
Introduction

In view of the upcoming Rio+20 conference, (*) taking place this June, WRM would like to offer some background information on issues that will undoubtedly be at the top of the agenda of this international event. Among those issues are so-called *environmental services* and related phenomena, such as *payments for and trade in environmental services*.

The reason we have decided to address these issues is because many people consider them to be extremely complex, as is also the case with similar subjects such as REDD, REDD+ and the “carbon market”. But are these subjects really that complex? Or are they perhaps presented in an overly complex manner so that the majority of the public does not attempt to understand and discuss them, leaving this task to the so-called “experts”?

We firmly believe that *environmental services* and related phenomena should be discussed by everyone, especially since the official agencies involved in the preparations for Rio+20, primarily the United Nations (UN), place key emphasis on them. These agencies maintain that the continued provision of *environmental services*, supplied in large part by rainforests, and the future *trade in environmental services*, are crucial for humanity, and that the only way to protect these *environmental services* is to *put a price on them*. But what lies behind this viewpoint, and what are its implications, particularly for communities who live in and depend on forests?

This article is aimed at answering these questions, because *trade in environmental services* will have major consequences, since it implies the deepening of the processes of the commodification and financialization of nature. It will mean an unprecedented advance of neoliberalism over “natural capital”, through the privatization of nature and the application of the principle of ownership rights to so-called *environmental services* in rainforests and other ecosystems.

It is important to note, as well, that the defenders of the idea of *environmental services* claim that tree plantations, referred to as “planted forests” by their promoters, also play a strategic role in the provision of *environmental services*, such as carbon storage, energy, maintenance of the water cycle and preservation of biodiversity.

Happy reading!

* - The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which will be taking place exactly 20 years after the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

