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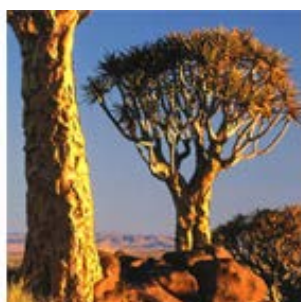
## OUR VIEWPOINT



### The roots of a forest

In March 2014, more than 100 organizations from all over the world requested through an open letter that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) change its misleading definition of forests. The FAO employs a reductionist definition based solely on the presence of trees, disregarding the fact that forests are spaces for different kinds of flora and fauna, as well as the home of local communities. Under FAO's definition, for example, large-scale monoculture plantations of fast-growing eucalyptus trees, managed with toxic agrochemicals, are regarded as 'forests.'

## A DIVERSITY OF STRUGGLES FOR A DIVERSITY OF FORESTS



### The forests not seen on picture post-cards: looking beyond the tropical belt

When it comes to 'tropical forests,' most studies, campaigns and policies focus on equatorial forests: the Amazon rainforest, the Congo basin or the south and southeast Asian forests. And with reason. Tropical rainforests are being increasingly fragmented, plundered and destroyed under the mantra of a so-called 'economic growth' model. However, there exist a wide variety of forests, often ignored, which are also plundered and where deforestation is also having devastating consequences.



### Forests in Mozambique face extinction

Mozambique was a country rich in forests. Nowadays, it can not only no longer be regarded as rich, but also its forests are at risk of disappearing altogether unless urgent, concrete and radical measures are taken. ProSavana, a programme that promotes agribusiness, is threatening one of Mozambique's most important native forests: the savannah. The programme is expected to occupy more than 14 million hectares, and it is being carried out without the knowledge or participation of civil society nor of the small farmers who are supposedly its beneficiaries.

### Páramos in Colombia: a short reflection on current threats and resistances

Páramos are life systems of the high Andean mountains. More than half of the



world's páramos are in Colombia. They are vital to the survival of millions of people in rural and urban areas, and yet, Colombia's páramos are being transformed, degraded, and even disappear, as a result of transnational interests of exploitation and extraction. To defend it, campesino communities have protested, marched against, blockaded and denounced this extractivist model, and have developed alternatives based on a productive agrarian model that protects and cares for their territories.



Russia: How to combine forest conservation and a traditional use of nature? The category of "Territories of Traditional Natural Resource Use" in the Russian legislation is intended to preserve the biodiversity of the 'taiga' or boreal forests. Despite this law potentially suitable to protect most of the indigenous territories in Russia, the reality had been different. Many 'ancestral' lands have been handed over for industrial extraction of natural resources like oil, gas, gold or diamonds.



India: Forest struggles at the crossroads

In India, forest communities, social movements and grassroots alliances have long defended the forests and their access to and control over them. But the struggle has become increasingly fierce. The present government has initiated moves to dilute India's strongest (and therefore most controversial) environmental right: the Forest Rights Act. Despite criticism on the law, local social movements have focused vigorously on the enforcement of the Act. They see this not as a bureaucratic process, but as a long-term peoples' struggle for the control of the forests.



Coastal forests threatened by tourism

On the tropical and subtropical coasts of Latin America, mainly in Mexico, Brazil and most of the Central American and Caribbean countries, tourism developments have destroyed and degraded coastal forests. The building of hotels, holiday homes and infrastructure to facilitate access to the sea, as well as the imposition of sceneries to satisfy the 'tourist landscape', generate enormous ecological damage, as well as the dispossession of the cultures and livelihoods of local populations that depend on this forests.

## PEOPLES IN ACTION

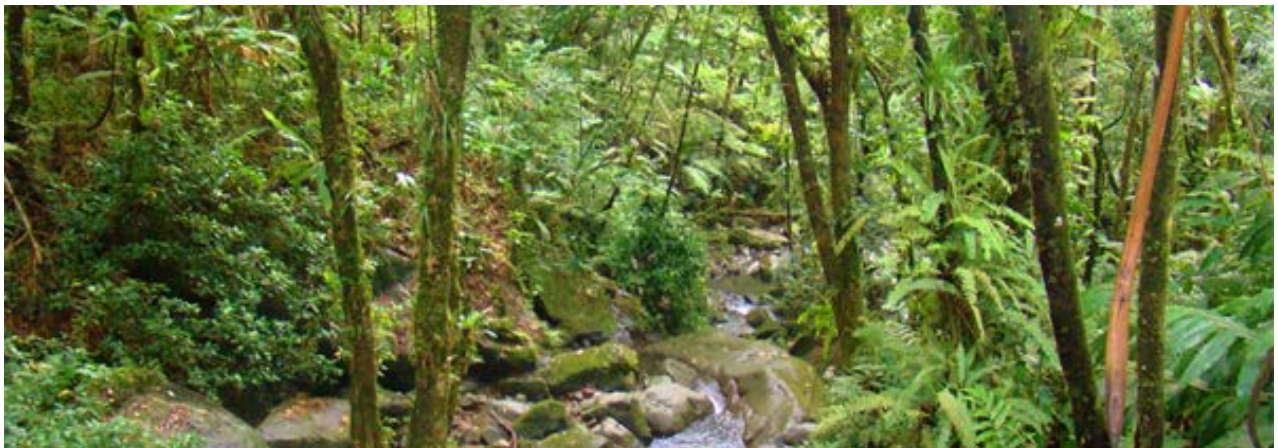
- "NO to ProSavana" Campaign in Southern Africa
- Southern Africa Development Community People's Summit Declaration: "We reject externally driven false solutions to climate change such as REDD+"
- Sixth Conference in Colombia on Páramos and High Mountains, Water for Life!
- Caravan for climate justice, gender and food sovereignty across Bangladesh, India and Nepal
- Petition to stop harassment of a defender of Earth and water in Peru: Yes to Water, No to Mining!

## RECOMMENDED

- Paraguay: Transgenic soy and human rights violations. After the coup comes consolidation of the real power of transnational companies
- Women groups converge in parallel to the Southern Africa Development Community Heads of State Summit (14-18 August)
- When forests aren't really forests: the high cost of Chile's tree plantations
- The African Biodiversity Network launched the documentary "The Mining Curse: Sacred Natural Sites Under Siege"
- The "State of the World's Rivers" website from the NGO International Rivers, illustrates the alarming situation of the Mekong River Basin

## OUR VIEWPOINT

The roots of a forest



In March 2014, more than 100 organizations from all over the world requested through an open letter that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, change its misleading definition of forests (1). FAO employs a reductionist definition based solely on the presence of trees, disregarding the fact that forests are a habitat for different kinds of flora and fauna, as well as the home of local communities. Under FAO's definition, for example, large-scale monoculture plantations of fast-growing eucalyptus trees, managed with toxic agrochemicals, are regarded as 'forests.'

In an article titled "Futures of Tropical Forests," published in *Biotropica*, two researchers attached to the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) also argue that this definition is unacceptable (2). They show that in certain regions of the world, 'forest' areas are 'created' when industrial tree monocultures are introduced in areas that previously did not have much tree cover. Thus, areas like savannahs or natural pastures, which are ecologically as unique and rich as forests, are being replaced by monocultures. The conclusion is clear: the present definition of forests must be changed to one that is closer to reality.

But how can this be done? The same researchers put forward another reference state for forests; they suggest 'old growth forest.' This would be an area with naturally regenerated trees older than the harvest cycles

used in the timber production logic, which aims to maximize volume of merchantable wood. Old growth forests would be much more biodiverse than those under timber extraction management. This new reference, according to the authors, would result in forests more resistant to environmental shocks and stresses, an important consideration in times of climate change.

The harvest cycle of tree monocultures is certainly short. In spite of campaign slogans like “Our future has roots,” used by eucalyptus companies such as Aracruz Celulose (now Fibria) in Brazil, nobody is fooled: the harvest cycle nowadays in eucalyptus monocultures, for instance, can be as incredibly short as 2 years in plantations for energy purposes, or 5 to 7 years for wood pulp or cellulose. In areas of ‘sustainable forest management,’ trees hundreds of years old are selectively logged for timber on 15 to 30 year cycles, which also results in forest destruction, although more slowly (see [WRM Bulletin 197](#)).

The CIFOR researchers point out that the people who have so far discussed and decided on the future of the world’s tropical forests are often outsiders. Monoculture tree plantations for wood emerged in Europe and sparked the launch of a new university degree, that of forest engineering. A more local viewpoint would prevent companies and foreign consultants from generalizing weak and even deceptive arguments: for instance, the argument that introduction of industrial monoculture ‘forests’ would reduce pressure on native old-growth forests. The authors found that this argument held only in New Zealand, but was found to be false in other countries with other contexts. This is what several organizations that support struggles against industrial tree monocultures, including WRM, have been saying for many years.

In order for forests to have a future, the researchers stress the need to understand the essential functions performed by forests and to recognize their many benefits. This means not only widening the viewpoint of forest engineers – who generally aim exclusively at maximizing wood production – but also involving other viewpoints, with consideration for the multiple dimensions of forests – social, cultural, even religious, and ecological. The authors defend the need for people actually living in the region to manage forests, including the local communities that depend on them. However, as WRM and other organizations have shown, this viewpoint has been hampered by unjust and very unequal power relations, which have resulted in violence. A small group of politically influential private interests always seek to debilitate local communities and their arduous struggle to prevent the destruction of the forests.

This bulletin seeks to contribute to showing the value of forests and their wide diversity, as well as their devastation and on-going resistance struggles. For forests to put down roots and become beneficial, communities, too, must be able to put down their roots.

Perhaps this is a good illustration of the CIFOR researchers’ message. In other words, a forest, to be a forest, must put down roots. This is what makes it possible for local communities, too, to put down roots and establish coexistence with the forest. In the context of monocultures or other intensive management regimes with short, destructive harvesting cycles, it is obviously impossible to put down roots, in spite of the propaganda of the kind used by Aracruz Celulose.

The problem is that the few people who currently hold the power to define the future of forests at present do not see things this way. They are, in a sense, blind, because they focus their view only on productivity and timber yield and the profits to be made in export markets. However, for a long time, millions of people who depend on forests have been aware of their importance for their lives, and they fight daily to defend them.

(1) Open letter to FAO, WRM, <http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/open-letter-to-fao-on-the-occasion-of-the-international-day-of-forests-2014/>

(2) Putz, Francis and Claudia Romero. “Futures of Tropical Forests (sensu lato)”, *Biotropica* 46 (4): 495-505, 2014. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/btp.12124/abstract>

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## A DIVERSITY OF STRUGGLES FOR A DIVERSITY OF FORESTS

The forests not seen on picture post-cards: looking beyond the tropical belt



When it comes to ‘tropical forests,’ most studies, campaigns and policies focus on those located along the equator: the Amazon rainforest, the Congo basin and the south or southeast Asian forests. And with reason. Tropical rainforests are being increasingly fragmented, plundered and destroyed under the mantra of a so-called ‘economic growth’ model (see [WRM Bulletin 188](#)). The consequences have been devastating and world-shattering, since these forests contain a large part of global biological diversity, participate in vital cycles – including the air and water cycles – and coexist with a multiplicity of peoples and cultures.

However, there exist a wide variety of forests, often ignored, which are plundered and where deforestation is also having devastating consequences. Climate, soil, altitude and humidity, among many other variables, create different biodiversities and forests, which at the same time play an essential role for the populations who depend on them. We find, for example, forests with trees with needle-like leaves; with open vegetation of arid regions; with woody scrubland; with clouds at the level of the vegetation; with swampy terrains; etc. Many of these ‘other’ forests are not often pictured on post-cards. Yet, they are of vital importance for biodiversity and local economies, and in many cases, they are even more threatened and have even higher deforestation rates than the tropical rainforests.

### Brazil’s most threatened forests

Brazil’s Amazon rainforests definitely captivate media headlines worldwide. But in fact, the Brazilian cerrado (savannah) and caatinga (semi-arid chaparral) are among the country’s most threatened areas. In the cerrado, the expansion of agribusiness with its monocultures of soya, sugarcane and eucalyptus and of cattle ranching with extensive grazing has pushed deforestation rates above those of the Amazon. Intensive use of toxic agricultural chemicals and heavy machinery is involved. Agriculture and livestock are the direct cause of the destruction of over 50% of the area of the cerrado in the last 35 years, as well as fragmenting habitats and causing the invasion of exotic species, extinction of biodiversity, soil erosion, pollution of water sources and fire regime changes (1). Mining activities are expanding in the region and are accelerating the disappearance of the cerrado (2). Above all, these industries have led to the displacement of countless traditional communities, including indigenous peoples and campesinos (peasants), and to the pollution of their territories.

Local populations who are resisting the advance of the agriculture and livestock industries are playing an

immensely important role in the defence of the remaining areas of cerrado (see [article in WRM Bulletin 195](#), and [RedeCerrado](#)). But land grabbing is happening fast. As Sergio Schlesinger of the Brazilian Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations stated, “Families living on family agriculture and forest management are being expelled. Pollution of water and of the soil is forcing people who live near the big plantations to move away.” (3)

With the focus on the Amazon, government policies have neglected the imperative need to stop the destruction of the cerrado by limiting the spread of agribusiness there. The Brazilian Forest Code, for instance, requires only 35% of agricultural areas in the cerrado to be preserved as legally protected areas, while in the Amazon rainforests that percentage is 80%, although still insufficient. Worse still, policies tend to reward agribusiness companies that have a discourse on ‘sustainability,’ while small farmers are blamed as the main perpetrators of deforestation. “While large producers cause an enormous amount of deforestation with impunity, small farmers are made to pay for the slightest change in the environment. The law nowadays is heavily weighted against the small farmer, who cannot even fell a single tree,” says Rosane Bastos of RedeCerrado (4). Moreover, approval of genetically modified soy and cotton crops has reduced production costs, acting as an incentive to expand agribusiness in the cerrado.

### Trees in the desert? Namibia’s dry forests

When it comes to the Namib Desert, one of the oldest and largest on the planet, forests do not immediately come to mind. But in addition to the vast gravel plains and sand dunes along the Namibian coast, the desert also has ‘dry forests’ or open savannah vegetation (5). These woodlands are home to unique flora and fauna and are important for the subsistence of local populations. The thorny !Nara plant, for instance, not only provides nutritious fruits and seeds for native peoples like the Topnaar, but also stabilizes the shifting sands of the dunes with its roots and stems.

Unfortunately, the desert coast also contains rich deposits of uranium; in 2012 Namibia was the fifth largest exporter of uranium in the world. At present, there are two mines in the country: Rössing Uranium, majority-owned by the Rio Tinto Group, which is the third largest open pit uranium mine in the world; and Langer Heinrich, belonging to Paladin Energy, an Australian company. Mining poses a major threat to the unique biodiversity of the desert’s dry forests. It also has serious health effects on mine workers (6), and on local and indigenous communities, due to heavy pollution of water sources and soil, as well as radioactive dust and chemicals released into the air during uranium extraction and processing (7).

Namibia’s uranium is extracted, milled, transported and exported as concentrated uranium oxide to nuclear plants in France, the U.K., the U.S. and Japan. Ironically, in these countries, the nuclear energy they produce is classified as ‘green energy’ and ‘free of carbon emissions.’

### Towards the North Pole: Canada’s boreal forests

The gigantic infrastructure needed to extract tar sands (deposits of oil, sand and clay forming an asphalt-like substance called bitumen) in Alberta, Canada, has deforested and contaminated thousands of hectares of the boreal forests. Boreal forests are incredibly diverse, featuring mountain ranges, forested plains, bogs and peatlands, coniferous forests (comprising trees with needle-like leaves) and mixed forests, and millions of waterways. They are home to several indigenous peoples or ‘First Nations’ (8), including the Mikisew Cree, Athabasca Chipewyan, Fort McMurray and Fort McKay Cree, Beaver Lake Cree, Chipewyan Prairie, and the Métis communities, whose livelihoods are being threatened by the tar sands mining. Extraction and transport operations in this area have resulted in the world’s second highest deforestation rate (9). Moreover, it has been reported that over five million gallons of waste water a year find their way into lakes, rivers and groundwater, seriously affecting not only flora and fauna but also the health of local communities and people

dependent on waters downstream.

In addition to the impacts suffered at the extraction sites, devastation is increasing exponentially elsewhere as infrastructure is being built over the length and breadth of North America to serve the gigantic export traffic and oil consumption. However, some planned oil and gas pipelines have met with fierce criticism and resistance from local populations and international campaigns. The Energy East Pipeline project is the largest proposed oil sands pipeline, and would pass through or close to the territories of 155 First Nations, as well as affecting the livelihood of hundreds of fisherfolk on the Atlantic coast (10). Its construction is being hotly debated.

Tar sands mining in Alberta is also in violation of Treaty 8, signed in 1899 between First Nations in Northern Alberta and Queen Victoria of England. The Treaty guarantees basic rights such as health care and education, as well as the right to pursue traditional ways of living, including hunting and harvesting. If the Canadian or Alberta state government does decide to reduce the amount of land used for these activities, it has a duty to consult with the affected First Nations. According to the treaty itself, this agreement will remain valid “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow” (11). Transport infrastructure will also affect other territories not covered by this Treaty.

Using examples from three continents, this article has tried to emphasize the great diversity of forests and the importance of each of them. This diversity is so wide that the whole of its extent cannot be covered in one bulletin. The forests and the peoples who coexist with them keep vast knowledge that has made it possible for them to maintain, safeguard, use and value each other. Increasing encroachment by agribusiness, mining or the fossil fuel industry, guided by the dominant economic model, is creating an alarming situation in the forests. It is imperative to change this dominant model which threatens life on the planet. Let us remember that forests, with all their diversity, play a key role in supporting life. By listening to, respecting and learning from the thousands of communities that live in co-existence with forests, we shall be able to work towards the transformation that is so urgently needed.

Notes:

- (1) A Conservação do cerrado brasileiro [Conservation of the Brazilian cerrado], Carlos Klink & Ricardo Machado, [www.equalisambiental.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Cerrado\\_conservacao.pdf](http://www.equalisambiental.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Cerrado_conservacao.pdf)
- (2) O cerrado e suas atividades impactantes: Uma leitura sobre o garimpo, mineração e a agricultura mecanizada [Activities impacting on the cerrado: An interpretation of mines, mining and mechanized agriculture], Paula Arruda & Lucia Vera, <http://www.observatorium.ig.ufu.br/pdfs/3edicao/n7/2.pdf>
- (3) Repórter Brasil, Ser “celeiro do Brasil” devasta o cerrado [Being the “granary of Brazil” is devastating the cerrado], Iberê Thenório, <http://reporterbrasil.org.br/2006/08/ser-celeiro-do-brasil-devasta-o-cerrado/>
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) A Forest Research Strategy for Namibia (2011-2015), Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, [www.mawf.gov.na/Documents/Forest%20Research%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.mawf.gov.na/Documents/Forest%20Research%20Strategy.pdf)
- (6) Study on low level radiation of Rio Tinto’s Rössing Uranium mine workers, 2014, EJOLT & Earthlife Namibia, <http://www.criirad.org/mines-uranium/namibie/riotinto-rossing-workers-EARTHLIFE-LARRI-EJOLT.pdf>
- (7) Namibia’s Rössing-Rio Tinto mine causes environmental and health problems, 2014, EJOLT & Earthlife Namibia, <http://www.ejolt.org/2014/05/namibias-rossing-rio-tinto-mine-causes-environmental-and-health-problems/>
- (8) Canada’s First Nations are its indigenous peoples, not including the Inuit or Métis.
- (9) Northern Rockies Rising Tide, <http://northernrockiesrisingtide.wordpress.com/tar-sandkearl-module-faq/>
- (10) Oil Sands Truth, <http://oilsandstruth.org/opposition-mounting-energy-east-export-pipeline-even-transcanada-files-official-application> ; Indigenous Environmental Network’s campaign

against tar sands, <http://www.ienearth.org/indigenous-resistance-kxl-tar-sands/>  
(11) Treaty 8, [http://www.treaty8.ca/documents/Treaty8\\_1899.pdf](http://www.treaty8.ca/documents/Treaty8_1899.pdf)

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## Forests in Mozambique face extinction



Mozambique used to be rich in forests. Nowadays, not only can it not be considered a rich country, but its forests are also at risk of disappearing unless urgent, concrete and radical measures are taken. Several studies in recent years by civil society organizations and academics clearly show that if the present model of forest exploitation continues, very soon we shall have to change our discourse about this being a country rich in forest resources. This wealth we boast about is being cut and exported in a savage and uncontrolled manner.

The great diversity of Mozambican forests is not widely known. Some studies estimate that two-thirds of the country's forests are Miombo woodlands, covering most of the northern region and part of the central region. In second place are the Mopane woodlands which extend from the Limpopo area to the valley of the upper Zambezi. (1)

Each of these woodlands plays a crucial role for rural communities, who obtain from them products essential for their subsistence, as well as making contributions to their cultural and spiritual welfare.

The main causes of the unsustainable situation of national woodlands are illegal logging, lack of inspections, illegality at all levels, inefficient or inexistent management plans and generalized corruption. Corruption in the forestry sector – fed by an “insatiable demand for timber” from Chinese companies (2) – takes place at all levels. We consider this to be the main cause of the lack of action in the face of so many facts and evidence denounced by civil society organizations, academics, journalists, etc. Multiple denunciations of corruption in the forestry sector have been disseminated by the local media, but little or nothing has been done about them. In February 2013, the NGO Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) launched the report “First Class Connections: Log Smuggling, Illegal Logging and Corruption in Mozambique,” which says that nearly 50 per cent of all the timber sent from Mozambique to China is cut illegally. The report describes several serious cases of smuggling and even alleges participation by the present Agriculture minister in illegal lumber exploitation deals (2). Early this year, we noted a press release from the Cabinet to Combat Corruption saying their investigations acquitted the minister of these allegations. What the investigation was based on, how it was carried out or indeed whether an investigation was performed at all, we will never know. Political powers-that-be are untouchable in Mozambique. Corruption allegations may be public and the facts plain to view, but little or nothing is done with this information. Cases are building up in society's memory and that of the few who still



think it is possible to change the country's direction.

The last national forestry inventory was carried out in 2007. Although objections have been raised over its methodology, it is the most recent survey and it is accepted by the government. The inventory reports a deforestation rate of 0.58%, equivalent to an annual loss of 219,000 hectares of forest. A study published in February 2014 by Eduardo Mondlane University (3) concluded that the situation has worsened, to the extent that illegal exploitation has increased by 88% since 2007. This study also estimates that 900,000 cubic metres were cut in 2012 for domestic consumption and international markets, much more than the 320,000 cubic metres licensed for that year.

Besides this illegal and unsustainable exploitation, in recent years we have observed increased investment and interest in plantations of exotic trees under the banner of 'reforesting the country.' Some plantations are already established and fully operating, and have caused a number of problems with local communities due mainly to land-grabbing (4).

Unfortunately, many people believe that these projects really are reforesting the country. However, it is important to remember that these plantations have serious negative impacts on biodiversity, water resources, local communities and their land rights. Irresponsibility and the greed for profit are so great that our native forests are in danger of being converted into 'green deserts.'

ProSavana: creating more opportunities for agribusiness

To make matters worse, new threats have arisen to what is left of our woodlands. The famed ProSavana Programme is one of these, and it affects one of Mozambique's most important native woodlands: the savannah. Savannahs (known as anhara in Angola and cerrado in Brazil) are grassy plains with scattered trees and shrubs, isolated or in small groups. They are a typical biome in tropical regions with a long dry season.

ProSavana is an agriculture programme involving Japan, Brazil and Mozambique that is supposed to support agricultural development on a large scale. The programme covers the provinces of Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia in the north of Mozambique. The area called the "Nacala Corridor" is home to four million people, most of whom depend directly on peasant agriculture for their livelihood. The ProSavana Programme plans to occupy more than 14 million hectares, using Brazil's "knowledge and technical experience" and "generous and disinterested" help from Japan.

The design of ProSavana was decided at the highest level, seeking to replicate a Brazilian agricultural project implemented by the Brazilian and Japanese governments in the cerrado. Along with the practice of large scale industrial monocultures (mainly of soya), the project is causing environmental degradation and the near extinction of indigenous communities in the affected areas (5). In spite of the well-documented social and environmental impacts of the Brazilian experiment, ProSavana is being carried out without the knowledge or participation of Mozambican civil society nor of the small farmers to whom it is targeted. The programme neglects family farming and regards agribusiness as the solution for all ills. How can it still be maintained that ProSavana seeks to develop family farming if small farmers themselves do not even know about the aims of the programme? If one of its goals is to combat shifting cultivation, which is practised by small farmers, how can it still be maintained that ProSavana supports small farmers?

For more than two years, nothing was publicly known about ProSavana except for news we received from our international allies. It was through these allies that in April 2013 we finally gained access to a version of the Master Plan (of March 2013) describing ProSavana in general terms. Although it was presented as a development programme, it in no way aims at supporting small farmers or developing family agriculture. On the contrary, the Master Plan is quite clearly designed for supporting agribusiness and everything it implies, as well as for controlling agriculture in Mozambique. We realized the motives behind the exclusion of small farmers and

civil society from the process of conception, design and elaboration of this programme. It is impossible for it to support the interests of small farmers since that is not the programme's goal. The Master Plan reveals the biggest case of land-grabbing in Mozambique and the destruction of our already deforested native woodlands. It anticipates greater instability in the country as well as conflicts over land, water and other resources; all this in order to create opportunities for agribusiness.

Small farmers wrote a letter to the highest authorities of the three countries involved in ProSavana – Mozambican President Armando Guebuza, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe – requesting them to urgently stop and reconsider the ProSavana Programme. The letter was signed by countless social movements and NGOs, including the União Nacional de Camponeses (UNAC – National Small Farmers' Union) and Justiça Ambiental (JA! – Environmental Justice). In spite of insistent requests for a reply to the letter, and innumerable declarations by our government representatives about processes of dialogue being under way, and their respect for dialogue, the letter was ignored for a year. There is no dialogue at all!

On June 2, 2014, the “No to ProSavana” campaign was launched. It was followed by the Second Triangular Conference of the Peoples of Mozambique, Brazil and Japan to reiterate our commitment to globalizing peoples' struggle against the programme. The conference was attended by small farmers, civil society organizations, academics and government officials from all three countries. At the meeting we realized that our governments' discourse had changed, but not their actions. We still have no access to the documents, we still listen to the same empty discourse: all words and no documentation.

We have repeatedly stated that the problem lies in the original conception of the programme, its goals and development model, which we consider inappropriate. Mr. Augusto Mafigo, a small farmer and president of UNAC, got the message across clearly, simply and without beating about the bush: “We do not want ProSavana.” The conference showed, again, that the people are united in this struggle and that we do not want this programme, for the reasons given. Once again, we denounced the mistaken way in which this programme has been developed. It was also very clear that we urgently need to start an honest and transparent dialogue about how to support and develop family agriculture.

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Justiça Ambiental, JA!, <http://ja4change.org/index.php/pt/>

(1) “Levantamento preliminar da problemática das florestas de Cabo Delgado”, Daniel Ribeiro and Eduardo Nhabanga, <http://africa.redesma.org/publicaciones.php?ID=1963>

(2) First Class Connections: Log Smuggling, Illegal Logging and Corruption in Mozambique, EIA, <http://eia-international.org/first-class-connections>

(3) <http://www.fao.org/forestry/eu-flegt/85805/en/>

(4) The Expansion of Tree Monocultures in Mozambique. Impacts on local peasants communities in the Province of Niassa, World Rainforest Movement, <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/the-expansion-of-tree-monocultures-in-mozambique-impacts-on-local-peasants-communities-in-the-province-of-niassa/>

(5) UNAC, <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/agrarian-reform-mainmenu-36/1321-land-grabbing-for-agribusiness-on-mozambique-unac-statement-on-the-prosavana-programme>

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## Páramos in Colombia: a short reflection on current threats and resistance action



Meekly the water flows from lichens and stones  
like a flood of feelings from  
the soul of the earth...  
(Efraín Gutiérrez Zambrano)

Páramos are life systems of the high Andean mountains of countries like Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia. Colombia is home to more than half the páramos of the planet. The landscape of páramos in Colombia commonly consists of reed beds, frailejón (*Espeletia*) species, rosemary, dwarf trees, swirling mist, farm crops, livestock and warmly-wrapped, red-cheeked peasants.

Colombians are aware of the importance of the páramos since they provide about 70 per cent of the water needs of the population. The ecological conditions in páramos are such that a large number of major rivers rise there, including the Cauca, the Magdalena and the Meta.

Historically, human beings have influenced and transformed the páramos. It has been home for thousands of years to many communities that have developed cultural characteristics and forms of production adapted to conditions in the high Andes.

These features are major reasons to view páramos as essential for the survival of millions of people in rural and urban areas. However, páramos in Colombia are being transformed: they are deteriorating and even disappearing.

Páramos in Colombia have traditionally been disputed territory. In recent years, government policies have favored foreign mining investments. Now more than ever, this is threatening the stability of the páramos, their ecology and the local populations who live in and depend on them.

Páramos are experiencing rapid environmental deterioration, much faster and more irreparable than that caused by extensive agriculture and livestock raising. In particular, the policies of the government of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014), making mining and energy projects the main engine of development in the country, have attempted to hand over Colombia's páramos and mountains for exploitation by transnational mining interests.

In spite of the fact that páramos are legally protected in Colombia, the State and national and foreign companies have ignored the Constitution and national legislation and expanded their activities into the

páramos. Fortunately, resistance by campesinos (peasants) and urban dwellers in different high mountain areas has not only denounced and made visible the many instances of abuses by companies in their territories, but has also halted and expelled these life-destroying activities.

Organized communities have reflected about their territories, finding effective routes of action to defend them. Water has been the main pillar of their struggles, and women's groups – representing the most vulnerable social sector in the face of mining threats – have stood out for their permanent participation and positive proposals. In fact, some of the resistance processes in the high Andes have inspired other communities facing the same threats in their territories.

In 2010, after nearly 20 years of organizing against mining activities in the El Almorzadero páramo, the local community in the municipality of Cerrito (Santander), represented by the “Vigilance and Oversight Commission for the Protection of the Páramo,” through a citizen participation mechanism known as the Normative Popular Initiative, managed to get the Cerrito municipal council to ban mining projects on the El Almorzadero páramo. This people's initiative has inspired the implementation of participation mechanisms in different areas of the country.

Another emblematic case was the organization of mass demonstrations against gold mining in the Santurbán páramo by the Greystar mining company, now called Eco Oro Minerals Corp. Led by the “Santurbán Páramo Defence Committee” in 2011, some 40,000 people participated in the demonstrations in Bucaramanga, with further mass protests being held in Bogotá and Cúcuta.

Since 2013, campesino communities in the municipality of Tasco have been defending the Pisba (Boyacá) páramo from the mining activities of Hunza Coal, a multinational company. Campesinos organized a camp for 28 days on the páramo to prevent the company's machinery from entering. The camp was an ideal space for people to connect and plan actions for the defense of the high-altitude páramos that remain to this day.

In defense of the páramos, local campesino communities have protested, marched against, blockaded and denounced an extractivist model that would hand over the country's mountains to transnational companies and expel communities from the páramos. They have constructed alternatives based on a productive agricultural model that protects and cares for their territories, and they have proposed land use norms in accordance with local settlements and regions, exercising their sovereign right to decide on the economic and productive uses of these territories.

We demand that páramos be free of mining and energy projects and of transnational companies!

Let the high Andean mountains, their waters and cloud forests, continue to coexist with their campesinos wrapped in ruanas!

Censat Agua Viva- Friends of the Earth Colombia

More information: [www.censat.org](http://www.censat.org)

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Russia: How to combine forest conservation and a traditional use of nature?



The Russian Federation, located in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia, is the world's largest country in terms of area. Part of this area is dedicated as “Specially Protected Natural Territories” (SPNT), a category that has been established about 100 years ago. It is currently composed of over 13,000 sites, covering around 11% of the Russian territory. But in the last couple of years, the Government weakened the protection regime in many SPNT even though the legislative base to create and maintain SPNT remains unchanged. The term ‘indigenous peoples’ in Russia applies only to peoples with limited population (up to 50 thousand). According to official records, only 45 peoples in Russia are recognized as indigenous, with 40 of them living in the North, Siberia and the Far East, mostly in the Asian part of the country. The majority of forests in Asian Russia are represented by coniferous trees (Siberian spruce, Siberian fir, Siberian larch, Siberian pine and Scotch pine). They are called in Russian ‘taiga’ and represent the boreal forests. When taiga forests dominated by coniferous trees are clear-cut, deciduous trees like birch and aspen replace the conifers. Forests dominated by coniferous trees will only re-grow, if there are no more disturbances at such sites for at least 70 to 100 years after clear-cutting and recovery dominated by birch and aspen.

Another land designation that is widely used in Russia is the “Territories of Traditional Use of Nature” (TTUN). The Federal Law on “Territories of Traditional Use of Nature of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Russian Far East” was adopted in 2001. Article 4 of the Law expressly states that one of the goals of creating TTUN is the “conservation of biological diversity in the territories of traditional use of nature”. Russia is the only among the Arctic countries with legislation that designates land as TTUN, and the law could potentially protect the TTUN. Unfortunately, the regional legislation needed to implement the TTUN has received little attention. Lands allocated to indigenous peoples were considered primarily as lands for traditional economic activities focused on profit (not on social or environmental issues). Accordingly, the provincial acts from several regions of Russia often did not have regulations aimed at protecting the biological diversity of these areas with the participation of indigenous peoples or in some cases, where such regulations were included, these were too weak. This soon resulted in negative impacts. Many ‘ancestral’ lands were given out for industrial extraction of natural resources, such as oil, gas, gold or diamonds.

If the TTUN law would be fully implemented, it would have the capacity to legally protect most indigenous territories in Russia. The purposes of the law are for protecting the traditional environment and livelihood of indigenous peoples, their ways of using natural resources, the protection of historically developed social and cultural relationships of indigenous peoples, the protection of integrity of objects of historical and cultural inheritance as well as to support the reproduction and protection of biodiversity.

The borders of every TTUN must be determined by federal, regional and local state authorities. The Federal Law on TTUN gives a clear role to the indigenous members and organizations of the local communities in establishing additional laws or regulations for each TTUN. Although the laws governing the use of resources in a TTUN must be in agreement with the laws of the Federation and regional governments, the regulations of the TTUN are to be based on the traditions of the indigenous communities that inhabit each TTUN. The clauses

seem to allow for either community management of resources or co-management with regional governments, depending on agreements that may be reached with those governments. Other residents, businesses and organizations may however also use a TTUN as long as that use is permitted by regulations of that particular TTUN. Ownership of the lands and waters within TTUN is not given to the indigenous peoples; but they have the right to usufruct the lands within the TTUN.

The implementation of the TTUN has been treated differently among Russian regions. For example, in 1992 in the Amur and Khabarovsk regions, the TTUNs were established to benefit the Udege, Ulchi, Nanai and Orochi indigenous peoples. The attempt however failed to withdraw forest tenant rights from logging enterprises like Terneiles or Dallesprom and violated the Udege, Ulchi, Nanai, and Orochi indigenous peoples in their right to use the forests. The result has been much more deforestation and violation of rights of indigenous peoples.

In the Primorskii region, TTUNs were allocated only on paper, but this was not implemented practically. After the Primorskii regional election, the new authority decided to use these territories, which have mainly forests dominated by oak and Korean pine, for profitable extractive activities. Similar events took place in Western Siberia. It was decided to allocate ancestral territories in the Yamalo-Nenetskii and Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous districts to companies. These ancestral lands, which are not yet fully demarcated, are of high interest for oil or gas companies.

In the Russian legislation, the role that indigenous peoples have in the conservation of a wide variety of forests and biodiversity has not yet been sufficiently reflected on. Their role is poorly understood. In this regard, a set of new measures is required to improve the legislation. For example, to prepare a public education program for TTUNs and to recognize the role of indigenous peoples in forest conservation. There should also be regulations to prevent the use of land in the territories of traditional use of nature for mining or other extractive activities.

TTUNs should be included in the Federal Law on "Specially Protected Natural Areas". The Federal Law on "Ecological Expertise" (the 'Environmental Impact Assessment' in Russian) should make additions related to the necessity of ethnological expertise in areas inhabited by indigenous minorities. The previous appeals of indigenous communities to review the implementation of TTUN demonstrates their understanding of biodiversity conservation goals and their interest to cooperate in the field of nature protection in the territories of traditional residence and where they carry out their economic activities.

Unfortunately, TTUNs do not use their potential for combining forest conservation and protection of traditional way of life of indigenous peoples. If Russia better implemented the TTUN concept in practice, it would make a good example to other countries on protection of natural biodiversity and traditional cultures of indigenous peoples.

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India: Forest struggles at the crossroads



One can still come across unfragmented forests and wilderness landscapes in India, some of them comprising the type of structural and species diversity of the vegetation that is typical for unfragmented landscapes, despite wholesale ravaging of such landscapes during both colonial and post-colonial times. Besides the rainforests in the Andaman Islands as well as the mountainous Western Ghats and Himalayan North-East India, the country also has extensive natural conifers, broadleaved and temperate forests covering much of the Himalayas, the moist deciduous Sal (*Shorea Robusta*) forest of eastern and central India, dry deciduous (mostly teak, *Tectona Grandis*) forest in central and southern India, and the thorn forest of the central Deccan and western Gangetic plain dominated by the babul (Arabic gum, *Acacia Nilotica*). The Adivasis (1), indigenous forest communities in India, share the forest habitats with other communities. In most areas, forests still offer food and energy for Adivasi and forest dependent communities and are an important part of their livelihoods.

Forests, however, have always been contested spaces in India. They were first 'reclaimed' as revenue-yielding agricultural land and human settlements before and throughout the colonial era. Later, forests were enclosed and clear-cut to make room for more 'productive' areas like monocultures and 'development' projects like big dams, mining, military installations and roads. By the turn of the present century, the official forest policy had tilted towards conservation, and random clearing of natural vegetation was stopped. This, however, did not translate into tangible relief for forest communities. On the contrary, the conservationist face of the Government's forest management made things worse: in the new 'protected areas' like wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and tiger reserves, people lost all access and right to use the forests. Meanwhile, remaining forests continued to be cut for 'development purposes'.

In India, forest communities, social movements and grassroots alliances have long defended forests and their access and control over the forest spaces. Yet, the struggles have become increasingly harder. The right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the 2014 parliamentary elections, marking another watershed in the history of struggles for forests. Following an overt corporate agenda, the new Minister for the Environment and Forests declared that the country's economic development should not be held back for environmental reasons. Afterwards, this ministry initiated a process to dilute the strongest (and hence, most contentious) environmental law in India: the Forest Rights Act (FRA). In the last few years, forest struggles in India centred upon the implementation of this Act. This focus succeeded to wrest major relief from the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government, while braving strong opposition from both the corporate and wildlife lobbies. Attempted dilution of the Act poses a huge threat to the struggles--on the ground as well as from the various sub-national and national alliance formations.

Efforts at placating big business houses had started during the last few months of the UPA government. Seen in retrospect, one can perhaps say that the over-emphasis by social movements and peoples' organisations on the FRA has a cumulatively detrimental impact on forest struggles in India. At the end of the day, India's environmental policies are framed and executed by a state that believes in the neo-liberal hegemony over nature

and natural resources. A brief look at the historical context of FRA's emergence and some events since then might be useful in understanding the dynamics of forest struggles in India.

Box: FRA defines 'forests' as all forest and wilderness landscapes perceived and used as forests by communities, irrespective of their officially recorded/recognized ownership/tenure status. This means that the Act opened all forms of forest enclosures (including official conservation areas) to communities. However, in defining communities whose rights it professes to recognize and safeguard, the Act discriminates. Whereas for members of forest-dwelling 'Scheduled Tribes' (tribes notified as such by the Government from time to time) need to provide a more recent residence-proof, December 2005 (the Act was adopted in 2006), it demands proof for three generations (meaning 75 years) in the case of other traditional forest dwellers.

FRA: fresh contexts for forest struggles

Strong and strategic lobbying by activist groups, together with a people's movement, led to the greatest mobilisation on forest rights that India had ever seen. This resulted in 2006 in the passage of Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act), better known as FRA or Forest Rights Act. The Act, which came into force in 2008, provided a new context to forest struggles in India by forcing into the political mainstream the hitherto 'marginal' discourse of who owns and will--in future--govern forests. Ever since the first draft Bill was tabled in 2005, conservation NGOs, a section of the Indian media and even a section of the Government kept opposing the proposed law because it would allegedly destroy the dwindling Indian wildlife, especially tigers. The pro-Bill campaigners on the other hand, successfully mobilised 'mainstream' political opinion in favour of the Bill, particularly the political left. They also got considerable support from international environmental groups. However, the new Act, when it was finally adopted, was a watered down version of the much more radical Bill drafted by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) constituted for the purpose. Grassroots groups accused the Government of sabotaging the Act, but nevertheless called to prepare for a long struggle for its implementation, because the movements feared Government agencies would try to hinder the Act from being properly implemented.

Despite the watering down, the FRA was truly a historic act. It admits that Adivasis and other forest dwellers in India have been historically deprived of their just rights, and provides a mechanism for recognizing a bundle of those rights, including over homestead and cultivable lands, ownership of all non-timber forest products, fishing rights and community rights like grazing. Besides, the Act provides for restoration of customary rights like Nistar (right to use and collect from common lands earmarked for the purpose) that successive governments had violated ever since the gradual, and often barely legal, state take-over of private/community forests which began in 1955, after India's independence. It is clearly stated that rights under the FRA can be claimed in all forms of forests, including protected areas, overriding provisions in other acts that might deny such rights to forest communities. And most importantly, the FRA empowers village institutions like the Gram Sabha (2) to govern their own community forests as well as all other forests they depend on. According to the Act, community institutions can stop any project if it harms their cultural or natural heritage, and they can take steps to protect and conserve forests, wildlife and biodiversity. The "Niyamagiri struggle" in which local communities halted a bauxite mine in the state of Odisha, provides a clear example where the FRA was successfully used.

Struggle for Niyamagiri

In the Eastern Ghats mountain range along the east coast of India, the Dongria Kondhs, an Adivasi community, resisted a concerted assault by the state and corporate power on their communal swidden cultivation, land and forests (and also, their sacred hill called Niyamagiri—the abode of the Niyama Raja). The Eastern Ghats support various forest types, including moist deciduous, dry deciduous, dry evergreen, thorn scrub and Shrub. The Kondhs staunchly said no to all 'development' proposals from the Government, like



road building and employment in factories and mines, and did not give up, even in the face of severe repression: the leaders of the movement had been threatened, badly beaten up and jailed. The Odisha state Government tried its best to go ahead with the bauxite mining project by Vedanta Ltd, the largest mining and non-ferrous metals company in India, headquartered in the UK. However, there was not much the Government could do when in mid-2013, all Gram Sabhas in the area rejected the mining proposal.

The Ministry of Forest and Environment had first withdrawn the environmental clearance for the mining project in 2009, citing non-compliance with the FRA. After appeals went to the Supreme Court of India, a landmark decision was made in April 2013, stating that the cultural values and spiritual rights of the local communities have to be respected under the rights provided by the FRA. It ruled that the indigenous peoples living in the Niyamagiri area would decide whether they want the mine or not. Besides, there was also a vigorous campaign inside and outside India for defending the Dongria Kondh rights over their sacred hill. The campaign, despite sometimes bitter and acrimonious infighting, witnessed a rare coming together of social movements, donor agencies and political formations. Although the FRA was effective in this case to safeguard Adivasi rights over their lands, the expansion of a system driven by increasing economic growth is robbing the Adivasi and other rural peoples of their forests and livelihoods.

Official implementation of FRA: politically motivated and undemocratic

Broadly speaking, however, the Governmental implementation of the Act turned into a hasty, politically motivated, and undemocratic exercise where people had no role. Provisions for community rights for forest governance and usage were undermined. The role of the Gram Sabha, the key institution in the FRA, has been ignored. Struggle groups allege that the Forest Department, under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, had been influencing and subverting the FRA implementation process in wildlife conservation areas. A process of 'relocating' villages in the existing and potential tiger areas was going on, in violation of both the FRA and the Wild Life Protection Act (2006 amendment), which should make such relocations subject to written, prior and informed consent of the Gram Sabha (which could only happen after the rights recognition process is complete). The dubious attitude of the state towards the forest rights issue reflects its internal political contradictions. The practical electoral necessities for Adivasi votes and the policy of containment of growing political unrest in the Maoist-affected areas both demand that the FRA is implemented. However, another set of political necessities demand that the forest remains a state space, where communities can have at best 'fringe' access.

Whither Forest Struggles? Post-FRA scenario

State repression in forest areas of India increased in the years following the enactment of the FRA. The Indian Government launched a full-scale military offensive against the Maoist Guerrillas, who operate from heavily forested areas mainly in the eastern-central-southern forest corridor, and control a large chunk of forests in India (3). An elaborate discussion on the Maoist movement will not be attempted here. It is however important to mention that Maoists have been known to use forest rights issues as a organisational strategy to mobilise Adivasis, and wherever they have created 'liberated' zones (as in Dankaranya on the Chattisgarh-Andhra Pradesh-Maharashtra border) the communities have apparently taken over forests. In other areas dominated by Maoist groups like the Saranda forests of Singhbhum of Jharkhand, government forest staff had abandoned their offices.

If we take the Maoist movement into account, the movements in Indian forests now have two definite trends. One, the well-organised and predominantly violent campaign against the Indian state led by the Maoist Communist Party of India (CPI). And two, a loose, often ill-organised, and largely localised ensemble of diverse people's movements. This trend includes the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers of India (NFFPFW), now defunct—the groups involved in the

process have since regrouped in two other formations: All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM) and All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP)—, and sundry other groups. Despite their inherently anarchic and localized nature, there is a growing tendency among the movements to take a more politically articulated position on issues like how to engage with an anti-people and increasingly military state, and whether older forms of non-violent democratic movements will continue to be effective in face of the state repression.

Despite their criticism of the FRA, non-party social movements in India have focussed more on its implementation than anything else. Significant community mobilisations in many parts of the country as people try to assert their control over forests bear witness to that. New struggles have emerged in Jharkhand, Orissa, Northern Bengal, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, and also in Tamilnadu, all of which view the implementation of the FRA more as a long-drawn people's struggle for control of forests rather than a bureaucratic process. Social movements now emphasize the necessity of using the FRA in present and future struggles to fight the aggression of capital in forest areas and to strengthen community control over forests. The struggle for who decides how forests are used is also being increasingly seen as a struggle for a better and more equitable social order, though differences and ambiguities on political perceptions and key organisational strategy issues persist at intra-movement and inter-movement levels.

Not all forces working on forest rights and demanding communal rights have such openly political agenda. It needs to be said that the politicization process of forest movements/movements for commons runs almost in parallel with another process dominated by big NGOs and donor agencies. Which, whether by chance or design, makes a pitch for de-politicization of struggles.

The increasing visibility of big NGOs

As the more politically minded movement groups, NGOs are also trying to create alliance formations. Questions remain about whether (and how) NGO-network formations could successfully link with social movements. And more importantly, if these formations ultimately only fulfil the state agenda of creating a manageable civil society buffer in Indian forests—a territory that has come under the influence of the radical left movement in recent years. It is possible that these groups, by taking a middle road between left-leaning movements and the state as well as advocating social reforms solely within the state framework, often occupy such a buffer space. This could end up diluting the political demands the social movements raise—especially the demand for forests as independent community owned commons. Social movements have closely worked with groups in this strata, but there are doubts whether political and tactical implications of such joint work are ever fully realized. Neo-liberal NGOs in the country are now directly targeting the 'forest rights' domain—a known neo-liberal think tank, Liberty Institute, is getting engaged in the implementation of the FRA.

Battling Capital and State: Challenges Ahead

The issue is not that the presence of capital in Indian forests will be louder as days pass, or that the state will further undermine and dilute the FRA for creating an investor-friendly environment. In a neo-liberal context, these are to be expected. The real issue for the movement groups is how well and quickly they perceive and internalize the political lessons that come out of the struggle for the FRA and its implementation. One lesson is that unless the movements disassociate their core political strategy from the state-run and increasingly NGO-dominated process of implementing the FRA, it is likely that they will cease to be politically visible. This visibility is already too small when considering the huge territorial sprawl of Indian forests and the diversity of communities living in those. This in turn demands that the movements formulate such political strategies first, keeping in mind a scenario where the state will no longer be open to negotiations, and the safeguards/relief provided by the FRA will gradually, if not outright, disappear. The demand for expanding the relief/safeguards in the FRA (and opposition to any attempt to undermine those) has to be strongly moored in the political realization that each influential struggle at the grassroots creates its own context. Moreover, the struggles as a

body should not suffer from an uninformed and partial understanding of what a right wing neo-liberal state is really capable of doing. The key strategy should be to strengthen existing struggles at the grassroots, build up more islands of resistance, and then, link those up, first politically and then organizationally.

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(1) Adivasi is a generic term for heterogeneous indigenous peoples in India

(2) As defined in FRA, the Gram Sabha is the open assembly of all adult residents in a 'gram' or village. Though it is notionally convened by the Gram Panchayat, a local self-government institution at the village or small town level in India, the Gram Sabha in FRA is an independent body. It can come up in all forest areas with a population of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and/or other traditional forest dwellers, irrespective of whether such forest settlements are officially recognized as villages.

(3) For information on present day Maoist Movement, see Chakrabarty. S, Red Sun, Delhi, 2009, Roy. A, 'Walking With the Comrades', Outlook India, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738>, Nawlakha, G, 'Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion', UK, 2012. For the genesis of the Maoist movement in India, see Banerjee, S, 'In the Wake of Naxalbari', Kolkata, 1980.

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## Coastal forests threatened by tourism



The tropical and subtropical coasts of Latin America, in Mexico, Brazil and most Central American and Caribbean countries, have been subjected to waves of tourist development over the last forty years. This has brought about reduction and degradation of what are known as 'saltwater forests.' Coastal forests include mangroves, beach forests, periodic swamps (tidal and flood plain forests) and freshwater swamps. One of the ecosystems most affected by the expansion of tourist and residential developments is mangrove forests.

Construction of hotels and homes right on the shoreline along the coasts has led in many places to reorganization of coastal territories to facilitate their use for tourism. Areas previously occupied by coastal forests have been destroyed by real estate or infrastructure projects to allow access from built-up areas to the sea. Sometimes they have been substituted with other natural sceneries according to standardized aesthetic ideas of what 'tourist landscapes' ought to look like.

In the last decade, for example, the Pacific coast of Costa Rica has become a Central American tourist epicentre. Rapid development of beach hotels and holiday houses is closely linked to the United States market. Together with cruise ships, residential tourism has transformed the physical landscape, displacing many fishing, agricultural and pastoral communities away from coastal areas (1).

## Coastal territories

Mangroves, or mangrove forests, are made up of trees and woody shrubs that “grow and develop in intertidal zones and flood plains of coastal deltas and estuaries, in saline, sandy, muddy or clay soils that are deprived of oxygen and sometimes acidic,” according to Red Manglar International, an alliance of organizations that support communities living in and depending on mangroves (2). Mangrove branches hang down and take root in the ground, interlocking with each other. This creates dense woodland structures above the water that provide refuge for a large number of species and plants, especially fish, snails, shellfish and crabs, as well as birds. Mangroves are a food source for coastal populations. Gathering activities are frequently carried out by women and provide the basis of the diet of many families.

Mangrove forests also protect coral formations in the Atlantic, where they act as a barrier to the silt carried down by rivers. The coral reefs are essential for local food supply and for the reproduction of many species. Mangroves also serve as a shock-absorbing barrier against natural phenomena like storms, tsunamis and hurricanes that are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change.

Beach forests are usually found above the high water mark in sandy soils. They may merge with farmland or high altitude forests. These coastal forest systems are highly sensitive to change. Beach vegetation and sand dunes play an important role in stabilizing soil and preventing silting in coastal lagoons and rivers. At the same time, they protect the population from invasion by sand dunes. The predominant animal species are crabs and shellfish. Beaches are also important sites for sea turtle reproduction.

Forests on swampy terrain subjected to periodic flooding are influenced by tides, and may be flooded by fresh water or brackish water twice a day. The height of the tides varies from one place to another. These woodlands are the natural vegetation cover of river floodplains. These floodplains are recognized as one of the most productive ecosystems in existence, with a wildlife rich in biodiversity.

Finally, forests in permanent fresh water swamps have constantly humid soils and are characterized by their plant species, rich in plant nutrients (3).

## Effects of coastal forest destruction

The progressive encroachment of coastal tourist and residential development, along with the expansion of the shrimp industry in other coastal areas, poses a clear threat to coastal forests, especially mangroves. Coastal forest destruction brings about immense ecological damage with far-reaching effects. It increases the vulnerability of the ecosystems as well as local populations to natural phenomena, in a context where these are expected to intensify because of climate change.

Massive uncontrolled urbanization of the shoreline and the proliferation of the hotel and port industries have led to coastal erosion. This has seriously affected the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. The most visible consequence is the alarming disappearance of beaches on the Mayan Riviera, denounced by Greenpeace Mexico (4). But beaches are also disappearing in other regions, like the province of Guanacaste in Costa Rica, as environmental organizations like the Confraternidad Guanacasteca and even the Social Pastorate of the Catholic Church have repeatedly warned (5). The loss of coastal forests also causes serious pollution problems in rivers, streams, beaches and the ocean, as well as soil erosion, destruction of springs of water and deterioration of habitats that support biodiversity. Ecosystem degradation has a negative impact on the

livelihood of coastal populations, impoverishing them and making it difficult for them to stay in their traditional territories. The destruction of the material basis of the life and reproduction of coastal communities encourages ‘depeasantization.’ Finally, in some places degradation and deforestation of coastal forests has led to increased social and environmental conflicts.

Tourism, far from being the ‘chimneyless industry’ praised by big corporations and their institutional representatives, has major environmental and social impacts. Nowadays, coastal forests are severely threatened by tourist and residential projects, together with the expansion of the shrimp industry.

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Notes:

- (1) [Femke van Noorloos](#), ¿Un lugar en el sol para quién? El turismo residencial y sus consecuencias para el desarrollo equitativo y sostenible en Guanacaste, Costa Rica (A place in the sun for who? Residential tourism and its consequences for equitable and sustainable development in Guanacaste, Costa Rica), Alba Sud, Opiniones en Desarrollo, N. 15, May 2013. [www.albasud.org/publ/docs/58.pdf](http://www.albasud.org/publ/docs/58.pdf)
- (2) Red Manglar International is an alliance of community-based organizations from 10 Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela). Its goal is to “defend the mangroves and coastal ecosystems, guaranteeing their vitality and that of the traditional user communities that live in harmony with them, against the threats and impacts of activities that degrade the environment, alter the natural ecological balance and/or violate the human rights of local communities.” <http://redmanglar.org>
- (3) FAO: Integrated coastal area management and forestry. <http://www.fao.org/forestry/icam/4360/en/>
- (4) Greenpeace México, Campañas: Turismo depredador (Campaigns: Predatory tourism). [www.greenpeace.org/mexico/es/Campanas/Oceanos-y-costas/Que-amenaza-a-nuestros-oceanos/Turismo-depredador/](http://www.greenpeace.org/mexico/es/Campanas/Oceanos-y-costas/Que-amenaza-a-nuestros-oceanos/Turismo-depredador/)
- (5) Ronal Vargas, Una mirada socio-económica a Guanacaste y su gente (A socio-economic overview of Guanacaste and its people), Alba Sud, Jan. 22, 2013. [www.albasud.org/noticia/en/378/una-mirada-socio-econ-mica-de-guanacaste-y-su-gente](http://www.albasud.org/noticia/en/378/una-mirada-socio-econ-mica-de-guanacaste-y-su-gente)

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## PEOPLES IN ACTION

“NO to ProSavana” Campaign in Southern Africa

The Mozambique Union of Farmers, UNAC, a member of La Via Campesina, stressed during the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) People’s Summit in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (14-16 August 2014), that ProSavana, a mega agri-business project in Mozambique that also involves Brazil and Japan, “is not only a national campaign, it is a regional one”. UNAC warned that ProSavana would turn 14.5 million hectares of agricultural land currently being used by small-scale farmers in the Nacala Corridor, Northern Mozambique, into industrial monoculture agriculture driven by corporations for export production.

Read further here:

<http://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/stop-transnational-corporations-mainmenu-76/1650-no-to-prosavana-campaign-mozambicans-seek-regional-solidarity>

See also the article from La Via Campesina denouncing how women in the Nacala Corridor are being

prevented from fetching firewood and other forest products where ProSavana is being implemented:  
<http://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/women-mainmenu-39/1646-mozambique-women-prevented-from-fetching-firewood-and-other-forest-products-in-nacala-corridor>

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Southern Africa Development Community People's Summit Declaration: "We reject externally driven false solutions to climate change such as REDD+"

The NO REDD in Africa! Network (NRAN) took part in the 2014 SADC People's Summit in Bulawayo City, Zimbabwe. The summit's final declaration brings strong demands to the Heads of States. The "Rejection of the False Solutions to Climate Change" is one of the demands, calling on governments to: "Reject externally driven false solutions to climate change embedded in for example the existing REDD Plus, Green Revolution and Climate Smart Agriculture proposals".

Read full declaration here: <http://www.no-redd-africa.org/index.php/declarations/106-2014-sadc-peoples-summit-declaration-we-reject-externally-driven-false-solutions-to-climate-change-such-as-redd>

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Sixth National Conference on Páramos and High Mountains, Water for Life!, Colombia

Friends of the Earth Colombia, CENSAT Agua Viva, is making available to the public three promotional audios for the Conference on Páramos and High Mountains, aimed at reaching the residents of the high Andean mountains. The Conference calls on mountain communities and the campesino, indigenous and social organizations of Colombia to participate in a space for reflection and networking by people for the defence of the mountain territories.

Download the audios here (in Spanish):

<http://censat.org/es/noticias/compartimos-audios-promocionales-de-la-vi-conferencia-nacional-de-paramos-y-altas-montanas>

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Caravan for climate justice, gender and food sovereignty across Bangladesh, India and Nepal

Peasant organizations and members of La Via Campesina from Bangladesh, India and Nepal invite people to join an 18-day Caravan (10-28 November 2014) to deepen and extend networks of grassroots movements in South Asia and build international solidarity around specific action concerning issues of climate change, gender and food sovereignty. There are 40 slots for international delegates and the deadline to register is the 1st of October.

See further information here: <http://www.krishok.org/climate-justice-caravan-2014.html>

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Petition to stop harassment of a defender of earth and water in Peru: Yes to Water, No to Mining!

In Cajamarca, in the northern Peruvian Andes, where the headwaters of the rivers, the forests and páramos should be protected territories, the biggest mining company in South America, Yanacocha, is attempting to impose a megaproject that violates the rights of local people. For more than 10 years, Máxima Chaupe and her family have refused to sell their land to the mining company, and as a result they have been brutally attacked more than once. A judge has sentenced Máxima to a prison term of two years and eight months and a fine of 5,500 soles as reparations to the mining company for alleged land usurpation. Signatures are being collected to deliver a letter through the Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres (Latin American Women's Network) to the Peruvian authorities.

Sign the petition to stop the harassment and violence against Máxima here (in Spanish):

[www.salvalselva.org/mailalert/965/condenada-por-empresa-minera-maxima-es-inocente](http://www.salvalselva.org/mailalert/965/condenada-por-empresa-minera-maxima-es-inocente)

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### RECOMMENDED

Paraguay: Transgenic soy and human rights violations. After the coup comes consolidation of the real power of transnational companies

The rapid expansion of monocultures of transgenic soy in Paraguay – 95 per cent of which are covered by Monsanto patents – has left in its wake a trail of destruction and desolation. The country's food sovereignty is at risk, and so are the lives of thousands of campesino families and indigenous peoples, who are being expelled from their places of origin with increasingly violent methods, and whose historic and ancestral rights are being violated. The most recent report by Alianza Biodiversidad (Biodiversity Alliance) about the impact of transgenic soy in Paraguay estimates that between 1991 and 2009 the country lost more than 3.2 million hectares of native forest, equivalent to 15.34 per cent of its total surface area. Read the full article (in Spanish): <http://nicaraguaymasespanol.blogspot.com/2014/08/paraguay-soja-transgenica-y-la.html>

Women groups converge in parallel to the Southern Africa Development Community Heads of State Summit (14-18 August),

Women from all corners of the Southern African region descended on Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to participate in the People's Summit. They aimed to share their experiences on how they have been affected either by decisions made by governments or the inherited colonial agro-mining complex, which continues to grab land for extractive purposes. More importantly, the women gathered to build and strengthen their solidarity, forge strong alliances and commit to the struggle to push for a system of change. See full note here:

<http://www.viacampesina.org/en/index.php/news-from-the-regions-mainmenu-29/1649-sadc-building-unity-and-solidarity-to-effect-a-system-change>

When forests aren't really forests: the high cost of Chile's tree plantations

According to Global Forest Watch, Chile's forests are expanding. On the ground, however, a different scene plays out: monocultures have replaced diverse natural forests, and tree plantations now occupy 43 per cent of the South-central Chilean landscape. Defining plantations as forests has allowed the government to expand

monocultures at a rapid pace, robbing the Mapuche indigenous peoples' territories. Despite this, the Mapuche continue a strong fight to recuperate their ancestral land rights. See full note here:

<http://news.mongabay.com/2014/0818-gfn-moll-rocek-chile-plantations.htm#BJxeJr3mJSQJTxBp.99>

The African Biodiversity Network launched the documentary “The Mining Curse: Sacred Natural Sites Under Siege”

The documentary explains how generation after generation, communities in Africa have maintained and defended their Sacred Natural Sites as critical places within forests, mountains, rivers, and water springs, which are of cultural, ecological and spiritual importance. These Holy Sites have been protected by men and women since times unmemorable. However, the increasing search for economic profit is now also looting resources mostly where Sacred Natural Sites are, resulting in devastating and far-reaching consequences that threaten the lives of entire communities. Extractive industries, in particular mining, are one of the main drivers of this destruction, desecrating the forest, hills and riverbeds that are areas normally associated with Sacred Natural Sites. The film explores local struggles through the voices of the custodians of these Sites. See full documentary here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=risppl\\_Xas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=risppl_Xas)

The “State of the World's Rivers” website from the NGO International Rivers, illustrates the alarming situation of the Mekong River Basin.

By selecting the ‘Mekong River Basin’ from the left panel where it says ‘2 River Basins in Focus’, detailed information will appear about the area.

The Mekong River is the longest river in Southeast Asia and the tenth longest river in the world. It begins its journey in China's Tibetan Plateau; fed by snow melt from the Tibetan Himalayas, the Mekong drops down through Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam before emptying into the South China Sea in southern Vietnam. Although the Mekong River Basin is one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world, the region's governments are determined on constructing scores of dams on the Mekong mainstream and its branches. This threatens to irreversibly impact its multitude of ecosystems as well as the livelihoods and food sovereignty of millions of people.

Access the interactive website here: [www.internationalrivers.org/worldsrivers/](http://www.internationalrivers.org/worldsrivers/)