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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Biofuels: A potentially positive solution turned into a serious threat to the South

No one in their right mind can accuse President George W. Bush of overly concerning himself with climate change. In this respect, his curriculum is spotless and both his unreserved support to the oil industry and his oil wars have implied significant inputs to global warming. And if any doubts were left, his persistent refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol has made him the undisputed leader of those making the largest contribution to the destruction of Planet Earth's climate.

For this reason his recent interest in biofuels is most astonishing. In fact, during his recent visit to various Latin American countries (Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico) this was the

clearest point on the agenda of a trip that was defined by some media as "ethanol diplomacy." What is more, before starting his trip he visited the installations of a company associated with ethanol production where he made reference to "technologies that will enable us to convert wood chips into fuels that are running automobiles."

Bush's sudden attentiveness to an issue seemingly so distant from his interests and concerns serves to better understand the reasons behind the fact that so many Northern governments and agencies are promoting the development of biofuels in so many Southern countries.

Contrary to other Northern government representatives, Bush does not even try to present himself as being "green." The reasons he puts forth are basically strategic and economic ones. He affirms that the promotion of biofuels is "a very important national goal, to become less dependent on oil from overseas, thereby ensuring that our national security interests are better intact and our economic security interests are better intact". Regarding economic reasons he states that "It makes sense to be able to -- as the price of hydrocarbons goes up- ... that there be alternative sources of energy coming to the market as quickly as possible."

Most probably the governments of most of the countries of the North – and particularly the European ones – have come to the same conclusions, making us doubt the "greeness" of their intentions.

From the viewpoint of many governments of the South, biofuels are simply perceived as a new product to be exported, as an "opportunity." This, added to the manifold support they are receiving from cooperation agencies and multilateral organizations, has given rise to the adoption of policies and concrete measures for their promotion in dozens of countries, without considering the possible social, political, economic and environmental consequences.

In contrast, grassroots organizations in the South see biofuels as a serious threat to subsistence. In fact, government plans imply that millions of hectares of land that today produce food, are going to be given over to the production of fuel to feed automobiles. Crops such as maize, soybean, sugarcane, oil palm and many others are going to be converted into ethanol or biodiesel. In the words of Bush himself, wood-chips will be converted into ethanol, implying the threat of even more monoculture fast growing tree plantations to feed cars. All this will be done to the detriment of lands producing food and of forests.

In this context, the recent meeting held in Mali on food sovereignty with the participation of delegates from over 80 countries, clearly declared itself against "the 'Green Deserts' of industrial bio-fuel monocultures and other plantations." ([see 1](#)). The women meeting there also supported this position in their declaration on food sovereignty, emphasizing that "Monocultures, including those dedicated to agrofuels ... have a harmful effect on the environment and on human health..." ([see 2](#))

In a different context, the Peoples' Permanent Tribunal (formerly the Russell Tribunal), at its recent meeting in Cacarica, Colombia included serious accusations against companies producing palm oil in its declaration. Among other things, it accused them (and the Colombian Government) of having planted oil palm on "the collective territories of Afro-Colombian communities, an operation that was possible thanks to the commission and impunity of over 113 crimes of Lese Humanity, 13 forced displacements, 15 cases of torture, 17 arbitrary arrests, 19 ransacking of settlements, 14 para-military style raids, aggressions on the humanitarian zone, 4 murders or extra-judicial executions and the so-called 'demobilization' which has enabled the development of further death threats and control over the population." ([see 3](#))

Of course this would not have overly concerned the Colombian and US Presidents when they recently met, as both have been – and continue to be – partners in the massacre taking place in Colombia under the name of the “Colombia Plan.” The final result will be positive for them: the production of biodiesel from oil palm. However, it is fitting that the future consumers of this fuel reflect on the evidence of a woman who told the Tribunal that “oil palms are fertilized by the blood of our brothers and sisters, friends and family members,” adding that “we have nowhere to work as the territory is covered by oil palm trees.”

This is the true face concealed behind the so-called “biofuels” in the South. Bio means life. However, the cultivation of these fuels means death. Death of entire communities; death of cultures; death of people; death of nature. Be these oil palm or eucalyptus plantations, be these sugarcane or transgenic soybean monoculture plantations, be they promoted by “progressive” or “conservative” governments. Death.

What could have been a positive solution (replacing fossil fuels by fuels from biomass) has become, by the grace of certain Northern interests, one of the most serious threats to the survival of millions of people in the South. For biofuels to become a positive solution the approach must change completely. It must change from production for a global market to production for local supply, from monoculture plantations to diversity, from monopoly to decentralization, from socially and environmentally destructive to respect for people and nature. This is not in the minds of the companies, but it is possible to find it in the minds of people, both in the South and in the North. We appeal to them all to protect life and to help stop this process which – under an “ecological” mantle – is a synonym of death.

(1) The full declaration is available at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/WSF/Nyeleni_2007.html

(2) The full declaration is available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/Nyeleni_2007.html

(3) The full declaration is available in Spanish at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Colombia/Tribunal_Pueblos.html

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Brazil: MST peasants occupy a shrimp farm

The problem of the loss of territories by peasants and indigenous peoples in favour of industrial projects has several aspects in Brazil and the Landless Peasant's Movement (MST) has been struggling to counteract this process.

We have reported on the successive occupations of land covered with vast monoculture eucalyptus plantations for pulp production – one of such occupations recently involved the women of Via Campesina/MST on the occasion of International Woman's Day.

Mangroves are also affected by depredatory projects. Shrimp farming is an extractive business that implies mangrove destruction. On 21 January this year in response to the situation and to protest against the slowness of the agrarian reform in the state, approximately 150 families associated with MST invaded the Qualibras shrimp farm located in Itapipoca, the coastal region of the State of Ceará.

With this occupation, MST was denouncing yet another act of violence by agro-business in the country: that of the Qualibras group destroying the mangroves in the region. According to Brazilian law this is a serious environmental crime because of the importance of mangroves, among other things, in the marine food chain. The Brazilian Terramar Institute denounced that the shrimp farms are violating Ceará laws as they are building nurseries in permanent protection areas. "An assessment made by the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) found that 75 percent of the shrimp farms in Ceará are located in permanent preservation areas, violating the state laws."

In the mangroves big business finds great profitability thanks to low production costs, an abundant and close water supply and tide movements that help to keep down the cost of pumping water into the tanks.

In spite of the environmental importance of mangroves and of the legislation, shrimp farming companies continue to expand their business: between 2003 and 2004, the area of shrimp farms in Brazil rose from 14,824 to 16,598 hectares with a total of close on 1,000 farms throughout the country, compared to the 20 that existed in the eighties.

While this agro-business advances over the mangroves in the northeast of the country, the workers are getting organized. The families that took part in the occupation are camping in the coastal region of the state, struggling to be given land and granted deeds. There are a total of 1,700 families spread out in 25 camps, and many of them have been waiting for over five years for the promised agrarian reform. In 2006, the goal of the National Institute for Settlement and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) was to settle 2,000 families in the State, but only 206 have received lands. The indigenous group "Tremembés" also took part in the occupation, demanding demarcation of lands in the indigenous zone of Buritis in Itapipoca.

Gunmen hired by the company surrounded the camp on the night of 23 January, in an attempt to intimidate the men, women and children. Finally and to avoid a conflict placing the safety of their families at risk, the landless peasants abandoned the occupation the following morning.

"We left with the intention of returning again in the event that INCRA does not definitively resolve the problems of the agrarian reform," affirmed a representative of the landless movement.

Article based on information from: "Brasil: MST ocupa fazenda devastadora de mangues no Ceará", Igor Felippe Santos, <http://www.biodiversidadla.org/content/view/full/29831>; "MST ocupa fazenda de criação de camarão", Carlos Henrique Camelo, OPovo online, <http://www.opovo.com.br/opovo/ceara/664429.html>; "MST sai de fazenda com ameaças de jagunços no Ceará", CUT, <http://www.cut.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?infoid=7314&sid=22>

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- Cameroon: When women mobilise to protect the moabi

Southern Cameroon is red and green. Green like the forest of the Congo basin that breathes and has a heartbeat and that offers its inhabitants the biotic resources necessary to subsist; and red like the dusty roads where trucks run, transporting the bodies of forest giants that will be turned into furniture, flooring, doors, etc. Along Cameroon's open veins flows its vital element to the port of Douala, where the vampire from the North comes to quench its thirst...

Voices of women reach us from the forest. In Southeast Cameroon women are organizing to improve their living conditions and to preserve a mythical tree, the moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*). This forest giant from the basin of the Congo River is being industrially exploited at a pace that is hard to determine but that is affecting local peoples and in particular, women.

For the peoples of Southern Cameroon, the moabi is of considerable importance. Traditionally the "Sacred Tree," dead ancestors were placed sitting at the foot of the tree or in a hole in its trunk; thus the moabi incarnated the power of the dead person. As the "Pharmaceutical Tree" its bark, its leaves and roots served to make over fifty traditional drugs used among other things for menstrual pains, vaginal infections and after childbirth. As the "Nutritional Tree" its edible fruits reduce women's work when it bears fruit, the seeds produce a good quality oil that is under the control of women from the time of gathering to the time to take it to market, representing one of the main sources of income in the areas where it grows.

Industrial exploitation of the forest started in Cameroon at the beginning of the twentieth century, during German colonization in the coastal region, to spread later to the whole country at the pace the railway was built. And, although some industrialists cannot find an explanation to the dwindling of maobis, it may be seen that the distribution of these species is inversely proportional to the historic presence of forest exploitation. In fact, maobi trading is lucrative as it is a very good quality timber for carpentry and fetches a high price on the international market. It is really a luxury product that finds its place in yachts or estates, as decks, windows, panelling, etc. Maobi parquet was used to cover the floors of the Paris Champs Elysées Theatre.

In Cameroon, the international timber trade is exclusively in the hands of foreign companies, mainly French, Italian, Lebanese and more recently, Chinese. However, the moabi market continues to be very "Franco-French": according to official statistics, between 2000 and 2005, 45 percent of the volume of moabi was produced by French companies and 71 % of the production was sold in France (24% in Belgium). It is thus obvious that the moabi trade is in perfect coincidence with the trade ties with the old metropolis.

Since the eighties, many villages are in dispute with the forest exploitation companies surrounding the Dja reserve, a region that is rich in moabis. The villagers have sent numerous letters to the relevant authorities, claiming their right to use the forest and asking for moabis to be protected. They have taken various measures, such as organizing meetings with the industrialist, marking the moabis to point out their right to use them and blocking the entry of heavy machinery until the army intervened... but none of these measures really achieved its objective. At Bedoumo, the army violently repressed a strike aimed at blocking the entry of the logging companies. The villagers were obliged to pick up the cinders of the fires they had light along the road to warm them from the cold night air with their bare hands, they were beaten and tortured and as a result some pregnant women had miscarriages. Confrontations of this type mobilize the entire community, although in general it is the men who appear at the forefront, as supposedly they are the ones who have contact, both oral and written, with the authorities.

However, the two conflicts specifically related with the moabi tree that made the villagers physically

confront the companies were either promoted by women or led by women. In Bapilé, the Italian company FIPCAM opened up a road (during a feast day when the villagers had gone to a neighbouring village) through the space reserved for the community forest and destroyed a cemetery. The following day, on hearing the noise made by the lumberjacks and discovering that various moabis in flower had been felled, five village women went to the forest to try to convince the workers to give up their logging, with no success. The following days, the whole community mobilized to block the road and the machinery, struggles and strikes went on for a month, and finally they achieved the protection of some of the remaining trees and recognition of the damage caused (300 moabis had been felled). Although compensation has not yet been payed.

In the village of Zieng-Ognoul, Pallisco, a French industrialist opened up a road in the space reserved for the community forest. When the villagers heard the noise, Mrs Koko Sol marched to the forest with various villagers, mainly women, and threatened to set fire to the machinery if the loggers did not stop their work. As a result, the loggers were expelled and a large number of moabis were preserved; unfortunately eleven had already been felled.

In some cases conflicts arise between men and women in the villages. In the first place because the men work in the logging companies and are responsible for making inventories of timber species. In the second, because some of them sell moabis from their land to clandestine sawmills. A woman from Ebimimbang affirmed that "the men are guilty because they are in contact with the industrialists and are well aware that the moabi is very important to the women."

The scarcity of moabis causes particular prejudice to women who must find other options for food; receive less income and do without medicinal ingredients or medicines for the specific treatment of female genital diseases. This situation is added to the masculine domination that they must endure in their societies.

Faced with this situation, Mrs Rufine Adjowa decided to establish an NGO known as CADEF. Its objective is to improve the living conditions of women by protecting the moabi. The idea is to gather village women in small groups or even cooperatives to develop the sale of moabi oil. The peasant women can thus obtain substantial income that enables them to pay their children's schooling and medical attention or to purchase the oil and soap they need without having to ask their husbands for money.

Because of their exclusion, all these women make up a social group able to promote changes in relations of power and to propose effective solutions for sustainable and equitable management of forest ecosystems.

By Sandra Veuthey, based on the author's field observations. E-mail:
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- Ecuador: The Awa People and their territory between political interests and economic pressure

The Ministry of the Environment is placing Ecuador's indigenous territories in danger. Under a new term, that of "co-management" it intends to hand over our ancestral territories and their natural resources to logging, oil palm and mining companies.

On 12 January 2007 the Minister of the Environment, Ana Albán modified the granting of Awa territory and set up a co-management regime between the indigenous Awa and Afro-Ecuadorian communities for the Parish of Ricaurte-Tulubí, Canton of San Lorenzo, Province of Esmeraldas. This resolution affects five Awa communities: Guadualito, Mataje, Balsareño, Pambilar and La Unión, involving 771 inhabitants and a territory of some 17,493 hectares.

We Awa are an ancestral indigenous nation from the Northwest of Ecuador and the Southwest of Colombia. We have a unique culture and our own language "Awa pít". We have 22 legally established Awa centres (communities) in Ecuador. They are all organized in the Federation of Awa Centres of Ecuador (FCAE), which is legally recognized by the Ecuadorian State. FCAE and its 22 centres have been granted a total of some 115,336 hectares of community land (under different kinds of deeds), located in the Provinces of Esmeraldas, Carchi and Imbabura.

We need our land for our livelihood and our survival. We are not going to abandon our homes and communities nor are we going to retreat a single step. If our ancestral lands are invaded, there will be confrontations. We will defend our land to the utmost, even if it involves losing our lives. We certainly do not want to reach any extreme or use any violence, but we hold the Minister Ana Alba directly responsible for anything that may occur in this case.

We are protected by our legitimate rights, guaranteed by the Ecuadorian Constitution and by international treaties such as the International Labour Organization's Convention 169, signed by the Ecuadorian State.

In April 2006 the Ecuadorian Negro Association (ASONE) sent a letter to the former president Alfredo Palacios in which it demanded the derogation, using false information and ill intentioned accusations, of the granting of 99,337 hectares of our Awa territory made by the Ministry of the Environment on 2 March 2006.

It is sufficient to visit our land to see who lives there and grows their crops there. ASONE says we are Colombian and drug traffickers, but the truth is that we are one of the 14 indigenous nationalities officially recognized in Ecuador. We were all born here, we have Ecuadorian identity cards and all our communities are legally established. There are no coca plantations on Awa territory.

We have always lived peacefully on our lands and no one has claimed ancestral rights over them. On 2 March 2006, after 30 years of struggle, the Minister of the Environment Ana Alba finally granted us 99,337 hectares of our ancestral lands. This grant was the result of painstaking public, administrative and field work over a period of three years. Each metre of our property lines has been checked in the field.

Furthermore, these same lands were demarcated as "Traditional Settlement of the Awa Indigenous Community Area" by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1988 and our ancestral possession was demarcated and recognized as an "Awa Ethnic Reserve" corresponding to 101,000 hectares by INEFAN, the predecessor to the Ministry of the Environment in 1995. Our lands' property lines have never been moved.

Land traffickers from San Francisco and San Lorenzo are behind this complaint, ghost organizations such as the "Citizen Front for the Defence of Ancestral Territories" together with the former deputy, Rafael Erazo from Esmeraldas. They want to sell our natural resources and lands to logging, oil palm and mining companies. They are concealed behind ASONE to make it look like an ethnic conflict, but

this is not the case. We have no problems with Afro-Ecuadorian communities. For centuries we have been living side by side with them as good neighbours, each on his own land. We have mutual respect for our cultures and our lands.

In March there was a first invasion by Guido Rodríguez, a well-known logging intermediary in the area, who works for Plywood Ecuatoriana and CODESA, belonging to the Alvarez Barba Group. With his personnel he invaded the forest belonging to the Awá Balsareño centre to open up strips in the forest. The community evicted him, as we had already done in 2005 when he came to the territory with high-clearance tractors to cut down our forest and turn it into plywood boards.

In another Awa centre, the Rio Tigre centre in the Province of Carchi, Tulcán canton, the situation is even worse. In 2002, the National Institute for Agrarian Development (INDA), the State institution responsible for granting lands, legally granted 6,024 hectares of communal ancestral lands to the Awa Rio Tigre Centre. But in December last year, INDA resolved to revert the land grant to the State, accepting the demand made by two farming associations from Ibarra, the "Asociación de Trabajadores Autónomos San Vicente" and the "Asociación de Desarrollo Comunitario Vista Hermosa del Río Tigre" which are claiming some 4,000 hectares of forest in Awa territory.

These associations also speculate with land: they want to take over our land and forests to do business. They have never lived there or worked the land. Their partner is a corporation (Egocreanet – Ecuador), and they want to allocate them some 500 hectares of these lands.

Today our territory is the last large remnant in the whole Ecuadorian coast of tropical rainforest. We have always defended our lands and have preserved our forests. We are living in harmony with the environment, benefiting from it without destroying it. As there is no land left for new oil palm plantations they want to take over our Awa territory.

We will not allow them to evict our communities to sell our territory to logging and oil palm companies. We are organized and ready to implement any necessary action. We have our own Community Forest Management Sub-programme and a Centre for Stocking and Transforming Timber in San Lorenzo. We take advantage of small quantities of timber using traditional methods of low environmental impact.

If there is this interest in recovering ancestral lands in the area of San Lorenzo, the authorities should recover the tens of thousands of hectares of lands that were taken from Afro-Ecuadorian communities by oil palm companies. These companies have felled some 40,000 hectares of forests in the Canton of San Lorenzo since 1999 to establish industrial oil palm plantations.

The consequences are most serious. The Choco forests, with their high rate of biodiversity have disappeared for ever. The animals that were hunted and the fish in the rivers have gone. The Afro-Ecuadorian communities have practically no land, food or sources of employment. The rivers have been poisoned with insecticides and fertilizers from the palm plantations. It is a green agro-industrial desert.

In this context the complicity of the Ecuadorian State should also be pointed out in the occupation of ancestral lands and in the felling of forests in the Canton of San Lorenzo. On 8 August 2002, the former president, Gustavo Noboa signed decree 2961, designating for agricultural use a polygon of approximately 60,000 hectares of community lands in the Canton of San Lorenzo, including part of Awa territory and 5,000 hectares of the State's Forestry Heritage.

This decree was jointly prepared by the Ministries of the Environment, Agriculture and Foreign Affairs and oil palm companies. The aim of the decree has been to legitimize the land that the oil palm companies acquired illegally, to increase their area and legalize the felling of forests that has been going on for years without permits or environmental impact assessments, or consideration for local communities.

FCAE demands that the Ecuadorian Government:

- Respects and definitively ensures land title deeds for Awa territory
- Prosecutes all invasion, extraction of timber by third parties, etc. on Awa territory
- Recognizes the Awa indigenous authority over its territory (circumscription)

At the same time we are asking for support and endorsement from all organizations in defence of our land.

By Olindo Nastacuaz, President of the Federation of Awa Centres of Ecuador (FCAE), e-mail:
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- India: Indigenous movement in Jharkhand challenge plans for industrial development that threatens to destroy Adivasi forests, farmlands and way of life

Like State governments in many other parts of India, the government of Jharkhand State is planning large-scale industrial expansion across the entire region in the name of "development" and "poverty reduction". To the dismay and disillusionment of mass movements in Jharkhand, newly elected government officials plan to uphold agreements struck by the previous State government with leading steel and mining companies. In return for 169198 Crore Rupees (c. US\$3.8 billion) of investment, these agreements promise companies massive land acquisition, which will deforest no less than 57,000 hectares of forest and displace 9,615 families, many of them located in legally protected Scheduled Areas set aside for indigenous Adivasi peoples in the State.

In Ranchi District, for example, the UK-based company Arcelor Mittal plans to take over tribal land and forests in Karra Block to develop a huge steel plant with backing from the State government. The whole plan has been developed without consultation and without the prior consent of the affected Adivasi people – in direct violation of legal protections for indigenous peoples, including the 5th Schedule, the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) and the Samata Judgement.

In the last two years indigenous and mass social movements in Jharkhand, have mobilised to challenge these official plans for massive industrial development across the State. Peoples' movements are categorically saying 'no' to industry-related displacement and they reject interference in their local affairs and decision-making by company "community liaison officers" or political party activists and politicians.

In Karra Block, the Adivasi people have started a campaign to save their traditional lands and forest and have formed a campaign organisation called Ottehasa Horo Sangathan (Organization of People of the Earth). Udikel village is one of the 144 communities threatened with displacement where the people have organised themselves to oppose top-down development.

Nandi Pahan, leader of Udikel Panchayat, affirms that his community will never exchange their forests and fields for industrial development:

"Everything is here on our traditional land: our homes, our fields, our forests, our burial grounds and ceremonial sites. This land is sacred for us. This is where we hold our Baha (flower feast) festival and other ceremonies. The forest has our special sarna 'prayer places'. So, our land is part of our way of life. We will not give up our land. If we surrender our lands: what will we eat? Where will go to plant our crops?"

He is backed up by other leaders of the community:

"The forest is of great importance to us. We gather fruits like karanj from the forest and medicines. We collect minor forest produce for sale. We have our orchards where we grow mangoes and tamarind. We use the forest to get construction materials for our houses and to make tools, including our agricultural implements. How can a factory replace all this? It is our culture and our livelihood. We cannot and will not give up this land." [Devar Pahan, Udikel Village]

In Seraikella Karshwan District mining and steel companies have put pressure on Adivasi villages to give up their traditional lands and forests for "development". No less than 39 villages in 4 Panchayats in the District report that Company agents have visited them in recent years to try to persuade them to give up their forests for mining. Dalbhanga Panchayat, for example, has been under constant pressure to open its lands up to limestone mining and has only stopped harassment by company agents following a massive protest rally against the proposed mine. In Rugudi Panchayat, Magila L Phonta Ltd has applied for a permit to mine gold that would affect Ramdih and Mutugarha villages.

Here too, villagers have opposed these plans and rejected approaches from company agents, partly by organising numerous rallies in 2005 and 2006 to protest against unwanted mining development on their lands.

"We do not want to surrender our land and customary rights to anybody – whether it is the government or private companies. Our land and our forest are the source of life for our communities. For us, the forest and the land is everything! We will never allow companies or the State to take them away from us!" [Mangal Singh, Batani village, Torandih Panchayat]

"If the mining companies come this place will become like Kolapani Island (remote and lonely): it will be like hell. It will become a miserable place. All the greenery will be gone and our land will be lost. Our health will be damaged and our medicinal plants will be destroyed. The company may promise to replace our forest, but these will be poisonous trees that will suck the water from our land. Those trees (eucalyptus) are no use to anyone here. Not to humans and not to animals. This is why we will not give up our rights." [Ghopal Singh Munda, Siyadia village, Rugudi Panchayat, Buchei Block, Bakas Mundari Khuntkatti and General Secretary of Samiti Rakshe Eevam Vikas]

For more information on threats to forests and indigenous and mass movement opposition to mining and industrial development in Jharkhand, contact Sanjay Bosu Mullick of Jharkhand Save the Forest Movement, email: rch_sanjay@sanchart.in, and Tom Griffiths, Forest Peoples Programme, email: tom@forestpeoples.org. See also a more detailed article with pictures at http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/asia_pacific/india_jharkhand_feb07_eng.pdf

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- Nigeria: Women of Idheze shut down Agip's oil facilities

We had already shared (see WRM's bulletin Nº 111) what the 'Operation Climate Change' -- launched on January 1, 1999 -- did in the Niger Delta: activists shut down oil flow stations and gas flares. In response, many houses were destroyed, people were killed and women were raped. However, the struggle continued and mainly women started a joint campaign to protect life by putting a stop to the depredations of Big Oil. They won a fight: in January 2006 Nigerian courts ordered Shell to stop the flaring of natural gas in Ogoniland.

Now, they have gone for more. Women of Idheze community in Isoko South Local Council of Delta State have again shut down oil facilities of the Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) alleging failure to pay compensation for damages caused by chemical/waste fluid of the firm flushed into the community.

Recently, chemical/waste from the rig site was discharged into the swamp of Idheze leading to the death and destruction of aquatic life. Many dead aquatic animals were still afloat in the ponds during the following days.

The women had early in December 2006 seized oil facilities belonging to Agip, owing to the failure of the company to implement an earlier agreement signed with the community on their entrance into their land.

They revealed that a spill led to the death of seven adults and three children and also destroyed economic trees and crops in 1982.

The women carried placards, barricaded the main entrance of the company's facilities and turned back all workers. Some of the placards bore inscriptions such as: "We are tired of the inhuman treatment of NAOC", "We will continue to disrupt your activities until you meet our demands", "Pay compensation for the chemical/waste fluid you have used to pollute our land."

The women came to the premises with their utensils and food items, including bags of rice, yams, garri as well as canopies with which they erected makeshift tents. They vowed not to vacate the yard until their demands were met.

According to them, after all that the community suffered as a result of the spill, Agip has refused to heed the advice of the inspectorate body of the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) which ordered Agip to compensate the community.

Leader of the protesters, Mrs. Mercy Okunwa, who spoke on behalf of the community's President-General, Joel Ogbru, accused the company of insensitivity to the plight of the locals as well as reneging on agreement reached with the community in Port Harcourt last December.

She said the non-challant attitude of NAOC to the issues of their community, led to a protest by the community on December 19, 2006 to register their "vexation but until now none of the promises made by NAOC when they invited the community people has been implemented".

She disclosed that many of the servicing companies operating in the rigs were "carrying out the job with the knowledge of Agip but detrimental to the community because none of them pays royalty to the community."

They accused servicing firms such as SERIC, IMPEANTI, and KCA Deutage for flouting outrightly,

agreements reached with the community, saying that Agip conspired with some of the servicing firms to rob the community of their entitlements. She lamented that contracts that should have been given to the indigenes were executed by outsiders.

"We are peace-loving people and knowing that Agip has been deceiving us, we wouldn't want anything that will be detrimental this time to our people and so until the company's management responds to our demand, we will not vacate the premises," the aggrieved women declared.

Article based on: "Women protesters shut oil facility as toxic waste ravages community", Chido Okafor, Warri, sent by Oilwatch, e-mail: info@oilwatch.org

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: An overview of monoculture eucalyptus plantations

Monoculture eucalyptus plantations are advancing over vast areas of the country, occupying traditional peoples' territories, displacing them, evicting people from rural areas, thus contributing to the creation of poverty belts, with the context of violence and criminality these necessarily imply. And as if this were not enough, they also have their quota of bloodshed.

At 9 o'clock on the evening of 26 February 2007, in the North of Minas Gerais, an armed guard of the V&M FLORESTAL Company – a company that has planted thousands of hectares of eucalyptus in the area – cravenly murdered Antonio Joaquim dos Santos, a 32 year-old farmer and extractivist, who was married and had four children. Joaquim and his daughter Eudisleia were on their way home after gathering firewood for domestic use. Two of V&M's armed guards, Claudinei and Joãozinho de Carmina, grabbed Antonio Joaquim, tied him up, hit him and then fired two shots into his mouth, all in front of his daughter. This happened in a eucalyptus plantation certified by FSC, which supposedly guarantees management aimed at "maintaining or enhancing the long-term social and economic well being of forest workers and local communities." According to community members, Antonio Joaquim was gathering firewood from his brother's property, from where he was taken by the guards who dragged him to the V&M area.

Last year, the Canabra community complained internationally, telling of their troubles and their lack of alternatives as a result of the deforestation of the "cerrados" caused by the V&M Company. This company had cut off the community's access to firewood and native fruit, in addition to drying up the Canabra River. V&M's response was to increase their pressure on the community which has been living in terror since then, threatened by armed guards who have taken over the farmers' carts and implements, have employed verbal and physical violence against the community members and have even put pressure on children bringing home small bundles of firewood on their bikes on their way back from school.

Various social organizations -- Rede Alerta Contra o Deserto Verde (Alert Against the Green Desert Network), CAA NM (Centre for Alternative Agriculture/Minas Gerais), CPT (Pastoral Land Commission of Minas Gerais State), Fórum Regional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável do Norte de Minas (Regional Forum of Sustainable Development in Northern Minas State), MST (Landless Peasents Movement), ASA Minas Gerais denounced the murder and sought action with official authorities and human rights organizations, demanding immediate and determined intervention

against the company's excesses. They also filed complaints with FSC Brazil and FSC International, asking them to immediately withdraw the Green Label granted to V&M. Coincidentally, the company anticipated affairs and on 15 March communicated its "decision to voluntarily withdraw from FSC after 8 years of very close relationship." The reason put forth by the company was that it did not agree with the way in which the certifying body (SGS) had carried out its audit.

In the meanwhile, the pulp industry attacks on other fronts. Stora Enso is acquiring land on the west frontier of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Although it is being cautious - it has declared that "Although we are in a continual process of acquiring land, the possibility of investing in the Stora Enso factory has not yet been decided," the Swedish-Finnish company's initial project foresaw the establishment of eucalyptus plantations covering an area of 100 thousand hectares. In order to achieve its objective it is putting pressure on INCRA – the body conducting the process and giving a technical opinion – for it to give a favourable assessment. It is also trying to get the National Congress to change Federal Law 6634/79 – which prevents foreign companies from owning land in frontier areas – to reduce from 150 km to 50 km the distance from the frontier line considered to be frontier zone.

Officially, the company alleges to have 45 thousand hectares in the region, but 2005 data from an official body (FEPAM) indicates this figure as being 60 thousand hectares and other sources affirm that they own as much as 150.000. Regardless of the amount, it is not possible to register it as public opinion was never explained where the land is located.

There are other pulp industry interests advancing in Rio Grande do Sul. The Brazilian industrial company "Votorantim Celulose e Papel" submitted a proposal to the government and to the State of Rio Grande do Sul, to build a new pulp mill near the Laguna Merin. This undertaking, which has the blessing of the governor of the State, implies an investment of some US\$ 1,800 million. Although the decision concerning the construction of the pulp mill, to be known as Três Lagoas, producing close on one million tons per year when finished in 2010, will be taken in the coming months, the Brazilian government has stated its satisfaction with the installation of the pulp mill.

It has been decided in the State of Rio de Janeiro to review an environmental law, preventing investment in the pulp sector in the region. Presently a new bill is under discussion on commercial tree plantations, which will imply a green light for 14 municipalities in the North and Northeast of the State to become eucalyptus producing areas for pulp, paper and timber companies. For a long time now, large companies in these sectors had stated their interest in investing in the State of Rio. However, a law existed (drawn up by the then state deputy, Carlos Minc, now secretary for the Environment) demanding a compensation that made the projects unviable. In fact, the provisions of Law 4.063/2003 stipulate that for each hundred hectares of commercial plantations, as compensation 30 hectares must be reforested with native species. The proposal of the municipal environmental secretaries (including Minc), is to submit a new bill to the Legislative Assembly, reducing the compensation from 30 to 10 hectares for the North and Northeast areas of the State.

Large scale eucalyptus plantations for export, even when becoming legal will never be morally right. It is immoral to allocate fertile land for this purpose when the people are hungry, when the indigenous peoples, first and eternal owners of these lands are standing on the sides of the roads without their land having been demarcated, when the territories of Afro-Brazilian communities are not legally recognized, when the numbers of landless people are increasing, when there are no conservation units or incentives to production implying nature protection.

As a sample of an alternative model that operates and gives people solutions, last year the Santa María de Ibicui Settlement, established on 6,600 hectares where each family unit possesses half a

hectare, produced 80,000 litres of milk per month in addition to maize, watermelon and cassava plantations in smallholdings. The 220 families settled there amount to some 900 – 1,000 people. The adults have employment and generate income for the municipality.

There are alternatives, there are other possible models. What has to be built up is the will to try them. The Brazilian people who resist and build have this will.

Article based on information from: a communiqué by the Alert against the Green Desert Network of 27/02/2007, transmitting the news of the murder of Antonio Joaquim dos Santos, sent by FASE, e-mail: geise.fase@terra.com.br; "O tirano projeto da celulose no Rio Grande do Sul - reflexões a partir do Seminário em Manoel Viana", by Ana Paula Fagundes, e-mail: sorriam@hotmail.com, complete version at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil.html#info>; "Proyectan construir nueva planta de celulosa en Brasil", newspaper La República, Uruguay, February 2007; "Stora Enso prevê uma área de 100 mil hectares para plantar eucaliptos no RS", 2/3/2007, "Eucalipto no Norte do Rio de Janeiro", Clipping Service, and "Conjuntura do monocultivo de eucalipto no Rio Grande do Sul e a luta dos movimentos sociais", by J.H. Hoffmann and Lino De David, all three sent by Joao Pedro Stedile, MST, e-mail: sgeral@mst.org.br

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- Cambodia: Indigenous Jarai take out legal case to reclaim their land

Loss of land and loss of access to natural resources is fuelling a livelihood and economic crisis among Cambodia's rural communities. "People are being dispossessed from their lands by those with political power and money," writes Shalmali Guttal in a recent report for Focus on the Global South.*

Loss of land translates into "hunger, cash-poverty, poor health and destitution for rural communities", notes Guttal. When indigenous communities lose their land, their livelihoods, culture and tradition are also destroyed. "The loss of traditional/local territories among indigenous communities results in extremely severe consequences including sickness, destitution and even death."

By 2004, private companies had taken control of 2.7 million hectares of land under concession contracts. Included in this figure are "economic land concessions", used for industrial plantations, mining and oil exploration, fishing and tourism. In many cases concessions are established on villagers' land. Resistance is met by bribes to village leaders, often followed by displays of violence from the police, military or private armed security guards.

Some of the most blatant land grabbing has taken place in Ratanakiri Province in north-east Cambodia. The indigenous Jarai villages of Kong Yu and Kong Thom in O'Yadao district provide a snapshot of what is happening throughout the country.

In the last three years, the Jarai have seen their land bulldozed to make way for a 500 hectare rubber plantation. A sign on a gate to the plantation at Kong Yu village reads, "No entry without authorisation".

The concession is owned by Keat Kolney, the sister of the Cambodian Finance Minister, Keat Chhon. Keat Kolney's husband is Chhan Saphan, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Land Management. Local authorities forced the deal through using threats, deception and fraud. Some Commune Council members have admitted publicly to accepting bribes to ensure that the land

transaction goes through.

In early 2004, when commune officials first asked them to sell their land, villagers refused. Officials then returned with a story that Prime Minister Hun Sen needed the land for disabled soldiers and that the villagers had no rights to the land. The villagers, who were unsure of their rights and reluctant to create problems with the prime minister or the army, agreed to hand over 50 hectares of land.

In August 2004, officials held a party for the villagers, plying them with pork, beer and two large jars of rice wine. Once the party was well under way, officials collected villagers' thumb prints in red ink. A week later, together with Keat Kolney, officials distributed presents to villagers including sarongs and money. Villagers were asked to thumbprint documents that they didn't understand.

"They told us if we did not agree with the land sale or accept the money they would take it anyway without pay or [even] one grain of salt," Sayo Tem, a Jarai villager, told the Phnom Penh Post.

By the time the bulldozers started clearing their land and forest, villagers realised that they had been tricked. The land had been transferred to Keat Kolney, not to disabled soldiers and the area was 500 hectares, ten times the area previously discussed. Kong Yu villagers filed a complaint with the local administrative offices.

In February 2006, 200 villagers gathered at the local commune office to ask for information about the company clearing their land and to voice their concerns. Officials accused villagers of causing social unrest and military police threatened to arrest villagers if any further demonstrations took place.

On 23 January 2007, the Community Legal Education Center and Legal Aid of Cambodia filed a lawsuit at the request of villagers to attempt to regain possession of their land.

In Sam Ath, a representative of Keat Kolney, argues that the thumb prints show that the transaction is legal. "Provincial authorities hold up our plantation as an example for newer investors," he told the Cambodia Daily.

In fact, Cambodian contract law requires contracts to be signed freely, among informed parties without fraud, deception or duress. The Land Law includes protection for indigenous land, including recognition of collective ownership. Management of land, including transfer of rights, must be free of official interference. Accepting bribes, to which several officials have admitted, is also illegal.

"Ratanakiri is in crisis now," says Ngy San, the deputy director of NGO Forum. "Land grabbing is out of control and it is devastating indigenous lives. Kong Yu is emblematic of the worst of these cases. It pits the interests of the rich and powerful against the needs of the poor. How this case is handled by the courts will be a litmus test for land disputes all across Cambodia."

CLEC is asking for letters in support of the Kong Yu and Kong Thom villagers to Prime Minister Hun Sen and to Ambassadors in Cambodia. Sample letters are available here:

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/cambodia/letters.htm>

* Shalmali Guttal (2006) "Land and Natural Resource Alienation in Cambodia", Focus on the Global South. <http://www.focusweb.org/land-and-natural-resource-alienation-in-cambodia-17.html>

By Chris Lang, e-mail: chrislang@t-online.de www.chrislang.blogspot.com

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- Cameroon: The tough reality in oil palm plantations

Last December I was travelling with three friends (a Cameroonian and a Swiss couple) along the public route that crosses the oil palm plantations belonging to Socapalm (Société Camerounaise des Palmeraies) in the Kribi region. On reaching the control post installed by the company – that we had crossed earlier on – we were stopped by a private security guard who demanded our identity documents. On asking him why he wanted them he informed us that Socapalm “secret agents” aware of our visit had ordered him to do so. He added that he had been told to take us to the company’s information office. Of course we did not hand over our documents nor did we accept to be taken to the information office because the company has no legal right to demand this. However, the story serves to illustrate the power of the company and the police-type control it exercises over the inhabitants of the area.

In spite of its name, Socapalm is not a “Cameroonian society,” but belongs to the powerful French Bolloré group which also owns another large oil palm plantation in the Kribi region (the Ferme Suisse). Together these plantations cover 31,000 hectares.

In last month’s bulletin we published an article on the serious social and environmental impacts of a rubber plantation in the same Kribi region (belonging to the Hevecam Company). What is interesting is that the present article is almost identical to the previous one, the only difference being the name of the companies.

In fact, the indigenous Bagyeli (“pygmy”) people who live around the palm plantations told us practically the same story as the Bagyeli affected by the rubber plantations. Socapalm evicted them from their homes, promising them modern housing. The palms were planted, grew, gave fruit, were harvested, but the company has not built a single house.

Now these Bagyeli people are surrounded by plantations and banned from entering them. If they do so, the guards who catch them chase them out with whips. They are forced to live in a flood area where mosquitoes and associated diseases are abundant.

As to their livelihood, they are hardly able to survive. The company does not employ them and if it does, it pays them a lot less than the other workers. The only animals left in the plantation for the Bagyeli to hunt are rats. Only some hunting is possible in the surroundings of the plantation and further away in the mountain area.

All this is a consequence of the destruction of the tropical forest by the company to convert it to palm plantations. Previously the Bagyeli (expert hunters and gatherers), found all they needed in the forest (meat, fruit, etc.). Now they do not even have clean water as it is polluted by chemical fertilizers and sediment from erosion. Regarding health, problems related to poor nourishment, polluted water and the unhealthy place where these people live are becoming more serious as they no longer have the plants they used for their traditional medicines. The hospital belongs to Socapalm and as they are not on the company’s payroll, they have to pay if they are hospitalized.

Regarding the situation of the company workers, it is no different from that of the Havecam plantation workers. They also live in crowded housing belonging to the company, they also work for outsourced employers, they also have problems with their eyesight due to the lack of protection from the dust

falling from the bunches of fruit, they also apply agrochemicals without the necessary protective clothing, they also have problems with drinking water and sanitation.

Regarding labour organization, the workers told us that there was no independent trade union and it is unlikely that one can be organized. In 1992 there was a strike in demand of better working conditions and an increase in the "miserable salary" they earn. The result was that the strike leaders were imprisoned and made redundant.

At a time when oil palm plantations are being promoted to supply fuel to the countries of the North, the consumers in these countries should realise that in no way can this fuel be considered "green." Its true colour comes from a combination of social exploitation, violation of human rights and environmental destruction.

By Ricardo Carrere, based on information gathered during a trip to the region in December 2006 with researchers Sandra Veuthey and Julien-Francois Gerber. The author thanks the Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED) for the support received that made this trip possible.

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- Colombia: Irish-Dutch pulp company accused of serious social and environmental crimes

The Peoples' Permanent Tribunal – Colombian Chapter met on 26 and 27 February 2007 in Lower Atrato to bring to trial transnational companies focusing on the issue of biodiversity and exploitation of natural resources in Colombia. The participating communities and social organizations – including environmental organizations – accused Smurfit Kapa Carton de Colombia "of violating human, environmental, social and cultural rights. More specifically: the destruction of tropical rainforests, Andean forests and other ecosystems and destroying the communities' social weave, traditional and cultural means of production, eliminating and contaminating water resources; influencing government policy-making in the country and putting pressure on State officials to favour the multinational's interests; concealing information regarding the company and manipulating mass media both on a regional and national level; using false postulates and untrue information and advertising to justify its activities and conceal the impacts generated; accusing and criminalizing with inaccurate arguments those denouncing the company's improper conduct."

During the more than fifty years that they have been on Colombian territory, the company has destroyed a considerable part of the tropical rainforest area in Lower Calima in the Department of Valle del Cauca (the biogeographical Choco region) and the Andean forest, high stubble and other ecosystems in the coffee-hub departments. It has introduced plantations in the territory of indigenous communities living in the Departments of Cauca and Caldas and has planted trees on land previously used for farming which boosted the economies of the populations living in the Departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Risaralda, Quindío, Tolima and Antioquia.

As proof of the accusations made against Smurfit Kapa Cartón de Colombia, a book written by Joe Broderick "El Imperio de cartón – Impacto de una multinacional papelera en Colombia" (The Cardboard Empire – The Impact of a Pulp and Paper Multinational in Colombia) was submitted by the plaintiffs. This book sets out the results of investigation financed by the Bio-Pacific (Ministry of the Environment) UNDP project, GEF/92/G31. The author underscores the fact that when he was living in Dublin in 1993, he learnt that 70% of Smurfit's profits are obtained in Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia.

The damages caused by clear-cutting in the transitional zones between very humid tropical rainforests and tropical rainforests in the Pacific region of low hills to the south of the San Juan River and the River Calina, in the biogeographical Choco region are fully documented and the impacts on Afro-descendent communities and on ethnic Embera and Waunama indigenous communities are stressed.

In areas of forestry exploitation the Afro-descendent and indigenous communities have suffered cultural changes because of the presence of logging companies associated with Smurfit Kapa. A homogenizing and hegemonic lifestyle has been imposed on them, generating a loss of knowledge and values, creating insecurity, involving the loss of territory for traditional communities settled in the region. With clear-cutting the Waunama community witnessed the disappearance of many trees whose timber was of traditional importance for building canoes, trunks and other utensils as well as other plant species appreciated for their value as food, medicine or for ritual purposes. With extractive logging activities and habitat destruction, much of the wildlife has disappeared and many fish are no longer to be found in the rivers.

In 1978, Smurfit Kapa Carton de Colombia purchased land from the large landowners and planted pine trees in smallholdings located in the municipalities of Buenos Aires (Cauca) which the Paez communities had been claiming since the sixties as their ancestral territory. The indigenous people endeavoured to recover their territory by occupying this land and other plots; the communities wanted to avoid more land being purchased and to stop the encroachment of Smurfit in the Cauca, as they thought the company was disrespectful towards nature and the local flora. They had seen what had happened in Balsa (Cauca) where a one thousand hectare smallholding was planted with eucalyptus trees, preceded by the destruction of native trees and the indigenous people were evicted by the National Army and some leaders were sued and imprisoned. There were also some cases of indigenous leaders being murdered, such as the murder in 1985 of the indigenous leader Luciono Labio and his wife.

In 1989, the Paez and Smurfit Carton de Colombia signed the so-called Jamundi agreement, engaging themselves to maintain the status quo until reaching a definitive agreement regarding the establishment of an indigenous reserve for the Paez Paila community. The indigenous community continued planting foodstuffs in the smallholdings under dispute and the company deployed its enormous power and well-known influence over the regional and national authorities and evicted the community. In this context the Paez denounced the connivance existing between Smurfit and some Departmental and municipal officials in the Cauca where they had participated in evicting the people from their recovered smallholdings without the relevant legal procedure.

Smurfit Carton de Colombia apparently suspended its activities in the Paila region in 1990, but in 1991 it set up the Agroforestal el Naya S.A. company, thereby avoiding the danger of their pine trees falling into the hands of the indigenous people (either by expropriation or appropriation) and also ensured its continuity in the area and the right to continue timber exploitation without the expense and responsibility involved in landholding and labour requirements for timber extraction. Thus, Smurfit is apparently out, but it receives the timber and everything is handled by its Agroforestal partners.

The murders of indigenous leaders continued during 1992. Miguel Labio Quiguanas was arrested by National Army soldiers while travelling on a bus with other indigenous people; later his body was found, dressed in uniform.

Penetration of coniferous plantations in the west of the Department of Cauca by Smurfit Carton de

Colombia, has occurred in parallel with the systematic denial of collective rights linked to legal appropriation of territories and has encouraged – on driving the mass of peasants, indigenous and Afro-descendent people towards the distant region of Naya to grow coca – events as painful in the history of the country and the world as the horrendous Naya massacre undertaken by paramilitary troops in April 2001 which, according to the community, left some 100 dead (or 70 dead, according to the Attorney General of the Nation).

At the beginning of the nineties, Smurfit Carton de Colombia launched an aggressive strategy, purchasing land to install pine plantations in high areas where water sources spring from, and relict primary Upper Andean forest is to be found. The communities of Alsacia, Agua Blanca and la Esperanza and the Paula Indigenous Reserve, which were more energetic in their demands for land recovery and deeds, were craftily misled by Carton de Colombia and divided. In view of this situation, many families from the area decided to occupy land in the Naya region, located on the Pacific slope, where initially they established farming systems. However, because of the excessive distance and absolute abandon by the State, they have been obliged to change to the plantation of illegal crops.

In April 2001, one of the most violent massacres in Colombian history took place, where a still unknown number of peasants, indigenous and Afro-descendent people were torn apart, sawn up, thrown down cliffs by para-military groups.

Today pines are still being planted, dominating the landscape and substituting the primary forest. The communities of the Upper Naya have not received the deeds for their territory and the locality of Timba suffers from a notorious water shortage. The Upper Naya communities consider that among the major projects threatening the integrity of the territory and the life of the communities is Carton de Colombia's demolishing progress under cover of its mask as Agroforestal Naya S.A., and now with para-military presence in the region.

Summary based on article produced by Herney Patiño, Grupos Ecológicos del Risaralda, e-mail: herpa@uniweb.net.co. The complete article is available -in Spanish- at http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Colombia/Smurfit_Kapa.html

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- Swaziland: FSC credibility hits all time low with certification of Sappi

Sappi's plantations in Swaziland are the epitome of what is wrong with industrial tree plantations. More than fifty years of living with plantations has done less than nothing to develop the country's people. Species-rich grasslands were destroyed and people moved to make way for the plantations, when they were established as a British "aid" project in the 1950s. The plantations are monocultures of pine trees, exotic to Swaziland. Every year, Sappi clearcuts a total of 3,000 hectares of its plantations, leaving vast scars on the landscape. When the clearcuts are replanted, the trees suck up water, drying up streams and reducing flow in rivers. Sappi's plantations and nurseries can only be managed through the use of chemical pesticides.

In July 2006, Sappi's plantations in Swaziland were given the FSC 'green' label following an assessment by the Soil Association's Woodmark. Founded in 1946, a major part of the Soil Association's work has been "to promote organic agriculture as a sustainable alternative to intensive farming methods." But with its certification of Sappi's plantations in Swaziland, Woodmark is promoting intensive, non-organic monocultures, exactly what the Soil Association was set up to

challenge.

During the assessment of Sappi's plantations in May 2006, Woodmark found that Sappi's replanting procedures did not comply with national regulations requiring a 30 metre wide strip along streams. In one place trees had been planted too close to a stream. In another, a stream was channelled across a road instead of under it. "Due to the planting of pine trees since 1989 . . . the natural flow of water in the streams was severely depleted," a farmer neighbouring one of Sappi's plantations told Woodmark. "Devastating fires" have damaged Sappi's plantations over the past seven years.

Woodmark's inspectors visited a logging area, where more than 40 hectares was being clearcut. They found that there was no first aid provision, no designated area for equipment and provisions, no drinking water provided for workers and no fire fighting equipment. There were no records of training for workers and no training schedules for 2006. For a work force of 120, the contractor had only two first aiders. And both of their certificates had expired.

Oil was leaking from a storage area owned by one of the contractors. The construction of the oil separator pit did not comply with Sappi's requirements. A chemical store operator was not trained in health and safety issues handling toxic chemicals. Not all contractors had written safe work procedures including risks and hazards associated with the various tasks.

To address these breaches of FSC's standards, Woodmark issued a series of corrective action requests which Sappi has to meet before Woodmark's next visit to Swaziland in July 2007.

But the most shocking part of Woodmark's report of the Sappi assessment is the revelation that Sappi uses pesticides which are prohibited in FSC-certified operations.

In November 2005, during a pre-assessment of Sappi's operations in Swaziland Woodmark found that Sappi was using two pesticides which are banned under FSC's 2002 Pesticide Policy. Woodmark issued a corrective action request that Sappi ensures that "pesticides with the active ingredient benomyl and imazapyr are not used". Sappi stopped using imazapyr, but continued to use benomyl.

Benomyl is a fungicide which is selectively toxic to micro-organisms and invertebrates. Sappi acknowledges that it is "very toxic to fish and earthworms". The company uses benomyl against *Fusarium circinatum*, a fungus which causes pitch canker in pines. In December 2005, FSC issued a new Pesticide Policy. Benomyl is listed in both the 2002 and 2005 Pesticide Policies as a "highly hazardous" pesticide.

FSC's 2005 Pesticides Policy states that "The use of any pesticide containing an active ingredient included on the current FSC list of 'highly hazardous' pesticides shall constitute a major non-compliance" with FSC's standards "and shall therefore be prohibited unless a temporary derogation [or partial waiving of the rules] for use in the applicable territory has previously been approved by the FSC Board of Directors."

Woodmark decided not just to bend the rules but to throw them away. Rather than waiting to see whether or not FSC would approve the use of benomyl in Swaziland, Woodmark issued the certificate to Sappi arguing that "A derogation request for the use of Benomil has been submitted." By March 2007, FSC had still not approved the derogation request for Benomyl, but Sappi's Swaziland certificate remains in place.

Woodmark has certified Sappi's monocultures partly on the basis of hoped for future improvements

but also on the basis of hoped for future weakening of FSC's Pesticides Policy. By issuing the certificate and allowing it to remain in place, Woodmark is undermining the credibility of both FSC and the Soil Association.

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AGROFUELS

- Treethanol: A remedy worse than the malady

Ethanol is a biofuel usually made from maize (corn) or sugar cane, which is being enthusiastically promoted as an alternative fuel which can be blended into ordinary petrol or burned directly in special "flex-fuel" engines.

Now, in the present agro-fuel rush, the idea of using trees for the production of ethanol is being put forward as a better solution. According to its promoters, "Treethanol" has the potential to be much more energy efficient than other crops like maize or sugar cane. The energy balance (the ratio of the energy yielded by a given amount of ethanol to the energy needed to produce it) for ethanol made from maize is estimated by the US energy department at 1.3; in other words, the ethanol yields 30% more energy than was needed to produce it. For ethanol made from sugar cane in Brazil, the energy balance is 8.3, according to the International Energy Agency. But for ethanol made from trees, which contain a lot of cellulose, the energy balance is said to be as high as 16, at least in theory. In practice, producing such "cellulosic" ethanol is much more difficult and expensive than producing it from other crops. But corporation researchers are racing to develop ways to chip, ferment, distil and refine wood quickly and cheaply.

Interest in cellulosic ethanol is growing as the drawbacks of making ethanol from maize and sugar become apparent. Both are important food crops, and as ethanol production is stepped up around the world, greater demand is driving up the prices of everything from animal feed to cola and biscuits. The price of corn rose by 70% between September 2006 and January 2007 to reach its highest level in a decade. Mexico's president, Felipe Calderón, even capped the price of corn tortillas in January as US's fast-growing ethanol industry caused prices to rocket.

So in come the trees. The promoters of tree-ethanol argue that trees grow all year round and contain far more carbohydrates (the chemical precursors of ethanol) than food crops do. Ethanol is the result of the fermentation of sugars, which is why it can be so simply and efficiently made from sugar cane. Making ethanol from maize is a bit more complicated: the kernels are ground into flour and mixed with water, and enzymes are added to break the carbohydrates from the maize down into sugars, which can then be fermented into ethanol. Making ethanol from cellulosic feedstocks is harder still, however, since it involves breaking down the tough, winding chains of cellulose and hemicellulose from the walls of plant cells to liberate the sugars. This can be done using a cocktail of five or six enzymes. Although such enzymes exist, they are expensive.

However, tree-ethanol enthusiasts see that there is much money to be gained and are actively trying to find solutions. In the first place, they are searching for cheaper and more efficient enzymes. Two large producers of industrial enzymes -- Genencor, a US firm, and Novozymes, from Denmark -- are working to reduce the cost of cellulase enzymes, which can break down cellulose, to below \$0.10 per

gallon of ethanol. For its part, Diversa is developing enzymes capable of breaking down hemicellulose. One approach is to "tweak the structure" of existing enzymes (meaning genetic manipulation of enzymes) to try to make them more efficient. Another approach is "bio-prospecting" (meaning bio-piracy), which implies looking for natural enzymes in unusual places, such as in the stomachs of wood-eating termites.

To make the business even more profitable and matters worse, a second –and probably complementary- "solution" is to create new trees. A team led by Vincent Chiang, a biologist at North Carolina State University, is investigating the production of ethanol from genetically modified trees, with funding from the US Department of Agriculture.

They will try to get faster growing trees containing less lignin and more cellulose so they would both grow faster and also produce more ethanol. Some transgenic trees of this kind are being tested in the US. Dr Chiang and his team are also looking at ways to modulate the genes that determine the structure of a tree's sugar-containing hemicelluloses in order to make the breakdown and fermentation processes more efficient.

What those high-tech researchers are not even considering –as usual- are the environmental and social costs that the resulting expansion of large-scale –and genetically modified- fuel tree plantations would have: substitution of food crops by fuel crops –in a world where millions are malnourished- , displacement and impoverishment of local communities –and its accompanying repression- impacts on water, ecosystems, soil. Such impacts will almost certainly fall mostly on Southern communities, where the bulk of those plantations would be established. At the same time, the serious environmental threats of genetic manipulation of trees (see WRM Bulletin Nº 88) and enzymes are also ignored.

A simple question has yet to be answered by those promoting treethanol and other agro-fuels: can a solution to one problem (climate change) be considered a solution if it creates serious problems to other equally important problems? Large scale agrofuel crops and treethanol plantations will result in biodiversity loss, water depletion, soil degradation, impoverishment, malnutrition, human rights abuses –to name only the more obvious. Our answer to the question is that this is an unacceptable solution which must be opposed.

Source of information used: "Energy: Could new techniques for producing ethanol make old-fashioned trees the biofuel of the future?", Derek Bacon, March 2007, The Economist Newspaper, sent by STOP Genetically Engineered Trees Campaign, e-mail: info@stopgetrees.org, <http://www.stopgetrees.org>

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- Brazil: Agro-fuels represent a new cycle of devastation of the Amazon and Cerrado regions

The present energy matrix is basically compounded by oil (35%), coal (23%) and natural gas (21%). The nations of the OECD -- the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development -- which account for 56% of the planet's energy consumption are desperately in need of a liquid fuel replacement for oil. Worldwide petroleum extraction rates are expected to peak this year, and global supply will likely dwindle significantly in the next fifty years.

The Bush Administration is committed to significantly expanding biofuels to reduce its dependence

upon foreign oil (the US imports 61% of the crude oil it consumes). Although a range of prospects for biofuels exists, ethanol derived from corn and soy currently constitutes 99% of all biofuel use in the US.

The energy contained in grains or plants is actually an agro-chemical metamorphosis of solar energy transformed into fuel – biodiesel and ethanol – through vegetable oil or alcohol. The best conditions for this process are present in the countries of the South where there is greater solar energy.

The production of fuel from sunflower seeds, corn, soybean, almonds, oil palm or sugar cane is presented as a good intention – that of substituting oil, a contaminating and non-renewable fuel, by renewable fuels – and will be widely advertised because it is presented as a gesture of goodwill to curb global warming.

However the so-called “solution” aims at leaving untouched the present energy wasting and individual transportation model that must be replaced by a model based on collective transportation. The energy crisis has provided an opportunity for powerful global partnerships between petroleum, grain, genetic engineering, and automotive corporations. These new alliances are deciding the future of the world’s agricultural landscapes. The biofuels boom will further consolidate their hold over our food and fuel systems and allow them to determine what, how and how much will be grown, resulting in more rural poverty, environmental destruction and hunger. The ultimate beneficiaries of the biofuel revolution will be grain merchant giants, including Cargill, ADM and Bunge; petroleum companies such as BP, Shell, Chevron, Neste Oil, Repsol and Total; car companies such as General Motors, Volkswagen AG, FMC-Ford France, PSA Peugeot-Citroen and Renault; and biotech giants such as Monsanto, DuPont, and Syngenta.

In an initiative promoted by the Governor of the State of Florida, Jeb Bush, the former Brazilian Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Rodrigues and the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Inter-American Ethanol Commission was launched in Miami. Furthermore, the purpose of President Bush’s Latin American tour this March to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico was to achieve that the governments of the region promote large-scale production of biofuels – such as alcohol from sugar cane and ethanol from corn – for export to the US market. The objective is for the countries of the South to concentrate their agriculture on producing fuel to supply the cars and trucks of the first world and thus it will not have to depend on oil imported from countries that the US considers problematic (such as Venezuela, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Angola).

All this will reinforce the trade relation between Brazil and the US which is already the largest importer of Brazilian ethanol, importing 58% of the nation’s total produced ethanol in 2006. Far from good news for Brazil, if the renewable fuel standards for ethanol proposed by the Bush administration were to be met by Brazilian sugarcane, Brazil would need to increase its production by an additional 135 billion liters per year.

Given the new global energy context, Brazilian politicians and industry officials are formulating a new vision for the economic future of the country, centered on production of energy sources to displace 10% of world gasoline use in the next 20 years. This would require a five-fold increase in the land area devoted to sugar production, from six to 30 million hectares.

And not only sugar but also soybean and other potential energy crops. In response, Brazil alone will likely deforest an additional 60 million hectares of land in the near future. New cultivation will lead to land clearing in new areas that will likely face deforestation comparable to that in the Pernambuco region, where only 2.5% of the original forest cover remains.

Biofuels are initiating a new cycle of expansion and devastation in the Cerrado region where the planted area is rapidly expanding and where the natural vegetation cover is expected to have disappeared by 2030. The Amazon is also threatened. The Brazilian chemical engineer, Expedito Parente, who owns the first patent registered in the world for the production of biodiesel on an industrial level declared that "We have 80 million hectares in the Amazon that are going to become the Saudi Arabia of biodiesel."

Presently, 85 percent of Brazil's total soybean production comes from five States: Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraná, Goiás and Rio Grande do Sul, although lately in areas in the north of the country (Rondonia, Pará and Roraima) amazing advances have been recorded. The total land used for soybean cultivation has increased by a factor of 57 since 1961 and the volume of production has multiplied 138 times. Fifty-five percent of the soy crop, or 11.4 million hectares, is genetically modified. The development plan "Avança Brasil" is aimed in this direction. It seeks to expand the agricultural frontier, penetrating deeply into the forest area to promote soybean cultivation, with the Government intending to allocate some 40 billion dollars for this purpose. President Lula has declared that transgenic soybean will be used for agrofuels and "good soybean" for human consumption.

Soy cultivation has already resulted in the deforestation of 21 million hectares of forests in Brazil. Monocultural production of soy in the Amazon Basin has rendered much of the soil infertile. Poor soils necessitate increased application of industrial fertilizers for competitive levels of productivity. One hundred thousand hectares of depleted former soy-growing lands have been abandoned to cattle-grazing, which leads to further degradation. Furthermore, soybean expansion leads to extreme land and income concentration. In Brazil, soybean cultivation displaces eleven agricultural workers for every new worker it employs. This is not a new phenomenon. In the 1970s, 2.5 million people were displaced by soybean production in Parana, and 300,000 were displaced in Rio Grande do Sul. Many of these now landless people moved to the Amazon where they cleared pristine forests.

The advancement of the "agricultural frontier" for biofuels is an attempt against the food sovereignty of Southern nations as land for food production is increasingly being devoted to feed the cars of people in the North. The amount of cereal needed to fill a tank of almost 100 litres once is sufficient to feed one person for a whole year. Biofuel production also affects consumers directly by increasing the cost of food.

Only strategic alliances and coordinated action of social movements (farmers' organizations, environmental and farm labor movements, NGOs, consumer lobbies, committed members of the academic sector, etc) can put pressure on governments and multinational companies to ensure that these trends are halted. Joint work is needed to ensure that all countries retain the right to achieve food sovereignty via agroecologically-based, local food production systems, land reform, access to water, seeds and other resources and domestic farm and food policies that respond to the true needs of farmers and consumers.

Article based on: "O Mito dos Biocombustíveis", Edivan Pinto and Marluce Melo, Comisión Pastoral de la Tierra Regional Nordeste – CPT NE, and Maria Luisa Mendonça, Red Social de Justicia y Derechos Humanos, 23 February 2007; "The ecological and social tragedy of crop-based biofuel production in the Americas", Miguel A Altieri, Elizabeth Bravo, complete version (in English) in <http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/biofuels.html#analytical>; "Estados Unidos y Brasil: La nueva alianza etanol", Raúl Zibechi, http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/Biocombustibles/Alianza_Etanol.html; El mito de los biocombustibles, Edivan Pinto, Marluce Melo and Maria Luisa Mendonça, Agencia Latinoamericana de Informacion – ALAI, March 2007, sent by Biodiversidad en América Latina

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<http://www.iccc.es/2006/08/07/bodiesel-o-biotrampa/#pp0>.

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FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

- Obscenity of carbon trading

If we want to curb climate change, carbon trading won't do.

In 1992, an infamous leaked memo from Lawrence Summers, who was at the time Chief Economist of the World Bank, stated that "the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable, and we should face up to that".

The recently released Stern Review on climate change, written by a man who occupied the same position at the World Bank from 2000 to 2003, applies a similar sort of free market environmentalism to climate change.

Sir Nicholas Stern argues that the cost-effectiveness of making emissions reductions is the most important factor, advocating mechanisms such as carbon pricing and carbon trading.

While dumping toxic waste in the global South might look like a great idea from the perspective of the market, it ignores the glaringly obvious fact of it being hugely unfair on those getting dumped upon.

In a similar way, Stern's cost-benefit analysis reduces important debates about the complex issue of climate change down to a discussion about numbers and graphs that ignores unquantifiable variables such as human lives lost, species extinction and widespread social upheaval.

'Junk economics'

Cost-benefit analysis can be a useful tool for making choices in relatively simple situations when there are a limited number of straight-forward options to choose from.

But as Tom Burke, visiting professor at Imperial College London, has observed: "The reality is that applying cost-benefit analysis to questions such as [climate change] is junk economics... It is a vanity of economists to believe that all choices can be boiled down to calculations of monetary value." Some commentators have applauded the Stern Review for speaking in the economics language that politicians and the business community can understand.

But by framing the issue purely in terms of pricing, trade and economic growth, we are reducing the scope of the response to climate change to market-based solutions.

These "solutions" take two common forms:

- under emissions trading, governments allocate permits to big industrial polluters so they can trade "rights to pollute" amongst themselves as the need arises
- another approach involves the generation of surplus carbon credits from projects that claim to

reduce or avoid emissions in other locations, usually in Southern countries; these credits may be purchased to top up any shortfall in emissions reduction

Such schemes allow us to sidestep the most fundamentally effective response to climate change that we can take, which is to leave fossil fuels in the ground. This is by no means an easy proposition for our heavily fossil fuel dependent society; however, we all know it is precisely what is needed.

What incentive is there to start making these costly, long-term changes when you can simply purchase cheaper, short-term carbon credits?

Forcing the market

In the current neo-liberal economic environment, trading rules inevitably succumb to the pressures of corporate lobbying and deregulation in order to ensure that governments do not "interfere" with the smooth running of the market.

We have already seen this corrosive influence in the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), when under corporate pressure, governments massively over-allocated emissions permits to the heaviest polluting industries in the initial round. This caused the price of carbon to drop by more than 60%, creating even more disincentive for industries to lower their emissions at source.

There are all manner of loopholes and incentives for industry to exaggerate their emissions in order to receive more permits and thereby take even less action.

Market analyst Franck Schuttellar estimated that in the scheme's first year, the UK's most polluting industries earned collectively £940m (\$1,792m) in windfall profits from generous ETS allocations.

Given all we know about the link between pollution and climate change, such a massive public concession to dirty industries borders on the obscene.

We are being asked to believe that the flexibility and efficiency of the market will ensure that carbon is reduced as quickly and as effectively as possible, when experience has shown that lack of firm regulation tends to create environmental problems rather than solve them.

Community interest

There is a groundswell of opinion that the "invisible hand" of the market is not the most effective way of facing the climate challenge.

The Durban Declaration of Climate Justice, signed by civil society organisations from all over the world, asserts that making carbon a commodity represents a large-scale privatisation of the Earth's carbon cycling capacity, with the atmospheric pie having been carved-up and handed over to the biggest polluters.

Effective action on climate change involves demanding, adopting and supporting policies that reduce emissions at source as opposed to offsetting or trading. Carbon trading isn't an effective response; emissions have to be reduced across the board without elaborate get-out clauses for the biggest polluters.

There is an urgent need for stricter regulation, oversight, and penalties for polluters on community,

local, national and international levels, as well as support for communities adversely impacted by climate change. But currently such policies are nigh-on invisible, as they contradict the sacred cows of economic growth and the free market.

There is, unfortunately, no "win-win solution" when it comes to tackling climate change and maintaining an economic growth based on the ever increasing extraction and consumption of fossil fuels.

Market-based mechanisms such as carbon trading are an elaborate shell-game of global creative accountancy that distracts us from the fact that there is no viable "business as usual" scenario.

Climate policy needs to be made of sterner stuff.

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