
[Words and deeds in forest protection](#)

Everyone seems to agree on the need to protect the world's remaining forests ... while forests continue to disappear at the same alarming rate as usual. It is therefore important to distinguish between those who are truly committed to forest protection and those whose deeds and words go in opposite directions. For this purpose, most of the articles included in this issue of the WRM bulletin serve as good examples.

Take for instance the case of the article on Ecuador, where local communities are struggling to prevent a Canadian mining company from destroying their environment, which includes an area of primary forest of enormous biological value located in the buffer zone of one of the country's more important ecological reserves. Men, women, and young people have organized themselves under the common and nonnegotiable position "No to Mining" which today has the unanimous support of all the local governments in the region, in addition to the communities within the limits or adjacent to the mining concessions.

In the case of Congo, the local Efe people have used and protected the Ituri forest for centuries. In the early 1990s, European and Malaysian commercial logging companies began to destroy the forest –and thus the livelihoods of the Efe- while the transnational corporations' appetite over the region's minerals –gold and coltan- have brought in war and further forest destruction.

In Laos, the Norwegian consulting firm Norconsult won a US\$1.5 million contract to supervise construction work of the Xeset 2 dam, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. China is also heavily involved: the Import-Export Bank of China is funding 80 per cent of the US\$135 million project and the main contractor is the China North Industries Corporation. A local person says: "We do not want them to build the dam. It will badly affect our land and the environment. ... But we dare not oppose government officials." Government agencies and consultants –in Laos, Norway and China- know that this is true but plans continue ahead.

Everyone knows that oil palm plantations are a major cause of forest destruction. However, the Northern demand for biodiesel is pushing the expansion of this crop throughout the tropics. In the case of Thailand, the government plans to increase plantations from the current 400,000 hectares to 1.2 million hectares by 2009. As the article included in this bulletin states: "If an expansion of the oil palm plantation areas was made according to the government's plan, Thailand would irreversibly lose its food security, forests and biological diversity. It would mean a catastrophe for the Thai People."

Several more articles provide further examples about government-corporate doublespeak. Fortunately, the coin has two sides. The other side includes organized local peoples and supporting organizations, pushing forward their own social and environmental agenda.

For instance, at the end of April this year, the Brazilian Landless Peasants Movement and Via Campesina organized an International Meeting on Monoculture Eucalyptus Plantations to strategise on joint actions against the advance of monoculture tree plantations and pulp mills in the South.

Also in April, Uruguayan small farmer organizations, NGOs and other social organizations from the four corners of the country launched a National Initiative for the Suspension of Monoculture Tree Plantations.

In Uganda, the government finally decided in May to drop its intention of giving away the Mabira Central Forest Reserves for commercial sugar cane growing. This decision was the result of strong demonstrations –where five people were killed and many more injured- from local people against forest destruction.

In Costa Rica, several organizations are promoting family-centred forest restoration based on documented experience carried out in the country, in opposition to the monoculture tree plantation model implemented until now.

In sum, governments simply talk about forest conservation, while people take real action to protect their forests and environment. The explanation for the former is profit. This is made clear in the article on the Finnish Botnia pulp mill in Uruguay: Why is EU public money being used? As the author says, “the answer to the question is simple: EU public money is going to Botnia because it benefits European industry.” The explanation for peoples’ struggles to protect their forests is equally simple and exemplified in the Congo article: "You will understand why we are called People of the Forest....When the forest dies, we shall die."