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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Community rights should be at the centre of resource use in Africa

Africa is fast becoming the Promised Land for emerging powers –as in the cases of Brazil, China and India- trying to outcompete the old colonial powers in the scramble for the riches of this continent. At the same time other comparatively less powerful countries –such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, South Korea, Finland and others- are grabbing whatever they can –farmland, forests, carbon markets, cheap labour- in the spaces left unoccupied by the former.

As peace expands over the until recently war-torn continent, national and foreign governments –from North and South- open up opportunities for access to Africa's natural resources by transnational corporations. The key words being used to hide

their true intentions –profits and plunder- are poverty alleviation, job creation, healthcare, education, development.

Within this context, the Liberian Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) hosted on 27-29 April in Monrovia a very timely “International Conference on Community Rights and Natural Resources”, organized jointly with the Africa Community Rights Network and the World Rainforest Movement.

The meeting brought together 35 community representatives from 9 Liberian counties, NGO delegates from 10 African countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Togo), as well as participants from Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Uruguay.

The main issues addressed at the meeting related to natural resource extraction and community rights, focusing particularly on the forestry sector and including industrial logging, large-scale tree plantations and forest-related carbon markets (REDD).

In the case of Liberia, the host organization (SDI) had recently alerted that “there is convincing evidence that large-scale logging operations, contrary to widespread expectations, neither alleviate poverty nor create secure and decent jobs for forest communities. In fact these operations have been found to exacerbate poverty in forest communities, and in other instances they have played a direct role in financing state and non-state actors involved in violent conflicts.” (1)

In spite of the evidence, the Liberian government is opening up a third of the country’s forests –more than 1 million hectares- to industrial logging, which has raised strong concerns among forest communities that will be affected by those operations.

The situation was discussed at the Monrovia meeting and after a fruitful exchange of experiences, Liberian community representatives produced a statement (2) explaining that although “the new forestry reform law of Liberia provides for the consultation of local communities and their free and informed participation in the decision making processes of their forest resources ... the processes leading to the signing of social agreements between the communities and concession holders did not take into account the informed participation of affected communities...” The statement added that “local communities have been repeatedly ignored about decisions relating to the use of their forest resources”, and that “contract holders and managers of forest resources have consistently failed to respect community rights and ensure fulfillment of community benefits...”

As a result, one of their main demands was “that all social agreements signed between affected communities and concession holders be renegotiated”.

On their part, the members of the Africa Community Rights Network (ACRN) also released a statement (3) calling for a number of urgent actions in the region’s countries, among which the following:

– That Community Rights (CR) should be the centre of natural resource governance and management.

- That government ensure CR Laws are made and where such law exist, fully implemented and the knowledge should be made accessible to the communities.
- That governments ensure access to information on natural resources management to interested parties, particularly to affected communities.
- That community involvement should be based on free prior informed consent.
- That governments ensure that women have equal rights and access as well as equal participation in natural resources management.
- That government ensures that fair prices should be paid for natural resources exploitation in Africa.

The meeting also addressed the issue of large scale tree plantations –rubber, oil palm, eucalyptus- as well as that of the carbon market in general and REDD in particular, regarding their possible impacts on African local communities and on their rights. In this respects, the community statement demanded “that more and direct community consultations be held on emerging issues such as the Voluntary Partnership Agreement, REDD, carbon trading, and large-scale plantations”.

On its part, the ACRN statement “noted the increasing amount of land being targeted for large scale monoculture plantation in Africa over the last few years” and expressed that “having noted the negative impacts of large scale plantations we call for vigilance in order to protect livelihood and environment.” At the same time, they “noted that carbon trading will provide a perfect excuse for northern and industrialized countries to escape their responsibility to drastically reduce their carbon emissions” and therefore rejected “carbon trading as means of financing sustainable forest management.”

Both the community and ACRN statements show the abysmal differences between community and corporate approaches to natural resource extraction. While the former focuses on community rights, the latter thinks in terms of access to and appropriation of other people’s resources for profit-making. While the former can ensure long term benefits to forest communities, the latter results in increased poverty and resource destruction. While the former can conserve forests, the latter results in their degradation and substitution by monoculture tree plantations.

In such context, the message coming from the Africa Community Rights Network is loud and clear: “Community Rights should be the centre of natural resource governance and management.”

(1) Liberia – The Promise Betrayed, January 2010

http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Liberia/Promise_Betrayed.pdf

(2) http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Liberia/Position_statement.html

(3) http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Liberia/Africa_Community_Rights.html

WORLD PEOPLE’S CONFERENCE: CLIMATE CHANGE AND RIGHTS OF MOTHER EARTH

- Following in the Footprints of Cochabamba

Several weeks have passed since the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate

Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, convened by Bolivian President Evo Morales. But in these times of fast-moving and disposable news, we should make an effort to ensure that the crucial significance of this meeting is not simply tossed on the junk news heap.

While it was underway, the biggest media coverage given to the conference focused on the indigenous president's remarks about female hormones in chickens, comments which were misinterpreted or perhaps poorly expressed.

But beyond the brief coverage attracted by these controversial remarks, there was very little serious media analysis of what was in fact a major international event, attended by more than 30,000 participants. Representatives of campesino and indigenous communities, urban social organizations, environmentalists, government officials, intellectuals and activists gathered in Cochabamba – which gained renown ten years ago as the main battleground of the “water war” against privatisation of this essential natural resource – and collectively built a platform for analysis of climate change.

Climate change, the threat that looms over the entire planet while most of us are distracted by other things. Climate change, an issue that the world's governments have been talking about for almost 20 years – through the United Nations process of the Framework Convention on Climate Change – while moving ever further from finding real solutions to the problem, concentrating instead on the consequences of this global disaster and looking for ways to cope with and adapt to the effects. And making the problem worse.

In an era when corporations are spreading to every corner of the planet appropriating every possible resource in their search for profits (land, water, oil, minerals, plants, genes, etc.), even the climate has become a business. False solutions have been invented, “market-based” solutions like “compensation”: those who emit huge amounts of greenhouse gases, which cause climate change, pay for others in the South to not produce emissions, and thus supposedly “compensate” for their own emissions, instead of reducing them.

A lot of money for a few companies. Even a financial carbon market! And this is how the process has continued, postponing responsibility for cutting emissions. And then came December -the deadline for the world's countries to establish their emission reduction commitments- when the process was exposed for what it is, and it was made abundantly clear that the powerful nations are not willing to do anything. A handful of countries, historically responsible for the crisis, tried to impose a parody of an agreement that they called the “Copenhagen Accord”. No obligations, no responsibility for those who have created the emissions. No change. And the worst prospects ever: a rise in temperature of up to 4°C which signifies disaster.

Cochabamba was the alternative. Bolivia, which was one of the few countries that said NO to this parody of an agreement, convened the World Conference of the Peoples. And the people came, to call things by their name, to give them other names than those used in official documents. And so they talked about Mother Earth and her rights, about “Living Well”, about Food Sovereignty as the people's right to control their own seeds, land, water and food production in harmony with Mother

Earth in order to have access to sufficient, varied and nutritious foods. They talked about the climate debt accrued by the so-called developed countries, about restorative justice – in other words, not merely economic compensation but also “the restitution of integrity to our Mother Earth and all its beings” – and about creating an international tribunal for trying crimes against the climate.

And the people talked about the root of the problem: the CAUSES of climate change.

The Peoples' Agreement (1), the result of an intensive, pluralistic and diverse participatory process encompassing 17 working groups, states that the cause of climate change is the crisis of the capitalist system: “We confront the terminal crisis of a civilizing model that is patriarchal and based on the submission and destruction of human beings and nature that accelerated since the industrial revolution. The capitalist system has imposed on us a logic of competition, progress and limitless growth. This regime of production and consumption seeks profit without limits, separating human beings from nature and imposing a logic of domination upon nature, transforming everything into commodities: water, earth, the human genome, ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, the rights of peoples, and life itself.”

To address the problem, it proposes “the recovery, revalorization, and strengthening of the knowledge, wisdom, and ancestral practices of Indigenous Peoples, which are affirmed in the thought and practices of ‘Living Well,’ recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship.”

“The model we support is not a model of limitless and destructive development. All countries need to produce the goods and services necessary to satisfy the fundamental needs of their populations, but by no means can they continue to follow the path of development that has led the richest countries to have an ecological footprint five times bigger than what the planet is able to support. Currently, the regenerative capacity of the planet has been already exceeded by more than 30 percent. If this pace of over-exploitation of our Mother Earth continues, we will need two planets by the year 2030.

“In an interdependent system in which human beings are only one component, it is not possible to recognize rights only to the human part without provoking an imbalance in the system as a whole. To guarantee human rights and to restore harmony with nature, it is necessary to effectively recognize and apply the rights of Mother Earth.”

Polluters must accept their responsibility. The Peoples' Agreement calls on the developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50%, and to genuinely reduce emissions, rather than using deceptive strategies “that mask the failure of actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions,” such as carbon markets and the new market mechanism known as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), aimed at incorporating forests into the carbon market.

With regard to forests, the Peoples' Agreement categorically states: “The definition of

forests used in the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which includes plantations, is unacceptable. **Monoculture plantations are not forests.** Therefore, we require a definition for negotiation purposes that recognizes the native forests, jungles and the diverse ecosystems on Earth.”

Profit-driven industrial agriculture carried out by and for agribusiness has fatally wounded Mother Earth and her children, because it does not respect the right to food and is one of the main causes of climate change. The Peoples’ Agreement condemns agribusiness and its various technological, trade-related and policy tools: free trade agreements, intellectual property rights over life, dangerous technologies such as transgenic crops, agrofuels, geo-engineering, nanotechnology and others that serve as instruments of privatization and “only serve to deepen the climate change crisis and increase hunger in the world.”

Also present in Cochabamba were the internal contradictions of a process of change that is difficult to carry out within the broader context of savage capitalism. Numerous organizations were convened by the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), an indigenous federation, to take part in an independent working group outside the official conference structure, known as Working Group No. 18. Their purpose was to denounce the serious environmental conflicts caused by extractive projects and infrastructure megaprojects undertaken in the framework of the South American Regional Infrastructure Integration (IIRSA) initiative which cross through indigenous territories and fragile protected areas. At the end of their discussions, the working group members called on the government of Evo Morales to suspend all extractive activities and projects that adversely affect the country’s indigenous peoples.

Despite contradictions like these, Bolivia, with its indigenous pride restored, took the first major step towards an active leading role for the peoples in confronting the climate crisis. This step left a footprint. Now it is up to us to follow in the steps of Cochabamba, until our collective footprints become deep enough to forge a new path.

By Raquel Núñez, WRM, email: raquelnu@wrm.org.uy

(1) <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement/#more-1584>

- A unified people's agenda to combat climate change

By convening the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, the plurinational government of Bolivia set the stage for a transcendental political event: social movements representing an extraordinary range of sectors collectively formulated a unified agenda of their own, with a radical stance towards climate change – radical because it focused on the root of the problem. This unity was also the result, undoubtedly, of the maturation of a lengthy process of integration among diverse social movements, in the search for strategies aimed at a genuine solution not only to the problem of climate change, but also to the various crises facing the world – the energy crisis, food crisis, financial crisis, loss of

biodiversity, etc. – which merely serve to highlight a major structural crisis.

The People's Agreement of Cochabamba, the final declaration which summarizes the conclusions reached by 17 working groups made up of anyone who chose to register for and attend the conference, reaffirms that it is not enough to discuss climate change "as a problem limited to the rise in temperature;" the time has come to question the cause.

In this regard, all of the conclusions reached by the working groups concur with the position that the People's Agreement states in this way: "We confront the terminal crisis of a civilizing model that is patriarchal and based on the submission and destruction of human beings and nature that accelerated since the industrial revolution." The capitalist system, with its logic of limitless growth, has led the Earth's regenerative capacity to be exceeded by more than 30%, and if this current rate of over-exploitation continues, the world will require the resources of two planets by 2030, concluded the members of Working Group 2: "Harmony with Nature to Live Well".

For its part, Working Group 1 on "Structural Causes of Climate Change" stressed that every alternative to the current capitalist model "must lead to a profound transformation of civilization. Without this profound transformation, it will not be possible to continue life on planet Earth. Humanity is faced with a huge dilemma: continue down the road of capitalism, patriarchy, Progress and death, or embark on the path of harmony with nature and respect for life."

Harmony, integration, interdependence, complementarity, equity and justice are concepts repeated throughout the conclusions of the different working groups. The need to preserve (for some), recover or find (for others) a tie of belonging to nature, to Mother Earth, is a constant. Mother Earth is a living being, with rights. In recognition of this, Working Group 3: "Mother Earth Rights" formulated a draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. Article 1 defines Mother Earth as a living being with inherent rights, which are outlined in Article 2, while Article 3 of the declaration establishes the obligations of human beings to Mother Earth.

This living Earth has sons and daughters who have lived in harmony with her for thousands of years. Their wisdom and spirituality are intrinsically linked to Mother Earth, and they suffer the assaults against her in the flesh. "The aggression towards Mother Earth and the repeated assaults and violations against our soils, air, forests, rivers, lakes, biodiversity, and the cosmos are assaults against us. (...) Our territories are not respected, particularly those of peoples in voluntary isolation or initial contact, and we suffer the most terrible aggression since colonization only to facilitate the entry of markets and extractive industries," declared the members of Working Group 7: "Indigenous Peoples".

But in addition to denunciations like these, the indigenous peoples also have a great deal to contribute. They have their own knowledge, technologies and ancestral wisdom that they propose to be incorporated into curricula and teaching methods. And they have their concept of "Living Well", which Working Group 9: "Shared Vision" describes as follows: "The shared vision is a world in which all people 'live well' in harmony with Mother Earth and other human beings. (...) The shared vision of 'living

well' is of societies that respect the principles of interdependency and responsibility and therefore practice reciprocity, complementarity, solidarity, equity and live in harmony with Mother Earth and each other. It is a global society of peoples and social movements, who stand in solidarity to change the system that is putting the planet in peril. This change will come from revaluing traditional knowledge that respects nature in all parts of the planet.”

But this change will also come when those responsible for the problem honour their responsibilities. In order to sufficiently stabilize greenhouse gas emissions so as to limit the rise in global temperature to no more than 1%, the wealthy industrialized countries, who have colonized the planet's atmosphere, must effectively reduce their own emissions, without the use of carbon markets. Working Group 10 on “The Kyoto Protocol and Emission Reduction Commitments” stresses: “The emission reductions of developed countries must be achieved domestically, without the use of carbon markets or any other offsetting mechanisms that allows them to avoid the adoption of real measures to reduce emissions.” The group calls for a thorough review of the market mechanisms created by the Kyoto Protocol itself, which have allowed the industrialized countries of the North, who are primarily responsible for the “slow death of Planet Earth,” to evade their real obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

These countries, which account for only 20% of the world's population, “have appropriated the Earth's atmospheric space by emitting the vast majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions,” thereby accumulating a considerable climate debt. Working Group 8, which specifically addressed the “Climate Debt”, underlined that honoring this debt does not depend “merely on financial compensation, but on restorative justice – on ‘making whole’ those people and members of the community of life on Earth.” The group declares that the responsibility lies not only with the industrialized countries of the North, but also transnational corporations and financial speculators who “also bear responsibility to compensate for the disasters that they provoked.”

Among other measures, the group calls on the so-called “developed” countries to fulfil their responsibilities by “altering their patterns of life and development, immediately cancelling external debt, stopping the production of armaments, shifting from fossil energy to renewable energy, and changing the international financial, economic and social systems that perpetuate the current patterns.”

Clearly absent from this list are the false solutions offered by carbon market mechanisms, which were condemned in the final conclusions of numerous working groups. In particular, Working Group 15: “Dangers of the Carbon Market” declares that the absolute failure of the carbon market is undeniable, given that “greenhouse gases emissions (GHG) have increased by 11.2% within developed countries from 1990 to 2007.” In the meantime, the world has witnessed a financial crisis which merely serves to prove that “the market is unable to regulate the financial system which is fragile and insecure due to speculation and the rise of intermediaries.” This leads to an obvious conclusion: that “it would be totally irresponsible to leave the very existence of humanity and our Mother Earth under their care and protection.”

The carbon market working group also rejected other false solutions, such as nuclear

energy, transgenic crops, geo-engineering, mega infrastructure projects, agrofuels, and changes in land use that entail the destruction of existing ecosystems for their replacement by large-scale tree plantations of fast-growing alien species (eucalyptus, pine, acacia, etc.) that would purportedly serve as “carbon sinks”. On this latter point, Working Group 14: “Forests” is eminently clear: “Tree plantations under CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) within the Kyoto Protocol framework are a false solution that threatens native forests and jungles and violates Peoples’ rights. Plantations for carbon credits as well as for agrofuels are a false solution to climate change.” The same group forcefully spoke out against the attempt to incorporate forests into the carbon market: “We condemn neoliberal market mechanisms such as the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) mechanism and its + and ++ versions, which are violating our Peoples’ sovereignty and right to free, prior and informed consent; as well as the sovereignty of national States. This mechanism is violating the rights, uses, and customs of the Peoples and the Rights of Nature.”

It continues, “We demand instead that contaminating countries acknowledge their historical ecological and climate debt, and transfer financial and technological resources directly to the Peoples, nations and ancestral indigenous, aborigine, and peasant organic structures so they can restore and maintain forests and jungles. Thus can real funding of plans for a comprehensive life and for living well be ensured with direct compensation, in addition to the funding committed by developed countries, outside the carbon market, and never used as offsets of the carbon market.”

“The future of humanity is in danger,” the People’s Agreement concludes, “and we cannot allow a group of leaders from developed countries to decide for all countries as they tried unsuccessfully to do at the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen. This decision concerns us all. Thus, it is essential to carry out a global referendum or popular consultation on climate change in which all are consulted regarding the following issues: the level of emission reductions on the part of developed countries and transnational corporations, financing to be offered by developed countries, the creation of an International Climate Justice Tribunal, the need for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and the need to change the current capitalist system.”

With this agenda as a foundation, social movements can continue building a genuine solution to the climate change problem and an alternative to the system that has given rise to it.

The documents cited are available at the official People’s Conference website: <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/>

By Raquel Núñez, WRM, email: raquelnu@wrm.org.uy

- Women and climate change in Cochabamba

An analysis of Peoples’ Agreement (1) that emerged from the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held from 20 to 22 April in Cochabamba (Bolivia) may lead us to think that the gender issue was not

present at that Conference.

Although in general terms it may be true that a gender perspective was not substantially incorporated into the conclusions of the working groups, gender language can be found in some of the texts. For example, group 6 on migrations specifies that it is women who suffer the most serious situations arising from migration; group 7 on indigenous peoples, calls for the full and effective participation of vulnerable groups, including women; group 8 on climate debt mentions women twice in connection with vulnerable groups; group 12 on funding appeals for women to have representation in the new funding mechanism that should be set up to take on the costs of climate change; and group 14 on forests asks for recognition of the role of women in the preservation of cultures and the conservation of native forests and jungles and proposes the establishment of an expert group with representation of at least 50% by women. (1)

However, it would not be fair to assess the influence of feminist and women's groups solely based on the conference texts and not consider the important contributions made alongside the working groups that prepared the final document. Here are some examples:

The Feminist Working group from Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) made a presentation at a workshop, showing the conclusions of the tribunals on gender and climate change held in seven countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The presentation included an analysis of the differentiated gender impacts caused by climate change, among which, the lack of access to drinking water and water for agriculture, impact on food sovereignty and greater dependence on the economy and the market, prolonged droughts and heavy unseasonal rain and the loss of the ability to produce natural medicines due to reduced availability of the appropriate plants. This activity was positively assessed by the participants as it introduced a relevant but scantily addressed issue at the conference. However, perhaps the most important input of this group was related to the role of education in the generation of changes in production and excessive consumption patterns that are the true causes of climate change. (2)

The event organized by the Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy (Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía - REMTE) made important inputs regarding "the structural causes of climate change and the challenges of an economy for life," an approach in which the proposals of "Living Well" (Buen Vivir), the visions and practices of ancestral community economy, of feminist economy and of ecological economy all converge. In a very brief summary, they state that "what matters is to move towards an economy that promotes a broader reproduction of life instead of the reproduction of capital."

Along the same lines, during the Assembly of Social Movements that took place during the conference, women's struggles did not go by unnoticed. In the Letter made public, it is stated that "resistance [to the climate crisis assessed as part of the global crisis] is being built up from the interrelation of diverse anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-racist approaches"... and that in the "process of articulation under permanent construction" one of the "key moments" will be the Third International Action of the World March of Women to take place in Congo next

October.(3)

For their part, the Latin American representatives of Gender CC - Women for Climate Justice, made an analysis of the gender impacts of climate change in Bolivian and Colombian communities. Perhaps their most important contribution was the analysis of the impact on women of the false solutions to climate change proposed so far. These false solutions include, among others, increased monoculture tree plantations for agrofuels and carbon sinks and major hydroelectric dams promoted as supposedly clean energy sources. They are false solutions because, from the standpoint of climate they do not attack the true causes and, what is even worse, they will not only aggravate injustices towards the poorest communities but also, as has already been proven, they worsen the lives of women in particular. (4)

The Latin American Feminist Community group, the voice of feminist social movements and organizations, also made a substantial input, making public a Pronouncement that arose from a document presented at one of the workshops. This document was discussed during the workshop and later the discussion was continued in an open space, where it received contributions from indigenous and other women from different countries. The Pronouncement analyzes in detail the concepts of Pachamama (Mother Earth), community, reciprocity, autonomy and climate change. As it is a lengthy document we will only refer to some points related to climate change which we believe to be of substance. (5)

Regarding climate change, the pronouncement explains that “it is the consequence of human activity, of human excesses, conceived in the framework of a predatory development model that is sustained by the consumption of fossil fuels and through deforestation and violation of nature in order to increase cement cities. A capitalist and patriarchal system, where everything is a commodity, where everything can become private property and have a price on it, and where any consequence of human activity can be repaired or modified by science and technology. It is the result of a system that ... has undermined the basic necessary conditions for perpetuating life in a harmonious cosmos, for us the Pachamama (Mother Earth).”

One of the indigenous members of the movement explained that for them, patriarchy is a system of oppression of which its offspring, such as colonialism and neo-liberalism, are just different ways of plundering life, where the latter is the one that most cynically plunders the Pachamama. For this reason she added, it is not the indigenous peoples who are going to save the planet, because the men and women of the indigenous peoples are also patriarchal and it is patriarchy that is destroying life. This is the reason for the need of a Pronouncement by Community Feminism, because our struggle is for our dreams.

Regarding the effects of climate change, the group ratified and agreed with the analysis made by other groups that “they are different and more severe for women because of their socially allocated role, where production, feeding and looking after the family is central; bringing up children and working outside the home, which does not imply not doing so-called domestic chores. As a result, women are more intensely affected by changes in the climate.”

The pronouncement rejects the fact that the same patriarchal rationale that inequitably

allocates roles and tasks to sustain society is used to face climate change. Those responsible for it, the self-denominated developed countries have plundered, contaminated and forced the Pachamama. Their industries, elites and corporations are attempting to compensate and put a price on destruction. Regarding this, the pronouncement emphatically concludes: "From this community feminist viewpoint we reiterate that we do not want money in exchange for the damage caused to the Pachamama or to women. To accept money would be like a time bomb, it would mean that they will continue exploiting and paying for this exploitation. We want restitution of rights. The damage caused can no longer be repaired, but the Pachamama's rights can be restored and for this patriarchy must be dismantled, including its states, its armies, its transnational corporations, its hierarchical rationale and all the violence this means to women and to the Pachamama. We will not accept either that we women are made responsible for the plundering, what we have before us, men and women, is a community task. That is to say a task for all of us."

Women spoke out clearly in Cochabamba. The enormous task of disseminating these contributions and their true inclusion on the agenda of social movements struggling for change still remains.

By Ana Filippini, Latin American Focal Point of the international network Women for Climate Justice, Gender CC, email: mujeresporjusticiaclimatica@gmail.com

(1) The full texts can be found on the Conference's webpage e: <http://cmpcc.org/>

(2) See details of the conference and the presentation in the text distributed by Ana Agostino available at: <http://www.icae2.org/files/349c.pdf>

(3) Full text of the Letter in Spanish available at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/actores/CCC/CMPCC/Movimientos_Sociales.html

(4) Full texts and power point presentations in Spanish available on the webpage of Gender cc: <http://www.gendercc.net/>

(5) The full document in Spanish is available at:

<http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/pronunciamiento-feminismo-comunitario-latinoamericano-conferencia-pueb>

- Eduardo Galeano, present at Cochabamba

Letter from Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, read at the opening ceremony of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth:

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth starts today in Cochabamba, Bolivia, convened by Bolivia's President Evo Morales.

Unfortunately, I shall not be able to be with you. Something has come up that prevents me from traveling. But I'd like to be, in some way, part of this meeting of yours, this meeting of mine, since I have no choice but to do the little that I can rather than the much that I want to do.

And, to be there without being there, at least I am sending these words.

I'd like to say to you: may all that is possible, and impossible too, be done, so that

the Summit of the Mother Earth will be the first step toward the collective expression of the peoples who do not lead, but suffer from, global politics.

I hope that we will be able to advance these two initiatives of compañero Evo's, the Climate Justice Tribunal and the Global Referendum against a system of power founded on war and waste, which holds human life in contempt and hangs an auction flag over our earthly goods.

I hope that we will be able to speak little and do a lot. Serious damage has been done, and is being done, to us by discursive inflation, which in Latin America is more dangerous than monetary inflation. Besides, we are, above all, fed up with the hypocrisy of rich countries, which are leaving us without a habitable planet while making pompous speeches to cover up their heist.

Some say that hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays virtue. Others say that hypocrisy is the only proof of the existence of the infinite. And the logorrhea of the so-called 'international community,' the club of bankers and warriors, does prove that these two definitions are correct.

I'd like to celebrate, in contrast, the force of truth that radiates from the words and silences born in the human communion with nature. And it is no accident that this Mother Earth Summit is being held in Bolivia, this nation of nations, which is discovering itself after two centuries of living a lie.

Bolivia has just celebrated the tenth anniversary of the people's victory in the war of water, won by the people of Cochabamba, who were capable of defeating an all-powerful corporation from California, the owner of the water of Bolivia thanks to a government which claimed to be Bolivian but was very generous to other people.

This water war was one of the battles which this land keeps fighting in defense of its natural resources — in other words, in defense of its identity with nature.

There are voices from the past that speak to the future.

Bolivia is one of the American nations where indigenous cultures have managed to survive, and their voices are now ringing with more force than ever before, despite the scorn and persecution they suffered for a long time.

The entire world, stunned as it is, is wandering about like a blind man in the middle of a crossfire, having to listen to those voices. They teach us that we, tiny beings called humans, are part of nature, relatives to all those who have legs, paws, wings, or roots. The European conquest condemned the indigenous, who lived in that communion with nature, for idolatry, and for believing in that communion they were flogged, their throats were slit, or they were burned alive.

From the times of the European Renaissance, nature has been turned into a commodity or an obstacle to human progress. And, to this day, this divorce between us and her has persisted, so much so that there still are people of good will who are moved by poor nature, so abused, so wounded, but are seeing her only from outside.

Indigenous cultures see her from inside. Seeing her, I see myself. What is done against her is done against me. In her I find myself, my legs are also the road on which they walk.

Let us celebrate, then, this Summit of the Mother Earth. And may the deaf listen: the rights of human beings and the rights of nature are two names of the same dignity.

With hugs sent on wings, from Montevideo.

Eduardo Galeano, 21 April, 2010

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Brazil: The double role of Norway in conserving and destroying the Amazon

Norway is a major donor of the Amazon Fund, the Brazilian Development Bank's fund that receives donations from governments, multilateral institutions, big NGOs and companies to fund forest conservation projects with the alleged aim of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases resulting from deforestation. The contribution of donors is recognised with diplomas that are nominal, non-transferable and do not imply equity rights or carbon credits to offset.

In clear contradiction with the above, the Norwegian government is investing in bauxite mining and aluminium production in the same Amazon forest it claims to protect. Norwegian state-owned company Norsk Hydro ASA -Europe's third largest aluminium maker- has recently signed an agreement to take over Vale do Rio Doce's aluminium businesses in Brazil.

The agreement implies –among other things- that Norsk Hydro will take control of Brazil's Paragominas, one of the largest bauxite mines in the world, and gain 91 percent ownership in Alunorte, the world's largest alumina refinery. At the same time it will get 51 percent in the Albras aluminium plant and 81 percent ownership in the CAP alumina refinery project. (1)

The Norwegian government cannot ignore that bauxite mining, its refining into alumina and smelting to make aluminum metal are highly destructive processes, including deforestation, contamination, displacement of local communities and severe impacts on livelihoods and health. At the same time, some of those processes –particularly deforestation- are significant contributors to global warming. Additionally, it is a well known fact that aluminium smelting is a highly energy-intensive process, with electricity representing about 20% to 40% of the cost of producing aluminium.

That implies the need for vast amounts of cheap energy. Norsk Hydro and the Norwegian government know perfectly well that in Brazil such energy can only come from large-scale hydroelectric dams.

Those types of massive dams have been and are being built in the Amazon region and it comes as no surprise that the Brazilian government has recently approved the controversial Belo Monte dam, aimed at feeding industrial processes such as aluminium with the low cost energy they require.

With an estimated cost of over US\$ 16 billion, the Belo Monte massive dam project on the river Xingu would flood 516 sq km of forest land though estimations say that all in all 1,522 sq km would be affected, leading to the displacement of some 20,000–40,000 people.

Belo Monte would be the third largest dam in the world and most of the funding would come mainly from the Brazilian government's financing (as much as 80%) through public funds (public pension funds and money from the National Treasury) (2). It is important to highlight that 25% of all electricity in Brazil is consumed by nine mining and energy companies -Alcoa, ArcelorMittal, Camargo Corrêa Energia, CSN, Gerdau, Samarco, Vale do Rio Doce and Votorantim- and that some of these same companies want the Belo Monte dam for expanding their extractive operations.

Quoting International River's factsheet on the Project: "Belo Monte is being proposed as a renewable energy project and an important part of the country's commitment to reduce emissions by 38% by 2020. Yet reservoirs in tropical forests like the Amazon can themselves be significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions due to decomposing vegetation. According to Philip Fearnside, Brazil's foremost expert on reservoir emissions, Belo Monte is unlikely to be a standalone project due to its low generating capacity in the dry season. Fearnside therefore assumes that the Barbaquara Dam – a much larger storage dam – will be built upstream. According to Fearnside, during the first 10 years of operation, the Barbaquara and Belo Monte dams combined would have emissions four times higher than an equivalent fossilfuel plant."

Such a massive flooding would bring about the displacement of thousands of local people whose lands and livelihoods would be lost forever. Up and downstream impacts of the dam would also have heavy impacts on local populations who might have to migrate in search of work, competing for few low-paid jobs in outside towns and villages.

The indigenous peoples of the Xingu have for many years been leading a strong campaign in defense of their river and lands: "We have already suffered many invasions and threats. When the Portuguese came to Brazil, we indigenous people were already here, and many died, many lost their enormous vast territories, we lost many of the rights that we had, many lost parts of their culture, and other tribes disappeared completely. The forest is our butcher shop, the river is our market. We do not want the rivers of the Xingú to be invaded, and our villages and children to be threatened, children who will grow with our culture", stated Cacique Bet Kamati Kayapó and Cacique Raoni Kayapó Yakareti Juruna, representing 62 indigenous leaders of the Xingu basin, in a declaration after the Belo Monte Dam Auction.

"We do not accept the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam because we understand that it will bring more destruction to our region. We are not thinking only about the locale where they want to construct the dam, but about all of the destruction the dam will bring in the future: more corporations, more ranches, more land invasions, more conflicts, and even more dams. If the white man continues to carry on like this, everything will be destroyed very quickly."

"The world must know what is happening here, they must perceive how destroying

forests and indigenous people destroys the entire world. Because of this we do not want Belo Monte.”

If the Norwegian government is sincere about wanting to preserve the Amazon and avoid emissions from deforestation it cannot engage in the large-scale industry of aluminium production which is developed at the expense of the Amazon and its forest dependent peoples. Otherwise, it must say clearly that it is prioritising profits and business over the Amazon. As is currently the case.

Article based on the videos by Rebecca Sommer from the joint side event that took place in April 2010, at the World's Peoples Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, Video part 1:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4LI_eS5Jfw; Video part 2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdn5kmsS4cs>; Video part 3:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SommerFilms#p/u/6/nFRDiMUzjxU>; and “Belo Monte.

Massive Dam Project Strikes at the Heart of the Amazon”, International Rivers Network, http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/J4337_IRN_Factsheet_3.pdf ;

“Indigenous Declaration After the Belo Monte Dam Auction”,

<http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/xingu/indigenous-declaration-after-belo-monte-dam-auction>

Data sources:

(1) Investor Village, “Norsk Hydro Buys Vale Aluminum Units for \$4.9 Billion”,

<http://www.investorvillage.com/mbthread.asp?mb=4198&tid=8944803&showall=1>;

(2) “Belo Monte's Public Finance: Red Hot & Risky”, International Rivers,

<http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/blog/zachary-hurwitz/2010-5-19/belo-montes-public-finance-red-hot-risky>

- Guatemala: Don't sell forests, water and the future for oil!

Guatemala is facing the possibility of an extension of contract 2-85 that is threatening to expand and increase the oil frontier in one of its most important natural areas, the Laguna del Tigre national park. This is the country's biggest national park and the core area of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, classified under that protection category in 1990 because of its international ecological importance.

The Laguna del Tigre is a wetland comprising over 300 tropical lagoons and ponds, slow running rivers, flood zones, vast savannahs and forests. It is a strategic area for biodiversity conservation and because of its size, it still hosts various species that have disappeared from other places, such as the jaguar, the tapir and the howling monkey. It has the highest concentration of the Moreletti crocodile in Guatemala and is one of the last nesting sites for the Scarlet Macao, a seriously endangered species.

Current research reports over 40 species of mammals, 188 species of migratory and resident birds, 17 amphibians and 55 species of fish, but it is very likely that further investigation would come up with a longer list. Added to this natural wealth are two uncommon natural systems of great importance, a bivalve reef in the waters of the San Pedro River on the southern border of the national park and a remnant of red mangrove forest at over one hundred kilometres from the sea.

Within the national park is the Laguna del Tigre biotope. This was included on the Ramsar list of internationally important wetlands in 1990. Three years later, due to the threat of oil exploitation and the changes in land use, the government requested its inclusion on the Montreux Record, which groups Ramsar sites that require special conservation attention.

The process of destruction of the Laguna del Tigre's natural riches started with the arrival of oil exploitation in the heart of this park. In 1985 the government signed a 25 year contract for oil exploitation, which expires in August this year. In order to continue with oil extraction and exploitation, at that time the Basic Resources Company opened up a road crossing from the limits of the San Pedro River to the Xan oilfield.

The oil company violated an agreement signed with the National Council for Protected Areas (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas –CONAP), in which it promised to control access to the park. This resulted in the establishment of human settlements (presently over 40), forest destruction, cattle ranching, forest fires, timber and flora and fauna trafficking in general and changes in land use.

The original exploiter of contract 2-85 was Texaco. Following this it was operated for a long time by the Bahamas based Basic Resources, a company that only exists in Guatemala. Later it passed into the hands of UPR and Anadarko Petroleum that then sold it to the French company Perenco, presently exploiting the area. This company, which also operates in other Latin American countries, is characterized by entering into controversial places and situations. As an example, it has the intention of building an oil pipeline approximately 207 kilometres long crossing isolated indigenous peoples' territories in the Peruvian Amazon.

In spite of the fact that it would seem that extension of contract 2-85 is illegal, government officials publicly defend this violation that transgresses the hydrocarbon law, which literally states in its article 12 that in no case may contracts exceed a length of 25 years.

One of the false arguments put forth by those defending extension of the contract - among which the Ministry of Energy and Mines- is that the area is totally destroyed and there is little to save. In spite of the destruction, Laguna del Tigre is still alive and still has well conserved ecosystems and water reserves of regional interest. Extending the contract would condemn Laguna del Tigre to the inevitable destruction and degradation of this ecosystem due to the characteristic impacts inherent to oil extracting activities.

Those who would like to join the campaign in defence of the Laguna del Tigre can visit the webpage of the School for Ecologist Thought (Escuela de Pensamiento Ecologista – SAVIA): <http://www.saviaguatemala.org/> to send letters to the President requesting respect for the law and not to extend contract 2-85. There is a video explaining the case at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OG5nVdm4HbQ>

By Carlos Salvatierra, SAVIA Escuela de pensamiento ecologista, correo electrónico: Salvatierraleal@gmail.com

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Kenya: The Forest Service to the rescue of eucalyptus

Concerns have been raised in Kenya about the high water consumption of eucalyptus trees, which in 2009 led the country's Environment Minister, John Michuki, to order the uprooting of eucalyptus trees from wetlands and banned their planting along rivers and watersheds. WRM welcomed this move and provided an overview on this issue in WRM bulletin 147 (October 2009).

Within this context, we were taken by surprise by a recent document produced by the Kenya Forest Service, basically aimed at further promoting eucalyptus plantations in the country ("A Guide to On-Farm Eucalyptus Growing in Kenya", December 2009. Available at http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Kenya/Eucalyptus_guidelines.pdf).

In words of Prof. Eric Koech Chairman of the Kenya Forest Service Board (foreword to the document), this Guide "has been developed as a result of the increasing concern on the effect of the species on the hydrological cycle." He says that "there are claims that the species consumes a lot of water resulting in decrease and in some cases the drying of rivers, springs and lakes."

He seems to subscribe to those "claims" by stating that "generally, planting of Eucalyptus is not recommended in water scarce areas, riparian areas, wetlands and marshy areas." Although he does not say so explicitly, the obvious reason is that he knows perfectly well that eucalyptus trees consume vast amounts of water.

However, he goes on to add that the public has "been made to believe that the tree is responsible for the national drought conditions being felt and have been discouraged from further planting of the species and given a go ahead to uproot eucalypts wherever they are." To our knowledge, no-one has accused eucalyptus of causing a drought. What the public knows through experience, is that in a drought-prone country such as Kenya, planting eucalyptus trees will only exacerbate the problem by depleting the little water available for other uses.

His final words are enlightening as to whom the Guide is aiming to support, when he says: "I hope this document will assist the Eucalyptus tree growers nationally." We sincerely hope it doesn't.

Most of the Guide is in fact a conventional plantation forestry guide, explaining how to obtain seeds, how to produce seedlings, how to prepare the soil for planting, how to plant and how to manage the plantation until harvest. Most of the rest is related to marketing eucalyptus plantations' products.

Regarding the issue of water –which is what started the debate in Kenya- what the Guide in fact does is to mislead the public. Given the importance of this issue, we consider it necessary to include and comment all the relevant quotes from the document.

In section 1.3.1 ("Eucalyptus and water use"), the Guide explains that "a lot of concern has been expressed on the effect of Eucalyptus spp planting on the hydrological patterns with various claims that their presence on the landscape is causing the

drying up of water sources, rivers and springs. These claims have not been conclusively supported by scientific evidence.”

In spite of the above, the Guide itself implicitly agrees that those claims are true by recommending “Areas where Eucalyptus should not be planted” (4.3.2), including:

- i. Wetlands and marshy areas
- ii. Riparian areas
 - a) Along rivers (reserve not less than 30 meters as stipulated in the Survey Act Cap 299 of the Laws of Kenya. In addition allow for an extra 20 meters to ensure that the trees do not adversely interfere with the water source.)
 - b) Areas around lakes, ponds, swamps, estuary and any other body of standing water.
- iii. Irrigated farm lands.
- iv. Areas with less than 400mm of rainfall.
- v. In farms next to water sources, planting should be minimized by inter-planting with indigenous tree species or in mosaic plantations between indigenous trees with the latter occupying a greater percentage or strip planting of eucalyptus with natural vegetation.”

The obvious question is: why should eucalyptus not be planted in those areas if there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that the presence of eucalyptus “is causing the drying up of water sources, rivers and springs”? The answer is equally obvious: because there is more than sufficient evidence regarding the impacts of eucalyptus on water.

In support to the above, it is interesting to note that in section 4.3.3 (“Areas suitable for Eucalyptus planting), the Guide recommends planting in “Water logged areas for purposes of draining the area”, thus highlighting the role of eucalyptus trees in sucking up vast amounts of water.

Much of the arguments provided by the Guide on water use by eucalyptus are clearly aimed at misleading the public, such as illustrated in the following quote:

“However, studies have established that Eucalypts exhibit high efficiency in water use for biomass accumulation”, adding that “it has been established that eucalyptus requires less water to produce one (1) Kg of biomass than most crops”. The examples provided by the Guide are the following:

- “- Eucalyptus species require on average 785 litres
- Cotton / coffee / bananas each require 3,200 litres
- Sunflower requires 2,400 litres
- Maize, potato and sorghum require 1,000 litres each”

The above is clearly aimed at making the public believe that all those crops consume more water than eucalyptus, which is in fact absolutely false. The only thing that those figures prove (assuming they are true) is that some plants need more or less water for producing 1 kilo of biomass, which is totally irrelevant to the discussion about the impacts of eucalyptus on water. What was really needed were figures on how much water is consumed by each of those crops per hectare/year. And those

figures were not provided by the authors of the Guide.

The real debate is not about which crop is more “efficient” in producing biomass from a litre of water but about the total amount of water used by eucalyptus and on whether it depletes or not the water resources. According to research from the Kenya-based International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), one single 3-year old eucalyptus “drinks” 20 litres of water per day. During the following years, consumption exponentially increases and at age 20 the tree will “drink” 200 litres per day. Using the lowest figure (20 litres), this means that one single tree will consume 7300 litres of water per year and that during that same time a typical plantation (1100 trees/hectare) will consume 8,030,000 litres of water per hectare/year. Which of course explains why eucalyptus is described in Kenya as the “water guzzler”.

The Guide goes one step beyond misleading the public, by saying something completely untrue: “Comparisons of Eucalyptus species with other forest plants demonstrate that eucalypts do not consume more water than other native forest tree species as shown in the Table 2.”

What Table 2 actually shows is that eucalyptus consume much more water than the other three species mentioned. According to the column “Water consumed (litres/yr)”, *Acacia auriculiformis* consumes 1231.50 litres, *Albizia lebbek* 1283.90 litres, *Dalbergia sissoo* 1534.05 litres and *Eucalyptus hybrid* 2526.35 litres. Which proves –contrary to the above statement- that eucalypts do consume more water than other native forest tree species.

In that context, the real aim of table 2 is to try to hide the fact that eucalyptus consume more water than other tree species by using the concept of “high efficiency in water use for biomass accumulation”. Thus, the final column provides figures proving that eucalyptus consume less water **per gram of biomass produced**. Even if one accepts that eucalyptus are “more efficient” than other tree species in producing wood with the same amount of water, this does not answer the real question: how much water do eucalyptus use? And the answer –ignored by this Guide- is provided by research carried out by ICRAF in Kenya itself: between 20 and 200 litres of water per day during the whole year.

Regarding the impacts of eucalyptus plantations on biodiversity, the 27-page Guide (plus annexes), only dedicates one paragraph to this important issue (“1.3.2 Eucalyptus and bio-diversity conservation”). The paragraph says:

“The greatest positive contribution of eucalyptus is perhaps in replacing indigenous species for fuel-wood, thereby preventing further degradation of natural forests. Although it is claimed that there is limited biodiversity in eucalyptus plantations, their cultivation saves biodiversity elsewhere by preventing the destruction of natural forests. Furthermore, certain Eucalyptus species, by quickly producing firewood, would eliminate the causes which frequently may have led to land degradation and desertification.” And that is all!

One would have assumed that a “A Guide to On-Farm Eucalyptus Growing” would have at least included some simple guidelines on biodiversity conservation –flora and fauna- in plantation areas (biological corridors, measures for protecting

threatened species, plantation of native species, etc.). However, the Guide only subscribes to the questioned concept that “plantations alleviate pressure on native forests”, giving a green light to biodiversity destruction by monoculture plantations of alien species in non forested areas.

Finally, the Guide includes two paragraphs on another crucial issue: “Eucalyptus and soil fertility” (1.3.3).

The Guide starts by saying that “when eucalyptus is grown as a short rotation crop for high biomass production and removal, soil nutrients are depleted rapidly which conforms to conventional scientific argument.” Good start indeed, but obviously not very useful for promoting eucalyptus plantations.

The Guide therefore adds the following very confusing arguments: “However, areas under eucalyptus **have been found** [emphasis added] to have higher levels of micronutrients [and what about macronutrients?] compared to areas under crops **such as tea** [emphasis added] of similar age. Long term planting of eucalyptus **has been reported** [emphasis added] to improve soil fertility while comparative studies of soils under eucalyptus and adjacent grassland have found no significant differences **if the trees have a rotation of more than 10 years.**” [emphasis added]

The second paragraph proves nothing but gives the message that eucalyptus are useful in soil conservation: “**Studies have indicated** [emphasis added] that on degraded hillsides and wastelands, the net soil contribution of eucalyptus through litter fall **is likely** [emphasis added] to be positive. Eucalypts also **exhibit good potential** [emphasis added] for topsoil retention on degraded hillsides.”

In spite of all those confusing arguments aimed at supporting eucalyptus plantations, the fact is that in Kenya “eucalyptus is grown as a short rotation crop for high biomass production and removal” and therefore –as the Guide says- soil nutrients will be rapidly depleted.

In sum, there is nothing in the Guide proving that “if the prescriptions contained within this Guide are observed then the negative environmental impacts will be minimized.” The expansion of eucalyptus plantations will result in further water depletion, biodiversity destruction and soil degradation.

There are alternatives to eucalyptus in Kenya, such as several native tree species that conserve water and that can provide multiple benefits –including fuelwood- to people and the economy. Knowledge about those trees exists and ICRAF is there to provide it. What is needed is the political will to promote –as ICRAF suggests- the planting of trees in integrated “tree-crop” systems, in which agriculture and forestry are practised on a single piece of land.

In the meantime, it would be very useful to have “A Guide to On-Farm Growing of Native Trees”. Would the Forest Service be willing to produce such a Guide?

By Ricardo Carrere, WRM International Coordinator

- The Pulp Invasion continues: Companies linked to Asia Pulp and Paper setting

up in Vietnam

Asia Pulp and Paper (APP) is one of the most controversial and destructive paper companies on the planet. The company has cleared vast areas of rainforest to feed its two million tonnes-a-year pulp mill in Sumatra, Indonesia.

APP is constantly expanding. In September 2007, Vietnam Investment Review reported that APP was considering building a two million tonnes-a-year pulp mill in Vietnam. While this plan has so far not progressed, APP seems to be moving into Vietnam through a company called Green Elite.

Green Elite first appeared in Cambodia in March 2004, when it started logging melaleuca and mangrove forest inside the Botum Sokor National Park. Although the 18,300 acacia plantation concession was illegal, since it was inside a national park, the company managed to clear several hundred hectares and started to build a wood chip mill.

Eventually the Ministry of Environment threatened Green Elite with legal action for US\$1 million in damages and reparations. While the lawsuit was subsequently dropped, it did at least get Green Elite out of the national park.

Green Elite appears to have close links to Asia Pulp and Paper. In September 2004, the Cambodia Daily reported that thousands of acacia seedlings had been imported from Arara Abadi, which is part of the APP's parent company, the Sinar Mas Group. The Cambodia Daily spoke to ex-employees of Arara Abadi who were now working for Green Elite. One of them, Frankie Ng, referred to Arara Abadi the "sister company" of Green Elite.

Further confirmation of a link between APP and Green Elite came in January 2005, when Jeff Hayward of SmartWood wrote to NGOs in Phnom Penh. Hayward explained that Smartwood "was asked by APP if we would conduct an independent 3rd party evaluation of the concession area in Botum Sakor for which the subsidiary company Green Elite and management company Green Rich Group Ltd. intend to develop into plantations."

On 21 January 2005, APP put out a statement denying any involvement: "Neither APP China nor APP group have any ownership or interest in either Green Elite or Green Rich." Which sounds very clear, except that given the labyrinthine structure of the Sinar Mas Group, the statement does not actually rule out a link between APP and Green Elite.

Since its exploits in Cambodia, Green Elite has moved across the border to Vietnam. On 30 May 2007, according to VietNamNet, Green Elite applied to the Nghe An provincial authorities for permission to set up plantations. Within a few days, the authorities awarded the company with an investment certificate for 70,000 hectares of plantations. A subsidiary of Green Elite, InnovGreen Nghe An, is to implement the project.

The plantations in Nghe An province are part of Hong Kong-based InnovGreen's plans to plant a total of 349,000 hectares in six provinces in Vietnam. The land would

be leased to InnovGreen for a period of 50 years.

Although only a small area of the total area has so far been planted, VietNamNet reports that InnovGreen's plantations are already causing serious problems for local communities.

Lo Van Tho, chairman of Cam Muon commune, told VietNamNet that “we have received no benefits from this firm and they have had no commitment or contract with Cam Muon commune”. Yet 300 families in the commune have handed over their land to InnovGreen. VietNamNet's reporter visited Huoi May village, home to 39 families belonging to the Kho Mu indigenous group. “Innov Green has taken our land,” Vi Van Que, chief of the village's production team, said. “If they don't compensate us, we will starve to death. That's a fact; we are waiting for death!”

In Quang Ninh, VietNamNet spoke to Tang A Tai in Ban Danh village. “If they lease all the forest land here to grow eucalyptus, what will my family do to live?” he asked.

La Van Vi, secretary of the youth branch of Ha Lau commune, said that “Many things will change in 50 years but one thing is sure: without forest land, we will starve to death!”

Dong Sy Nguyen may seem an unlikely person to protest against industrial tree plantations. He is a retired Lieutenant General, former cabinet member and member of Vietnam's Communist Party Politburo. From 1992 to 1998, General Nguyen was in charge of implementing Programme 327, which aimed to re-green Vietnam's barren hills. Unfortunately the “re-greening” mainly consisted of eucalyptus and acacia monocultures.

But in January 2010, General Nguyen wrote to Vietnam's Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, expressing his concern about the leasing of forest land to foreign investors.

On 10 March 2010, the Prime Minister instructed local governments not to allow any further such projects until the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) had completed its investigations into the issue.

In a fascinating interview with VietNamNet, General Nguyen explains the core problem faced by proponents of industrial tree plantations in Vietnam: the land is already in use. “Some provinces said that they leased land to foreigners because the land had been unused for years,” Nguyen said. “It is irresponsible! When I implemented Project 327, I saw clearly that our people always need land.”

I couldn't have put it better myself. But it remains to be seen whether the Vietnamese government listens to InnovGreen's false promises of jobs and development or to the voices of General Nguyen and local communities.

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

A recent report, by Ernesto Cavallo in Hanoi: “Farmers' Forests and Crop Land for Wood Pulp Factories? – The mean business practices of InnovGreen in Vietnam” is available in English here: <http://bit.ly/btxBCQ>, and in Vietnamese here: <http://bit.ly/br5T3N>

- Mozambique: Video and Publication on the expansion of tree plantations

The government of Mozambique is in the process of expanding large-scale monocultures of alien, fast-growing tree species, mainly eucalyptus, pine and teak trees in the northern part of the country.

In November 2009, Winfridus Overbeek, member of the Alert against the Green Desert Network and Domingos Firmiano dos Santos, Afrobrazilian (quilombola) community leader of Angelim and national leader of CONAQ (Coordenação Nacional das Comunidades Quilombolas – National Coordination of Afrobrazilian Communities), made a field visit to Mozambique.

Both activists, with a long involvement in the struggle against tree monocultures in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, exchanged experiences with the affected communities about the impacts of monoculture tree plantations.

National organizations involved in the subject - UNAC (União Nacional de Camponeses - National Peasant Union) in Mozambique, and UCA (União dos Camponeses e Associações de Lichinga – Union of Peasant and Associations of Lichinga) - received and accompanied the Brazilian delegation and organized the visits so they could have an insight of the current introduction and expansion of tree monocultures in Mozambique (see WRM Bulletin N° 150).

As a result of the visit, two tools were produced: a video and a publication. The video “Ninguém come eucalipto. Em Moçambique também não” (No one eats Eucalyptus. Neither in Mozambique) is only available in Portuguese and can be downloaded at http://www.wrm.org.uy/ninguem_come_eucalipto.html

The publication “The Expansion of Tree Monoculture in Niassa Province, Mozambique, and its Impacts on Peasant Communities, A field report”, by Winfridus Overbeek, makes a brief description of the introduction and expansion of large-scale tree monocultures in Mozambique and the different stages of implementation in Nampula, Zambézia, Manica and Niassa provinces.

Niassa, the largest province in Mozambique, has been targeted by the Mozambican government to orient there some of the companies and investors interested in pine and eucalyptus plantations which intend to plant several hundred thousand hectares. The publication gives a deeper insight of the situation in Niassa including the potential area of tree plantations, the investors, as well as the potential development of CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) projects by companies from industrialized countries in the northern hemisphere which would use tree plantations to ‘offset’ their CO2 emission at home.

The publication can be accessed at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Mozambique/book.pdf>

- World Bank: No more funding for oil palm plantations!

In August 2009, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and shortly thereafter the

wider World Bank Group (WBG) of which it is part suspended finance for the palm oil sector. This was done in response to critical complaints by Indonesian NGOs and indigenous peoples' organizations and international NGOs which triggered a damning audit report by the IFC's own Compliance Advisory Ombudsman.

However, the Bank appears to be determined to continue funding oil palm expansion in Africa, Asia and Latin America and has launched what it defines as "an open and participatory process, engaging a diverse group of stakeholders" for developing a strategy for "future engagement in the palm oil sector".

As part of that process, the Bank has organized several consultations: Washington (April 23-26), Indonesia (May 3-7), Costa Rica, (May 17-18), Ghana (31 May-1 June) and The Netherlands (3-4 June).

Once this process has been completed, the Bank will "take note" of the diverse views expressed by a wide range of "stakeholders" and will come up with a strategy that will allow it to continue funding the expansion of this very controversial crop.

In response, several social and environmental groups, which have been denouncing the greenwashing of oil palm plantations, launched an action. On May 18th 2010, a letter was sent to the World Bank on behalf of over 80 organizations from more than 34 countries urging the World Bank to stop funding oil palm plantations.

The letter stresses that "The evidence provided by the documented environmental and social harm caused by industrial oil palm plantations, makes it necessary to insist that those plantations are part of a model of large-scale extractivist production aimed at export, which is inherently unsustainable". As a result, the letter concludes that "What is therefore needed is to stop the expansion of oil palm monocultures" and that "The World Bank must not finance oil palm plantations."

The letter can be accessed at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/WB/Letter_2010.html

If you wish to express your support to this letter, send an email to:

unsustainablepalmoil@gmail.com

You can also do that by entering the following web page:

<http://www.salvalaselva.org/>
