
Southern governments' sad role

Southern governments are ultimately responsible for the adoption of the plantation model and for its implementation at the national and local levels. Even when the idea for the promotion of plantations may originate in external actors (World Bank, consulting firms, aid agencies, etc.), it is the Southern governments which need to pave the way to make their implementation possible. The first step usually consists in carrying out viability studies -with funds provided by international funding or bilateral aid agencies- to justify such development. A second and crucial element is the adoption of legislation to promote tree plantations, which centrally includes direct and indirect incentives to make the activity profitable for corporations. These incentives, coupled with cheap land and labour, weak environmental norms, fast tree growth and an enabling environment for national and transnational corporations' investment, constitute the basic premises for plantation development.

Forestry Departments are the state agencies in charge of implementing this policy by administrating funds and controlling plantations in the field. They usually carry out the necessary research to support the model. They also disseminate information and propaganda to show the "benefits" of the model and are in the front line to counter criticism from environmental and social organizations.

In many cases, the participation of governments in the process is much more brutal. Police and armed forces are mobilized to repress local communities and indigenous peoples when they resist forced migration and land occupation by plantation companies, or pollution caused by pulp mills.

It is important to stress that Southern governments do not act alone; a number of other important national and international actors participate actively in convincing the government to adopt the plantation model. While it is very important to recognize such fact, it is equally important to realize the sad role that Southern governments are playing in this respect and that policy changes to halt plantations will need to be finally approved by the government. There is therefore much work to be done to influence it at different levels.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Oppose the large-scale plantation model at all levels
- Promote changes in current legislation and policies promoting such plantations
- Oppose the passing of legislation to promote plantations
- Demand the government to carry out social and environmental impact assessments on plantations at the basin level
- Identify and promote successful community forest management initiatives as alternatives to this type of plantations