



Issue 121 - August 2007

OUR VIEWPOINT

- [FSC Certification of Veracel: A turning point or business as usual?](#)

VERACEL: A TEST CASE FOR THE FSC

- [Brazil: The impossible certification of Veracel](#)
- [The reasons why Veracel cannot be certified, seen from the standpoint of society](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- [Bangladesh: The Modhupur fortified forest](#)
- [Brazil: The Pataxo's struggle for their territory continues](#)
- [Congo, Democratic Republic: Tracking the deadly thread of coltan](#)
- [Costa Rica: Depredatory tourism takes everything with it](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- [Australia: Pulping democracy](#)
- [Colombia: Communities eradicate oil palm plantations to repossess their territory](#)
- [Sweden: Research into GE trees risks irreversible damage to forests](#)
- [New report and website on the pulp industry](#)

WOMEN, LOGGING AND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

- [Indonesia: The impacts of oil palm plantations on women](#)
- [Papua New Guinea: Life can be hard for women in oil palm plantations](#)
- [Solomon Islands: Women wounded by logging company for defending their land](#)
- [Solomon Islands: Logging as the main factor of sexual abuse of girls](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- FSC Certification of Veracel: A turning point or business as usual?

For over a decade WRM has been gathering, producing and disseminating information and analysis on the social and environmental impacts of fast wood plantations, characterized as large-scale, fast-growth tree monocultures. At the same time, we have been stressing that such plantations should not be certified, focusing on the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), this being the scheme certifying most of such plantations.

In spite of having launched in September 2004 a plantation certification review, the FSC has continued to certify fast wood plantations, thus undermining its own credibility and weakening local struggles against plantations. The Working Group established to study the issue presented its final report to the FSC Board in October 2006, but nothing seems to have changed since and the FSC has continued to certify uncertifiable fast wood plantations.

Within this context, the FSC-accredited firm SGS started to carry out the certification process of a company –Veracel Celulose- with a long and well-documented history of negative social and environmental impacts in Bahia, Brazil (see article below). The news about the possible certification of Veracel resulted in strong reactions by numerous organizations from Bahia and other parts of Brazil, that have been for years suffering the impacts and campaigning against these and other fast wood plantations. Although they were never formally “consulted” by SGS, they managed to make their voices heard.

In support to their opposition, a number of organizations -among which WRM- expressed their concerns to the FSC Board in a letter (http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Board.html) dated 6 July, inviting Board members to visit the area accompanied by Brazilian organizations. The letter said that “during the visit, you will be able to meet with local communities and have first hand knowledge about their opinion on those plantations as well as their perception of the company seeking certification.”

The letter added that “such visit will provide you with a better understanding on why certification of plantations such as these is being opposed by so many organizations throughout the world and why the FSC loses credibility every time plantations like those of Veracel are FSC certified”.

However, the Board declined the invitation, responding that “We do not think that it is appropriate or the role of the board to intervene in a public consultation process nor directly in a certification evaluation”. (http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Board_letter_07.pdf)

The obvious question is: then what is the Board’s role? The future of the little of what’s left of FSC’s credibility is at stake and the Board thinks it is not “appropriate” to intervene? Is turning a blind eye on the certification of fast wood plantations the role that the Board chooses to play? If this is the case, then the proposal put forward by one of our Brazilian partners would make sense. He said: “our campaign should not be focused on saying that Veracel does not deserve FSC; what we must now say is that FSC and Veracel deserve each other!”

The case of Veracel’s plantations is absolutely clear and well documented. In no way can these plantations be considered to be an “environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests”, and their certification would clearly violate the FSC mandate. Local people –the true stakeholders- are there to prove this to whoever is willing to ask them their opinion.

But it is also important to stress that Veracel is but a drop within a sea of millions of hectares of fast wood plantations already FSC-certified by SGS, SCS, Smartwood and other certification firms, that have made a mockery of the FSC system, through “consultation” processes that never consulted the true stakeholders and whose evaluations never took into account the full extent of the social and environmental impacts of such plantations.

Veracel must clearly not receive FSC certification, but at the same time it is essential that the FSC cease to certify fast wood plantations and that it begins to de-certify a large number of plantations that should have never received the FSC label. Only then will the FSC be able to comply with its own mandate.

[index](#)

VERACEL: A TEST CASE FOR THE FSC

- **Brazil: The impossible certification of Veracel**

Veracel Celulose – a joint venture between the Swedish-Finnish company Stora Enso and the Norwegian-Brazilian company Aracruz Celulose - has launched a process to obtain FSC certification for its eucalyptus plantations in the extreme south of the State of Bahia. For this purpose, it has hired the consulting firm SGS.

This has led to a strong reaction on the part of over 300 Brazilian and international organizations that on 14 August sent a letter to FSC and SGS (available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Veracel.html) denouncing Veracel, contesting the process and demanding that certification should not be granted.

The fact is that Veracel has a long record of noxious actions in the area. Its eucalyptus plantations have occupied part of the lands that historically belonged to the indigenous population of the Extreme South of Bahia, thus violating its indigenous territorial rights. Logging and indiscriminate use of poisons in river areas and near springs are practiced by the company, thus making it very hard to consider it as being "environmentally responsible."

Among other damages denounced the letter refers to the problem with water which is being affected by Veracel's monoculture tree plantations both in quantity and quality, and the company's contribution to the migration of the rural population.

The organizations signing the letter sent on 14 August also contest the process for assessment and recognition carried out by the certifier company SGS. Contrary to what could be understood as a true consultation, the certifier did not duly contact the social organizations in the area that are actively involved in the problems caused by Veracel. On the morning of 23 July it made a phone call to the well-known organization CEPEDES to tell them that they would only be available that day or the following day to hold a meeting with the Extreme South Socio-Environmental Forum. The lack of time prevented the meeting from taking place because the organizations already had prior engagements. And, as is denounced in the letter, various organizations were not even aware of the process.

The scant organizations - members of the Socio-Environmental Forum of the Extreme South – that did receive a form to be answered, sent a letter to SGS requesting a meeting and inviting it to a field visit together with organized civil society organizations that have been operating in the area for many years, as the auditors sent by the certifier were not from the region and did not know the Extreme South of Bahia. But SGS did not address this request.

It is also denounced that the auditors only dedicated five days for the field assessment in the ten localities comprised in the area where the company carries out its activities, which comprises a total area of 1,421,773 km². Something which is humanly impossible!

As stated by the organizations making the complaint, "we consider that a company such as Veracel Celulose, one of the symbols of the "development" model imposed in an arbitrary, illegal and violent way, giving rise to serious negative consequences and causing violence, poverty and hunger to the people of the Extreme South of Bahia, cannot be considered as "environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable."

This joint action bore its fruit. On 22 August, the Executive Director of FSC, Heiko Liedeker, answered the letter sent by the social organizations, expressing his gratefulness for the contribution made to the certification process, which he qualified as "valuable."

He also reported that this information had been sent to the certifying body accredited by FSC – that assesses whether Veracel complies with FSC standards – and to Accreditation Services International (ASI) that is responsible for accrediting and supervising certifying bodies – in this case SGS.

Finally, Liedeker invited the organizations to continue sending information and expressing their concerns to FSC authorities.

The process continues. Those who should be listened to have raised their voices and made themselves heard by getting organized and by mobilizing. The inhabitants of the Extreme South of Bahia continue to be alert, in the expectation that FSC will say what needs to be said vis-à-vis Veracel's "fast wood" plantations: that their certification is

impossible.

Article based on the letter sent to FSC and SGS: "Arguments to show that Veracel should not receive certification", http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Veracel.html

[index](#)

-The reasons why Veracel cannot be certified, seen from the standpoint of society

Once again, Stora Enso and Aracruz are using their economic power to mislead and wheedle. In addition to misleading and wheedling the Brazilian people, they are now misleading and wheedling Northern society with the aim of increasing the price of their products, increasing their sales and therefore, their profits! With this purpose, the Veracel pulp company presented itself voluntarily to FSC certification and resorted to SGS ICS, with headquarters in Sao Paulo, as certifying body. It set up the scenery for a theatrical event, in which the actors belong to the company and the public comprises financed partners to show that no conflicts exist. Once more, society was left out. Once again the story is told in a way that is advantageous to the companies, by people who have no commitments or responsibilities towards the environment, the future of forthcoming generations and the planet. Faced by this, society reacts and argues:

The reasons why Veracel cannot receive certification:

In one of the speeches at the Sixth Assembly of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle, held on 17, 18 and 19 August, in tears Marlene Pataxo from the village of Meio da Mata spoke of the difficulties her people are undergoing. "Veracel says that it has a society with the Pataxo Indians, this is a lie. That company invaded our territory and planted eucalyptus trees. This cost our people a very high price, they are now cornered and frightened because the company has private security services in the eucalyptus plantation to prevent the Indians from exercising their right to come and go freely according to our culture, our habits. Our springs and our rivers are contaminated by the poison used in the plantation. I am the mother of 14 children; I need to ensure their rights and their sustenance. Therefore, I implore the authorities to determine the end of the eucalyptus plantation on our lands under the dominion of Veracel Celulose, which continues to attack our environment. A company that acts in this way and that causes the death of my people can never receive certification."

The Movement of Landless Rural Workers –MST – defends the granting of Brazilian land to Brazilian workers and not to companies such as Veracel that take over our natural resources, exploit our work force and send their profits outside Brazil. "We need to plant food to feed our people," says Cabacinha, a member of the MST. For him it is shameful that a region such as this, with so much natural wealth and with a climate suited to agriculture, has so many people going hungry. "The advance of eucalyptus plantations is evicting small farmers because of the pressure of agribusiness or because of isolation in the middle of the green desert," says Evanildo Costa, a member of the state board of directors of MST.

Eliezer Lucas Tavares Leite, an agronomist and a farmer, affirms that certification of Veracel means people will continue to be killed and condemned to death. "We used to be the greatest fruit-growers in the world. The number of jobs generated annually for the population amounted to 28,497. We can in no way compare this with the ridiculous number of 741 jobs generated by the company. Many families are going hungry, violence increases every day. With certification in their power, the company will surely increase the plantation of eucalyptus, further compromising our sustenance."

Melquíades Spínola, an environmentalist and member of CEPEDDES, emphasizes that we are facing a 'green hell' because nothing survives this destruction. "Nature and people are agonizing. There is a lack of work, a lack of food, a lack of scenic beauty, to which we have a right. Here in the region of the extreme south, after the plantation of

eucalyptus, a violent reduction in biodiversity took place, with the extermination of fauna and flora, reduction of water courses, soil and water contamination due to an excessive use of poisons. Various rivers and streams are drying up. They are planting eucalyptus in the cities, in the graveyards and in Permanent Preservation zones, which is banned by law. They respect neither the living nor the dead. People have lost their land, their culture and are losing their dignity." He adds: "The only perfect thing in Veracel is the fertile minds and intellectual capacity of the company's directors and officials in inventing so many lies, so much deception, and their skill in concealing the truth. It is a crime against humanity to grant certification to a company such as Veracel."

The rate of progress of eucalyptus plantations in the southern region of Bahia by Veracel Celulose, is causing a lot of concern, affirm the representatives of CIMI, southern region, the Land Pastoral Commission, the Centre for Studies and Social Action, the Movement of Landless Workers, the Cedula de la Tierra - Sur, Peasant Youth and Tupinamba indians. It has been observed that the "plague" has already reached some villages in the southern region, damaging the sustenance of rural workers. "The land reform is being invalidated due to the lack of land in the extreme south and also in the southern region of Bahia," we are told by Jairson, a member of the Farm Workers Federation (Fetag/Ba) and of the Rural Workers Trade Union.

Organizations from the south and extreme south of Bahia have met in search for a regional undertaking in which rural and urban societies play the leading role and in which activities not only use economic rationality but also environmental and human rationality, compatible with the culture of the local population and social and environmental sustainability.

For all these reasons, society is taking a very firm position: tree plantations are not FORESTS and should not be certified for the above mentioned reasons and because they directly and indirectly evict people from rural areas, mainly small farmers, causing a lack of food and an increase in the price of foodstuffs, they concentrate land in the hands of a few, leaving most of the people without an opportunity to gain their sustenance, they increase unemployment in rural areas, increase the number of unemployed families in belts surrounding the cities, increase violence and prostitution, that is to say, that plantations result in profound social, environmental and economic impacts.

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[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Bangladesh: The Modhupur fortified forest

The book authored by Philip Gain -Stolen Forests, published in 2006- denounces the horrendous consequences of the introduction of plantations —teak, rubber, eucalyptus and acacia monocultures— on Bangladesh's native forests.

Except for the Sundarbans, monoculture plantations have rapidly expanded in recent times in all forest regions of Bangladesh. This has happened in the setting of rapid expansion of 'simple plantation forestry' around the globe. The plantation projects are implemented by the government but are financed mostly by the international financial institutions (IFIs) -Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank.

The promotion of plantation economy is one of the major factors that underlie the destruction of forests and the misery of the forest-dwelling ethnic communities. There are very disturbing statistics —the country's official 18 per cent public forestland has shrunk to approximately six per cent that includes the mangrove forests and the plantation of more than 400,000 ha.

'Degraded', 'denuded' and 'less productive' forestlands are usually targeted for plantations. However, what is often branded as 'less productive' or 'degraded' is actually native forest that has immense social, cultural, traditional, educational, medicinal and environmental values.

In the Modhupur sal forest (*Shorea robusta*), invasive species have made their way into the forestland under the guise of 'social forestry' that is plantation in essence. Now, the traditional Modhupur sal forest has vanished in most parts and the Forest Department (FD) wants to protect the last bits! Inspired by a World Bank funded study under the Forest Resources Management Project (FRSP), it wanted to erect 66 thousand feet walls around 3,500 acres in the National Park that is marked as core area.

But the ground realities did not favour the FD. The indigenous Garos around the so-called core area stood strong against the walls. During a demonstration on January 3, 2004, the FD guards and the police opened gunfire to stop the demonstrators. A Garo man, Piren Snal was killed. Utpal Nokrek, another Garo youth of Beduria village, was severely wounded and has become paralyzed for the rest of his life. Many others were wounded from gun-shots. The construction of the walls was suspended in the face of strong criticism and resistance. Since then the wall issue in Modhupur has become nationally and globally known. Of the approximately 20,000 feet of walls constructed, almost half has been demolished.

It was not just the walls that were ruined as an aftermath of the shooting on the Garo protestors. The stands of trees that still survived have been drastically reduced. Organized gangs of wood smugglers took advantage of the trouble and cut whatever they could take away. The banana cultivators also cut hundreds of acres. The FD officials put the blame on the anti-wall movement for this situation. The Garos complain that the FD turned a blind eye on the situation to put the blame on them.

Last January, the Forest Department again attempted to erect the eco-park walls that it had to postpone. The walls involve approximately 3,000 of 63,000 acres of the Modhupur reserved forest. What has happened, and will happen, to the major share of the forest outside the walls? One traveling to any corner of the Modhupur forest will see huge banana, papaya and pineapple plots. These have replaced the forestland, and have caused wholesale destruction of the gene pools of the forests. The Garos -who have been forced to rent most of the high land in their possession for banana cultivation- agree that it is a serious problem for their environment, economy and society.

Depletion of the sal forest in Modhupur has severely affected the life of the Garos and other forest dependent people. The majority of the estimated 20,000 Garos and Koch in Modhupur are concentrated in two unions -- Aronkhola and Sholakuri (distributed in some 40 villages). At one time they had full access to the forest and its resources. But actions such as a ban on shifting cultivation in the 1950s, establishment of national parks, promotion of plantation economy, aggression of massive scale banana plantation, construction of roads, and encroachments, have reduced the forest to a miserable size and have unsettled the traditional life of the Garos and the Koch.

The process of the destruction of the Modhupur sal forest has apparently gone beyond control. Many believe that the complete destruction of the Modhupur sal forest is only a matter of time.

Excerpted and adapted from: Comment of the book authored by Philip Gain "Stolen Forests", <http://www.sehd.org/pubnew12.html>; and "Modhupur walls to protect wilderness or marauders!", by Philip Gain, Earth Touch, N° 10, April 2007, a publication of SEHD (Society for Environment and Human Development), <http://www.sehd.org/reports-features/modhupur-wall-2007.doc>

[index](#)

- **Brazil: The Pataxo's struggle for their territory continues**

The Sixth Assembly of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle met at Monte Pascoal, Bahia, on 19 August to assess the problems they are facing as a consequence of insufficient land, impairing their sustainability and culture.

The history of the Pataxo and their uprooting goes back to 1861, when together with other indigenous communities they were evicted from their lands by the government of the Province of Bahia, to gather them in a single locality.

Later the Pataxo managed to occupy an area in the Mata Atlantica that stretches between the base of Monte Pascoal, the coast, the Cariaba River and the Corumbau River, known today as Barra Velha, where they took refuge and managed to remain in relative isolation.

However, in 1961 the Federal Government converted 22,500 hectares of land traditionally occupied by the Pataxo into conservation units of what became the Monte Pascoal National Park. The Pataxo were violently evicted and found that overnight they could no longer circulate within their own lands.

In the Special Bulletin on the Pataxo that we published in the year 2000, we stated: "The rest of what was once the vast Mata Atlantica continues to be systematically destroyed by various non-indigenous actors, while the Pataxo are denied the right to their own lands, allocated – by force – to preservation. An unjust situation that could not last." And that was what happened. On 19 August 1999, numerous indigenous Pataxo people travelled to the foot of the mountain where they declared that 'Monte Pascoal belongs to the Pataxo' reclaiming their territory in order to, as they stated at that time, "transform what the authorities call Monte Pascoal National Park into an indigenous park, the land of the Pataxo, to preserve it and to rehabilitate it." In October that year a WRM representative visited the Park and offered support to the Pataxo. Since then the Pataxo have been struggling to get the Government to recognise their rights.

In other areas of Bahia, other indigenous Pataxo peoples have been faced with eviction and also struggle to recover their lands. This is the case of the Pataxo families in the Prado municipality and the Pataxo-Hã-Hã-Hãe people in the southern region of the State of Bahia, where their ancestral lands cover 53,000 hectares of what were once dense forests of "Mata atlântica," presently illegally occupied by cattle ranchers and converted into pasture lands and cocoa bean plantations.

Harassed by constant stress due to the lack of land, by "sustainable development" projects that only generate internal tension and conflicts, the Pataxo gathered and issued the following declaration:

SIXTH ASSEMBLY OF THE PATAOXO FRONT FOR RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE

The Territory of Monte Pascoal is a historic right of the Pataxo people

We, members of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle, gathered in Monte Pascoal, the heart of our territory, on 17, 18 and 19 August 2007, to hold our Sixth Assembly, representing the villages of: Corumbauzinho, Tauá, Craveiro, Pequi, Tibá, Alegria Nova, Aldeia Nova do Monte Pascoal, Meio da Mata, Boca da Mata, Cassiana; with the presence of our allies Anaí, Cimi, Cese, Cepedes, Banking Trade Union, CUT-Bahia, Fetag and the Apoinme indigenous organization, and the communities of Coroa Vermelha, Tupinambá da Serra do Padeiro and Pataxó Hã Hã Hãe, have assessed the situation of our territory and the difficulties we are facing as a result of the lack of land to guarantee sustainability and the valuing and strengthening of our culture, insist on the following demands:

1 – The immediate demarcation of our territory as a continuous area, respecting our traditional rights. For this reason we have decided to launch an international campaign for the demarcation of our territory. We will not accept any kind of negotiation aimed at reducing our territory and we reject the persecution and criminalization of our leaders who are struggling for our legitimate rights;

- 2 – A specific policy guaranteeing our communities' sustainability, together with our peoples' food security.
- 3 – The guarantee of a health policy respecting our peoples' diversity and specificity as set out in the Federal Constitution, promoting efficient and agile medical and hospital care while valuing and respecting traditional medicine practices;
- 4 – A specific educational policy that respects our socio-cultural situation, guaranteeing facilities by building schools and providing equipment, suitable teaching aids, teacher-training and the participation of the communities in the definition of a differentiated, communitarian and quality education;
- 5 – The immediate implementation of a basic housing and sanitation policy, as a human right.
- 6 – We insist on the eradication of monoculture eucalyptus plantations and of any other monocultures on our lands, and reaffirm our commitment to defend the environment and self-manage our territory.

Considering the harsh situation we have lived through over the years, struggling against policies negating our identity and the right to our territory, against social discrimination and exclusion, we affirm that we will continue to resist all forms of injustice affecting our people, including exploited and excluded sectors of our society such as the quilombolas*, the landless people, small farmers, fisher-folk and others. We insist on receiving attention to our demands as a way of respecting our constitutionally guaranteed rights.

For justice and demarcation of our single territory of Monte Pascoal: we will go forward!

Monte Pascoal, 19 August 2007

*Translator's note: Quilombolas: descendents of African run-away slaves

[index](#)

- Congo, Democratic Republic: Tracking the deadly thread of coltan

In April 2003, in WRM Bulletin N° 69, we wrote an article on the Democratic Republic of Congo focused on the exploitation of columbium-tantalite (coltan, for short), widely used in cellular phones, laptop computers and video games, and how the mining of this ore has devastated forests like the Ituri forest, changing forever sites which used to sustain the Mbuti livelihoods and were the habitat of several animals like gorillas, okapis --a relative of the giraffe--, elephants and monkeys. It was a sad picture that coltan left in the forests of DRC, a scenario for war and depredation.

Now, we want to track the thread of this mineral into its processing to see whether its destruction is somehow worthwhile. For that, we'll travel with Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, an independent journalist and writer, along the excellent report he wrote on his journey across Congo in the summer of 2006 on a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. He went and saw by himself what coltan leaves to the people.

Mvemba visited the city of Bukavu, "once known as the pearl of Congo because of its beautiful climate and mountains" and nowadays a coltan center. He tells that "the Bukavu I found last summer barely resembles the famed city I heard about as a child."

Following the path of coltan, Mvemba went to the city's Ibanda neighborhood, "to the backyard of a two-story house that someone converted into offices. Olive Depot is one of the largest coltan companies in town, but to my surprise, it is unimpressive. Considering the publicity coltan has received recently in Western media, I expected a large processing center, an imposing edifice with complex machines and engineers barking orders to their foremen. Instead,

I found the most rudimentary of processing systems, two dozen men working with their hands and playing with dirt like children. No one barked orders. They worked in silence, interrupted only by the sound of their own movements. The men give us a quick look and return to their business. They are covered in dust, coltan. A couple of them sift through a large bowl of dirt and blow on the dust, which falls on their faces. It looks terrible. Most of them do not wear any mask. Neither do they wear any uniform. They also do not wear shoes, perhaps by choice. I do not ask. They work in silence." "The process means the men in the hangar have to separate all impurities from the product itself. Deep in that dirt is coltan or its sister products of cassiterite and wolframite, and they will have to find it. The end product looks like crushed gravel."

Mvemba tells that most of the workers have no contract: "Every morning a large group of laborers lines up outside the compound's gate and ask for work. Few are chosen and the rest are sent home. They make less than US\$1 a day." Meanwhile, "on the international market, coltan costs between US\$8 and US\$18 per pound."

And then there is the work at the mines. "At Mushangi, a treacherous path leads to the mines where we find only a handful of adults. The mines are exploited by children of all ages, working in precarious conditions. From sunrise to sunset, they toil in open pits with the most primitive tools and no protection from falling rocks and mudslides. They crawl through dark tunnels with no structural support.

"In my travel across Congo, I have seen a great deal of suffering. Watching children crawl through those pits and tunnels tested my resolve. Ten-year old Bashizi tells me, 'I do this hard work because my father is too old to support me.' He has been doing it for several months. 'That is the only thing there is to do around here,' he says."

"The children swarm around us, seeking attention and asking to be photographed. I snap several pictures as I speak with them and hear their stories. Through my lens, I see lost childhoods and broken dreams."

"We ask 16-year old Baruti and his friends whether they understand where their coltan goes from Mushangi. 'It goes to Bukavu,' they say. 'Do you know coltan is highly prized in America and Europe? It is needed for computers, mobile phones and video games,' I follow. 'No,' Baruti replies. Their world revolves around the open-pits where they spend seven days a week and make less than 20 cents a day."

"One last question before we leave for Bukavu. It is three in the afternoon, and that is late to be out here. 'Do you understand that the exploitation of coltan fuels the conflict in Congo?' I inquire. Baruti looks at me straight in the eye and answers, 'If we knew that, we would no longer work here.'"

Article based on the report "In Search of Congo's Coltan" by Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, published in Pambazuka News 316, Email: pambazuka-news@pambazuka.gn.apc.org, <http://www.pambazuka.org/>

[index](#)

- Costa Rica: Depredatory tourism takes everything with it

Tourism has come to stay in Costa Rica and, with it, ransacking and depredation of the country's prodigious ecosystems (see WRM Bulletin 84). This is denounced by Juan Figuerola, of the Costa Rican Federation for Environmental Conservation (FECON), in a press release under the heading of "The environmental devil: lord and master of Costa Rica" ("El diablo ambiental: amo y señor de Costa Rica", available in Spanish at http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/CostaRica/Diablo_Ambiental.html).

Among the examples denounced as reflecting the critical environmental situation, Figuerola mentions that "the recent electricity cuts scourging the country are a perfect pretext to justify the construction of more dams and geothermic projects in forest areas, implying the destruction of National Parks and Ramsar sites that gave Costa Rica so much

international renown.”

Furthermore, the restrictions are not felt equally by all the population. “We are told to switch off the light and that water is saved drop by drop ... But the tourist enterprises and the five-star hotels in Guanacaste – the driest region of the country – are not told to stop watering their golf courses in the summer or not to change the water in their swimming pools every week. How much water is consumed during the dry season in Guanacaste just by building projects, condominiums, hotels, luxury residences? The communities are already complaining that the building companies are drying up the emblematic Tempisque River.”

The best places are passing into private and foreign hands, such as those of the Canadian citizen Paul Lambert, “owner of various millionaire projects in Quepos and Manuel Antonio, including the sale over Internet of the State’s natural heritage, monumental buildings on sharply sloping land, felling of trees to obtain panoramic views, buildings in the middle of forests.” Figuerola also tells how “in the Golfito Wildlife Refuge in Cerro Adams, an individual known as Carrión, dizzy with the delirious but much questioned Marina project, is building lookouts and felling trees to clear the view on sharply sloping land, threatening to cause a disaster that could mean the loss of dozens of human lives if a landslide were to occur due to deforestation, which would fall on the village of Golfito.”

Forests are one of the ecosystems that mega-tourism wipes out. “In Liberia, in the Papagayo Tourist Pole project, declared of national interest, the dry coastal forest is being felled to set up hotels, swimming pools and golf courses.” “In Tamarindo, in the Baulas Park buffer zone, the Tamarindo Preserve company is attempting to develop an ecological residential project over hundreds of hectares.” “There are buildings already where until this January a mangrove grew in the San Francisco swamp.” “In Nicoya, at Sámara beach the last remnants of wetlands - home to migratory birds and of a rich and diverse wildlife - are being filled, drained and cut down to open up the way for tourist and residential development.” “All along the Coastal Strip, between Dominical and Palmar, tourist and residential projects are the main cause of deforestation, putting an end to biodiversity, forest lands and coral reefs. One of the best highways in the country is being built in this zone, precisely aimed at attracting foreign investment.”

In March 1993, on occasion of the Berlin Tourism Fair the then Minister of Tourism of Costa Rica was “awarded” the Environmental Devil Prize. So many years after this warning, so-called “development” is still causing losses that are impossible to assess.

Article based on: “El diablo ambiental: amo y señor de Costa Rica”(The environmental devil, lord and master of Costa Rica), Federación Costarricense para la Conservación del Ambiente, FECON, sent by Juan Figuerola:
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[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- **Australia: Pulping democracy**

This week, the Tasmanian Parliament will debate Gunns' proposed pulp mill at Bell Bay in Tasmania. If built, the US\$1.4 billion project would need four million tonnes of logs a year. It would double Gunns current rate of clearcutting in Tasmania's native forests. The pulp mill would produce large amounts of toxins, polluting the air and Tasmania's Bass Strait.

The day before the Tasmanian Parliament started its discussions, Australia's Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced a "draft decision" to approve the pulp mill.

The approval process has become a multi-million dollar sham. In July 2006, Gunns submitted a Draft Integrated

Impact Statement on the proposed pulp mill to the Resource Planning and Development Committee (RPDC), an independent statutory body. The Tasmanian Government, meanwhile, spent millions of taxpayers' dollars on a "Pulp Mill Task Force" to promote the pulp mill.

In January 2007, two members of the RPDC resigned, complaining about political interference in the assessment process. When Gunns threatened not to build the mill if they didn't receive approval within six months, Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon met with Gunns' chairman John Gay and told him he would be "working on the process to do his best to make sure the pulp mill is built". In March 2007, Gunns withdrew its application to the RPDC and asked Premier Lennon to change the law on assessing the proposed pulp mill. The next day, the government announced that it would fast-track the assessment process. After meetings with Gunns' lawyers, the government produced new legislation, which was duly passed by Parliament as the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007. Under the Act, a decision on the pulp mill must be reached before the end of August 2007. Instead of the independent RPDC assessment process, the Tasmanian Government appointed two consultants to recommend whether Gunns' pulp mill should proceed.

The government's choice of consultants is revealing: ITS Global and SWECO PIC. ITS Global was set up by Alan Oxley, an Australian academic, free-trade lobbyist, and climate change sceptic. Among ITS Global's clients are Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau, whose destructive logging operations and human rights abuses in Papua New Guinea have made it amongst the most controversial logging companies in the world. In July 2006, ITS Global put out a series of reports praising Rimbunan Hijau. Not surprisingly, ITS Global decided that the "net benefit for Tasmania overall" of Gunns' proposed pulp mill is "positive and high".

SWECO PIC is a Finnish consulting and engineering firm. In its report to the Tasmanian government, the company notes that since its creation in 1971, "SWECO PIC has specialised on serving the pulp and paper industry." This is precisely the problem. SWECO PIC is not independent from the pulp industry.

SWECO PIC was hired to assess whether the proposed project complied with Tasmania's emission guidelines for new pulp mills. SWECO PIC found that the proposed mill was in breach of eight of the guidelines, but recommended that "the project can proceed to further consideration by the Tasmanian Parliament".

I asked Rune Franzén, SWECO PIC's Director Pulp and Paper and the team leader for the Gunns assessment, some questions about his company's involvement in promoting this project. I asked Franzén whether his company won the contract after an international bidding process. I asked Franzén whether his team had met any representatives of local communities, environmental organisations or any members of the RPDC. I asked for Sweco PIC's response to Professor Andrew Wadsley's calculations which indicate that Gunns underestimated the emission of dioxins from the proposed pulp mill by a factor of 1,400. (SWECO PIC's report does not deal with the issue.) I asked how SWECO PIC addresses accusations of conflict of interest, since several of SWECO PIC's past (and potential future) clients are working on the Gunns project, including Andritz and Pöyry.

Franzén declined to answer any of my questions. SWECO was hired only to assess the proposed pulp mill, he replied. "SWECO is not involved in any matters of public discussion or debate." Franzén forwarded my questions to Rebekah Burton of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Tasmania.

I wrote to Burton and in addition to the questions I'd asked SWECO PIC, I asked for a copy of SWECO PIC's terms of reference and asked how much the Tasmanian Government paid for SWECO PIC's assessment. In reply, I received a letter signed by Daniel Leesong, Chief of Staff at the Office of the Premier. Leesong also declined to answer any of my questions.

"In April this year Parliament passed the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 to establish a rigorous and thorough assessment process for the pulp mill proposal," wrote Leesong, apparently oblivious to the fact that the only reason that the Government wrote the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 was because Gunns asked them to do so.

The Tasmanian Government has attached 1,100 pages of permits and operating conditions to the final pulp mill approval motion which Parliament is now discussing. Gunns was allowed to see the draft permits and operating conditions and could suggest changes. On 28 August 2007, Tasmania's parliamentarians will vote on whether to approve the proposed pulp mill. Unlike Gunns, they will not have the opportunity to amend either the motion or the permits and conditions attached.

In June 2007, Matthew Denholm of Tasmanian newspaper the Mercury revealed that Gunns had already signed a contract with construction firm John Holland to start building the pulp mill "in the first week of September". Delay beyond this time will cost Gunns almost US\$1 million dollars a day. Either Gunns knows in advance what Parliament's decision will be, or they are stupid. No wonder Tasmanians call the Government the "Gunnerment".

By Chris Lang, email: chrislang@t-online.de, <http://chrislang.org>

Tell Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull not to approve the pulp mill - visit www.wilderness.org.au to send him a message.

[index](#)

- Colombia: Communities eradicate oil palm plantations to repossess their territory

As member of a group of international observers, invited by the Justice and Peace organization, we had the opportunity to visit an area in Colombia (Curvaradó) where ten years ago the local communities suffered from a violent eviction process and are now returning to their territories.

It should be noted that "suffered a violent eviction process" does not reflect all the horror of the actions undertaken by groups of paramilitary murderers with the support of the Colombian Armed Forces. By means of murder, torture, disappearances, destruction and torching of homes and bombing, the repression achieved its objective: the eviction from the region of all the communities (in particular the Afro-Colombian and mestizo population).

Ten years later in a courageous demonstration – in the midst of constant threats – the people have slowly started to return to their destroyed homes and have found that their lands and forest – where they had lived for over 120 years – are now occupied by thousands of hectares of monoculture oil palm plantations and that their "owners" are those same paramilitary forces responsible for the genocide that forced them to migrate. "When we got back it was all planted with palm trees," an inhabitant told us indignantly.

Indignation has managed to overcome fear and the legitimate owners are striving to recover their territory occupied by the palm trees, in the only way they can, by eradicating them. "We must cut down the palm trees that are bothering us," said one of the returning community members. In some cases they cut the palm trees down with chainsaws, in others they uproot them and in most cases they chop off all the leaves and the top sprout ("lopping" them). The work is exhausting as the palm trees have already got thick trunks and the leaves hide dangerous thorns that cause swelling and infection. Added to this are the dangers of poisonous snakes and wasps that attack when least expected. Some 20 people can only get rid of about two hectares of palm trees per day. At the time of the visit, it was estimated that some 40 hectares had been restored and were being planted with food crops.

The fact is that in Curvaradó palm trees are not considered as life or a possibility of life. "What life are they talking about when they talk about bio-fuels derived from palm trees? Here palm trees are green desolation, human destruction, the death of all life." In this region, the majority of the 50 thousand hectares of Collective Territory were once pristine forests with more than 25 marshland areas. The inhabitants say that "they have exploited the timber we had, the marshes have been channelled and dried out, the animals have no food, the birds have left for lack of fruit."

When asked about their plans for the future, they reply that they are seeking to produce food, "planting what we used to plant." They also want to "restore the forests and start planting some trees" and for "the rivers to recover their water and for the fish to come back." They want to organize "biodiversity zones to recover the species that have disappeared, the fish and the hunting," seeking to "attract these species".

In a visit to the area we came to the village of Andalucía. The village no longer exists. It was all destroyed by the paramilitary forces. The founder of the village took us to where once his home had stood; all that is left now is the cement floor. We also visited the graveyard where only half is still in place as the "para-palm growers" committed the outrage of digging a drainage ditch through the middle of the graveyard, planting palm trees in the other half.

Life is not easy for those who have returned, as threats are made by the so-called "demobilized" forces (paramilitary forces that have supposedly laid down their arms) and they make photographic and video records of everyone, covering the area on motorcycles and generally making their presence felt. One of them, known as "El Chupa", tells them in a threatening tone that "this cutting down of palm trees will be paid for elsewhere and it will cost you dearly, in the same way you cut the trees into pieces, it will happen to you." Meanwhile there are rumours that the "Black Eagles" (a paramilitary group) are coming towards the area and well-known paramilitary members are patrolling up and down the areas where oil palms are being felled.

The "para-palm growers" are seeking to generate conflicts among the people. On the one hand they try to set up the workers hired to work in the plantations – many of them with a paramilitary past – against those who have returned, telling them that their work is being taken away from them. Thus, from the trucks – used by the company to transport like cattle some 60 workers at a time - insults or jeers are called out to those who are cutting down the palm trees "lop the palm trees, plant coca, we will come and harvest it" they shout from the trucks.

On the other hand, they are bringing in people from other regions – both former paramilitary and peasants – to occupy the lands belonging to the communities who have come back – under the absurd name of "forest warden families" (the only "forest" they want to protect are the palm plantations). It is the old strategy of division.

The military also have a role to play and at the military checkpoint on a bridge they ask people many questions, including "Who is paying you to cut down the palm trees?" Given their previous direct involvement in repressing the communities, their presence causes fear in those who have come back.

Neither are we "gringos" (that is to say, all the non-Colombians who support these communities) free from threats, and thus as if by magic signs spring up saying "go away gringos" and "death to the gringos."

However, in spite of everything, the communities continue to recover their territory. When we were leaving, one of them said to us "I ask you to make the truth known to the world." This article is aimed at just that, while at the same time paying tribute to these peoples' heroism and condemning the Colombian Government responsible for this situation. There are few places in the world where oil palm trees are tainted with as much blood as in Curvaradó and the only way of starting to repair the outrages committed is for the Government to legally recognize these communities' rights to their lands. Until then, it deserves to be condemned.

By Ricardo Carrere, based on observations and interviews made during a visit to Curvaradó between 9 and 11 August 2007

More information in Spanish (and photos) at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Colombia.html#info>

[index](#)

- **Sweden: Research into GE trees risks irreversible damage to forests**

Professor Ove Nilsson is the star of genetically engineered tree research in Sweden. Nilsson and his research team at the Umeå Plant Science Centre won the race to identify the gene that controls plants' flowering allowing them to produce genetically engineered trees which flower in weeks, instead of years. In 2005, the journal Science declared it one of the most important discoveries of the year.

"Finding the start button for tree flowering means that we understand the underlying molecular processes. It means that we can press the start button instead of awaiting the natural course of things. In this way we can get trees to flower when we want them to," Nilsson explains in an interview with Eva Krutmeijer on the Linnaeus300 website.

Selective breeding of trees takes many generations, especially with cold climate trees such as spruce and aspen, which flower after 10 to 15 years. One of the reasons that eucalyptus is so popular as a plantation tree species is that it flowers in two or three years, allowing rapid breeding for characteristics such as fast growth and straight stems.

Nilsson's quick flowering trees allow him to work on producing faster growing trees for cold climates. Nilsson argues that faster growing trees and trees which will grow in colder climates are needed to meet increasing demand. Nilsson doesn't even consider the possibility of reducing consumption. "The only way we are going to cope with rising demand is increase forest productivity," he told the Sydney Morning Herald in July 2007.

Nilsson isn't really talking about increasing "forest productivity". He's talking about increasing productivity from industrial tree plantations. The fast growing eucalyptus plantations that Nilsson admires have dried out streams and lowered water tables, leaving local communities without water supplies in many countries in the South. Faster growing trees in cold climates would also need more water. Faster growing tree monocultures have already replaced many native forests and other ecosystems in Europe and North America. Growing GE trees for biofuel, another area of interest for Nilsson, would require vast areas of land - land which is often already in use for food production, for example.

In recognition of his research, Nilsson will be awarded the Marcus Wallenberg Prize in Autumn this year. The prize indicates who will benefit from Nilsson's research - the pulp and paper industry and the biofuel industry. The Marcus Wallenberg Prize was set up in 1980 by Stora Kopparbergs Bergslags, now pulp and paper giant Stora Enso. The prize is named after Marcus Wallenberg, a banker, industrialist and chairman of Stora's Board of Directors. While the Marcus Wallenberg Prize claims a focus on "Sustainability of renewable resources", it also "recognizes efficiency improvements, cost improvements, the opening of new markets and the underlying research".

Nilsson isn't worried about the risks of genetically engineered trees. He claims that his GE fast-flowering trees will only be planted in sealed greenhouses. Once he has produced high yielding trees, the flowering gene can be bred out and the trees to be planted will not contain any foreign genes.

But Nilsson's activities are not limited to laboratory research. He is a board member of SweTree Technologies, a Swedish biotechnology company. The company specifically aims to provide products and technologies "to improve the productivity and performance properties of seedlings, wood and fiber" for the pulp and paper industry. Also on the board of SweTree Technologies is Björn Hägglund, a former Deputy CEO at Stora Enso and a board member of the Marcus Wallenberg Foundation. Hägglund is the chair of the board of WWF Sweden, which could explain why we don't hear much criticism of GE trees from WWF Sweden.

SweTree Technologies was formed in 1999 as a joint initiative of the Foundation of Technology Transfer (Innovationsbron) in Umeå and the company Woodheads AB. Innovationsbron aims to profit by commercialising Swedish research and innovation. Woodheads AB was formed to handle the intellectual property from 44 researchers at the Umeå Plant Science Centre and the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. SweTree Technologies' website boasts that it has "the right to all innovations in plant and forest biotechnology emanating from the members of

Woodheads".

SweTree Technologies is working on trees genetically engineered for increased biomass growth, increased fibre length and to produce wood that is easier to pulp (with more easily extracted lignin content). Three Swedish forestry companies (Sveaskog, Bergvik Skog and Holmen) are part-owners of SweTree Technologies. Clearly the GE trees developed by SweTree Technologies will not remain in greenhouses. Once GE trees are planted it is inevitable that they will cross with trees in forests. The impacts are unknown and irreversible.

Nilsson has a vision of the future: "Trees will be 'tailor-made', clearly earmarked for their end uses. Examples of these are fast-growing porous trees for the pulp industry, trees with long wood fibres for the paper industry, slow-growing trees for furniture manufacture." In reality this means vast monocultures of genetically engineered trees. It has nothing to do with sustainability or concern for the environment. It is about profit for industry.

By Chris Lang, email: chrislang@t-online.de, <http://chrislang.org>

[index](#)

- **New report and website on the pulp industry**

A new report by German NGO Urgewald on the social and environmental impacts of the pulp industry is now available. The report "Banks, Pulp and People – A Primer on Upcoming International Pulp Projects", produced by Chris Lang, describes the impacts of the industry, analyses the track records of the companies involved and looks at new expansions in the sector. The report is available on Urgewald's new website: www.pulpmillwatch.org, which documents the problems caused by existing operations and flags upcoming problematic projects.

[index](#)

WOMEN, LOGGING AND OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

- **Indonesia: The impacts of oil palm plantations on women**

Twenty-two women from provinces throughout Kalimantan and Sumatra gathered in Bogor from 22nd to 24th May to discuss the effects that oil palm plantations have had on their lives.

Women and development

Why women? It is obvious that Indonesian women are stakeholders who have been marginalised by the development process, including the establishment of large-scale oil palm plantations.

Women are rarely decision-makers in developments initiated by the government and companies. They are usually only seen as the 'hands' rather than the 'brains': as the means of implementing measures once decisions have been taken, rather than being actively involved in the planning, control, supervision and evaluation stages. However, women tend to see themselves as survivors and are often a tower of strength when communities oppose plans that threaten their way of life.

The creation and expansion of oil palm plantations have had a number of different impacts on women, both direct and indirect. For example, in traditional societies, women have important roles in managing natural resources and maintaining sustainable livelihoods which support their families. These are lost once plantations replace the forests and agricultural land (see *DTE* 63: 1, <http://dte.gn.apc.org/63WOM.htm>).

Companies are still gaining access to communities' land by just taking it and paying thugs to intimidate people. Those who resist, including women, are forced to flee their homes because they are accused of damaging company property. The police threaten them with arrest should they return to their villages. People are frequently detained by the police without any proper authorisation. Also, witnesses too often become suspects. For these reasons, most villagers are afraid to take any action against companies that violate their rights.

Women's voices

This is what happened to Yana, one of the participants from South Sumatra who has not been able to go back to her home for fear of detention by the authorities. Another participant, from Indragiri Hulu district in Riau, told how a woman in her village had died from shock after her husband was detained by the police for alleged criminal damage of plantation company property. When women from the village of Hajak Dusun Sikui in Central Kalimantan tried to reclaim their agroforestry plots, the company accused them of illegally occupying the land; the case is currently being processed by the police.

Environmental pollution and health issues are also serious areas of concern for women living in and around plantations. In the village of Keladi, in the Ketapang district of West Kalimantan, people are beginning to experience a shortage of clean drinking water because the river they use for their supplies is downstream of a large oil palm plantation. Children have developed rashes after bathing in the river. A woman from Long Ikis in Pasir, East Kalimantan described how the River Soi has turned black and is no longer suitable for collecting drinking water. It is impossible to find fish in the river even one kilometre from the plantation. Apparently the problem is due to the company disposing of waste from its palm oil processing plant directly into the river when the waste tanks are full.

Several participants related how they were provided with agrochemicals by companies who did not provide adequate safety instruction or equipment. Women often had no idea about the possible effects of the pesticides they used, especially during the early stages of pregnancy. Women who were weeding were sometimes accidentally contaminated with sprays used by other workers nearby. Pesticides and fertilisers stored in people's homes presented hazards, particularly to women and children who could not read or understand the labels. Empty pesticide containers were occasionally used for domestic purposes and pesticides stored in containers such as old water bottles.

Other problems for women associated with oil palm plantations are those of poverty and debt. Many companies pay women lower wages than men on the grounds that they get easier work. A woman from the village of Wirano in Southeast Sulawesi complained that no processing plant had been built six years after the plantation was established, so villagers just have to throw away ripe palm fruits. Meanwhile, the plantation company is still demanding repayment of loans it provided for their co-operative.

Many young women from West Kalimantan decide to go to neighbouring Malaysia to look for work. Their main reason is that they no longer have any land to farm or rubber plantations to tap since the whole area where they lived has become oil palm plantations. Often they return to their village as unmarried mothers. It is common for such women to open a café with rooms at the back, which are used for prostitution. The presence of such cafes, which exist in most plantation villages, further increases the numbers of children born out of wedlock. They also cause problems for married women in the community: customary fines for infidelity are said to be rising.

Plantations have made women's lives harder in other ways too. Women have to go much further to find firewood for cooking once the forests have been cleared to make way for oil palm. There is no grazing for livestock close to the village once it is surrounded by plantations. And women have to carry clean drinking water longer distances.

Demands for action

The burden for women is likely to increase with the further expansion of large-scale oil palm plantations. So some

participants from this workshop went on to meet representatives of the National Commission for Women and the national parliament in Jakarta. In their written statement, the women urged the Commission to:

- Support communities in their struggle with oil palm plantation companies;
- Push the government to resolve conflicts between communities and plantations;
- Carry out field studies to investigate the negative impacts that oil palm plantations have on women who live in and around them.

Article by Down To Earth, Newsletter No. 74, August 2007, sent by Carolyn Marr, Email: dte@gn.apc.org, <http://dte.gn.apc.org>

[index](#)

- Papua New Guinea: Life can be hard for women in oil palm plantations

Large scale oil palm plantations have proved to be a very bad development for local people in PNG, and especially women for whom they have meant dramatic changes in their lives, work, safety and health (see WRM Bulletin N° 120).

The promised "development" –namely water supply, electricity, "improved" housing- offered to the communities in exchange for their land never come true. And the income results meager. According to chronicles from campaigner Andrea Babon, an oil palm grower said last year that they were initially promised around 200 Australian dollars (AU\$) per ton of oil palm fruit they harvested. However, the international price of oil palm dropped and they just received AU\$50 per ton.

Babon explained that "Oil palm fruit is harvested by the growers and collected by the oil palm company every fortnight." It may take an entire family (including children as young as five) two days working from sunrise to sunset to harvest 1.7 tonnes of fruit, for which the payment was approximately AU\$85 less costs deducted by the oil palm company for materials like fertiliser and loan repayments that can eat up as much as 70% of the payment. That's a lot of hard and heavy work for as little as \$25.50 a fortnight."

More problems add to the scanty payment, especially for women when it comes to the income distribution within the family. Women only get a tiny amount of the money earned by their husbands even though they have contributed to the production of palm fruits. They usually have less control of the money than men because oil palm companies deal with men as they get the highest paying jobs for chopping the large bunches of fruits from the trees.

Also, this loss of the social participation of women has meant a dramatic change in societies which used to be matriarchal. A report from the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) quotes a New Ireland landowner woman saying: "Our society is a matriarchal society [where a woman is the head of a family or tribe]. But consultation with women is not happening. Men are making all the decisions, but the land is ours. Land in other parts of the world is very expensive. We are like cows. They take milk from us and then they go. It is time we made a stand."

There are also areas with matrilineal system, which in PNG means that the land is handed down from mother to daughter instead of from father to son. Even when women are the rightful landowners, as long as oil palm companies only talk to men it's them who sign away the women's land for rent without the latter's consent.

A report of ACF revealed that "in Mosa Local Level Government area (LLG) in West New Britain Province, women experience the most significant aspect of poverty when they say that they feel 'boxed in' by resettling in an oil palm block and now have nowhere to go but to keep on picking the fruit. They are unable to even afford the cost of travel to go home." Here a monthly income from a 4 hectare oil palm block is around PGK1,800. With two to three generations of household family members living off this income, it is not enough to provide for all their basic needs. With promises

of development, people were lured to the area resulting in significant over-crowding of the blocks. Some families can not even afford basic items such as soap and medicines and are cash-strapped to pay for school fees and uniforms.”

When traditional farmlands are converted to oil palm plantations women's access to garden land is sometimes restricted. This implies that women are deprived of a source of food for their families. With less land for gardens and subsistence farming what follows is that families have to rely on store food, for which more money is needed.

Restriction to garden also deprives women of the income they can earn from selling garden food at local markets, which they usually control, not only restricting their freedom but also influencing the household income, since it is recognized that women tend more to spend their money in the family than men.

Based on that notion the Oil Palm Industry Corporation (OPIC) introduced the Mama Lus Frut Scheme (MLFS) at Hoskins in WNB in 1997. It's a system which reduces women to pick up the leftovers. According to ACF's report, the scheme "was originally developed because too much fruit was being left on the ground and wasted. Under the scheme, women were given their own harvest nets and payment system (called a 'mama card'). They were asked to pick up the loose fruit to sell to the company. This scheme has been promoted by supporters of oil palm, including the Australian aid agency (AusAID) as a good step to help women in PNG.

“Men were convinced to accept the MLFS because OPIC told the men that if the women earned an income, the whole family would benefit. At the beginning, this seemed like a good idea. However, this might also have encouraged some men to give all the responsibility for the welfare of the family to women, so that they could spend their own pay cheques only on themselves.”

Ignored, restricted, with burdensome work, tiny income and even threatened by domestic violence from men subject to tough work and loss of traditional livelihood and values, life can be hard for women in oil palm plantations.

Article based on: "The Impact of Oil Palm on Women and Families", Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), sent by Lee Tan, Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator, Australian Conservation Foundation, Email: L.Tan@acfonline.org.au, <http://www.acfonline.org.au/>; "Papua New Guinea Case Study - Asian Development Bank Technical Assistance Loan to Papua New Guinea for Nucleus-Agro Enterprises", Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights (CELCOR/FoE PNG) and Friends of the Earth Australia (FoE Australia), Written by Lee Tan, sent by the author; "Anatomy of a Campaign", by Andrea Babon, http://www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res_Habitat_AP_3.pdf

[index](#)

- Solomon Islands: Women wounded by logging company for defending their land

Logging operations of Omex Industry Limited in Boloboe land on Vella La Vella island, Western Province of the country, have long been a subject of disputes and legal battles. Over the weekend of the end of July a tragedy took place.

A group of local women went into the forest to demonstrate against the operation which they consider illegal. Their effort to protect their right over the land and their resources was suppressed by the security guards of the company, who –armed with knives, sticks, bow and arrows and stones- attacked and injured the defenseless group of women. Serious cuts, bone fracture and diverse wounds were the result of such attack.

According to reports from Moffat Mamu, published in the Solomon Star on 30 July 2007, "a spokesman from Leona village - speaking on condition of not being named - said that the community are shocked by this attack on defenceless women from their community." "It is the first time that women are hurt in such a way while demonstrating

against logging and the Gizo Police takes the case very seriously," he said. "These women are mothers of our children, trying to protect their right and resources," the village elder said.

The Western Province's Council of Women reacted promptly to the attack, which they described "as cruel and inhumane", and in a press statement it called on national authorities to condemn the attack and suspend the logging license of the company on the grounds that it had not respected the women who are also mothers and have children to care for and nurture.

According to Radio New Zealand Internacional, "The president of the National Council of Women, Hilda Kari, declared it is time for the government to look again at the issues involved in the forestry industry. She says, however, that it relies so much on the revenues from logging that it's very hard to get through to them about the problems.

But, Mrs Kari says the government needs to act now. "They should reconsider looking at all these development areas in the logging industry; what kind of people are in the field, whether or not they should be bringing foreigners to be in the employment sector in this area or using Solomon Islanders in this labour force, rather than bringing these people who are causing these problems."

Mrs Kari is also condemning the sexual exploitation of children which is reported to be occurring near some logging camps."

Article based on: "Logging Guards Injure 6 Women", Solomon Star, 30 July 2007, Moffat Mamu, sent by Brian Brunton, Alotau Environment , e-mail: alotauen@online.net.pg; "Solomon Islands National Council of Women condemns logging incident", Radio New Zealand International, <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=34038>; "Women Call for Suspension of Logging License", Edner Rence, Solomon Times Online, <http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=472>

[index](#)

- Solomon Islands: Logging as the main factor of sexual abuse of girls

Logging in Southern countries has proved that it may collect big export revenues for governments and huge profits for companies, but for local communities it has several miserable sides spreading environmental and social distress everywhere (see WRM Bulletin N° 34).

One of such sides has been highlighted in Solomon Islands, where a recent report by the Church of Melanesia's Christian Care Centre, which undertook the study in the Arosi region of Makira province, revealed that more than 70 children from 12 villages had been sexually exploited by loggers working at nearby logging camps of the six villages studied.

The report "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands: A Report Focusing on the Presence of the Logging Industry in a Remote Region" looks into the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, or sexual abuse in exchange for money or goods, like rice, and focuses on the presence of the logging industry and the role this industry plays in abusing and exploiting children.

Though no company name is provided by the report, logging in Solomon Islands is dominated by Malaysian and to a lesser degree, South Korean companies. However, clear-felled timber is all now being shipped to China to be used in Olympic facilities in Beijing.

Looking into the contributing factors related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the region, the overall findings from the group work and from discussions with the project team were that "child abuse has been a

longstanding problem in the community, while CSEC represents a more recent development which was largely attributed to the presence of the logging industry”.

Logging has implied a dramatic change in the traditional way of living of the local communities, with the introduction of cash, different customs, distorted consumption. Money, as an element of power, is being held by men, mainly foreigners. Women, especially young girls -some of them no more than 13 years old- become the prey of those men, they themselves also a prey of exploitation, alienation and loneliness. What follows is disharmony and social decay.

According to the report “The issue of money is highly significant to the presence of CSEC. Money was cited as the reason for CSEC in most cases.” “It appeared that in most cases, money was used for what would be considered in the villages as non-necessities, such as processed foods, housing made from permanent materials (rather than the more common leaf houses), travel to visit Honiara [the capital city] for enjoyment and clothing or beauty products. The overseas loggers presented an ‘opportunity’ for young people to access money and goods which would normally be out of their means. This is also reflected in the number of reports of children visiting the camps to view movies, look at machinery or look at logging vessels- things they would not otherwise be able to see. As such, the children see logging camps as exciting places, and can be easily persuaded to board the ships or enter houses and bedrooms, thus greatly increasing the risk of abuse.” “Outside influences were also mentioned in relation to loss of kastom [customary or traditional practices], where things such as the availability of alcohol and drugs, pornographic materials and influence from Honiara (with greater crime rates and a more “Western” style of living) were considered to be damaging to traditional ways of life.”

Logging is a business which not only does not provide decent lives to the local communities but also reinforces and deepens gender abuse. Quoting the words of Ta’ahia who authored “Logging, a cursed blessing: is this the island way? The plight of the Tawatana Villagers of Makira Island”: “Logging is killing our people. Maybe not right away, but slowly, and maybe in more ways than we will know. To stop unsustainable logging development in our islands is not only for the preservation of our environment or the islands but most importantly for the preservation or conservation of what it means to be Solomon Islanders, and above all, the integrity, freedom and survival of a race of people. Yes, we all must face change, and we are, but we should ask ourselves: Are we progressing, or benefiting from such development? Or are we no better off than before, except now maybe worse since we are losing our resources, our cultural morals, and being forced to change at the hands of shady business dealings and short-term benefit by a few chosen men?”

Article based on: “Logging sparks rise in child sex abuse-Solomon”, Solomon Star, 01 August 2007, <http://www.solomonstarnews.com/?q=node/14571>, sent by Nina Bulina, Greenpeace Australia Pacific, Email: nina.bulina@pg.greenpeace.org; “Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Solomon Islands: A Report Focusing on the Presence of the Logging Industry in a Remote Region”, http://www.anglicanmelanesia.org/download/CCC_CSEC_Report.pdf

[index](#)

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