
Plantations campaign: a call for coordinated action

Carrying out a campaign against plantations is not easy, particularly in places located far away from the plantation areas. How can you be against tree planting? Doesn't the world need more trees? These are the type of questions we have to face time and time again. We explain that we are not opposing the plantation of trees but a specific type of activity, characterized by being large scale monocultures of exotic trees which usurp local peoples' forests and lands and result in a large number of negative social and environmental impacts. But the task is not an easy one. At the receiving end -in the plantation areas- there is little need for explanations and much need of support to people confronting them, precisely because they know -and suffer- the consequences.

In spite of the specific difficulties of this campaign, we believe that we have moved a long way forward and that there is now increased awareness and opposition, particularly to pulpwood plantations. However, some changes have also occurred at the other side. In many cases -exemplified by Indonesia- the government's support and the corporations' interest have shifted from pulpwood to oil palm plantations. At the same time, at the global level there is a strong push for the implementation of vast areas of "carbon sink" plantations, using the same type of large-scale monocultures as in the case of pulpwood and oil palm plantations.

This implies the need to continue disseminating information and analysis on these issues as we -and many others- have so far been doing, in order to facilitate the task of those working at both the local and international levels to put a stop to this type of forestry.

But we also believe that enough groundwork has already been done and that the time has come to carry out a concerted and coordinated effort simultaneously in a number of scenarios, among which the following:

- Local level. In most Southern countries there are varying levels of organized opposition to large scale plantations, ranging from weak to very strong. In many cases there are ongoing local struggles which need support. The dissemination of information about such struggles to the general public can greatly assist both in rallying support to them and to increase public awareness and opposition to this type of forestry.
- International processes, agencies and actors. Many of these are directly or indirectly promoting plantations while others are playing an ambiguous role in this regard. Some of the more relevant are: the Biodiversity and Climate Change Conventions, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, the Global Environment Facility, the Multilateral Development Banks, the International Monetary Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization. All of these need to be influenced, because their decisions and actions may either promote the spread of these plantations or assist in halting them.
- Government cooperation agencies. Many of these Northern governments' agencies -the Japanese JICA being perhaps the worst but by no means the only one- are actively promoting plantations in many countries as part of their governments' strategy to ensure cheap supplies of wood, pulp, and palm oil to their countries as well as to facilitate their industrial exports (e.g. forestry and pulp-making

equipment) or their commitments regarding carbon emissions.

- Consulting firms and technology suppliers. In many cases these firms work hand in hand with the above mentioned agencies. In this case, Finland's Jaakko Poyry is the most eminent though not unique example of Northern consultancies. They are extremely influential at the government level and help to prepare the ground for the development of monoculture plantations, which will later need to be harvested and industrialized ... using Northern technology for such purpose.

- Southern governments. Ultimately, it is Southern governments which are responsible for the promotion and support of plantations. This may be the result of some arm twisting on the part of some of the above actors, but this does not relieve them for their responsibility in the issue. Governments are however not monolithic. Some agencies and individual public servants have a critical view about this and need to receive support to facilitate policy changes within the government. A halt to plantations will require decisions at the government level and putting pressure on them is therefore crucial.

- Northern consumers. The current level of consumption in the North is unsustainable and is destroying people, communities and the environment in the South. Paper consumption has already depleted many of the world's forests and is now the main reason for the promotion of pulpwood plantations in the South. Fossil fuel consumption has resulted in the greenhouse effect. In order to avoid the need to reduce consumption of such fuels, the North has come up with the "brilliant" idea of creating carbon sinks -in the South, of course- in the manner of large-scale fast growing tree plantations. Such destructive consumption patterns need to be radically changed.

- Corporations. These are obviously the main beneficiaries of the actions of most of the above processes and actors. While some of them (e.g. pulp or oil palm industries) are clearly perceived at the local level, others (particularly those promoting carbon sinks) may be hidden in the background. Given their size and economic power, they have also an enormous capacity to politically influence other actors -including local governments- to their own benefit. Their large-scale logic generates large-scale social and environmental impacts, which cannot be disguised under their newly adopted "green" and "social" discourse.

The above is by no means a comprehensive list of all the possible entry points for people willing to challenge the plantation model, but it highlights some of the many arenas where there is a need to intervene.

The time has come to move on and to challenge the plantation model in all the possible arenas. To highlight its destructive character; to point out the contradictions between what intergovernmental agencies have been mandated to do -such as poverty eradication or forest and biodiversity conservation- and their attitude regarding the spread of monoculture plantations; to inform Northern people about what their government agencies and companies are doing in the South; to demand Southern governments to halt the promotion of plantations.

We now call on people and organizations from all over the world to carry out a coordinated effort to halt this destructive forestry model. We have focused this bulletin entirely on the plantations campaign to provide you with an overview of all the possible scenarios where you can intervene. We have also included specific suggestions, as a means of highlighting some possible avenues for action, but we look forward to receiving your own ideas and suggestions on the matter. Please get in contact with us so that we can coordinate actions at the different levels. We firmly believe that if we all work together, we can achieve success in changing this destructive forestry model to the benefit of

local peoples and their environments.