



# WRM BULLETIN

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## OUR VIEWPOINT

### - Forests, agrofuels and policies of hunger

World hunger is a source of ever greater concern for those who have yet to suffer from it, and ever greater suffering for those who already do – and who are growing in numbers year after year. Yet the policies being formulated in the global power centres not only do little to solve the problem of hunger, but actually tend to even further exacerbate it.

A clear example of this point is the promotion of agrofuels. Under the guise of environmental protection (through the replacement of climate change-provoking fossil fuels) and the green label of "bio" fuels, millions of hectares of land are being turned over to the production of food... for automobiles.

This policy has severe impacts on the South. On the one hand, basic food crops like corn are no longer being raised to feed humans, but instead to produce ethanol. On the other hand, lands that once produced food have been taken over by sugarcane or soybean monocultures to produce agrofuels. In both cases, the result is a dwindling supply of foodstuffs, leading to market speculation and soaring prices.

Of course, agrofuels are not exclusively (nor primarily) responsible for rising food prices. But they are clearly one more factor that contributes to the worsening of an already serious situation, that of growing hunger and malnutrition in the countries of the South.

Rising food prices have already led to public protests and rioting – triggered by despair – in many parts of the world, and have also spurred the organization of powerful movements working to promote food sovereignty.

However, there is another process linked to food production that remains relatively ignored, and needs to be incorporated into this struggle: the destruction of forests.

The expansion of agrofuel crops is taking place in two different settings: on agricultural lands and on forested lands. In the first case, food crops are being replaced by agrofuel crops. In the second, forests are being destroyed so that the land they once occupied can be used to grow crops for fuel production (oil palm, soybeans, sugarcane).

The second case – the destruction of forests – is rarely perceived as an impact on food security and food sovereignty, for the simple reason that few people are aware of the food-producing capacity of forests. Those who are aware of this capacity are the millions of human beings who live in the forests, and for whom the forests provide most of their means of survival, the chief of which is food. Thus every hectare of forest that disappears means taking the food from the mouths of these peoples, whether the land is being taken over to produce agrofuel crops or for any other activity that causes the destruction of forests (tree plantations for pulp production, commercial logging, hydroelectric dams, shrimp farming, etc.). The result: hunger and malnutrition in communities that were once well nourished by the food provided by the forests.

Hunger – whether in the forests, the countryside or the city – is not an inevitable phenomenon. Rather, it is the result of the same policies and economic interests that are at the root of other crises, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, the disappearance and contamination of water supplies, the destruction of soils, and many others. At the same time, all of these crises further exacerbate the problem of the lack of access to food among the poorest and most vulnerable.

The misnomered “development” policies promoted for decades by international institutions like the World Bank, IMF, FAO, WTO and others have more than amply proven to be socially and environmentally disastrous. The only thing that they have succeeded in “developing” are the profits of large transnational corporations, at the expense of human hunger and environmental destruction. The model they have imposed on us is crumbling. It is time for them to admit it, and to make room for the proposals of social movements.

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## COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

### - Brazil: Sugarcane for agrofuel poses a growing threat to highly biodiverse ecosystem

Agrofuels are increasingly drawing words of warning, protest and condemnation from such disparate voices as high-level United Nations representatives like FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf and Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Jean Ziegler, statesmen like Fidel Castro, and social organizations in both the North and South (see notes 1 and 2). Nevertheless, plantations of crops raised specifically to produce fuel continue to spread.

In Latin America, Brazil is undoubtedly at the forefront of this trend. Energy agreements signed with the United States and Chile last year and recently with Germany have consolidated Brazil's position as an ethanol producer.

Plantations of sugarcane for fuel production now occupy some six million hectares of land in Brazil, primarily in the southeast, in the states of Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais and Goiás, and also in the central states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul.

The region where sugarcane monoculture is now exerting the greatest pressure is the Cerrado, a sprawling woodland savannah biome that is home to a vast wealth of biodiversity. The Cerrado covers two million square kilometres of land and is bordered by the Amazon, Atlantic Forest and Pantanal regions. It was traditionally used for large-scale cattle farming, but in recent decades sugarcane plantations have been gradually taking over and converting large areas of the Cerrado into sugarcane fields. According to figures from a study to be published in June by the Brazilian NGO Instituto Sociedade, População e Natureza (Society, Population and Nature Institute, ISPN), there are 152,000 hectares of the Cerrado designated as conservation areas by the government that are currently covered by monoculture sugarcane plantations.

"Any monoculture provokes a loss of biodiversity," stresses Nilo D'Avila, the coordinator of the study, adding: "Sugarcane plantations alter the biochemical composition of the Cerrado, especially the acidity of the soil, which is very high in the region." Thus, on top of the deforestation that results when land is taken over to establish plantations, sugarcane monoculture techniques attempt to "correct" this acidity with lime, which has killed off numerous fruit species that had adapted to the Cerrado's highly acidic soil.

The greatest tragedy of the Cerrado is the fact that its rapid destruction has been largely ignored. It is the second most threatened biome after the Amazon region, but ranks first in terms of the threat posed by sugarcane plantations.

A report published by the Latin American regional office of the IUF trade union federation (3) reveals that in the last 40 years, the Cerrado has lost one half of its surface area as a consequence of the spread of sugarcane plantations, among other activities. If this trend continues, this ecosystem will have disappeared by the year 2030.

Big agribusiness has attempted to build an "eco-friendly" façade around the commodity of sugarcane by using the term "biofuels". But that façade is crumbling, and there are now some who have begun to call these products what they really are: necrofuels, the fuels of death.

(1) Position Paper of the Global South, at: [http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Quito\\_Manifest.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/agrofuels/Quito_Manifest.html)

(2) Call for a Moratorium, at: [http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/SBSTTA/Press\\_Release\\_26\\_6.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/BDC/SBSTTA/Press_Release_26_6.html)

(3) Caña de azúcar devasta el "cerrado", Silvia Adoue, Radioagencia NP, at: <http://www.rel-uita.org/agricultura/cerrado.htm>

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### **- Burma: Cyclone proved the failure of "development" based on mangrove destruction**

In the first weekend of May, a cyclone ravaged Burma. Cyclone Nagris hit the Irrawaddy delta with winds reaching 190km/h. However, most havoc was played by a sea surge that came with the storm: a wave up to 3.5m high swept away and inundated half the houses in low-lying villages. People couldn't flee and figures of dead people are estimated at more than 100,000.

The storm was strong indeed, but the root of such an enhanced devastation can be traced back in the country's so called "development programmes" in the industries of tourism and shrimp farming, that implied the destruction of formerly lush mangroves.

The importance of mangroves as buffering zones that protect inhabited areas from storms and big waves is widely acknowledged. Mangroves are salt-tolerant and grow along coastlines, rivers and deltas where the saltwater and freshwater meet, often covering a few kilometers inland. They form a dense protection barrier of intertwining roots, branches, and trunks that dissipate the force of storm surges.

Whenever coastal zones are being deprived of their mangrove protection, the damage of big waves is much more dramatic. The BBC reported several studies that reveal the importance of mangroves to human lives and settlements: a study of the 2004 Asian tsunami found that areas near healthy mangroves suffered less damage and fewer deaths. Also a study published in December 2005 said healthy mangrove forests helped save Sri Lankan villagers during the Asian tsunami disaster, which claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people. Researchers from IUCN compared the death toll from two villages in Sri Lanka that were hit by the devastating giant waves --while two people died in the settlement with dense mangrove and scrub forest, up to 6,000 people lost their lives in a nearby village without similar vegetation (1).

According to Mangrove Action Project (MAP), the loss of mangroves started in Burma under British colonial rule, "in order to clear space for rice production. Since that time, mangrove loss has continued; during WWII [Second World War] to satisfy military demands, and more recently, for fuel wood and unsustainable developments, such as industrial shrimp aquaculture and urban expansion." MAP reports Burmese researchers revealing that "during a period of 75 years (1924-1999), 82.76% of the mangroves of the Irrawady were destroyed."

"The conversion to large-scale shrimp and fish farms is the most significant threat to mangroves world wide, and other pressures include tourism developments and rising populations. This is worrisome to those who believe that global warming and rising sea levels will cause more frequent and intense storms, and that the loss of mangroves will make the coastlines more susceptible to damage." (2)

The December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that ravaged several Asian coasts, the 1999 Super Cyclone that hit the coast of Orissa (India) killing more than 10,000 people are sad memories recalled by the recent disaster in Burma, especially because they could have been "greatly lessened and much loss in life and property damage could have been averted if healthy mangrove forests had been conserved along the coastlines of the Irrawaddy Delta," said Alfredo Quarto, MAP's executive director.

The cause of the evil is well known by national and international authorities. An FAO officer has acknowledged that "There are very limited areas that you would describe as pristine or densely covered mangrove in the Irrawaddy area" and though there are some efforts to rehabilitate and replant mangroves, the loss rate is quite substantial still. The officer said that "During the 1990s, they lost something like 2,000 hectares each year, which is about 0.3% being lost annually. But that does not give you the whole picture because the majority of these tidal habitats are being degraded, even if they are not being completely destroyed." (1)

How many other lives should be lost in order to gain the political will to change the present "development" policies that have so dramatically proved to be unsuccessful? No development is possible on the long run when it implies destroying our home, our nature. Burma's people can sadly tell you that.

Article based on information from: (1) "Mangrove loss 'put Burma at risk'", Mark Kinver, BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7385315.stm>; (2) Press Release: "Destruction of Mangrove Forests Increased Devastating Impact of Cyclone Nagris", MAP. [http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/news/current\\_headlines/press-release-destruction-of-mangrove-forests-increased-devastating-impact-of-cyclone-nagris/](http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/news/current_headlines/press-release-destruction-of-mangrove-forests-increased-devastating-impact-of-cyclone-nagris/)

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### - Paraguay: Forced contact brought illness and death to indigenous man

Parojnai was his name. He was from the Ayoreo-Totobiegosode indigenous people who inhabit the Chaco forest stretching from Paraguay to Bolivia and Argentina, south of the Amazon basin.

Parojnai Picanerai, his wife and their children had managed to live in the Chaco forest (located in Paraguay), without contact with the outside world despite increasing encroachment onto their territories. Though the Paraguayan law acknowledges the Ayoreo's right to own the lands which they have traditionally inhabited, their forest is being sold to private owners and rapidly cleared by speculators and ranchers for logging and later on for cattle raising.

In 1979 and 1986, the American fundamentalist New Tribes Mission organized "manhunts" to force large groups of Ayoreo Totobiegosode out of the forest. Later on, harassment and bulldozing of the Chaco forest continued with regular incursions. Ayoreo communal life in villages was disrupted and they had to move camp to live in hiding inside the forest, abandoning their huts and leaving behind the crops they had planted as well as valued possessions such as cooking pots and tools.

Finally, tired of the lonely life and of living on the run, Parojnai and his family eventually gave up and made contact in 1998. Survival International brings us his testimony in that moment: "We ran from one place to another. It looked like the bulldozer was following us. I had to leave my tools, my bow, my rope to run faster... We thought that the bulldozer had seen our garden and came to eat the fruit – and to eat us too."

They went to live in a small Ayoreo community on the edge of the forest, but soon after contact, Parojnai contracted flu and tuberculosis. Survival campaigner Jonathan Mazower, who had visited him in 2003 and in 2007, this month said: 'When I first met Parojnai, he was already very sick. But I've seen pictures of him taken on the day after first contact and he was incredibly fit and healthy then.'

On the first days of May, Parojnai died. His death acquired a significance that Mazower expressed quite properly: "For me, Parojnai's life symbolises the fate of indigenous people in the Americas since Columbus. Loss of his land to outsiders forced him to give up his independence, and contact left him sick with a disease that eventually killed him. The same tragedies faced by Indians 500 years ago are being played out today for the world's last remaining uncontacted tribes."

Article based on information from: "Paraguay: Ayoreo Indian Dies after First Contact", 7 May 2008, Survival International, <http://mcsv.net/cgi-bin/redirect?MCid=ADomPAu9J28E4tnmA4RM>

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### - Zambia: Grabbed by the agrofuel stampede

In Africa, agrofuel initiatives are proliferating in many countries including Zambia, where jatropha has been selected as the main crop to produce biodiesel while sugar cane, sweet sorghum and cassava are chosen for bioethanol.

A research undertaken by Matongo Mundia (1) in 2007 explains that "As on the rest of the continent, much of the drive for biofuel developments in Zambia comes from talk of achieving energy security and supporting social and economic development. However, there seems to be a lack of clarity over whether investment and targets are aimed at production of biofuels for the Zambian market or for export."

The Zambian government has supported and endorsed the production of agrofuel but the sector is fairly new in the country. The report identifies *D1 Oils* -- a UK-based global producer of biodiesel -- and *Marli Investments* as the main drivers of agrofuel production. Through the Biofuels Association of Zambia (BAZ), the agrofuel industry has been trying to get incentives such as minimum agrofuel blends for all consumers, and the provision of incentives that may fuel capital for the development of the sector.

"It seems that companies such as *D1 Oils* may be promoting biofuels as a domestic energy strategy, in order to open

the door to amenable legislation, while really intending to focus biofuel production on the export market. The likelihood that biofuel production will ultimately be targeted at export markets, and fail to benefit Zambians, is supported by the fact that Zambia has no biofuel refining facilities and *D1 Oils* are building a refinery in Durban, South Africa. Once the product has left the country, the greater buying power of the European consumer will undoubtedly prevail", explains the report.

A shared fate in most places where large-scale agrofuel schemes have been launched is that of deforestation and displacement: "66% of Zambia's landmass is comprised of woodlands and forests, some of which are of special importance such as those in the river headwaters (catchment areas), forest reserves and game parks. Only about 26% of Zambian woodlands and forests could be used for further agricultural productivity such as crops for agrofuels. However, even without clearing more forests for agriculture, Zambia is already experiencing very high levels of deforestation. In a recent statement, Copperbelt Province Minister Mr. Mwansa Mbulakulima intimated that a de-gazetted forest reserve will be given to investors (The Post, 4th May 2007). It is not yet public knowledge whether this give-away will go towards biofuel production, or to other industry developments. However, this indicates that biofuel developments leading to deforestation will not find many obstacles from local or national government."

"There are serious questions in Zambia about land availability for conversion to agrofuel production, and the impact it will have on farmers, food production, forested areas and indigenous peoples. The Lands Act of 1995, provides for the conversion of customary tenure to leasehold tenure, and many investors have already used this provision to expropriate land for investment purposes. The government of Zambia has intimated that they want to adopt a market oriented land policy, and the new draft land policy also looks to be taking these strategies forward."

A strong opposition to agrofuels has been rapidly mounting up challenging both the alleged "carbon neutral" solution they claim to be and their environmental and social impacts. In November 2007, several African civil society organisations made "An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments" (2) calling for a moratorium on new agrofuel developments on their continent. "We need to protect our food security, forests, water, land rights, farmers and indigenous peoples from the aggressive march of agrofuel developments, which are devouring our land and resources at an unbelievable scale and speed," reads the call.

They warn that "the agrofuels 'revolution' is geared to replace millions of hectares of local agricultural systems, and the rural communities working in them, with large plantations. It is oriented to substitute biodiversity-based indigenous cropping, grazing and pasture farming systems with monocultures and genetically engineered agrofuel crops. In addition, the millions of hectares of what the agrofuel-pushers euphemistically call 'wastelands' or 'marginal soils' are to be turned to 'productive' fuel production, conveniently forgetting that millions of people in local communities make a living from these fragile ecosystems. And where there are no indigenous farming systems to replace, one just takes the forests. In the driver's seat are the multinational corporations that manage these kinds of huge monocultures best and already control the international market for agrofuels."

And they conclude: "We can ill afford to lose our food, forests, land and water, if we are to meet the challenges of climate change and food insecurity. We therefore ask our African governments and those of the North to stop and think. We urgently call for a moratorium that can protect Africa from the many threats of the new and dangerous Agrofuels stampede."

Article based on information from: (1) "Agrofuels in Africa – The impacts on land, food and forests", African Biodiversity Network, July 2007, *Biofuel case study: Zambia*, Matongo Mundia, commissioned by Clement Chipokolo, [http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/AgrofuelAfrica\\_Jul2007.pdf](http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/AgrofuelAfrica_Jul2007.pdf); (2) November 2007, An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments, <http://www.africanbiodiversity.org/media/1210585794.pdf?PHPSESSID=0c91fabd2a80b164ffb52f594d4da9c5>



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## - Community forest management: A new and inspiring FoEI publication

Millions of people throughout the world live in rural areas and to a greater or lesser extent depend on forest ecosystems for their livelihoods. However, forest degradation and deforestation are occurring at alarming rates, thus endangering their lives.

Whether for forest-dependent indigenous peoples and rural peasant communities or for urban communities reliant on environmental services provided by forests, these play a vital role in everyday life. Unfair distribution processes, consumerism and the lack of good governance lie at the centre of unsustainable resource management causing environmental problems and the continual impoverishment of local populations.

This new publication produced by the Forest and Biodiversity Programme of Friends of the Earth International, provides renewed impetus and documentation illustrating how innovative solutions based on the knowledge of local communities are contributing to the improvement of their life conditions while also protecting and maintaining forest ecosystems.

*"Community-based forest governance refers to the regulations and practices used by many communities for the conservation and sustainable use of the forests with which they coexist. This type of governance is collective-communal, and by tradition identifies with forest protection, opposing the industrial and commercial use of forest resources".*

The publication provides community experiences from a broad array of countries, detailing successes and challenges in local peoples' efforts to control, use and protect their forests. These experiences include cases in India, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Indonesia, France, Greece, Chile, Bolivia, Amazonia, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Haiti. The cases offer a good basis for illustrating and motivating reflection on community forest management with the aim of encouraging the sustainable use of forests.

In addition to local community experiences, the publication includes analysis for critical reflection and discussion on a large number of threats and opportunities, with issues ranging from the role of governments and international financial institutions to food sovereignty, consumerism, climate change, peoples health, markets for local products and land tenure. The book shows how those issues affect local peoples, linking them with the broader issue of social and environmental justice.

Used as a basis for collective reflection over local level resource control, through processes of participatory decision making and egalitarian benefit sharing, this inspiring publication is a valuable tool to be used by communities wanting to exercise greater control over their lives and resources, for communities struggling to improve their lives, to restore degraded ecosystems, as well as for political lobbying against socially and environmentally destructive policies.

By: Antonis Diamantidis, email: [antonis@worm.org.uy](mailto:antonis@worm.org.uy)

The book is available in electronic format in Spanish at <http://www.coecoceiba.org/images/pub91.pdf>, and will soon be available in English and French. For further information please contact Javier Baltodano, from Friends of the Earth at: [licania@racsa.co.cr](mailto:licania@racsa.co.cr)

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## **- Women the most impacted by agrofuel production**

The expansion of large-scale plantations --either crops or trees-- for the production of liquid agrofuels such as bioethanol and biodiesel is increasing in many Southern countries --with harmful impacts on people and the environment.

Now, even the FAO admits the risks. A recently published FAO report looks into agrofuel production and their gendered impacts, explaining that it may increase the marginalization of women in rural areas, threatening their livelihoods.

The large-scale pattern of agrofuel feedstocks conveys increased land requirements that put pressure on so-called "marginal" lands, which provide key subsistence functions to the rural poor and are frequently farmed by women. The report acknowledges that replacement of local crops with monoculture energy crop plantations could threaten agro-biodiversity as well as the extensive knowledge and the traditional skills of smallholder farmers in the management, selection and storage of local crops, all activities performed mainly by women.

In addition, agrofuel production may negatively impact the livestock sector, which is key to the food security of rural households, through a reduction in the availability of land for grazing and an increase in the price of fodder (due to the growing use of agricultural commodities for agrofuel production).

The potential depletion or degradation of natural resources associated with large-scale plantations for agrofuel production may place an additional burden on rural farmers' work and health, in particular on female farmers. If agrofuel production competes, either directly or indirectly, for water and firewood supplies, it could make such resources less readily available for household use. This would force women, who are traditionally responsible, in most developing countries, for collecting water and firewood, to travel longer distances thus reducing the time available to earn income from other sources.

The potential loss of both biodiversity and agro-biodiversity presents risks to food production as well, posing a serious threat to rural livelihoods and long-term food security. In particular, the potential deforestation associated with the establishment of large-scale plantations for agrofuel production may negatively impact the peoples who depend on such forests for their livelihoods, increasing their food insecurity.

Agrofuel production might also have gender-differentiated impacts on food access, through both price and income effects. There is growing evidence that the increasing demand for agricultural commodities for the production of liquid agrofuels is contributing to reverse the decrease in the price of both agricultural commodities and food that has occurred in the last few decades. This may have negative food security impacts, particularly for households that are net purchasers as well as countries that are net importers of agricultural commodities and food. The rising demand for liquid agrofuels could also make the prices of agricultural commodities and food more unstable, exposing a significant number of households and individuals to the risk of food insecurity. Sudden increases in food prices would have negative repercussions in particular for poor households and vulnerable groups, particularly women and female-headed households, which tend to be particularly exposed to chronic and transitory food insecurity, due also to their limited access to income-generating activities.

Furthermore, the alleged employment opportunities in rural areas of the establishment of plantations for agrofuel production are targeted mainly to low-skilled agricultural workers and these are rather seasonal jobs or on a casual basis. FAO reports that a growing number of these workers are women, who due to existing social inequalities generally tend to be disadvantaged, compared to men, in terms of employment benefits and exposure to occupational safety and health risks.

In general, the cultivation of sugarcane and oil palm has been linked, in several Southern countries, to unfair



conditions of employment, health and safety risks, child labour and forced labour. In some cases, working conditions on plantations (including those of agrofuel feedstocks) tend to have a differentiated gender impact. Landowners tend to prefer women workers, as they are able to pay them less than their male counterparts and find them a docile and dependent workforce, and are therefore more exploitable.

Reliable data on the share of women waged agricultural workers are difficult to obtain, given the prevalence of informal labour arrangements. There is evidence, however, that this share has been rising worldwide and women now account for 20-30 percent of total waged agricultural workers. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the figure is 40 percent, while, in African countries, this percentage is likely to be higher. There is evidence that women tend to receive on average less training and instruction than men, they often do repetitive work that can result in health problems, and face reproductive hazards as a result of exposure to agrochemicals. In Malaysia, for instance, women, who represent about half the workforce on plantations, are often recruited as sprayers of chemical pesticides and herbicides, without proper training and safety equipment. This may have serious implications for the long-term health of these women workers.

The FAO report concludes that efforts to mitigate climate change through the promotion of liquid agrofuels production can reduce people's socio-economic resilience (especially among the most vulnerable groups, including women), weakening their ability to cope with exogenous shocks such as climate change.

However, FAO fails to take a committed stance against the agrofuels model being promoted, which is unsustainable by its own nature, and ends with the wishful thinking that "making sure that biofuels production is beneficial to both men and women in developing countries would therefore strengthen their ability to cope with the impacts of climate change".

We welcome the information provided by the FAO report, though we feel that its final conclusion doesn't hold water. Agrofuels are increasingly proving that they bring no environmental or social benefits, and the FAO report depicts how they affect especially poor and rural women. The conclusion should therefore be strong and clear: if you want to benefit poor and rural women, do not promote agrofuels!

Excerpted, adapted and commented from: "Gender And Equity Issues In Liquid Biofuels Production Minimizing The Risks To Maximize The Opportunities", Andrea Rossi and Yianna Lambrou, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 2008, <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/ai503e/ai503e00.pdf>

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### **- Australia/Tasmania: Deal favours Gunns' pulp mill project despite popular opposition**

On the first days of this month the Tasmanian people got to know of a deal that had been struck four months before between their government and the timber company Gunns. The deal, called the Sovereign Risk Agreement, provides that taxpayers should fund the company along 20 years with \$15 million in case its wood supply is compromised by any reason. (1)

Gunns' projected pulp mill has faced strong opposition from social sectors including students. In the blog *Students Against the Pulp Mill* (<http://stopthemill.blogspot.com/2008/04/alliance-forms-to-save-tasmania-from.html>) it can be read: "So if we vote this government out because we don't approve of the pulp mill, the next government will be forced to continue supplying timber to Gunns, even if most Tasmanians don't agree to it. How undemocratic".

The government's favouritism for Gunns is in stark contrast with its attitude towards the concerns raised over the potential adverse impacts of the unpopular pulp mill Gunns plans to build in the Tamar Valley. The Gunns fast track approval did not even assess the potential adverse impacts of the pulp mill industry on tourism, fishing, niche clean

agriculture and wine making. And in case the proposed pulp mill causes damage to clean, green industries, they won't receive any compensation for that.

Local businesses were told that it's not the government's business to help them out if damage to their clean, green reputation ensues.

An article from The Tasmanian Greens (2) denounces the following: "A letter written by Premier Paul Lennon to the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) specifically addressing industry concerns over the pulp mill, dated 6 September 2007, states in relation to the following concern expressed to him:

*TICT: 'There must be a method of assisting businesses that suffer loss of trade or capital value as a proven result of the operation of the pulp mill'.*

*Premier: 'Individuals will need to seek independent legal advice about remedies available to them should they suffer loss of trade or capital value as a result of the operation of the pulp mill.'"*

The students' blog reports that last April 16 "A diverse collection of groups, individuals and businesses from around Tasmania and Australia have come together in the Tamar Valley this weekend and agreed to the formation of a cohesive working alliance to stop the Gunns pulp mill."

There was a call to close personal bank accounts in ANZ Bank as a punishment for its potential support to the Gunns' pulp mill project, and around 100 people –especially young people— rallied on the Parliament House's lawn to express the central message: DON'T PULP OUR FUTURE!

Article based on information from: (1) Compo for Gunns if supply fails, Matthew Denholm, The Australian, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23652116-5013871,00.html>; (2) \$15 Million Price Tag On Democracy Under Deal With Gunns, [http://tas.greens.org.au/News/view\\_MR.php?ActionID=2979](http://tas.greens.org.au/News/view_MR.php?ActionID=2979)

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## **- Burma: Generals go berserk on biofuels**

Biofuels – bio-diesel oil extracted from plants to replace high cost fossil fuels – have become controversial as the biofuel plantations are taking away lands mainly used, in particular for food production, by local communities.

In Burma, the ruling military junta has embarked on a massive expansion of biofuel plantations through forced confiscation of lands as well as arrests, fines, and beatings of farmers.

The junta's five-year plan targets 8 million acres with the *Jatropha curcas* (physic nut, *jetsuu* in Burmese) tree for biofuel production. Each state and division of the country has to plant the crop across 500,000 acres. Now two years into the program, information is seeping out about the brutalities the local populations undergo being forced to plant *jatropha*.

"Biofuel by Decree: Unmasking Burma's bio-energy fiasco," a report produced by the Ethnic Community Development Forum, an alliance of seven community development organizations from Burma, details how the Burmese junta is terrorizing the local populations to plant *jatropha* for biofuels even as, according to the report, "evidence of crop failure and mismanagement expose the program as a fiasco."

The report says that farmers, civil servants, teachers, schoolchildren, nurses, and prisoners have been forced to purchase seeds and fulfill outrageous planting quotas, consuming precious time, land and resources essential for

subsistence.

A manual produced by the Ministry of Agriculture says that 1,200 trees should be grown per acre. If the targets are reached, this would require every man, woman and child in Burma to each plant 177 trees within three years. The junta also plans to export biodiesel in future and the jatropha project has attracted investors from Thailand, Singapore and UK.

The junta claims that biofuels are necessary as a fuel substitute to make Burma decrease its dependence on the 200 million gallons of oil it imports annually. The junta-owned Myanmar oil and Gas Enterprise hopes that the country can replace all of its 40,000 barrels of conventional oil imports with domestic jatropha within a few years. The junta's claims for energy self-sufficiency, however, seem dubious given that it has been selling off the country's numerous natural gas deposits to Thailand, India and China.

On March 2006, the head of Burma's military and the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Senior General Than Shwe, urged the "extensive growing of physic nut across the nation," a speech that effectively made the biofuels project a "national duty" and set off frenzied activities to plant jatropha in "all empty spaces."

Soon high profile plantation ceremonies involving military top brass and battalions of soldiers kicked off plantation projects across villages and townships. The military told civil servants to plant jatropha at state offices, schools, and hospitals; house gardens, churchyards, monastery compounds, and even cemeteries were targeted.

The military makes people buy seeds, branches or seedlings as well as use their own labor, farm tools and land. Land confiscation is the norm: for example, in northern Shan State, the military took 1,000 acres of land belonging to farmers in Man Mao village and gave the land to the local militia to grow jatropha.

The majority of villagers are forced to buy seedlings, branches, or seeds in packets and tin baskets (as well as an "instruction manual") often at exorbitant prices.

One interviewee reports, "We bought the plants when the authorities came to our village. Every house had to buy at 400 kyat per plant. Some villagers had no money and had to borrow from others to pay for the plants." (The official exchange rate varies between 5.75 and 6.70 kyats per US dollar.)

In one bizarre instance, villagers were forced to find wild seeds, sow them in a nursery, and then buy back the seedlings they had nurtured.

By August 2006, jatropha cultivation reached the 1 million acre mark; updated plans then called for 2.3 million acres in 2006-07, 2.68 million acres in 07-08, and 3.38 million acres in 08-09, making a total of 8.36 million acres.

The report explains the chilling situation in Burma where these quotas are being enforced with beatings and death threats. Field research in 32 townships in each of Burma's states including 131 interviews with farmers, civil servants and investors details how soldiers are arresting and beating people and threatening death to those not meeting quotas, damaging the plants, or criticizing the program. At least eight hundred people have fled across the border to Thailand from Southern Shan state to escape the cruelty of the biofuels program.

Despite all these measures, massive crop failures – as high as 72% – plague the project after two years of implementation due to haphazard growing techniques and bad seed stock.

Even when the trees themselves grow, often they bear few seeds because climate and soil conditions are not adequately taken into consideration. Moreover, Burma has little capacity to extract oil from seed, and much of the biodiesel produced has been of such poor quality that engines won't run on them.

The jatropha trees take 4 to 5 years to mature fully. During this period, farmers get no income from it; families also have little to eat since the arable lands are taken over by the biofuel plantations. One farmer asks, "They said it would be a three-year project; but what are we going to eat in the meantime?"

Food scarcity is a serious problem in many parts of Burma. According to the United Nations World Food Program, in 2007, some 5 million people or almost 10 percent of Burma's population were chronically short of food.

One farmer said, "We suffer from lack of farmlands for cultivation. We cannot work for ourselves properly. We have to grow *jet suu*. If we don't want to grow they collect 2,500 kyat per acre from each of us. Our time is limited and now we have to go far away to work and have no time to weed our paddy."

Concerns also persist about the poisonous properties of the jatropha plant due to presence of toxalbumin called curcin, ricin and cyanic acid, related to ricinoleic acid. Though all parts of the plant are poisonous, seeds have the highest concentration of ricin and thus highly poisonous. Ricin has been shown to exhibit many cardiotoxic (heart muscle damage) and hemolytic (breaking open of red blood cells and the release of hemoglobin into the surrounding fluid) effects. Adverse effects following consumption of seeds include vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and burning sensation in the throat.

Local people have found ways to show defiance. Faced with loss of lands and livelihoods, many villagers see no choice but to find ways to avoid or refuse to plant. Some buy seedlings but don't plant them; others plant less than ordered; signboards promoting biofuels have also been defaced.

By Amraapali N., a writer in the Mekong region, e-mail: [amraapali@gmail.com](mailto:amraapali@gmail.com)

*The report "Biofuel by Decree" published by the ethnic Community Development Forum (ECDF) is available for download at: <http://cban.ca/Resources/Topics/Agrofuels>.*

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## **- South Africa: A visit to Komatiland Forests industrial tree monocultures**

In November 2007, several representatives from World Rainforest Movement visited Komatiland Forests' operations at Brooklands in Mpumalanga province in South Africa.

Under a photograph of J. Brooke Shires, who planted the first eucalyptus and acacia trees at Brooklands in 1876, we listened to a company presentation. Komatiland is a parastatal company managing a total of about 128,000 hectares of mainly pine plantations. The trees are grown on a 28 to 30 year rotation for saw logs. Komatiland employs 2,400 people with a further 1,200 people employed on a contract basis, we were told. The Komatiland plantations at Brooklands cover an area of just over 12,000 hectares. The company uses a horse harvesting system on about one-third of its land at Brooklands.

The company has been certified by SGS Qualifor under the Forest Stewardship Council certification system since 1997. A Komatiland official told us that there are four stages of certification: unknowingly non-compliant; knowingly non-compliant; knowingly compliant; and unknowingly compliant. In these days of corporate greenwash, this part of the presentation was refreshingly honest. "I'm buggered if I know where we are," he said, laughing. "Somewhere between two and three." This was a staff member of an FSC-certified company admitting publicly that Komatiland was not fully compliant with FSC standards. "There are problems with all operations. We are not perfect. You will be able to find problems in every one of our plantation units." He said this to an audience that he knew was critical of both industrial tree plantations and FSC certification.

Winnie Overbeek asked about land rights and conflicts over land. "That sounds like a very European question," came the reply. Overbeek explained that he has worked for more than a decade in Brazil supporting the Tupinikim and Guarani Indigenous Peoples in their struggle for land in the area occupied by Aracruz Cellulose's plantations and that his question was based on this experience. Undaunted, the company representative continued. "South Africa is a very unique country", he explained. "There are no indigenous people in South Africa according to FSC standards. Apartheid happened and there are lots of land claims. All plantations and farms have land claims. That doesn't mean that they are valid land claims." All of which sounds remarkably similar to the arguments that Aracruz used, before the Brazilian Ministry of Justice ruled in favour of the Tupinikim and Guarani (see WRM Bulletin 122, September 2007).

In 2007, Komatiland lost about 17,000 hectares of plantations to fire. "Global warming is making things worse," said the Komatiland official. "For example, pine beetles are attacking native forest trees. No one knows what will happen next. We're in for some changes and we're scared of it."

Wally Menne of the TimberWatch coalition pushed home the point that although the company is called Komatiland Forests, this is a misnomer, because Komatiland's forestry operations consist of large scale industrial tree plantations.

After the presentation, the company took us to look at some of its plantations. We drove through Komatiland's pine and eucalyptus monocultures. We saw huge areas of clearcuts and burnt areas of plantation. We drove past the company-built accommodation for workers - rows of small, crudely built terraced bungalows with tin roofs and large numbers painted on the doors. In its assessment of Komatiland, SGS states that the company directly employs only 1,729 people. Driving through the plantations and clearcuts we saw very few workers.

We stopped on a ridge, with lush green grassland on one side of the track and a scene of complete destruction on the other. Every living thing had been cut and scraped away, leaving what looked like a brown moonscape. We got out and walked past piles of logs, some of which were marked with SGS's forest management and chain of custody number (SGS-FM-COC-0068). In the distance a machine was picking up logs and leaving them in neat piles.

In the company's presentation we'd been told that 30 per cent of Komatiland's land is open, and that since 1994, the area of plantations at Brooklands had been reduced from 10,000 hectares to 9,000 hectares. We were told that there was no planting within 20 metres of streams. There was a stream flowing just next to the clearcut. Eucalyptus and pine trees were growing right up to the stream bank.

We saw a log extraction operation using horses. Komatiland told us that using horses damages the soil less and employs more people than mechanised log extraction. The operation that we saw was on a slope that was in any case far too steep to use machines. It looked like brutally hard work. Four men were working with three horses. The horses pulled the logs one at a time down the slope. The men then had to unfasten the chains from the log and pull the horses back up the slope. Meanwhile the managers watched them from the bottom of the slope. One of them had brought his dog with him to work.

During the company's presentation, we had been told that "Apartheid happened" in South Africa. Yet every worker we saw was black. And every manager we saw was white. In Komatiland's plantations, it seems, apartheid still exists.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

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DIRECT FROM THE CBD

- Bursts of true life into the CBD

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international governmental process which looked pretty nice when it was born in 1992, under the UN Earth Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

By then it seemed that the world's governments had become aware of the Earth's looming future in case biodiversity loss under deforestation, biopiracy, agribusiness expansion, and so on, remained unchanged. So a mechanism –the CBD-- was put in motion, gathering every two years in high-level summits paralleled by civil society organization's events.

The CBD managed to resist corporate contamination a bit more than other fora (e.g. the Convention on Climate Change). However, little by little it has been increasingly hijacked by the industry's agenda until it has become a string of protracted sessions where documents full of brackets are delayed waiting for lobbies clinching their deals on issues that have direct impacts on peoples' present and future lives.

Over and over again social organizations have tried to make a breach in the wall participating in the spaces granted to them within the process. However, real effects at policy and implementation level have been few.

As a result, they have tried to make their way and insufflate true people's problems, worries, dreams --true people's lives-- into the CBD. And they have done so through imagination, participation, humour and –why not?,- even anger.

Here follows a brief overview of some of the actions carried out at the current 9th Conference of the Parties (COP9) to the CBD, taking place in Bonn.

### **Sunday May 18**

#### **"Agrofuels create poverty and hunger"**

Around 60 people protested against the large scale cultivation of crops for energy --which is disastrous for food supply and causes deforestation— as a way of dealing with global warming. So far, the honest conclusion that a radical reduction of energy use is needed mainly in 'the West' is ignored by the mainstream media and policy makers.

At two petrol stations car drivers had to make a choice: 'petrol' to the right, 'food' to the left. Banners were stating "agrofuels, no solution for oil addiction."

Most drivers had some sympathy for the action but wanted to fill up petrol anyway this time.

The worker in the Shell station was furious about the counter information in front of her petrol station and called the police. After some discussions the action was allowed, although drivers had to be given more possibilities to go around the 'gate of choice'.

After two hours the group started to move again for a short demonstration ending on a field with a picnic with healthy and local food, as it is still possible.

Amongst the activists were many people from Via Campesina, the international network of small farmers. For them and the millions they represent, the large scale introduction of agrofuels is a direct danger for their livelihoods and life.

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/1.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

### **Thursday may 22**

#### **UN Biodiversity Day ... or let's say the International Profitdiversity Day**



A lunch-meeting was organised by the International Chamber of Commerce, the lobby organisation of the world's largest corporations. Their meeting was interrupted by the visit of a peculiar group of "happy shareholders" who celebrated agribusiness monopolies and congratulated industry for destroying agricultural biodiversity, all of which made possible their high profits. They ended making a toast to the Purveyors of the (Gan)Green Revolution! Part of their speech: "We, 'The Small Shareholders Initiative', TSSI are very glad about the important issues we have to report on behalf of the International Profitdiversity Day today:

- Business gets 220.000 US \$ to support companies in their work at the CBD. This means that we can give our profits to the shareholders and still make people believe that we work for biodiversity.

- During the high level meeting Thursday May 29, business rightly gets a full hour to present its ideas. All other stakeholders together have to share the other hour. Afterwards all delegates are invited, as part of the official programme, by business for a lunch. Another possibility is to make the delegations do what we want.

Hear hear!"

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/2.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

## **Thursday May 22**

### **Nature for People, Not for Business!**

Activists from all over the world hang a banner, banged on teacups and handed out Via Campesina messages during the official celebrations of Biodiversity Day, at the end of a message by UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon to the delegates of the Convention.

Given that agrobusiness dominates the present global food trade with a Green Revolution package that destroys bio and agrodiversity, the banners read "No Agrodiversity Without Farmers" and "Nature for People Not for Business".

After a few minutes the banners were taken away by UN police officers and officials and the people holding them were escorted out of the Maritim Hotel, and lost their accreditation badges, which are required to participate in the meetings.

However, members of Via Campesina were given a round of applause from many government delegates when they chanted "nature for people, not for business".

The message was that no solution can come from such production model. Instead, it is rural communities who are the key to both the solution to world hunger and the safeguarding of the world's biodiversity.

They have the ability to feed the world promoting food diversity, sustaining traditional cultures and not burdening the environment. Moreover, small-scale, local and ecological production is an effective and immediate way of reducing carbon emissions and cooling down the planet.

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/3.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

## **Friday May 24**

### **Plantations are not Forests!**

The German Forestry Council organized an event for forest and timber industry representatives.

The usual pro-market, utilitarian approach to forests speech made no distinction between forests and plantations, and in fact was illustrated with pictures of monoculture tree plantations, described as forests.

The use and marketing of forests was presented as a climate friendly strategy, with much attention on the carbon sequestering capacity of forests. The presentation ended with an emotional "plea" to utilize wood resources, illustrated by an image of a sculpture, the "wooden man" and followed by a violin concert, and the point was then made that "even violins" are made out of wood.

After the presentation there was a reception. On the spur of the moment, a group of five women quickly put together a strategy for presenting their views: as guests were enjoying drinks and appetizers, they captured their attention, then took turns, each for a very brief statement, to speak on the dangers of GE trees, on the failure of plantations to support goals of mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity and on the impact of monoculture tree plantations on soils, waterways and people in Brazil and Uruguay, as well as the situation of European forests, pointing out their long history of exploitation and the concomitant loss of biodiversity.

A small group of people stomped out of the room apparently angry at their interruption, but overall their small action was well received by the guests who clapped and mostly nodded in apparent agreement. One more opportunity taken to speak out against the monoculture mentality.

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/4.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

## **Tuesday May 27**

### **A Call for a Ban on GE Trees**

A tree planting ceremony was being held outside the meeting of the CBD. A large number of activists participated, some mimicking Genetically Engineered frankentrees that attempted to invade the CBD, while others stopping and chopping them down before they could succeed.

The tree planting ceremony was symbolic of what industry is pushing--non-native, often invasive trees for monoculture timber plantations. GE trees will mean more plantations and an even greater threat.

A ban on the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment is supported by African delegates plus numerous Parties from Asia and Latin America. It was discussed at length during the first week of the Biodiversity Convention and will now move into the High Level Session where Ministers from around the world will decide what will happen with this issue.

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/5.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

## **Wednesday May 28**

### **FSC: Stop Certifying Monoculture Tree Plantations**

Activists from social movements attended a side event organized by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Holding a banner, they expressed their concern about FSC's approach, that has disregarded the dramatic evidence provided by social and environmental movements from around the world regarding the harmful impacts of tree plantations, which has allowed millions of hectares of monoculture tree plantations to be falsely certified as "forests".

During the side event a statement was read in which they expressed that apart from having to confront governments and corporations, local communities struggling against large-scale monoculture tree plantations must face the additional problem posed by the fact that these same plantations are being given credibility through certification by the FSC. Yet, the credibility of FSC is increasingly undermined by certification of these and other destructive projects.

After a couple of questions and a short discussion, FSC closed the meeting, although several more people wanted to ask questions and some pointed out that this should be a democratic space for discussing the problems with FSC.

The activists concluded that FSC's decision-making is controlled by corporate interests which try to convince consumers that buying more timber products is good for biodiversity. This is undermining the efforts of environmental organizations, which are working on educating consumers on the need to reduce consumption.

Their claim was: Plantations are not forests and FSC should not certify them! FSC should STOP being a tool for corporate interests!

See photo at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/130/11FSC.jpg>

More photos available at: <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/gallery.php?catID=26>

Reports based on information from:

La Vía Campesina, [http://viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php](http://viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php);

Global Justice Ecology Project, <http://www.globaljusticeecology.org>;

Indymedia Biotech, <http://biotech.indymedia.org/or/>

Global Forest Coalition, <http://www.globalforestcoalition.org>

Photo courtesy: Global Forest Coalition

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