



## Issue 145 - August 2009

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## OUR VIEWPOINT

### - Plantations as sinks: the carbon fraud at its worst

While for the majority of humanity climate change spells disaster, a few corporate-minded people perceive it as a good business opportunity. The way they see it, climate change is about carbon emissions and carbon can be traded as a commodity in the global market. This market – so they say – can be worth billions or even trillions of dollars and they expect it to bring them huge profits. Never mind if this market has any value at all in terms of halting climate change; the only thing that counts is its value as a profit making investment.

The problem is that these people have power and are very influential at both the national and international level, where laws and agreements are tailored to suit their wishes. Such has been the case in the Convention on Climate Change and its related Kyoto Protocol, which caved in to their pressure by accepting the carbon market as one of the “solutions” to climate change. Thus the so-called “Clean Development Mechanism” was approved as a means of “offsetting” CO2 emissions.

Additionally, governmental support to “free market” approaches have allowed those same actors to set up a voluntary carbon market where people are duped into believing that by paying some money they can be free from the guilt of their CO2 emissions –for instance, in air traveling. The “carbon neutral” market was thus born.

Both the “official” and “unofficial” carbon markets have included tree plantations as one of the possible mechanisms for “offsetting” emissions.

WRM has produced abundant information on the impacts of tree plantations in general, has produced analyses on why plantations should not be considered as carbon sinks, has detailed the reasons for opposing the carbon market and has explained why “carbon neutrality” is a fraud. All that information is easily available in our web site.

We would now like to focus on only one issue, which is in itself sufficient for the exclusion of tree plantations as carbon sinks: the risk of fire.

Imagine the following situation. A polluting company in the North pays a “carbon neutral” seller that promises to “offset” its emissions by planting trees. Let’s assume that the trees are in fact planted and that they do absorb the entire amount of carbon emitted by the polluting company. Six years later, the plantation goes up on fire. The result will be that the burnt plantation will have released the entire amount of carbon that it was supposed to “offset”. Which means that the plantation’s only use was to allow the polluting company to avoid investing in what is most necessary from a climate perspective: cutting emissions.

The above is a real situation scenario, because the most common types of plantations – eucalyptus and pines – are naturally prone to fire. Both types of trees are highly flammable in natural stands – fires in fact help them to out-compete other species – and are even more flammable in large-scale fast growth plantations because they create a very dry environment under their canopy, ideal for the spread of fire.

Additionally, the social conditions they create also make them arson targets in many places where local people have been affected by them. Although not a proven fact, some fires in places as distant as Chile and Swaziland, are said to have been initiated by local people displaced or impacted by plantations. Some 10 years ago, in Venezuela, plantation and pulp company Smurfit employees had orders to search local people near its plantations and to confiscate matches and lighters for fear of arson. And the possibility was very real, because most of the locals did in fact wish to set the plantations on fire and expressed it openly.

For both social and environmental reasons, plantations are constantly going up in flames all over the world. Some of the cases that have received more news coverage include plantations – and forests – in Australia, Spain, Portugal, Chile, South Africa, Swaziland. But it is sufficient to do a simple internet search to find many more plantation-related fires in countries with large areas of tree monocultures.

The obvious conclusion in relation to plantations as carbon sinks is that it is very unwise – not to say plain stupid – to use them for storing carbon. Plantations as sinks have only one positive aspect: they portray the carbon market fraud at its worse.

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## MARKETING THE CLIMATE

### **- Brazil: Plantar's 'new' eucalyptus projects advance towards CDM validation**

In mid-July the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Executive Board accepted a new methodology proposed as part of the controversial Plantar project in Minas Gerais, Brazil (see background on Plantar on WRM bulletins 84, <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/84/Plantar.html>, 70 and 72).

Plantar SA is a pig-iron and plantation company whose CDM project in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, was one of the first to be supported by the World Bank Prototype Carbon Fund (PCF), which anticipated the purchase of over 1.5 million CERs (around \$25 million, assuming credits are sold at \$15) in “emissions reductions” by 2012.

Plantar and the World Bank promoted the project as a model operation. However, the company's activities in the area of the project have illegally dispossessed many people of their land, destroyed jobs and livelihoods, dried up and polluted local water supplies, depleted soils and the biodiversity of the native cerrado biome, threatened the health of local people, and exploited labour under appalling conditions.

The company plants one species of non-native tree in an industrial plantation model for the sole purpose of burning them, thus releasing CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants. The trees are burned in small ovens to make charcoal that is then used for the company's pig iron operations, yet a considerable amount of destruction was required to clear a path for this industry.

The original proposal for the project, submitted as a forestry offset, was rejected by the CDM Executive Board. At first, Plantar claimed that there would be an “accelerated reduction in the plantation forestry base in the state of Minas Gerais.” It presented its plantations as forests and claimed that, once it had cut down the trees and burnt them to make pig iron, it would not replant them unless carbon finance was forthcoming. When reminded that CDM rules do not allow credit to be provided for “avoided deforestation”, the company rewrote its design documents to emphasise other justifications. The second attempt claimed that Plantar was preventing an otherwise necessary switch in the fuels for its pig iron operations from eucalyptus charcoal to more carbon-intensive coal or coke.

In other words, the company claimed that carbon credits for its 23,100 hectare project were the only thing that could ensure charcoal supplies, even though Minas Gerais alone boasts 2 million hectares of eucalyptus plantations. Plantar itself owns rural properties covering more than 180,000 hectares, mainly devoted to eucalyptus for charcoal and almost all located in Minas Gerais, and provides management services for more than 590,000 hectares of plantations for itself and other companies in Brazil.

The repeated rejection of this project should have led to it being scrapped, as some 143

local groups and individuals argued in a letter to the CDM Executive Board of June 2004: “[T]he claim that without carbon credits Plantar . . . would have switched to coal as an energy source is absurd.” The project was instead repackaged and resubmitted to the CDM in its component parts, which included a project to reduce methane in the tree-burning process, a revised reforestation project and a further project linked to the reforestation project, which claims to introduce a new iron ore reduction system in pig-iron processing.

In 2007, Plantar first managed to gain access to the CDM for its methane reduction project, which it expects to generate 112,689 CERs over a seven-year time span from 2004 to 2011.

The methodology of the second project, “Use of Charcoal from Planted Renewable Biomass in the Iron Ore Reduction Process through the Establishment of a New Iron Ore Reduction System,” was accepted by the UN Methodology Panel in mid-July 2009. Plantar argues that a new CDM methodology should be created relating to what it describes as an innovative method for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from blast furnaces. In fact, the project is wracked with discrepancies. For example, the Project Design Document admits that multiple sources will be used for the supposedly “sustainable” charcoal, but no environmental assessment has been made of the plantations that would be used in addition to those of Plantar itself.

The resubmitted reforestation project, linked to the iron ore methodology, promises “dedicated plantations” grown for the production of charcoal that is referred to, euphemistically, as “renewable biomass.” The company claims that the original rejection was not due to flaws in the project, but was rejected because CDM regulations on land-use, land-use change and forestry were not finalised when originally submitted. It attempts to backdate the claim for carbon credits to 2000 – although the fact that the activities described in the project have already been underway for nine years is *prima facie* evidence that there is nothing “additional” about it.

Plantar anticipates that the reforestation project would reduce over 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over its 30 year time span, which could fetch the company around \$45 million from its buyer, the Netherlands CDM Facility, a Dutch government scheme managed by the World Bank. The iron ore reduction project aims to generate 2,133,551 CERs (around \$30 million) over a seven year time frame.

Plantar’s projects, like all CDM projects, do not result in emissions reductions. Each project that is developed in the South allows more pollution to issue from fossil-fuelled power stations or heavy industry in the global North. The attempt by carbon offset promoters to distinguish between “good” and “bad” projects misses the point and seriously undermines constructive struggles on the ground. Not designed to deal with the real complexities and intricacies of communities and livelihoods, they require –particularly in the case of tree plantations- enormous quantities of land, water, machinery and are not set up to benefit the local communities or ecology. They generally take place in regions where people have little power, deepening the North-South gap while continuing to reinforce an unsustainable development paradigm.

By Tamra Gilbertson, Carbon Trade Watch, email: [tamra@tni.org](mailto:tamra@tni.org)

## **- Ecuador: Statement by the indigenous peoples against forest/REDD CO2lonialism**

The inclusion of forests on the carbon market in its REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) format was adopted by the United Nations System through the UN-REDD Programme. In 2008, the UN Secretary General presented the UN-REDD Programme, implemented by three UN agencies: FAO, UNEP and UNDP, in close collaboration with the World Bank.

This is a programme involving plans and credits to compensate for carbon emissions, which has been rejected by many social, environmental and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, that denounced the REDD initiative as a false solution to climate change.

The International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change has declared that: *"REDD will not benefit Indigenous Peoples, but in fact, it will result in more violations of Indigenous Peoples' Rights. It will increase the violation of our Human Rights ... steal our land, cause forced evictions, prevent access and threaten indigenous agriculture practices, destroy biodiversity and culture diversity and cause social conflicts. Under REDD, States and Carbon Traders will take more control over our forests."*(1)

The UN-REDD Framework Document itself warns that the Programme may erode non-profit making conservation practices based on cultural values, and exclude the landless and those having communal usage rights.

Still, carbon traders are moving fast. Australia and Indonesia have announced that they are working on two REDD carbon trade projects worth 200 million dollars that will use the forests of Asia and the Pacific to compensate for local industries' carbon emissions. They are planning to submit these projects at the negotiations on Climate Change to take place in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

However, organizations are working just as fast to unmask the REDD initiative, qualified as Forest CO2lonialism, and the organized peoples are expressing themselves on this issue.

In a recent communiqué, issued from Puyo, Ecuador, on 3 August (2), the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) pronounced itself against any type of environmental negotiations on forests, warning that "Any negotiation or extractive policy or activity involving forests and biodiversity on our Ancestral Territories will cause unimaginable implications, among them the extinction of the identity of the Ancestral Nations, the loss of control and management of our territories, passing them into administration by the State, foreign countries, transnational corporations, REDD negotiators or carbon traders. This will end in misery, hunger and extreme poverty as never seen before, as is the case with our indigenous brothers and sisters in the Amazon to the north of Ecuador, because of geopolitical, economic and commercial interests."

Based on this, the Confederation resolves that "it will not negotiate or dialogue without the consent of its grassroots on negotiations involving Oil, Mining, and Hydroelectric Extractive Activities, the Forest Partner Plan, REDD deals, or Environmental Services, etc, because certain organizations such as the Environmental Energy and Population Institution, the World Bank and Carbon Traders, together and in partnership with Latin American governments, intend to negotiate on the life of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, affecting our Territorial Rights."

Their rejection of REDD projects is because “they aim at taking away our free management of our resources and also because they are not a real solution to the problem of climate change, on the contrary, they just make it worse.”

In exchange, they have made a genuine proposal, set out in a “Guide for the Indigenous Peoples. False solutions to climate change” (3) which would imply:

- Drastically Cut Emissions at Source
- Transition to sustainable models of production, consumption & development
- Promote sustainable family farming, organic farming, perennial pastures
- Promote a paradigm shift
- Leave fossil fuels in the ground
- Promote renewable energy
- Scale down: Promote local sustainable energy solutions
- Reduce, reuse, recycle
- Phase out extractive industries
- Redirect military budgets; Stop war; Promote peace
- Pay ecological debt and cancel foreign debt to address climate crisis
- Promote peoples' sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water
- Ensure rights-based resource conservation
- Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Demarcate and protect Indigenous Peoples' territories
- Promote food sovereignty and food security
- End deforestation and its underlying causes
- Promote energy-efficient modes of transportation and specifically public transportation

(1) Quoted in FPP’s briefing: “Some views of indigenous peoples and forest-related organisations on the World Bank’s ‘Forest Carbon Partnership Facility’ and proposals for a ‘Global Forest Partnership’”,

[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/forest\\_issues/fcpf\\_ip\\_survey\\_feb08\\_eng.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/forest_issues/fcpf_ip_survey_feb08_eng.pdf)

(2) “Ecuador: CONFENIAE rejects environmental negotiations and extractive policies” (in Spanish), Servindi, <http://www.servindi.org/actualidad/14994>

(3) “A Guide for Indigenous Peoples. False solutions and climate change”,

[http://www.earthpeoples.org/CLIMATE\\_CHANGE/Indigenous\\_Peoples\\_Guide-E.pdf](http://www.earthpeoples.org/CLIMATE_CHANGE/Indigenous_Peoples_Guide-E.pdf)

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### **- Uganda: Carbon sink plantation - where trees are more important than people**

The UK-based New Forests Company is establishing tree plantations in Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania. The company states that “Whilst based on commercial forestry economics, our projects are underwritten by carbon credits ... in compliance with the Clean Development Mechanism. This means that its profits from the sale of wood will be increased by selling “carbon credits” to polluting industries in the North. It also means that companies buying these carbon credits should be also held responsible for the impacts of these plantations on local peoples and the environment.

Given that New Forests “has already established itself as the biggest tree planter and the dominant player in Uganda” and “is set to begin operations in other countries”, it is important to let people know about what is actually happening in its 54,000 acres of land in this country.

The company defines its activities as “Sustainable and socially responsible forestry”. The meaning of this is shown clearly in the pictures and short text in its own web site at [http://www.newforestscompany.com/project\\_area/uganda](http://www.newforestscompany.com/project_area/uganda). The “responsible” process begins with the destruction of local biodiversity in two steps: 1) manual “bush clearing” 2) “chemical spraying”. Once the local vegetation has been totally eliminated -and the environment polluted with chemical herbicides- it is substituted by two fast-growing alien tree species (Eucalyptus and Pine) planted as monocultures over large areas of land. These green deserts are the “New Forests” from where this company takes its name.

Evidence about how “socially responsible” the company can be is also provided in the above mentioned pictures. Two of them show a few women working in very uncomfortable conditions in a makeshift tree nursery. Another photo shows a 16-strong “clearing team” without appropriate clothing for the task. Finally, the 12 workers of the “chemical spraying” team are shown from too far away to assess if they have been provided with the necessary protective gear and clothing. Given that the company does not provide any information on the figure of 1800 workers that are “expected” to work in the plantation, one can only guess that most of them will be employed in tree planting and dismissed once that activity is completed.

But even in the impossible case that all the 1800 workers were to be employed on a permanent basis, the company fails to mention that over 10,000 residents of Kitumbi sub-county in Mubende district are facing eviction to make way to its plantations. Which means that –on balance- 8,200 people will be in a far worse condition than before the company’s arrival. And “far worse” is in fact an understatement of what they are being subjected to.

The following quotes from an article published on 20 July in the Ugandan web site New Vision, provides more than ample evidence about the “significant social benefits” that the company has been providing local people with.

According to the article, residents in the villages of Kyamukasa, Kyato, Kicucula, Kisiita, Mpologoma, and Kanaamire denounced that armed groups were beating people, abducting them and destroying their crops and houses. Such actions were meant “to subdue them to leave their land, which they have occupied for decades”, so that the New Forests Company could plant its trees.

“My banana plantation on three acres has been destroyed by the people who are trying to evict us. They even took 10 bags of maize from me,” Jessica Nyinamatama, a 56-year-old widow, who is taking care of nine orphans, said.

The local land committee chairman, William Mpamira stated that “Two of our neighbours were abducted by armed people who are trying to evict us.”, adding that “Richard Twahirwa was arrested on June 26 and Cyprian Munyagaju was arrested on July 13. Up to now, we don’t know their whereabouts.”

According to Mpamira, the population is suffering night attacks and as a result most residents have resorted to sleeping in the bushes. He also added that “we doubt whether the intention

of the company is to plant trees and protect the environment,” because “since 2005, they have been cutting down trees which we had preserved for commercial timber.”

As a result of the situation they were suffering, the villagers decided to go to Kampala, where they petitioned the lands minister, Omara Atubo, to stop the evictions. In response, the minister vowed to stop the investor from evicting the residents and said:

“As a ministry in charge of land, we are saddened by what has happened to you. It is important to respect your rights irrespective of whether you occupy the land legally or not. There is no need for your colleagues to disappear, your property to be stolen or crops to be destroyed,” Atubo said as the villagers applauded.

The minister said he would summon the resident district commissioner and the company officials to respond to the reports. Atubo also promised to lead a team of investigators to Kitumbi on a fact-finding mission.

“This is an urgent case because it is about life and death. These acts against our citizens should stop immediately. Investment is only good if the residents benefit from it. Human beings are more important than trees,” he stated.

New Forests Company officials should repeat after him: Human beings are more important than trees!

Based on article sent by Timothy Byakola ([acs@starcom.co.ug](mailto:acs@starcom.co.ug)), “Uganda: Mubende Residents Petition Lands Minister Over Eviction, Harassment”, by Moses Mulondo, 20 July 2009 <http://allafrica.com/stories/200907210016.html> and on information from the company’s web site: [http://www.newforestscompany.com/index.php/project\\_area/7/](http://www.newforestscompany.com/index.php/project_area/7/)  
<http://www.newforestscompany.com/>  
<http://www.newforestscompany.com/about-us>

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## **- Destroying with one hand, taking with the other: Biomass, REDD and forests**

Forests are big news these days. Preventing deforestation will help us address climate change (at least if the carbon stored in the forests isn't traded, allowing emissions to continue elsewhere). Yet forests have never been under such serious threat.

Reducing deforestation is a good idea. Stopping it altogether would be better. Paying the Indigenous People and local communities who protect the forests would be even better. That is supposed to be the idea behind the Big New Plan to save the forests: REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation). So why does REDD not attempt to address the drivers of deforestation?

As WRM has repeatedly pointed out, one of the most insidious threats to forests comes from industrial tree plantations. The current obsession with all things carbon, coupled with the UN's failure to differentiate between forests and plantations, provides the biggest ever incentive to clear forests and replace them with plantations.



A major part of that threat comes from a false solution to climate change: biomass plantations. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wood is considered to be “biogenic carbon”, which is “part of the natural carbon balance [that] will not add to atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide.” But as a result of this creative accounting, biomass plants are springing up like mushrooms after the rain. China is planning to build 30,000 MW of biomass power plants by 2020. The southern USA has been called the “Saudi Arabia of biomass”. Much of this expansion is to feed European utility companies, which have to produce 20 per cent of their energy from “renewable sources” by 2020.

As trees grow they absorb carbon. So far so good. But biomass proponents are ignoring the fact that burning wood releases carbon dioxide, much as the pulp and paper industry ignores the fact that pulping wood to make paper also produces massive amounts of carbon dioxide.

Of course, if the trees are replanted, they will absorb carbon dioxide. But even with the fastest growing eucalyptus trees there is a five to seven year delay before the carbon dioxide released by burning the wood is absorbed by the trees. If we are going to address dangerous runaway climate change, the last thing we need is a five to seven year delay. Trees in Europe and the USA grow more slowly and therefore take longer to absorb the carbon.

A May 2009 report in Science magazine, written by Marshall Wise and colleagues at the University of Maryland, compares two possible future scenarios. One where all carbon emissions are taxed (including emissions from land use change) and one where only fossil fuel and industrial carbon emissions are taxed. The latter case is the logical outcome from considering biomass as “biogenic carbon” and therefore ignoring the carbon dioxide emitted when it is burned. The result of this would be that “virtually all land that is not required for growing food and forest products is used for growing bioenergy”. A graph in the article shows that by 2065 all unmanaged forest, shrubland, grassland and unmanaged pasture worldwide would be converted to bioenergy plantations.

The authors drily comment that “Such grand-scale deforestation is hard to imagine in reality, because it is hard to imagine that society would find this result acceptable.”

Riau Province, on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, provides an example of precisely such “grand-scale deforestation”. Twenty years ago the province was 80 per cent forested. Now, only about 30 per cent is left. Two pulp and paper companies have driven the deforestation: Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) and Asia Pacific Resources International (APRIL). The conglomerates that own the companies (Sinar Mas and Raja Garuda Mas, respectively) have also invested in massive oil palm plantations, resulting in yet more forest destruction. One of the drivers of oil palm plantation expansion is the demand for bioenergy in Europe.

The Indonesian government is fond of REDD, not least because it hopes to gain millions of dollars worth of funding through REDD. Countries in the North are also keen to fund REDD in Indonesia, not least because it allows them to greenwash continued oil extraction. Norway's StatoilHydro, for example, is developing oil projects in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Norway's Ambassador to Indonesia, Eivind Homme can claim that “Norway is financing the UN REDD program, one of the pilot projects on climate change, in Indonesia.”

Indonesia was the first country in the world to establish legislation on REDD investments. Yet earlier this year, the same Indonesian government decided to allow the expansion of oil palm

plantations on peatlands. To grow palm oil or pulpwood tree plantations on peatland the land has to be cleared and drained, which releases millions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. The authorities also allow pulp companies to log native forests and turn a blind eye when they use illegal timber.

Will REDD address this destruction? Not if progress so far is anything to go by. In Guyana, President Bharrat Jagdeo assures industry that his Low Carbon Development Strategy will not affect logging companies, mining companies or plans for road building through forested areas. In Papua New Guinea, the government is doing little or nothing to address the destruction caused by industrial logging or oil palm plantations, while allowing a series of companies to sign dubious forest carbon trading deals with villagers for future REDD projects.

Unless REDD addresses the destruction caused by logging and plantations (whether for bioenergy, oil palm or pulpwood) it will fail to halt deforestation. And as long as the UN definition of forests fails to differentiate between forests and plantations, there is no chance of this happening.

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

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## COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

### **- Argentina: Wichi and Guarani women raise their voices against deforestation linked to soybean expansion**

According to a research paper produced by Daniel Slutzky from the Conicet Centre for Urban and Regional Studies quoted by journalist Claudio Scaletta (1), in the Province of Salta “until the mid nineties sugar cane, tobacco and citrus, together with kidney beans were the traditional crops.” Later the kidney bean cycle shrunk because of the rise of the soybean. Today this crop occupies over fifty percent of the cultivated land in the Province and continues to expand.”

Along with the soybean came deforestation. It has been estimated that between 1988 and the present, 2.3 million hectares were deforested. According to the article, “although indiscriminate felling started with kidney bean crops, it is now part of the soybean problem.”

In addition to deforestation, soybean also brought land concentration, unemployment and eviction. “The increasing prices of oilseeds and new technologies have made many marginal areas more profitable. The price of land and land renting was low in relation to potential profitability, sufficiently low to absorb the extra cost of logging and freight to ports. Due to soybean requirements regarding scale and facilities, these new opportunities were only accessible to medium and large-scale farmers. In the year 2000, 95 thousand hectares were in the hands of 19 farm operators and one of these alone possessed 25,000 hectares.

Concentration of land coexisted with the eviction of workers. Technological modernization led to a drastic cut in labour requirements, dropping from 2.5 working days per hectare to 0.5, an unprecedented increase in work productivity. The counterpart was a significant migration of the rural population and the virtual disappearance of small villages. The traditional linking between large farm operators and small farmers, many of them indigenous farmers, was broken. Small peasant subsistence farmers started finding serious difficulties in complementing their income with salaries from the seasonal demand for cane and bean harvesting, activities that lost relative importance. To the situation of small farmers evicted from their lands is added that of the indigenous peoples, such as the Wichi. Some emigrated to the suburbs of Tartagal and Embarcación and the City of Salta. Others found themselves cornered in shrinking forests.”

In this context, on 17 December 2008, 18 indigenous Wichi and Guarani communities from Salta filed a precautionary measure before the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation demanding the suspension of the numerous logging authorizations issued by the provincial Government. Through the Environmental Secretariat, the Government had endorsed requests for clear felling and logging on a total of 807,509 hectares of forest. In spite of complaints about pollution, diseases and natural disasters caused by the depredation of native forests and the indigenous communities' demand to have their ancestral lands restored, the Court did not issue any definitive verdict. At the end of December 2008, it ordered the temporary suspension of clear felling and logging of native forests, authorized during the last quarter of 2007, until an environmental impact assessment was made, which should be ready within 90 days.

On 26 March 2009 the Court extended the suspension, while awaiting the provincial report. In spite of this verdict, deforestation continued, the companies continued to advance on the territories claimed by the communities and on the native forest.

Faced by the imminent final verdict of the Court, 20 Wichi and Guarani women took the decision to make themselves heard. Thus, at the end of July they travelled from Salta to the capital city, as they explained “for US, WITHOUT INTERMEDIARIES, to take the claims to the places where the decisions on our lives are taken, that is why we are going to Buenos Aires.” So far, the response to their claims, presented before the provincial municipalities, has only been more repression, exclusion and discrimination.

These women, who are determined to “take up the arms of awareness,” have announced that they do not want to be represented by intermediary organizations “be they NGOs or others.” “We want to shout our claims clearly: for our lands and our territories that are being devastated by clear felling, because the ban on felling the native forest is not being complied with.” “We are in a state of poverty which we did not seek, but that is the consequence of the dehumanized way people on the other side behave who, thought their money and power, have overwhelmed us and made other poor brothers and sisters confront us by invading our lands and depriving us of our territory.”

They speak about the diseases that come with clear felling, of leishmaniasis which they are unable to defend themselves against because they do not know about it. “Nobody comes here to teach us, nobody comes to train us and we know that no indigenous people are involved in preparing health projects and programmes.” (2)

In Buenos Aires, the group of women presented a petition to a number of institutions and

organizations, among which the Supreme Court, the Presidency of the Nation, the Nation's Peoples Defence Office, the Chamber of Deputies, Amnesty International, the American Association of Jurists and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights.

However, there is no truce: on 14 August the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation decided euphemistically to "allow the execution of tasks for forest management in the Departments of San Martin, Oran and Santa Victoria." This implies that deforestation will be allowed to continue in the north of Salta, rejecting the demands of the indigenous communities.

The women stated that the response they were given was that "perhaps what we are denouncing is "Selective Felling" or "Reforestation". After looking at the photos and the proof of all we had submitted, they told us that we could follow the example of our brothers and sisters from the South who are the protectors of national parks!!!! But of course, provided we have the ownership deeds!!! OUTRAGEOUS!!!! They neither gave us a reply nor an alternative." (3)

As they stated "we are suffering at this time from what we have suffered all our lives: dispossession. If before they used to fight us with Winchesters, Remingtons and Mausers, now it is with this soybean model."

(1) "Soja y bosques nativos", Claudio Scaletta, page 12,

<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/cash/17-3842-2009-03-29.html>

(2) "Para ser vistas y escuchadas. Mujeres de la comunidad wichi "Honat Le' Les", en lucha", Raquel Schrott and Ezequiel Miodownik for the News Agency Biodiversidadla,

<http://www.biodiversidadla.org/content/view/full/50831>

(3) "Argentina\_MUJERES WICHI Y GUARANI: La lucha continúa", Red Latina Sin Fronteras,

[http://red-latina-sin-fronteras.lacoctelera.net/post/2009/08/20/argentina\\_mujeres-wichi-y-guarani-lucha-continua](http://red-latina-sin-fronteras.lacoctelera.net/post/2009/08/20/argentina_mujeres-wichi-y-guarani-lucha-continua)

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### **- Burma: The looming social and environmental disaster of the Tasang dam**

Keng Kham is a community located along the Pang River, that flows down from the mountain and into the Salween River in southern Shan State of Burma. The community had an estimated total population of 14,800 before the Burma Army started in 1996 an anti-insurgency campaign that forced relocation and made the majority to flee to Thailand. Now it has dwindled to some 3,000 in 114 villages.

The situation for those that still live in Keng Kham is constantly precarious. Villagers often have to hide from passing Burma Army patrols to avoid harassment, extortion, forced labor, or interrogation. However, those who remain are managing to maintain their traditional rural ways of life and culture in an ecologically unique area.

Yet, they face a further major threat: the Tasang dam, the largest of five dams planned in Burma for the transnational Salween River by the Chinese, Thai and Burmese governments, that will submerge 870 km<sup>2</sup> in the heartland of Shan State. Tens of thousands will be displaced by the dams upstream and a half million will be impacted in the delta downstream. Three of the dams will flood areas of outstanding biodiversity and one will submerge the

homeland of the last remaining Yin Ta Lai people, who now number just 1,000.

The majority of the power from the dams will be sold to Thailand, providing revenues to the military ruling Burma but not electricity to a domestic population that faces chronic energy shortages. Keng Kham community will be directly impacted from the Tasang Reservoir when the dam is finished as nearly all the 114 villages will go under water together with their river-fed farms, sacred cave temples, pristine waterfalls and forests.

Initial surveys for the dam began in 1998, in the midst of the relocation campaign. Project investors include the Thai MDX Company and China's Gezhoubu Group Company. They are eager to begin construction and have already held a ground-breaking ceremony.

However, the project continues to be delayed by the instability of the area surrounding the dam site. Areas south and southeast of the dam site are under the control of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a ceasefire group. Since early 2009 the Burmese regime has been putting pressure on ceasefire armies to transform into Border Guard Forces which will be fully under Burma Army control. Many of the ceasefire groups, including the UWSA, are resisting this, throwing into doubt the stability of former ceasefire territories. This will directly threaten the security of the main supply route from Thailand to the Tasang dam-site, which is also the expected route of the power transmission lines.

Meanwhile rampant logging carries on unabated in areas surrounding the dam site. Hard wood trees including teak are being clearcut for transport and sale in China and Thailand.

Logs are transported after the rainy season. From January to May 2009, Century Dragon, a logging company of Tay Za, a close associate of the Burmese generals, and the Wa-controlled Hong Pang Company were actively logging from the east banks of the Salween inland. In the past, Thai Sawat logged only big trees in this area, but today's loggers are clear-cutting everything.

Most of the forests in the Mong Pu Long area are now gone. Recently Hong Pang Company also started building a logging road west of the Salween between Mong Pan and Tasang. In various areas logs are floated down the Salween for sale in Thailand or sent up the Mekong for sale in China.

The Shan Women's Action Network has documented sexual violence by Burma Army troops against hundreds of women living around the Tasang dam site and denounced that "Women's lives are interdependent with nature because we must collect vegetables, firewood, and traditional medicines for the sustenance and health of our families. The natural environment must be preserved for the survival of our future generations and the most important component is water and our rivers. But now Burma's military government is going to build dams on our Salween River for their own interest. Before building the dams they are logging and constructing the road to carry materials to the dam site. At the same time the number of soldiers is increasing for the dam's security. This situation is making it very difficult and unsafe for women who depend on the forest around the Tasang dam."

The Shan Sapawa Environment Organization is calling for a halt of the Tasang dam. They have produced the report "Roots and Resilience" (1). By focusing on the ecologically unique area of Keng Kham community and their struggle to survive amidst civil war, the report tries to reveal the potential human costs and all that will be lost under the flood of the Tasang Dam.

(1) "Roots and Resilience", by Shan Sapawa Environment Organization, can be downloaded at <http://www.salweenwatch.org/>

Article based on the report "Roots and Resilience" and the 4 August 2009 press release.  
Contact: Sai Sai, e-mail: [shansapawa@gmail.co](mailto:shansapawa@gmail.co)

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### **- Kenya: Projected sugar cane plantations may wipe out invaluable Tana River Delta**

The Tana River Delta is one of the most important wetlands in Africa and among the largest and most important freshwater wetland systems of Kenya. It covers an area of 130,000 ha where a mix of savannah, mangrove swamps, forest and beaches provides good grass throughout the dry season. Local Orma and Wardei pastoralists have used the delta for centuries.

The website of the Tana River Delta campaign describes that "there are also large area of rice paddies and other agricultural activities being carried out along the edges of the Delta. Crops grown in the Delta include rice, maize, mango, cassava, bananas, melons, beans, peas and many other vegetables. Most farmers belong to the Pokomo ethnic group. Fishermen include the Bajuni people and migrants from other parts of Kenya.

The Tana River Delta is a lifeline to some 30,000 farmers, pastoralists and fishermen as well as minority hunter and gatherer communities collectively called the Wasanya."(1)

This invaluable ecosystem that sustains a high biodiversity and the livelihood of tens of thousands of people may well be disrupted out of blind short-term profits. The push for agrofuels is behind the project of large-scale planting of sugar cane in order to produce large amounts of ethanol for export to the European market.

Mumias Sugar Company (MSC) Ltd. and Tana and Athi River Development Authority (TARDA), in a planned private joint venture, are proposing to turn 20,000 hectares of the mostly pristine Tana River Delta over to sugarcane. On 11th June 2008 Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) approved the project.

A short sight approach has overestimated the potential profit and ignored Tana delta's ecological benefits, including flood prevention, the storage of greenhouse gases and food provision that "defied valuation", concluded a report commissioned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The report warned of grave environmental consequences if the project went ahead. (2)

Tana River villagers and fishermen as well as pastoralists who bring 60,000 cattle from as far afield as the Somali and Ethiopian border regions to graze in the delta during the dry season are angry because their concerns about the loss of livelihoods have not been addressed. They have disrupted public hearings on the project.

"Since time immemorial, thousands of livestock farmers in Tana River have been relying on the delta for the provision of pasture and water for their animals. During severe drought,

livestock farmers from as far as Garissa and Ijara in North Eastern Province stream here for pasture and water," Orma elder, Mr Hussein Guracho said. "When Tarda and Mumias Sugar bring in the sugar project, millions of animals will be wiped out by drought since Tana River is semi-arid, denying over 100,000 pastoralists a living," he explained.

Anger grows out of outrage: "Tarda will establish the factory over our dead bodies" warned the protestors. (3)

Cases like this of the Tana River Delta illustrate the destructive side of agrofuels with their toll of poverty and displacement when occupying large tracts of land that are people's livelihood base.

(1) "About the Tana River Delta", <http://www.tanariverdelta.org/tana/about.html>

(2) "Wildlife and livelihoods at risk in Kenyan wetlands biofuel project", Xan Rice, The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jun/24/biofuels.wildlife>

(3) The East African Standard (Nairobi), <http://www.suc-re-ethique.org/Kenya-Tana-Residents-Protest.html>

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#### COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

### **- FSC's greenwashing of tree monocultures: Evidence provided by the Brazilian Pulp and Paper Industry itself**

For over a decade, the World Rainforest Movement has been denouncing that -by certifying large scale tree plantations- the FSC is greenwashing the destructive activities of plantation companies in Southern countries (for further information see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/FSC/index.html>). More importantly, WRM has stressed that by doing so, the FSC is undermining local peoples' struggles against monoculture tree plantations.

Evidence supporting the above is provided in a video by the executive president of the Brazilian Pulp and Paper Industry (BRACELPA), who argues that Brazilian "planted forests" cannot be called Green Deserts (as local communities suffering their impacts define them), because "all our forests [plantations] are certified by the FSC ...".

The video is available at [http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/FSC/FSC\\_greenwashing.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/FSC/FSC_greenwashing.html)

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### **- Indonesia: Indigenous Peoples oppose acacia plantations on their customary lands**

The indigenous people of Teluk Meranti in the Kampar Peninsula, Riau, Sumatra, are resisting efforts by a pulp and paper company to take over their customary lands.

The pulpwood plantation company, Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper, (RAPP) owned by the pulp and paper giant, APRIL, has obtained in principle permits to develop Acacia plantations on 45,000 hectares of peat swamp forest in the Kampar Peninsula, Riau Province, Sumatra.

RAPP would like to establish up to 150,000 hectares of Acacia plantations in a ring around the edge of the 700,000 Kampar Peninsula on peat forests that are under the traditional management and ownership of about ten indigenous communities.

RAPP's permits cover peat forests that are the customary lands of the indigenous community of Teluk Meranti. If the acacia plantations are developed on their lands, the Teluk Meranti community will lose an essential source of livelihood, as it manages and uses the area for fish, shrimp, small game, building materials and non timber forest products. RAPP plans to start clearing the forests this year.

In June, the community of Teluk Meranti sent a letter to the company RAPP/APRIL declaring that they reject the presence of the company on their lands. They did so "with regard to the following considerations:

1. The land is to be retained for our grandchildren's future
2. Experiences by other surrounding villages and areas where the RAPP company has operated have impacted negatively on the local community's rights
3. It has caused loss of agricultural and horticultural land belonging to the community
4. The community will lose the source of its livelihood (economic, social and cultural) from the forest which will be converted to an industrial timber plantation."

This community has the right to this land because as they specified in their letter: "We, the community of Teluk Meranti, have inhabited and utilised this area in a wise and traditional way since long before Indonesia's independence".

The letter, signed by 82 community members, had the intention specified by the community "that unwanted problems will be avoided in the future". Copies of the letter were sent to the most important authorities of the country including the Ministry of Forests and different Commissions of the House of Representatives.

Scale Up, a local organization that is now assisting the community to prepare a map of their customary territory, was recently requested by community leaders to contact national and international groups and ask for their support in their struggle to stop their peat forests being destroyed by RAPP.

As a result, on August 17, 26 organizations from Asia, Europe, and the Americas sent a joint letter to the company, urging it to respect the community's decision of rejecting the presence of the company in their lands. In the letter, they reminded the company that "the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, includes the right of indigenous peoples to reject planned developments that would affect their customary lands". Copies of this letter were sent to the community, the authorities, the press and the customers of RAPP.

We hope that the Indonesian authorities will take action to ensure that the rights of the indigenous people of Teluk Meranti are respected and that they will intervene to stop the planned acacia plantations on their lands.

Article based on information sent by Patrick Anderson. Please contact WRM for his email address.



## **- Indonesia: Call for suspension of World Bank (IFC) lending to oil palm**

An internal audit has revealed that the World Bank's private sector arm – the International Finance Corporation (IFC) – has allowed commercial interests to override its social and environmental standards in making major loans to the oil palm sector in Indonesia.. The uncontrolled expansion of oil palm plantations in Indonesia has become synonymous with widespread clearance of forests and peatlands, massive CO2 emissions and the theft of indigenous peoples' lands. Yet the government plans to expand from a current 7 million hectares of plantings to more than 20 million hectares over the next decade.

Although the IFC knew about all these risks, it went ahead with loans to the Wilmar palm oil trading group, in violation of its own standards, according to the report. The IFC failed to assess the supply chains or look into the damaging impacts of the company's subsidiary plantations that were taking over community lands and forests in Borneo and Sumatra. These findings come from a highly critical audit report just issued by the semi-independent Compliance Advisory Ombudsman of the IFC which looked into a detailed complaint filed in July 2007 by Forest Peoples Programme and a coalition of 19 Indonesian civil society and indigenous peoples' organisations, including SawitWatch and Gemawan.

The complaint was sparked by the fact that the IFC was persistently ignoring NGO warnings that its favoured commercial client, Wilmar International, was operating in violation of both IFC standards and Indonesian law. In a detailed dossier submitted in 2007, the NGOs demonstrated that Wilmar was: failing to recognise the customary rights of local communities; grabbing the lands of communities with the connivance of local and national State agencies; party to serious human rights abuses when communities objected to the takeover of their lands; clearing extensive areas of forest and peat; carrying out illegal practices such as use of fire to clear lands; failing to comply with legal regulations and failing to carry out environmental impact assessments and; breaking promises made to communities to establish areas as smallholdings. At the time the IFC made the investment guarantee to Wilmar that triggered the complaint, Wilmar group companies were actually the subject of legal proceedings brought by the government for alleged violations of environmental laws.

The company, Wilmar trading, has over the 8 years that it has enjoyed IFC patronage grown into the world's largest trader of crude palm oil and become a 'vertically integrated' business empire, worth an estimated US\$7 billion, with factories in eastern Europe, ports and refineries in Sumatra, shipping facilities, an HQ in Singapore and an aggressively expanding 'land bank' of extensive plantations in Sarawak and Indonesia, heading towards a target area of 1 million hectares.

The IFC-Wilmar case has been particularly shocking as, even after the complaint had been filed and a team from the CAO was negotiating land disputes between Wilmar and local communities, IFC staff persisted in ignoring the situation and prepared a further loan to the Wilmar Group. Although NGOs warned the President and full Board of this travesty and even though IFC staff were again in violation of procedures, the Board approved a further loan to the company.

As is normal when the CAO issues an audit, in this case Senior IFC staff also published a 'Management Response' to go out at the same time that the audit was released. Having

carefully scrutinised this response NGOs have told the IFC they find it 'inadequate'. In a strongly worded letter supported by NGOs from all over the world to World Bank/IFC President, Richard Zoellick, they argue that:

"In the first place, it is clear to us, and the audit confirms this, that IFC suffers a systemic problem whereby the pressure to lend and to support business interests overcomes prudence, due diligence and concern for social and environmental outcomes. No actions are proposed to address this problem. Secondly, the Management Response provides no contextual analysis of the wider problems within the palm oil sector in Indonesia, instead an Annex to the management response only puffs the potential benefits. As our own documentation has detailed and as the audit report confirms, the palm oil sector in Indonesia suffers endemic problems which are not limited to one company or group of companies.... We note in particular that in the Management Response:

- No actions are suggested to discipline IFC staff for systematic policy violations.
- No actions are recommended to stop IFC staff misleading the Board when controversial projects are presented for the Board's approval.
- No actions are proposed to remedy the wider problems still besetting the Wilmar group's operations in which IFC has so heavily invested.
- No actions are proposed to address the fundamental problem that the current land tenure laws and land acquisition procedures in Indonesia deny customary rights and encourage companies to take over communities' lands without their free, prior and informed consent.
- No actions are proposed to address the problems raised in our complaint that companies are planting on peatlands and burning forests, despite global concern about climate change being exacerbated by deforestation and land use change,
- Indeed no comprehensive action plan is presented to clarify what IFC staff will actually do to ensure future compliance with standards."

The NGOs have thus called on the IFC President and Board to suspend IFC lending to the palm oil sector in Indonesia until these deficiencies are addressed.

Sources: Press release by Forest Peoples Programme, SawitWatch and Gemawan, 10th August 2009;

[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi\\_igo/ifc\\_wilmar\\_cao\\_fpp\\_press\\_rel\\_aug09\\_eng.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/ifc_wilmar_cao_fpp_press_rel_aug09_eng.pdf)

Original complaint and follow up correspondence with the IFC and CAO see:

[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi\\_igo/ifc\\_wilmar\\_fpp\\_let\\_jul07\\_eng.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/ifc_wilmar_fpp_let_jul07_eng.pdf)

[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/prv\\_sector/bases/oil\\_palm.shtml](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/prv_sector/bases/oil_palm.shtml)

CAO audit see:

[http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi\\_igo/ifc\\_wilmar\\_cao\\_audit\\_report\\_jun09\\_eng.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/ifc_wilmar_cao_audit_report_jun09_eng.pdf)

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### **- Malaysia: Indigenous Peoples call for a moratorium on large-scale tree plantations**

On the World Indigenous Peoples Day – 9th August 2009 – the Malaysian Indigenous Peoples Organisations Coalition called on for Malaysian State governments “to stop large-scale plantations and other extractive activities on our customary lands until effective measures to safeguard our rights and the environment are in place”.

Malaysians Indigenous Peoples Organisations described in a press release (1) how timber companies have exploited their forest, which provides for their means of livelihoods: “Logging have destroyed our fundamental existence to livelihood, the plant varieties including medicinal plants, animals and fish have either become threatened or extinct.”

More hardships are in store for the Indigenous People: “In Sarawak, our communities are yet to face the worse in the near future. As the sun sets on the timber industry in Sarawak, the current state government is energetically seeking to diversify and broaden its revenue base via land development for oil palm plantations and large-scale trees plantations. These land development activities has time and again encroached into the lands and forests of various indigenous communities which claim native customary rights (NCR) over these territories.”

Taking NCR land as “idle land”, the government promotes large-scale commercialisation as a means of bringing “the native communities into mainstream society in order to alleviate their poverty. This argument was used to promote logging in the 1970s and is now used to justify the introduction of oil palm plantations and industrial tree plantations.”

However, such “development” has proved a failure: “the indigenous and local community by and large do not benefit from these activities that destroy the resources on their land”. “After more than three decades of extensive logging and deforestation, why is it that most of our people living in the interior are now worse off than before.” Indigenous Peoples’ organisations question “the reigning ‘development paradigm,’ the idea that these large-scale projects are always beneficial to the indigenous communities.” The reality is that “such projects generate large profits for a small number of people, the elites and the corporations; they also bring social and environmental devastation to the country, and beyond.”

Now, apart from oil palm plantations, the State government of Sarawak has issued licenses for tree plantations over 1,397,644 hectares including NCR land and water catchment areas. “With the water catchment damaged or destroyed, the communities are no longer able to get clean water. The rivers would be polluted with chemicals and silt that washed down from the forest plantation estates” reads the statement.

Plantation companies have already illegally encroached into the customary lands of the indigenous communities without their free, prior and informed consent, resulting in disputes over rights to land and resources that lead to an increasingly tense situation. More than 100 legal demands have been issued by Indigenous communities against the plantation developers, the State Agencies and the State government in the High Courts all over Sarawak.

Representatives from Indigenous Peoples organisations that form the Malaysian Indigenous Peoples Organisations Coalition “strongly urge a moratorium on any plantation development projects and call the government to immediately bring about meaningful solutions to all these land disputes problems and land rights issues in Sarawak.”

(1) “Malaysian Indigenous Peoples want moratorium on plantations, other extractive projects”, press release of the Malaysian Indigenous Peoples Organisations Coalition, <http://www.indigenousportal.com/Environment/-Malaysian-Indigenous-Peoples-want-moratorium-on-plantations-other-extractive-projects.html>, sent by Bruno Manser Fonds, e-mail: [bmf@bmf.ch](mailto:bmf@bmf.ch)

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## **- Meeting of the Latin American network against monoculture tree plantations**

On 1 August 2009, members of the Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations (RECOMA) met in the locality of Villa Serrana, Uruguay, to examine the reasons for the alarming expansion of monoculture tree plantations aimed at the production of charcoal, pulp, timber and agrofuels (agrodiesel and ethanol derived from wood), mainly intended for export.

Representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay exchanged information and experiences regarding the different types of plantations: eucalyptus, pine, oil palm, teak and gmelina.

An element common to all of them is the increasing appropriation of territories by forestry companies and oil palm growers, leading to a concentration of land directly affecting local community rights and good living, as set out in the final declaration of the meeting (see the complete text at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/RECOMA/Declaration.html>).

In the case of Chile, which has become the “model” for the expansion of timber plantations in the region, there are two and a half million hectares planted with pine and eucalyptus trees for pulp, concentrated in just a few regions. The expansion continues: over the past five years pulp production has doubled, with the introduction of mills with an annual production of over 1 million tons – 98% intended for the international market.

The expansion continues thanks to government support, although the pattern has changed. Subsidies and tax exemptions granted to companies are now directed towards small farmers and indigenous peoples, seeking to co-opt them with bridge loans that pay money in advance to establish the plantation.

In Peru, a decree known as Law of the Jungle, at the root of the recent indigenous rising, intends to establish private investment on thousands of hectares of Amazon forest. With the reasoning that “reforestation” of “deforested” zones is being promoted, the law will make it possible to introduce large-scale tree plantations on lands that are part of the traditional migratory farming model followed by peasant and indigenous farmers.

In the Peruvian sierra, plantations are promoted within plans for closing mines, while oil palm plantations advance in the forest area, displacing small farming communities. There are also 18 tree plantation projects in the coastal area.

In Colombia pine, eucalyptus and oil palm plantations cover 600,000 hectares. In the case of oil palm plantations, the rise of agrofuels has had a strong impact and there is talk of establishing 3 million hectares of plantations.

Following the Chilean model, plantation expansion has enjoyed state support under the form of subsidies and different types of tax exemptions.

At this time, policies are stepping up commercialization of the natural heritage (forests, water, fauna, etc.), promoting strategies for the certification of plantations and dismantling the

Ministry of the Environment's monitoring system.

In Ecuador, tree plantations have been established in forest and paramo areas, on the lands of communities that were induced and deceived into signing 20-year contracts whereby they gave the State the right to intervene and have left themselves exposed to the application of sanctions.

In Nicaragua the cultivation of oil palm has started on the Atlantic coast, hand in hand with ferocious deforestation affecting the Bosawas Reserve. A programme of reforestation and highway infrastructure in the west of the country - including teak and gmelina plantations - is in the pipeline.

In Mexico there are projects for 1 million hectares of oil palm plantations. The promotion is taking place at an accelerated and disorganized pace, with the rationale that this is not deforestation but occupation of degraded lands. The European Union has been an important actor in the expansion of oil palm plantations around the Lacandona Forest, with the argument that they are preventing the indigenous people from deforesting the area.

The paper-pulp and iron and steel industry sectors are behind the expansion of tree plantations in Brazil. In 2003, the government's forestry plan proposed a growth of 6 million hectares of plantations. Finally, plantation expansion mainly took place in the States of Rio Grande do Sul, Parana, Para and Bahia, in addition to Espirito Santo and Minas Gerais, although the expansion was not quite so intense in the latter states.

The first stage of expansion in Brazil was mainly on the traditional lands of indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant farmers' lands. During the last stage, the plantations advanced on areas that were intended for the Agrarian Reform or on the lands of small farmers through rental-type contracts.

In Uruguay, the plantation promotion law established benefits leading to the establishment of one million hectares planted with trees, of which 600,000 are in the hands of just 4 foreign companies: Stora Enso (Sweden-Finland), Arauco (Chile), Weyerhaeuser (USA) and Botnia (Finland). A consortium involving Stora Enso and Arauco hold the largest landed estate in the history of Uruguay covering 253,000 hectares.

FSC certification has been an important factor in the consolidation and legitimization of the model, weakening opposition. Certification is present in all the plantations and is merely a bureaucratic process.

As set out in the RECOMA declaration "The process of tree plantation expansion is becoming more consolidated and is expanding further, hand in hand with false solutions to climate change such as agrofuels and the wrongly called 'carbon sinks' that are simply new business opportunities for transnational companies."

"Communities, movements and social organizations resisting this uncontrolled advance of monoculture plantations are undergoing persecution, harassment, criminalization and plundering of their means of living."

RECOMA affirms that "As part of our struggle we take up the defence of food sovereignty, the defence of land and territories, forests, biodiversity and water."

