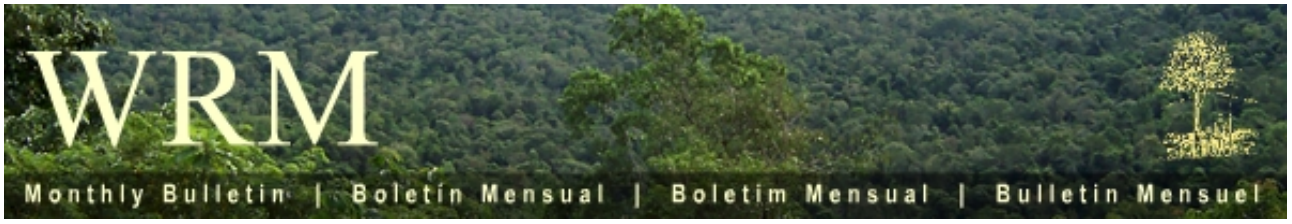

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- International Year of Biodiversity: And what about peoples?

The United Nations declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity. According to the official web site, "It is a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. The world is invited to take action in 2010 to safeguard the variety of life on earth: biodiversity." Biodiversity is portrayed as our "natural wealth", on which we rely to provide us with "food, fuel, medicine and other essentials" we "simply cannot live without."

We believe that although true, the above does not adequately reflect the full

meaning of biodiversity. In this respect, we think it is necessary to stress that humans are part of the Earth's biodiversity, not only as its users –and abusers- but also as a repository of a huge diversity of cultures, many of which having a profound knowledge about the sustainable use of biodiversity. Some of these cultures have already been wiped off from the face of the Earth while others –using the biodiversity language- have become "rare, threatened and endangered". However, they are not to be found in "red lists" as in the case of animal species that face extinction.

But extinction is taking place right now. With great sadness, we received the news that on February 4th the last member of a unique tribe died on India's Andaman Islands. Boa Sr, who died aged around 85, was the last speaker of 'Bo', one of the ten Great Andamanese languages. The Bo are thought to have lived in the Andaman Islands for as much as 65,000 years, making them the descendants of one of the oldest human cultures on Earth.

Had she been the last representative of a species of tiger, or monkey or gorilla, her death would have probably received worldwide coverage. But she was "only" the last member of a "tribe" in an island in the Indian Ocean.

In the forests of that same island live the Jarawa, who chose and managed to resist contact with all outsiders until 1998. According to Survival International, they are now under serious threat. Poachers are camping for days at a time in their forest, and local authorities have defied an order from India's supreme court to close the road that cuts through the Jarawa's reserve. In 1999 and 2006, the Jarawa suffered outbreaks of measles – a disease that has wiped out many indigenous groups worldwide following contact with outsiders.

A similar situation is being faced by a number of indigenous peoples living in the forests of South America, who are still resisting contact with the surrounding society. They live in voluntary isolation in their ancestral territories and were never asked if they would like to be citizens of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay or Perú. Their territories were simply included inside the boundaries of the new countries created in the 19th Century by mostly Spanish and Portuguese descendants after independence from Spain and Portugal.

Their fate is closely linked to one of the best publicized biodiversity issues: tropical forest destruction. Most of the remaining isolated groups live in the Amazon forest while a few others live in the Chaco forest of Bolivia and Paraguay. Forest biodiversity provides for all their needs, but their forests are being constantly destroyed and degraded by the outside society, thus putting them on the brink of extinction.

Many other indigenous peoples and traditional communities worldwide are struggling to protect their diverse cultures -strongly rooted in biodiversity- against the forces of so-called "development" unleashed against them by governments and international institutions. Industrial logging, oil, mining, dams, plantations, cattle-ranching, shrimp farming don't simply "happen": they

are promoted by those same governments and institutions that are supposed to protect biodiversity.

Instead of receiving a well-deserved “environmental award” for protecting biodiversity, these peoples are being dispossessed, repressed and evicted from their territories, either to allow the occupation of their land by corporations that destroy biodiversity or to establish so-called “protected areas” that destroy their livelihoods and culture –without even achieving the stated aim of biodiversity conservation.

If by declaring 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity, the United Nations truly aims at safeguarding the “variety of life on earth”, it should start by safeguarding the rights of all those peoples, thus ensuring the conservation of biodiversity in its full extent. That would be a good start.

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Africa: The huge value of mangroves for communities

Africa is richly endowed with mangroves, which cover over 3.2 million hectares, extending from Mauritania to Angola on the Atlantic coast and from Somalia to South Africa along the Indian Ocean.

Mangrove forests have a huge value for coastal communities that derive their livelihoods from them. Although commonly defined as “poor” in official statistics, communities living in healthy mangrove areas have what many urban people lack: diverse and abundant food. Mangroves provide for many of their needs, usually complemented with other productive activities such as farming, poultry, bee-farming and so on. Mangrove wood is a multi-purpose resource for fish stakes, fish traps, boat building, boat paddles, yam stakes, fencing, carvings, building timber, fuel and many other uses.

The Rufiji River Delta mangroves provide a good example on the above. Located in southern Tanzania, it is the largest delta in Eastern Africa and contains the largest estuarine mangrove forest on the eastern seaboard of the African continent. The Delta region is home to over thirty thousand people who live, farm and fish in its fertile agricultural lands and rich fishing grounds. The latter produce over 80 per cent of Tanzania's prawn exports with the entire catch being wild prawns.

The importance of mangroves for local communities becomes even clearer when they are degraded or disappear. In the case of Senegal, oysters, shrimp, tilapia, barracuda and catfish are among the many fish species that live in Casamance’s mangrove forests, but now, as a result of mangrove degradation "you can only find big fish, as well as shrimps and oysters, but

you can no longer find catfish or other varieties, while there used to be plenty."

The depletion of fish stocks has particularly affected women who sell fish in bulk: "Women are closely involved in the fishing economy in this region. We sell fish, shrimp and oysters in the market and can earn up to US$20 a day from this, which greatly benefits our families. Now it is difficult for fish-sellers in Ziguinchor markets to earn even US$4 a day because there is so little fish left to sell."

The disappearance of mangroves harms other crops as well. Fewer mangroves means increased salt content of the water, which impedes the growth of paddy rice. "When we plant the rice now, it doesn't grow because there is so much salt in the water."

Regarding biodiversity, mangrove forests have few tree species to show (6 to 10), which may lead people to think that they are biodiversity-poor. In fact, they are exactly the opposite: mangroves are an irreplaceable and unique ecosystem, hosting incredible biodiversity and ranking among the most productive ecosystems in the world. The aerial roots of their trees form a complex web, hosting a multitude of animal species (fish, molluscs, crustaceans) and they operate as zones for mating, refuges and nursery areas for a large number of other species. The enormous quantities of fish and invertebrates that live in these coastal waters, provide an abundance of food for monkeys, turtles, and aquatic birds and they serve as an important migratory point for many birds.

Many species of animals use the Baly Bay's 7200 hectares of mangroves as nesting, roosting and feeding areas. Located to the West coast of Madagascar, the bay' mangroves constitute an important habitat for crab and shrimp species.

By some estimates, over 60% of fishes caught between the Gulf of Guinea and Angola breed in the mangrove belt of the Niger Delta. Mangroves have been sustainably managed by the many generations of communities living there. Sustainable use has been possible because of their profound knowledge about this ecosystem, passed on from generation to generation.

However, a number of changes have taken place over the last few decades that have resulted in mangrove destruction or degradation in many countries. Two different processes (frequently related) affecting mangroves can be observed: total destruction or degradation.

In some cases their total destruction may be due to urbanization, large-scale tourism undertakings, rice production or their eradication to give way to commercial shrimp farming. According to the FAO, Africa has lost about 500,000 hectares of mangroves over the last 25 years.

In other cases, partial deforestation is further aggravated by mangrove degradation – where most trees may remain standing – due to activities such

as oil exploitation or mining. That is to say, the installation of pipelines, seismic exploration and open cast mines cause deforestation; while oil-spills, gas flaring and waste dumping pollute the water and the air and seriously degrade the ecosystem as a whole. Another important cause of "invisible" degradation is the use of agro-toxics in nearby agricultural production, where toxic chemicals end up in this ecosystem, thus resulting in severe impacts on mangrove biodiversity and peoples' livelihoods.

In terms of degradation, major oil spills have occurred that have devastated rivers, killed mangroves and coastal life and affected the health and livelihoods of millions of inhabitants. Although this has happened in several countries in both Eastern and Western Africa, the case of the Niger Delta is probably the worst. As denounced by Amnesty International, the local communities living there rely on "the land and natural waterways for their livelihood and sustenance. Now, they have to drink, cook with and wash in polluted water and eat fish contaminated with toxins. They have lost farming land and their incomes from oil spills and breathe air that reeks of oil, gas and other pollutants."

A further form of mangrove degradation results from overexploitation of its resources –both the trees themselves or the fish and other aquatic life forms that live there. In Africa, excessive mangrove wood extraction has been linked to fish smoking, building materials, fuelwood and charcoal production.

Within that context, efforts should be made to ensure sustainable use of existing mangroves, to restore degraded areas and to replant mangrove forests whenever possible and viable.

For the above to be possible, the necessary starting point is to identify and address all the direct and underlying causes of mangrove loss and degradation. In this respect, it is important to note that while most of the former have already been identified, the underlying causes are still a matter of debate that needs to be studied much further. Such analysis is fundamental in order to avoid the easy solution of putting the blame on "poverty" or "population growth", while obscuring the role of governments, international institutions and corporations in mangrove loss and degradation.

While existing problems are addressed, it would be wise to prevent the development of new ones. In this respect, policies should be adopted and implemented to stop the expansion of unsustainable industrial shrimp farming, which is now looking at Africa's mangrove areas as a new business opportunity to be exploited with little regard to the ecosystem. The negative social and environmental impacts of this activity are already well documented in all the countries where it has established itself, particularly in Latin America and Asia. The result, in country after country, is that industrial shrimp farming destroys mangroves, biodiversity and local peoples' livelihoods. The impacts of the few existing cases of industrial shrimp farming in Africa should also serve as a basis for convincing governments on this issue.

African mangroves should be allowed to continue to play the role they have

traditionally played: to ensure local peoples' livelihoods through the conservation and wise use of their rich biodiversity.

Summarized version of "African mangroves: their importance for people and biodiversity", by Ricardo Carrere, editorial of "The relevance of mangrove forests to African fisheries, wildlife and water resources", Nature & Faune Volume 24, Issue 1. The full article with footnotes, quoted sources and references is available at ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/ak995e/ak995e00.pdf

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- Bangladesh: The role of the ADB and World Bank in the destruction of the "forest of the fallen leaves"

The last remnants of forests in Bangladesh are disappearing and much of the blame goes to local peoples' "slash and burn" agriculture. The government – supported with loans and funds from multilateral and bilateral financial institutions- is actively promoting the plantation of trees and would thus appear to be trying to revert the situation.

However, the opposite is true. While indigenous peoples' traditional shifting cultivation (*jum*) has historically proven to ensure the survival of the forest, government/IFI-sponsored "reforestation" is destroying the last remnants of true forests.

The "*sal* forest" is but one of several examples of the above, as the following excerpts from Philip Gain's "Stolen Forests" clearly show:

"The traditional *sal [Shorea robusta tree]* forest used to extend over the Modhupur Tract as well as over the districts of Dhaka, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Rajshahi. However, today the remnants of the *sal* forest do not represent its tradition. Most of the *sal* forestland has been denuded and encroached upon or taken over for commercial or industrial plantation of exotic species and agricultural use. A small part of the *sal* forest has also been converted to rubber plantation."

"There are unique characteristics of the *sal* forest that is also known as the forest of the fallen leaves. Its one unique feature is that it regenerates with little care. The patches of the *sal* forest that still survive are the ideal habitat for hundreds of native species. Although *sal* is the dominant species (up to 70 per cent of the stands) in this forest, there are countless other species of plants including medicinal plants, fruit trees, uncultivated vegetables, herbs, creepers, and thousands of other life forms. Not long ago, the *sal* forest used to be the safe sanctuary for wildlife such as the tiger, bear, monkey, langur, and birds. The *sal* forest of unique genetic and wildlife resources has now become history. It is now bereft of its traditions."

“At one time *jum* agriculture used to be practiced in the *sal* forest areas… The *zamindars* [big landlords] permitted the Garos of the Modhupur forest to carry out *jum* cultivation on the condition that they maintained the forest. The maximum period for such cultivation in a plot in the Modhupur forest was three years. After that *sal* and other local species had to be planted to regenerate the forests. The Garos would take the responsibility to create and tend such forests. *Jum* cultivation was allowed in the Modhupur forest throughout the British period. But the natural *sal* forest remained intact and the forest people lived in peace. After the forest was transferred to the Forest Department, *jum* cultivation was banned in Modhupur.”

That measure not only deprived local peoples of their means of livelihoods but led directly to the destruction of the *sal* forest. Philip Gain summarises the situation as follows:

“What is uniquely common in the *sal* forest patches in recent times is monoculture plantation of exotic species, acacia and eucalyptus being the dominant ones. One traveling from Dhaka to North Bengal along the *sal* forest belt will come across these plantations almost everywhere. These two exotic species growing in rows and devoid of understory vegetation is a common picture in the *sal* forest. In most cases the monoculture plantation replaces the degraded *sal* forest that could have been regenerated into the *sal* forest again. In disagreement with the Forest Department, environmentalists and professional foresters believe that monoculture plantation in the *sal* forest is a disaster that could have been avoided. What is ‘planted forest’ to the government agencies and the IFIs, is actually monoculture plantations that has no traditional and educational value.”

In his introduction, Gain explains that “over the past one and a half decades I have learned how wrongfully the ill-fated forest-dwelling communities and their practices are frequently blamed for the ruin of the forests.”

However, that is far from being the case and the blame lies squarely on ADB and World Bank-sponsored plantation projects:

“I have witnessed how the Modhupur *sal* forest has been stripped of its traditions. Decay of forests is not unique in Bangladesh. But the introduction of plantations –monoculture of teak, rubber, eucalyptus and acacia- has horrendous consequences on these native forests. In Modhupur, invasive species have made their way into the forestland under the guise so-called ‘social forestry’ that is plantation in essence. Here ‘social forestry’ that was initiated in 1989-90 was preceded by rubber monoculture that destroyed a significant part of the *sal* forest. The so-called ‘social forestry’ funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has caused immense ruin to the *sal* forest, not only in Modhupur, but also in other *sal* forest patches up to the northern tip of Bangladesh as well.” “In Bangladesh while the plantation projects are implemented by the government, they are financed mostly by the international financial institutions (IFIs)-Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.”

Gain stresses that not only “plantations are not forests at all”, but that they are one “of the major factors that underlie the destruction of the forests and the misery of the forest-dwelling ethnic communities.”

Four years after the publication of his book, Philip has informed us that he met a top official of ADB in January 2010, who “confirmed that the Bank has completely withdrawn from the forestry sector in Bangladesh and elsewhere in Asia since 2007. She also conveyed that ADB confesses it did not perform satisfactorily with forestry projects. The World Bank has also stopped funding forestry projects in Bangladesh. This is a victory for us who have been telling the two IFIs that they were ruining the forests by funding forestry projects.”

Article based on excerpts from Gain, Philip (2006).- Stolen Forests, Bangladesh, SEHD and on a message sent by the author to WRM on 16 February 2010. E-mail: sehd@citech.net

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- Chile: Research provides data on the role of native forests in the production of water

An article published in the newspaper “La Tercera”(1) and taken up on the Mapuche IMC blog (2) reveals the results of research carried out by scientists from Valdivia’s Austral University that link the presence of native forests with greater water production.

According to this study, a major part of South American temperate forests are found within the Valdivian Rainforest Ecoregion (35–488S) in Chile and adjacent areas of Argentina, which has been classified among those with the highest conservation priority worldwide.

The study points out that most of the native forests in Chile are privately owned (71% of the total). The remaining is in national parks and reserves. Privately owned forests have been generally valued and used for firewood and timber production (mainly within unsustainable logging schemes) or as land for the expansion of other productive activities: agriculture, pastureland and fast-growing commercial tree plantations of exotic species (Pinus radiata and Eucalyptus spp). Rapid conversion to forest [sic] plantations between 1975 and 2000 resulted in deforestation rates of 4.5% per year within an area.

The research states that the poor conservation status of native forests may be explained by the forest policy followed since 1974 in Chile. This policy has not provided economic incentives for the sustainable management and conservation of native forests, in contrast to the use of public funds to support the establishment of plantations. This, along with the liberalization of exports and privatization of state-owned plantations and pulp mills, explain the fast growth of the forestry industry based on plantations, often regarded

as an economically successful model in other Latin American countries and elsewhere (Lara and Veblen, 1993; Sedjo et al., 1999; Lara et al., 2006).

While tree plantations increase, native forests are degraded or destroyed. According to information provided in the article in 'La Tercera': "in the Araucanía region, an average of 2,845 hectares per year is lost through forest fires, flooding from dams, illegal logging and forest degradation. The scenario has improved, as according to FAO, before 2000 the average annual loss was 20 thousand hectares. Other estimates: between the V and XII regions the loss has amounted to 100,000 hectares since 1995. And a study by the universities of Concepción, Austral (Chile) and Alcalá, (Spain) states that 82,131 hectares of native vegetation was lost in the V, Metropolitan and VI regions between 1975 and 2008 – the equivalent of 42.5% of the original total."

Academics have responded to the loss of native forest by trying to show its importance as an ecosystem, together with the benefits it provides, either directly or indirectly, to society. Among these benefits, is the provision of water, both in quantity and in quality.

The research carried out by the Austral University "took daily measurements, during four years in six basins ranging from 140 to 1,462 hectares in the Coastal Cordillera, in the Valdivia area. The percentage of native forest cover was considered for each basin as well as the runoff rate – that is the relationship between stream-flow and annual precipitation. And the conclusion was that stream-flow and production of water are correlated with the percentage of native forests covering the basins. In figures: an increase of 10% in the native forest cover in the basins would produce an increase of 14.1% in the summer stream-flow."

"The native forest reduces the speed of runoff, enabling the water table to recharge and the water to flow slowly towards rivers and streams maintaining summer stream-flows, as compared to farm land and tree plantations," explained Antonio Lara, Dean of the Austral University and member of the research team. The forest regulates water flow and provides a balance.

Furthermore, the study refers to research showing that the conversion of native forests to fast-growing plantations decreases streamflow especially in summer. In addition, studies of the water balance of young plantations of E. globulus and P. radiata in south-central Chile have revealed an increased depletion of the soil moisture reserves with stand ageing, as well as an increase in the canopy interception and evapotranspiration. Furthermore, conversion to plantations has led to a decrease in water quality due to increased sediment loads associated to clearcuts in plantations managed under 12-year rotations for Eucalyptus spp. and 20 years for Pinus radiata.

As pointed out in the article in 'La Tercera' academic results confirm what the Mapuche movement and socio-environmental organizations have been stating for a long time: monoculture tree plantations impact on soils and water reserves.

Today more than ever forests must be cared for. They are the basis of biodiversity and life support, not only for the communities who directly depend on them for sustenance but, in the long run, for humanity as a whole.

(1) “Estudio relaciona presencia de bosque nativo con mayor producción de agua”, http://www.mapuexpress.net/images/publications/18_12_2009_23_3_41_1.jpg
(2) http://aureliennewenmapuche.blogspot.com/2009/12/estudios-relacionan-presencia-de-bosque.html

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- Mangrove restoration is necessary, mangrove monoculture plantation is not

The December 2004 tsunami that played havoc on several Asian coasts also exposed the level of human-made destruction of protective greenbelts including mangroves along coastlines. The need to re-establish natural protective greenbelts followed suit with quite often failed attempts.

As the organization Mangrove Action Project (MAP) explains in its website, “Much of the post-tsunami effort to restore coastal greenbelts involved simple planting of mangrove seedlings and propagules. There have been numerous failures, already, due to planting of inappropriate species, and in inappropriate locations. Failure occurs, in general, due to a lack of understanding of the restoration site itself”.

The history of the site, the mangrove species that have grown there as long as their hydrological requirements, the depth of the substrate in which they grew, the fresh water inputs to the area or where did exchange of tidal water take place are usually not taken fully into account in standard planting practice which sometimes promotes an afforestation approach which is not mangrove restoration.

A lot of money has been spent in developing mangrove seedling nurseries while neglecting the need to determine the site-specific needs of mangroves at each restoration location. MAP gives the example that “contrary to popular belief, mangroves require some freshwater to grow well, and they are submerged only around 33% of the time. Planting mangroves along an exposed coastline, in too-deep water without fresh water input, is a recipe for failure”.

A recent case of alleged mangrove restoration project at the estuary of Sabarmati, Gujarat, India has been questioned as only being a monoculture plantation. The project is about planting mainly one mangrove species (Avicennia marina) on mudflats. However, mangroves do not grow well in mudflats till conditions of hydrology change and mangroves may move into these adjacent wetland areas to colonize them. This occurs when substrate

height increases along the shorelines allowing mangroves to migrate into the changing mudflat zone.

MAP's Executive Director Alfredo Quarto questions the approach: "As sea levels rise, as is the case today, should we not expect mangroves to move upland to the areas behind the present mangrove boundaries -into the salt flats or salt marshes, perhaps? Another question is: how can planting mangroves in a mudflat be likened to mangrove ecosystem restoration, when it is actually ecosystem conversion and afforestation? Aren't mudflats themselves important, productive ecosystem components of a dynamic, interconnecting, intertidal zone, which includes the mangroves, salt flats, salt marshes and mudflats? Don't migratory birds such as wader birds and other species such as mollusks and other marine life have important connections with and dependencies on a healthy mudflat?"

He concludes that "a plantation approach does not restore a viable, biodiverse ecosystem, but instead creates a monoculture. In no way is a mangrove plantation a healthy mangrove ecosystem."

There is a better way than promoting monocultures of such a multi-species ecosystem -especially in Asia, where there may well be 20-30 varieties of mangroves found in a single area. The Ecological Mangrove Restoration (EMR) approach is an ecosystem approach that MAP is promoting as a long-term, biodiverse method of mangrove restoration that prioritizes the restoration of the natural hydrology of disturbed areas.

As MAP explains, "Restoring an area's natural hydrology will, in many cases, allow Nature to restore the mangroves via tidal ebbs and flows, transporting mangrove propagules (seeds) for the natural regeneration of a bio-diverse and healthy forest wetland."

MAP Ecological Mangrove Restoration (EMR) Method promotes an economical and efficient 6-Step approach to mangrove restoration which follows basic natural processes and places the local community at center stage in the restoration and management process.

Government and NGOs should work jointly with local communities to:

1. Understand both the individual species and community ecology of the naturally occurring mangrove species at the site, paying particular attention to patterns of reproduction, distribution, and successful seedling establishment;
2. Understand the normal hydrology that controls the distribution and successful establishment and growth of targeted mangrove species;
3. Assess the modifications of the mangrove environment that occurred and that currently prevent natural secondary succession;
4. Select appropriate restoration areas through application of Steps 1-3, above, that are both likely to succeed in rehabilitating a forest ecosystem and are cost effective. Consider the available labor to carry out the projects, including adequate monitoring of their progress toward meeting quantitative

goals established prior to restoration. This step includes resolving land ownership/use issues necessary for ensuring long-term access to and conservation of the site;
5. Design the restoration program at appropriate sites selected in Step 4, above, to restore the appropriate hydrology and utilize natural volunteer mangrove recruitment for natural plant establishment;
6. Utilize actual planting of propagules or seedlings only after determining through Steps 1-5, above, that natural recruitment will not provide the quantity of successfully established seedlings, rate of stabilization, or rate of growth as required for project success.

Compared to the huge and often failed programs supported by World Bank loans and government agencies, MAP EMR small-scale approach has been very successful. As part of post-tsunami recovery, with the engagement of local communities, 580 hectares of mangrove forests in Riau and North Sumatra, Indonesia have been rehabilitated using the MAP EMR Method.

For more information on MAP EMR see http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/map-programs/restoration or contact Alfredo Quarto, e-mail: mangroveap@olympus.net

To learn more about MAP's EMR yahoo e-group and to request to join please visit: http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/emr_group

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- The myth of GHG emissions reductions from "Sustainable Forest Management"

A recent report by Greenpeace ("Why logging will not save the climate: the fallacy of GHG emissions reductions from so-called 'Sustainable Forest Management' (SFM) or Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) of natural forests") evaluates greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from the various forms of industrial logging.

The report highlights the value of primary (ancient or old growth) intact forest not only for its high biodiversity but also because they are the most resilient to climate change and contain the biggest carbon stock. However, consideration of options for the inclusion of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) often gives reference to the potential of 'sustainable management of forests' as a way of achieving emissions reductions. The forest industry and some governments with vested interests in the logging sector, as well as several international organisations, are pushing a narrow interpretation and reframing of this under the broader term of 'Sustainable Forest Management' (SFM).

Selective logging affects 28% of tropical forests worldwide. In Papua New Guinea (PNG), between 2.9 and 4.1 million hectares of primary forest had

already been selectively logged by 2002, and around half of PNG's forest (16.3 million hectares) is in concessions and under threat of becoming degraded as a result of logging. In Indonesia, 42 million hectares of forest are in concessions. Across Central Africa, nearly 40 million hectares of primary forest are allocated to industrial logging concessions.

Typical stand damages in conventional logging in many developing countries range from 10% to 70% of the residual trees, depending on logging intensity along with logging technique. Site damage, such as soil disturbance and compaction, or erosion will also release greenhouse gases from other carbon pools. Several studies in Southeast Asia looking at harvested timber, unutilised tree parts (roots, branches, etc) and trees, lianas and other vegetation damaged or destroyed, found that the direct impact of selective logging results in an approximate 50% reduction in biomass carbon. Taking into account road-building and infrastructure, as well as fragmentation and edge effects, carbon stock losses are even greater. Roads in particular are viewed as 'the seeds of tropical forest destruction'. Furthermore, if the indirect impacts of logging are considered, such as edge effects increasing drought sensitivity and the likelihood of being burnt, or improved access increasing the risk of degradation or conversion, then the climate impacts of selective logging would be considerably greater. In the Amazon, remote sensing found that selective logging doubled the area of forest degraded by human activities.

Degradation of primary forest through logging, whether it be conventional or SFM, limits the ability of these forests to absorb anthropogenic CO2, whilst increasing their vulnerability to climate change. SFM is a forest degradation activity and -in particular in comparison with forest conservation, restoration or protection- it cannot claim that it results in emission reductions.

It doesn't seem efficient or effective to give considerable financial or carbon incentives to logging companies who are production and profit driven to attempt managing forests 'sustainably', and whether these companies can be trusted to deliver real emission reductions. Many of these companies are embroiled in scandals related to illegalities, corruption and destructive practices.

REDD-incentivised SFM may in fact end up being a subsidy for the expansion of logging into primary forests and intact forest landscapes.

In addition, net rather than gross accounting rules for deforestation rates that allow for SFM (emissions from logging less removals by regrowth) may increase incentives to expansion of logging into primary forests. Given that under the current UN definition, a forest is only required to have a 10% canopy, many models of so-called SFM would likely allow considerable degradation of the forest without impacting on forest cover and deforestation rates.

Thus, one of the conclusions of the report is that "No REDD funds should be used to support or subsidise industrial logging of forests, whether it is

claimed to be so called SFM or not."

(1) Extracted from Greenpeace report: "Why logging will not save the climate: the fallacy of GHG emissions reductions from so-called 'Sustainable Forest Management' (SFM) or Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) of natural forests", Rosoman, G., Cotter, J., & Marahrens, M, September 2009, http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/international/press/reports/why-logging-will-not-save-the.pdf

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: Once again opposing Plantar's CDM project

Plantar S.A. Reflorestamentos, a pig-iron and plantation company operating in Brazil, in the state of Minas Gerais, has been trying hard to get money through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

The company's activities involving large scale planting of non-native eucalyptus trees – which are burnt to make charcoal that is then used for the company's pig iron operations – 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 (see WRM Bulletin Nº 145).

Already in 2004, Plantar S.A. applied for a 1.5 million CERs (certified emission reductions) carbon credit transaction based on "the planting of forests". CERs, equivalent in this case to approximately USD 25 million, are tradable permits that certify that emissions of greenhouse gases have been reduced by the project. Polluters somewhere else can buy those permits and so spare the effort to reduce their own emissions.

The argument was that the forested area in the state of Minas Gerais was rapidly shrinking, and that without the capital provided through carbon credits, the company would be unable to replant on the land where trees had been harvested for industrial use. However, Plantar has always planted and replanted trees on a massive scale and eventually the project didn't get the approval.

In another try, Plantar reformulated the project and argued that it would have to burn coal if it did not receive the funds to (re)plant eucalyptus in Minas Gerais for the production of charcoal. Several social organisations opposed the Plantar project, which once again failed to be approved.

In mid-2009, Plantar resubmitted a reforestation project, linked to the iron ore methodology, to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) Executive

Board under the title “Cultivated Biomass as a Renewable Source of Energy for Pig Iron Production”. The project promises to grow “dedicated plantations” for the production of charcoal. If approved, the project would enable the company to get paid for doing what it has already been doing since 2000: planting and replanting eucalyptus on a massive scale for industrial use.

A group of individuals, organizations, movements and networks representing Brazilian society, together with international supporters from the North and South, have denounced and opposed the project of Plantar S.A.

In a letter sent by the organisations to the members of the CDM Executive Board they claim that “a new reworking of the Plantar CDM project promises to set aside eucalyptus plantations on the company’s own land for the production of vegetable coal, under the false claim of producing ‘renewable biomass’. The company is attempting to obtain carbon credits for trees it has already been planting since 2000, which proves that it is not ‘adding’ anything to its usual activities. Although classified as ‘carbon neutral’, Plantar’s operations will do nothing to neutralize the carbon dioxide emissions produced through its transportation and logistical operations and above all the burning of its own wood in charcoal ovens, not to mention the contamination caused by the pig iron industry and the production and use of automobiles, to which the bulk of production is devoted.”

The signatories state that “As far as we are concerned, Plantar S.A.’s large-scale, chemical-intensive plantations of fast-growing eucalyptus trees and their subsequent burning can in no way be considered a mechanism for climate justice.”

On the contrary, they stress that “the contamination and disappearance of rivers and streams; the forced displacement of peasant farmers, indigenous forest-dwelling communities and geraiszeiros (inhabitants of the Cerrado savannah ecosystem); the land disputes over agrarian reform measures and with quilombola (Afro-Brazilian) communities fighting to recover their ancestral territory (as is currently the case in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo); the destruction of native forest in the Cerrado and Atlantic Forest regions and its replacement with plantations of a single, exotic tree species; the repression, criminalization and intimidation of local community leaders and resistance movements; the threat to food security in areas around eucalyptus plantations; outsourcing, precarious work conditions and high rates of work-related accidents and disease (as amply documented by many sources) – all of these are essential elements that should be taken into consideration and lead the CDM Executive Board to reject Plantar S.A.’s project proposal once again.”

The complete letter is available at:
http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/LetterPlantarCDM.pdf

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- Hiding monoculture oil palm plantations under a business-friendly "forest" definition

An article published on the website EUobserver.com (1) informs that "a draft commission communication offering guidance to EU member states on the use of biofuels has classified palm oil plantations - the source of one of the most destructive forms of biofuels - as "forests." Essentially, the document argues that because palm oil plantations are tall enough and shady enough, they count as forests."

The article quotes the document: "Continuously forested areas are defined as areas where trees have reached, or can reach, at least heights of five metres, making up a crown cover of more than 30 percent." "They would normally include forest, forest plantations and other tree plantations such as palm oil." "This means, for example, that a change from forest to oil palm plantation would not per se constitute a breach of the [sustainability criteria]."

The above is the successful outcome of the intense lobbying campaign on the EU Commission carried out by Malaysian producers – through GPlus, the international lobbying outfit hired by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council. At the same time, it serves well the purposes of the EU, that last year passed the EU Renewable Energy Directive, which requires EU member states to source 10 per cent of transport fuels from renewable sources, much of which will certainly come from monoculture oil palm plantations. Defining those plantations as "forests" will assist in greenwashing their social and environmental impacts.

Indonesia, the world's top producer of palm oil has swiftly seized the opportunity for defining its destructive oil palm plantations as "forests". On 16 February, the Jakarta Post informed that "the Forestry Ministry is drafting a decree to include oil palm plantations in the forest sector to comply with international standards in mitigating climate change." The head of research and development at the ministry, Tachrir Fathoni, said that "by definition, oil palm plantations will be defined as forest", arguing that "many countries such as Malaysia, the world's second biggest palm oil producer after Indonesia, had included oil palm plantations in its forest sector."

Although defining industrial monocultures of an alien species as "forest" is scientifically absurd, it makes much economic sense, as Tachrir Fathoni explains: "By doing so, Malaysia can reap financial incentives from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of carbon trade." He said that the UN only categorized trees with a certain height as forest trees, without identifying their species and that this move "is to anticipate the implementation of the REDD scheme". Under REDD (Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation) countries with extensive "forest cover" can receive financial benefits by stopping deforestation. Which means that Indonesia will be financially rewarded for destroying its tropical forests as long as they substitute them with oil palm "forests"!

All this absurd situation serves at least to strengthen the position of the many organizations that have for years been challenging the FAO's definition of forest, that includes plantations as such. International processes such as UNFCCC have uncritically accepted the FAO definition, thus leading to absurd situations such as the one now being exposed.

At the same time, we hope that the leaked document will lead to organized opposition in Europe against such definition by the EU, which if adopted will help to accelerate forest destruction, not only in Indonesia and Malaysia, but throughout the entire South.

Oil palm plantations are not forests!

(1) "Palm oil plantations are now 'forests,' says EU", by Leigh Phillips, http://euobserver.com/885/29410

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- Laos: Research on the impacts of rubber plantations

A research project was carried out in Laos to evaluate the economic, social and ecological impacts of large-scale land concessions to plant rubber and for making recommendations for the future management of land in Lao PDR. Two provinces were selected in the south of Laos (Champassak and Salavane), to conduct research over the course of one year from July 2007 to July 2008.

The project was carried out jointly between the Centre for Research and Information on Land and Natural Resources of the National Land Management Authority, Office of Prime Minister (Laos), the Foundation for Ecological Recovery, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University (Thailand).

The research has been finalized, but the official publication of the Summary Report is pending as it is waiting for the approval of the National Land Management Authority. The latest version was presented to the Centre for Research and Information on Land and Natural Resources in September 2009, which was relatively late for the study's findings.

On the strong presumption that, by the time the publication is approved, the findings may be essentially outdated and fail to reflect the current situation, the Foundation for Ecological Recovery, as co-researcher, would like to make the latest version of the report unofficially available via websites for interested people.

Given the importance of this research, WRM has posted the report in its website, available in English at:
http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Laos/RubberSummaryReport.pdf

- México: Violent evictions in Chiapas for establishing oil palm monocultures

What follows is a communiqué from the Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations (RECOMA) reporting on the violent situation that local communities and Indigenous Peoples of the Lacandona forest in Chiapas are presently going through.

“Appeal to international solidarity to protect the Lacandona Forest in Chiapas (Mexico), February 2010.

The Latin American Network against Monoculture Tree Plantations (RECOMA) is hereby denouncing the arbitrary treatment suffered by various communities in the Lacandona forest, in the area declared as the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, in the State of Chiapas, Mexico.

Last January, the Chiapas State Congress approved funding for the construction of a palm oil processing plant. Shortly afterwards, dozens of families from the Municipality of Ocosingo were evicted from their territory, in order to give way for the expansion of monoculture oil palm plantations.

Dozens of heavily armed police arrived in helicopters and with aggressive violence evicted men, women and children from their homes, which they then burnt down and with no explanation, removed the community to the city of Palenque.

While the government talks about conservation and protection of the zone, it evicts those who have been truly responsible for making this conservation possible. At the same time, it replaces local ecosystems by oil palm monocultures.

Oil palm plantations are being promoted under an “ecological” mask, as if the production of agrofuels based on palm oil could be a solution to climate change. Apart from the falsehood of these affirmations, no mention is made of the serious negative impacts they generate such as violation of the local population and indigenous peoples’ human rights, as is presently the case in Chiapas.

Furthermore, monoculture oil palm plantations are one of the main causes of deforestation and therefore contribute to worsen climate change through the release of carbon stored in the forests, destroying the means of subsistence and food sovereignty of millions of small farmers, indigenous people and other communities, and generating serious negative environmental impacts. The plantations require agrochemicals that poison the workers and local communities and contaminate soil and water. Monoculture oil palm plantations eliminate biodiversity and deplete fresh water sources.

In sum, monoculture plantations for the production of paper and agrofuels (such as in the case of oil palm) worsen the living conditions and opportunities for survival of the local population and are only beneficial to a small handful of companies that become rich at the expense of social and environmental destruction.

For this reason, we are appealing to the international community to condemn the plans for the expansion of monoculture oil palm plantations in Mexico, denouncing this situation by all means at your disposal. We also appeal to you to join and participate actively in the forthcoming Montes Azules Social Forum, in defence of the right to life and to the territory (http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Mexico/ForoMontesAzules.jpg), to be held on 5 and 6 March in the Ejido Candelaria, Municipio de Ocosingo, Chiapas, in the heart of the Montes Azules".

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CARBON TRADING

- REDD: Breathing new life into the scam of carbon trading

Reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is based on a simple idea: Making forests worth more alive than dead. But on closer examination, it is not simple at all. To forest peoples, forests already are worth more alive than dead. REDD could involve the biggest ever transfer of control over forests – to international carbon financiers and polluting companies.

A massive new market in forest carbon would come with a series of new (and not so new) risks. In an article describing how Goldman Sachs helped create (and profit from) the financial bubble that so spectacularly burst a couple of years ago, journalist Matt Taibbi explains that "Instead of credit derivatives or oil futures or mortgage-backed CDOs [collateralised debt obligations], the new game in town, the next bubble, is in carbon credits . . . a groundbreaking new commodities bubble, disguised as an 'environmental plan'." This new market in carbon derivatives "will be vast, complicated, and dauntingly difficult to monitor," writes Rachel Morris in Mother Jones magazine.

But it is not only journalists who are concerned about the complexities of this new market. Feike Sijbesma is the Chief Executive Officer of Royal DSM, one of the largest Dutch multinational corporations. "There are now already in development derivatives of CO2 prices that are so complicated that I do not understand it any more," he said at the World Economics Forum earlier this year. "If you get a reservoir of derivatives which becomes so big that it becomes an industry in itself that is very dangerous because you can get the tail wagging the dog."

At least one hedge fund company is already betting on the carbon market collapsing. "We think there's a 30 percent chance the [carbon] market collapses," says Anthony Limbrick, the chief investment officer of the hedge fund firm, Pure Capital. Limbrick, however, is not too worried about a collapse. "That could create a 'fat tail' (a very rare event with major consequences) for us to make money."

Proponents of financing REDD through carbon trading put forward two apparently contradictory arguments. The first is the "low-hanging fruit" argument - stopping deforestation is one of the cheapest and easiest ways of reducing emissions. "Tropical forest conservation is a critically strategic climate change solution," says Jeff Horowitz of Avoided Deforestation Partners, "because it is more affordable than technologically intensive solutions therefore allowing bigger pollution reductions than would otherwise be economically or politically feasible." Horowitz and his organisation have lobbied hard to make sure that carbon offsets are part of the draft climate legislation in the US. Horowitz also estimates that "protecting tropical forests will cut the cost of U.S. climate legislation almost in half – saving [U.S.] Americans billions."

The second is that reducing deforestation needs so much money, that the only way of financing REDD is to make sure that the carbon markets are involved. Here's Horowitz again: "The only path to secure the $40 billion annually that may be needed to end and ultimately reverse deforestation is through creating incentives for private investment."

Of course there is no guarantee that throwing vast sums of money at the problem of deforestation will make it go away. Underlying causes of deforestation include corruption and illegal logging. The Forestry Ministries in several REDD countries are the most corrupt ministries in some of the most corrupt countries in the world. Illegal logging accounts for a large proportion of timber exports from many of the countries currently interested in implementing REDD.

"Alarm bells are ringing," says Peter Younger, a specialist in environmental crimes at Interpol. "It is simply too big to monitor. The potential for criminality is vast and has not been taken into account by the people who set it up." In an interview with the Guardian last year, Younger notes that "Organised crime syndicates are eyeing the nascent forest carbon market . . . REDD schemes are open to wide abuse."

Abuse is already happening, in both the forest and the market. Papua New Guinea has seen fake carbon credits, carbon cowboys and a series of dodgy-looking deals with landowners. Meanwhile in Europe, carbon credit fraud in the Emission Trading System (ETS) has resulted in losses of about five billion euros. The European Law Enforcement Agency estimates that "in some countries up to 90 per cent of the whole market volume was caused by fraudulent activities."

The risks are obvious. So is the impossibility of regulating such a complex

market. And the point of this whole shaky edifice, apart from generating huge profits for carbon traders? To ensure that companies can buy carbon credits allowing them to continue pumping out greenhouse gases.

By Chris Lang, http://chrislang.org

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