the Brazilian government.

During the community's arduous struggle against the pressures of the ranch owner, the SPVS and environmental agencies, a series of environmental crimes committed by the ranch owner – such as the diversion of a river and the indiscriminate use of toxic agrochemicals – were reported to the environmental authorities, but went completely ignored. Nevertheless, the camp's families have continued to develop their community. They have carried out small reforestation projects, and have decided to work collectively on the basis of an agroforestry system, combining organic farming with the cultivation of trees. Each family will also have a small individual parcel of land to meet their own basic subsistence needs.

The area occupied by the camp borders on the SPVS reserve. According to the local inhabitants, the forested areas under the control of the communities are in better condition than those controlled by the SPVS.

The future

Near one of the local communities there is a research centre, in the middle of the forest, where SPVS is carrying out studies on Atlantic Forest tree species, according to the inhabitants. This research is being financed by HSBC, a private international bank, through the HSBC Climate Partnership programme. According to the HSBC Brazil website, this is an "innovative environmental programme" aimed at "the preservation of the planet." (4)

In the meantime, the future of the local communities is seriously endangered if the

SPVS model of forest preservation, which has the full support of state authorities, particularly the environmental and police agencies, continues to dominate the region. It is absolutely urgent to stop the abuse and persecution of these communities. As the testimonies of local inhabitants of the region demonstrate, they are being subjected to a host of serious violations of human rights, including social, cultural and environmental rights.

In the words of one community member:

Yes, we have always preserved the forest, except that sometimes we need to cut a few trees too, sometimes we need to build a house, we need wood. But it's not allowed, so things are difficult. (...) Before we would clear a few trees to plant our crops, but we can't do that anymore. When the SPVS arrived, that was the end of everything. In the place where my father lived, it's impossible to live now. Before he had his crops, he planted cassava, he planted beans, but now they can't plant anything. (...) Before he didn't have to buy beans, he didn't have to buy corn, he planted lots of vegetables, he cleared a few trees and planted, and he got most of his food from the land. And now he can't plant anything, he has to buy everything. Rice and beans and cassava, all the things he used to plant. (...) Before there were no diseases and now a lot of people are sick all the time. (...) They promised that they were going to help my father but up until now we haven't seen any help, things have just gotten worse and worse. They said they were going to help, and then the Força Verde came and wanted to take my father to prison on top of everything else. That's the help they've given us...

To combat global warming, what is urgently needed is for the U.S. corporations involved in the SPVS project to immediately start reducing their carbon emissions, instead of compensating for those emissions by purchasing carbon credits generated in an area where the people are being punished for something worthy of respect: their forest conservation practices.

(1) http://www.revistavisaoambiental.com.br/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=643:projeto-de-carbono-colabora-com-o-desenvolvimento-sustentavel-de-comunidades-no-parana&catid=5:noticias&Itemid=5

(2) http://www.spvs.org.br/download/boletins/bol_jan10.html :

(3) Communities that have emerged from genetic and cultural mixing among the first Portuguese settlers and Indians who lived on the coast. They live in isolation, practicing different activities for their survival. (source: <http://www.ilhabela.com.br/CULTURA/index.html>)

(4) <http://www.hsbc.com.br/1/2/portal/pt/sobre-o-hsbc/sustentabilidade/meio-ambiente/hsbc-climate-partnership>

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- Towards September 21

As September 21, the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, draws ever closer, we continue to collect reflections, experiences and testimonies that capture the prodigious life of forests, so utterly different from the sterile uniformity of industrial tree plantations.

Myths, legends and stories comprise a rich treasury of knowledge and collective observation that preserves essential and symbolic elements of everything of significance to human beings.

And that is undoubtedly why the forest is so often reflected there, with its lights and shadows, its mysteries and aromas, defining its enormous diversity and its role as a home and source of sustenance for countless plant, animal and human lives.

We invite you to send us stories, legends, myths, poems about the forest, the woods, the jungle, to let the people who know them and love them be the ones to define them.

We also want to remind you about the various other activities in our campaign for a true definition of forests, which you can find here: <http://wrm.org.uy/forests.html>

*Because the rainforest is lung,
oxygen, teat,
we must defend the rainforest*

*The rainforest is sweet earth,
fresh water, planetary root,
inhabited vessel, plume of freedom,
loving hurricane still unknown,
and nest of birds with voice and vote.*

*The rainforest is not a joke, not a game.
The rainforest is not a mute river, nor a blind spear.
The rainforest is global hierarchy,
womb and seminal root.*

*The rainforest is eternal, germinal.
Brilliant ethnicity and mythical cosmogony.
We must defend the rainforest.*

Translation of the poem by Carlos Villacorta Valles, a native of Moyobamba, San Martín region, Peru, director of the literary group Generación Caoba

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