



# WRM BULLETIN

World Rainforest Movement



Issue 129 - April 2008

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## OUR VIEWPOINT

### - A Tale of Two Conventions

Once upon a time ... the governments of the world got together and agreed that the Earth was facing severe environmental problems and that something needed to be done about it. The historic event was named the Earth Summit and it took place in 1992 in the tropical scenario of Rio de Janeiro.

Everyone was feeling very enthusiastic because governments had committed themselves to a new type of development -which they defined as "sustainable"- which would prevent the negative environmental impacts of the until then prevailing development model.

People became even more hopeful about the future when they were told that from then on governments would ensure that all types of production would be socially equitable and environmentally friendly.

As proof of the seriousness of governments' commitments, a Convention for the protection of biodiversity (CBD) was

agreed upon and so was another one for the prevention of climate change (UNFCCC).

However, both conventions were soon hijacked by the ogre present in most tales. Even worse, this particular story had a large number of extremely nasty ogres who were only interested in devouring all the Earth's resources. The only sustainability they were interested in was that of the flow of money into their pockets.

As we all know, this is –unfortunately– a true tale about the takeover of the two conventions by transnational corporations. As a result, instead of protecting biodiversity, the CBD has opened up spaces for corporate control over the Earth's biological wealth –including genetic manipulation of life forms. Instead of working to prevent climate change, the UNFCCC has helped to create a useless –in terms of climate– but extremely profitable carbon market for the benefit of the same corporations that are destroying the climate.

These corporations have been so successful that 16 years after the two conventions were approved, biodiversity continues to disappear in forests, grasslands and wetlands, while climate change continues to increase. Even worse, the two conventions have become useful tools for corporate profits in industries such as biotechnology, agribusiness, hydroenergy, nuclear power and others, while enabling the worse biodiversity and climate criminals –headed by the oil industry– to continue business as usual.

For making the two conventions comply with their original mandate –to conserve biodiversity and to avert climate change– it is therefore necessary to remove the highjackers' influence from both processes and to build pressure from organized civil society demanding governments to change course.

The story is still unraveling. The two conventions will meet this year: the CBD in May and the UNFCCC in December. A happy ending is still possible, but the outcome will depend on civil society's capacity to counter corporate influence and to put peoples' needs on the conventions' agendas.

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## FOCUS ON BIODIVERSITY

### - An appeal to COP 9: Biodiversity with and for people

Today the world – the people's world – is helplessly witnessing a global crisis due to a steep rise in the price of foodstuffs which, as all disasters, affects the more vulnerable sectors, the more dependent economies, the more impoverished countries, more seriously.

Many factors leading to this crisis have been pinpointed: the increase in the price of fertilizers (caused by the rise in oil prices), serious droughts in key regions, increased demand by countries with economies in expansion – such as India and China. But above all, because more farmland is increasingly being turned over to the production of agrofuels. In fact, out of the world production of grain, less than half is allocated to human consumption; the difference goes to animal feed and increasingly, to the production of fuel.

The dominant global economy is dismantling national food systems and causing food crops to stop being at the service of people, just like nature as a whole. In a pathetic parody of King Midas, the predominant neoliberal and globalizing model converts everything it touches into goods, business, speculation and profit-making. In order to achieve this, they have deviated the diverse features of nature, patronizing all possible types of monocultures: farm crops, trees, and those of the mind. They have had various tools to help them: the industrial and exporting agricultural model of the "Green Revolution" started in the sixties and free trade through "recipes" and policies imposed by the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organization and more recently, the Bilateral Free Trade Agreements.

Technocratic spheres, where the destiny of people is usually defined, also reproduce the model and loose total contact with the true situation. One example is the FAO, with its definition of industrial monoculture tree plantations as "forests" – taken up by the Convention on Biological Diversity – completely ignoring the ecosystem concept. However, local populations that have suffered from the negative impacts of plantations, have a clear perception of the difference reflected in the diverse definitions given in the various parts of the world, according to the experience they have had with these plantations.

In a country such as Thailand, where agriculture is of vital importance for the peasant population, they define eucalyptus trees as the "selfish tree" because not only do they prevent crops from developing under them, but also appropriate the water needed for the rice crops.

In Chile the vast pine plantations were installed in Mapuche territory during the Pinochet dictatorship. It is not surprising that they should be defined as "planted military" because they are green, stand in line and advance!

In the Cauca Valley in Colombia, the local people call pine plantations "forests of silence." This is due to the fact that the plantations are lacking any form of life beyond that of the trees. Silence is thus total.

In Brazil, people call eucalyptus plantations "Green deserts" as they do in South Africa. However in the latter country this definition has been challenged with the argument that in a few square metres of desert there is more life than in an entire eucalyptus plantation!

Furthermore, also in South Africa there are people who prefer to define plantations as "green cancer," an expression that reflects the uncontrollable progress of the plantations, that advance destroying water, soil, flora, fauna and the peoples' means of livelihood, eventually killing everything...just like cancer does.

In the State of Sarawak in Malaysia, the local people claim that eucalyptus and oil palm plantations are much worse than industrial logging. The reason is that the logging companies enter the forest, cut down the best trees and leave, taking the timber with them. But the plantation companies cut down the best trees, burn the rest and stay!

In Ecuador there are communities that, not by chance, call eucalyptus trees "eucas." The reason is very simple "eucalptos" contains the charming diminutive "ito" (little), which these trees don't deserve because they are so evil.

A last example, that in some way summarises all the above definitions, comes from the state of Espirito Santo in Brazil, where the eucalyptus plantations were defined as "dead forests that kill everything."

All these definitions are a reflection of the fact that the rural communities are well aware of the meaning of biodiversity because it has been the sustenance of their ways of life: ranging from agricultural biodiversity, treasured and transmitted through the centuries, to the forests that have been another opportunity for food sovereignty for those who inhabit them and depend on them.

Monoculture plantations not only devastate local seed diversity but also the knowledge accompanying it, the cultural identity that bred it, the food sovereignty that it ensured. The owners of monoculture plantations – increasingly large agribusiness transnational corporations - take over the land, the seeds and the destiny of the food and the peoples.

But this is not enough for them; they want to strengthen their power even more with genetic manipulation, making tree plantations tailored to their business. Transgenic trees threateningly stick out their green crowns from the test tubes of powerful laboratories related to famous and not so famous universities, linked to corporate groups interested in the various points of the business: biotechnology, the automotive industry, the pulp and paper industry, the energy industry, the chemical industry, just to name a few. They intend to install monoculture transgenic tree plantations and even then, continue to call them forests!

In this framework, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has an enormous responsibility in its hands: to define whether biodiversity is to be at the service of corporations or at the service of people.

The forthcoming COP 9 must resolve various pending issues, among them agrofuels, transgenic trees and forest diversity. There has been no consensus over these issues and therefore the proposed text will be full of brackets (\*). Paraphrasing Helena Paul of Econexus...biodiversity itself is between brackets.

Regarding transgenic trees, the CBD will have to decide between a moratorium, the precautionary principle or no restrictions. The proposal of a moratorium was submitted by some delegates to CBD in 2006, promoted by various social organizations. On that occasion, it was decided that CBD should prepare a report on "the possible negative environmental, cultural and socio-economic impacts of genetically modified trees." This was presented in February at the thirteenth meeting of SBSTTA. It pointed out that many scientists place "emphasis on the application of the precautionary principle on considering the use of genetically modified trees." But some countries are attempting to weaken this safeguard, promoting another text that leaves it between brackets.

Regarding agrofuels, in spite of the acknowledged and overwhelming evidence of the negative environmental and social impacts of their large scale production, CBD is sailing between two waters, acknowledging the negative impacts but also talking of the positive ones and it is not categorical in opposing their large scale expansion.

In general terms, it is alarming that CBD opens up its doors to the companies responsible for productive, market and consumer models responsible for so much destruction and that today can be part of national delegations to the convention.

In order to protect biodiversity, the CBD should give instead its decided support to community forest management systems and to traditional farming systems that have successfully harvested and conserved biodiversity.

As expressed in the open letter to CBD, which many social organizations are supporting ([http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/open\\_letter\\_CBD.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/open_letter_CBD.html)), this excludes the expansion of large-scale monoculture plantations, and requires that:

- monoculture tree plantations are excluded from the definition of forests;
- all political, technical and financial support should be withdrawn from monoculture plantations for agrofuels due to their direct negative impact on biodiversity and food sovereignty;
- the release of transgenic trees should be banned together with the use of "terminator" technology.

Only thus can a biodiversity for and with people be possible.

(\*) The texts over which a consensus has not been reached are left between square brackets for later discussion.

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## COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

### - Ecuador: Amnesty Exposes Unjust Criminalization of Environmental Activists

The Constituent Assembly formed to discuss and draft a new Ecuadorian Constitution resolved on 14 March 2008 to grant an amnesty to 357 human rights activists who had been "criminalized for their protest and resistance actions in defence of their communities and the environment," according to an official press release. Most of the 357 are community and peasant leaders, some of them indigenous, from communities throughout the country. The criminal

charges against them stemmed from their involvement in grassroots opposition to mining, oil, hydroelectric and logging projects, as a means of protecting water supplies and the environment and defending their communal lands and collective rights. Their crime: defending life, human rights, and nature.

Local human rights organizations, such as the Ecumenical Human Rights Commission (CEDHU), have documented countless cases of the criminalization of social protest in Ecuador. CEDHU has compiled a list of over 100 cases involving a much larger number of individuals, since many of the charges are collective, encompassing entire families, groups or communities. But the dimensions of this problem are even greater, since many of these cases remain shrouded in anonymity, unknown and ignored as cases of common crime. "We celebrate this event as a victory of collective causes over the attempt to individualize the socio-environmental struggle through the prosecution of leaders and community members," said a joint statement released by human rights organizations right after the amnesty was announced.

Among those cleared under the amnesty there are a large number of residents of the Intag valley, an area of incomparable natural wealth covered by a subtropical rainforest. The valley forms part of the Chocó bioregion, one of the most biologically diverse regions on the entire planet. The local communities face the constant threat of extermination by a transnational mining megaproject but have continued to struggle unconditionally in defence of the rainforest. As a result, many community leaders have been brought up on criminal charges, and close to 100 peasant farmers from the area have faced legal prosecution. During the course of their trials, held in local courts, evidence emerged of strategies concocted by the companies, false statements made by witnesses and irregular proceedings. In the end, all of the defendants were acquitted.

The recently announced amnesty represents a further step and is viewed as highly important by local communities. It implies the full clearance of guilt on the part of community and peasant leaders for their participation in legitimate acts of community resistance. Through the amnesty, an official body is openly and clearly acknowledging the existence of the unjust criminalization of defenders of the environment and of human rights, a phenomenon that up until now had been almost completely ignored by the general public.

The amnesty has also served to expose many of the dirty tactics to silence community resistance used by numerous companies with powerful economic interests in natural resources and raw materials. These tactics include punishing those who get in the way of environmentally destructive business projects by legally prosecuting them for common crimes established in the country's Criminal Code. The resulting trials are typically "rigged" by buying witnesses and sometimes by bribing public officials. It is not unusual for those accused to end up behind bars. The crimes they are most frequently sentenced for include sabotage and terrorism, rebellion and attacks against public officials, aiding and abetting criminal acts, illicit association, crimes against property (such as theft) and crimes against persons (such as kidnapping), among others. "It is not possible that they can violate the rights of communities, destroy their natural heritage and evict them from their lands under the pretext of generating income for social development, from which these communities are excluded outright," declared CEDHU.

For these reasons, this major victory in Ecuador has become a reference point and a successful precedent for other communities facing similar situations. Moreover, these are not isolated cases in Latin America.

Through this amnesty, the systematic persecution of those who oppose extractive projects that deplete natural resources, the destruction of tropical rainforests and the violation of human rights has been exposed and made visible to society and to the national and international public. Civil society organizations should follow this lead to demand that other governments adopt similar measures for victims of the criminalization of social protest in their own countries.

The significance of this amnesty transcends the borders of Ecuador, setting an important precedent for peasant struggles criminalized in the same way in other countries. Many Latin American communities and members of social

or human rights organizations have suffered or are currently suffering the criminalization of acts of legitimate struggle and resistance in defence of life and nature (for an overview of the situation in December 2007 see WRM Bulletin N° 125 at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/125/viewpoint.html>). This phenomenon, relatively unknown and systematically silenced, has been exposed and brought to public attention through the amnesty granted by the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly.

Peasant communities throughout Ecuador are celebrating this encouraging development. The amnesty is the result of determined efforts by the communities affected and human rights and environmental organizations who continue to work vigilantly to ensure that truth and justice prevail. We congratulate all of them for this new victory. The amnesty is a sign that when people fight for it, change is possible.

For more detailed information, see the website of the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly and the statements by its president, Alberto Acosta (in Spanish) at:

<http://asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec/boletines/amnistia-para-defensores-de-los-derechos-humanos-criminalizados-aprueba-asamblea.do>, [http://asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec/blogs/alberto\\_acosta/2008/03/14/acosta-â€œese-ha-hecho-justicia-con-los-perseguidos-politicos-por-defender-la-naturalezaâ€ /](http://asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec/blogs/alberto_acosta/2008/03/14/acosta-â€œese-ha-hecho-justicia-con-los-perseguidos-politicos-por-defender-la-naturalezaâ€ /)

By Guadalupe Rodríguez, Salva la Selva, [www.salvalaselva.org](http://www.salvalaselva.org)

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### **- Ghana: Norwegian biofuel company destroyed local forest to establish a large jatropha (1) plantation**

Agriculture in Northern Ghana accounts for more than 90% of household incomes and employs more than 70% of the population in the region. Most of the agricultural production is by small-holders at subsistence level, reliant on seasonal rainfall which is unpredictable and sporadic. During the dry season much of the population is idle, forcing people to migrate to the more prosperous southern parts of the country where they are employed in menial jobs.

Rural communities who are desperate for incomes are enticed by developers who promise them a “better future” under the guise of jobs with the argument that they are currently only just surviving from the “unproductive land” and that they stand to earn a regular income if they give up the land for development. This argument fails to appreciate the African view of the meaning of the land to the community. While the initial temptation to give up the land to earn a wage is great, it portends of an ominous future where the community’s sovereignty, identity and their sense of community is lost because of the fragmentation that the community will suffer.

The strategy for the acquisition of the land often takes the following course. The imaginations of a few influential leaders in the community are captured. They are told about prospects for the community due to the project and they are swayed with promises of positions in the company or with monetary inducements. The idea is that these people do the necessary “footwork” in the villages where they spread the word about job opportunities. A document is then prepared, essentially a contract, to lease the land to the company. In the event of problems, the developer can press their claim by enforcing the ‘contract’ or agreement. When the legality of the process is not adequately scrutinized, the developers have their way but, subject to proper scrutiny, it emerges these contracts are not legally binding as they have not gone through the correct legal channels. This is what happened in the Alipe area.

In November 2007 a team from RAINS (Regional Advisory and Information Network Systems) discovered massive destruction of vegetation cover over a large stretch of land near a village called Alipe within the White Volta River basin about 30 kilometres from Tamale, the capital town of the Northern region of Ghana. Heavy agricultural machinery were systematically pulling down trees and decimating the area a few metres south of the village. The land had been stripped bare of all its vegetation cover. Enquiry revealed that the site was to be the beginning of a large jatropha plantation developed by a Norwegian biofuel company called BioFuel Africa – a subsidiary of Bio Fuel

Norway.

Using national regulations, RAINS managed to get them to stop the destruction but not before more than 2 600 hectares of land had been stripped of its natural vegetation cover. Still, the identity of the company responsible for the development had not yet been disclosed. They were described simply as “some white men”. In this community, like in most parts of Ghana, over 80 percent of the land is held under communal ownership and more that 70 percent of this land is managed by traditional ruler-chiefs mainly on behalf the members of their traditional areas. The chief was very categorical that he had not made such a grant and that he had also been battling with those “white people” to stop them – without much success. He confirmed that he “thumb printed” a document in the company of the Assemblyman of the area which had been brought to his palace by the “white people” but he did not confirm its contents. The Chief was initially unwilling to go against the wishes of his people as his efforts to stop the developers were being interpreted by the community as “driving away opportunities to earn an income during the current dry season”.

After presentation of the case to the community by RAINS and further discussions, the community realised that BioFuel Africa’s promises were really a hoax. The community understood the impact that such a project would have on their lives individually and on the community in general and realized that the promise of jobs, shared prosperity and improved livelihoods – the Company’s main benefit to the community – were not really commitments but mere campaign gimmicks. But how long will this hold as they sit idle for the rest of the year until the rains come in April?

Most vocal indeed were the women at the session. Looking at BioFuel’s representative in the face a woman asked, “Look at all the sheanut trees you have cut down already and considering the fact that the nuts that I collect in a year give me cloth for the year and also a little capital. I can invest my petty income in the form of a ram and sometimes in a good year, I can buy a cow. Now you have destroyed the trees and you are promising me something you do not want to commit yourself to. Where then do you want me to go? What do you want me to do?”

Such is the story of how a Norwegian biofuel company took advantage of Africa’s traditional system of communal land ownership and current climate and economic pressure to claim and deforest large tracts of land in Kusawgu, Northern Ghana with the intention of creating “the largest jatropha plantation in the world”.

Excerpted from “Biofuel land grabbing in Northern Ghana”, by Bakari Nyari, Vice Chairman of Regional Advisory and Information Network Systems (RAINS), Ghana and African Biodiversity Network Steering Committee member, [http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Biofuel\\_Northern\\_Ghana.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Biofuel_Northern_Ghana.pdf)

(1) *Jatropha curcas*, is indigenous to Central America. Its oily seeds can be used to produce biodiesel. The plant, particularly the seeds, is toxic to humans and animals.

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### **- Indonesia: Destruction of forests by pulpwood and oil palm plantations drives climate change**

A recent study published by WWF (1) analyzes deforestation and forest degradation in Riau Province between 1982 and 2007 and identifies their main drivers: pulpwood and oil palm industrial plantations.

The study shows that the fastest rate of deforestation in Indonesia is occurring in central Sumatra’s Riau province, which used to have 78% of its land covered by forest. In the past 25 years, some 4.2m hectares (65%) of its tropical forests and peat swamps have been cleared for industrial plantations.

About 30% of Riau’s forest has been cleared to establish oil palm plantations. The recent rise of palm oil demand to feed the increasing global market of agrofuels is fuelling much of the forest clearance.



Industrial pulpwood plantations also entered the scene. According to the study: "In the 1980s began the forest conversion boom that covered Riau with more oil palm concessions than any other province in Indonesia. Over the last decade the palm oil industry saw the rise of a serious competitor in Riau: the pulp and paper industry". The pressure on Indonesia's and Riau's forests is going to increase as plans to establish tree plantations accelerate.

As the report says, the "speed and finality" of forest conversion to feed the ever expanding pulp and paper and palm oil industries is matched "by no other type of deforestation".

Still, the problem of deforestation in Riau is not only about biodiversity loss. Greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation, forest degradation and peat decomposition and burning in Indonesia have generated increased attention.

Both forests and peat soils are important long-term or even permanent, stores of carbon on Earth. According to the study, "Riau is home to vast peatlands that are estimated to hold south-east Asia's largest store of carbon, and contains some of the most biodiverse ecosystems". Soil loss from deforestation has resulted in globally significant CO2 emissions and the much-reported trans-boundary haze across the Malacca Straits.

"After 2000, forest conversion began focusing on Riau's peatlands. Long, deep canals dissect all of Riau's peat bogs, draining the soil with canals sometimes more than a meter deep until the loggers, legal and illegal, can go in to cut the trees and float out the logs. The peat subsides and the dried-out soil becomes Riau's number one source of fires. The fires blanket central Sumatra and neighboring Singapore and Malaysia with haze for weeks without end in many years and accelerate the release of untold tons of CO2."

Peat fires as well as forest destruction deprive people from their livelihoods and have increased poverty, which is now up to four times more severe in Indonesian peatlands than in the country's other lowland areas. The fires have also led to increased illnesses, with "about 30% of all young children in peatlands in Indonesia having respiratory diseases and growth inhibition as a result of peat smoke".

These findings add to the many others that urge a drastic change in public policies in order to halt the present model of production, trade and consumption which carelessly destroy forests and other sources of life, irresponsibly change our climate and is criminally leading us towards extinction.

(1) "Deforestation, Forest Degradation, Biodiversity Loss and CO2 Emissions in Riau, Sumatra, Indonesia", 2008, by WWF, Remote Sensing Solutions and Hokkaido university, [http://assets.panda.org/downloads/riau\\_co2\\_report\\_wwf\\_id\\_27feb08\\_en\\_lr\\_.pdf](http://assets.panda.org/downloads/riau_co2_report_wwf_id_27feb08_en_lr_.pdf)

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### - Peru: Government intent on privatizing the Amazon for implementing tree plantations

Alan Garcia's government is promoting a bill (draft law 840) also known as the "Forest Law." It is a law concerning the promotion of private investment in reforestation and agro-forestry, whereby land with no forest cover in the Peruvian Amazon – erroneously classed as deforested wastelands, meaning there are no acquired rights over them – could be allocated, not as concessions, but as private property. This would open the door to major capital to establish large-scale tree plantations, under the guise of "reforestation."

The argument used is that in order to promote reforestation, private investment needs to be attracted and security must be given to the investors. For this purpose, it is not enough to give them a 40-year, renewable concession as established in the present Forestry Law, but allocate them land as "owners" that is to say, for ever. Furthermore, when the State allocates land under ownership it can no longer control or make demands in the same way as if it were



under concession.

There is strong resistance to the bill, among other things because it is contrary to article 66 of the Constitution, which establishes the public nature of renewable and non-renewable natural resources. It has also been denounced that no preliminary land survey has been made to delimit the extension of deforested lands that could be invested in, or their location. This fact would enable the new law to become a perverse incentive to encourage deforestation and lay waste the Amazon.

Furthermore, in Loreto (as in Ucayali or in Madre de Dios) there are no large areas of free deforested wasteland areas according to an article published by Servindi (1). The article points out that "the traditional slash and burn agricultural model used by the peasants implies leaving fallow for 10 to 20 years land that is "tired", to enable a process of secondary forest regeneration and to recover soil nutrients. Most of the secondary forests in regeneration in Loreto have owners, although these may not have deeds." Another factor is that "out of the almost 2,500 indigenous and peasant communities existing in Loreto, less than 500 have deeds and the rest has no documentation whatsoever certifying their ownership rights over farms and forests they use and have used for hundreds of years for their subsistence."

The First Amazon Summit meeting was held on 17 February in Pichanaki, Junín, where, among other things, the rights of native communities over lands in the Central Forest and in the Amazon were proclaimed and the "intention of Alan Garcia's Government to auction off our Amazon in favour of large foreign capitals" was rejected (2).

The Second Amazon Summit was held in Pucallpa, Ucayali region on 12 and 13 March. On this occasion the "Platform of the originating Amazon peoples before the Peruvian State and the international community against a single centred world" was re-launched (3). Among the items on their action plan is the demand to "definitively shelve the Legislative package that contains the Draft Forest Law," because "with this Bill the intention is to dispossess us of our territories and the natural resources of the Amazon. We therefore demand that our own initiative of community development as a people is taken into account, and not to discriminate against us in favour of big capital."

Many demonstrations and strikes took place in the central forest zone, in rejection of law 840. In March this year, in the web page of "Con nuestro Perú" (with our Peru) it was reported that "several thousand indigenous people from the Shipibo, Konibo, Ashaninka, Yine and Cocama peoples marched through the main streets of the city of Pucallpa to ask the Peruvian State to shelve the 840 Bill and the 2133 Bill or Forestry Law. This peaceful march, that was considered to be one of the largest indigenous demonstrations that had taken place in the region, was joined by students, professional people and indigenous mayors."(4).

Servindi reports that (5), the Romero group is behind the government's initiative and has ten million dollars to purchase 2 million hectares of land in the Amazon as soon as the Bill is adopted. Part of the two million hectares would be dedicated to carbon sink plantations with the aim of trading carbon on the New York stock-market under the Kyoto Protocol Mechanism. Some of the beneficiaries would be pension fund administrators, specific power groups and high officials of the present government.

As stated at the First Amazon Summit, "We declare the Amazon to be in a state of emergency because of the danger hanging over our peoples and we call on each one of the Amazon Regions to prevent the consummation of the violation of our human and constitutional rights, the right to life and to the environment, to the biodiversity of our water and energy resources."

Article based on information provided by Alain A. Salas Dávila, ONG INCODES, e-mail: [ongincodes@malko.com](mailto:ongincodes@malko.com), [www.malko.com/ongincodes](http://www.malko.com/ongincodes); (1) "Ley de la Selva y Desarrollo Regional" (Forest Law and Regional Development), José Álvarez Alonso, Servindi, <http://www.servindi.org/archivo/2008/3346>; (2) First Amazon Summit, 16 and 17 February 2008. <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Amazonia/Cumbre.pdf>; (3) Platform of the originating Amazon peoples

before the Peruvian State and the international community against a single centred world.

[http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Peru/Pueblos\\_Originarios\\_Amazonia.pdf](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Peru/Pueblos_Originarios_Amazonia.pdf); (4) Ucayali Indigenous peoples march against the Forest Law, 20 March 2008.

[http://www.connuestroperu.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1681&Itemid=32](http://www.connuestroperu.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1681&Itemid=32); (5) Peru: ¿Por qué es criticado el Proyecto 840, "Ley de la Selva"? (Why is Bill 840 "Forest Law" criticised?), January 2008, Servindi, <http://www.servindi.org/archivo/2008/3332>

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## - Second generation biofuels will destroy ecosystems and worsen the food crisis

The world is undergoing an acute food crisis with soaring prices for basic food and desperate food-related riots that threaten political stability in many Third World countries. By the end of March, prices of rice and wheat were about double their levels a year earlier, and maize prices were over a third higher. According to FAO, the import bill for cereals for the world's poorest countries will rise by 56% in 2007/08, after a 37% increase in 2006/07.

The crisis in food prices is the result of a combination of factors, among which the reduction of supplies due to farmers' switch from growing crops for food to crops for biofuels. Rich countries have promoted the production of biofuels despite strong arguments warning about the ecological and social disaster they would imply on the world's food security and on local peoples' livelihoods and environments.

However, deaf to good sense and wide-open to a new market opportunity, second generation biofuels are being heralded, to be based largely upon woody biomass. According to Glen Barry (1) "It is a myth that enough unused forest and agricultural waste, and a surplus of land to grow various grasses and wood, exists to base an industrial energy source. The same will be true of ethanol production from trees. Cellulosic ethanol will be the ultimate deforestation biofuel, equivalent to dismantling and burning your home to keep warm."

Dr. Barry explains that "As with agrofuels, a cellulosic ethanol industry will indirectly destroy forests and lead to more costly food by increasing land pressures upon natural forests and agricultural crop lands. We can expect more vast, lifeless, toxic and water dependent monocultures of genetically modified Frankentrees on stolen deforested lands at a net carbon loss. And the biofuels will be sold to us as a green product, perhaps certified as 'well-managed' by WWF, FSC, and other forest sell-outs".

The promotion of cellulosic ethanol would thus result in increased clearing of terrestrial ecosystems: "As if the world's forests, land base, ecosystems and habitats do not have enough demands upon them already, let us try to use them to power seven billion consumers in their drive to each have it all. Think this a needlessly harsh appraisal? Name one time the global economic system has demonstrated self-control in matching growth to underlying resources." Barry warns that "The Earth system is perilously close to failure and cannot stand more environmental solutions based upon greater and more resource use for current, much less increased, human population and consumption. There is a finite amount of energy that can be taken, and waste put into, the global biosphere before it becomes uninhabitable. And we are reaching or have passed that point."

"It is imperative that we embrace an environmental agenda based upon what is actually needed to maintain and restore ecological systems upon which all life depends. It is too late to put our efforts into anything else than the full package of societal and personal change necessary to maintain the biosphere. There are no solutions worth pursuing at this late date other than those that are ecologically sufficient. Anything less is more of the same disease that is assuredly destroying being", concludes Glenn Barry.

(1) "Burning Forests to Feed Cars. The Ecological Madness of Biofuels, Take Two", Glenn Barry, March 15, 2008, Ecological Internet, Earth Meanders, [GlenBarry@EcologicalInternet.org](mailto:GlenBarry@EcologicalInternet.org), <http://earthmeanders.blogspot.com/>; Posted

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## COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

### - The Brazil of Stora Enso: Violence against women and made-to-measure legislation

In Brazil there are two conflicting models: that of the large monoculture plantations (ranging from eucalyptus, soy-beans and rice to sugar-cane), on lands held by a few large companies; and that of the peasant, indigenous and landless communities that build collective and diverse productive spaces and demand the historically promised agrarian reform.

In the framework of the week of International Women's Day and as a way of strengthening 8 March as a day of struggle for peasant women against agri-business and in favour of the Brazilian people's food sovereignty, 900 women, members of Via Campesina in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) occupied 2100 hectares of monoculture eucalyptus plantations belonging to the Swedish-Finnish transnational company, Stora Enso –the Taruma ranch, located in the municipality of Rosario do Sul (State of Rio Grande do Sul), in the frontier zone with Uruguay. The fact that Stora-Enso is the owner of these lands involves a violation of legal provisions, which prohibit the acquisition of land in frontier zones along a 150 km strip from the bordering country. Stora Enso has endeavoured to elude the regulation, purchasing land through a fictitious company, the Azenglever company, whose owners are two important company officials (1)

The occupation of this ranch by the women of Via Campesina had various objectives:

- To demand that these lands illegally acquired by Stora Enso be expropriated in favour of the Agrarian Reform.
- To demand that projects proposing a reduction of the frontier strip be withdrawn from the Senate and the Federal Chamber, as they will only lead to greater land concentration in benefit of foreign companies, while involving a threat to the ecosystems and to Brazil's sovereignty, causing greater environmental destruction and more poverty for the people.
- to denounce the impacts of monoculture eucalyptus plantations – depletion of water sources, elimination of flora and fauna due to agrochemicals applied in the plantations – that end up by affecting peasant farming, as can be testified by the rural population of the Municipality of Encruzilhada do Sul, where Aracruz Celulose has an enormous green desert. (2)

The action against Stora Enso was quickly repelled by repression. The Rio Grande do Sul Military Brigade used extreme violence against the 900 women and 250 children who occupied the Stora Enso plantations. Later they showed on their bodies the marks of rubber bullets, fragments of bombs and horse-hoof marks, among other atrocities.

The speed of the Rio Grande government's reaction in support of Stora Enso may be explained by the fact that the present State Governor's electoral campaign was partly financed (according to official data from the High Electoral Court) by the pulp companies, Aracruz, Votorantim and ...Stora Enso.

However, in the midst of so much violence, the solidarity of the population of the frontier town of Santana do Livramento prevailed, guaranteeing food and medical care, lawyers contributed voluntarily to avoid greater outrages, some few parliamentarians put pressure on the federal and state governments, demanding the adoption of measures against Stora Enso and the punishment of those responsible for acts of violence against women, and number of people from different parts of the world sent messages in solidarity with the women's struggles, in indignation over the violence.

As a response to the violence the women stepped up their commitment, expressing that for each woman who suffered violence, ten more will appear, willing to resist the death plans being carried out by companies such as Aracruz, Stora Enso (through its company Derflin) and Votorantim, in addition to the Granflor plantation company, that are planning to plant 400,000 hectares of monoculture tree plantations in the next ten years in Rio Grande do Sul.

Contrary to what happened with the peasant women, the companies did not have to face any repression in order to achieve their objectives. The result of the pressure they exerted was that on 9 April, 19 out of a total of 29 members of the Rio Grande do Sul State Environmental Council (Consema) voted in favour and adopted the much questioned Environmental Forestry Ordinance, which had been under preparation for almost three years. The original plan established limits in the State regarding the plantation of alien species – such as eucalyptus, pine and acacia. Throughout 2006 no licences were granted and only temporary authorizations were issued. In 2007 the pulp industries stepped up pressure considering that the situation was damaging to their business, arguing that the government encouraged their projects but hindered the progress of investments on refusing authorization for the planting of trees. The result was the withdrawal of the ceiling on percentages of area authorized for plantation (3). The decision “will compromise from 500 thousand to one million hectares of our native rural areas in one generation. When this happens, the present managers of public affairs will be dead and no one will be able to question them or make them take on their responsibilities” stated Celso Marques, a member of the Upper Council of the Gaucha Association for Protection of the Natural Environment (Agapan).

And he added “the means that the government is using to impose the interests of the major national and foreign companies trading in timber-pulp-paper, form a chain of legal and administrative irregularities. These range from a real government intervention in the state environmental body, Fepam, successively changing its directors, imposing a regime of terror with threats to the officials and effective persecution of the technicians who, safeguarding public service, were not in agreement with the government’s political impositions in the sector’s regulations, to the culmination of irregularities and legislation and ethical violations as was the adoption of the Environmental Forestry Zonation in the State Environmental Council.” (4)

Two models are confronting and excluding each other: on one hand the Brazil of profit, of transnational corporations, of concentration that charges in with monoculture agribusiness plantations, counting on the support of power and violence. On the other, the Brazil of women, of peasants, indigenous people, defending themselves with solidarity, conviction and courage. We pay tribute to the latter.

(1) Manifesto of the Women of Via Campesina, March 2008,  
[http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Manifesto\\_Mulheres\\_Via\\_Campesina.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Manifesto_Mulheres_Via_Campesina.html)

(2) Letter of the women of Via Campesina de RS,  
[http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Manifesto\\_Mulheres\\_Via\\_Campesina.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Brasil/Manifesto_Mulheres_Via_Campesina.html)

(3) “Zoneamento para plantio de florestas é aprovado”, 9 April 2008, Zero Hora,  
<http://www.clicrbs.com.br/zerohora/jsp/default.jsp?uf=1&local=1&section=Economia&newsID=a1823196.xml>

(4) “Perda total do Estado de Direito”, 13 de abril de 2008, RS Urgente!, <http://www.rsurgente.net/2008/04/perda-total-do-estado-de-direito.html>

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### **- Colombia: Oil palm plantation workers in Puerto Wilches on strike**

The municipality of Puerto Wilches, located in the Central Zone defined by the Agricultural Plan for the Implementation of the Biodiesel Programme, is home to much of the agricultural activity in the department (province) of Santander. According to the Agricultural Plan, there are roughly 21,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in the municipality, representing 91.7% of the department’s palm oil output.

Oil palm plantations invaded Puerto Wilches, destroying the original wetland and tropical rainforest vegetation, after large landholders succeeded in acquiring ownership of the land. As the Agricultural Plan itself recognizes, the destruction of these ecosystems "has had a direct influence on the extinction of varieties of flora and fauna and on the decrease in water resources which has modified the structure and composition of the soils."

Despite the enormous cost involved, the expansion of oil palm plantations in the region has not benefited the residents of the area in any way. According to the 2005 census, the rural region of North Santander presents low levels of socioeconomic development, reflected in an Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index rating of 45.4% – a figure that drops to 21.9% for the department of Santander as a whole when urban areas are included. (1)

In December of 2002, we reported on the abysmal working conditions on the oil palm plantations of the region, as described by a representative of the oil palm sector workers organization in the department of Santander (see WRM Bulletin N° 65).

There are approximately 5,000 oil palm sector workers in the region, yet only 610 are directly employed by the companies that own the plantations. The rest are members of so-called work cooperatives, which pay an average of less than 120 dollars a month, far below the legal minimum wage. Workers employed through cooperatives work for up to 16 hours a day, must pay for their own working tools and other equipment, and are charged stiff fines for picking unripe or overripe fruit. They are not granted even such minimum rights as pensions, health insurance or family allowances. The dramatic situation they face is reminiscent of the conditions suffered by Colombian workers when capitalism took hold in the country in the first decades of the 20th century. (2)

On 30 January, 350 workers on the Monterrey oil palm plantation in Puerto Wilches began a strike that quickly spread to the rest of the plantations in the municipality. There are now over 2,500 workers on strike against the Monterrey, Bucarelia, Brisas, Agropalma and Agrícola del Norte companies. They are demanding individual labour contracts, higher wages, and the elimination of fines based on the quality of fruit picked. They are also demanding that the companies pay for their transportation to and from the plantations, food, work clothes and tools – costs that the workers are currently obliged to cover themselves.

The oil palm industry workers and residents of Puerto Wilches are calling on the Colombian government to take responsibility for protecting the rights of the workers and ensuring that they are paid decent salaries, because "they are ultimately the ones who are generating wealth."

During a community assembly in February, the residents of Puerto Wilches resolved to call a civic strike to show their support for the oil palm workers. The strike was staged on 14 and 15 February, followed by a demonstration on 18 February. Both actions met with violent repression by public security forces, as denounced by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) trade union federation. (3)

As the Colombian human rights organization Espacio de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de Derechos Humanos reported in a press release, "Social and trade union organizations in the region have pointed out that the expansion of oil palm plantations poses a threat to food security, because large concentrations of oil palm trees impoverish the soil and inhibit the growth of other types of vegetation. As a result, local residents pay a high price for a crop that leaves very little wealth in their municipality."

"The uprising has come at a time when the quality of life of the workers is extremely poor, due to the lack of workplace security. A worker died in 2007, apparently because of agrochemicals that are handled without proper protective gear. Working conditions are established through work cooperatives that serve as subcontractors and intermediaries for the large companies. 'Outsourcing' is a mechanism established by the state to benefit employers, since it allows them to evade their responsibility to provide employees with social security and benefits."

(<http://colombia.indymedia.org/news/2008/02/80323.php>)

CUT accuses the government of encouraging outsourcing and promoting the legalization of work cooperatives, temporary employment agencies and all other forms of precarious employment that serve to cut labour costs and deprive workers of their most basic rights. In a statement released on 21 February, CUT stressed that this hiring model "has spread across the length and breadth of our territory, sowing poverty and contributing to the worsening of the difficult social and economic conditions faced by the population." (4)

Staged in defiance of threats against trade union leaders and the use of tear gas to break up demonstrations, despite the presence of children and pregnant women, the uprising in Puerto Wilches is a milestone in the defence of the rights of oil palm sector workers.

(1) General Census 2005, Unsatisfied Basic Needs, National Statistics Department,  
[http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/nbi\\_censo2005.pdf](http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/nbi_censo2005.pdf)

(2) Communiqué from the Press Office of Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo, of the Polo Democrático Alternativo, posted by Carlos A. Vicente, information officer for Latin America, GRAIN, email: [carlos@grain.org](mailto:carlos@grain.org)

(3) "Huelga de trabajadores de CTA en Puerto Wilches", CUT website,  
[http://www.cut.org.co//index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=955&Itemid=456](http://www.cut.org.co//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=955&Itemid=456)

(4) Press release from the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT), 21 February 2008,  
[http://www.abpnoticias.com/boletin\\_temporal/contenido/comunicados/359.html](http://www.abpnoticias.com/boletin_temporal/contenido/comunicados/359.html)

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## - Ecuador: Social and environmental impacts of oil palm

The Palmeras del Ecuador Company was established in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in the Province of Sucumbios, Shushufindi Canton, at the end of the seventies.

The former Institute for Agrarian Reform and Settlement (Instituto de Reforma Agraria y Colonización - IERAC) granted a concession to the company of 10,000 hectares of land, considered to be "waste land," deliberately ignoring that these were ancestral lands of the Indigenous Siona and Secoya peoples and nationalities. This led to their almost complete extermination because of the occupation of their lands.

The method used by the company to install its palm plantations was to clearcut the entire rainforest, build drainage to dry out the marshy areas and use herbicides to kill off the weeds. As a result, the tropical forest in the area was totally destroyed. According to local testimonials "the palm lords took the best land and the peasants took the land that was left over."

People from the community and men coming from outside work in the company's plantations. Among the workers there are two situations: those who work under a signed contract and those who have no contract. In the first case they have health insurance, social security and legal guarantees. This is not the case with those who work without a contract and who are not protected by the law.

Women who work in the plantations have to do the same work as the men. Each person – man or woman – is responsible for a certain number of plots and the work done is measured by: 1) the number of trees pruned; 2) the number of bunches cut and loaded; 3) gathering and cleaning of seeds on the ground; 4) clearing the land, by cutting the woodland in the whole plot and leaving the land clean.

A local woman tells us: "we have no protection...if we are pregnant we have none of the benefits of the law, the office workers do have this right, but us women who work in the plantations, we don't have it."

Spraying is an activity carried out by men and by women, with back-packs loading 12 litres. Very often those who have been spraying come home feeling dizzy, their bodies ache and they feel nauseous because of the chemicals used in spraying. One woman tells us that her son "was spraying and he started to get patches all over his body, his skin got mottled and he had a boil, his body became ugly, he didn't even want to get up, the company people took him away and put in a drip, they had him there all day and he came back better. After that he became frightened and went off to Santo Domingo."

In addition to suffering from the same problems as the men when they also work, they are also affected when they don't. A woman explained this situation by saying: "For us women, caring for the family, the children and the husbands who work in the company is a worry. When they come back sick we have to spend a lot of money on medicine to cure them. The days they are sick they don't go to work and therefore don't earn. We have to leave our daily chores and therefore we too don't earn our living. It is a lot of expense."

A special problem is that of water pollution. Although the populated centre has tap water coming from a well, the people used the river Raya to wash clothes and for recreational activities such as bathing and children's games. Today it is known as "dirty river," it is in the middle of the palm plantation and absolutely polluted. When people bathe in the river they come out with their whole body itching. It has been observed that a lot of drainage in the plantation ends up in the river. Both spraying products and waste from washing the pumps end up in the marshes and eventually the water reaches the river. Those who are not aware of this and drink water from the marshes or drainage suffer from diarrhoea and vomiting."

Another problem affecting both the health and the economy of the local population is the so called "Stable Fly." This plague originates from the Palmeras del Ecuador Company's practice of fertilizing the land by placing around each plant the waste left from the bunches of palm fruit. The community complains that the fly breeds in the places where this waste is left. They say that "it is a fierce fly that stings all the animals, the cows, the horses and even the pigs, it also stings people, and the sting of these flies is severe."

The problem is serious: "the quantity of flies is such that the animals' heads are black with so many flies. When the flies sting the animals they try to run away and go into the forest, so we have to go and look for them until we find them. With the flies attacking, the cattle can't eat in peace. During the day the cattle don't eat, they go out at night so the flies don't bother them."

On applying the waste around the palm trees and causing the fly to proliferate, peasant economy is seriously affected because the cattle – an important source of the peasants' livelihood – on being attacked by the flies do not eat properly, getting thin and not producing any milk and in some cases, even dying. Furthermore, the animals escape from the areas where there are more flies and leave the peasants' farms so they have to spend a lot of time in recovering their animals and neglect other tasks on the farm.

What the company calls "stable fly" and many local people call the "fierce fly" is also a problem to health and those most affected are children. It causes fevers, headaches and skin irritation.

In spite of the pressure, the company continues to fertilize with this waste and, because it coincides with the pressure the company is exerting on the peasants to sell their farms, it leads us to suppose that the application of waste is also a measure to force the sales. It is interesting to note a testimony saying that "here in the populated centre the fly has not attacked with any force because the company does not put any waste nearby." However where it does put the waste is "where the farms are, where the cattle is and that is where it bothers."

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## - Malaysia: Severe health effects of pesticides on workers in oil palm plantations

Pesticides negatively impact the health and lives of millions of agricultural pesticide users, their communities and consumers worldwide –they also cause great damage to biodiversity and the environment. The pesticides used in oil palm plantations have adverse impacts on human health and the environment. Agricultural workers in oil palm plantations are heavily exposed to pesticides and suffer a range of dangerous acute and chronic health effects, though many remain tragically ignorant of the causes.

Tenaganita and PAN AP have carried out numerous surveys in Malaysian oil palm plantations during the last few years which have revealed horrendous working conditions. These include workers spraying pesticides without any knowledge of their hazards; not being provided with protective clothing; and even cases where the labels are removed from the pesticide bottles before being given to workers so that they are unable to identify the pesticide used.

Workers complaining about pesticide poisoning are treated callously by the medical personnel and often prescribed paracetamol for pain and skin creams for skin irritation. Workers in oil palm plantations, are reluctant to report pesticide poisoning for fear of losing their jobs or retaliation, or because they cannot afford the time off or medical costs. The impacts of pesticides compromise people's ability to work, earn a living, and conduct community and livelihood functions.

Long term chronic impacts (including systemic damage and diseases, cancer, reproductive health problems and hormonal disruption) seriously threaten rural communities' long term survival. Endocrine disruption can affect particularly unborn babies —disturbing growth and formation, causing systemic and functional deficiencies like lowered IQ levels, susceptibility to disease, behavioural problems, and effects on future fertility. These impacts on children seriously threaten the future of whole communities, and could mire communities in more social and economic disintegration, greater poverty and suffering.

Women are particularly susceptible due to physiological characteristics and socio-cultural and economic circumstances as they are often the poorest of the poor. Impacts on women's health (and children) are critical as the pesticides women workers spray are potentially toxic to the foetus. Women can be exposed even if they do not directly apply the pesticides, and yet are less likely to receive training to reduce risks. Such is the case with the Glufosinate ammonium, a groundwater contaminant that has toxicity to humans, including carcinogenicity, reproductive and developmental toxicity, neurotoxicity, and acute toxicity.

Some of the pesticides used in oil palm plantations may produce chronic illness and death in humans --like endosulfan, an endocrine disrupting chemical insecticide that acts primarily on the nervous system known to interfere with hormonal mechanisms at very low concentrations; 2,4-D dimethylamine and diuron, that are potential carcinogens; glyphosate, cypermethrin and carbofuran, maneb, that are possible endocrine disrupting pesticides.

Paraquat is a highly hazardous pesticide that is known to cause the highest number of poisoning of agricultural workers in the oil palm plantations in Malaysia. The Malaysian government announced a ban on paraquat but the ban has not been implemented due to the pressure from the industry. The symptoms of paraquat poisoning are nosebleeds, tearing of the eyes, contact dermatitis, skin irritation and sores, nail discolouration, dropping of the nails, and abdominal ulcerations. Damage to the lungs, for example, may not be evident until several days after absorption. There is no antidote against paraquat poisoning. The outcome can be fatal and in these cases death results from respiratory failure. In 1994, the Danish government had imposed bans and severe restrictions on 7 pesticides - including paraquat- it considered a threat to health, the environment or both. The Danish decision to ban paraquat, enacted in 1995, was based on its persistence, and its toxicity to non-target organisms.

However, as the Pesticide Action Network's regional office for Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) has already expressed, "in Malaysia the industries' profits override the health considerations of the people."

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## CARBON TRADE

### - Offsetting Democracy

Carbon trading and offsets distract attention from the wider, systemic changes and collective political action that needs to be taken in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Promoting more effective and empowering approaches to climate change involves moving away from the blinkered reductionism of free-market dogma, the false-economy of supposed quick fixes, the short-term self interest of big business.

The concept that underpins the whole system of carbon trading and offsetting is that a ton of carbon here is exactly the same as a ton of carbon there. That is, if it's cheaper to reduce emissions in India than it is in the UK, then you can achieve the same climate benefit in a more cost-effective manner by making the reduction in India.

But, the seductive simplicity of this concept is based on collapsing a whole series of important considerations, such as land rights, North-South inequalities, local struggles, corporate power and colonial history, into the single question of cost-effectiveness. The mechanisms of emissions trading and offsetting represent a reductionist approach to climate change that negates complex variables in favour of cost-effectiveness.

So when the Dutch FACE Foundation plants trees in Kibale national park in Uganda to offset consumer flights, it ignores the fact that the land has been the site of violent evictions in the recent past and is still hotly contested by the people who once lived there. When companies buy carbon credits in the EU Emissions Trading scheme, the cheapness of the supposed emissions reductions is all that is important. But, any offsetting in Southern countries to justify emissions in Northern countries completely bypasses the issue of the extreme disparity in the levels of per capita carbon consumption and assumes that emissions reductions in the South can be treated like another colonial commodity to be extracted and traded.

Even within the cost-obsessed logic of the market, the use of carbon trading and offsetting goes against common sense. The point of the system is to provide opportunities for Northern companies to delay making the costly transition to low-carbon technologies. This is indeed, 'cost effective' in the short term, as it's easier and cheaper to buy carbon credits rather than go about the complicated business of making those changes, but studies have shown time and again that the longer we delay making those changes, the more expensive and difficult it will be, in terms of society enmeshing itself even further in the web of fossil-fuel dependency, and of even more costly adaptation to the exacerbated impacts of climate change.

There has already been some documentation of how offsetting can be used by countries to avoid taking responsibility for meeting their Kyoto targets, and how fundamentally unsustainable companies like Land Rover, BP and BA can use offsets in an attempt to garner undeserved environmental legitimacy. What is more disturbing are the new ways in which offsets are being creatively applied by the corporate sector in order to further their agenda.

The corrosive influence of offsets illogic is now not even restricted to the sphere of climate change and carbon emissions. Coca Cola has been the subject of sustained campaigns by social justice groups all over the world, but its business practices in India have received particular attention. In 2003, the Delhi-based Centre for Science and the

Environment issued a report on laboratory tests that showed pesticide and insecticide levels of between eleven-times and seventy-times the maximum set by the European Union for drinking water, in a number of soft drinks being sold by Coca Cola in India. The US-based India Resource Centre has made numerous allegations against the company, saying that it causes severe water shortages for local communities, and that its bottling facilities pollute the surrounding soil and groundwater. In March 2004, officials in Kerala, a state in Southern India, shut down one of Coca Cola's bottling plants over claims by local communities and activists that it had drained and polluted local water supplies.

In August 2007, while he sipped a can of Diet Coke in front of the distinctive World Wildlife Fund (WWF) panda logo, the CEO of Coca Cola, Neville Isdell announced a \$20 million dollar partnership with WWF that would aim to "replace every drop of water we use in our beverages and their production." Aside from plans to reduce and recycle the water being used, the third component of the package was to replenish. This replenishment wouldn't be taking place at the sites of the water depletion, but through a series of projects taking place in other parts of the world – effectively water offsets.

This \$20 million sum (which represents less than 1% of Coca Cola's enormous \$2.4 billion annual advertising budget) is being used to counteract the huge amount of negative publicity that Coca Cola has received through its practices of water depletion and pollution in countries like India. The company has maintained a vigorous campaign of denial of responsibility for any of the devastating impacts that such communities have suffered, so by using water offsets, it can play the corporate good guy in other parts of the world without having to even acknowledge the damage it has caused elsewhere.

The potential for water offsets isn't limited to just individual acts of corporate greenwash. Some commentators, like John Regan, a carbon credit-supplier on the Chicago Climate Exchange, sees Coca Cola's water offset scheme as "an encouraging sign of the nascent need for a water-credit trading scheme." The idea is that if one company didn't control its water pollution sufficiently, it would have to purchase credits from another company that had controlled its water pollution beyond its target.

Like carbon trading, such a scheme would provide ample opportunity for obscure accountancy procedures and the flurry of market activity to give the impression of activity and mask the fact that very little happens in reality to address the fundamental issues of environmental degradation and social injustice.

Many other schemes to commodify and trade away environmental problems have been proposed or are in development, including landfill trading, endangered species trading and wetlands banking. The irony is that it is the perpetual expansion of market economies that has *created* such pressure on natural resources and threatened all manner of ecosystems with the soaring levels of industrial pollution. Now, those same market forces are being put forward as the panacea to our multiple environmental ills. This commodification agenda has little to do with public interest – it's more about the opportunities for businesses to capitalise on the transactions of such new markets. What is claimed to be a cheaper solution for industry to meet environmental standards transforms a political and social issue into a market issue, thus offsetting democracy.

If we are to properly grapple with the issue of climate change, we need to develop and apply a systemic analysis that goes beyond the fixation with cost or even carbon dioxide, and promote synergies with other important struggles in the areas of trade, finance, human rights, biodiversity, environmental justice and democracy.

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Monthly Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement  
This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese  
Editor: Ricardo Carrere

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