
Monoculture tree plantations targeted by a Latin American network

The Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations (Red Latinoamericana contra los Monocultivos de Árboles - RECOMA) is a decentralized network of organizations from all the countries in the region, and its basic objective is to coordinate activities to resist the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the region, either for the production of timber and pulp, for the production of palm oil or to act as “carbon sinks.”

At the Fifth World Social Forum, various members of RECOMA who were in Porto Alegre were able to meet and to up-date themselves on the situation in each country while drawing up future strategies and planning their activities for the year.

One of the important aspects of this coordination work has been the possibility of obtaining the results of various research works carried out by members of RECOMA –some finalized and others currently on-going– that will certainly provide important elements for the network’s tasks.

In Brazil a study was carried out on the generation of employment and labour conditions in large-scale tree plantations associated with pulp-mills. The research was done by the Brazilian organization, FASE and is yet another demonstration of the social disasters of the forestry model being applied and that is being promoted throughout the region.

In Ecuador, the organization “Acción Ecológica” carried out research on the activities of the Dutch foundation FACE, which has installed pine and eucalyptus plantations to capture the greenhouse gas emissions produced by Dutch electricity companies. At the same time, Acción Ecológica has launched a new investigation, focussed on the socio-economic impacts of monoculture tree plantations.

In Chile, the Latin American Environmental Controversy Observatory (Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales) is undertaking research work on the social effects of tree plantations and also of their so-called economic benefits for the country. The results of this research will be very important as Chile is presented as “the model” by those promoting the development of tree plantations in other countries.

In Venezuela the organization AMIGRANSA carried out a small study on the situation of two communities affected by the Irish company, SMURFIT, which occupied large areas of fertile land to implant large-scale tree plantations to supply its pulp-mill. As a result of this research, action was taken and an open letter was addressed to President Hugo Chavez in support of the communities’ struggles.

In Uruguay, the Guayubira Group has supported a research on the environmental impact of tree plantations and another one on their social impacts. The latter showed that not only is tree plantation much worse than extensive cattle-raising with regard to job-generation per hectare, but also that the conditions prevailing in the plantations are also much worse.

The objective of the abovementioned research activities is to provide more information and analysis with the aim of strengthening the struggle against these monoculture plantations. It is thus not a academic exercise but one of developing tools that will serve not only for action but also to enable the organizations to better insert themselves into social struggles.

Another of the issues that arose as a central theme on the RECOMA agenda is that of certification, both that of the FSC and of other national certification schemes. The unanimous reflection of the members of the network is that certification weakens local struggles against the expansion of monoculture tree plantations and the participants at the meeting agreed to develop joint activities in this area.

The fact that RECOMA met at the World Social Forum is in itself a clear message that the Network perceives the issue of monoculture tree plantations as an essentially social issue. The “other” possible world must be diverse, both regarding the environment and social matters, and will have no place for monoculture of any kind. In the case of trees, RECOMA is progressing along this path and its negation – NO to monoculture tree plantations – is fundamentally an affirmation. YES to life and YES to diversity.

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