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OUR VIEWPOINT

- "The struggle for rights and the importance of mobilizing and social struggles

Significant advances have been made in recent decades in the struggle for rights at the international level. Numerous countries now recognize a series of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Communities and peoples who depend on forests, particularly indigenous peoples, have gained greater recognition of their rights over the territories they have traditionally occupied. In spite of these advances, however, of the very same rights recognized on paper continue to be violated – and increasingly so, as is demonstrated in this issue of the bulletin by articles and testimonies from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Indonesia and Chile.

What is most striking about these stories of communities seeking to defend their rights is that the companies that are grabbing their lands are considered to have the right to do so – in other words, the governments also view them as rights holders. And in an unequal power game, governments tend to privilege the individual rights of companies and the rights of 'free' markets over the collective rights of indigenous communities, peasant farmer communities and others affected by the activities of these companies.

To advance in the struggle for rights, it is undeniably crucial to guarantee and maintain the rights of communities that are increasingly impacted by large-scale corporate projects aimed at appropriating their lands - in fact, nature as a whole (see the January 2014 issue of this bulletin on "Environmental Services"). Moreover, struggles for collective rights, such as that carried on by La Via Campesina for the right to food sovereignty and the rights of peasant farmers, are of enormous importance, precisely because they address collective rather than individual rights – in other words, rights that do not fit into the logic of neoliberalism. Under neoliberal logic, transnationals believe they have the rights – individualized, personified rights – to grab and commodify absolutely everything: the territories of peoples and communities, the water and even the carbon and biodiversity of forests, which are sold to provide big corporations with "the right to pollute and destroy".

And it is also crucial to recognize that the struggle for rights cannot be separated from the struggle to organize and mobilize with and in communities to defend what is most sacred to them: their territories. These are under greater threat than ever before, in view of the intentions and plans of transnational corporations devoted to the extraction of minerals and oil, the construction of hydroelectric dams, and the expansion of the agroindustry. Therefore, the stories of communities fighting for their territories, usually in isolations, demonstrate the importance of organizing and mobilization, of expanding the potential of alliances between social movements and other sectors of civil society who share a commitment to fighting injustice and promoting social change. And this is not only crucial in order to advance in the struggle for rights, but also to more effectively challenge the unjust and unequal power relations that rule the world and result in a situation where the basic rights of the majority of the people are not fulfilled, while numerous rights are granted to a minority representing the interests of big productive and financial/speculative capital.

TERRITORIES UNDER SIEGE BY INDUSTRIAL TREE PLANTATIONS AND OTHER MEGA PROJECTS

- Nigeria: Okomu Oil Palm Company – destroying communities for oil palm expansion



Okomu Oil Palm, which operates in the palm oil as well as rubber production business, was established in 1976 as a Federal Government of Nigeria pilot project covering an area of 15,580 hectares out of which 12,500 hectares could be planted with oil palm. In 1979 the company was incorporated as a private company with limited liability and in 1990, within a Structural Adjustment Programme, it was converted to a Public Limited Company (PLC). It is a member of the Belgian Socfin, a global player group in the cultivation of oil palm as well as rubber, coffee and tropical flowers. Socfin owns 62.69% of Okomu Oil Palm's shares.

It has since grown to become one of Nigeria's leading oil palm companies with an oil palm area of 9.713 ha (2012) in the State of Edo, with plans to add 402 ha in 2013 and other 400 ha in 2014.

The company's 2012 annual report announced the intention to expand its oil palm and rubber plantations and also revealed plans to build the biggest oil mill in Africa expanding its oil mill capacity from 30 tons per hour to 60 tons per hour in Sierra Leone (see article below).

Among investors, the Okomu Oil Palm Company is presented as a success story, with the highest dividend in its history paid to shareholders in 2013. But in this kind of extractive agribusiness, the "success" for investors carries a high price for local communities.

In an interview with WRM, local resident Sunny Ajele, talks about how life for the communities has changed with the expansion of the oil palm plantations by Okomu: "Our experience started in 1998, when Okomu Oil Palm destroyed three villages namely: Oweike, Agbede, & Ijawcamp (Owieke, Ajbede and Ijawkam) without villagers receiving compensation. When the villages were destroyed, chiefs died in frustration when the bulldozers came without announcement. The state government set up a committee to investigate but they never visited the villages. The committee report claimed that the villagers were illegal occupants and the villages were founded only in the 1950s, though a section of that ad-hoc committee report contained evidence that the village had already existed in 1935. A forest ordinance also existed that gave the villagers the right to farm, to fish, to reside, and is dated 1912."

"As a result of that ad-hoc committee report, villagers felt devastated. Then in 2010, Okomu Oil Palm sent a final notice to Makilolo Community- my community that the community had certain days to leave. The note was delivered by the military police. The community at that stage said 'enough is enough', and

we let the government know they should prepare for a mass burial if that was what was needed. Still, we got no response from the government.”

“At that stage, the Managing Director of Okomu Oil Palm Dr. Graham Hefer, who had asked us to sign the Memorandum Of Understanding or face eviction, started his holidays. The said MOU was singlehandedly written by the company without our input. Police, security agencies and villagers met to try and resolve the situation. The Police chief stated that as long as the company had the certificate of occupancy the village could not win. The police chief suggested ‘Go beg the company to let you stay.’ We said ‘That is not possible’. The village then also met with the Managing Director of Okomu Oil Palm. He proposed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and said he expected a decision from the community on the offer within 24 hours.”

“Nobody in their right mind would have signed this MoU, it would have sent you straight into slavery. So the village refused to sign this MoU.”

“The company then locked the community in, they cut off access to the market. In order to get to the market, we had to make a huge detour, through another state in order to leave the area because they had us locked in. The straight route to Benin City takes about 1hour 30 minutes. Having to take the route through the state of Ondo, it is a whole day’s journey.”

Sunny talked about encounters with soldiers along the straight route to Benin City that the villagers normally used, saying that soldiers along that route had instruction that ‘if you see villagers, shoot’. The lock-in lasted from 17 December 2010 to 25 February 2011.

“We informed the police that the action would likely pose a public disturbance, that youth would rebel if the gate were not opened again soon. Nonetheless, the gate remained locked,” he explained.

“I received a misleading call to come to the office. I went and was arrested at the meeting place for allegedly planning to throw a bomb. They locked me up for a day and later I was released. On 18 January 2011, I was invited in again. A claim was made that I had kidnapped a white man in the plantation and that the man supposedly had been hurt seriously and had to be sent abroad for treatment. I asked ‘How could I have done that? I was in jail, with you, here, that day. How could I have kidnapped someone in the plantation at the same time?’ A State Security Service officer told me quietly that they were trying to set me up, and that this was a serious issue.”

“At that stage I cancelled my phone, left home and was on the run. I managed to get in touch, with ERA/FoEN's Head of Legal Department, Bar. Chima Williams through its project officer on forest & biodiversity. A letter was outrightly written by ERA to the management of Okomu Oil Palm PLC demanding that the only entrance and exit gate to the village locked by the company be made open to the community members; and secondly, the community people should not be compelled to sign an MOU that they are not part of. It was at that stage that ERA suggested to me to stop running.”

“A meeting was called with the Managing Director of Okomu Oil Palm, community representatives, state security service, soldiers, Paramount chiefs. The MD then wrote another agreement, promised to grade the road, to train 60 youth annually, to provide scholarships, to upgrade school...these promises were to be implemented by the end of 2011 - all on the condition that the village sign the MoU that the community had already rejected earlier. If that offer were not accepted, the company would offer nothing. And the village responded: ‘We cannot sign.’”

“At the same time, the company started working on some people in the village to sign the MoU. Some

people eventually did sign that MoU. The company then claimed to have donated four litres of red palm oil and many books ...but the donated books are still in the house of those who signed the MoU without consent from the community. The person who signed the MoU became special advisor on community matters to the company. All communication with the company has to go through him (he is also planning to run for paramount chief).”

“The road in late 2013 still only is half graded. In 2012, they started a bore hole because the river villagers used to use is not usable anymore during the rainy season when all the agrotoxins that the company uses in the plantation get washed into the river. The villagers still drink the water but they know it is not good for them.”

Allegations and criminalisation continued. Sunny Ajele for example was accused of running military camps. An officer informed him confidentially that the order had been to ‘find him, fix him and finish him’; in other words, to kill Sunny.

Since then, the situation has become slightly less tense but still unbearable for the community. 50 acres were ‘donated’ to the village, on the condition that no permanent structures be erected, no planting be done, dogs, goats be kept out of the plantations, or else, the community would face eviction. Every vehicle coming to or leaving the village has to pay 200 Naira [some US\$ 1.20] for use of the road, while food trucks pay more. Recently, charging of personal vehicles has stopped but commercial vehicles are still charged.

“Leaving the village or coming home is like passing a border. If they see that you come with a camera, your camera will be seized,” Sunny explained. “The company has a hospital but only for their staff, not for villagers. They also have the right to come and search every ‘house’ at will. There is the constant accusation that we are stealing palm fruit. Over 20 villagers have been arrested. So we are slaves on our own land. The MoU gives the company the right to demolish our village any time, as they did with the other three villages. In those three areas, where planting has already started, people are prohibited to enter, while the plantings are guarded by soldiers, paid by the company.”

This story speaks of the true cost of the expansion of oil palm. Humble and brave local people who stand up for their rights pay a high cost, and often risk their lives. Yet, the headlines go to the companies boasting about their revenues.

Based on an interview by Jutta Kill, WRM with Sunny Ajele during an international meeting held from 2–5 November 2013 in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. See also the Calabar Declaration (<http://wrm.org.uy/meetings-and-events/calabar-declaration/>).

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- Sierra Leone: Report by Green Scenery on land confrontation with SOCFIN



One month after the confrontation between land owners in the SahnMalen Chiefdom, Pujehun District in southern Sierra Leone and the SOCFIN Agricultural Company (see WRM Bulletin 197, at <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/sierra-leone-farmers-reject-land-grab-for-oil-palm-plantation/>), Green Scenery published a 13-page report on the clamp down on community members who have been advocating for their rights to their land.

The report was the result of a fact finding trip to the region to corroborate facts of the police arrest and highhanded measure of fifty seven citizens.

Green Scenery's report highlights that "the SOCFIN Company leased from the Government a total of 6,500 ha. While the communities/land owners and users challenge the manner in which it was done, SOCFIN has been able to assert its hold on this land area and has planted if not all with palm trees. Socfin's operation affects an estimated population of 9,000 people and 22 villages within this area.

But SOCFIN's insatiable desire for more land continues to drive the company in taking over more land even over the agreed lease agreement. It is confirmed by company authorities that the company is now in control of 7,100 ha of land an area in excess of 600 ha in breach of its agreement with the government. There are now over forty communities affected by its operations and a total population in excess of 10,000 people and in spite of all of the conflict the land takeover is causing, SOCFIN continues to endure working with the Paramount Chief and his Speaker to forcefully take land from land owners and pass it on to the willing company."

Green Scenery considers that "perhaps one of the problems in the land sector has to do with governance". Thus, it explains that though "cap. 122 [of the Constitution] may be seen as a law with a good interpretational spirit for not allowing land in the provinces to be sold to none citizens and vesting the land in the Tribal Authorities (chiefdom council) which head is the paramount chief, it has a lacuna which is being exploited and misused. This misuse is giving rise to the present instability in regions affected by land grabbing such as Malen. One key lacuna is the entrusting of land in the Chiefdom Council on behalf of the communities. Ostensibly, the law entrusting the land to the care of chiefdom authorities authenticates the customary law practice of land disposal/acquisition in many parts of the country.

The challenge however with the law is that it is been abused by certain chiefdom authorities, government authorities and agents due to its looseness and ill-explicit definition of the role of trusteeship.

It is very important that in this period of constitutional review the issue of land ownership and tenure-ship as well as problematic phrases or words that are causing confusion and tension around land would be addressed.

As we examine the stakes we continue to observe the trend in the intensity of the conflict in Malen. As we continue to monitor land grabbing in Sierra Leone we note this observation for Malen that the conflict has graduated from one of mild disagreement to serious dispute and each time no proactive action is taken to genuinely deal with the Malen problem and keeping it the problem under the mat hoping it will solve itself lays the risk of moving into the next stage. The situation at this stage requires frank dialogue by all Malen citizens, whether or not they are land owners. It requires taking decisions humane enough to respect rights of citizens, and ensuring that people decide their own destiny.”

Source: “Report on the incident of police arrest and highhanded measure of fifty seven citizens in Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun district,” by Joseph Rahall, Milton Kainyande, Green Scenery, December 2013, released January 2014. c<f.williams@greenscenery.org>, http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Arrest_of_fifty_seven_citizens_in_Malen_Chiefdom.pdf

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- Indonesia: Struggle against land grabbing of oil palm company PT Hardaya



The villagers of Buol District, in Central Sulawesi, have struggled for 20 years to regain their lands. All of their customary lands and forests had been signed away without their knowledge or consent to one of Indonesia's richest and most powerful families - business magnate Murdaya Widyawimarta and his wife Siti Hartati Cakra Murdaya through their holding company, the Cipta Cakra Murdaya Group- for the creation of a massive 22,000 ha oil palm plantation. The business had a dramatic toll: the farmlands and forests used by over 6,500 families were destroyed.

When the operation began in 1994, many villagers stood in front of trucks and attached themselves to trees to prevent the chopping down of trees in the surrounding forests of their villages. Yet, with the military backing the operation, there was little that they could do. Eventually, endless monoculture of oil palms belonging to the PT Hardaya lnti Plantations company replaced the lands where the villagers used to have their fruit trees and paddy fields.

Since 2005, the area under oil palm in Indonesia has nearly doubled, and now covers 8.2 million hectares, about a third of all of Indonesia's arable land, and Sulawesi is one of the main targets of the breathtaking expansion of oil palm plantations in the country. This expansion is fuelled by growing global demand for cheap vegetable oil for food processing and biofuels. But it's also a result of brutal inequality.

Norwegian pension fund withdraws investments in certain oil palm companies

Indonesia together with Malaysia share the position of world leaders in palm oil production which has expanded exponentially in the last years. In Indonesia, the total area of oil palm plantation increased by 279 % between 1998 and 2008, converting legally and illegally huge swaths of rainforest into monoculture plantations and reaching some 7 million hectares that in 2009 the government announced it aimed at expanding by further 18 million hectares.

The expansion of the oil palm plantations has led to numerous conflicts with local communities, as well as widespread criticism for the disastrous environmental impact of the massive forest destruction.

Norway has been one of the countries which has invested in palm oil companies (US\$ 637 million in 21 companies), among them the Singapore company Wilmar International. But recently, Scandinavia's largest pension company, Storebrand, has announced that it will no longer invest in 'climate villain' companies, meaning not only non-renewables such as coal, which contributes to large amounts of CO2 emissions, but also palm oil as long as its boom is a major cause of deforestation across the tropics, and hence a huge source of carbon emissions.

Source: http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_round_up/2259146/norwegian_pension_giant_drops_investments_in_coal_tar_sands_palm_oil.html,
<http://www.u-landsnyt.dk/nyhed/19-11-12/b-redygtig-palmeolie-sv-rt-opdrive-i-danske-butikk>, <http://www.regnskog.no/no/s%C3%B8keresultat/attachment/30008/binary/27091?download=true&ts=137126c547d>

Despite the powerful forces ranged against them, the villagers of Buol District were determined to get their lands back. A series of road blockades and other protest actions forced PT Hardaya to negotiate a compromise agreement in May 2000, under which the company agreed to provide around 4,900 ha of land to compensate displaced villagers and to establish an outgrower programme – known in Indonesia as plasma farming - where the company would prepare and plant 2 ha of oil palms for each family and purchase the harvest at an agreed upon price.

But just one month later, the company denied having made the agreement and instead offered only to run an outgrower programme on 15,000 ha outside of the concession area, on lands that the provincial government would have to identify.

It was a painful setback for the villagers. Depleted from years of struggle and without any support for their cause from the government, their protests petered out and the company was able to move forward with its operations and began expanding outside of its concession area.

The deforestation and planting of oil palms along river banks and on hillsides both within and outside the concession caused severe soil erosion, with much of the soil ending up in the fast flowing Buol river.

The company's promised outgrower programme has barely materialised. So far, just 400 ha have been allocated for the programme, and most of these lands have gone to the local politicians that supported the company.

Working conditions on the plantation are abysmal. There are over 3,000 people working on the

plantation, many of whom lost their lands to the same company. They live in dilapidated camps and are paid according to the amount they harvest.

Hamsi is one of these workers, living with his wife and children in a cramped room in one of the work camps on the plantation. He and his wife have been working long, hard weeks here for the past 13 years.

"No matter how hard we work, we are always in debt," says Hamsi.

It is not only the meagre wages paid by the company that keep its workers poor. The company constantly makes deductions for all kinds of expenses – from the electricity and water they use in their homes, to the tools and safety equipment that they need for work. By the end of each month, Hamsi says, there's no money left.

Hamsi's wife, like other women workers in the plantation, is responsible for spraying pesticides. One of the pesticides used extensively in the plantation is Gramaxone (paraquat), an herbicide that is banned in over 30 countries due to its severe impacts on human health. She says she was not provided with training or protective equipment by the company, and that she sprayed pesticides throughout her pregnancies and soon after child birth, as she could not afford to take unpaid days off from work.

In 2012, the plantation workers had formed a union and had begun pushing for better working conditions. Together they decided to take up the fight against the company once again under the banner of Forum TaniBuol. In 2012 they organised a road blockade and occupied the mayor's office. The government and company officials responded with promises to pursue a settlement of the land conflict, but nothing materialised. In March 2013, peasants and workers took over the company's processing factory. The government sent in the military to remove them, but not before they managed to wrest another promise from the government to impose a resolution.

Despite the years of failed promises, the villagers are optimistic that they are close to getting their lands back and they are even starting to discuss what they will do with the lands once they get them back. They are in agreement that the lands should be managed collectively and not through individual ownership and they recognise that they have little choice but to keep producing palm oil until the current trees are fully mature and can be replaced by other crops.

The experience of the communities in Buol shows how the profound impacts of oil palm plantations on local communities get worse over time. The meagre benefits that a plantation provides, whether in jobs or through outgrower programmes, are no substitute for the loss of access to and control over lands and water that communities use to ensure their food needs and livelihoods.

It is in this context that international solidarity and monitoring of the situation is critical. The villagers are keen to bring more international exposure to their case. They say that one of the ways in which people can provide support is by signing a petition that they will be sending to PT Hardayanti Plantation.

Read the petition in support of the Buol villagers' struggle at http://www.grain.org/bulletin_board/entries/4870-petition-for-the-struggle-of-buol-farmers-forum-against-land-grabbing-by-pt-hardaya-inti-plantations, and get in touch with the villagers through AGRA: agraindonesia@grain.org or agraindonesia12@gmail.com

Excerpted and adapted from "Long struggle against Indonesia oil palm land grab", GRAIN, January 2014, <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4868-long-struggle-against-indonesia-oil-palm-land-grab>

- Chile: Tree plantation companies and indigenous rights, a longstanding conflict



Historically, relations between Mapuche indigenous communities and the forestry industry have been marked by conflict, primarily because of the expansion of industrial tree plantations on lands that are part of the Mapuche territory and the impact of these plantations on the communities' habitat.

There are three business groups that control most of the forestry industry in Chile: Forestal Arauco, Compañía Manufacturera de Papeles y Cartones (CMPC) and MASISA. According to figures from 2007, these three companies owned a total of 1,715,910 hectares of tree plantations in Chile, mainly in the regions of Biobío, La Araucanía, Los Ríos and Los Lagos. In these same regions, tree plantations in the traditional Mapuche territory account for an area three times greater than the indigenous lands recognised by the state.

Most of the tree plantations have been established on traditional Mapuche lands. The communities affected by this industry are claiming their right to tenure over the lands occupied by the plantations, which were usurped from them both during the colonial era and following the military coup of 1973.

“Usurped lands”

“Usurped lands” refers to lands claimed by the Mapuche as belonging to them which were allocated by the state to private parties or which, in other cases, were effectively usurped by private parties – primarily tree plantation companies – despite the existence of indigenous land tenure titles.

Although there was subsequently a timid policy of restitution of land to indigenous peoples, it did not go far enough, and the problem of land conflicts continues.

Currently, the Forestry Promotion bill, which modifies and extends Decree Law 701 – the legislation that regulates and provides incentives for the tree plantation industry – is aimed at expanding this activity towards small producers, by making available funds to them. But this does not mean that small producers will be given priority over big companies. On the contrary, due to the shortage of available land for the industry, largely owing to the fact that this land is designated as indigenous land or is made up of very small landholdings, the goal is to promote a redirection of production among indigenous and non-indigenous peasant farmers, who would end up growing trees for the big companies, which would set the prices and purchase their output.

This is why the industrial tree plantation model of forestry has been and continues to be an invasive process for Mapuche society, because these plantations exert pressure on the availability of land and alter territorial spaces as well as the social-spatial relations of Mapuche communities. The advance of the tree plantation industry results in the colonization of the territory and obliges Mapuche communities and small landowners to give up their ways of life and customs, forcing them to establish tree plantation micro-enterprises or to work as salaried employees of the plantation companies.

Nevertheless, Mapuche communities have not backed down in their efforts to reclaim their rights over their traditional territory, including land tenure and control over the territory, in order to exercise the right to establish their own priorities for development and to have access to the natural resources necessary to ensure their organized existence as a people.

Faced with a law whose objective has been to reduce their territories, in addition to land claim mechanisms that have destroyed indigenous peoples' faith in state institutions and land conflict resolution mechanisms that have proven ineffective, Mapuche communities – who have never been able to rely on effective institutional mechanisms for state protection of their rights – have resorted to the “occupation” of landholdings to demand their territorial rights and give visibility to their conditions of exclusion and the denial of their rights. There are many cases of the occupation of indigenous lands that are currently under the control of tree plantation companies and under dispute.

These conflicts have resulted in extreme situations of the criminalization of community members and leaders who have occupied disputed landholdings, due to the categorization of their actions as crimes. This has opened the way for criminal court proceedings against organizations, indigenous communities and their members and leaders, who are accused of committing common crimes established in the Penal Code such as arson, unlawful association, issuing of threats and cattle rustling. In many cases the accused have ended up imprisoned and publically vilified. In addition, emergency laws such as the anti-terrorist law and domestic security law have been invoked, enabling the courts to step up the penalties imposed for common crimes and withhold guarantees of due process.

The Chilean government policy on the forest resources of the Mapuche people continues to be one of exclusion and imposition in a context of the rapid loss of forests and the biodiversity associated with them, which is observed today in Mapuche territory as a consequence of the expansion and proliferation of industrial monoculture plantations of exotic tree species.

Extracted and adapted from the working paper “Pueblo mapuche y recursos forestales en Chile: devastación y conservación en un contexto de globalización económica”, José Aylwin, Nancy Yáñez, Rubén Sánchez; Observatorio Ciudadano IWGIA,
http://www.observatorio.cl/sites/default/files/biblioteca/pueblo_mapuche_y_recursos_forestales_en_chile_devastacion_y_conservacion_en_un_contexto_de_globalizacion_economica.pdf

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- Mangrove territories: "Culture, tradition and a vital space for coastal peoples"



Communities, peoples and civil society organizations have worked for years to raise the visibility of the significant benefits of the mangrove ecosystem and the importance of its existence. They have fought for the recognition of mangroves as highly productive systems that provide livelihoods and a space for the practice of the cultures and traditions of coastal peoples. “The mangrove is our natural enterprise, it is our employment, it does not ask us for our qualifications or a CV or identification. As long as we are in good health we can cast our nets and harvest our food,” declared Enrique Bonilla, president of COGMANGLAR and a fisherman from Champerico, Guatemala.

Today, the former perception of mangroves as mosquito-infested swamps has changed, but the struggle to defend them has become increasingly difficult in the face of the new and aggressive actors threatening their existence and the survival of the peoples and communities who inhabit them, from Latin America to Asia to Africa. “They are slowly exterminating us. Government policies criminalize and impoverish us. We are not poor; we have great wealth that the powerful want to appropriate, and we call that environmental racism,” said Marizhelia López of the Movement of Fishermen and Fisherwomen of Bahia, Brazil, expressing her concern over the loss of territories.

In addition to the shrimp farming industry, which has historically been responsible for the destruction of thousands of hectares of mangroves in tropical regions, mangroves now face a long list of threats, including oil drilling, tourism megaprojects, the construction of dams and reservoirs on rivers, metal mining on the coasts and seabeds, industrial monoculture plantations of trees and agrofuel crops like sugar cane and oil palm, large-scale port complexes and wind farms, among others. All of these activities are increasingly threatening the collective livelihoods and lives of coastal peoples and form part of a process of the privatization and grabbing of territories and extraction and exploitation of nature for the exclusive benefit of particular private interests. As an example, the government of Honduras recently launched a proposal for so-called “model cities” or Employment and Economic Development Zones (ZEDE) in the country’s southern region. According to the Committee for the Defence and Development of the Flora and Fauna of the Gulf of Fonseca (CODDEFFAGOL), this is an outrageous proposal that would cause irreversible damage to the mangrove wetlands of the gulf.

Mangroves, considered one of the planet’s five most productive ecological units, are the main source of food and livelihoods for millions of coastal families who practise artisanal and subsistence fishing and gather shellfish such as conchs, snails and crabs. As a result, mangroves are the foundation of food sovereignty for these peoples. They also serve as a natural protective barrier against the impacts of climate change. Silvia Quiroa of CESTA in El Salvador stressed, “The climate crisis is a reality that is already affecting communities and peoples. We must challenge and oppose the utilization of mangroves as carbon sinks. The survival of the peoples will be the path to follow.”

Above all, mangroves are territories. They are one of the basic elements that sustain life in coastal

areas, which in most countries are public-use areas. According to Líder Góngora of C-CONDEM, Ecuador, "It is important to recognize the maternal nature of mangroves, which are like a womb in which a diversity of species are bred, raised, protected and reproduced."

It is of great strategic importance to demand the designation and maintenance of marine coastal territories as public areas, as well as to demand enforcement of the collective rights of the communities and peoples who inhabit them to make decisions on their collective management, protection and use. This is a right that corresponds to them, because they are the ones who have long guaranteed the existence and survival of mangroves through the wisdom, cultural practices and ancestral knowledge and traditions passed down from generation to generation. "In Guatemala, for decades, the national territorial reserves have been privatized, used by politicians as payoffs in their electoral campaigns. There is still a great deal of interest on the part of large landholders, sugar plantation owners, shrimp farm owners and urban developers to continue grabbing more territories," warned Sergio Maldonado of Avedichamp in Guatemala.

In the struggle to defend mangroves, women play a fundamental role. The contribution of women to local and community development, to the construction and defence of territories, and to the protection and transmission of knowledge is essential, and should be valued and highlighted. At the same time, it is crucial to recognize the situation of inequality between men and women in order to promote social justice and equity.

The members of Redmanglar International aspire to a world in which the traditional use of territories to sustain life is given priority over business, in which local communities regain control over their own economies, and exchanges among peoples take place on the basis of solidarity and equality.

By Carlos Salvatierra, Executive Secretary of Redmanglar Internacional. Based on discussions held during the Redmanglar strategy meeting in February 2014.

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PEOPLES IN ACTION

- Nigeria: social coalition demands amendment to PIB as a way of restoring transparency and accountability in the petroleum sector

In Nigeria, a coalition of social and environmental justice organisations including Environmental Rights Watch/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Green Alliance Nigeria, the Host Communities Network of Nigeria, and Students Environmental Assembly Nigeria, have stepped up the pressure on elected politicians to approve an improved, "pro people Petroleum Industry Bill", PIB2012.

On 25th February 2014 the coalition demanded that the government adopt the "PIB not as it is currently but with an amendment proposed by the civil society coalition."

The coalition sees the passing of the amended bill as an "opportunity to check corporate rule, total disregard of local livelihoods, and reckless degradation of the environment, violence, corruption and theft which have been the sad hallmarks of the Nigerian petroleum industry."

For ERA, one of the environmental justice organisations involved in the push for approval of the bill, the passing of the bill is important because "we see some of the provisions of the PIB as a conflict resolution mechanism to the decades of violent conflicts, and the restoration of transparency and

accountability in the petroleum sector in Nigeria," ERA director Godwin Ojo said.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Environmental-Rights-ActionFriends-of-the-Earth-Nigeria/81335606026>
<http://www.mydailynewswatchng.com/2014/03/05/erafoen-others-final-push-pib/>
<http://nnimmo.blogspot.de/2013/04/draft-petroleum-industry-bill-not.html>

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- Support the struggle of the Tupinambá in Bahia, Brazil for the demarcation of their lands and against militarization!

Once again we are calling for your support for the legitimate struggle of the Tupinambá indigenous people of the state of Bahia, Brazil.

Although official studies by FUNAI, the government agency responsible for indigenous affairs, demonstrate that the Tupinambá have traditionally occupied an area spanning 47,000 hectares in the south of Bahia, and therefore have a constitutional right to this territory, the Minister of Justice has still not signed the orders for the demarcation of their land, bowing to pressure from non-indigenous parties who are opposed to the demarcation. To make matters worse, the Brazilian army has now joined the National Public Security Force and the Federal Police in their occupation of the region, in an attempt to intimidate the Tupinambá and force them off their lands.

The conflict has grown increasingly fierce and the non-indigenous parties have unleashed a wave of racism and discrimination against the Tupinambá (see the video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3_jFLJRM3c).

Please show your support for and solidarity with this struggle by urgently sending a letter to the Supreme Court of Brazil (see the model letter at http://cimi.org.br/site/pt-br/?system=news&conteudo_id=7370&action=read). For a better understanding of the situation, we recommend reading the following statement of solidarity with the Tupinambá and small farmers in the region (<http://www.cimi.org.br/site/pt-br/?system=news&action=read&id=7375>).

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- The Austrian company Andritz received the blame and shame award “Eyesore of the year 2013” for its involvement in disastrous mega-projects

The “eyesore of the year” award is given by the Network Social Responsibility (NeSoVe) - a network of NGOs and workers' representatives - to companies, organizations, institutions and individuals who have acted very irresponsibly and without regard to social and / or environmental damage, often using elaborately designed Sustainability and CSR reports, lobbying and sponsorship. The blame and shame award “eyesore of the year” aims at uncovering and denouncing this behaviour to demand corporate accountability.

In 2013, the “eyesore of the year” award went to the Austrian company Andritz for its involvement in three dam projects with tremendous negative ecological and human rights impacts: Xayaburi in Laos, Belo Monte in Brazil and Ilisu in Turkey. All three dams are situated in ecology highly sensitive areas, and in all three cases involve the displacement of tens of thousands of people from their homes, often threatened by military or security forces.

The company has also just signed the contracts for yet another disastrous mega-project for Asia Pulp and Paper's OKI pulp mill project in the middle of the Indonesian Sumatra's rainforests. The mill is reported to have a nominal capacity which will make it the largest single pulp line in the world. Affected communities fear pollution of nearby rivers, with severe effects for their fishery and agriculture, as has been the case with other APP factories in the region.

See the Press release of ECA Watch Austria at http://www.schandfleck.or.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ECA-Watch_PA_Andritz_Schandfleck_en_20140221.pdf

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RECOMMENDED

- New investigative and critical website on French transnational corporations - Multinationals Observatory - Online resources and in-depth investigations on the social, ecological and political impact of French transnational corporations. See <http://www.multinationales.org/?lang=en>

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- There you go! - Around the world 'development' is robbing tribal people of their land, self-sufficiency and pride and leaving them with nothing. "There you go" is a short, satirical film, from Survival International, that tells the story of how tribal peoples are being destroyed in the name of 'development'. See <http://www.survivalinternational.org/theyougo>

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