
[BINGOs in Search of REDDemption](#)

The threat of climate change has increased in tandem with the expansion of financial markets into every field of life, including climate change.

As the latest issue of the WRM Bulletin tries to show, REDD is a false solution to both deforestation and climate change; it is, however, useful for the carbon market – a highly debatable, sophisticated new financial market that trades carbon credits generally used by polluters to compensate for their carbon emissions. This year the carbon market doubled its value up to 237 million dollars, though the volume of transactions diminished by 22% compared to 2010. (1)

As another building block of the global financial architecture, the primary benefits of REDD will obviously go to the financial players. However, numerous institutions, big NGOs (BINGOs), corporations and governments promote REDD as beneficial for communities, who will eventually earn some spare change to “compensate” for the negative impacts they suffer from the project. Several articles in this bulletin deal with the harmful implications of REDD.

REDD marketing has achieved some degree of success because certain stakeholders have lent credibility to the proposal. Big NGOs like The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Forest Trends and Rainforest Alliance are involved and/or support many REDD projects in the global South.

Their rather “brown” partners – including Alcoa, Arcelor Mittal, Barrick Gold, BG Group, BHP Billiton, BP Foundation, Bunge, Cargill, Chevron, Coca-Cola, De Beers Group, Giti Tire, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase&Co, Kimberly-Clark, Kraft Foods, McDonald’s, Medco Group, Monsanto, MPX Colombia, Newmont Mining Corporation, Northrop Grumman Corporation, Rio Tinto, Shell, The Walt Disney Company, Toyota Motor Corporation, United Airlines, Walmart, Wilmar International – were in urgent need of some “green” wash. And they got it.

In March 2010, the US magazine The Nation published an article by Johann Hari, (2) who had investigated financial ties between environmental groups and environmentally unfriendly corporations, especially since the major conservation group The Nature Conservancy was found to have forged a long-convenient relationship with oil giant BP that green-washed the company’s image and helped TNC procure funding for its projects.

Hari wrote:

“Environmental groups used to be funded largely by their members and wealthy individual supporters. They had only one goal: to prevent environmental destruction. Their funds were small, but they played a crucial role in saving vast tracts of wilderness and in pushing into law strict rules forbidding air and water pollution. But Jay Hair - president of the National Wildlife Federation from 1981 to 1995 - was dissatisfied. He identified a huge new source of revenue: the worst polluters.

Hair found that the big oil and gas companies were happy to give money to conservation groups. Yes, they were destroying many of the world's pristine places. Yes, by the late 1980s it had become clear that they were dramatically destabilizing the climate - the very basis of life itself. But for Hair, that didn't make them the enemy; he said they sincerely wanted to right their wrongs and pay to preserve the environment. He began to suck millions from them, and in return his organization and others, like The Nature Conservancy (TNC), gave them awards for 'environmental stewardship.'

Companies like Shell and British Petroleum (BP) were delighted. They saw it as valuable 'reputation insurance': every time they were criticized for their massive emissions of warming gases, or for being involved in the killing of dissidents who wanted oil funds to go to the local population, or an oil spill that had caused irreparable damage, they wheeled out their shiny green awards, purchased with "charitable" donations, to ward off the prospect of government regulation."

Under the current pragmatism, most governments and several BINGOs enter into partnerships with the private sector, including big corporations that have been and still are drivers of forest destruction. This allows those polluters to graciously buy their redemption by engaging in REDD / REDD+ projects.

Most REDD/REDD+ projects are related to the carbon market and aim to put an economic value on forests and carbon.

Conservation International (CI) has announced that it is working "to encourage funding for REDD+ and market-based approaches to create a demand for forest carbon offsets" and is enthusiastic about carbon trade: "The emerging carbon market presents one of the greatest opportunities in the last fifty years to reverse the destruction of the world's remaining tropical forests by matching buyers and sellers of carbon credits." Indeed, BINGOs are strong promoters of the carbon market for carbon compensation in general and REDD in particular.

CI has a presence in Africa, giving technical and financial support for REDD projects in DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar and Liberia. In Asia CI is behind forest carbon projects in China, Philippines, Indonesia, while in Latin America it participates in projects in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia.

[box] **BINGOs BEHIND REDD PROJECTS IN AFRICA, ASIA, LATIN AMERICA** Conservation International (CI) has a presence in Africa, giving technical and financial support for the coordination of a national REDD strategy, as well as developing REDD pilot projects in two nature reserves (Tayna and Kisimba-Ikobo) in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. (3) In Equatorial Guinea CI has pilot projects in Monte Alén National Park. In Madagascar, it works in the Makira Forest Project and the Mantadia Corridor Project, while in Liberia it participates in the Network of Protected Areas. CI is also endorsing several forest carbon projects in Asia and Latin America: the Tengchong Forest Initiative in China, the Sierra Madre in the Philippines, the Mamberamo Basin in Indonesia, the Chocó-Manabí Corridor Initiative in Ecuador, the Alto Mayo Forest in Peru, the Northeast Atlantic Forest and the Muriqui Habitat Corridor Forest Carbon Initiative in Brazil, the Maya

Biosphere Reserve Conservation Carbon Initiative in Guatemala, the La Cojolita Selva Lacandona Carbon Initiative in Mexico, and the Bogotá Conservation Corridor in Colombia. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is involved in the Rio Bravo REDD project in Belize, the Noel Kempff project in Bolivia, the Atlantic Forest project in Brazil (Guaraqueçaba) (see the article on Green Economy in Brazil in this bulletin), the Tengchong Forest project in Yunnan Province, China and the project in Berau District, Borneo, Indonesia. TNC also participates in REDD pilot projects in initial phase, such as in Northwestern Mato Grosso the São Félix do Xingu Pilot Project, in Pará, Brazil. TNC is the partner responsible for administering the resources generated from the sale of sequestered carbon in the Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use in Mbaracayú, a GEF project in Paraguay. It also advises on the development of financial mechanisms in both the Program for Environmental Services through Carbon Sequestration in the Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve and Avoided Deforestation in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park, Guatemala. WWF Brazil along with the IUCN, is involved in the Acre State Carbon Project - Payment for Environmental Services in Brazil, and supports the Madre de Dios Amazon REDD Project in Peru.[/box]

The sheer concept of conservation is inappropriate here. As Hari said, “in an age of global warming, the old idea of conservation – that you preserve one rolling patch of land, alone and inviolate – makes no sense. If the biosphere is collapsing all around you, you can't ring-fence one lush stretch of greenery and protect it: it too will die.”

Furthermore, carbon trading doesn't reduce emissions. On the contrary, it provides a dangerous distraction from the immediate task of really reducing greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels.

Regrettably, a lot of money and effort is devoted to promoting false solutions along the lines of market-based REDD/ REDD+. Their promoters should bear in mind that they are supremely responsible for diverting time and money away from, and thus deepening the current climate, biodiversity and social crises.

- (1) Leveraging the Landscape: State of the Forest Carbon Markets 2012, by Ecosystem Marketplace
- (2) <http://www.thenation.com/article/wrong-kind-green#>
- (3) Democratic Republic of Congo. Conservation International REDD pilot project: a different kind of Disney production, by Belmond Tchoumba, WRM, 2011, http://wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/DRC_REDD_en.pdf