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OUR VIEWPOINT

- When will the FAO stop calling fast wood plantations “forests”?

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has the task of carrying out periodic assessments on the state of the world’s forests. In order to do this, it has developed a number of definitions one of which –obviously- is about what can be considered to be a forest. This should have been a relatively easy mission … were it not for the fact that the FAO decided to define plantations –included those of alien species- as “planted forests”.

The recently published State of the World’s Forests 2007 report includes a box (8) with the heading “Planted forests in the continuum of forest characteristics” (see note 1), where “productive plantations” are under the heading “planted forests” and are defined as “Forest of introduced and/or native species established through planting or seeding mainly for production of wood or non-wood goods”. It is interesting to note that in that box even “trees in urban environments” are included in “the continuum of forest characteristics”!

From the above it becomes clear that for the FAO any “productive tree plantation (e.g. a fast-growth monoculture eucalyptus plantation) is not only a “planted forest”, but pure and simply a “forest”. This has very important

consequences, because time and time again the FAO assessment –due to such definition– hides the reality of widespread deforestation, the equally important reality of forest degradation and biological impoverishment of forests and the negative impacts of eucalyptus, pine, acacia, teak, gmelina, rubber and other alien tree plantations on people and the environment.

It may perhaps be debatable if a plantation of a native species can be considered to be a forest or not, but there can be no doubt that a eucalyptus plantation in South Africa or in Brazil or a pine plantation in Chile, or a rubberwood plantation in Cambodia, or a gmelina plantation in Costa Rica, or a cryptomeria plantation in India are not. However, the FAO not only defines them as "forests", but includes them as part of the world's forest cover.

The FAO needs to be made aware that this is not an issue to be discussed within a closed circle of experts –as it has done until now– because this unscientific definition has concrete negative consequences on people and the environment. It is precisely these people –that suffer the impacts of plantations– who are the real experts. They have defined them as "green deserts", "planted soldiers", "green cancer", "dead forests", and these definitions are much closer to reality than calling them "planted forests" or "forests".

This issue about the FAO definition is not an idle academic exercise: it is about people. It is about the way in which this definition disempowers local communities fighting against large-scale monoculture tree plantations –"productive forests" in the FAO terminology. Governments, consultants, multilateral agencies, aid agencies and –more importantly- large corporations use this concept of "planted forests" as a means of hiding the impacts of these plantations to the broader public. People in Finland are told that Metsa Botnia is "planting forests" in Uruguay or that Stora Enso is "planting forests" in Brazil and are in this way convinced that those companies are doing something positive abroad. It would be much more difficult to convince them that planting "green deserts" or "dead forests" in southern countries is acceptable. But this is precisely what they are doing.

The fact is that these alien monoculture tree plantations are impacting on forests, grasslands, soils, water resources, biodiversity and people's livelihoods and that the FAO is not only responsible for concealing this in its assessments but for its continuing support to the establishment of "forest plantations". The only doubt is whether the FAO realizes the social, environmental and political implications that this has or whether it doesn't.

Giving the FAO the benefit of the doubt, we recommend it to open up a dialogue on this issue with the more knowledgeable experts –the people impacted by plantations– and with national and international organizations that have been supporting them and documenting the impacts. As an initial step in that direction, it should at least be open to learn from organizations such as CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research), which in a 2003 publication coined the term "fast wood plantations". This is exactly what they are and the way in which we would like the FAO to call them. Is this too much to ask for?

(1) Box 8 is available at: ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/a0773e/a0773e09.pdf

index

FOCUS ON FAO

- What FAO's definition conceals

As it does every two years, FAO has published its report "State of the World's Forests 2007" (http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0773e/a0773e00.htm), where "progress towards sustainable forest management" is examined. Although it admits, "Deforestation continues at an alarming rate of about 13 million hectares a year," the report's overall conclusion is that "progress is being made" and it adds: "but it is very uneven."

It would seem that the serious state of forests today and of the environment in general cannot be acknowledged: the mass deforestation of mangroves to give way to shrimp farms; the vast stretches of land granted in concession to agro-industry (for industrial tree or crop plantations); mining; hydroelectric dams; industrial logging – all these activities imply degradation and/or destruction of forests with the consequent social and economic impacts on local communities. Practically none of this appears in the FAO report. Nor are the underlying causes of this destruction identified.

The report states that some regions "especially those with developing economies and tropical ecosystems continue to lose forest area, while lacking adequate institutions to reverse this trend." In the case of Africa it is stated that "the ability of institutions to implement sustainable forest management is limited, owing largely to the overall unfavourable social and economic situation."

In this respect, it is timely to quote what Assitou Ndinga of the Democratic Republic of Congo said on the external factors affecting the decisions of national forestry administrations: "Globalization and the insertion of Central African countries in increasingly dense networks of international links have positive but also coercive effects that weaken their commitment with the forest ecosystem cause. This is due to western hegemony and to the culture of international relations sociology in the western countries and to the African people's scant feelings of nationalism." He also added that official western diplomacy "is usually at the service of the forces which, in the past, caused the weakening of the structures and impoverishment of the region; forces whose primary concern is personal interest but that orchestrate the power of their own State and international conventions" (see WRM Bulletin Nº 107).

To this lack of acknowledgement of the dimension of forest loss and lack of delving more deeply into the causes of this loss is added another shortfall: the definition including industrial tree plantations as a forest subcategory, that of "planted forests." This definition contributes to legitimize the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, concealing the poverty, social exclusion, and environmental destruction it has left in numerous countries in the South. FAO erroneously and confusedly addresses the concept of forest cover, equalling it to forests and including in it plantations, thus resulting in an underestimation of the degree of forest destruction and in making the severity of the tree plantation problem invisible. Furthermore, the data provided by FAO regarding tree plantations conceal not only the nature of the problem and its true magnitude – regarding the percentage of area occupied in the affected countries – but also those responsible for it, the mechanisms for appropriation of natural assets, and the impacts on people and the environment.

We are not implying here that FAO is the only actor in the conversion of vast stretches of ecosystems – grasslands, forests, paramos – into "green deserts" of homogeneous tree plantations. It is undeniable that the driving forces behind expansion are fundamentally the major economic interests. And among them, the world paper pulp industry seeking cheap raw material to supply the North's wasteful consumption. However, FAO has been instrumental to the process in its capacity as "expert" agency, actively participating in international processes (such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development) and its guidance, promotion and legitimization is being taken as a starting point at different international fora and proceedings.

As a way of showing the derivations arising from the definition of tree plantations as forests, we will provide some comments on the following sections of the report: Planted forests, Forest tenure, Forest landscape restoration, and Forestry and poverty reduction.

FAO's "planted forests"

The section headed under the title of "Planted forests" (page 88) shows a table identifying the 10 countries with largest area of "planted forests" 2005, among which the United States, Russia, Japan, Sweden, Poland, Finland together with Brazil, India, China and Sudan.

Beyond our absolute discrepancy with the outrageous idea that an ecosystem can be "planted" the table is exceedingly misleading. FAO's definition of "planted forests" matches "forests with planted components" – as would be the case of Finland or Sweden – with "plantations for production" generally with exotic fast-growing species, defining the large-scale monoculture tree plantations advancing on the territories of the countries of the South and which remain invisible in FAO's statistics.

For over 10 years now we have been carrying out a Campaign on this issue, based on evidence provided by indigenous and peasant communities, social and environmental organizations, academics, research workers and affected persons and others who are sensitive to the issue. We have hundreds of articles and books gathering complaints and endeavouring to give a voice to those who are ignored and wrecked by the corporation power.

Research carried out in South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and testimonials gathered in these and other countries such as Malaysia, India, Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Ghana and others report the serious past and continuing negative impacts monoculture tree plantations cause in these countries.

However, only two of the above-mentioned countries – Brazil and India – appear on the FAO list, while in all the others tree plantations are made invisible. The over 2 million hectares in Chile, the 3 million hectares in Indonesia, the million and a half hectares in South Africa, the 5 million hectares in Brazil and the hundreds of thousands of hectares planted with trees in dozens of countries in the South would seem not to exist. However, they do and their negative impacts have already been documented.

At the same time, the FAO table hides the percentage of territory occupied by plantations in each country or region and with it, the influence of their impacts. For example, in the case of Swaziland, plantations occupy 8 percent of the national territory and are located on the best land. The same happens in many countries, where certain states or provinces contain very high percentages of their land given over to such monoculture plantations (Kwazulunatal in South Africa, Misiones in Argentina, Espirito Santo in Brazil, Chile's Ninth Region, etc.)

Forest tenure

FAO states in its report (page 80) "Public forest ownership remains by far the predominant category in all regions." Adding that "At the global level, 84 percent of forest lands and 90 percent of other wooded lands are publicly owned."

A figure is shown in this section, illustrating the percentages for "forest ownership" in 19 countries of South East Asia where it appears that 92% are public property – totalling 365 million hectares of forest – while industry appears with a meagre 1%.

To start off with, these figures conceal two things: that although they are in public hands, many forests are destroyed by companies enjoying concession rights for extractive activities – logging, mining – and for the establishment of plantations and it is precisely these concessions that give them rights implying that these forests are in private hands.

This is a situation occurring in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Panama, the government has approved major concessions for the development of mining industries in forests, causing prejudice to the people living in them, such as in the case of copper and gold mining in the Ngobe-Bugle and Kuna territories. In 2005, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 103 timber companies received concessions covering 14,752,600 hectares of forests. In Gabon, most of the forests have already been allocated to timber companies, while over half the territory of Suriname is under concession, benefiting a handful of people. Among these concessions are those granted for timber exploitation and gold in tropical forests of vital importance to the Marune. The forestry sector in the Central African Republic is dominated by companies and capitals of French origin, intervening in the exploitation of close on 3.2 million hectares of forests allocated under concession. Concessions granted in the state of Kachin in Burma – one of the last major

areas of forest remaining intact in continental Southeast Asia – enable a small elite to enrich itself with the extraction of natural resources, logging and mining. In Cambodia at the end of the nineties the government granted over a million hectares of logging concessions – at the expense of the local inhabitants' lands and forests that have been their means of livelihood for generations – and land concessions, many of them to establish large-scale industrial tree plantations which, according to FAO criteria, appear as forests.

Also contained in these statistics of forests are the plantations in Indonesia belonging to the Asia Pulp & Paper Company (APP), involved in the pulp and paper industry. APP has been granted two concessions for the plantation of trees for pulp in the provinces of Riau and Jambi. The latter works with Acacia mangium as raw material for pulp. So far, the area already converted or to be converted into "Acacia land" by the company covers 500,000 hectares in that province. In Riau, it is fast establishing plantations to feed its pulp mills, turning forests into plantations and superimposing them on community lands. APP also has another concession in the south of Sumatra, covering 380,000 hectares. During the seventies, the Indonesian government declared 140 million hectares of land as State forests, ensuring State control over forests traditionally managed by thousands of local communities. As with concessions for industrial logging, the government grants concessions to the pulp and paper industry without considering who lives on the land or who has traditionally used the forest (see WRM Bulletin N°101). The plan is now to establish another five million hectares of Acacia plantations for pulp.

Forest landscape restoration

In this section (page 76), FAO defines that "forest landscape restoration" involves "practical approaches that do not try to re-establish the pristine forests of the past" but to adopt other approaches that "restore the functions of forests and trees and enhance their contribution to sustainable livelihoods and land uses."

To illustrate this model, the page on this issue shows a photo with the caption that serves to give a clear idea of the goal: "a mosaic of planted forests for wood production and secondary naturally regenerated forest for protection of valleys and waterways," in Bahia State, Brazil.

Between 1970 and 1985, Bahia lost 70 percent of its native forests with the arrival of the pulp and paper companies Suzano-Bahia Sul, Aracruz, CAF Santa Bárbara Ltda. and Veracel. Only 4 percent of the original Mata Atlantica remains in the extreme south of Bahia in reserve areas and over half the arable land is in the hands of the companies. The eviction of rural workers, quilombolas (slave descendents), indigenous peoples and small farmers has caused an increase in the Favelas (shanty towns), the disintegration of groups and families and violence and poverty.

This destructive process is far removed from restoration. The euphemism neglects the tragedy of the occupation of territories in the South by powerful groups seeking favourable conditions for their monoculture tree plantations – that is to say, cheap labour and land and soil, water and climate conditions favouring rapid growth of the exotic species introduced, while leaving pollution and social conflict out of their own countries.

In September 2006, a large group of "men, women and young people, rural and urban workers, indigenous people, scientists, teachers and students" from Bahia denounced the "situation of degradation and poverty found in the region of the Extreme South of Bahia, promoted by the Veracel pulp company, a Stora Enso joint venture." In their letter they affirmed that the company caused "approximately 400 [rural] workers" to lose their jobs. Most of these people moved to the outskirts of neighbouring cities. Additionally "Throughout the region, extensive eucalyptus plantation has promoted the disappearance of several rivers and streams" (see WRM Bulletin Nº 110).

For these people these are neither figures nor statistics, but tragic situations which affect their lives and their future.

Forestry and poverty reduction

In this section (page 78), FAO mentions the possible links between national forestry programmes and poverty reduction strategies and comments on the conclusions of various interviews with government authorities. Once again, when referring to the contribution made by "forest resources" to homes and the identification of opportunities and obstacles for the contribution of the forestry sector to alleviate poverty, the problem of industrial tree plantations is entirely overlooked.

What is understood by "forest resources"? If we are talking of the forest and its products, much can be said about the contribution they make to the communities that live or depend on them. Food is found in forests, such as honey, fruit, seeds, nuts, roots, tubers, insects, wild animals. They use the resin, rattan, bamboo, tannin, colourants, leaves, straw, skins, and leather for self-consumption or as a source of income when sold. The plants found there serve as fodder and are of particular importance for the production of cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels. To this should be added the important contribution made by the forest ecosystem to regulating the water cycle.

Here again we return to the problem of what is concealed in the FAO concept of equating plantations with forests. Behind this euphemism is hidden the suffering of numerous peoples in Asia, Latin America and Africa, where monoculture tree plantations are destroying peasant farming, substituting the production of food, preventing the necessary agrarian land reforms and devolution and demarcation of indigenous lands, displacing communities from their land and ecosystems and dismantling their culture.

Acacia plantations are destroying the Belum and Temenggor forests in Malaysia; in Cambodia, monoculture plantations of acacia, pine and eucalyptus indiscriminately advance on the grasslands that the local Phnong population use for grazing cattle and on ancestral forests and graveyards that are an essential part of their culture. In Indonesia, the introduction of tree plantations to supply the pulp and paper industry has come into conflict with local populations' boundaries and ownership, seen in the enormous number of "complaints" and "claims." In Ecuador, in 2006, young people from Muisne carried out action against the Japanese company EUCAPACIFIC's tree plantations that are having a profound effect on the region, depleting their water, flora and fauna that used to be abundant and used by the local population and evicting the owners themselves from the area. In Colombia this year the Permanent Tribunal of the People – Colombian Chapter met to bring to trial transnational companies focusing on the issue of biodiversity and exploitation of natural resources in that country, accusing Smurfit Kapa – Carton de Colombia among other things, "of violating human, environmental, social and cultural rights." "The destruction of tropical rainforests, Andean forests and other ecosystems is 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."

The forestry companies arrive with great promises of employment, selling the message that they "offer opportunities for employment, even in the most remote areas of the country." But research and testimonials tell a very different story (see "Promises of employment and destruction of labour" http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/fase.html; WRM Bulletins Nº 74 and 69). Final employment figures are very far from those announced and work in the plantations is usually seasonal, outsourced, poorly paid and very often takes place under deplorable conditions.

We could continue mentioning numerous more cases that we have heard and denounced in our campaign against industrial tree plantations. Unfortunately, they are many.

While peoples and social movements appeal for food sovereignty, FAO is walking along paths leading to the opposite direction. It is high time for the organization to address the underlying causes of deforestation. We would like to see a report dealing in depth with the problems arising from unequal land tenure, the lack of participative democracy, the influence of the military and the exploitation of rural areas by urban elites, excessive consumption in high-income countries, uncontrolled industrialization – factors that are at the root of forest destruction and degradation.

Likewise, if FAO aspires to be the world agency contributing to shed light on the state of the world's forests with a view

to their care and preservation, it is also responsible for making visible the urgent problem of the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations at the expense of territories, ecosystems and peoples of the countries of the South. FAO is responsible for giving a voice and an opportunity to these questionings and problems.

A first step is to acknowledge that plantations are not forests and to eliminate finally the unsustainable categorization of monoculture tree plantations as forests.

index

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- DRC: Threat to rainforests gain momentum

The Congo rainforests of central Africa are, after the Amazon, the second largest rainforest on Earth and a major biodiversity hotspot: Two-thirds of the forest lies in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) -- still divided by a vicious civil war fuelled by competition for control over natural resources, and that claimed 3.5 million lives. About 40 million people of DRC depend on the rainforests for their very survival.

However, the World Bank -- by far the largest creditor to the DRC -- is encouraging with its support the government plans of a massive expansion of industrial logging. Those plans will unleash a wave of destruction of DRC's rainforest which are now allocated to the logging industry which is taking advantage of continued legal uncertainty and a weak government.

The rainforest is being sold off under the argument that it will alleviate poverty in one of the poorest countries on Earth but it is tantamount to a death sentence for the forest and forest dependent people. The Twa, Mbuti and Aka 'Pygmies', and the Bantu people have lived in the Congo's forests for thousands of years surviving by hunting and gathering wild foods. They know how to protect the plants, animals and ecosystems of the rainforest. But they don't know what big business has in store for them.

In exchange for timber worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, logging companies are giving communities gifts such as crates of beer worth less than $100, and make promises to build schools and hospitals. These promises rarely fulfilled and there are reports that intimidation tactics are used against people who try to protest.

The DRC Government introduced a moratorium in 2002 forbidding the allocation, extension and renewal of logging titles. But despite the original moratorium being reaffirmed by Presidential decree, it has been widely ignored, including by the World Bank and other credit institutions that support this plan.

More than 150 contracts covering an area of rainforest of around 21 million hectares (over 51 million acres) have been signed with 20 companies over the past three years. Many are believed to have been illegally allocated in 2002 by a transition government emerging from a decade of civil wars and are in defiance of a World Bank moratorium.

The Rainforest Foundation has been warning for the last three years that large-scale logging could spark massive environmental problems, fuel conflict with people living in the forest, and spread corruption as politicians, officials and warlords cash in on a 'timber bonanza'. Greenpeace recently joined the Rainforest Foundation's Stop the Carve-Up of the Congo campaign and released a 100-page study. Compiled by Greenpeace International working with Congolese ecological and human rights groups "Carving Up the Congo" reports that the companies are mainly from Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Singapore and the US, and they will extract African teak which is widely used for flooring, furniture and doors in Britain.

To gain access to the forests for the next 25 years, the European companies have made agreements with village

chiefs, offering bags of salt, machetes and bicycles, and in some cases promised to build rudimentary schools, the report states.

International groups called for at least a 10-year freeze on the allocation of new areas for timber cutting in the Congo. The Rainforest Foundation is calling now for a G-8 declaration on the importance of the Congo rainforests and the role they play in combating climate change. "We will keep up the momentum at the G-8 meeting of the most wealthy nations in June to maintain the focus on the world's last great rainforest frontier," said Simon Counsell, from The Rainforest Foundation.

Article based on: "Plight of Congo forests grabs world attention", The Rainforest Foundation, http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/s-Plight%20of%20Congo%20forests%20grabs%20world%20attention; "Rainforest destruction in Africa", Greenpeace, http://www.greenpeace.org/international/news/congo-report-110407; "Selling off the rainforest - a modern-day scandal", John Vidal in Kisangani, April 11, 2007, The Guardian; "Report From The Congo Rainforest", Cath Long, The Rainforest Foundation, http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/s-Report%20from%20the%20Congo%20Rainforest

index

- Paraguay: Ayoreo-Totobiegosode endangered by a cattle ranching company

Between 1959 and 1987, a great majority of the Ayoreo from Paraguay (see WRM Bulletin No. 96) were contacted by force and deported to places outside their vast ancestral territories. They were also displaced from their lands taken over for farming activities. This situation has submitted them to a high degree of dependency on the religious missions and the regional market.

At present, there are more than 2000 members of the Ayoreo ethnic group who live sedentarily in 13 settlements – ten communities in Bolivia and 3 in Paraguay. All these settlements are located outside their traditional habitat. Their culture is increasingly influenced and hindered by the model of modern life, which has barely left them a marginal space, insufficient to discern and to reshape their path towards the future.

There is only one local group, the Totobiegosode, still living in the forest, without contact with other Ayoreos or foreigners, in an area known as Amotocodie in the North of the Paraguayan Chaco. They live nomadically, hunting, gathering fruit and honey, fishing and cultivating small plots which they plant "on the go," during the rainy season. They constitute, with their habitat – high and low forests, palm groves, open fields, dry riverbeds, streams, and lagoons – an inseparable unit and live communally. Although no one has any direct contact with them, their existence can be felt and verified by signs of presence such as footprints and holes in trees that show that they have been harvesting honey. In some cases, they have even been seen in the distance.

Most of the territory inhabited by groups in voluntary isolation is in the hands of private owners: Paraguayans and foreigners, large-scale farmers and investors, individuals and companies. Less than 10% of the territory corresponds to Parks or National Protected Areas. The clearcutting of primary forests to install cattle ranches substantially depleted territories inhabited by the indigenous groups, cutting them off in isolated patches, divided by belts with no forest cover and increasingly busy roads. The forest groups can no longer travel along their annual migratory routes and access parts of the habitat that are vital for their life and survival.

The accelerated expansion of the frontiers of western civilization in the North of the Paraguayan Chaco is a threat both to the Ayoreo groups in voluntary isolation and to the still vast forests with which they co-exist.

At present, they are facing a serious and imminent danger. The Paraguayan organization, Iniciativa Amotocodie – which is endeavouring to accompany uncontacted groups from "outside" and from a distance – has denounced that a

company called Ganadera UMBU S.A. purchased 40,000 hectares of pristine forests in the centre of Amotocodie. Of these, 24,000 hectares will be deforested to install cattle ranches. They already have the corresponding permits and work could start at any time now. With clearcutting, it is highly probable that there will be contact with groups in isolation. This seriously violates human rights and the life of these groups that have always lived there. – Furthermore, according to the warning by Iniciativa Amotocodie, this could lead to a bloodbath, as has already happened on other occasions.

Iniciativa Amotocodie has taken all the pertinent legal measures, but has not managed to halt the clearcutting project so far. For their part, the Ayoreo, through UNAP (the Union of Paraguayan Native Ayoreo), have put pressure on the authorities and have made this serious situation public.

A campaign has been organized to try to halt what the Ayoreo define as an "attack" against the life of their people in the forest and the future of their people. Iniciativa Amotocodie's web page contains an invitation to send a letter to the appropriate Paraguayan authorities. To make it easier, the letter has already been drafted (in English: http://www.iniciativa-amotocodie.org/actual/files/letter_grave_amenaza.pdf) and all that has to be done is to return it to the names and addresses that appear at the foot of the letter.

The Ayoreo are determined to fight for the integrity of their brothers and sisters in the forest and for the ancestral territory of the Ayoreo People, looking towards a future where restoration of what is theirs - both lost territories and their model of ancestral life - has started to take on a meaning. The groups in voluntary isolation give testimony of a paradigm of a relationship with nature that used to be practiced by all the indigenous peoples, but which they have had to abandon. This paradigm serves as a vital reflection on the history of these ethnic groups and as a source of inspiration in the search for alternatives for survival and for the future.

Article based on: "Grave Amenaza en Amotocodie", Iniciativa Amotocodie, http://www.iniciativa-amotocodie.org/actual/20070425_graveamenaza.html; information sent by Guadalupe Rodríguez, Rettet den Regenwald (Salva la Selva Tropical), e-mail: guadalupe@regenwald.org, http://www.regenwald.org/international/spanisch/; Atlas de las Comunidades Indígenas en el Paraguay, ttp://www.dgeec.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/Web%20Atlas%20Indigena/171%20Plantilla%20Ayoreo%20toto.pdf

index

- Malaysia: Nomadic and semi-nomadic Penan communities intensify campaign against Samling Group

Intense and continuing logging has taken place in Sarawak for the last 30 years or so. More than 95% of Sarawak's original forest cover has now been logged at least once. The few remaining portions of unprotected primary forest in Sarawak are in mountainous regions close to the border with Indonesia, and these are now being hastily logged by the five leading logging groups active in Sarawak and their myriad of subsidiaries and associated contractors.

The forestry ministry of the State of Sarawak speaks of sustainable harvesting of the forests on a 25 year cycle and allocation of vast tracts of land for palm and cash crop cultivation. However, the net result is, as most biologists agree, destruction of the delicate 100 million year old forest ecosystem with the disappearance of the canopy. A secondary effect now evident all over the country is an almost universal pollution of fresh water rivers and streams with silt which has severely impacted both the inland and marine fishing sectors.

No less critical is the plight of Sarawak's forest indigenous people who rely on the forest for sustenance. There remain 200 or so nomadic Penans and their future looks dire in terms of their ability to continue in the manner they have been accustomed to for hundreds of years. Many of the remaining Penans are locked in a state of constant confrontation with the logging industry and the local government for preservation of their remaining forest lands. While numerous land-rights cases are passing slowly through the legal system, the logging continues, with the local people being no

match for the well funded and connected logging concession holders and their contractors.

The Samling Group holds 1.4 million hectares in the Malaysian state of Sarawak. On the recent occasion of its public listing at the Hong Kong stock exchange, 37 organizations from 18 countries asked investors and banks to shun the company for its failure to comply with basic environmental and social standards.

Samling has already logged large areas of primary tropical forests in the Upper Limbang river area, close to the Batu Lawi, a mountain which the Penan consider to be holy.

Four nomadic and semi-nomadic Penan communities living on the Limbang river in the North of the state of Sarawak launched a joint appeal to the international public. The communities of Long Nyakit, Long Peresek, Long Adang and Long Keneng urge Credit Suisse, HSBC and Macquarie Securities, the three banks who have sponsored Samling´s recent public listing, to stop supporting the timber giant.

"Samling is destroying our last remaining rainforest in the Upper Limbang", headman Awing Tubai said on behalf of the Penan communities. "We need clean water for drinking and fishing and intact forests where we can gather our food and other forest products."

Article based on: “Rainforest communities step up campaign against Samling”, Bruno Manser Fonds, www.bmf.ch; “The Final Chapter for Sarawak's Primary Forests”, www.ForestAlert.org, http://forestalert.org/forest.php?lang=en&news_id=5

index

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: The hushed issue of water in Aracruz Celulose business

The huge Aracruz Celulose high-tech pulp and paper complex located in Barra do Riacho in the Southeast region of Brazil has led to major conflicts since the company’s encroachment upon land belonging to the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples. However, not only land but also water is being taken over by the company’s mill and large-scale monoculture tree plantations which spread along more than 175,000 hectares in the north of the State of Espirito Santo and the Southernmost part of the Bahia State.

Aracruz hushes when it comes to water issues, notes the recently published report “H2O para Celulose x água para todas as línguas” carried out by FASE Espíritu Santo. Its authors reveal that from the company’s annual reports, web page, magazines, and publications just incomplete or fragmented information can be gathered, with no evidence of a clear water policy for the whole complex including mills, tree nurseries, tree plantations, port and infrastructure.

What is the role of the water in the whole industrial process of Aracruz Celulose? To whom does the water belong, from whom is it seized and in what conditions is it returned to the environment? By which means does the company take hold of and use the water? In what quantities? How much does it pay for it? Those are unanswered questions on the part of Aracruz Celulose.

Water is one of the primary materials used in the whole process of cellulose production; it is consumed in several sectors and moments of the pulp productive process --like digesting, bleaching, and mainly to feed boilers. After being used in the industrial process the water returns back as an effluent carrying along wastes and pollutants.

The long record of testimonies from neighbouring Guarani, Tupinikim, Quilombola, and peasant communities evidence the disappearance of several streams and ponds as well as the great difference in the level of rivers and streams

since the arrival of the eucalyptus plantations. This is because eucalyptus requires high levels of water, from the moment that it is planted as well as during its growth and also because the cutting cycle has been shortened. Heavy machinery used to cut and pile up timber has further impacts on the water problem since the heaviness of the machines compresses the soil thus hampering rainwater absorption and contributing to water runoff. The residents of the region testify that what little remained of the water reserves, has been taken for eucalyptus irrigation by the companies contracted by Aracruz Cellulose.

The right to water has been completely violated by Aracruz. The waters of the Doce River have been diverted after a suspicious licensing process and most of the 14 streams that crossed between the town of Itaúnas and the headquarters of the company in the village of Conceição da Barra are now dead, which has greatly affected the quality of life of local population. Many houses now get their water from makeshift wells that have been recently dug. Given the poor quality of this water, the sale of water has now become big business for commercial establishments in the area.

The water problem along the homogeneous tree plantations is not only quantitative but also qualitative. The intensive use of agrotoxic substances and chemical fertilizers pollutes the water resources of neighbouring communities. The rivers that cross their territories are no longer safe to drink, or even to bathe in, and few people still fish.

Ten thousand families lived in the area before Aracruz arrived. Now, just 1.500 people stay, strive for their survival and resist the neoslavery imposed by the company by several ways: separating families and pushing them out of the land, isolating them, depriving them of their food sovereignty and their culture which is directly linked to the forest, sacrificing family agriculture, suppressing gatherers and fishers with its private armed police. Once abundant, now the water is scarce and the communities compete with the army of eucalyptus of Aracruz Celulose for every drop.

The daily water consumption of the company to provide for its cellulose production capacity of 2,000,000 tons/year is enough to supply a city with a population of two and a half million, and the company pays nothing for it. Aracruz's private port, Portocel, is the point of departure for most of its production which goes to Europe, North America, and Asia. The pulp will be used in the production of sanitary napkins, paper used in surgical procedures, paper bed sheets, specialized papers for writing and printing, serving the high -- and unsustainable --demands of First World consumption patterns. In the North remain the best employments, the highest added value, and the least environmental risks. In the South remain the "green deserts" of eucalyptus plantations, a few exclusive employments and some meager more, scant taxes and several environmental conflicts.

The misappropriation and use of river watersheds for pulp production and eucalyptus monoculture are distinct traits of environmental racism, concludes the study. Also the distribution of water in the State of Espirito Santo reveals a clear environmental injustice: abundant and free for Aracruz Celulose; scarce, payed and contaminated for indigenous people, quilombolas, landless people, peasants and fishers.

The hushed problem has been voiced as well as the claim for several measures to be adopted among which the first one is to stop immediately the expansion of industrial eucalyptus plantations.

Article based on: "H2O para Celulose x água para todas as línguas", Daniela Meirelles and Marcello Calazans, FASE, 2006, e-mail: fasees@terra.com.br, http://www.fase.org.br/noar/anexos/acervo/12_h2o.pdf; "Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights Violations in Eucalyptus Monoculture: Aracruz Cellulose and the State of Espírito Santo", FASE, http://www2.fase.org.br/downloads/2004/09/553_relat_desc_es_ing.pdf

index

- Spain: FSC's certificate to NORFOR or the continuation of a fraud

On last April 9, the Galician organization APDR (Asociación pola defensa da Ría) issued an official statement regarding the FSC certification of the NORFOR company, a subsidiary branch of the Spanish pulp and paper company ENCE, which had been certified in April 2005.

In the statement, APDR denounces that “In Galicia, we have been suffering for many years the consequences of the dreadful influence of the company ENCE in our natural environment and in our economy." APDR refers to the monoculture and trading of eucalyptus wood for the manufacturing of pulp which “has caused the impoverishment and abandonment of rural communities, abandonment of forestry lands”. The communiqué enumerates other impacts of industrial timber plantations, such as “high risk of fire”, “intense erosion of lands”, “the loss of biological diversity and the destruction of resources” and the pollution of “streams and underground aquifers” by the use of “large volumes of pesticides”, as well as the “loss of quality of the landscape of the areas occupied by their activities”.

In spite of all that, the company obtained the certificate of the FSC through the certifier SGS (Societé Générale de Surveillance), a Swiss inspection, verification, testing and certification company which in 1997 had been suspended from certification activities by the FSC for six months, due to controversy arising over the certification of a logging operation undertaken by the forestry company Leroy in the forests of Gabon.

From the beginning APDR denounced the problem to the FSC delegation in Spain, elaborating a detailed 85-page report (http://www.apdr.info/norfor/norbarpr.htm). Last year, APDR together with organizations from other seven countries requested that, “in accordance with the objective of the FSC to ‘promote the environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable of the world’s forests’ the certification of NORFOR is cancelled forthwith” (see http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/FSC/Campaign_De_Certification/Spain.html).

Now, APDR statement says that the recent report published on February 5, 2007, by SGS regarding the second assessment audit of the certification under FSC standards of the forest company NORFOR “was full of falsehoods, manipulation of the information, misrepresentation of the facts and concealment of the reality. But now the problem is not the intention of defrauding which the company has held from the beginning of the certification process. The problem is that FSC, fully aware of the fraud, has decided to continue with this certification in spite of the increasingly crushing evidence of nonfulfillment of the standards; thus, FSC takes another backward step by moving further away from the aims with which it was created.”

The communiqué regrets that: “In Galicia, the worst management system, which favours erosion, the loss of biodiversity and the disappearance of forest uses and resources, has the FSC certificate. More than two years after the certificate was issued, NORFOR´s forest management system has not been modified and the maintenance of the certificate is based on deceit and concealment of reality on the part of the certification body, SGS, and the complicity of FSC, which, almost two years after APDR lodged a formal complaint by bringing forward clear and easily contrastable evidence of nonfulfillment of the standards, continues to strive to maintain the certificate at any price. FSC is demonstrating, in the certification of NORFOR, that their real primary objective is to protect a flourishing business rather than ‘guarantee the authenticity of its certifications’ and ‘promote a forest management system which is responsible, beneficial to society and financially viable’”.

APDR warns that the certificate is “a document which gives enterprises access to important public subsidies granted by states and international organisms”, it “allows the enterprise to improve its position in a market where the certification is granted a value and a prestige which, as the falsified certifications proliferate, it is losing. It is only the economic value of the benefits which forestry enterprises obtain from the acquisition of the certificate which makes the companies seek them and FSC maintain them at any price, not taking into account the nonfulfillment of the standards.”

It’s high time people become aware that “being in possession of the certification does not necessarily mean that the holder's forest management is responsible, beneficial to society and financially viable.”

Article based on “Official Statement of APDR (Asociación Pola Defensa Da Ría) Regarding the FSC Certification of NORFOR”, http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Spain/APDR.pdf, April 9, 2007, sent by APDR, e-mail: apdr@apdr.info, www.apdr.info

index

- Swaziland: Large-scale tree plantations which are no exception to the rule

The case study “Swaziland: The myth of sustainable timber plantations” carried out by Wally Menne and Ricardo Carrere and published in March 2007, aims at unveiling the myth of sustainable plantations in Swaziland and showing that large-scale monoculture tree plantations in this country have similar negative impacts as elsewhere and are no exception to the rule.

Before the implementation of large-scale timber plantations in Swaziland, the area that they now occupy was grassland, interspersed with patches of evergreen forest growing in moist, sheltered spots. Domestic crops and animals, hunting, and natural resources from the forest and grassland provided Swazi people all they needed to survive.

Things began to change in the 1870s when Europeans flocked to Swaziland and through different means obtained rights to settle on vast portions of the country. In 1899 the Anglo-Boer war broke out and in 1902 the British took control of Swaziland. The country remained under British colonial rule until September 1968 when Swaziland gained independence.

Many of the timber plantations were established during colonial rule but their continued existence is today a means of “freezing” the unjust distribution of land ordered by the British imperial rulers. At present industrial tree plantations cover an estimated total area of almost 135,000 hectares (8% of the total land area). Even worse, they occupy the land with the most productive potential, at the expense of other agricultural land uses. Most plantations (78%) are composed of pines trees, while an important area has been planted with eucalyptus (20%) and a smaller area with wattles (2%). Additionally, there are some 25,000 hectares of so-called “wattle forests”, which are areas invaded by alien acacias (The Swaziland Environment Action Plan, 1997).

Clearly not all of Swaziland's woes can be blamed on industrial tree plantations. But more than fifty years of development by the pulp and paper industry has failed to bring benefits to the majority of Swaziland's population. Instead it has made matters worse.

The most obvious impact is the destruction of natural vegetation when large-scale plantations are first established but also fragmentation of highveld grassland has been identified as a problem, with negative implications for the conservation of biodiversity.

Timber plantations have impacted directly on soils causing soil erosion, nutrient depletion, changes in soil structure, and acidification that have yet to be studied in Swaziland. Also on water: the areas covered by industrial timber plantations in Swaziland are already deprived of water. They consume more than the natural rainfall supply to the area that they occupy, even drawing additional water from surrounding aquifers and streams. The extent to which plantations impact on water resources has had serious consequences for people relying on water from streams and rivers flowing from the highveld catchment area. Some people, born in the area before plantations arrived, can remember waterfalls and deep streams that no longer exist.

Indirect impacts are related to the appropriation of the best land by plantation companies. In a country where the majority of people are landless, nearly 120,000 hectares of the most productive land in the country (the ‘High Veld’

region in the West) is occupied by timber plantations owned by foreign corporations. As a result, traditional agriculture and cattle grazing were displaced onto drier, steeper areas where shallow soils have higher erosion potential and less capacity for water and nutrient retention. A relatively larger number of people now need to subsist off a smaller area of less arable and productive land. These factors result in downstream impacts such as more severe flooding, soil erosion, soil nutrient depletion, and siltation of streams and wetlands, with consequent food shortages and impacts on health.

Today, two South African pulp and paper companies control most of the industrial tree plantations in Swaziland. Mondi owns 30,000 hectares of eucalyptus and pine trees in the north of the country, while Sappi, leases 70,000 hectares of plantation land in western Swaziland. Mondi exports it eucalyptus wood to its pulp mill at Richards Bay, 400 kilometres away in South Africa. The pine goes to local sawmills. Sappi owns a pulp mill which produces 220,000 tons of pulp each year, most of which is exported to Southeast Asia.

Employment offered by the timber industry is often far more hazardous than conventional agricultural jobs including danger of injury to workers, and exposure to toxic chemicals and dangerous machinery in pulp and saw mills, while the recent trend of outsourcing as a means of increasing profitability and reducing the risk of labour action resulted in even lower wages and worse working conditions.

Air and water pollution from pulp mills, is often the subject of complaints by communities. Although the levels of pollution produced by sawmills are less obvious, the cumulative effect of the use of toxic wood preservatives in an area can be considerable. The disposal of waste materials into nearby streams appears to be a common practice which can have negative implications for aquatic organisms and human communities.

The tree species commonly used in plantations are all highly invasive. For many years, the timber industry has allowed their trees (acacia, pine and eucalyptus) to spread into watercourses, wetlands and steep inaccessible areas. This results in the displacement of natural species mostly through shading or suffocation, and further destruction of habitat through ongoing impacts such as the dehydration of streams and wetland areas.

Large-scale tree plantations in Swaziland have resulted in serious impacts on people and the environment, both at present and in the past. It is difficult to understand how two of them have been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council: Mondi (20,000 hectares) and Shiselweni Forestry Company (17,000 hectares). According to its mandate, “the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) shall promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests”. Apart from the fact that these plantations are obviously not forests, the findings of the research have revealed that they are neither environmentally appropriate nor socially beneficial and that their economic viability depends on the externalization of social and environmental costs.

Large-scale monoculture tree plantations in Swaziland have similar negative impacts as elsewhere and are no exception to the rule.

Excerpted and adapted from: "Swaziland: The myth of sustainable timber plantations", by Wally Menne and Ricardo Carrere, WRM, http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Swaziland/Book_Swaziland.pdf)

index

CARBON TRADE

- How credible is carbon compensation?

Eindhoven Airport in the Netherlands has claimed to be the first airport in Europe where passengers as of May 2007 can compensate emissions from their flight by donating for tree plantation projects. Last week however, activist groups

in London have criticized this kind of carbon offsetting. So how credible is carbon compensation?

Eindhoven Airport cooperates with the firm GreenSeat that calculates and cashes the compensation fees and with the FACE Foundation which runs tree planting projects. They are not the only ones that compensate emissions. The Carbon Neutral Company - target of the British climate activist group last week - Climate Care and Offset My Life share the same growing market. In 2006, the carbon offset market tripled in comparison with the previous year and it is expected to be worth 450 million Euros in three years time.

However, according to the organization Carbon Trade Watch (CTW), part of the Amsterdam based Transnational Institute, carbon offsetting is nothing more than a modern form of indulgences - the sin taxing system invented by the Catholic Church in the late Middle Ages. "The modern-day Pardoners are building up what they claim are good climate deeds through projects which supposedly reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions," the CTW-organization writes in the recent report The Carbon Neutral Myth.

Author Kevin Smith argues that it is impossible to assess just how much CO2 is taken up by trees. For a start, there is a distinction between the locked-up fossil carbon and the carbon which is part of the living carbon-cycle. You can easily convert locked-up carbon to active carbon -we do it all the time by burning fossil fuels - but you can't put it back. Once active, carbon might be fixed in a tree trunk for a while, but eventually the wood will be burnt or rot away releasing the carbon back into the atmosphere. For this reason claims of carbon-offsetting by planting trees, by the Scottish and Southern Energy Group (SSE) were rejected by the UK Advertising Standards Authority, which ordered the SSE to stop making these claims in its leaflets.

Due to mounting criticism on tree planting programs, carbon offsetting firms have started taking refuge in other compensation projects such as investing in renewable energy projects or energy efficiency projects which reduce emissions elsewhere, known as Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation (JI). Think of solar panels, wind parks and conversion of dung and waste into energy. Smith is also sceptical about such projects, saying that you can never assess the amount of carbon reduced, since a comparison between the situation with and without the project cannot accurately be made.

So should we stop flying altogether? Activist Kevin Smith distinguishes between carbon needs (necessary and inevitable transports) and carbon luxury (short haul trips for which alternatives exist, holiday flights). Since compensating carbon emissions is a myth, according to Smith, it's not right to make people believe they can continue behaving as they do. "This greenwashing is just a smokescreen standing in the way of working towards solutions," says Smith.

Speaking for CarbonNeutral, Sue Welland told the BBC: "What we do is help companies measure and reduce their reductions; and where they can't reduce their emissions, we help them offset."

The main question -a question of conscience perhaps- is whether certain emissions are necessary or luxury. UK Environment Minister David Miliband said last month: "The first step should always be to see how we can avoid and reduce emissions." But reducing the number of flights is hardly in the interest of airports. Eindhoven Airport director Bart de Boer acknowledged that his initiative would not discourage people to fly. "But that's also not my task here," he remarked.

By Green Prices, 27 February 2007, sent by Kevin Smith, e-mail: kevin@carbontradewatch.org, author of "The Carbon Neutral Myth Offset Indulgences for your Climate Sins", Transnational Institute, http://www.tni.org/detail_pub.phtml?know_id=56&menu=

index

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