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OUR VIEWPOINT

- September 21st - International Day against Monoculture Tree Plantations

This September we pay tribute once again to the men and women around the world who have taken up different struggles against monoculture tree plantations in defense of their territories, their forests and their way of life, as opposed to the greed of big corporations and investors who seek to exploit the same land for their own benefit.

This date was not chosen randomly in some office, but rather commemorates a meeting in Brazil in 2004 among people who had witnessed the direct impact of monoculture eucalyptus on their lives. They felt a specific date should be set to commemorate their struggle and serve as an additional means of reinforcement for

the resistance effort and their battle to recover the territories lost to eucalyptus trees. Inspired by the events of that day in 2004, several battles have since been waged in Brazil to recover territories, in addition to actions taken by other resistance movements. With the idea of reinforcing the claim worldwide, the WRM decided to make September 21st an International Day.

Those familiar with the life of communities affected by monoculture oil palm, eucalyptus, rubber, acacia and pine trees have no trouble understanding the reasons behind such conflicts. The companies responsible for monoculture trees seek to take over the territories of native populations and control their ways of life and often end up dismantling and dividing communities.

The increasingly vertiginous pace at which these plantations are multiplying is the outcome of a process geared by multi-national companies, who profit from the "certification seals" that legitimize their actions. The latest report by the WRM (1) indicates that, in the past 20 years, the surface area covered by plantations around the world has quadrupled, with oil palm and eucalyptus trees in the lead. If it weren't for the resistance shown by the communities in different locations and countries, these areas would certainly be much larger.

We would like to take this opportunity to warn everyone about a new form of expansion in particular: large-scale monoculture tree plantations in Latin America, Africa and Asia, intended to generate energy sources for North American and European countries, and some in Asia. Instead of reducing their astronomic consumption of fossil fuel-sourced energy to make it more efficient, these countries are determined to maintain their current levels of consumption by resorting to so-called bio-fuel produced by tree plantations.

Trendy terms such as "renewable" and "green" are taking us back to colonial times, when it was common practice to take over vast territories belonging to indigenous communities in pursuit of guaranteeing the raw materials needed by the few in the countries of the Northern Hemisphere. The current situation should be seen as a direct attack on the food sovereignty of entire populations aimed at "feeding" the vehicles and power plants in industrialized countries with high levels of energy consumption.

This bulletin is intended to open a forum for debate on the worldwide battle against both bio-fuel plantations as well as "traditional" plantations involved in cellulose production, which continue to multiply. In the end, the communities whose everyday life is affected by plantations couldn't care less about the specific use for which the plantations are intended—what they are concerned about is safeguarding and recovering their territories. We and many others share and support this aspiration, and hope this International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations serves to raise awareness and reinforce the struggle.

(1) "An overview of industrial tree plantations in the global South: conflicts, trends, and resistance struggles" has been written by WRM under the auspices of a project called EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade, see www.ejolt.org). The report can be accessed at <http://www.ejolt.org/2012/06/an-overview-of-industrial-tree-plantations-in-the-global-south-conflicts-trends-and->

MONOCULTURE TREE PLANTATIONS: CHALLENGES, CONFLICTS AND RESISTANCE

- Unilever's greenwash with RSPO

Baby food scandals in Africa, tropical forest destruction for candy bars: There are companies like Nestle that attract scandals like light the flies.

On the other hand there are the Teflon-corporations, such as the American Newsweek magazine once called multinational corporations who do basically exactly the same as their competitors, but on which critical allegations do not stick. Unilever is the prototype for this. Unilever is even praised by major international environmental organizations like WWF for its environmental commitment. How can that be, although Unilever is one of the largest palm oil consumers in the world?

First of all, Unilever has contracts with scandal firms like the palm oil multi-national Wilmar. Wilmar has a record of continuing human rights violations and illegal logging and is the world's largest palm oil trader. With the help of police units, Wilmar destroyed the village of Sungai Beruang as well as neighbouring settlements which were located within the palm oil plantation, in order to break the inhabitants' resistance to the palm industry [Robin Wood press release at <http://www.robinwood.de/Newsdetails.13+M55ead9b1d73.0.html>]. Friends of the Earth have documented serious human rights violations of Wilmar in Uganda [<http://www.foei.org/en/resources/publications/pdfs/2012/land-life-justice/view>]. Unilever is one of Wilmar's largest customers and is jointly responsible for the crimes and violations of its supplier.

At the same time the palm oil boom has been a disaster for the world's climate. The conversion of rainforest into oil palm plantations has made Indonesia the third largest emitter of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. This does not prevent Unilever CEO Paul Polmann to celebrate himself as protector of the earth's atmosphere at the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009.

Besides this, Unilever is engaged against agro-energy but this doesn't follow altruistic motives. Instead of the threat for the world's food supply it's the cheap access to raw materials that worries consumer food companies such as Unilever.

Unilever's greenwash communication primarily relies on the RSPO (Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil) certification scheme. Unilever admits that the global palm oil production causes serious problems, but also points out that these can be solved with the help of the RSPO. From the perspective of Robin Wood and its partners in Indonesia, the RSPO is merely a helpful tool for Unilever to greenwash its businesses as usual. The following five points explain why:

RSPO membership is industry dominated

581 companies face only 26 NGOs and 11 of the 16 seats at the RSPO board are reserved for banks and palm oil business. The RSPO is chaired by Unilever and not by a neutral party. This means that Unilever has significant control over this certification scheme.

Weak criteria

Because of these structures, the criteria are weak. Palm oil companies that have massive conflicts with local people receive the RSPO label. In addition, RSPO allows forests to be converted for new plantations and tolerates the use of extremely toxic agro chemicals such as Paraquat. No wonder, as the manufacturer of Paraquat (Syngenta) is itself a member of the RSPO.

Dependent certification bodies

The companies that apply for a RSPO certification pay the certification bodies. This direct commercial relationship leads to a race to the bottom: The certification body that overlooks as many errors in favour of its client, receives more lucrative contracts. An example of this is provided by the RSPO accredited certification body TÜV. ROBIN WOOD has reviewed the actions of this certifier in October 2011 in a case study in Sumatra and alarming deficiencies were found [Statement Robin Wood zum TÜV Rheinland at http://www.robinwood.de/uploads/media/Statement_Robin_Wood]. Key players at RSPO were informed about the failures of TÜV in Indonesia, but so far without any consequences.

From right-holder to stake-holder

The RSPO turns in his practice local people with land rights (right holder) into people with legitimate interests (stake holder). At the roundtable local people are forced to negotiate with representatives of the mighty palm oil lobby on their rights. This implies, that a fair compromise could be found somewhere in the middle between aggressor and victim. In this scenario local people can only lose. Human rights are not negotiable.

The over-exploitation continues - RSPO promotes the expansion

The most important contribution of a sustainability label for palm oil would be to stop further expansion of the palm oil industry. This is a clear demand of Indonesian environmental and human rights organizations like Cappa, Walhi, Save Our Borneo or Perkumpulan Hijau together with Robin Wood. On the opposite, companies that are members of the RSPO are among the drivers of the expansion for new plantations. Current examples can be found in the Indonesian province of West Papua. RSPO members like Wilmar, Medco or Rajawali started a giant palm oil project at the expense of the local population and the last remaining rainforest. [<https://awasmiffee.potager.org>].

Conclusion: NGOs and the broader public should not be blinded by Unilever's Greenwash strategy. Corporations such as Unilver by making contracts with the

global palm oil business are co-responsible for the displacement of people, clear-cut of forests and contamination with toxic pesticides using the RSPO to greenwash these practices.

By Peter Gerhardt, peter.gerhardt@ovi.com, published by EJOLT (Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade), <http://www.ejolt.org/2012/09/unilever-and-how-to-greenwash-tropical-devastations/>

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- Energy plantations: Another huge new threat to our planet

Problems arising from the social and environmental impacts caused by industrial timber and pulpwood plantations have been well documented over the past 20 years. Now there is ample evidence that the temporary financial benefits generated by monoculture plantation projects which mostly accrue to affluent consumers of their artificially cheap products, the corporate plantation owners and their banks, are heavily outweighed by the costs of their negative environmental and social effects, which are long-term or permanent.

Nevertheless it seems that this knowledge has done little to discourage further investment in more of the same destructive industrial monocultures. Instead there has been a rush to expand the area under such plantations, with the ill-informed encouragement of United Nations bodies such as the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and of course the World Bank. One of the factors motivating this trend is the assumption being promoted by the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) that tree plantations are effective in reducing carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions, despite the fact that they are just a temporary timber crop that will be logged and, earlier or later, converted into even more CO² emissions on a continuous basis.

This nonsensical notion has been further justified by the "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol, which has approved the 'Afforestation/Reforestation' methodology as a way for polluting industries in the North to be able to continue emitting greenhouse gases whilst destroying biodiversity, water resources and local subsistence economies in poor Southern nations. What makes this part of the CDM even crazier is that the invasive alien tree plantations that are being established in functional grasslands, severely degrade the environment and in fact cause the release of CO² and methane into the atmosphere. This is in addition to the problems created through the displacement of sustainable small-scale agricultural communities, excessive water consumption by the plantation trees, and the loss of topsoil and permanent damage to the fertility of the land that they cause.

However, the greed and convoluted thinking that has been used to legitimise this system has also been employed to find new ways to prop up and to perpetuate the wasteful consumption of energy in so-called developed countries. This latest false climate change solution is generally misrepresented as 'renewable energy' from

biomass, which can take the form of liquid fuels such as soybean or rapeseed oil, or ethanol produced from sugar cane or sugar beet, otherwise known as 'agrofuels'. A worrisome aspect of this approach is that while it appears to be based on noble intentions, in reality it seeks to maintain high levels of wasteful energy use by simply replacing fossil fuels with biomass-based fuels. Thus, under the guise of the biggest scam of the 21st century, known euphemistically as the 'green economy', these energy plantations give those countries that have already done the most damage to ecosystems and to the global climate, license to continue plundering the resources of Southern nations.

African countries are particularly vulnerable to this onslaught, with land and resource grabs taking place with increasing frequency. Vast areas are being targeted for ethanol crops, especially sugar cane, whilst massive timber plantations for the production of woodchips to be burned in former coal-fired power stations in Europe and the UK are in the pipeline. Though huge new discoveries of fossil gas and oil deposits in Africa will help feed the global energy juggernaut, it is very unlikely that the greedy grip of old and new colonial forces on African land, minerals and water will just go away.

The Threat of Energy Plantation Stupidity in South Africa

Most of the Energy-from-biomass projects being planned or considered in South Africa are aimed at increasing total energy consumption rather than for reducing the production and consumption of fossil fuels. There is an unwelcome prospect of even more fossil fuels being consumed via the use of shale gas obtained by 'fracking' for which the South African government has issued a number of exploration permits.

The main drivers of plans to use biomass-based energy derived from large-scale crop or tree plantations are a mandatory biofuel blending policy of the government, and the desire of various polluting industries to green-wash their excessive energy-consumption by making small token changes to the mix of energy used in their factories, such as by adding small amounts of wood-waste to the coal they burn. These pathetic efforts have also been inspired by the ridiculous notion that a dirty polluting pulp mill can earn carbon offset credits under the CDM by making dubious emission reductions on one level, whilst in fact increasing overall emissions!

However the biggest threat to rural communities and to the natural environment in South Africa is the ambition of the sugar industry to establish huge new industrial plantations on un-transformed community land, in order to produce the ethanol required to meet the petrol-ethanol blending target set by the government. This will destroy hundreds of thousands of hectares of communally-owned natural grassland areas, and will also cause the displacement of low-input traditional food-farming by extensive agro-chemical and irrigation based cropping of sugar cane and sugar beet.

However, apart from all the industry hype and propaganda, how these actions can contribute in any meaningful way to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, or even help to mitigate global warming and climate change, remains a complete mystery!

By Wally Menne, Timberwatch Coalition, e-mail plantnet@iafrica.com,

- South Africa: How Green is my Power?

Sappi Limited, South African producer of pulp and paper, plans the construction of a biomass combustion plant at Ngodwana Mill, Mpumalanga. It has a proposed capacity of about 50 megawatt, which will supply to the public grid. Misleadingly, this investment is called 'Green Energy Power Project' (GEPP) – in reality, the power is as green as the inside of the Sappi boiler.

According to Sappi, the plant will partly operate using waste products from the pulping process, mostly screening rejects and bark. Currently this material is either burnt in the existing boilers of the mill or dumped. But the majority of the needed biomass – about 390 of 530 thousand tons per annum – will be collected in the surrounding timber plantations and then be transported by trucks to the mill site.

The massive removal of biomass, which is normally burnt or left to rot in the plantations, is hugely problematic as it would result in loss of organic matter and increased soil fertility problems. This problem is acknowledged by Sappi. They aim to rectify the situation by removing the ash from the boilers and distributing it in the plantations – which would result in even more pressure on the fragile dirt road infrastructure on plantation estates. It seems likely that GEPP will impact the soil condition in the plantations and worsen existing problems like soil nutrient impoverishment, erosion and flash flooding, which could make the affected land unusable in future.

But perhaps the direct damage caused in the surrounding environment is the lesser evil in this case: If one asks Rachel Smolker, co-director of Biofuelwatch, she says that any growing demand for wood will encourage the further expansion of plantations: 'And of course the plantation industries are well aware of this and are part of the effort that is promoting this practice of burning wood for electricity and heat.' (1)

And indeed this is exactly what Sappi is doing at the moment – trying to increase wood dependent industries where it can, and on the other hand fighting with a struggling market for conventional pulp. This already performs well in pushing forward the production of chemical cellulose as a wood-based alternative for textiles and packaging. There are currently several Sappi mills converted to be able to produce for this profitable market.

However this would not be a problem, if the combustion of wood was the better way to produce electricity. But according to Rachel Smolker, 'the definition of burning wood as renewable energy is where the problem starts': The reason why the combustion of biomass is actually considered to be green is no more than a calculation: It is expected that the harvested biomass will be replaced by new plants in the future, absorbing the same amount of emission from the atmosphere as generated by the combustion process. But in doing so, the so called 'carbon-debt'

is neglected. The 'carbon debt' refers to the time it takes from when the biomass is burnt to the time it takes for the new plants to grow and 're-absorb' the carbon.

But even without considering this, burning wood means additional emissions of small particles, it means emissions through harvesting, transport and the destruction of natural vegetation. Thus promoting biomass combustion as renewable is critical. Nevertheless the majority of the currently produced 'green' energy is energy resulting from wood combustion.

'Of course alternatives to the current fossil-based model are needed', Philip Owen, international coordinator of GeaSphere, says. 'But this alternative is reduction. We cannot afford substituting one damaging demand by another one, which is even worse.' But this substitution is happening and in this case even supported by the South African public authority. GEPP aims at claiming to be part of the 'Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme', facilitated by the South African Department of Energy in order to produce 3,725 megawatt of 'green' electricity in cooperation with the private sector.

Instead of this increase in our dependency on timber plantations in the region - a decrease of the existing plantation area would actually be necessary – combined with an attempt to rehabilitate, diversify and utilize indigenous timber species in a 'multiple use' forest system. 'We can see how communities struggle with water and land – their environments and livelihoods impacted upon by large scale industrial timber plantations.' Philip Owen says. 'The Sappi Green Energy Power Project will not help to alleviate the primary problems of land degradation – but may in fact make matters worse.'

Article by Jan Quakernack, IVA, GeaSphere, www.geasphere.co.za,
www.facebook.com/geasphere

(1) Presentation by Rachel Smolker : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOSRHKsoZJ8>

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- Liberia: Uncertain futures. The impacts of Sime Darby on communities

Liberia, a small West African country with a population of approximately 3.5 million people, has a predominantly agrarian economy, with high dependency on land and land based resources. The majority of the population lives in rural areas and is engaged in subsistence agriculture and forest-based trade for income generation. Healthcare facilities are poor and in some places non-existent, and the majority of children lack access to safe drinking water. They also lack decent education. The country ranked 182 out of 187 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index in 2011. However, the abundance of fertile farmlands has enabled people in rural Liberia to survive and thrive even in these very difficult circumstances, much to the amazement of outsiders.

As in many West African countries –like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, DRC, etc- the oil palm industry is expanding at alarming rates and negatively impacting on local communities' livelihoods.

The Malaysian Sime Darby –one of the world's largest oil palm producer- entered into a 63-year lease agreement with the Government of Liberia on July 23, 2009, for a total of 311,187 hectares of land, which is referred to as the Gross Concession Area. This Gross Concession Area is to be located within four counties: Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, Bomi and Bong.

When the government signed the contract with Sime Darby, the agreement was hailed as another milestone in Liberia's drive towards economic recovery, a critical step towards sustainable development. The company promised to provide tens of thousands of jobs and to contribute to the government's economic recovery agenda.

The company's current plantation development activities are situated in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties. In Bomi, the company is clearing old rubber trees to start planting oil palms in the area. In Grand Cape Mount, within the Garwula District, the company has established a nursery and started planting its first 5,000 ha.

But it is now the case that often, when people in the area talk about Sime Darby, they are not commenting on the development benefits that have been generated. Instead they are critical of the company's impacts on communities where it has cleared forest and planted oil palm.

The situation facing communities impacted by the expansion of Sime Darby's oil palm plantation in Garwula District, is dire: the plantation is on their doorsteps, and their farms and farmlands are being swallowed up by it. There are very few alternative livelihood options.

According to locals, Sime Darby did not pay them any compensation for their farm lands. They also claim that the compensation paid for crops that had been destroyed was inadequate and that forest areas used for cultural practices had also been destroyed and replaced by oil palm.

“We did not have a choice in the matter. The company was here, the government had given them the land, they were ready to clear your farm and destroy your crops – what more could you do. The situation was that either you take whatever amount they were giving you or they take the money back and still clear the land anyway” said one of the villagers from Baka and Kenemah towns.

Most of the men and women in the affected villages are now out of work, and their children are hungry. There are very few alternative livelihood options.

The Government of Liberia and Sime Darby share responsibility for the negative situation facing these communities, since they negotiated a contract that clearly cannot be implemented without violating the rights of third parties. These third parties include communities that have traditionally occupied and used the land, communities that hold collective titles and private property rights to their land, individuals that hold private property rights to their land, and all those who have estates and other forms

of assets on lands that fall within the Concession Area. The contract obliges the government to allocate land free of encumbrances to Sime Darby. This is impossible: there is no land free of encumbrances in the counties targeted for the development.

To lease customary lands and private properties to Sime Darby without the consent of those living on and using the land and the landowners, or following due process, is an invitation for conflict. As such, it is highly likely that communities and private landowners in the affected areas will continually challenge implementation of the current contract. This might lead to Sime Darby and the government using aggressive tactics to ensure that the company continues to expand, or it might result in Sime Darby accepting that it cannot implement the contract and asking for a renegotiation of the terms. The former approach could generate conflicts that might easily deteriorate into violence, but the latter could provide an opportunity for the government to rectify the mistakes that were made during the negotiation of the current contract. This would also allow for proper consultations with private landowners and communities and for those with an interest in oil palm development on their land to negotiate a fair deal that takes into account their livelihoods and the overall environmental health of their communities.

However, regardless of how well the contract is negotiated, and how much incentive the government and Sime Darby are able to offer, there will inevitably be private land owners, families and communities who will not want to give up their land for oil palm plantation. The government and Sime Darby would do well to recognize and respect the rights and interests of these groups. This would not only demonstrate a genuine desire to uphold the rule of law on the part of the government, it would also demonstrate that the government puts the interests of its citizens above all other considerations.

Source: The above has been excerpted from a new publication "Uncertain Futures. The impacts of Sime Darby on communities" recently published by WRM and SDI (Sustainable Development Institute) from Liberia, written by Silas Kpanan'Ayoung Siakor. The book can be accessed at:
http://wrm.org.uy/countries/Liberia/uncertain_futures.pdf

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- Laos: Expansion of rubber plantations - more conflicts with communities

With an increasing global demand for natural rubber in the past few years, large-scale rubber plantations in Laos are expanding, causing conflicts with local communities in a country where, in early 1990s, it was widely accepted as well as referred by scholars and people who study about Laos that about 80% of the Laos people relied directly on the forest – including the river - for their physical, cultural and spiritual well-being.

In 2010, 9.8 million hectares of commercial rubber plantations existed globally and this number is expected to increase to 13.8 million hectares in 2018. About 90% of

the rubber production is concentrated in Asia, mainly in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, mostly through smallholders. The production is mainly absorbed by the tire industry, closely linked to the motor vehicle industry, regionally concentrated in China. The present expansion boom is mainly through large-scale plantations and one of the countries in the Mekong region where expansion is taking place rapidly is Laos.

There are over 60 different ethnic groups in the country. With only 20% of the land being low land, the majority of Laos's people live in the rural hilly and mountainous areas. Rural communities mainly depend on forests for their physical, cultural and spiritual well-being. However, when at the end of the 1980's the economic ideology changed and the Laos government opened the land for the global market economy, forest communities have suffered from commercial logging and timber exports.

In 1990, the country adopted the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP), pushed by the World Bank and FAO in several countries. One of the TFAP proposals was to invest in tree plantations. After the era of logging, tree monoculture plantations arrived to play a crucial role in Laos as the tool to turn forest and forest land into a capital asset. Together with the plantation companies, the government promoted the tree plantations – which encroached into peoples' land, forest and livelihood – promising jobs and income for the rural population.

As a result, especially since the end of the 1990's, the rubber industry has expanded in Laos. While some investments involve local and smallholder capital, about 75% of all plantations are large scale and set up by transnational companies from China, Vietnam and Thailand. According to the Ministry of Commerce, by 2007, 40 companies were growing rubber over an area of 182,900 hectares, granted to them through land concessions.

The expanding tree plantations have serious negative impacts on the local communities. First of all, land conflicts are created because the concessions granted to the companies generally overlap with lands used by communities. In Laos, land ownership is held by the government as a socialist state but customary right to use the land on a permanent basis is recognized in laws and regulations. However, village people still are constrained to get the land certification that ensures their customary land right on a permanent basis. Most often, local people are not aware of such right as the government hardly informs them of it. Thus, people have no chance to exercise their rights in their real life, which facilitates transnational companies to grab the lands used by the communities.

A common practice has been that the company, after the government grants the concession, contacts the local village leader to inform him where they intend to plant rubber and get support for the plan. The original target areas often are the fellow lands of the upland rice areas, which have been targeted for a long time by the Laos government to be erased under the "Shifting Cultivation Stabilization Programme". Allured by promises of jobs for the community, and pressed by the blame on the traditional upland rice shifting cultivation practice, community leaders may agree signing a document that certifies that "permission" has been given for the plantation.

But when the company starts clearing the land and planting the trees, the community

usually finds that very few jobs have been created and most of them last the first years of operation. Moreover, communities complain that the jobs are badly paid and that when pesticides are applied, no protection equipment is offered to them with the consequent severe impacts on their health.

Soon after the trees have been planted, more impacts appear. Then, the community really gets aware of what the project of the company is about. The areas occupied by the company are most often mixed forest areas used by communities, for example, those where they collect mushrooms, bamboo and other forest products. Besides, the pesticides application contaminates the environment, especially rice fields close to the plantations.

The increasing industry demand for natural rubber in the past years that drives the expansion of rubber plantation also increases the number of conflicts in Laos between transnational companies and local communities. Only the full respect of the rights of the forest peoples in Laos to use their lands and forest could help to reduce and prevent further conflicts.

However, a temporary suspension of the land concessions by the government in 2007 in order to study the problems involving these concessions has not had much result. On the contrary, companies continue wanting to increase their plantation areas. The Laos government intends to plant another 300,000 hectares of rubber plantations in the next decade.

Based on a recent field visit to Mekong region, “An overview of industrial tree plantations: conflicts, trends and resistance struggles” (<http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/EJOLTplantations.pdf>), and “Summary report: research evaluation of economic, social and ecological implications of the programme for commercial tree plantations. Case study on rubber in the South of Laos PDR, August 2009. Collaboration between CRILN/NLMA, Office of Prime Minister Lao, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai university, Foundation for Ecological Recovery, Thailand.”

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- Indonesia: Bayat Society Builds Life

Timber Plantation concessions are a model of forest exploitation conducted by corporations in Indonesia. More than 9 million hectares of timber plantation concessions have already been awarded by the Ministry of Forestry, though not all of these concessions are used for timber plantations. Up to 2011, less than half of the total area of timber plantation licenses was being managed by the license holder corporation. While in fact, timber plantation licenses have shifted the natural function of forest diversity and caused a series of problems in domino effect, such as influencing the social relation and the sovereignty of the indigenous peoples and the villagers that live on the concession land, undermining local knowledge and local food system, as well as draining the macro capital source to cover the bankruptcy threat of the downstream industry of timber plantation.

The weak sanctions by the government towards moral hazard enabled corporations to leave millions of hectares of land in an unclear management status --- corporations that have applied for a timber plantation license, cut down woods and taken them, leaving a damaged forest area after earning much money. One of those corporations is PT Pakerin, a timber plantation company in Musi Banyu Asin Regency, South Sumatra Province.

PT Pakerin received the timber plantation concession license from the Forestry Minister in 1998 for an area of more than 43,000 hectares, and started the operation in 1992. The concession of PT Pakerin had taken more than 7,000 hectares of the people's land of Simpang Bayat Village. The society of Simpang Bayat was fighting to defend the right, but the "wall" that protected the company was very strong, namely "tembpek" in the form of the support from the Government and the military apparatus.

In 1997, there was a fire disaster that destroyed the trees of PT Pakerin, which made the management stop the business activity. In the following ten years, the company did not conduct any activities. Since 2010, slowly, the community of Simpang Bayat has been re-entering the land that used to be their village. The community has built small houses, agreed together on a shared land management, and started working on the land to build their livelihoods

Until now, from 7,000 hectares people's land of Simpang Bayat Village that had been taken away by PT Pakerin, approximately 1,500 hectares have been successfully re-claimed by the community. The community of Simpang Bayat has built approximately 750 houses, that are inhabited by approximately 400 family heads or more than 1,000 people. Apart from building the houses, the community also built common facilities collectively, such as a road, place of worship, village secretariat, and an elementary school is being planned. For the daily life, the society produces charcoal for sale, and plants vegetables, fruits, and raises cattle. While for the long term, the community is planting rubber trees.

To organize itself and to consolidate the struggle, the community established an organization called Dewan Petani Sumatera Selatan (South Sumatran Farmers' Board). This local farmers' organization has established, together with the farmers, regulations for their organization and land use.

PT Pakerin accused the Society of Simpang Bayat Village to the Police of conducting illegal land exploitation. Some of the farmers' organization leaders have been arrested and the police has tried to intimidate the community in various ways, but they do not weaken the spirit of the farmers. The community of Simpang Bayat Village continues re-claiming their right on land and life.

By Rivani Noor, CAPP, www.cappa.or.id

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- Brazil: The fast expansion of oil palm in the Amazon region

The area planted with oil palm trees in Brazil used to be relatively small as compared to other countries producing this plant in Latin America. However, big transnational companies in Brazil like Vale and Petrobrás have revealed the rapid expansion of these plantations meant for the production of biofuels, in the Amazon region, mainly in the State of Pará.

In the last few decades, the company that has pursued oil palm monoculture plantations in the State of Pará at a most important scale has been Agropalma, a Brazilian company currently exploiting plantations that extend over 39 thousand hectares of its own land, and 10 thousand other hectares belonging to farmers. The company is working mainly on the production of palm oil to be used in foods, cosmetics and chemicals, since the production of bio-diesel was considered as non-viable until a short while ago. Nevertheless, the situation has started to change since the Brazilian trans-nationals started operating in the sector with their palm tree plantations.

Vale, one of the largest mining companies worldwide, is currently implementing a new project, following its acquisition, in 2011, of 70% of the firm "Biopalma", which in 2009 owned 5 thousand hectares of plantations and now has 50 thousands hectares planted with palm trees. Vale's project implies extending the plantation to a full 80 thousand hectares, 60 thousand of which would be their own, and another 20 thousand would be outsourced production on the land of private farmers. According to the company, approximately 600 families are taking part in the project, which is expected to reach a yearly production of 500 thousand tons of oil before the year 2019.

Vale is focused on producing bio-diesel as fuel for the company's trains used to transport the iron ore loads, on a non-stop basis, from the Carajás area to the coast. From there, the company exports the raw material to the world's largest consumer markets. According to Vale, the bio-palm project will "contribute to the energy matrix of the company in a sustainable and renewable manner, while also helping in environmental preservation". It would also be a "positive social vector", and a way of "generating income and a way of settlement for the population of the countryside". The company has also stated that the project would also reduce its carbon gas emissions by using bio-diesel instead of regular diesel fuel.

Another transnational company currently investing in the Pará region is the State-owned oil company Petrobrás, one of the largest in the continent. One of the projects implies planting, as of the year 2013, 24 thousand hectares of palm trees on the land belonging to some 1,250 farmers. Another project led to a company merger with the multi-national oil company Galp Energia de Portugal, with which they created the firm Belém Bionergia. Their idea is to plant palm on 50 thousand hectares in cooperation with 1,000 farmers. The expected yearly production of 300 thousand tons of oil is to be exported to Portugal, where green diesel will be refined as of 2015 at a plant projected for the city of Sines, meant for supplying the Portuguese and Spanish markets.

The exponential increase of oil palm plantations in Brazil, supported by governmental authorities, has caused concerns of different types. On one hand, the project benefits two big companies known for their serious impact on the different

regions where they operate, like Vale's mining activity in Mozambique and Petrobrás' effects on the lives of Brazilian fishermen (read bulletin 180 – editorial page). In the year 2012, Vale received the 'Public Eye Award', an international "prize" granted to the company causing the worst social, environmental and labor problems worldwide.

Additionally, the bio-diesel production project is not so 'green' or so 'renewable' as it appears to be. Vale's project provides for the substitution of scarcely 20% of the fuel used by the company's trains with bio-diesel, while the remaining 80% will continue to be regular diesel fuel. This implies maintaining a large-scale mineral extraction process and preserving an unsustainable and excessive production and consumption model meant only for a small part of the world's population, and Vale is not willing to change this situation. Also, the company's railway system has been repeatedly reported as the origin of negative effects for local communities.

Despite the fact that palm production may bring along benefits for groups of family farms that plant and sell their produce to Vale and/or Petrobrás, it is also true that those farmers become dependants of those companies as they give away part of their small properties to these transnational companies for long periods of time as part of a chemical monoculture system. This allows for the giants to increase the extension of their property in a state considered the most violent in Brazil as a consequence of the serious conflicts between large landowners and landless workers and their families, in addition to the lack of structural policies relative to agricultural reforms by the federal government.

And lastly, yet another aspect to consider is the accumulation of land acquired, which relates not only to palm production areas. For instance, Vale has declared that each hectare planted with palm represents one hectare of native forest preserved and that oil palm plantations would be a way of 'recovering' land. However, we must recall that the commitment to preserving native forests only involves compliance with Brazilian laws. Owning forest lands represents an opportunity for Vale to continue profiting, for example, from the carbon business in the "environmental services" market, which is undergoing a rapid implementation in Brazil, along with a series of revisions of laws like the famous Forestry Code, apart from newly established norms to regulate these issues.

Notwithstanding the "green" discourse, the production of palm has already generated conflicts like the one involving the Tembé people who are claiming to be the victims of the agrottoxics that contaminate their water sources due to pesticides applied to the oil palm plantation areas. According to a chief from that region, "we do not believe in the use of palm. We'd rather have rice, beans, poultry or fish". They also complained about "the guariba (howling monkey) now being hushed due to the hunting and fishing activities that have been affected by tree felling, with the result of animals losing their sites for shelter outside our area". However, both Vale and Petrobrás consider that the palm business is doing really good, because they see it as a new source of business and profits, and to top it all off, it is also a "green" activity.

- Family agriculture will gain with palm bio-diesel fuel. Economic value (2012).
http://www.abdi.com.br/Paginas/noticia_detalhe.aspx?i=1307

- Biopalma reaches an agreement with indigenous people. Source: <http://www.orm.com.br/projetos/oliberal/interna/default.asp?modulo=247&codigo=591475>
- Biodiesel: Biopalma project. http://www.fiap.br/cees/biodiesel/pdf/ivo_fouto.pdf

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- Chile: Serious impacts of FSC certified tree plantation company

The results of a research study carried out in different region, in 2010, by the Association of Forest Engineers for Native Forests were published last July. This Independent Forestry Monitoring led to a report on the environmental and social impacts caused by large scale tree plantations established by the company Anchile Ltda., and formal complaints were filed at the National Forestry Corporation ("Corporación Nacional Forestal" – CONAF), a body that is part of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The company Forestal Anchile Ltda., owned by Japanese firms Daio Paper and Itochu Corporation, has become one of the most important wood chip exporters in Chile, with its business focused on the Japanese market. The company's property covers an area that goes from the Toltén Municipality in the Araucanía region, to Flesia in the Lakes region. The monitoring work was carried out in the Rivers and Lakes Region, and in the Valdivia, Corral and La Unión Municipalities, where most of the company's net worth is located, currently amounting a total of 61,069.1 hectares, 28,043.8 ha of which correspond to monoculture tree plantations, particularly Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus Nitens*), Radiata Pine, and Oregon Pine, among other varieties.

The research focused on three sectors on the mountain range along the Valdivia Coast, in the Los Ríos Region. One of these sectors included plots located nearby fragments or extended areas of native forests that are part of the coastal humid rainforest, identified among the 25 areas in the world with the highest priority for preservation, mainly due to its level of fragility and because it is home to a great diversity of highly endemic fauna and flora species.

The substitution of the native forest with plantations of exotic tree species (like *Pinus radiata* at first and later with *Eucalyptus* spp) - started in the 1980s as a result of the large-scale acquisition of lands by forestry companies -. The subsequent migration of the rural population of these areas to the Valdivia region constitute one of the main factors that bring along a significant loss of biodiversity and the fragmentation of native forests.

The resulting report informs of the plantations' management practices with significant environmental impact that are taking place on all of Forestal Anchile's sites visited, in addition to evident non-compliance with applicable forestry regulations. Such practices imply "intervention in and/or destruction of areas that protect water courses, the removal and loss of soil in areas with steep slopes due to mechanical harvesting systems, progressive substitution of native vegetation that provides protection to

water courses, felling in areas of young native trees during the harvest of plantations and clear felling on extensive areas that cause a strong landscape impact in adjacent areas that include sites on Chilean territory where the preservation of biodiversity is a priority.”

The study also reveals the effects of pesticides to the micro-basin tributaries of the Futa River.”

The results of the forestry monitoring process show that “Forestal Anchile's bad practices in establishing and harvesting plantations generate a strong impact on land and water ecosystems throughout the region, as well as on different activities and initiatives by the local rural communities that are intended to promote tourism, and recover landscape value and the native forests' ecosystemic functions, mainly the production of water for domestic and irrigation purposes”.

Notwithstanding all the above, Forestal Anchile continues to be a company certified by the FSC, meaning that its tree plantations are supposedly “sustainable”. On 15 December 2002, the company was certified by the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) system, and such certification has been renewed since 2003 upon audits performed on a yearly basis. This comes to prove that aspects as serious as deforestation – often inherent to extended tree monoculture – and its impact are not taken into account in the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifying system.

The results reveal the weaknesses of the forestry legislation in force, as well as of the certification processes, which ensure them impunity on their impacts, as they present an obvious lack of rigor in the controls applied on the sites reported, and define insignificant fines as compared to the magnitude of the damages caused on the lands that are actually subject to punishment. This, in addition to the lack of transparency in certification processes, on the part of companies as well as on the part of auditors, thus affecting the reliability of the FSC's system, as a result of making evident the inconsistency of the criteria and principles governing forestry certifications with the actual practices detected in part of the activity of a company that has been granted certifications since 2002”.

WRM would also add that this is yet another proof of the fact that certifications have become an instrument for big companies to legitimize their business activity. The “green seal” allows them the imposition of production systems that are intrinsically harmful and hazardous for high-value ecosystems, as is the case of monoculture tree plantations.

Article based on: “Informe de resultados. Monitoreo forestal independiente a patrimonio de Forestal Anchile Ltda. en la región de Los Ríos y Los Lagos”, (in Spanish) July 2012, by the Association of Forestry Engineers for the Native Forest, http://www.bosquenativo.cl/descargas/documentos_AIFBN/Informe_Monitoreo_Anchile_28_08_12.pdf

- Uruguay: Investment Funds charged with illegal afforestation in protected area

The Quebrada de los Cuervos canyon, located in the mountains of the Treinta y Tres District, was the first area to be registered as one of Uruguay's National Protected Areas (2008) for its rich landscape, its biodiversity and because it is representative of native ecosystems. Made up of grasslands, canyon bottom forests, gallery forests and creeks, this area is a biological corridor for a variety of species of flora and fauna.

The area's classification as a "Protected Landscape" allows inhabitants who live on land located in and around the area to remain there and continue to practice their traditional farming activities. The Land Management Plan drafted for the protected area stated the need for a buffer zone between the protected area and the rest of the rural surroundings. It set a demarcation encompassing the mountain ranges of the Yermal Grande and Yermal Chico creeks and the Yermalito sub-basin, which was accepted by local citizens. However, years later this buffer zone has yet to be officially confirmed by authorities.

Because of the risk they pose, activities that are prohibited in the protected area include afforestation and mining, which should logically be prohibited in the buffer zone as well. In recent years, however, forestry companies like Weyerhaeuser (Colonvade S.A, US), Pradera Roja (Phaunos Timber Fund, investment fund, UK) and Forestal El Arriero (Global Forests Partners, pension fund, US) have established monoculture pine and eucalyptus plantations inside the buffer zone. These are exotic, invasive species in this region that put the Quebrada de los Cuervos at risk.

Forestry Investment Funds. Investment or pension funds from the Northern Hemisphere have become a notable presence in our rural areas in recent years. These funds purchase land in Uruguay and elsewhere in the Southern Hemisphere to transform it into monoculture eucalyptus plantations, which prove very profitable indeed for their investors but generate serious social and environmental impacts locally. The Phaunos Timber Fund, for example, just sold a private investor 690 hectares of land forested with eucalyptus in the Cerro Chato area for US \$2.9 million; the company had purchased the land for US\$ 1.3 million in 2009.

In 2009 this company was reported by local citizens for going forward with a forestry project and failing to inform the Ministry of Environment that it was located adjacent to the protected area. Not only they did not adhere to the basic criteria for preventing soil erosion, they also applied vast quantities of agrotoxics that killed native fauna. The claim resulted in a temporary suspension for the company and, several months later, a laughable fine that still is unclear if it was ever actually paid.

The Forestal El Arriero S.A. Case. The Forestal El Arriero S.A. company, which is owned by the US company Global Forests Partners, a timber investment management firm with pension funds, went down the same path. It currently owns 26,000 hectares of land in Uruguay, 16,000 of which are forested and under management by the Chilean company Cambium Forestal Uruguay S.A.

Forestal el Arriero established a pine plantation in 2009 in the "Obdulio" area, located within the Quebrada de los Cuervos buffer zone, without previous authorization from

the Ministry of Environment. It was not until the trees were over 1-meter tall and they had finished applying agrottoxics that they applied for the corresponding permit.

Once again, thanks to the charges and testimony submitted by local citizens in April 2011, said plantation was deemed illegal. The company violated Uruguayan regulations, and the researchers who carried out the environmental impact study of the tree monocultures were held liable for falsifying the information they submitted to the Ministry. However, even though the Ministry ruled to suspend all forestry activity by the company, rendering it liable to be fined, it allowed the company to continue with the paperwork to obtain the environmental permit.

Local Voices. Benedicte, one of the founders of the Quebrada de los Cuervos Rural Advancement Society, asserts that “the inhabitants of this place feel threatened by this pine plantation, which are considered invasive species; by the poisoning of the water in Yermal Chico Creek and the death of our native fauna caused by fumigation with herbicides; and above all by the destruction of our native pasturelands. The Advancement Society claims the local population's right to land and to keep traditional cattle-raising practices on natural pastures. We reject large-scale monoculture plantations, the use of agrottoxins and mining, because they affect our culture and our way of life.”

Carlos, a local citizen who has lived for 23 years in the area, says that this issue is of great concern. “On one hand there is the core area or protected area, and then there is the adjacent area or buffer zone intended to protect the canyon, which is where they are planting pines and there are also plans for lime mining. Something is not right! This is why we have come here to voice our grievances and find out how it is that, if we reported in April of 2011 that the company had illegally planted and fumigated the land without a permit from the Ministry of Environment (DINAMA) or an environmental impact study, they are now here presenting this project to us as if it were something new.”

Ana María, another local citizen and member of the Uruguayan Association of Rural Women (AMRU) says that “the impact that concerns us first is the effect on the water, mainly all the contamination from agrottoxics that also affects native flora and fauna. After they fumigate, there are always dead animals. There is life there that either dies or migrates, there are species that are disappearing; in the future we're going to have a vast green desert here and in the rest of Uruguay where these tree plantations are concentrated. We are a very small country, we cannot have so much territory under monoculture plantation. We must put a stop to it and say “No more!”

Responsibility of the authorities. The role of the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP) has become blurred and the delayed approval of the final version of the Land Management Plan indirectly fosters the establishment of timber and mining projects in the zone.

It is imperative that the measures proposed under the Land Management Plan are carried out, including: make the proposed limits for the buffer zone official; eliminate the “forestry priority” from land inside the buffer zone; apply cautionary measures as long as the Territorial Zoning Law for the region is not implemented; and restrict production projects such as afforestation, mining and industrial construction upstream

from the protected area.

The “stop” is in the hands of SNAP, the Ministry of Environment, the Forestry Department and the Municipality of Treinta y Tres. Will these authorities say “No more” and take a chance on what will truly, in the short and long run, benefit local citizens and the country?

Excerpts from the article “Investment funds charged with illegal afforestation in the Quebrada de los Cuervos” sent by the Grupo Guayubira, <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/> - access to the original version at <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/2012/09/investment-funds-charged-with-illegal-afforestation-in-the-quebrada-de-los-cuervos/>

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- Monoculture tree plantations in the financial market

Today, speculative financial markets have gained increasing power over the economy and life, in a response to the capitalist crisis that began in the 1970s.

According to data by the financial information group PEI Media Ltd. in the report “Investing in Timberland”, August 2010, among the investment instruments related to nature, timberland investment comprises a diverse range of different asset types: tree plantations established mainly for wood production, forests managed for wood, non-wood products, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity conservation. Assets typically consist of both land and the standing growing stock of trees, but investments can also be made in just one or the other.

As an institutional investment class – that is, with investor organizations which pool large sums of money – timberland investment began less than 30 year ago, with early investment managers acquiring non-strategic land from the forest-products industry on behalf of cautious institutional clients. As a long-duration asset, with low volatility and inflation-hedging aspects, timberland attracts those with patient capital: institutional investors, such as public and private pension funds, endowments, foundations and insurance companies, which have become the major players in the global timberland investment markets.

PEI identifies that in the US, timberland assets can now comprise perhaps 1–2 percent of some of the major pension fund portfolios. Funds of funds that include timberland components, along with other types of real assets, also are becoming more common. At present, investor capital placed in timberland is around \$70-\$80 billion.

Watching the process of timberland investment, PEI describes that a type of private equity vehicle called timber investment management organisations (TIMOs) have become major owners in US timberland. In the 1990s, the number of TIMOs and their assets under management in the US increased from around USD 1 billion to USD 10-12 billion. Towards the end of the decade, TIMOs also started to expand into some

capital-scarce emerging markets. High growth rates, low wood production costs, proximity of markets and demand as well as increasing land prices contributed to an increase in returns in this period. In the late 20th century, Latin America (mainly Brazil and Chile) and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) emerged as attractive timberland investment regions.

Research by PEI describes that by 1996, soaring stumpage (standing timber “on the stump” prior to harvest) prices, which had been good for timberland investors, had by now caused Western mills to close, with capacity and demand moving to the South. Plantation development and technology had advanced, increasing per-acre productivity to the point where it seemed a wall of wood was coming from every direction, including Australia, New Zealand and South America. This convergence caused stumpage prices across all regions to fall roughly 33% between 1998 and 2001. From 1996 to 2000, a net \$ 5 billion of value, representing approximately 7.9 million acres, transferred ownership to institutional investors, primarily through TIMOs in the US. The period 2001-2004 – when the tech bubble burst, the stock market declined, and still more institutional capital began looking for a home – saw an unprecedented transfer of assets to institutional investors. It was, once again, a sellers' market. From 2005 to 2009 the forest-products industry exited from timberland ownership and TIMOs were by far the major buyers in the US. Weyerhaeuser is now the only public integrated forest-products company left with significant holdings of timberland.

According to PIE, the current timberland market tends to have two types of investors: those who already have exposure in traditional markets and who are increasingly pursuing opportunities in emerging regions that offer more aggressive risk and return characteristics, and newer investors that are more interested in core timberland opportunities in proven markets. Overall, institutional investors continue to be the major players in the global timberland investment markets: three-quarters of the private forest investment managed by TIMOs are owned by institutional investors. While much of the capital flowing into the asset class originates from seasoned investors based in North America, European investors are becoming increasingly active. Capital of investors based in Latin America and Oceania is being placed primarily in their own regions.

The financial information group PEI describes how as more capital enters the timberland investment space, investors have more choices for structuring their participation not only making and managing timberland investments strictly in a private equity context but also using publicly traded investment vehicles, particularly attractive to investors who favour high levels of liquidity. These vehicles are typically structured as real estate investment trusts (REITs), unit investment trusts or exchange-traded funds (ETFs). At present, these include Plum Creek Timber Company (PCL), Rayonier Inc. (RYN) and Potlatch Corporation (PCH), three prominent timber REITs based in the US. They also include the Phaunos Timber Fund (which is managed by hedge fund manager Four Winds Capital Management) (see article on Uruguay) and Combiom Global Timberland Ltd. (which is managed by Cogent Partners), both of which are ETFs.

What WRM, as well as many other social and environmental groups and movements

have been saying is that climate change has regrettably become a new source of profit opportunities for financial investors. Data collected by PIE confirms so regarding timberland investors. The research says that in the 1990s, partnerships created between industrial companies and big conservation NGOs to promote tree plantations found their way in the markets for carbon credits which were drivers of the new timberland investments created through the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Carbon emissions traded in the carbon market represent new business opportunities for timberland investors who also welcome the promotion of energy from wood biomass for its significant potential to increase wood demand.

Based on data and research of the financial information group PEI, we confirm that tree plantations – which many communities resist for their notorious impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, water sources, and livelihoods – are a profitable business for increasing pools of capital investment. The difference with this kind of new owners is that they become intangible for the affected local communities that are defending their means of survival on the ground.

The difficulty to identify the owners of tree plantations in order to confront them is a challenge that we have to overcome working together.

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PEOPLES IN ACTION

- The International Day against Monoculture Tree Plantations around the world

On September 21, the International Day against Monoculture Tree Plantations, organizations, networks and movements around the world celebrated the annual resistance campaign that continues to grow every year demanding to stop the expansion of monoculture tree plantations, which threaten the sovereignty of our peoples.

Here follow some activities registered by WRM.

International

*The Latin American Mangrove Network adhered the international day by releasing a banner showing the social and ecological importance as well as the diversity of mangrove ecosystem versus the impacts of the monoculture tree plantations. The banner can be accessed and downloaded from:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantaciones/21_set/2012/Guatemala.html.

*The Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations released a declaration against the expansion of monocultures in Latin America, emphasizing the new driver of the expansion: the agrofuels demand -including both palm oil as well as wood- from the Global North. The declaration can be read at:

http://wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/2012/RECOMA_Declaration.html

* Radio Mundo Real - Friends of the Earth International's radio launched a short video called "Silent Occupation", where the advance of tree monocultures in different parts of the world is exposed. The video also makes reference to the resistance by several communities. Watch it at <http://vimeo.com/49907929>

* Global Forest Coalition, Biofuelwatch, Critical Information Collective, and Global Justice Ecology Project warned against EU and US plans to expand the bio-economy aimed at replacing fossil fuels with biomass coming from trees. This would imply that the world's remaining forests will be replaced by monoculture tree plantations, which are expected to produce more biomass than forests.

In South Africa

*GeaSphere's activists dressed up as 'mummies' (using paper towel) and distributed pamphlets about the impacts of timber plantations with the message 'paper consumption is DEATH to grasslands'. GeaSphere also presented a petition to the Global Solidarity Forest Fund (GSFF), an investment fund with northern investors which has acquired vast tracts of land in Mozambique to establish monoculture eucalyptus timber plantations. The petition, launched on September 21, 2011, gathered more than 10 000 signatures and calls on the GSFF to stop investing in monoculture tree plantations in Southern Africa, and rather to support small scale, diversified enterprises which benefit the local people and stimulate local economy. See the petition at <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-plantations-mozambique/>

*Timberwatch Coalition launched the report: "On 21st September the world must know the true costs of industrial monoculture tree plantations" that can be read at <http://www.timberwatch.org/>

In Liberia

* The Sustainable Development Institute released the report "Uncertain Futures.

The impacts of Sime Darby on communities in Liberia" picturing the situation facing communities impacted by the expansion of Sime Darby's oil palm plantation in western Liberia that threatens the rights of local communities, their food security, and puts their wellbeing at risk. The report can be downloaded at http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/2012/Liberia.html

In Malaysia

The Consumers' Association of Penang/ Friends of the Earth Malaysia gave a Press Conference denouncing the advent of large monoculture plantations, of mostly pulp and paper and oil palm on formerly forested areas in Sarawak which are under indigenous customary land rights claims. An open letter demands the government to stop the expansion of tree plantations. See http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/2012/Malaysia.html

In Indonesia

* The organization CAPP, organized in Jambi, Sumatra, a press conference with journalists from the AJI (Independent Journalist Alliance) on the International Day of

Struggle against Tree Monocultures, with the participation of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) and Friends of the Earth International. During the press conference they gave a broad overview of the conflicts created by tree monoculture plantations as well as the origin of this day of action and its relevance to Indonesia.

In Uruguay

*Friends of the Earth Uruguay and World Rainforest Movement carried out a public event in which FOE/Uruguay presented a new research denouncing the role of soy and forestry corporations in the process of landgrabbing in Uruguay. WRM presented an overview of the expansion of monoculture tree plantations and the conflicts associated to it in the world, jointly produced with EJOLT, accessible at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/publicaciones/ejolt.html>

* Guayubira group issued a press release denouncing the impacts already being suffered by large-scale tree plantations to feed the pulp mills from the consortium formed by Stora-Enso and Arauco, and the Finnish UPM. It also denounces the recent plan to build another pulp mill by UPM. In Spanish at <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/2012/09/21-setiembre-dia-internacional-lucha-contra-monocultivos-arboles/>

In Argentina

*Friends of the Earth Argentina carried out several grassroots actions – workshops, debates, videos - in different provinces of the country: Corrientes, Rosario and Buenos Aires

In Chile

*The Latin American Observatory of Environmental Conflicts (OLCA), released a statement rejecting the decree 702 as it is a continuation of decree 701, through which 50% of the 3 million hectares planted with pines and eucalyptus that have invaded the south of the country, have been subsidized for private profit. In Spanish at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantaciones/21_set/2012/Chile.html

*Mapuexpress, a collective of Mapuche Indigenous Peoples, also released a declaration denouncing the impacts of tree plantations on the Mapuche communities in Southern Chile.

In Spanish at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantaciones/21_set/2012/Chile_2.html

In Mexico

During a week of open public forums, parallel to an international government meeting to advance policies of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), community groups, academics, and civil society organizations gathered in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. They analyzed REDD+ which, among many concerns, considers “monocultures of African palm, jatropha, and eucalyptus to be equivalent to forests or jungles for purposes of absorbing industrial carbon emissions; therefore their cultivation is encouraged under REDD+ programs. We strongly condemn this approach, not only because industrial tree plantations are

'green deserts' devoid of biodiversity, but also because their demand for water and agrochemicals causes grave environmental and health problems. The economic benefits of biofuel and cellulose plantations go directly into the coffers of large multinational companies." See <http://www.scribd.com/doc/106773721/Chiapas-in-REDDelion-DECLARATION-english>

In Colombia

* A new documentary in Spanish called "Tree plantations, land and food sovereignty in the Cauca" was screened by Censat Agua Viva. The video can be watched at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI4PjCZ6Rvk&feature=youtu.be>

In Brasil

*FUNPAJ payed homage to Father José Koopmans, a leading activist against tree plantations in Brazil. They also launched the campaign against tree plantations and for a participatory economic and ecological zoning with the slogan "It is urgent to change the consumption pattern". Further information in Portuguese at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantaciones/21_set/2012/Brasil.html

Action Alerts

Three action alerts on the alarming rate of expansion of tree plantations were organized in Gabon - against the Singapore based company Olam establishing monoculture tree plantations in 300,000 hectares of land; in the Philippines – with the Higaonons and peasants in Southern Philippines struggling against land grabbing by the A Brown Company, Inc (ABCI) to establish a monoculture oil palm plantation; and in Brazil – with social organizations denouncing the FSC certification of Fibria Celulose SA monoculture tree plantations. More information at http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/2012/action_alerts.html

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- Thailand: Save the Mekong - Stop the Xayaburi dam!

On 15 and 16 September, representatives of community networks from northeastern Thailand gathered in Bangkok to protest against the Xayaburi hydropower dam, whose construction on the mainstream of the Mekong River in the territory of Laos is being strongly pushed.

The Thai communities, living up and downstream the proposed dam site along the Mekong River clearly recognize that this proposed dam will have major impacts on their livelihood, as well as on those of other communities in Cambodia and Vietnam where the people also rely heavily and directly on Mekong mainstream. A total of over 65 million people depend on this river for their livelihood, mostly by fishery, agriculture along the river banks, and also from its fresh water for their rice field and agriculture, especially in the delta part in Vietnam.

According to the community networks' representatives, the dam would further

aggravate the already felt negative impacts of the four already constructed hydropower dams in the Upper Mekong River in China. These impacts include more frequent and intense floods, affecting peoples' livelihoods, especially their fishery, while also causing erosion and reducing the available area for food production thus undermining peoples' food sovereignty and income.

The Thai government is directly implicated in this dam, once it is being constructed by a Thai company, and the financing is coming from four of the biggest Thai commercial banks. More than 95% of the energy is meant to be sold in Thailand. Besides the Xayaburi dam, another 11 dams are planned in the lower Mekong region.

The protesting people demanded a meeting with the Prime Minister in public, to personally hand over a postcard petition signed by thousands of people, demanding to stop the dam. However, the Thai Prime Minister refused to meet the people. Nevertheless, they protested in front of the Governments' house for one entire morning, and afterwards held a press conference, attended by numbers of national and international media.

For more information see www.savethemkong.org

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-Brazil: 30 people intoxicated by pesticides sprayed from plane on eucalyptus plantations

The traditional communities known as geraizeiras at the Vale do Guar Settlement, in the town of Rio Pardo de Minas, north of Minas Gerais, denounce that an airplane spraying poison on a major eucalyptus plantation has hit the community, intoxicating 30 people, including children, elderly, youth and adults. They felt nausea, fever, vomit and itching skin. Airplane spraying is increasingly common in Brazil – the world's champion in pesticide use.

The community says that they have no one to resort to in order to denounce the facts; they feel wronged and they complain about impunity. They would denounce it to the Municipal Environmental Council, but the Council has members linked to the local eucalyptus industry. The local geraizeira community demands immediate inspection by state and federal authorities on pesticide application, and protection for communities.

Local communities have been struggling against eucalyptus and its expansion for years. They say it has negatively affected their lives, taking over areas used by the communities and drying up water sources.

Based on information provided by Rede de Comunicadores Populares do Semirido Mineiro. See information on the Permanent Campaign against Pesticides and for Life in Brazil on the whole article available at ASA Minas's blog: <http://asaminas.blogspot.com.br/2012/08/agrotoxicos-em-monocultura-de->

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