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[Letter to be sent to the president of Gabon to express opposition to the creation of a ecosystems services market](#)

*The second action is being carried out in Gabon, in response to the recent approval of a decree (Resolution No. 20/2013 on Sustainable Development in the Republic of Gabon) that is aimed at the creation of a national and international ecosystems services market. Among other things, this would enable a company like Olam to use this mechanism to “compensate” for the destruction caused by its massive oil palm plantations. The letter will be sent to the president of Gabon to express opposition to this new decree.*

Also available in [French](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Spanish](#)

To sign on to the letter, send a message to : [21sept@wrm.org.uy](mailto:21sept@wrm.org.uy)

**To the President of the Republic of Gabon, Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba**

C.C.

- Prime Minister Mr. Raymond Ndong Sima
- Minister of Economy, Labor and Sustainable Development, Mr. Luc Oyoubi
- Minister of Water and Forests, Mr. Gabriel Ntchango
- Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development, Mr. Julien Nkoghe Bekale
- Minister of Promotion of Investments, Public Works, Transport, Habitat and Tourism, Mr. Magloire Ngambia
- Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Relations with Constitutional Institutions, Government Spokesperson, Mrs. Ida Reteno Assonouet
- Minister of Budget, Public Accounts and Functioning, Mrs. Cristiane Rose Ossoura Raponda

**Dear Mr. President,**

We are writing to express our deep concern with regard to the spirit and letter of Ordinance N°20/2013 on Sustainable Development in the Republic of Gabon. After numerous exchanges with a number of our colleagues from civil society, and in view of your country's international commitments to the protection of biological diversity, we are rather wary regarding the consequences of this ordinance for the trade in ecosystem services and more broadly for North-South relations.

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While fully supporting the fundamental principles of this ordinance, we fear that the trade in ecosystem services endorsed and supported by this text could be transformed into the right to pollute. We believe that any sustainable development strategy must respect such fundamental principles as the right to a healthy life, the need for harmony with nature, protection of the cultural heritage of Gabon, respect for the precautionary principle, and the prevention of pollution; we fear, however, that this ordinance, in clear contradiction with several of these principles, is aimed at the creation of a system of national and international trade in ecosystem services.

Numerous pilot projects in other regions have demonstrated the devastating impacts of the trade in ecosystem services for both people and the environment. Now, Ordinance N°20/2013 is based on the idea that environmental damage in one specific place can be “compensated” by purchasing “sustainable development credits” elsewhere. This environmentally destructive, socially unjust and economically ineffective idea has been introduced and promoted by a consortium of transnational corporations supported by the industrialised countries which increasingly depend on ever-growing and unlimited access to “natural resources”. It is also endorsed by international agencies like the World Bank, private banks and large nature conservation NGOs. Those who promote the idea of compensation maintain that it is the “only” way to conserve nature, disregarding much less costly and much more effective forest conservation policies and practices.

Must we point out, Mr. President, that at the same time that the generation of income from the sale of “sustainable development credits” is being considered, the carbon market, which is based on the same principles, is clearly demonstrating its shortcomings, in that it has yet to contribute to the greater well-being of local communities, as promised, while greenhouse gas emissions are higher than ever? This ordinance could undermine existing protection of land, because it will allow mining, forestry and agricultural concessions in areas that border on a “sustainable development” project area. We believe there is a great risk that forest-dependent communities would suffer twice from such a situation: first, they face the negative impacts from the mining, logging or industrial agriculture and second, they are denied access to traditionally used territory that is now inside a forest that is used, for example, in a carbon or ecosystem services trading scheme.

How could the destruction of forests that is associated with the expansion of industrial plantations, for example, be “compensated”? Purchasing “sustainable development credits” from e.g. carbon and/or biodiversity from other areas that will then be protected - whether these areas are inside or outside Gabon - will not remedy the loss and damage that the environment and local communities face. The result of such false equations, wherever they have been applied, has been more instead of less ecosystem destruction, and higher instead of lower carbon emissions. Forest-dependent populations are affected twice by such a mechanism: on the one hand, communities living inside the area of an industrial plantation and/or other compensation projects lose their forest and territory. At the other end of the transaction, the communities that live in the place chosen to “compensate” the damage from the industrial plantation will also be negatively affected, losing access to their forest territory and/or facing severe restrictions in how they can use their territory. This has been the reality in almost all of the REDD+ pilot projects around the world, implemented in a number of tropical forest countries including Peru, Brazil, DRC, Kenya, Mozambique and Indonesia. There is no reason that the pattern would be any different if ecosystem services were traded as proposed in Ordinance 20/2013.

The majority of the buyers of potential Gabonese “sustainable development credits” would presumably come from the global North, where most of the heavy industrial polluters are concentrated. The effect of trading these “credits” with such polluters through “ecosystem markets” is then the perpetuation of the pollution provoked by these polluting companies. An example is the

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very destructive and polluting extraction and refining of oil from tar sands in the US and Canada, also affecting negatively indigenous populations from these regions.

Including these “market solutions” into Ordinance 20/2013 adopted by the Gabonese government essentially risks allowing the big polluters in industrialised countries to continue to pollute and to continue to use far more than their fair share of 'natural resources'. These companies urgently need to reduce their pollution in order to decrease the chance of a tremendous climate and biodiversity crisis in the near future that will also negatively affect the Gabonese forests and people.

On September 21, communities and groups struggling against large scale monoculture plantations and their negative impacts in countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as in some countries of the Northern hemisphere celebrate the International Day of Struggle against Industrial Tree Monocultures. On the occasion of this International Day of Struggle, we urge the Gabonese government to take all the necessary measures to conserve its own natural patrimony, especially its significant forest areas.

Preserving nature is not a business. The government of Gabon could play a leading role in the world by advocating true solutions for forest conservation, building these from the bottom up, together with the population in your country that depend on the forests for their survival. Such a plan can lead to strong local and regional economies, strengthen food sovereignty, as well as the social, territorial, economic, environmental and cultural rights of all people. It is this perspective of defending Nature that holds the hope for alternatives such as the concept of 'buen vivir', based on building a future that allows for the well-being of the many, and pursuing a new social pact based on equality, justice and a rupture with the ongoing process of mercantilization and privatization of nature. Those alternatives have sprung up in the global South, and they need to be nurtured in the global South. We call on you to take up the challenge, to leave behind the ill-advised neo-colonial concept of ecosystem trading and join those spearheading alternatives that deserve that term.

Yours sincerely,