



Communities resisting extractivism: from bioeconomy to monocultures and mining

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OUR VIEWPOINT

Carbon projects are projects of death

This bulletin highlight several cases where the expansion of carbon projects has become an integral part of the extractivist model. Since this model has been destroying territories and people's livelihoods for a long time, we share articles on both old and new forms of extractivism, and how communities continue to carry on struggles to resist them.

From 9 to 11 July, 2024, members of Indigenous, peasant, traditional and Afro-descendent peoples from the Amazon region and Central America came together in the Alto-Turiaçu indigenous territory, in the state of Maranhão, Brazil. This meeting was hosted and organized by the Ka'apor People through their ancestral organizational system, called *Tuxa Ta Pame*.

Their objective was to share experiences and discuss forest carbon projects, often referred to as REDD projects (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). The number of these kinds of projects has dramatically increased in recent years, not just in Latin America and the Amazon, but also in Africa and Asia.

This meeting in Ka'apor territory differed from other meetings that have taken place on the same issue. It was a space by and for community activists and groups where they shared experiences, priorities, concerns and resistance struggles, without having carbon project promoters present.

The participants at the meeting also decided to make a collective declaration. In their [declaration](#), they first clarify that when they talk about REDD, they are also including projects “created following the same logic as REDD (for example, forest carbon projects, nature-based solutions projects, jurisdictional REDD programs implemented by state or national governments, and others)”.

They go on to analyse how promoters of forest carbon projects and programmes are no different from other companies and actors who promote extractivism. REDD is actually part of the same model that has been appropriating their territories and destroying their livelihoods, with State support, for a long time. REDD promoters use the same tactics as promoters of other kinds of extractivism, and they have the same objective: to profit. In this case, their 'commodity' is 'carbon credits'.

'Carbon credits', in turn, fuel the perpetuation of the extractivist model, so it is more accurate to call them 'pollution credits'. According to the declaration, REDD projects – which include jurisdictional REDD' or 'governmental REDD' programmes funded by Northern governments like Norway, Germany, the UK and the USA – “seek greater economic benefit for their [REDD] business and incentivize deforestation, because more deforestation means more business for companies that sell carbon credits.” The declaration goes on to say that REDD “is a greenwash. Like other false solutions to the climate catastrophe, such as ‘unconventional oil exploration’, ‘biofuels’, ‘responsible mining or green gold’, or the ‘energy transition’, REDD allows companies to continue with their business whilst polluting.”

Due to this situation, participants at the gathering called forest carbon projects and programmes a “project of death,” in contrast to the “project of life that we the peoples and communities are promoting through the respect and care for our territories.”

The articles [in this bulletin](#) highlight several regions where the expansion of carbon projects has become an integral part of the extractivist model. Since this model has been destroying people’s livelihoods and territories for a long time, we share articles on both old and new forms of extractivism in communities' territories.

For example, in the department of Vichada, Colombia, the impacts of mining, monocultures and other forms of extraction are being compounded by the introduction of carbon projects, including carbon plantations.

In Corrientes, Argentina, the community is fighting against the impacts of the sawmills that surround their homes, the result of thousands of hectares of eucalyptus and pine monoculture in the region. A survey carried out by the community on the impacts of these sawmills on their health shows that they should not continue near to their homes. Besides, the survey itself once more denounces the very model of tree monoculture, imposed on the region by the companies with the full support of the state.

Another article reports on the important victory of the communities in Edéa, Cameroon, that mobilised to prevent the SOCAPALM company, which promotes monoculture oil palm plantations in the region, from replanting the areas surrounding the communities. In a statement, a women's association from Edéa said: “we will not accept spending the next 50 years in this misery. We are determined to fight to free our lands and obtain living spaces for our children, who are the current and future generations.”

The land of Papua is currently a major global frontier for industrial oil palm expansion and deforestation. But it is also the territory of hundreds of different Indigenous Peoples. An article in this bulletin describes the resistance of one of these groups. It also describes how the Indonesian government is not only allowing the expansion of large-scale oil palm, but also letting companies use part of their concession area for the sale of carbon credits.

Another article reports on a peasant struggle in Pará, Brazil, where the 2025 annual UN climate conference will take place. The state government of Pará is using this stage to promote the idea of a 'bioeconomy' or 'economy of life' as the solution to the climate and deforestation crises. However, this 'bioeconomy' – which is based on industrial oil palm plantations to produce biodiesel and other products – is actually destroying peasant communities' territories and livelihoods. And this is occurring in collusion with the Pará government.

This last example epitomizes the final words of the aforementioned Declaration, which we highlight here: “They have been killing us since colonization. Currently, it is oil, mining, and agribusiness companies; dams and other infrastructure projects; carbon offset projects like REDD; and State policies which continue with the ethnocide of our peoples – killing our cultures, languages, identities, knowledge and wisdom. Enough is enough! We say No to REDD!”

The insane expansion of industrial oil palm in the land of Papua, and the resistance struggle of Kampung Bariat

Just like the Dutch colonizers in the past did, the Indonesian government, companies and investors consider the land of Papua to be a vast empty territory, a new frontier for extraction and profiteering. However, the land of Papua is not empty, but rather home to hundreds of Indigenous Peoples—including the women and men of Kampung Bariat village, who are struggling to ensure control over their ancestral territory and keep it free of oil palm plantations.

[In Indonesian here.](#)

One night in October 2023, dozens of women from Kampung Bariat, a village in Kondo district, Sorong Regency, province of West Papua, gathered in the centre of their community. They came together for an exercise that involved sharing and cataloguing the different ways they use and relate to the forest; these ways are essential for their caretaking tasks of feeding and ensuring the health and well-being of their families and community. Lit by only a few light bulbs, they wrote down and shared traditional knowledge about places of particular importance surrounding their community—for example, places where one can find good sago, a staple food of the community; places to cultivate certain crops; places to collect particular medicinal herbs, roots and leaves; sacred places; and so on. It was a joyful exercise, revealing a deep and strong connection the women have with their territory.

But the reason for doing this exercise was not joyful at all. In 2014, the Indonesian government in Jakarta decided to grant a 37,000-hectare concession in South Sorong to PT Anugerah Sakti Internusa, a subsidiary of the Indonusa Agromulia Group (1). Subsequent permits from authorities in Papua gave the company permission to start destroying 14,467 hectares within this concession area—which at the time was 96% intact forest—and plant millions of oil palm trees (2). The future of Kampung Bariat village came under threat because the concession overlaps with its territory. The community was not informed, let alone asked to give its opinion or consent for the concession.

On that particular October night, the women of Kampung Bariat also talked about the company. Angry about the situation, they say “We need to keep oil palm out!” and “We are able to take care of our territory!” The approximately 300 women and men of Kampung Bariat have taken care of their territory for generations, ever since ten family clans came together and settled in this area. They identify themselves as Tehit, an indigenous group belonging to the Afsya People.

Industrial oil palm expansion in Papua and Indonesia

According to official figures, there are about 16 million hectares of industrial oil palm plantations in Indonesia—about half of the total global amount of oil palm. However, Sawit Watch, an Indonesian NGO that monitors the oil palm sector, estimates the total area of oil palm plantations in Indonesia to be closer to 25 million hectares (3), and it predicts millions of additional hectares

in future. In 2023, industrial oil palm plantations grew by 116,000 hectares in Indonesia, a 54% increase compared with 2022 (4).

Along with the islands of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and parts of Java, Papua is targeted to become the new frontier for massive oil palm expansion in Indonesia and worldwide. This is due to its vast territory and the conditions that the Indonesian government offers companies and investors in the country. These conditions have become increasingly favourable, facilitated in part by the omnibus law (5). Papua is targeted for many more mining mega-projects, sugar cane plantations, large-scale agricultural so-called 'food estate' projects, and the longstanding Mamberano hydropower project—all of which would cause devastating impacts. It is no coincidence that Papua, with its vast 'natural resources,' was the last territory the Dutch colonizers tried to keep control over, but had to give up due to international pressure (6).

The legal justification the central government in Jakarta has used to hand over forest lands to oil palm and other extractive companies in Papua is based on a Ministry of Agriculture decision that was made during the Suharto regime (nr. 820/1982). It declared Papua's estimated 41 million hectares of forested area to be 'state forests,' which took away Indigenous Peoples' power to manage and make decisions about the territories they traditionally occupy and depend on.

An insane expansion

Both the Dutch government of the past and the subsequent Indonesian government claimed to be the “owners” of Papua, completely ignoring the presence of indigenous communities there. They acted as if it was empty, unused land that capitalist interests could extract and profit from. However, an investigation by Pusaka revealed the presence of at least 10,472 villages in Papua, mainly inhabited by Indigenous Peoples; the report added that all these communities depend on a wider territory that they steward, in accordance with their practices, customs, and beliefs, etc. (7). The largest area in concession for oil palm development is the so-called Tanah Merah project in Boven Digoel Regency, South Papua province. Seven companies control the area, which has a total of 280,000 hectares. This project violates the territory where the Awyu People reside and upon which they depend (8).

The 29 million total hectares that industrial oil palm plantations cover worldwide were also not “empty” when they were occupied for this activity—quite the opposite (9). There is a wealth of well-documented experience from communities whose lands were taken by oil palm companies. Their experiences—stories of violence they've experienced, abuses women have faced, destruction and contamination of land and water—are strikingly similar. This is why a new round of large-scale oil palm expansion targeting Papua is such an insane idea.

Some common aspects to these stories and experiences from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Colombia, Nigeria, Guatemala, Papua New Guinea, Ivory Coast, Honduras, Brazil, Ecuador, Cameroon and many other countries include the following:

- The territories of indigenous and black communities are targeted the most, in violation of their territorial rights and livelihoods. In the land of Papua, for example, oil palm expansion has caused conflicts with indigenous communities in every case. By 2018, 272,000 hectares of mostly forest

area in Papua had been converted to industrial oil palm plantations, leaving behind not only a wake of destroyed forests, but also destroyed livelihoods (10).

- Industrial oil palm not only appropriates land but also water. In West Kalimantan, more land and water have been appropriated for industrial oil palm than anywhere else on earth. An investigation there revealed massive water appropriation, contamination and destruction throughout the palm oil production chain—which affects the entire region and its population. Without water, no one survives (11).

- Palm oil has become the cheapest vegetable oil globally, due to the relentless labor exploitation of people who formerly sustained themselves from the forest, agriculture and fisheries. Oil palm companies' profits are particularly bolstered by the exploitation and control of women's bodies. When industrial oil palm invades a community territory, the lives of women become extremely hard. When a river is destroyed, for example, this has deep implications for women. Due to the existing sexual division of labour—in which women are the ones who sustain life—the destructive impacts of oil palm deepen the oppression of women. Companies also exploit women's labor on plantations. Prostitution and sexual violence against female workers is widespread in this context (12).

- Even when there is evidence of water contamination or other legal violations, oil palm companies enjoy impunity. Meanwhile, community activists face intimidation, death threats, criminalization, accusations of terrorism, and imprisonment when they say NO to industrial oil palm plantations and defend their human rights to their territory.

- Certificates of 'quality control,' such as the 20-year-old RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil), have become greenwashing tools for the oil palm industry. These certificates do not change the structural patterns of injustice, violence and destruction; and their internal complaint mechanisms do not change companies' behaviour in practice. What these tools do ensure are profits for palm oil producers, investors, traders and manufacturing companies (13). These tools and certificates bear co-responsibility for the multiple oppressions caused by extractive industries in the Global South.

Nowadays, 'biofuels' or 'agrofuels' from palm oil are sold to the public as 'renewable energy' and part of the so-called 'energy transition.' This is the latest lie that the palm oil industry has spread to justify its massive expansion. As early as 2013, research by GRAIN revealed that the current agribusiness-driven food system, in which the oil palm sector as a key player, is responsible for about half of global greenhouse gas emissions (14).

Kampung Bariat and other communities are fighting back

Back in Kampung Bariat, on another night in October 2023, the community gathered to watch a video from a visit that some community members had made to Indonesia's capital of Jakarta, about 3,000 km away. The images showed villagers expressing their concerns to different authorities in Jakarta. Yuliana Kedemes, one of the participants on the visit, summarized their message in an interview: “We can't allow them [the oil palm companies] to come here, because where will our children and grandchildren live in the future?” (15)

The next day, the community received the South Sorong regency and Kondo district authorities. They were welcomed in the Tehit language by representatives of the ten clans, who shared the story of how Kampung Bariat was founded. They gave the authorities a file with documentation and a map that shows the deep connection women and men have with their territory. They stated they need a minimum of 3,200 hectares of land to ensure their community's survival. The authorities declared they would support the demands of the people of Kampung Bariat. The fight of Kampung Bariat and many other Indigenous Peoples in Papua against the ongoing threats of oil palm received unprecedented support when, in April 2021, four oil palm companies had their licences revoked by the regent of Sorong. This was based on an audit that had begun in 2018, which identified legal and administrative violations on the part of the companies. The licenses of another 12 oil palm companies were revoked in June 2021 in South Sorong, including the licenses of PT Anugerah Sakti Internusa, the company whose concession overlaps with Kampung Bariat's territory (16). However, PT Anugerah Sakti Internusa went to court in December 2021 to fight the decision, in an attempt to get its licenses back.

More Indigenous Peoples in Papua are involved with court cases. In the case of Papua's biggest oil palm development area—the Tanah Merah project—the Awyu People are fighting for their rights in court, even up to the Supreme Court. In May 2024, the Awyu and Moi indigenous people travelled to Jakarta, where they held prayers and rituals and performed dances to call on the Supreme Court to protect their lands from destruction (17).

Part of what Indigenous Peoples in Papua are pointing out to the central government is the widespread abandonment of concessions by companies in Papua. An investigation by Pusaka showed that from 1988 until 2011 (when a presidential moratorium was issued on forest clearing), only 125,284 hectares of the 1,162,893 hectares granted to 51 oil palm companies (10.7% of the area) had actually been converted to oil palm. Meanwhile, a number of these companies had stopped operating. If logging and timber plantation concessions are also included, the amount of abandoned land, considering the concessions granted during this period of 1988-2011, is as much as 1,925,306 hectares. Indigenous Peoples claim that the government should return these lands to them, as it is their ancestral territory, and recognize their territorial rights (18).

'Green' extractivism

Rather than responding to the legitimate claims of Indigenous Peoples, the Indonesian government is allowing yet another type of extractivism to expand in Indonesia—with all its associated land-grabbing and profiteering: the 'green' extractivism of forest carbon projects and programmes. In recent years, since the Paris Climate Agreement, the demand for carbon credits has been fuelled by big polluting industries' frenzy to become 'carbon-neutral.' In reality, by buying such 'credits,' these polluting industries can continue with their activities and even increase the burning of fossil fuels—which is the main cause of climate chaos. That is why 'carbon credits' should be called 'pollution credits.'

This carbon market is in the interest of the Indonesian government: it has already received tens of millions of US dollars from the World Bank, Green Climate Fund and the governments of industrialized countries like Norway, Germany, Japan and the UK to become 'REDD-ready.' This means putting the necessary 'infrastructure' in place—such as favourable legislation and methods

of supposedly measuring and verifying the amount of carbon in Indonesian forests—which are compared with baseline amounts the government and donors themselves define (19).

In addition to being an opportunity for the so-called 'conservation industry'—e.g. organisations such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Conservation International (CI) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF)—to increase 'protected areas,' the carbon business in Papua has also become a new opportunity for extractive industries like oil palm plantations and logging. But their new business is worsening climate chaos and making Indigenous Peoples' struggle for their territorial rights more difficult.

The carbon market and carbon trading: A new opportunity for extractive industries, a new threat for Indigenous Peoples in Papua.

Palm oil and other companies in Papua can now tap into a new source of income. Instead of destroying forests for logging or oil palm, they can leave the forest 'standing' and still make money, by selling a new product called 'carbon credits'—based on the promise that they will maintain the forest intact instead of clearing it. The Indonesian government allows companies in the concession category PBHP (Forest Utilisation Business Permit) to use concession areas for more than one commercial activity, which can include carbon credits. The ALS Group (Alamindo group), for example, owner of three timber companies and industries in Papua, intends to set up a carbon business through PT Rimbakayu Arthamas, in collaboration with nine other companies, making use of this type of permit (20).

In Brazil, oil palm companies got into the carbon market in a similar way, while harming indigenous communities even more than they already were. The Agropalma company in the state of Pará in the Amazon region is using forest land (not under oil palm cultivation) to sell 'carbon credits.' These 'carbon forests' are 'protected' by heavily armed guards who persecute indigenous Turiwara and Afro-descendent communities, called quilombolas. These peoples will always try to enter the forest, because it is their ancestral territory where their ancestral cemeteries and places to fish and hunt are located (21). With the recent forest carbon project, their longstanding struggle to reclaim these lands has become even more difficult.

Globally, 17 years of experience with forest carbon and other so-called REDD-type projects has shown that wherever the carbon business advances, the struggle of indigenous communities for their territorial rights is weakened. This is in spite of the fact that promoters and supporters of carbon projects claim and promise that the projects will advance and improve the territorial rights of indigenous peoples." (22). What is worse, carbon projects do little to reverse deforestation, and they exacerbate climate chaos—which will ultimately negatively affect tropical forests, and thus Indigenous Peoples. According to research, the Amazon forest is in a process of rapidly 'drying up.' It could become a large savannah in the near future if governments, of industrialized countries in particular, do not swiftly decide to protect the underground store of fossil fuels from extraction (23).

Final remarks

The Indonesian government can no longer ignore the existence of Indigenous Peoples in the land of Papua, whose delegations regularly visit their offices in the capital of Jakarta. Handing over their land to private companies and allowing these companies to destroy it, or to practice 'green' extractivism, bluntly violates article 33 of the Indonesian Constitution—which states that even though land belongs to the State, it should be “utilized to the greatest extent for the prosperity of the Indonesian People.” In a recent interview with Al Jazeera, Indonesia's president-elect Prabowo even affirmed that “the interests, the security and future of all indigenous peoples are highest priority in my view. We have to protect them, we have to secure their livelihood” (24).

But securing their livelihoods means ensuring they can freely exercise control over their territories. This demand has been systematically ignored by the government. Therefore, strengthening the resistance struggle is key. This can occur through horizontal learning processes that connect communities worldwide, so that they can share their wide diversity of experiences of resistance against such plantations. One example of this is the informal alliance against industrial oil palm expansion in West and Central Africa, which since 2016 has connected communities fighting to reclaim their lands from oil palm companies in several African countries (25). Connecting struggles against oil palm and other extractive threats might be a key element in strengthening the ongoing fight of communities in Papua to defend their territories.

WRM International Secretariat

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- (2) <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/01/spurred-by-investor-friendly-law-palm-oil-firms-sue-to-get-licenses-back/>
- (3) Sawitwatch. Catatan&Proyeksi perkebunan sawit Indonesia tahun 2023, 2023
- (4) <https://nusantara-atlas.org/2023-marks-a-surge-in-palm-oil-expansion-in-indonesia/>
- (5) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/indonesia-legalizing-crimes-under-the-slogan-of-creating-jobs>
- (6) After the Indonesian government took over, the first foreign investment approved for the land of Papua in 1967 opened the door for Freeport Sulpur Inc. to extract ore from what is considered one of the world's biggest gold reserves, with devastating impacts on the communities that continue to this day.
- (7) Brief Paper: Karena ada Hutan Tong Hidup, Jakarta, 2023
- (8) <https://pusaka.or.id/en/the-awyu-tribe-fights-the-tanah-merah-project-companies-up-to-the-supreme-court/>
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- (12) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/breaking-the-silence-harassment-sexual-violence-and-abuse-against-women-in-and-around-industrial-oil-palm-and-rubber-plantations> and <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/18/rape-abuses-in-palm-oil-fields-linked-to-top-cosmetic-brands-ap>
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- (14) <https://grain.org/en/article/5272-how-much-of-world-s-greenhouse-gas-emissions-come-from-agriculture>
- (15) <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/01/spurred-by-investor-friendly-law-palm-oil-firms-sue-to-get->

[licenses-back/](#)

(16) Ibid

(17) <https://pusaka.or.id/en/land-back-supreme-court-ceremonial-venue-for-papuan-indigenous-peoples-fighting-palm-oil-companies/> So far, only seven communities have ensured control over their land through the use of a legal category that was created through changes in the Forestry Law of 2012. They are called 'customary forests,' and total 39.841 hectares. It is an important step, though insignificant at the same time, when compared with the areas released to companies--comapnies that are heavily impacting livelihoods and threatening the future of IPs.

(18) [Brief Paper: Karena ada Hutan Tong Hidup](#), Jakarta, 2023

(19) Indonesia REDD+ National Strategy 2021-2030; Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia November 2022

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(21) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/redd-and-the-green-economy-exacerbate-oppression-and-deforestation-in-para-brazil>

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(23) <https://www.the-scientist.com/amazon-rainforest-nearing-savannah-tipping-point-69782>

(24) https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=51Rctpb_EJg

(25) See the declaration from the last meeting of this Alliance in 2022 [in this link](#)

The destructive character of the bioeconomy and the struggle of the Virgílio Serrão Sacramento community for their territory in Pará state, Brazil

Peasant families are threatened with eviction by Brasil Bio Fuels (BBF) oil palm plantation company, with the complicity of the state government. This article shows that the much spoken of 'bioeconomy' is not 'sustainable' and even less 'clean'. What it does is destroy communities' territories, just like fossil fuel-based extractive industries have been doing for a long time.

On June 6, 2024, judge André Luiz Filo-Creão Garcia da Fonseca from the Agrarian Court of Castanhal municipality in Pará state, Brazil, issued a possessory warrant in favor of the Brasil Bio Fuels (BBF) industrial oil palm plantation company. The decision means the immediate eviction from their territory of 38 peasant families from the Virgílio Serrão Sacramento community. In his decision, the judge warned the families that in case they do not leave voluntarily, the Pará Military Police will enforce the decision by force. So far, the families have been waiting to be notified about the judge decision.

The Virgílio Serrão Sacramento settlement was born in late 2015 when dozens of families came together in Mojú municipality in the northeast of Pará state, part of the Amazon region, to take back an area of some 700 hectares from which many of them had been expelled by loggers and ranchers in the past. The families' motivation was the threat that BBF would take over the area as part of its project to expand oil palm monoculture plantations even more in the region. Further, the families knew that the 700 hectares they re-occupied were public land, belonging to the state of Pará. And as the country's Constitution prescribes, this land should fulfill its social role, which means benefiting peasant families rather than private companies like BBF.

But this is not what happens in the state of Pará. Right after the re-occupation in 2015, the families asked the state of Pará land agency ITERPA for the regularization of the area. But for years ITERPA refused to meet the families' demands despite promising more than once to carry out an agrarian study of the area. When BBF went to court in 2019 stating that it was the rightful owner of the area, ITERPA washed its hands of the matter for good, claiming it could do no more because the case had entered the judicial sphere. In 2020, the company obtained its first favorable preliminary injunction determining that the 38 families vacate the area.

But according to the families, BBF used bad faith, since it presented the judge with improper deeds. The families defense attorneys appealed and managed to reverse the injunction. However, in mid-2023, BBF obtained another preliminary injunction in its favor. At this point the case went over to the Agrarian Solutions Committee of the Pará state Judiciary for analysis. This is a body created to mediate agrarian conflicts in Brazil. But the parties did not reach an agreement because the peasant families were sure of their legitimate right over the 700 hectares, and unwilling to give up a single centimeter of territory. Owing to the absence of an agreement, the case reverted back to the judge, who decided to grant the land to BBF in order for it to advance with its oil palm monoculture plantation project, as mentioned above.

In a statement, the Pará chapter of the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA), a member organization of Vía Campesina, an international network in defense of peasants all over the world, has said that it is “neither just nor moral to privilege a company that violates rights to the detriment of 38 families that produce food”. In their fields the families plant a great variety of food crops that feed not just the families themselves, but also benefit the regional population. In the almost 8 years since the occupation they have built their homes, creating and re-creating their ties with the territory. Since 2020 – and above all at the moment –, they have suffered with the constant threats of eviction, as reported by one of the local dwellers: “My brother is crying like a child; his whole area was ready to be sown with watermelon when we got the news. I haven't been able to sleep for three nights.” (1)

The state government's option for the 'bioeconomy' and the palm oil agribusiness

The option made by the Pará state government, led by governor Helder Barbalho, to work toward increasing the profits of a private company like BBF and others in the palm oil sector to the detriment of peasant communities, is no surprise. After all, lately the governor talks about nothing but the 'bioeconomy', and industrial palm oil is considered one of the strategic 'renewable energies' on which the state's 'bioeconomy' is based.

One example of the governor's activities meant to benefit BBF was his participation in an event in April 2023 in London, side by side with Milton Seagall, the main executive of Brasil Bio Fuels. During his speech at the event, Barbalho stressed: “I draw your attention to the importance of paying attention to this new economic activity [the bioeconomy] in our country. The bioeconomy, starting off from investments in innovation, technology and research, will permit the leveraging of new businesses. Certainly, if you look at global windows of opportunity, you will notice how much the bioeconomy is what is on the agenda, allowing the world to dialogue with business, but above all with its biodiversity. Given that Brazil is the country with the planet's largest tropical biodiversity, we cannot miss this opportunity.” (2)

Barbalho prides himself of the fact that Pará is the first state in Brazil to have a “bioeconomy plan”. (3) He states that this Plan was “constructed by listening to traditional peoples and [their] ancestry”. But in fact, the Plan was formulated by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Headquartered in the United States, TNC has been called “the world's richest environmental group” by The Washington Post. For this reason, it is a lot more akin to a company than to an environmental NGO. Furthermore, TNC has strong links with the elites of international financial capital, which has representatives on its Board. (4) In fact, the Bioeconomy Plan was conceived mainly as a way of attracting new business ventures, which Barbalho also remembered to mention in his speech in London: “We have identified, based on 43 types of products [from the bioeconomy], the leveraging of US\$ 120 billion in business deals”.

Oil palm monoculture plantations are one of the main activities among these “ventures”. In a video advertised on BBF's web page, Barbalho considers that the state of Pará has a “vocation” for industrial oil palm plantations to produce “biofuel”, that oil palm plantations is a “clean” and “low carbon” activity, and priding himself of the fact that Pará is already “Brazil's largest producer”. (5)

The face of the 'bioeconomy' of oil palm monoculture plantation: destruction and violence

If this is the future that the governor intends to present to the world as he hosts the COP30 Climate Conference in Belém in 2025, he will have to drive, mile after mile, past monotonous rows of dendê palm trees with his guests, in the midst of the constant spraying of toxic agro-chemicals that kill everything except the industrial oil palm trees and contaminate water courses. They will need to transit through a model that promotes injustice and rights violations.

These monotonous rows hide life stories of communities like Virgílio Serrão Sacramento, which – differently from what industrial oil palm plantations do – seek to give life to the land, thus allowing them to live with dignity. This is the same situation faced by several indigenous and quilombola families in a nearby region, the Acará River Valley: the same aggressions related to the expansion of oil palm plantations by BBF and other companies, such as Agropalma. They also face the State's refusal to regularize their territories.

The only indigenous land officially demarcated by the Brazilian State in the Acará River Valley, namely the Turê-Mariquita Indigenous Land of the Tembê people, with its 147 hectares, is the smallest officially demarcated indigenous land in Brazil. Tired of waiting for the Brazilian State, since 2021, indigenous people and quilombolas have carried out several land re-occupations. They have organized the IRQ (Indigenous, Riverine and Quilombola) Movement fighting together for the demarcation of their territory.

Since these re-occupations began, the communities have faced violent practices from various highly armed groups, including the state police forces, corporations' security guards and private militias, and organized crime "gangs". There have been frightful increases in persecutions, death threats, humiliations and even racism on the part of segments of the regional population against the Tembê, Turiwara and quilombola communities, which stand accused of standing in the way of development. Successive denouncements and police reports filed by the communities before the appropriate agencies have had no effect. (6)

Lastly, we vehemently repudiate both judge André Luiz Filo-Creão Garcia da Fonseca's decision in the case and the complete inaction of the state government, which fails to fulfill its obligation as the defender of the rights of the people of Pará, in this case the 38 families of the Virgílio Serrão Sacramento settlement.

The settlement's story shows in all clarity that the often spoken of 'bioeconomy' is not 'sustainable' and even less 'clean'. What it does is destroy communities' territories in the same way as the industries that promote fossil fuel-based extractivism have been doing for a very long time.

WRM International Secretariat

(1) [Denúncia: 38 famílias de agricultoras e agricultores familiares do MPA no Pará estão sendo despejadas pelo estado do Pará e BBE](#), MPA, June 2024.

(2) [Em conferência em Londres, governador do Pará anuncia concessão de áreas florestais para crédito de carbono](#), Globo, April 2023.

(3) [Helder Barbalho discute Zona Franca da Bioeconomia no Pará com vencedor do prêmio Nobel](#), Environment and Sustainability Department, Government of Pará, September 2023.

(4) WRM Bulletin 266, [REDD and the Green Economy exacerbate oppression and deforestation in Pará, Brazil](#), July 2023.

(5) <https://www.grupobbf.com.br/noticias/estados-da-regiao-norte-apostam-em-energias-renovaveis-para-atender-a-populacao/>

(6) WRM Bulletin 269, [The struggle for land in the Brazilian Amazon region against palm oil and mining corporations](#), February 2024.

The Orinoquía region of Colombia: Between oblivion, extractivism and an agricultural reserve

Colombia's Orinoquía region stretches from the foothills of the country's eastern mountain range to the Venezuelan border. This region has historically been associated with the exploitation of rubber, timber, furs and other so-called “natural resources,” to the detriment of ancestral communities. Today, new threats are emerging under the paradigm of conservation, green energy and carbon projects.

The Orinoquía region is one of five geographic regions of Colombia, spanning the departments of Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Vichada, and the northern part of Guaviare. Also known as Los Llanos, this region contains great cultural and ecosystemic diversity, including foothills, transitional forests, savannahs, floodplains, mighty rivers, and a large variety of flora and fauna—some of which is in danger of extinction.

The Orinoquía region has been described as “empty;” its common name, “plains,” refers to a flat, uninhabited and wild area (1). Yet, this region is home to a diaspora of nomadic Indigenous Peoples who have ancestrally inhabited the area. Today, these peoples are either confined to established indigenous reserves, or they live in settlements that State authorities, such as the Ministry of Interior, have not yet recognized (2). The Constitutional Court has declared that most of these populations are at risk of physical and cultural extinction (Order 004) (3). Due to the structural racism and ethnocide they have suffered, these populations currently do not have the physical or cultural means to survive (4).

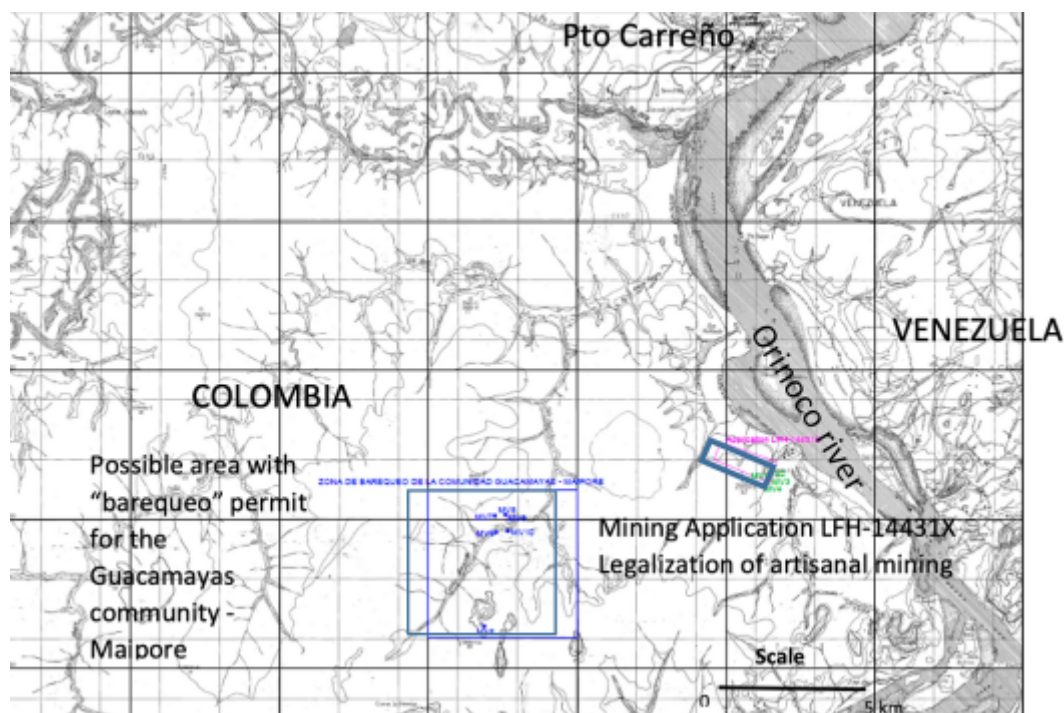
The Colombian state continues to promote the idea that this territory is “empty” and available to be used as an agricultural reserve. To this end, it has given usufructuary land titles to large national and foreign capital interests, without taking into account the existence of communities, nor their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The state has not applied a necessary differentiated approach when considering activities and projects that directly affect indigenous territories and territorialities (5).

The ancestral culture of the peoples of the Orinoquía contrasts with the violent development strategy that is currently being implemented in the territory—via targeted colonization programs, and exploitation of rubber, cinchona, indigo, hydrocarbons, monocultures, and cattle ranching (6). Additionally, the region has recently been designated as “a great agricultural pantry” on which to expand agribusinesses, carbon capture and offset projects, and rare earth mining.

With the approval of document 3797 of the Economic and Social Policy National Council in 2014 (CONPES, by its Spanish acronym), the Colombian state determined that a portion of the Orinoquía, called the high plains, would be an agricultural expansion zone—highlighting its potential for large-scale oil palm and mining projects (7). This document made no mention of Indigenous Peoples, their productive projects or their organizational processes.

Let's look at three recent examples of external intervention in the territory.

Vichada and mining: The Orinoco mining arc



(From Auxico Resources <https://www.auxicoresources.com/colombia>)

Mineral reserves in the Colombian Orinoquía region have a high value on the international market, due to the presence of rare earth minerals (8). In 2012, the Colombian State demarcated areas in the department of Vichada as Strategic Mining Areas (AEM, by its Spanish acronym) through resolution 0045 of the National Mining Agency (ANM, by its Spanish acronym) (9). However, this resolution—along with others of a similar nature—was declared to be null and void by the Constitutional Court in 2015, due to violations of the rights to prior consultation, cultural diversity, citizen participation and territory (10). Prior to that Court decision, though, 190 applications for mining titles had already been filed with the authorities (from 2003 to 2012). The total area of these titles amounted to 895,908 hectares, or the equivalent of 9% of the department (11).

In 2022, the indigenous community of the Guacamayas Maipore Indigenous Reserve in Vichada began to express concern about mining activities in their reserve and in a neighboring area. Auxico Resources, a Canadian multinational mining company, had negotiated to acquire a property adjacent to the Indigenous Reserve—which since 2010 had been under a process of approval for artisanal mining. But in 2023, the National Mining Agency granted the mining title to Auxico Resources, and in 2024, the environmental authority (Corporinoquía) approved the Environmental Impact Study for this project (12).

Auxico Resources claims to have a memorandum of understanding with the Guacamayas Maipore Reserve to mine within this territory (13). Yet the majority of the Reserve's inhabitants deny this, saying that only one person signed the documents without the participation of the community. Now the inhabitants fear that the company will begin exploiting the metals in the Reserve without

their consent within a few years. Meanwhile, the environmental impact studies have not taken into account the effects on surrounding communities, and there are no preventative measures or environmental offset activities planned.

Auxico Resources uses the term “artisanal mining” strategically to gain the rights to exploit under less stringent standards. One might wonder what kind of “artisanal” mining a multinational company would do, when it has strategic interests beyond our borders and plans to build a rare earth refinery in Colombian territory. It is also unclear who would be responsible for the obligations that this license entails: would it be the company, or the person from whom they purchased the land? Who would be responsible for any environmental or social impacts caused by the company (14)?

Casanare: Caño Mochuelo and the conflicts surrounding two “environmental” projects

The Caño Mochuelo Indigenous Reserve, located in the department of Casanare, won an important victory in 2010: in a general assembly, the communities decided to prevent oil exploration in their territory (15). However, the communities are now debating about two projects that are part of the “green economy”—a trend that Iván Duque's government originally promoted, and Gustavo Petro's government later expanded upon. These two projects are 1) the sale of carbon credits, and 2) a 200-hectare “reforestation” project with eucalyptus species.

The Caño Mochuelo Reserve is a rather unique case in Colombia's cultural pluriversity. In an area of less than 100,000 hectares, ten different Indigenous Peoples are confined within 14 settlements; these Peoples have nomadic or semi-nomadic traditions and have historically been physically and culturally exterminated (16). As a form of governance and participation, the communities have a General Assembly. Yet sometimes the decision of the Assembly is not respected, and one person ends up making a decision for all 14 communities.

Carbon credit project (2022)

The communities living in the Caño Mochuelo Reserve are impoverished due to the lack of attention and educational and employment opportunities. They are also victims of multiple violations of their human dignity, which the Colombian State itself has recognized in its process of collective reparations for victims of the armed conflict (17).

Since 2022, the CO2CERO company—through a private individual, Henry Andueza Errunuma—has been promoting a project to sell carbon credits, which would be implemented in the Reserve. The agreement would be signed between the company and Andueza, who would act as a REDD+ coordinating partner on behalf of nine Indigenous Reserves. Yet the agreement does not specify the kind of activity through which the carbon credits would be generated (e.g. conservation, tree plantations, etc). On the company's website, there is a project registered under the name of Awia Tuparro +9, in which several indigenous territories are mentioned; however the Caño Mochuelo Reserve does not appear on this list (Proyectos de Carbono – CO2CERO).

In their social outreach for this project, project proponents have not employed the protocol of free, prior and informed consultation. Believing that the commercial nature of the contract makes

them exempt from certain protocols, proponents claim that it is a free-will agreement among the parties. Despite the existence of tools like the social, environmental and institutional safeguards enacted in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, there is no guarantor, in practice, to enforce communities' minimum rights to citizen participation and access to information (18).

This contract has some particularities that are worth mentioning:

- The contract is a power of attorney (mandate contract) in which the Reserve grants a third party the ability to negotiate on its behalf.
- The contract has confidentiality clauses that undermine the social safeguards on access to information.
- The contract stipulates that the Reserve must be responsible for guaranteeing social and environmental safeguards, despite the companies' real obligations in this regard.
- Despite the claim that these investments are a part of communities' so-called “life plans,” the communities of the Reserve currently do not have such plans. A “life plan” is a tool that communities develop in order to be able to inhabit their territory with their own culture and identity. A “life plan” covers several areas, including spiritual, political, environmental and economic.
- The non-compliance clauses to which communities would be liable amount to \$100,000,000 Colombian pesos (USD 25,000).
- Once the studies have been carried out, if the project is considered to be infeasible, the costs must be assumed by the Indigenous Reserve.

The carbon credits project was not approved through the normal channels of the Reserve's General Assembly, but rather through an entity that does not exist in its statutes: a board of directors made up of 14 authorities. This board did not take into the account the will of the communities, which had already repeatedly expressed their objections to the project in assemblies.

Yet despite the fact that the General Assembly decided not to move forward with the project (in April 2024), the Governor of the Reserve had already signed the contract for the project in December 2023, without the Assembly's authorization. This makes it challenging to stop the project without legal ramifications.

Eucalyptus “reforestation” project (2024)

In December 2023, the former governor of the department of Casanare, Salomón Andrés Sanabria, and the current governor of the Caño Mochuelo Reserve, surreptitiously agreed to reallocate money from the General Royalties System. These funds, which had been designated for educational infrastructure in indigenous schools, were reallocated to “implement actions to improve the quality of life of the indigenous community of the Caño Mochuelo Indigenous Reserve, through productive reforestation in the municipality of Paz de Ariporo” in the amount of \$7,000,000,000 Colombian pesos (USD 1,700,000) (BPIN Code 2023100010060).

There was no prior consultation about this project, and the Assembly did not approve it. There was only a private document signed by the governor of the Reserve. Meanwhile, the Caño

Mochuelo Reserve had already established that the royalties from the State were to be used for educational infrastructure in indigenous schools in Casanare—as previously stated in both internal documents and agreements with other indigenous groups in the department of Casanare (19). Why, then, was the communities' decision modified?

This project aims to plant 200 hectares of eucalyptus trees in the middle of the Casanare savanna. The argument is that planting these trees is an efficient way to “rebuild” and “recover indigenous identity.” However, the negative impacts of eucalyptus monocultures are well documented. One of these impacts is the high consumption of water, including of water from the water table.

More examples of carbon colonialism and racism in Orinoquía

Long before the project in Paz de Ariporo, foreign investors from the company, Forest First Colombia, appropriated 40,000 hectares in Vichada to install a eucalyptus plantation. The aim of the plantation was to make money from the sale of carbon credits. In an interview, company representatives claimed that “in this area of Colombia, not only are there no carbon stocks in the soil, but there is also no vegetation to hold that carbon.” They added that eucalyptus, in contrast, was “very efficient at taking carbon out of the air and storing it in the wood.” Echoing the Colombian government's characterization of the region as ‘empty,’ project representatives claimed that they were “not displacing people.” Meanwhile, they accuse the grassroots communities of environmental destruction, while turning a blind eye to how their own eucalyptus monocultures cause destruction: “the few people who live there set the grassland on fire multiple times a year due to poor land management practices” (20).

Ironically, the environmental impact study for the Paz de Ariporo project justifies reforestation with eucalyptus trees using the argument that it will help recover the cultural identity of the indigenous communities—when in reality there is no cultural relationship between these trees of Australian origin and the communities of the Orinoquía region.

It is worth mentioning that if the goal of the project were focused on strengthening Indigenous Peoples—and not just capital interests and the contractor friends of the current government—the reforestation project would have been planned using multiple species of the *Arecaceae* (palm) family. Due to the high demand for palm trees, and the very reduced space that the communities have, these trees have disappeared from the Reserve.

Arecaceae trees are not only the most important source of raw materials for construction, and for the manufacture of tools, clothes, crafts, medicines and food, etc; they are also part of a theological universe that interweaves all organisms that coexist in the Orinoquía region. The moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*) stands out due to its complex relationships of association with multiple species; this is why it has been named a keystone species for life. A similar phenomenon occurs with the seje palm (*Oenocarpus bacaba*), the royal palm or cucurita (*Attalea maripa*), the cumare palm (*Astrocaryum aculeatum*) and the Açaí palm (*Euterpe oleracea*) (21). The communities of the Reserve believe that the wisdom of their ancestors is embodied in these species of palm trees and other plants of the Reserve.

Despite these facts, government institutions are not taking responsibility for the environmental impacts caused by this project, nor are they guaranteeing the collective rights of the communities or adequate consultation. This leaves the communities in a vulnerable situation.

Corporación Claretiana NPB (22)

Andrés Tiboche and Daniel Ávila

(1) Rausch, J. M. (1999). *La frontera de los Llanos en la historia de Colombia : (1830- 1930)* / Jane Rausch ; translation Nicolas Suescún. Santafé de Bogotá: Banco de la República, El Ancora

(2) The Indigenous Reserve is a political-administrative entity, taken from the colonial era, that seeks to protect the territory of indigenous communities, with respect for their autonomy and self-determination, in accordance with ILO Convention 169.

(3) <https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/autos/2009/a004-09.htm>

(4) As evidenced in the report that the Llano & Selva Network presented to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP, by its Spanish acronym), “Ethnocide and Structural Racism in the Orinoquía,” in 2021.

(5) The Constitutional Court has recognized indigenous communities' “territorialities” as places that, though not within their officially demarcated territory, are part of their culture due to spiritual and cultural relationships. SU 123 from 2008.

(6) Editores. Gómez G., A. (1991). *Indios, colonos y conflictos : una historia regional de los Llanos Orientales, 1870-1970* / Augusto Gómez G. Bogotá: Siglo XXI Editores, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.

(7) National Council for Social and Economic Policy, a body responsible for advising on the country's economic and social policies.

(8) Rare earth minerals are a special group of minerals that have a high commercial value for technological development.

(9) DIARIO OFICIAL. AÑO CXLVIII. No. 48483. 6, July, 2012. p. 131. In:

<https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?id=4007264>

(10) Ruling from Tutela T 766 from 2015

<https://justiciaambientalcolombia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/sentencia-t-766-2015-1.pdf>

(11) Rojas, I., Ospina, J. & González O. (2019) *Vichada: Tierra Codiciada*. In: *TERRITORIO Y DESARROLLO* 2019; January-June. Vol. 3, N°1. PP. 13-19.

(12) https://www.elespectador.com/investigacion/la-historia-no-contada-de-la-primera-mina-de-tierras-raras-en-vichada-colombia/#google_vignette

(13) https://www.auxicoresources.com/files/ugd/6f9bc0_4801a8ed522945498617f1d95afbfc12.pdf

(14) The Colombian government is currently working with indigenous communities to update the mining code; however, we have been able to demonstrate that the issue of rare earths has not been directly addressed, and there is a significant lack of knowledge about this kind of project.

(15) <https://sistematizacioncm.wordpress.com/4-el-proceso-de-intervencion/el-proceso-de-intervencion/2010-2/> Article 1 of Resolution 0171 from 2016 of the Unit for Comprehensive Attention and Reparations to Victims defines confinement as a situation in violation of basic rights, in which communities—despite remaining in a part of their territory—lose mobility, due to the presence and actions of illegal armed groups. This restriction means they are unable to access goods that are indispensable for their survival, because of the military, economic, political, cultural and social control exerted by illegal armed groups in the context of the internal armed conflict.

(16) In the framework of the Colombian State's process on collective reparations for the victims of the armed conflict, there is something called a precautionary measure: a preventative legal contract to avoid causing greater damages than those already caused. This has been established via Order 098.

(17) As this article was being written, the Colombian Constitutional Court recognized these violations of communities' collective rights in its ruling T 248 from 2024, as well as the Colombian State's failure to apply an ethnic approach in the voluntary REDD+ market.

(18) The General Royalties System (SGR, by its Spanish acronym) is a mechanism that seeks to guarantee the equitable distribution and efficient use of revenues from exploitation of the country's non-renewable

natural resources.

(19) <https://dfcgov.medium.com/a-q-a-with-forest-first-colombia-ceo-tobey-russ-and-cfo-jonathan-dodd-on-climate-change-mitigation-06e33921cd4d>

(20) Schultes, R. E. (1974). Palms and religion in the northwest amazon / Richard Evans Schultes. Cambridge: Harvard University.

(21) Organization that has been accompanying indigenous communities of the Orinoquía region for over 20 years.

Cameroon: Resistance against SOCAPALM replanting operations is fertile!

The company is in the process of renewing part of its oil palm plantations in Edéa. At the end of last year, communities started to mobilize against this process. The community resistance has led the sub-prefect to request Socapalm to stop its activities. This is a first victory of the community but the struggle will continue until SOCAPALM returns the lands to the communities!

SOCAPALM is the name of a company that controls nearly 60,000 hectares of industrial oil palm plantations in Cameroon. It was a state-owned company until the year 2000, when it was privatized and acquired by the agro-industrial SOCFIN company, owned mainly by the French group Bolloré, controlled by the Bolloré family, and the Huber Fabri family of Luxembourg. The World Bank played a key role in the story of how the SOCFIN conglomerate, and the handful of European billionaire families that control this company, has profited from purchasing SOCAPALM. (1).

Nowadays, the company is in the process of renewing part of its oil palm plantations in Edéa in order to maintain and further increase their productivity and thus, their profits.

At the end of last year, communities in Edéa, started to mobilize against this process. In particular, the women of one of the villages who organized in the Association of (Women) Neighbors of Socapalm in Edéa, Afrise, by its French acronym.

They launched a petition (2) to raise international solidarity to their demand to stop SOCAPALM from replanting and to alert that they were ready to do whatever was needed to stop SOCAPALM's operation in Edéa saying "we will not accept spending the next 50 years in this misery. We are determined to fight to free our lands and obtain living spaces for our children, who are the current and future generations."

Alerted by the fact that the replanting operation already started in some villages, early this month, the Informal Alliance against Industrial oil palm plantations in West and Central Africa, a collective of communities and activists, fighting against the expansion of plantations in Africa, released a statement in support of the communities.

In the statement (3), the Informal Alliance says we "urge Socapalm to immediately stop replanting oil palm plantations in the vicinity of the houses and graves of the communities living in Apouh à Ngog, which has been going on since Wednesday 08 August 2024. The planting of tens of thousands of hectares of palm trees in front of the yards of these local residents is a serious attack on the food sovereignty of the families in the village and on the dignity of the women of Apouh à Ngog, in the Edéa 1 district of Cameroon."

The community resistance and their determination to stop the company has led the sub-prefect to request Socapalm to stop its activities.

This is a first victory of the community and the organized women from Edéa, but the struggle will continue until SOCAPALM returns the lands to the communities!

- (1) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/the-enduring-legacy-of-a-little-known-world-bank-project-to-secure-african-plantations-for-european>
- (2) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/action-alerts/your-support-is-needed-sign-this-petition-by-women-in-cameroon-resisting-industrial-oil-palm-plantations>
- (3) <https://www.wrm.org.uy/action-alerts/stop-socapalms-replanting-operations>

Argentina: The community fight against contamination from sawmills

The Argentine province of Corrientes has the largest area of tree plantations in the country. 80% of the timber from these plantations goes to sawmills, where mountains of sawdust are regularly burned, causing serious health problems for neighboring communities. The local organization, Guardians of Y'vera, conducted a community health survey to highlight the problem, demand the relocation of these mills, and denounce the impacts of the forestry model.

Black clouds of smoke and dust force families living in Concepción, in the Argentine province of Corrientes, to regularly shut themselves inside their homes. The burning of sawdust at the seven sawmills in this town of 26,000 inhabitants causes respiratory problems and skin reactions. Children and the elderly are among the most affected. And yet, local authorities take no measures to stop this contamination—revealing an attitude that prioritizes the economic interests of the forestry sector over the well-being of the community.

Faced with this situation, the social and environmental organization, Guardians of Y'verá, decided to conduct a health survey of the households close to the sawmills. In November 2023, they surveyed households in the neighborhoods of Caaby Guazú, 30 and 36 households. "35% of the people surveyed had health problems that they associate with the sawmills, such as allergies and respiratory problems, which in some cases have developed into asthma and skin diseases," the organization reported.

"Children are the most effected," says Araceli Romero, a resident of Concepción and member of the Guardians of Y'verá, who also participated in the survey. "After they burn the sawdust, children with respiratory or skin problems end up in the hospital. The problem is very evident," says the activist, who is also a nurse.

The province of Corrientes has the largest area of monoculture tree plantations in the country, with somewhere between 434,000 and 500,000 hectares planted—mostly with pine and eucalyptus trees. The data differ depending on the source: the National Secretary of Agriculture reports that 437,803 hectares had been planted as of March 2024. Meanwhile, the Argentine Forestry Association (AFOA, by its Spanish acronym), a group that includes the leading companies in the sector, states that there are more than 500,000 hectares. According to data from the national government, 80% of the timber goes to sawmills (1).

The town of Concepción is located in the department of the same name, at the gates of the Esteros del Y'verá. The Esteros del Y'verá are one of the largest wetlands in the Americas, and they are currently threatened by monoculture tree plantations and other activities (2). There are 39,500 hectares of plantations—mostly pine—in the department of Concepción. Jobs at the plantations and sawmills are some of the few employment opportunities available to the population, but the working conditions are very precarious and dangerous.

Monoculture tree plantations in Argentina began to increase significantly in 1998, with the enactment of Law 25.080 that promoted "cultivated forests." This law grants subsidies to

companies (such as access to "non-refundable economic support") as well as huge tax benefits, including tax exemptions and fiscal stability for 30-50 years (meaning no taxes can be increased or added in that period). In Corrientes, this policy has resulted in a greater than 200 percent increase in the area of pine and eucalyptus monoculture plantations from 1994 to 2019 (3).

Plantations and sawmills: false promises of progress

Far from improving the economic and social situation of communities in Corrientes, the expansion of pine and eucalyptus monoculture plantations has brought serious consequences: the displacement of peasant families whose lands have been invaded, environmental contamination due to the use of agrochemicals, over-consumption of water, and an increase in fires.

In addition to these impacts, there are impacts from the sawmills—which are located in urban areas, and which primarily affect people living in nearby neighborhoods. Every week, the sawmills burn the mountains of sawdust that have accumulated as residue from their activities. In addition to experiencing health problems caused by the smoke and dust, families are affected by noise pollution from the mills, according to the survey conducted by the Guardians of Y'verá. Twenty-five percent of the households surveyed also reported the precarious employment situation of the sawmill workers, as well as cases of serious occupational accidents.

"The State is very absent in this town," Araceli explains. "There is no work, and, unfortunately, some children have to leave high school to go work at the sawmills—where they endanger their health with the dust they are constantly breathing in." She goes on to say: "In many cases the working situations are unsafe, and some workers suffer amputations because of the machines."

Another dangerous and polluting practice of the sawmills and the municipality is to fill the wetlands with sawdust, especially during periods of drought. During seasons of fires, which are increasingly frequent because of climate change and the tree plantation model, the presence of sawdust in wetlands next to neighborhoods increases the risk that fires will reach the homes. Far from being a firebreak, then, the wetland becomes combustible.

The community's fight

The Guardians of Y'verá see these health surveys that community activists have carried out as a tool in their fight against monoculture tree plantations and agribusiness. Prior to this survey, they had conducted one in Mburucuyá, 50 kilometers north of Concepción. There, the use of agrochemicals in citrus and tomato plantations is causing very severe health problems. In 2017, a nine-year-old girl by the name of Rocío Pared died of poisoning, after eating a poisoned tangerine that fell off of a tractor. Seven years later, the crime still remains unpunished, and her relatives and social organizations are [demanding justice](#).

"The community surveys are an important part of our struggle, because they focus on what people living in the area are saying," explains Cristian Barrionuevo, another member of Guardians of Y'verá. In addition to gathering information to shed light on the problems, the survey process creates a safe space for residents to express other concerns; in many cases, they stay in contact with the community activists who conducted the surveys and ask them questions or denounce other cases of contamination.

In this case, the survey on the sawmills effectively showed that it is not viable for these establishments to continue operating near homes. Meanwhile, it was also proven—once again—that the tree plantation model does not bring the promised benefits to the population, but rather the opposite.

In light of this, the Guardians of Y'verá are demanding the relocation of the sawmills away from towns and cities, and they continue to denounce the impacts of the industrial forestry model: "Our organization continues to demand the removal of sawmills from towns, and we continue to denounce the industrial forestry model and its consequences—which include the aforementioned problems, as well as other serious ones. For example, in the months of extreme drought, there were large fires in Corrientes, many of them in the towns of Concepción and Santa Rosa. These fires are exacerbated by filling the wetlands with sawdust—a practice that creates a fire hazard for all the homes."

Guardians of Y'verá, Corrientes, Argentina and the WRM International Secretariat

(1) Secretary of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of the Nation. Forestry Industry Dashboard: <https://www.magyp.gob.ar/sitio/areas/desarrollo-foresto-industrial/foresto-industria/tablero.php>

(2) WRM Bulletin, [Monoculture Tree Plantations, Poverty and False Solutions: Harvard's Legacy in Argentina, July 2023](#)

(3) Baruzzo, M; Smichowski, H. and others. Plantaciones Forestales: crecimiento y expansión de la actividad forestal en las Lomas Arenosas en Corrientes, Argentina. Universidad Nacional de Formosa, 2020: <https://ri.conicet.gov.ar/handle/11336/162643>

FROM THE WRM BULLETIN ARCHIVES

TO REREAD- A Reflection from Africa: Conquer the Fear for Building Stronger Movements

Several articles in the current bulletin report about community struggles against old and new forms of extractivism that threaten the territories and livelihoods of communities in Latin America, Africa and Asia. For this reason, we recommend the rereading of an interview with the WRM Advisory Committee member Nasako Besingi, from Cameroon, about the challenges communities face. From an African perspective, he reflects not only about resisting the corporate and State projects that affect the territories but also the challenges to build a stronger movement within the countries and cross-border. The interview, published in 2018 on the WRM Bulletin 241, [is available here](#).

RECOMMENDED

New publication: Promise, divide, intimidate, and coerce: Tactics palm oil companies use to grab community lands. Summary Edition

Recently, the Informal Alliance against industrial oil palm plantations in West and Central Africa has launched a new summary edition of the booklet “Promise, divide, intimidate, and coerce: Tactics palm oil companies use to grab community lands”. This new edition consists of a collection of more than 20 tactics that oil palm companies use to grab people’s land for plantation expansion. It is the result of many years of experience of community activists and grassroots groups who have been struggling to resist the corporate takeover of community lands. Although the focus is on the tactics of oil palm corporations, many similarities exist with other industries and sectors involved in land grabs and extractivism. The booklet is available [in French here](#), and [in English here](#). If you think the booklet would be useful in other languages too, do not hesitate to let us know! The the long version, from 2018, is available here: [French](#) / [English](#).

Argentina: Justice demanded for Arauco's eviction of peasant families

On July 5, 2024, three peasant families were violently evicted in Paraje San Lorenzo 2, in the municipality of Wanda, in the Argentine province of Misiones. The provincial police carried out the eviction, in collaboration with the multinational company, Arauco. During the operation, the police [destroyed the ten-hectare](#) farm which had been the families' livelihood for a decade. They demolished and burned their houses, their crops, their chicken coops and their pig pens. The families lost everything, and some of them were detained for up to three days. Peasant and indigenous organizations have organized together in the “Group in defense of the right to land,” and they have [presented a request](#) to the government of Misiones to urgently return these lands to the evicted families, or give them other lands. As of the end of August, they had received no response. Arauco, [which operates in Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay](#), arrived in Misiones in 1996, when it bought the Alto Paraná pulp mill. Since then, the multinational company has expanded onto more than 200,000 hectares of peasant and indigenous lands. Their pine and eucalyptus plantations have displaced communities and caused serious impacts on health, the environment and food sovereignty. In response, the communities have been carrying out a [historic resistance struggle](#).

Food and energy development project in Merauke threatening Indigenous Peoples and forests in Papua

Indonesian President Jokowi planted the first sugar cane of one more mega-project in Merauke Regency in the South Papua Province on 23 July 2024. He claims the project will help to address the global food and climate crises. But it seems just one more disastrous large-scale project set up in Indonesia and Papua - such as the failed [MIFEE project](#) - that put the livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples at risk. The organisations Pusaka and LBH Papua denounce the latest proposed mega-project, among other things, for fraudulent land grabbing involving 38 private companies; militarization of the region; disregard of the rights of and pressure on Indigenous Peoples to accept the project, and the absence of social and environmental studies on the project's impact. For more info, see [in English here](#) and [in Indonesian here](#).

DR Congo: Indigenous Batwa rights to return to their ancestral lands inside the Kahuzi-Biega National Park recognized after decades of struggle

The African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights recently made public its historic ruling on the Indigenous Batwa Peoples' right to return to their ancestral home from which they were violently evicted, when the Kahuzi-Biega National Park was created in Eastern DR Congo. Up to 6,000 Batwa were made landless when their ancestral land was declared a protected area in the 1970s. They received no compensation and faced decades of severe discrimination, deprivation and abuse. "We have suffered so much and for so long, now the community deserves to go back to their land and have their rights respected", says a Batwa quoted in an NGO press release on the decision. For more information in English, [see here the REDD-Monitor post](#) with links to the Minority Rights Group report and links to the ACHPR decision. For information [in French, see here](#). For information [in Spanish, see here](#).

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