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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Reasonable proposals to the Convention on Climate Change

Everyone now seems to agree that the Earth's climate is changing as a direct result of human activities and that the social, environmental, political and economic consequences will be catastrophic if nothing is done – and fast – to address the problem.

The 12th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change will be meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, from 6 to 17 November. Unfortunately, this Convention has until now shown that human greed has prevailed over human intelligence, and has been dominated by interests that care too little about the environment and people and too much about money.

It is therefore necessary to think in terms of what really needs to be done to avoid the looming climatic crisis and not about how much money there is to win or lose in different scenarios.

It is a well known fact that the main causes of climate change are related to fossil fuel consumption (coal, oil and gas) and to a lesser extent to deforestation, and that both result in the carbon emissions mainly responsible for global warming.

Those two causes are, however, totally different. The carbon stored in fossil fuels is not part of the biospheric carbon cycle. Once extracted and burnt, that carbon adds to the above-ground carbon pool and will not return back to its original underground form of oil, coal or gas for eons. Fossil fuel use is therefore, practically speaking, an irreversible cause of climate change.

This is why fossil fuel use should by now be considered an extreme environmental provocation which cannot be “compensated for” in any way. If governments had taken this approach when the Kyoto Protocol was agreed upon in 1997, we could now be moving toward a fossil fuel-free world, with a much brighter climatic future.

Carbon emissions resulting from deforestation are different, because the carbon stored in forest biomass is – and has always been – part of the above ground carbon pool. This means that if deforestation is reversed through forest restoration –which is not synonymous to monoculture tree plantations – the growing forests are likely to “suck up” some of the carbon released when the forest was destroyed or degraded.

In view of the above, if governments are serious about tackling climate change, they must commit themselves to:

- phasing out fossil fuels in a very short time
- halting and reversing deforestation in a very short time

However, not all countries are equally responsible for climate change. The industrialized North holds most of the responsibility for the problem, and is obliged to implement solutions to the problem it created. As most experts agree, it also has the financial and technical resources to make the phase out of fossil fuels possible.

The North’s responsibility is very clear in the case of fossil fuel-related carbon emissions, most of which they have released into the atmosphere since the start of the Industrial Revolution. But it is equally clear that most of the deforestation that is taking place in the South is also related to the North. Production of soya beans, meat, shrimp, palm oil, timber, pulp and paper, minerals – all of which result in forest loss – end up mostly in Northern markets, while Northern-led institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank impose policies on the South that necessarily result in further deforestation.

It is therefore necessary that Northern governments commit themselves to:

- making available any financial and technical resources required to phase out fossil fuels in a very short time – in both North and South

- introducing relevant changes to their economies and policies to make it possible to stop and reverse deforestation in a very short time
- ensuring that Southern countries and peoples benefit from and are in no way negatively impacted by those changes. Among other things, this means that no large-scale tree or biofuel monocultures are implemented on their lands

Accordingly, the Convention needs to move away from the complicated and fraudulent carbon trading schemes it has been involved in during the past nine years. As a sign of change, it should cease to consider the use of tree plantations as carbon sinks and immediately exclude the possibility of using genetically modified trees in such plantations. At the same time, it should begin to address seriously the issues of how to phase out fossil fuels and how to stop deforestation.

All this is nothing more than common sense – even though it is a far cry from the false solutions government climate negotiators will probably spend most of their time discussing when they meet in Nairobi.

Of course, many vested interests oppose common sense. But the main vested interest that should be taken into account is humanity as a whole, whose future depends on what is done – or not – by the governments involved in this process.

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- The Amazon: IIRSA thinks big, seeking business

Infrastructure development in the name of regional economic integration poses one of the greatest challenges to environmental sustainability and social justice today. The initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) is a striking example of this new trend. IIRSA proposes a series of large-scale, high-risk and debt-heavy mega-projects that would result in extensive alterations to landscapes and livelihoods in the region. In this development framework, mountains, forests, and wetlands are seen as barriers to economic development and rivers become the means for extracting natural resources.

The IIRSA initiative is coordinated by all 12 South American governments, with the technical and financial support of multilateral and national banks. It consists of 10 hubs of economic integration cutting across the continent and requiring major investment in transport, energy and telecommunications; and at least 7 sectoral integration processes designed to harmonize regulatory frameworks amongst the countries.

So far IIRSA has identified over 40 composite mega-projects for funding together with hundreds of smaller infrastructure improvement projects, with an aggregate cost in the tens of billions of US dollars. Given its magnitude and the scale of its potential impacts, many environmental organizations are referring to IIRSA as a “gigaproject.”

IIRSA is in fact a forum for innumerable conflicts and controversies that bear little relationship to alleged benefits for the poor. This is nothing new considering the political and economic interests involved and the amount of financial resources circulating. In addition to the governments of the 12

South American governments, other old and new actors from the financial area are involved, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Andean Development Corporation (ADC), the Financial Fund for the Development of the River Plate Basin (Fonplata), the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES), the World Bank (IBRD), and major corporations.

The combination of investment in highway construction, widespread dredging, and dams proposed under IIRSA, with significant investment from the private sector in resource extraction and agro-industry (for example soy-bean) will not only have direct effects on biodiversity, but also indirect effects on peasant and farm workers.
Historically, this has led to the displacement of rural and indigenous peoples, massive migration and deforestation. All of these developments potentially undermine the viability of the region's small-farm sector, established national parks, indigenous territories, and biodiversity reserves. Many of the projects proposed by IIRSA are in fact old national infrastructure projects that are being integrated into the regional framework in the hopes of reviving them. The environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of these projects on areas such as the Andes, the Amazon Basin, Mato Grosso, Pantanal and the Paraguay and Parana Rivers will be significant and, in many cases, irreversible.

The Amazon is being incorporated by force in the integration strategy sponsored by IIRSA. Parts of the Amazon territory of interest to big capital are the target of investment seeking to insert them in the capitalist globalization dynamics, with its rationale of inequality and exclusion. The Amazon hub covers almost 1,000 miles of the Amazon Basin, from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast. It includes part of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as well as the Amazon River and most of its main tributaries. This is an area covering 4,500 million square kilometres and involving approximately 52 million inhabitants. It contains almost half of the world's total biological diversity and between 15 and 20 percent of its fresh water supply.

Presently the Amazon hub contains 54 IIRSA projects, divided into 7 project clusters, most of them organized around the watersheds of tributaries to the Amazon River. The Brazilian Amazon is part of three hubs foreseen by IIRSA: the Amazon hub (Amazonas, Para and Amapa) the Guyanes Shield (Roraima and Amapa) and the Peru-Brazil-Bolivia hub (Acre, Rondônia, Amazonas and Mato Grosso). In the Brazilian Amazon the IIRSA list includes the construction of hydroelectric plants, lines of transmission between hydroelectric plants, construction and rehabilitation of highways, construction of ports, a pulp-mill, soy bean and instant coffee processing plants, a meat packing plant and transport works along over 6,000 km of navigable waterways as a way of increasing the movement of products and exit of natural resources.

The construction of new hydroelectric plants in the Amazon will have the function of generating energy to be used mainly by the most dynamic economic centres, enabling the expansion of waterways as well as of activities producing highly commercial export-oriented crops (for example soy beans) and supplying industrial plants that need large amounts of energy.

A characteristic element of IIRSA is that it is usually totally unknown, not only to local community leaders but also to the business community, leaders of federal bodies, members of the Judicial Power and parliamentarians, among others. The decisions on this new land planning and on infrastructure projects aimed at the region are not discussed with local state and municipal governments, and still less with social movements, non-governmental organizations, or Amazon educational and research institutions among others.

The struggle for access and control of the Amazon's natural resources is becoming increasingly acrimonious. Today this type of conflict is widespread in the region. A classical vision of the expansion

of the southern frontier towards the north and of the eastern frontier to the west is not enough to explain the nature and dynamics of conflicts in the Northern Brazil, as the present trend is that of conflicts disseminated all over the Amazon territory, covering areas that are not necessarily contiguous and involving people and institutions from different countries.

However, the creation and consolidation of networks and fora of social movements, pastoral groups, non-governmental organizations and the academic community are increasing in a necessary and comprehensive response to a threat that is global in nature.

Article based on information from: “Amazon Hub”, Building Informed Civic Engagement for Conservation in the Andes-Amazon (BICECA), http://www.biceca.org/en/Index.aspx; “Incorporação compulsória de territórios”, e “IIRSA: os riscos da integração”, Guilherme Carvalho, Máster en Planificación del Desarrollo (NAEA/UFPA) y técnico de FASE Amazônia – Núcleo Cidadania, published in Orçamento y Política Socioambiental, Nº 17, September 2006, Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos – INESC, http://www.inesc.org.br/pt/publicacoes/boletins/boletim.php?oid=XGyKPM5ozIOetvHwajV6FgCFnwST07xN

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- Bolivia: Brazilian dam project threatens the lives of Amazon communities

On 11 September 2006 the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) (the Brazilian environmental authority) approved the Environmental Impact Assessment on the construction of two dams in Brazilian territory on the Madera River, the largest tributary to the Amazon River.

This issue had cause concern amongst Bolivian and Brazilian scientists because, according to the data from the study itself, the dams will slow down the speed of the river flow, causing changes in the river itself and deteriorating the water quality, in addition to the impacts on smaller rivers flowing into the Madera river, an aspect not considered in the Environmental Impact Assessment. The flood area will reach as far as Bolivia and with time, the river bed will rise, with further negative effects on the flood problem.

Additionally, the expected changes will affect the living conditions of the inhabitants of the Bolivian Amazon, who obtain most of their food and sustenance from the rivers and the forest. Representatives of organizations and institutions from the northern Amazon region have stated with alarm that “these changes are going to frighten off the fish and bring them disease and death and the same will happen with the birds and other river animals and forest animals. The gathering of Brazil nuts and timber-yielding species will be seriously affected.”

The tropical forest remaining in the hands of Bolivia is still in a good state of preservation. Apart from agriculture, hunting and fishing, the population basically subsists on extractive activities such as gathering Brazil nuts (Bertholletia excelsa), of which Bolivia is the greatest exporter in the world. Brazil nut economy requires unaltered forests. Unlike Bolivia, in the Brazilian zone of the Amazon the environment has been greatly destroyed with forests replaced by grazing lands for cattle and displacement, very often under duress, of communities further increasing the ranks of the shanty-towns in the Brazilian mega-cities. For them development has signified becoming city poor and in

many cases for the indigenous peoples of the region, it has signified their physical extermination.

The inhabitants of the rural area of the Amazon region grow crops in the wetlands left by the rivers following the rainy season. The projected dams will flood these areas permanently, thus eliminating the agricultural base for many communities. Furthermore, this permanent flooding will contaminate their drinking water, bringing with it greater problems of malaria, dengue, leishmaniasis (an infectious parasitic skin disease), diarrhoea in children and possibly other diseases as was the case in Brazil with the construction of other dams.

The construction of hydroelectric plants is usually accompanied by the promise of cheap energy but, as in other cases, the astronomical cost of the dam and its installations may well convert the myth of cheap energy from the rivers into a sad reality of high costs and greater foreign indebtedness for the countries involved.

The two dams and their transmission line will in fact be part of a larger project including two other dams, one in waters shared between Brazil and Bolivia and the other in the latter country in addition to a 4000 km long waterway that will oblige major changes to be made in the region's river system to convert them into canals.

Considering the serious threat facing the Amazon region, representatives of organizations and institutions from the northern Amazon region – municipal councillors, the university community, representatives of fisherfolk associations, indigenous peoples' associations, rural school teachers, CARITAS, IPHAE, Foro Regional Norte Amazónico, FOBOMADE, among others - gathered in the City of Riberalta, Bolivia, on 12 October 2006, resolved:

"To request the National Government to intervene immediately before the Government of Brazil and international organizations, such as the United Nations, in defence of our territory, our rivers, our flora and fauna, the environment and our way of life. We also request that our right to timely information on the formalities and results of these formalities be recognized and taken into account.

To warn the Brazilian government that we will defend our territory at all international proceedings and show the world how major works are planned, regardless of the populations inhabiting the Amazon and regardless of the environment.

To convene our Brazilian brothers and sisters who are concerned and likely to be affected by the works, to join us in a world protest together with all the peoples and nations of the world, in defence of our Amazon territory."

Article based on information from: "Pronunciamiento de la región amazónica de Bolivia en torno a las represas proyectadas sobre el Río Madera", 12 October 2006, sent by Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (FOBOMADE), e-mail: comunicación@fobomade.org.bo, http://www.fobomade.org.bo; "Destrucción de la Amazonía: Brasil aprueba EIA de represas que inundarán territorio boliviano", Pablo Villegas, FOBOMADE, http://www.fobomade.org.bo/foro/doc/brasil_madera_bolivia.pdf

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- Laos: What did Smartwood know when it issued the certificate?

Last month I wrote an article about FSC certification of “village forestry” in Laos. The article was based on a leaked report from a World Bank and Finnish government project, the Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development Project (SUFORD). The SUFORD report documented serious problems with logging under the project, of which 39,000 hectares has been certified by SmartWood under the Forest Stewardship Council system.

Villagers’ forests and livelihoods have been seriously damaged by the logging in their forests. According to the SUFORD report, logging crews have cut villagers’ resin trees and are taking out more timber than is in the management plans. The level of logging is driven not by villagers’ management plans but by demand from local sawmills and logging quotas set at provincial level.

The SUFORD report found that timber leaving villager’s FSC-certified forests (and other areas of forest in Savannahkhet province) was not correctly marked. “Tracing and chain of custody of trees/logs is therefore impossible,” the author of the report commented. The logging is in breach of FSC standards and Lao forestry law, which, as the SUFORD report points out, states that logs that are not appropriately marked cannot be moved. This applies whether or not the logs are FSC-labelled.

I wrote the article last month to make public the findings of the SUFORD report and to generate a discussion about the certification. According to Scott Poynton, Executive Director of the Tropical Forest Trust, neither he nor SmartWood were aware of the SUFORD report before reading my article. My article also generated a fair bit of discussion.*

In this article, I’d like to look at a question that I overlooked both in my previous article and in the discussion that followed: How much did SmartWood know about whether the logging operations complied with FSC standards when it issued the certificate? Clearly this question is critical to any certificate, regardless of whether the operation certified involves industrial logging, industrial tree plantations or small-scale community forestry operations.

SmartWood issued the certificate in January 2006. Four months later, SUFORD found that the logging was in serious breach of several of FSC’s principles and criteria. My first assumption was that SmartWood had issued a certificate in the knowledge that the certified operation did not comply with FSC standards.

As Scott Poynton points out, it’s not as simple as this short timeframe implies. “The truth needs a little deeper search through the project’s history,” he says. He suggests that we need to look back to June 2005 when SmartWood decided that all the pre-conditions had been met. There was then a six month delay in issuing the certificate, “due to the need to accurately translate the contract document; the need for both parties to understand each other; and because of personnel changes in Savannahkhet”, according to Poynton.

Poynton explains that “there was ample time between June 2005 and May 2006 for systems to break down.” In other words, using Poynton’s argument, at the time that SmartWood issued the certificate it is perfectly possible that the operations did not comply with FSC standards.

SmartWood denies any such possibility: “At the time the FSC certificate was issued RA/SW [Rainforest Alliance/SmartWood] was confident that the communities were in compliance with the FSC standards.”

I suggest that we need to look even further back in time than Poynton suggests. SmartWood’s Public

Summary of the assessment includes a record of the Certification Assessment Process. According to this record, SmartWood's assessors visited the forests they certified in Savannahkhet only once, in May 2003, almost three years before the certificate was issued.

In May 2003, SmartWood's team spent three days in Savannahkhet province assessing the 39,000 hectares of "village forestry" operations. They inspected two secondary log landings, one area which was logged in 1999 and one area of active logging. They also took part in several meetings. A year later SmartWood returned to Savannahkhet but did not visit any forest operations. In July 2005, SmartWood carried out a desk review and determined that all the pre-conditions had been met and that the certificate could be issued.

As a result of SUFORD's report and my article based on the report, SmartWood will conduct a field audit in October 2006. It's about time. SmartWood's assessors will hopefully be able to determine whether the village forestry operations comply with FSC standards. However, it is extremely unlikely that they will be able to determine when, for example, the system of marking the timber broke down. This could have been at any time between May 2003 and May 2006.

Ten days ago, in a discussion with Scott Poynton I wrote that "SmartWood certified an operation knowing that it does not comply with either FSC principles and criteria or the Lao Forestry Law." I now realise that SmartWood certified an operation without knowing whether or not it complied with either FSC principles and criteria or the Lao Forestry Law. I'm not sure which is worse, but neither option inspires much confidence in SmartWood or in the FSC system.

*The discussion can be followed here: www.pulpinc.wordpress.com/fsc.

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- Liberia: New Forestry Law raises hopes and doubts

Similar to what has happened in several Southern countries harassed by centuries of colonialism, the wealth of Liberia has also been its curse. Tropical forests account for 47 per cent of Liberia's land. Between 1989 and 2003, revenue from forests was used to fund a brutal conflict fuelled by the pillaging of forests. Timber was a key resource for Liberia's armed factions. Wood flowed out; money and arms flowed in. So many concessions had been corruptly awarded that they totalled more than the land area of Liberia.

In July 2003, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Liberian timber exports. The blocking of timber exports brought an end to logging, and to former president Charles Taylor, who fled the country and now awaits trial in The Hague on war crimes charges. Guus van Kouwenhoven, a Dutch businessman and member of Taylor's inner circle who ran the notoriously rapacious Oriental Timber Company (OTC), is already in jail for breaking the UN arms embargo.

Following those years of destructive civil war, illegal lumber trafficking and massive fraud to fuel conflict, Liberia passed a forestry law on October 9, 2006, in line with new policies drawn up with the United Nations. The new legislation will allow implementation of Liberia's first-ever forestry policy, which FAO helped develop with numerous international partners (the United States, the European

Union, the World Bank, IUCN, and Conservation NGOs including Conservation International, Flora and Fauna International, a number of Liberian NGOs and industry) through the Liberia Forest Initiative.

According to Silas Siakor, the 2006 Goldman Environmental Prize Winner for Africa, the new law, which has led to the lifting of UN sanctions, is promising –if it can be enforced.

The law sets aside 30 percent of the forests as reserves, and guarantees that local communities will have to approve all timber concessions and will receive 30 percent of the revenues. But there's a smart twist -- those revenues will come from property taxes, not extraction fees, so the incentive is for the local communities to make sure there is no overlogging to ensure that the land isn't devalued and that the payments continue indefinitely -- a model considerably better than how the U.S. treats its own national forests!

There will be also forests available for commercial concessions. The law stipulates that people with a history of involvement in war, corruption and malpractice are barred from that option. However, many of the businessmen who gleefully raped Liberia's forests in return for favours are still there, looking after their other interests and keeping an eye on logging opportunities.

And not only nationals. At an International Tropical Forest Investment Forum held in Cancun, Mexico, on April 26, 2006, US Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary For Environment Daniel A Reifsnyder, enthusiastically announced: “We are putting our support and action behind Liberia”. He remarked that “This Forest Investment Conference will focus on many aspects of attracting investment to the natural tropical forest.” There is the trade interest behind glamorous sentences like “progressive forest management” and “conservation policies aimed at truly making the utilization of forest resources more sustainable”. The US officer said that “investors can both earn a profit and maintain forest resources for future generations.” Is there any example of the Big capital doing that, please?

Article based on information from: “Liberia enacts new forest policy with UN help to ensure benefits for all”, UN News Service, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20146&Cr=liberia&Cr1=; New dawn for Liberia's 'blood forests', Richard Black, Environment correspondent, BBC News, e-mail: Richard.Black-INTERNET@bbc.co.uk, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/science/nature/6035617.stm; “Issues and Opportunities for Investment in Natural Tropical Forests”, Daniel A Reifsnyder, Remarks to International Tropical Forest Investment Forum, Mexico, April 26, 2006, http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/rm/2006/65800.htm

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Australia: AFS certification scheme denounced by NGOs

In our previous issue (WRM Bulletin Nº 110), we published a section on “plantation certification at its worse”, including the case of the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC), a programme for the endorsement of national certification schemes.

The Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), developed by the Australian logging industry and the Australian Government and Government agencies, is the Australian member of the PEFC Council. It is also a main element of the Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS), started in 2000 to provide

an “Australian forest certification scheme”.

Similar to other certification schemes, the AFS contributes to the expansion of large scale tree monocultures as long as it allows the conversion of forests to plantations. As an added negative attribute, it has also been heavily criticized by local environmental NGOs.

In 2002, National Australian environmental non-government organisations (ENGOs) had expressed in a letter their complete rejection of the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), developed by the Australian logging industry and the Australian Government and Government agencies.

The NGOs had explained that as a result of the continued failure of the process to address any of their concerns, they had withdrew from the Standard’s development process at the beginning of that year because they had found that “there was no involvement of environmental interests in the development of either the Standard’s terms of reference, or the Steering Committee. The terms of reference were developed by the Australian Federal Government and the logging industry with no consultation of ENGOs or other stakeholders”. Also, they referred that the “repeated attempts by ENGOs to address these inequities were rejected by those driving the Standard’s development process”.

Standards Australia - self-described as the peak, non-government standards body in Australia which ensures the effective development of standards – had received ENGOs objections, but made no attempt to address their environmental concerns, particularly logging of old growth forests, conversion of native forests and native vegetation to plantations, clearfelling, and inappropriate use of chemicals.

All ENGO’s withdrew from the process in 2002 due to concerns over the lack of meaningful participation, and the contents of the draft standard. Since from then on the AFS has been developed and finalized without the involvement, support or endorsement of the environmental NGO sector, the ENGOs were deeply concerned that the Australian Government and the logging industry would seek either to gain mutual accreditation with other certification schemes or to misleadingly pass off this Standard as being independent and having the support of environmental stakeholders.

In an open letter issued in October 2005, Australian national ENGOs denounced that “despite the lack of a formal accredited Standard and the lack of ENGO participation, one accredited organization appears to imply in its materials that it is accredited under an AFS “Standard”, whilst materials on the AFS Ltd’s website appear to imply the ongoing participation of ENGOs.” They stated that “ENGOs do not – and did not – endorse any of the standards setting processes as the current and previous interim draft standards permit wood arising from clearing of native forests (including old growth and threatened species habitat) for conversion to single species plantations to be certified, as well as the poisoning of native wildlife, and continues to exclude ENGOs from meaningful participation in any of the standards setting processes.”

Being neither independent, nor third party, AFS’ poor performance adds to its responsibility as a promoter of the “green deserts”, with their heavy toll on the environment and the communities.

Article based on information from: “Open letter to European Union Environment and Trade Ministers, timber retailers, consumers and other interested parties”, June 2003; “Open letter from Australian national ENGO’s campaigning for forest protection and sustainable forest management”, October 2005, sent by Jutta Kill, FERN, e-mail: jutta@fern.org

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- India: Different plantation species, same problems

I recently had the opportunity of travelling to the Indian province of West Bengal and to visit the Dhoteria, Bagora and Mayung “Forest Villages” in the districts of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong.

To the outsider, the mountain area of the Outer Himalayas appears to be covered by dense forests, mostly composed of very large trees. However, local people know that these are not forests, but old and new plantations of mostly two species: the Japanese cedar (Cryptomeria japonica) and Teak (Tectona grandis).

Those plantations where initiated during British colonial rule in India under the so-called “Taungya system”, first implemented by the British in Burma and later extended to other colonies. The apparently “technical” name of this system served to hide its huge social and environmental impacts. People were moved –through “voluntary” or forced mechanisms- to the areas to be planted and were settled in so-called Forest Villages. Their first task would be to cut down the native forest and to set fire to the non commercially valuable vegetation. The second task would be to plant the selected species, -initially teak and later Cryptomeria. After that, the foresters would “allow” villagers to sow their own crops between the rows of planted trees, which in fact resulted in free weeding of the plantation. Once the canopy closed and crops would no longer be able to grow for lack of sunshine, the Forest Village would simply be moved to a new area where exactly the same process would begin again.

The independence of India did not bring about changes in Forestry Department thinking and action, which mostly continued the colonial policy of domination over nature and people. Ample evidence of this was provided by local people interviewed during the trip to the region.

In Dhotera Forest Village a man said that he had spent almost his entire life in the area. He said that “the Corporation cut the forest and planted. They used to be mixed plantations of hardwood species, but then they discovered that Cryptomeria grew faster and only this species was planted.” He added that “in the past villagers benefited more from both forests and plantations. They could find and sell fruits and other things. Forest fruits are very nutritious. However, the Forestry Department destroyed the forest in 1974, so people copied the government and destroyed forest too arguing that ‘if you can cut, then we can cut too’. Now things are even worse because this has been defined as a ‘wildlife area’, so we have no rights and they are trying to evict us as intruders.”

Another person said that in his area there were originally many species of trees and animals such as deer, bear and tiger. He said that “then they planted teak and now you don’t see even cattle. The roots of these trees can’t hold the soil or stand against wind, so they cannot give the protection provided by forests.”

A young man mentioned that many plantations are a fraud, because the Forestry Department “receives the money, plants trees only along visible borders and the unspent money goes into the foresters’ pockets.”

An old lady said that she had arrived here 50 years ago and had seen the forest disappear. She explained that “at that time the forest was very diverse and provided plenty of things: mushrooms, fruit, vegetables, different things to eat. Now only the stumps of those trees exist.”

Similar evidence was provided by villagers from Bagora Forest Village. One man explained that “the forest was full of medicinal plants, but now we have to use government medicine because we can’t find those plants anymore. Wild animals are now eating our crops because of food scarcity in plantations. The water has become foul and can’t be drunk from springs. The same springs that used to be pure now bring diseases.” He remembered that when they were paid to cut the forest they did it on bare feet, adding that “now we have boots, but there’s nothing in the forest. Cryptomerias give us nothing but problems. Now we even have to prove that we have lived in this area to avoid eviction.”

Another villager described what he said was the oldest teak plantation in India (planted in 1864). He said that the soil used to be much more fertile, with plenty of forest humus, but that “after they cleared the forest the humus disappeared.” He emphasized that “there’s no need to have these plantations anymore. They are not good for people or animals. Teak has made people poor. We can’t take cattle to the plantation. The plantation affects wildlife so it makes people poorer. There is no undergrowth and therefore no food or medicinal plants.”

A young man said that “a village was wiped out by a landslide.” According to villagers, teak trees not only do not hold the soil, but they enhance erosion due to the size of the water drops that are formed on the surface of their large leaves. Those bigger than normal water drops then hit on the soil from the trees’ high crowns -with no undergrowth to protect it- thus resulting in erosion and landslides from the hillsides.

Another person said that the people from this village had been brought here by the British in the 1940s. When the British left, the independent Indian government took over, but “has done nothing to help us. The land got fragmented and now we don’t have sufficient land and we can’t get it from the government. Now there is a road and a school, but our main source of livelihood has been taken away from us. The Forestry Department has mapped the area, but is only mapping a small portion of forest villages. The rest is defined as encroachment.”

An old person added that “in 1942-43 the area was heavily forested.” The Forestry Department brought them here and gave them land, timber for building, separate land for households and for grazing. “We carried out all types of work: clearfelling, charcoal production, tree planting.” The power of Forestry Department officials was such, that “if they came, we had to give them free milk, chicken and eggs.” Such power of forestry officials is still present, though in a different manner: “We are not allowed to take anything out from the cryptomeria plantations, because anything we do there is considered illegal.”

The issue of employment is deeply felt by the villagers. One of them stressed that “there is no employment, because the forest is strictly conserved and plantations provide us with nothing. There is nothing to eat, no land for grazing and no firewood; not even dry sticks.” According to villagers, the Forestry Department has increased harassment here in what they defined as an “outright violation of human rights.”

Similar evidence was provided by the inhabitants of Mayung Forest Village, who also mentioned the occurrence of “plenty of landslides in plantations.” Regarding employment, they said that plantations provide almost no jobs. At the best, they can work some 15 days ... a year! As a result, people are migrating.

However, they also showed us a change that has taken place in one part of their area: a mixed plantation established in 1998. This plantation was the result of a meeting held between villagers and

the local Forestry Department Officer, where the latter committed to no more monocultures.

In spite of the fact that this is perceived as a positive step, the election of the species for the mixed plantation was done by the Forestry Department with no consultation with villagers, who would have elected more beneficial species. In this plantation there is now some undergrowth for fodder, fruit and medicinal plants, mushrooms. There is now also more wildlife such as deer, wild boar, pheasants. They are happy with this, which compares favourably with monoculture teak and cryptomeria plantations ("which are terrible") but "it could have been much better if we had been consulted." They are now intercropping (cardamon, broom-grass).

In sum, the evidence provided by local people in the areas visited again proves that monoculture tree plantations –regardless of the chosen tree species- are socially harmful and environmentally destructive and should never substitute forests. It is now necessary to begin the process of bringing back the forest both through management of existing plantations and through planting with a mix of local species. But it is also necessary to learn from the Mayung Forest Village experience and to involve local populations in the selection of the plantation species to ensure that the future forests will be socially and environmentally beneficial.

By Ricardo Carrere, e-mail: rcarrere@wrm.org.uy. Information gathered during a field trip organized by the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (North Bengal Regional Committee) and NESPON.

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- Indonesia: Trouble at the mill. UFS to open new wood chip mill

Later this year, United Fiber Systems plans to open a new 700,000 tonnes a year wood chip mill at Alle-Alle on the island of Pulau Laut. The mill is the first step of UFS' proposed pulp developments for Kalimantan. The wood chips will be exported to feed pulp and paper mills in China.

For more than a year, UFS has been involved in negotiations to take over the 525,000 tonnes a year Kiani Kertas pulp mill in East Kalimantan. In July 2005, UFS signed a deal to manage operations at the heavily indebted pulp mill. "Our takeover bid for Kiani Kertas is still under discussion with the owners," UFS director, Wong Vun Khi, told WRM. UFS also plans to build a 600,000 tonnes a year pulp mill at Satui in South Kalimantan. "The development work for the Satui pulp mill project is in principle ready, but the start-up date for the construction of the mill has not yet been decided upon," said Wong.

A new report, "No Chip Mill Without Wood", written by Betty Tio Minar and published by Down to Earth, documents the problems related to UFS' wood chip mill and proposed pulp plans in Kalimantan. Betty Tio Minar and Deddy Ratih from Walhi South Kalimantan recently visited Europe to discuss the proposed projects with NGOs, members of the public and potential financiers of UFS in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

At a meeting in Berlin organised by Watch Indonesia!, Minar explained that local NGOs have been unable to obtain copies of the EIA for UFS' wood chip mill. UFS needs permission from the Ministry of Forestry to build the mill and from the Ministry of Transportation to build a port linked to the mill. UFS has received none of these permits. "The Governor of South Kalimantan has not yet given his

recommendation for the project," said Minar.

She added that local fisher folk have already seen the impacts of the wood chip mill, as coral reefs around the island have been used to construct the port.

Deddy Ratih explained that UFS paid less than the market rate for the land for the wood chip mill. Of the 320 jobs in the mill, only 30 are going to people from the island of Pulau Laut and only six from the village of Alle-Alle. "People who sold their land for the wood chip mill expected jobs," Ratih said. "Now they have no land and no jobs."

UFS claims that it will only use timber from plantations to feed its operations. I asked UFS for copies of independent studies of where the wood will come from. "All forestry studies prepared by independent consultants engaged by UFS are confidential documents," company director Wong Vun Khi replied. Down to Earth comments that "UFS' inability to provide data on the potential source of timber supplies indicates the likelihood that natural forests in South Kalimantan and further afield will be destroyed - legally or illegally to meet their needs."

Down to Earth has calculated the area of plantations that would be needed to feed each of UFS' proposed pulp operations. The wood chip mill will require an area of 85,895 hectares. The existing Kiani Kertas mill needs about 170,000 hectares of plantations to run at capacity. UFS' proposed Satui pulp mill would require almost 200,000 hectares of plantations.

State-owned plantation company Inhutani II has a 50,000 hectare acacia plantation on Pulau Laut, which could potentially supply part of the chip mill's wood. But in May 2006, Inhutani II joined the Global Forest and Trade Network, WWF's scheme to promote "eco-friendly" timber to international buyers. The World Bank's International Finance Corporation has been working with Inhutani II for almost three years, providing technical assistance and advice.

WWF's Darius Sarshar explained that at present about 20 per cent of Inhutani II's production is of saw log quality. This is likely to increase. "Pulp log prices will not ever reach those of sawlogs, if they did, any pulp mill would likely quickly go bust," he said. "It is therefore in Inhutani II's commercial interest to maximise its production of sawlogs, and we believe that they will continue to do so."

Through a subsidiary, PT Hutan Rindang Buana (PT HRB), UFS has a plantation concession covering about 250,000 hectares. UFS director Wong Vun Khi told WRM that PT HRB has planted 75,000 hectares. But forestry consultant Jaakko Pöyry estimates that only about 60,000 hectares is planted. Down to Earth quotes a local NGO as saying that only 15,000 hectares is in good enough condition to supply raw material.

"It's a bit like the magician's trick with three cups and a coin," said Down to Earth's Liz Chidley. "UFS tries to create the illusion that it has enough plantations for all three ventures, but when you look carefully, it hasn't."

Down to Earth makes a series of recommendations, including an immediate independent review of the sustainability of wood supplies for all of UFS' proposed developments. "UFS must, as a matter of priority, work on mitigating the environmental and social impacts of its Alle-Alle chip mill and no permit should be issued for the Satui pulp project," states the report.

But the problem is not just a lack of plantations. Large-scale plantations are in themselves environmentally and socially destructive. As the report makes clear, pulp investments are at the

expense of local people's livelihoods. Down to Earth recommends that instead of "prioritising the interests of investors", the Indonesian government should "support community-based forest management initiatives which are sustainable both from an environmental and a livelihoods perspective."

Down to Earth's report "No chip mill without wood" is available in English or Bahasa Indonesia here: http://dte.gn.apc.org/camp.htm, or as a hard copy from dtecampaign@gn.apc.org (English) or dteindocamp@gn.apc.org (Bahasa Indonesia).

By Chris Lang, e-mail: chrislang@t-online.de, www.chrislang.blogspot.com

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- United States: Opposition to U.S. Conference on Fast Growing Plantations

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) conference "Forest Plantations Meeting: Sustainable Forest Management with Fast Growing Plantations" 10-13 October, 2006 encountered heavy opposition by several environmental and ecological justice groups.

The groups involved in the opposition acted in solidarity with those in the Global South who are suffering due to large-scale monoculture timber plantations –from Asia (including India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Vietnam) to Africa (including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana), Latin America (including Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru), and Oceania (including Aotearoa/New Zeland, Australia).

The southern U.S., where the IUFRO conference took place, is the home of some of the largest timber plantations in the world, with one out of every five tree covered acres in plantations, mainly loblolly pine. The area has seen tremendous conversion from native forest to industrial timber plantations and the rural poor have been heavily impacted. South Carolina is also the international headquarters of ArborGen, a joint venture of International Paper, MeadWestvaco, and New Zealand's Rubicon. ArborGen was one of the conference sponsors and is the leader in the research and development of genetically engineered (GE) trees. South Carolina is home to the most GE tree test plots in the U.S.

Here are some of the highlights of the opposition:

• A month prior to the conference, Dogwood Alliance, Global Justice Ecology Project, ForestEthics and the STOP GE Trees Campaign traveled on a speaking tour around the southeastern U.S. to raise awareness of the effects of large scale monoculture timber plantations in that region and in the Global South including the threat of GE trees being introduced into those plantations.

• Immediately prior to the IUFRO conference we held our "A Tree Farm Is Not A Forest" Public Forum. It was originally booked at the Science Building of the College of Charleston, but the Dean objected when she learned that industry would not be presenting. She blocked us from using the building. Undeterred, we held the opening night of the forum in the auditorium of the College's Business Center. The controversy generated by the Dean helped increase our attendance.

• On the opening day of the industry conference, Earth First! and Rising Tide joined us to send an anti-plantations (and GE trees) message to the industry conference. On a ferry ride to tour Fort Sumter —

the first official event of the industry conference— protesters rode alongside the ferry in boats displaying several banners including some in Spanish and Portuguese in solidarity with our friends in Chile and Brazil. The action created quite a stir on the ferry among both the conference attendees and the 200 other tourists. The ferry captain apparently approved as he gave the banner crew a big thumbs up.

• Next our report "The Ecological and Social Impacts of Fast Growing Timber Plantations and Genetically Engineered Trees" was presented inside the industry conference. Danna Smith of the Dogwood Alliance spoke on the impact of large-scale loblolly pine plantations on the ecosystems and rural communities of the U.S. South and Neil Carman of the Sierra Club discussed the wholesale ecological destruction that would occur if native forests were contaminated by GE tree pollen and seeds. Global Justice Ecology Project Co-Director Anne Petermann discussed the active resistance to existing large-scale tree plantations by indigenous communities like the Mapuche people in Chile and the Tupinikim and Guarani peoples in Brazil, and by social movements like the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST). Petermann also described the potential social impacts on indigenous and rural communities from genetically engineered eucalyptus and pine plantations in those countries.

The presentation included photos taken last November of villages built by indigenous Tupinikim and Guarani peoples on land they had reclaimed from vast eucalyptus plantations owned by Aracruz Cellulose, the world's largest exporter of bleached eucalyptus pulp. There were also photos of the annihilation of these villages by governmental forces using Aracruz Cellulose equipment. The presentation also included images of Mapuche resistance to plantations in Chile and of the repression they have faced at the hands of the government—which has dredged up old laws from the Pinochet era to use against Mapuche activists.

The presentations generated much controversy at the industry conference. A representative from Aracruz Cellulose took exception to the portrayal of his company —especially in Petermann's presentation, that included the International Women's Day action earlier this year in Brazil at an Aracruz Cellulose nursery where 2,000 masked women form Via Campesina destroyed approximately 8 million eucalyptus seedlings. He responded by offering a tour of his company's facilities and plantations in Brazil to allow people to see for themselves. We forwarded his offer to our allies in Brazil, who may wish to take him up on it.

• A local group formed out of the Charleston activities and its first official action was the day they did guerilla theatre against ArborGen at the DoubleTree breakfast for the industry conference participants. This local group will be extremely important, especially with ArborGen located around 20 miles from Charleston.

• All of these efforts helped conceptualize a potential "South-to-South" network to oppose to large scale monoculture timber plantations and GE trees (basically a network between the U.S. South and the Global South), which are linked due to the threats each faces from timber plantations and GE trees. We believe it's important for the resistance in the Global South to know that there are people in the southern U.S. also struggling against plantations and showing solidarity with communities in the Global South. This South to South initiative can help bridge some of the gaps internationally and there are tremendous movements underway in the Global South that are inspiring to people in the industrialized north.

By Orin Langelle and Anne Petermann, Global Justice Ecology Project, e-mail: langelle@globaljusticeecology.org, globalecology@gmavt.net

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- SFI: A certification scheme by the forestry industry for the forestry industry

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative - launched in 1995 by the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA), the most powerful timber trade association in the world - covers an area over 40,485,830 ha in the United States and Canada. It is, in essence, a certification scheme by the forestry industry for the forestry industry. AF&PA member companies, including the largest loggers in the United States and Canada and the largest wholesale distributors of global wood products, account for 82% of the funds of SFI.

With its "cut a tree, plant a tree" model of forestry, SFI is making sure the logging industry sustains fiber flow but does nothing to sustain forest ecosystems and even allows convertion of forests to tree-farms.

Far from its standard's 4.1.4 Objective which mandates to "manage the quality and distribution of wildlife habitats and contribute to the conservation of biological diversity, by developing and implementing stand-and landscape-level measures that promote habitat diversity and the conservation of forest plants and animals" the reality is quite different.

The temperate forests of the Southern U.S. are some of the most biologically rich forests in North America. These forests are under assault by companies that subscribe to SFI. Over the last 10 years, SFI member companies such as International Paper (IP) have expanded paper production in the Southern U.S. causing an acceleration of clearcutting and the conversion of diverse, native forests to single-species tree plantations.

In the Green Swamp - part of the Middle Atlantic Coastal Forest Ecoregion -, IP has converted an area of diverse, natural forested wetlands to a monoculture of pine plantation. The intensive management of these industrial tree plantations (ditching, draining, clearcutting and herbicide spraying) has significantly degraded the habitat of many species of plants and animals indigenous to this area such as the venus flytrap, pitcher plant, red cockaded woodpecker, and wacamaw killfish.

From 1997 to 2000 alone, it was estimated that approximately half a million pounds of herbicides - a variety of some 22 different brands and mixes - have been spread over the Coastal Plains of North Carolina including the Green Swamp. When inspectors with North Carolina's Division of Water Quality investigated I.P.'s use of chemicals in the Green swamp they found that, "Based on this field work it appears that these herbicides are being widely used across this area without regard to the presence of ditches or permanently flooded wetlands. Based on these field observations, the DWQ believes that the spirit and the letter of EPA labels are not being followed and that these herbicides are being applied to surface water." (July 13, 2000)

The US NGO Rainforest Action Network is leading a strong campaign to say "NO" to SFI, which – they say - "in the US has destroyed most of our old-growth forests; has pushed hundreds of fish, wildlife, and plant species to the brink of extinction; has damaged water quality; has turned biologically diverse native forests into monocultural tree farms, and is now recklessly experimenting with genetically-modified trees. Despite all this, the logging industry wants the public to buy wood with an ecolabel that they have given themselves. It is the fox guarding the henhouse. Loggers call it the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, or SFI. We call it the Same-old Forest Industry."

Article base don information from: “Footprints in the forest. Current practice and future challenges in forest certification”, FERN, 2004; http://www.fern.org/media/documents/document_1890_1900.pdf; “International Paper In The Southern U.S.”, http://www.dontbuysfi.com/reports/IPSFI.pdf; “Take Action”, RAN, http://www.dontbuysfi.com/action/

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FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

- Women taking the lead in reversing climate change

A thorough report by Leigh Brownhill and Terisa E. Turner (“Climate Change and Nigerian Women’s Gift to Humanity”) traces Nigerian resistance to massive oil exploitation --which has not rendered any good for the country’s people (see WRM Bulletin Nº 56) -- and highlights women’s leading role in that struggle.

The Nigerian organization Environmental Rights Action stated in 2005 that “More gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. Estimates are notoriously unreliable, but roughly 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas associated with crude oil is wasted in this way everyday. This is equal to 40% of all Africa's natural gas consumption in 2001, while the annual financial loss to Nigeria is about US $2.5 billion. The flares have contributed more greenhouse gases than all of sub-Saharan Africa combined. And the flares contain a cocktail of toxins that affect the health and livelihood of local communities, exposing Niger Delta residents to an increased risk of premature deaths, child respiratory illnesses, asthma and cancer.”

In WRM Bulletin Nº 100 we have also depicted how vast tracts of mangrove forests are slowly suffocated by the numerous oil spills, which permeate the coastal waters and streams, and coat the exposed, air breathing roots of the mangroves.

However, Nigerian people have not been witnessing such a massive destruction without resistance. Environmentalists in Nigeria, notably from among the Ogoni, Ijaw and other ethnic groups in the oil-rich Niger Delta, including the MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People), have persistently tried to shut down Shell’s gas flaring. As a response, on November 10, 1995 Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the MOSOP were hanged by Nigeria’s military dictatorship (see WRM Bulletin Nº 27).

On 11 December, 1998 the newly formed Ijaw Youth Council, acting as part of the multi-ethnic, pan-Delta Chikoko movement issued the Kaiama Declaration, which stated that all land and natural resources belonged to the communities and demanded “that all oil companies stop all exploration and exploitation activities in the Ijaw area. We are tired of gas flaring, oil spillages, blowouts and being labelled saboteurs and terrorists.”

On 1 January 1999 activists in the Niger Delta launched ‘Operation Climate Change,’ to shut down oil flow stations and gas flares in the Delta. What was conceived as a ten-day program of non-violent civil disobedience, with occupation of flow stations and attempts made to shut down the flares, finally lasted for several weeks. The Operation Climate Change seriously affected five oil companies - Agip, Chevron, Mobil, Shell, Texaco -. The Shell-backed military administration responded with a state of

emergency. Two warships and up to 15,000 troops were deployed. Many women were raped by soldiers. Soldiers using a helicopter and boats owned by Chevron, attacked environmentalists who were occupying a drilling rig, killing over fifty people and destroying dozens of homes.

Dozens of women's groups from across the Delta, mobilized in a multi-ethnic umbrella organization called Niger Delta Women for Justice, took to the streets in Port Harcourt. Nigerian peasant women asked for solidarity from women and other international activists in a joint campaign to protect life by putting a stop to the depredations of Big Oil. Environmentalists in Nigeria and the UK described their Operation to shut down Shell gas flares as a "gift to humanity" because it sought to cut carbon emissions that threaten humanity as a whole.

The aftermath for those engaged in the "gift to humanity" campaign unfolded over the subsequent eight years along three axes: first, the deepening of militancy within the Niger Delta around the demand for democratic 'resource control;' second, the achievement of significant success in expelling oil companies from the Niger Delta; and third, the experience of violent counter-insurgency at the behest of the Nigerian state and foreign oil companies. This third dimension of the aftermath exposed the empirical power relations between women who try to interdict perpetrators of ecocide and those men who profit from expanded oil production with its escalating deadly emissions.

In 2005 the Nigerian women's groups, including Niger Delta Women for Justice that had contributed to a moratorium on gas flaring were labeled "terrorist" by the government which was being drawn ever more deeply into the U.S. global 'war on terror.'

The Nigerian women's "gift to humanity" provoked a leap in global consciousness about the dire common fate of all humanity if specific polluters amongst the world's tiny clique of 400+ billionaires are allowed to run rampant outside democratic control as well as provoked and accelerated an international groundswell of coordinated mobilization (see more info in the report).

In January 2006 Nigerian courts ordered Shell to stop the flaring of natural gas. Shell has appealed the ruling. The oil giant has also been unable to return to Ogoniland since 1993. In a 23 September 2006 interview, Owens Wiwa stated that "It was Ogoni women who were most instrumental in preventing Shell from operating in Ogoniland over the past decade. This is a major success because not only have we driven Shell out non-violently, but we have set a precedent for all Nigeria and indeed the whole world: without local people's agreement, no oil company can go in. A tremendous price has been paid in loss of life. But government's revocation of Shell's operating licence is a tremendous victory and it is due largely to the commitment of ordinary village women, mostly organized through the Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations."

The shut-down of all Shell operations in Ogoniland means less gas flaring, less carbon emissions and less global warming. The shut-down is not limited to Ogoniland. Across the Delta, some 600,000 barrels a day, or about a quarter of Nigeria's total production, was shut-in throughout 2006. This entails a massive cut in greenhouse gas emissions.

Nigerian women led a remarkable global initiative to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The coordinated, international action and its aftermath suggest tactics that, if adopted more generally today, promise to deliver success in the complex struggle to reverse climate change.

Extracted and adapted from: "Climate Change and Nigerian Women's Gift to Humanity", by Leigh Brownhill and Terisa E. Turner, Centre for Civil Society, http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,40,5,1153

- Biofuels do not solve but only worsen climate change

The volume of fossil fuels burnt by the “oil” civilization in one year contains an amount of organic matter equivalent to four centuries of plants and animals.

“We must break our addiction to oil” President George W. Bush said in his State of the Union address, but he wasn’t advising people to use less oil. Instead, he launched the “Advanced Energy Initiative,” that would increase the federal budget by 22 percent for research into “clean” fuel technologies, including biofuels such as ethanol and biodiesel obtained from conventional agricultural crops (such as soy and maize) or other oil-seeds (particularly oil palm), sugar cane or other cereals.

Faced by the problem of global warming caused by the enormous carbon emissions, the governments of the industrialized countries do not consider reducing demand but are trying to fix things on the supply side. Substitution of oil by biomass implies the occupation of vast tracts of land with monoculture plantations.

The European Union hopes that by the end of 2007, 2% of the use of fuel it now uses will come from biodiesel, rising to 6% by 2010 and 20% by 2020. However it is very unlikely that it will devote its land to this type of crops: the cost of biofuel is considerably lower if the energy crops are produced in other countries, and not only due to cost. As pointed out by the British journalist George Monbiot: “In order to move our cars and buses with biodiesel, we would require 25.9 million hectares. There are 5.7 million hectares in the United Kingdom. If this were to happen all over Europe, the consequences on food supply would be catastrophic: enough to tip the scales from being excess producers to becoming net losers. If, as some environmentalists claim, this were to be done on a world scale, most of the arable surface of the planet would have to be given over to producing food for cars, not for people. This outlook would seem, at a first glance, to be ridiculous. If the demand for food could not be covered, wouldn’t the market ensure that crops be used to feed people instead of cars? Nothing is sure about this. The market responds to money, not to needs.”

Thus the following stage of colonization has started and the industrialized world is aiming at the countries of the Third World, where companies can appropriate vast tracts of land, find cheap labour and neglect the serious negative environmental impacts involved in the establishment of large monoculture plantations, from which biofuels will be refined at the expense of forests and lands suitable for food growing.

Thus the soy bean plantations in Argentina are displacing, little by little, the quebracho forests in the Chaco, while in Paraguay they are replacing the Pantanal, the Mata Atlantica and the Chaco, and in Brazil, the Pantanal, the Mata Atlantica, the Cerrado and the Caatinga. Between 1990 and 2002, the planted area of oil palm on a world level increased by 43 percent. Most of this growth took place in Indonesia and Malaysia. Between 1985 and 2000, oil palm plantations have been responsible for 87 percent of the deforestation in Malaysia and there are plans to occupy another 6 million hectares of forest. In Sumatra and Borneo, some 4 million hectares of forests have become the land of oil palm plantations. In Indonesia, thousands of indigenous people have been evicted from their lands and Indonesian workers suffer from the rigorous working conditions and brutal trade unions repression (see WRM bulletin No. 109). The forest fires that so often cover the region with smoke are mainly

caused by palm tree growers (see WRM bulletin No. 97). The whole region is becoming a gigantic vegetable oil field. In Uganda the destruction of tropical forests and indigenous forest lands has begun in order to produce palm oil and sugar, and since the forests of the Bwendero peninsula were felled, the Ssese Islands are being destroyed by strong winds and low salaries (see WRM bulletin Nº 109).

The argument about the "goodness" of biofuels is that they do not contribute to carbon emissions; burning them simply returns to the atmosphere the carbon dioxide the plants took out when they were growing in the field, so they would be "carbon neutral." However this is only true depending on what was there before the plantation was established. Burning and slashing forests to give way to plantations of oil palm releases enormous carbon reserves. In marshy forests, where there is peat, once the trees are cut the plantations dry out the soil. When the peat dries, it oxidizes and releases even more carbon dioxide than the trees.

Furthermore, research carried out by David Pimentel, a professor at Cornell University New York and Tad Patzek, a professor of chemical engineering at University of California Berkeley, reveal that with current processing methods more fossil energy is used to produce the energy equivalent in biofuel. Even when research includes in its calculations the energy necessary to build processing plants, farm machinery and labour – usually not included in this type of analysis – it has not included the cost of waste treatment or the environmental impact of intensive bio-energy crops, such as the loss of soils and environmental pollution due to the use of fertilizers or pesticides. All this demolishes the neutrality of biofuel regarding carbon emissions.

Biofuels do not set out to change the present model of unsustainable energy production aimed at unsustainable consumption, and would do no more that add new problems to humanity. But their worst sin is that they are disguised as a solution.

Article based on information from: Resistencia, Nº 60, Oilwatch Bulletin, April 2006, http://www.biodiversidadla.org/content/download/28726/133766/version/1/file/Boletin+Resistencia+N°+60+-+BIOCOMBUSTIBLES.pdf; "Las Nuevas Repúblicas del Biocombustible", http://www.eco-sitio.com.ar/ea_07_republicas_biocombustible.htm; "¿Representan los biocombustibles alternativas ecológicas al petróleo?", Ambientalistas en Acción, http://www.censat.org/A_A_Analisis_177.htm

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- The World Bank: A major broker of carbon purchases

The World Bank has become the main international trader of carbon credits. Its new role gives rise to a series of conflicting interests.

At its third conference held in Kyoto in December 1997, the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change launched the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The CDM was designed as a scheme to allow countries with emissions reductions targets under the Kyoto Protocol to invest in projects allegedly leading to the reduction of greenhouse gases in countries of the South. Simultaneously the World Bank revealed its own proposal for carbon trading, a Prototype Carbon Fund (PCF). The Fund was officially opened in 1999. Since then the Bank has set up two other carbon funds and it manages several funds on behalf of individual donor countries, among them Italy, the

Netherlands and Spain.

The World Bank is the largest public broker of carbon purchases, with over 1,000 million dollars in its portfolio of carbon credits. Internal documents on the origins of the PCF show that it was created as a way of making profit. The Bank makes up to 10 per cent on commission, mainly on the carbon credits it purchases for the fund it is managing.

The following criticisms challenge the role of the Bank as carbon trader:

* The World Bank is in a position to obtain profit from the CDM and also to influence the rules of the mechanism, creating conflicting interests. The Bank has actively put pressure on the CDM to make its rules friendlier for investors and less significant as regards avoiding climate change. In particular the Bank has attempted to weaken the interpretation of the concept of vital importance in the CDM, that of "additionality," that is to say, a project should only be eligible for carbon credits if it would not go forward without the benefits it receives from these credits. The weakening of these rules enables projects to continue even though they do not contribute to reducing the emission of greenhouse effect gases.

* The Bank's carbon funds are setting a shameful precedent on purchasing credits for projects that would have been carried out even if they had not received the carbon credit qualification. For example the Xiaogushan hydro-energy project in China was declared by the Asian Development Bank as the least costly project option and was already under construction when the World Bank proposed supporting it with carbon credits. In this case the carbon credits provided a good subsidy to investors but did not avoid the emission of greenhouse effect gases in the least. All the carbon credit systems, including that of the World Bank, enable the buyers in the North to continue contaminating and finally they have a negative impact on the global climate.

* The role of the World Bank as a carbon trader highlights the contradictions within the Bank's energy projects portfolio. The Bank continues to contribute to climate change supporting fossil fuel projects, even though it would appear to be helping to solve the problem of climate change through its carbon funds. Between 1992 and 2004 the World Bank supported as an average fossil fuel projects with lifelong emissions of 1,457 megatons of carbon. This figure is between four to 29 times the anticipated annual amount of the so-called reductions of emissions according to the CDM.

The production of emissions from the joint energy projects funded by the Bank far exceeds the (alleged) reduction of emissions made through carbon funds. Through the PCF the Bank keeps count of the greenhouse effect gas emissions that supposedly were avoided with the carbon credit projects. But it refuses to calculate carbon emissions from its own portfolio of energy investments. In this way the Bank accounts for what it avoids but not for what it produces, concealing the net impact of its energy operations on climate change.

Those who accept the Bank as an honest and impartial carbon dealer must be aware that the investments made by the Bank are largely directed by the world's thirstiest country for oil: the United States, together with other nations requiring the same fuel. Until the power structure of the Bank is reformed, it will continue to be an institution under obligations with the most powerful contaminators in the world.

Edited excerpts taken from: "How the World Bank's Energy Framework Sells the Climate and Poor People Short", September 2006, Bank Information Center, Bretton Woods Project, Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale, CEE Bankwatch Network, Friends of the Earth-International, Institute

for Policy Studies, International Rivers Network, Oil Change International, Urgewald; http://www.seen.org/PDFs/Energy_Framework_CSO.pdf; "A Wrong Turn From Rio. The World Bank's Road To Climate Catastrophe"; by Jim Vallette, Daphne Wysham, and Nadia Martínez; Sustainable Energy and Economy Network / Institute for Policy Studies / Transnational Institute; December 2004, http://www.seen.org/PDFs/Wrong_turn_Rio.pdf

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- GE Trees: Contradictions in United Nations Conventions

The 9th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change held in Milan in 2003 allowed Northern companies and governments to establish plantations in the South under the Kyoto Protocol's "Clean Development Mechanism" (CDM), allegedly to absorb carbon dioxide and to store carbon. COP-9 allowed the use of plantations of genetically engineered (GE) trees [also known as genetically modified, GM, or transgenic trees] as carbon sinks, that is to supposedly offset carbon emissions

From then on, several organizations and representatives from social movements from Eastern and Western Europe, as well as North and South America have challenged the large-scale tree monoculture model because of its negative social and environmental impacts, and have demanded a ban on GE trees (see WRM Bulletin Nº 90). In March 2006, a call for a moratorium on the release of genetically engineered trees into the environment was raised at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Eighth Conference of the Parties in Curitiba, Brazil. The CBD took a historic decision: a recommendation that countries exercise caution when approaching the potential use of genetically engineered trees. The decision, acknowledging for the first time the potential social and ecological dangers of GE trees, would help slow down the headlong rush to commercialize GE trees.

The fact that the CBD was able to take such a strong stance against GE trees indicates the high level of concern over the unique and important threats posed by genetically engineered trees. Geneticist Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher of the Federation of German Scientists sums it up this way, "this CBD outcome, recommending a precautionary approach to GE trees, represents a first step in recognizing the dangers of GE trees. It will assist NGOs and scientists alike in sending an urgent alert to all nations that there is insufficient scientific data on the implications of GE trees, which pose a threat to forests and indigenous and local peoples globally—and therefore it is crucial to halt all releases at least until such data and assessments become available."

However, while the CBD acknowledges the potential damages of GE trees, the Climate Change Convention accepts its use. This is the reason why a number of organizations have decided to send a strong message to the Climate Convention to be held in Nairobi next November. They have produced an open letter to the delegates requesting the UNFCCC to end "the contradiction between its own pro-GE trees decision and the UN CBD's strong decision against GE trees", to "bring its policies in line with those of the UN CBD" and to "immediately prohibit the release of genetically engineered trees."

Destructive plantations are not the solution for the energy crisis, and GE trees plantations could be a real disaster for Humanity.

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