
[A new destructive business: Carbon credits from tree plantations](#)

This editorial is part of the special bulletin “Tree plantations for the carbon market: more injustice for communities and their territories”.

[See here the complete bulletin.](#)

Almost 24 years ago, the WRM published a document titled [“The Carbon Shop: Planting New Problems”](#). The briefing was aimed at alerting about a new business opportunity for the plantation industry: the expansion of tree plantations to generate carbon credits that allowed polluting companies to claim that the climate damage from continued burning of fossil fuels had been compensated. That first wave of plantations aimed at generating carbon credits was triggered mainly by the Kyoto Protocol. This United Nations agreement gave birth to carbon offsetting mechanisms that helped Northern governments and corporations to avoid the necessary measures to stop the climate chaos: ending the extraction of oil, gas and coal.

Within the carbon trading mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol, the trade in carbon credits from tree plantations remained limited, not least because of the obvious absurdity of paying plantation companies for an already very profitable business that was causing well-documented massive ecological and socioeconomic damage and human rights abuses.

The plantation industry and conservation NGOs also took the ‘carbon plantation’ idea to the so-called voluntary carbon market. They kept promoting tree planting as a ‘solution’ to the climate crisis, claiming that without using trees to ‘remove’ carbon from the atmosphere, the goal of the UN Paris Agreement to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C was impossible to reach. The continued promotion of this false claim has triggered a new round of tree plantation initiatives for carbon offsetting. Since the adoption of the UN Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015, and in particular, following the UN climate conference in November 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland, carbon offset initiatives involving tree plantations have multiplied. Companies’ pledges to become a ‘net-zero’-emissions producer have resulted in carbon offset projects proliferating in many countries in the global South.

As a result, the number of plantation projects for voluntary carbon markets has more than doubled in the past three years. Not only have these projects increased in number, but also in scale. Most of these projects are taking place in the global South where plantation companies can get large areas of land, trees grow fast and ways to avoid regulations are many. This has been the pattern since colonial times: companies target land in the global South to expand their business because it is where they can make the highest profits by exploiting the land and the people.

Despite the huge propaganda by the plantation industry and its allies to try to greenwash their image, their industrial plantations destroy local livelihoods, grab vast areas of land, pollute water, and impose violence. It is also absurd to believe that tree plantations can compensate the (climate) damage resulting from burning fossil carbon. Tree plantations may store carbon temporarily, but they cannot

guarantee storage of carbon for the hundreds and more years that carbon released from underground oil, gas and coal deposits will interfere with the climate. Claiming that tree plantations can compensate for the emissions that result from burning fossil fuel only benefits the plantation companies and the extractive sector that can continue -and even increase- fossil carbon extraction and use.

With this bulletin, the WRM wants to draw attention to this new business strategy to make expansion of tree plantations even more profitable for the plantation industry. The articles explain how and where this expansion is taking place, and who is benefiting from this latest corporate push for more destructive tree plantations.

One thing is clear: communities whose livelihoods depend on their territories will not stand to benefit from more tree plantations occupying their lands.